What weird meant to Williams

O que o estranho significava para Williams

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Abstract
In August 1928, *Weird Tales* magazine published "The vengeance of Nitocris," a short story written by 16 year-old Thomas Lanier Williams. What Tennessee Williams wrote later in his life resembles the plots, the structure, and stylings of stories (including the names of characters) that appeared in *Weird Tales* in and around 1927 and 1928. Consistently, where the progression of certain fantasy images (including ghosts and vampires) in *Weird Tales* leads to withering death and punishment in hell, the same fantasy imagery included by Williams in his plays, poetry, and fiction progresses to flourishing life and, even in death, as in the death of Nitocris, self-defined accomplishment and satisfaction.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams; *Weird Tales*; Queer; Fantasy; Science fiction.

Resumo
Em agosto de 1928, a revista *Weird Tales* publicou "A vingança de Nitócris", um conto escrito por Thomas Lanier Williams, com apenas 16 anos na época. O que Tennessee Williams escreveu posteriormente em sua vida assemelha-se às tramas, à estrutura e ao estilo das histórias (incluindo os nomes dos personagens) que apareceram em *Weird Tales* em torno de 1927 e 1928. De maneira consistente, onde a progressão de certas imagens de fantasia (incluindo fantasmas e vampiros) em *Weird Tales* leva a uma morte fulminante e punição no inferno, a mesma ideia de fantasia incorporada por Williams em suas peças, poesia e ficção evolui para uma vida próspera e, mesmo na morte, como no caso da morte de Nitócris, conquista e satisfação autodefinidas.

Palavras-chave: Tennessee Williams; *Weird Tales* (revista); *Queer*; Fantasia; Ficção científica.

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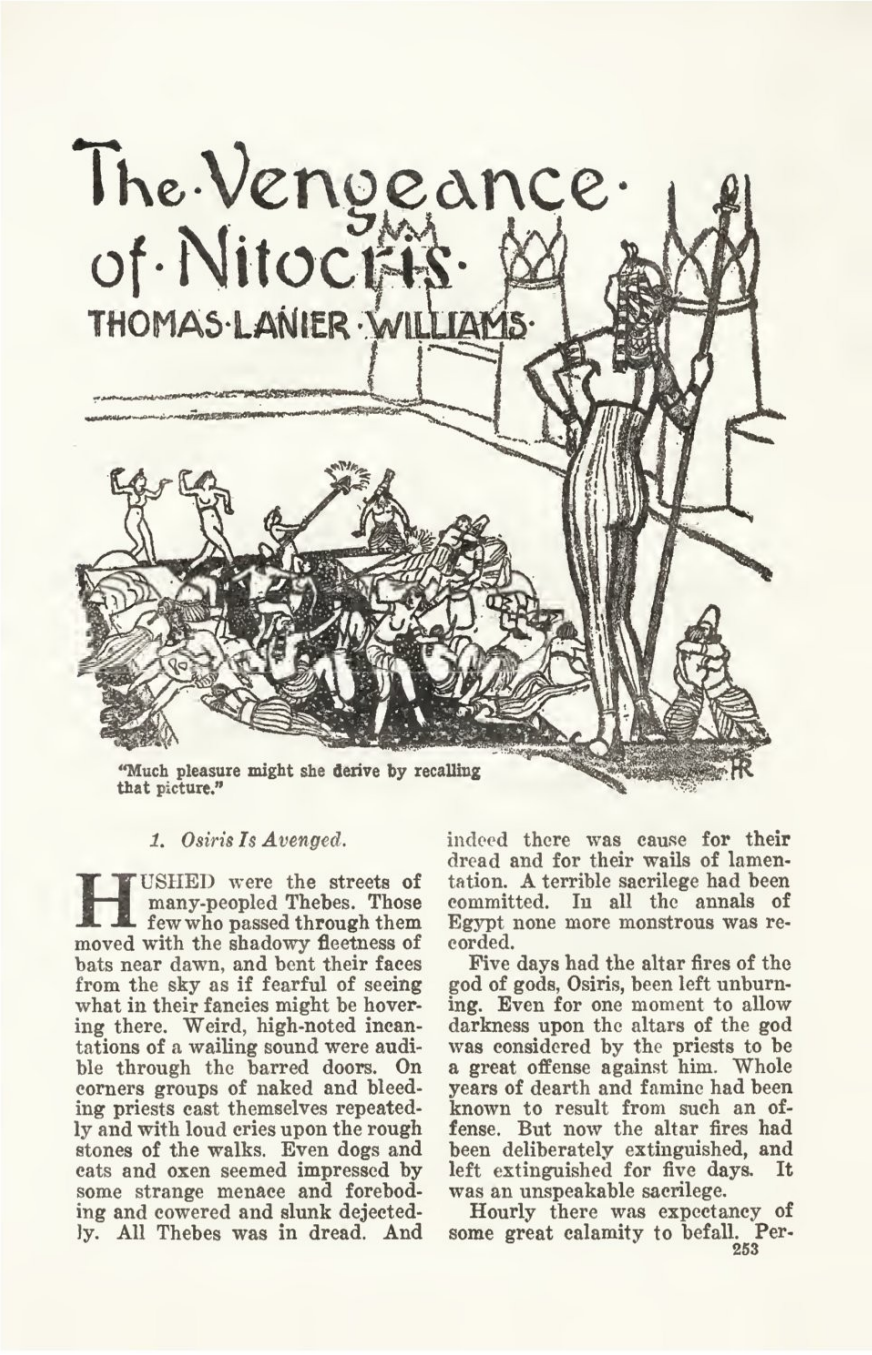
August 1928 – *Weird Tales* magazine – "The vengeance of Nitocris":

> Hushed were the streets of many peopled Thebes. Those few who passed through them moved with the shadowy fleetness of bats near dawn, and bent their faces from the sky as if fearful of seeing what in their fancies might be hovering there. Weird, high-noted incantations of a wailing sound were audible through the barred doors. … A terrible sacrilege had been committed. In all the annals of Egypt none more monstrous was recorded (Williams, 1928, p. 153).

Figure 1 – First page of "The vengeance of Nitocris", short story by Williams, published in *Weird Tales*, v. 12, n. 2, August 1928



The Vengeance of Nitocris

THOMAS LANIER WILLIAMS

"Much pleasure might she derive by recalling that picture."

1. Osiris Is Avenged.

HUSHED were the streets of many-peopled Thebes. Those few who passed through them moved with the shadowy fleetness of bats near dawn, and bent their faces from the sky as if fearful of seeing what in their fancies might be hovering there. Weird, high-noted incantations of a wailing sound were audible through the barred doors. On corners groups of naked and bleeding priests cast themselves repeatedly and with loud cries upon the rough stones of the walks. Even dogs and cats and oxen seemed impressed by some strange menace and foreboding and cowered and slunk dejectedly. All Thebes was in dread. And indeed there was cause for their dread and for their wails of lamentation. A terrible sacrilege had been committed. In all the annals of Egypt none more monstrous was recorded.

Five days had the altar fires of the god of gods, Osiris, been left unburning. Even for one moment to allow darkness upon the altars of the god was considered by the priests to be a great offense against him. Whole years of dearth and famine had been known to result from such an offense. But now the altar fires had been deliberately extinguished, and left extinguished for five days. It was an unspeakable sacrilege.

Hourly there was expectancy of some great calamity to befall. Per-

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Source: Author´s collection.

What probably prompted 16-year-old Thomas Lanier (not yet Tennessee) Williams to submit stories[2] to the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* was the chance of a fee he might receive, if what he wrote was accepted for publication. His tale "The vengeance of Nitocris," set in ancient Egypt, was published in *Weird*'s August 1928 issue: his first story in print. He was paid $35. That's the equivalent of $550 today. You could buy a refrigerator in 1928 for $35.

Williams' "Nitocris" is a 4800-word riff on a 120-word throwaway paragraph from the chronicles of the Greek historian Herodotus in which a Pharaoh's sister from the Sixth Dynasty of Egypt revenges her brother's death at the hands of a mob. "Beauteous" Nitocris (Williams has her wearing lipstick) announces a banquet in an underground chamber, conveniently next to the Nile. In 1959, in the *New York Times*, Williams described what happened next: "…at the height of this banquet, she excused herself from the table and opened sluice gates admitting the waters of the Nile into the locked banquet hall, drowning her unloved guests like so many rats" (Williams, 1959, p. 446).

In 1928 Tom pitched his prose to what would please a *Weird Tales* editor.

> With the ferocity of a lion springing into the arena of a Roman amphitheater to devour the gladiators set there for its delectation, the black water plunged in. Furiously it surged over the floor of the room, sweeping tables before it and sending its victims, now face to face with their harrowing doom, into a hysteria of terror. … And what a scene of chaotic and hideous horror might a spectator have beheld! The gorgeous trumpery of banquet invaded by howling waters of death! Gaily dressed merrymakers caught suddenly in the grip of terror! Gasps and screams of the dying amid tumult and thickening dark! (Williams, 1928, p. 260).

Weird Tales, the magazine that offered an outlet for Thomas Lanier Williams' fevered prose in 1928, published its first issue in March of 1923. *Weird Tales* was a "pulp" magazine, printed on inexpensive wood pulp paper that grows browner and more fragile over time. A hundred years later the pages shatter into flakes when touched or turned, but archivists have digitalized the contents of the issues and placed digital copies online, which makes reading and research possible, as do CD disc collections.

In the 1920's a single issue of *Weird* cost twenty-five cents and was available monthly on newsstands and in drugstores throughout the United States. Copies of *Weird* were mailed around the world, including to U.S. military bases. Each issue in the late

[2] Three stories at least, found in typed manuscript pages in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas, seem to be intended for submission to *Weird Tales*: "The vengeance of Nitocris," "The eye that saw Death," and "The flower-girl of Carthage."

1920s ran to 148 pages. A *Weird* Table of Contents in the 1920s listed an average of fifteen entries, including stories and poems of various lengths and authors both famous and unknown. The magazine ended publication in 1954.[3]

Every month *Weird Tales* printed a full-page ad for itself defining the contents of what was published. The headlines varied in 1928, the year *Weird* printed Williams' Nitocris story: Gripping Fiction (January), Quality Fiction (February) Superb (March) Unique (April), but the copy was more or less the same:

> NOWHERE except in the pages of *Weird Tales* can you find such superb stories of the bizarre, the grotesque and the terrible—fascinating tales that grip the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take one from the humdrum, matter-of-fact world into a deathless realm of fancy —tales so thrillingly told that they seem very real. This magazine prints the best contemporary weird fiction in the world. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor to *Weird Tales*. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that look into the future with the eye of prophecy (Weird Tales, February, 1928, inside cover).

Rhode Island's Gothic surrealist H.P. Lovecraft (*Weird* published over a dozen of his stories)[4] put it this way:

> *Weird Tales*, February 1928, The Call of Cthulhu
> 'The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light … (Lovecraft, 1928, p. 159).

The pattern of Lovecraft's stories—the inevitable horrific revelation of a willfully forgotten past—could pass for the plot summary of Williams' most famous plays: *Suddenly last summer*, *Sweet bird of youth*, *A streetcar named Desire*, *The night of the iguana,* and *The glass menagerie* if you think it's horrific to abandon your crippled sister. Williams thought it was monstrous.

Besides "The vengeance of Nitocris," at least two other typed manuscripts for short stories signed Thomas Lanier Williams demonstrate teen-aged Tom's understanding of

[3] Beginning in 1973 there have been several attempts to start new magazines called *Weird Tales*. As of this writing there is a *Weird Tales* website.

[4] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, born 1890, died 1937. *Weird Tales* published seven Lovecraft stories while he was alive—one ghost-written for Houdini—and published another six stories by Lovecraft posthumously.

what *Weird* was willing to pay for. *Weird* boasted of "surgical stories" in the menu of genres touted in ads. Thomas Lanier Williams' manuscript for "The eye that saw death,"[5] relates a sinister surgery story that resembles four other sinister surgery stories published by *Weird* in 1929,[6] including March 1929's "The rat" by S. Fowler Wright in which "The surgeon experimented on a blind rat, then committed a stage murder".[7]

In Williams' "The eye that saw death" a troubled patient with a transplanted eye takes on the tormented vision of a murderer (from whom the eye was removed after execution). Williams typed his parents' St. Louis address— 6254 Enright Avenue—on the last page of "The eye that saw death" manuscript, as he had on the "Nitocris" manuscript. The Williams family lived at Enright from June 1926 to September 1935 (Leverich, 1995, p. 79, 153), but it is impossible to pinpoint when "The eye that saw death" was written. The question the story poses—whether it is better to retain a horrific vision or have it surgically removed— is the same question posed in *Suddenly last summer* written in 1957. Williams' ultimate answer, having it both ways, lies in the title of the play *Something cloudy, something clear* written in 1981.

"The flower-girl of Carthage,"[8] another story signed by Thomas Lanier Williams (giving his parents address) that seems intended for *Weird*, resolves a love triangle, thanks to reincarnation, over the span of two thousand years from an Ancient Roman chariot race to a car collision in an early twentieth-century mid-western city. Reincarnation stories were also a *Weird* specialty. Williams stopped his narrative for some philosophical reflections:

> The bodies of men are like waxen candles. They burn with life for their short periods. Then their flame vanishes – into that vast and mysterious darkness of death, from which all flames of life have sprung and into the rapacious maw of which all must eventually be swallowed.[9]

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5 "The eye that saw death" was published posthumously by *Strand Magazine* in 2015.

6 *The Weird Tale*s 1929 line-up of surgical stories along with their descriptions in the magazine: February: "An adventure in anesthesia" By Everil Worrell. "The new gas used at the hospital drove one man to suicide, and had a startling and weird effect on another." March: "The rat" by S. Fowler Wright. "The surgeon experimented on a blind rat, then committed a stage murder." July: "Dr. Pichegru's discovery" by Carl F Keppler. "An unscrupulous scientific zealot performs an experiment in brain-transplantation, with hideous results." November: "The gray killer" by Everil Worrell. "Through the wards of a hospital slithered a strange horrifying creature, carrying shocking death to his victims."

7 The description in *Weird Tales*, February 1929, the month before publication.

8 "The flower-girl of Carthage" is so far unpublished. The typed manuscript is in the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

9 Harry Ransom Center folder, page numbered 9 by Professor Thomas Mitchell.

The purple prose puts crudely what Williams would embody in more subtle ways onstage, memorably so in the last lines of *The glass menagerie*.

> TOM: … for nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura - and so good-bye.
> [She blows the candles out.]
> THE SCENE DISSOLVES (Williams, 2000a, p. 465).

Or the fireworks that conclude *The eccentricities of a nightingale.*

> (Another rocket explodes, much lower and brighter. The angel, Eternity, is clearly revealed for a moment or two. Alma gives it a little parting salute as she follows after the young salesman, touching the plume on her hat as if to see if it were still there.)
> (The radiance of the sky-rocket fades out; the scene is dimmed out with it.)
> The End (Williams, 2000b, p. 487).

Whether he was conscious of it or not, half-remembered or completely forgot, what Williams read in *Weird* echoed over the decades of his writing. In the January 1928 issue of *Weird* there's "A ghost-tale of New Orleans" titled "The garret of Madame Lemoyne,"[10] the story of a haunted torture chamber that fifty-five years later echoed in the title of Williams' one-act farce of a torture chamber set in an attic, *The remarkable rooming-house of Mme. LeMonde*, submitted for publication in 1982.[11] There are other coincidences, or perhaps they aren't coincidences.

The points of contact, or let's call them coincidence, of Williams' writing with *Weird* stories, names, themes, and sympathies peak in 1928, the year he was waiting for his Nitocris story to be published. [12] Such contacts/coincidences occur a little less so in 1927, the year in which his "Nitocris" was accepted for publication. There are points of contact with the surgical stories in 1929.[13] By September 1929, Williams was in college at the University of Missouri at Columbia. Would he have continued reading *Weird* in college? Maybe. There are some points of contact or coincidence in 1926. Did Thomas Lanier Williams see much of 1925 *Weird Tales*, when he was 14? Maybe he did.

In any of the years Williams might have been reading *Weird* he would have had the opportunity to dip into (along with then modern science fiction and fantasy) an inspiring range of fantasy stories—and poetry —written by an international array of great authors

[10] "The garret of Madame Lemoyne" by W. K. Mashburn, Jr. *Weird Tales*, v. 11, n. 1, p. 44, January 1928.
[11] *The remarkable rooming-house of Mme. LeMonde* was first published by Albondocani Press in 1984.
[12] According to Williams' *Memoir*, he wrote and submitted "The vengeance of Nitocris" in 1927, receiving notice from *Weird Tales* it would be published in 1928.
[13] For surgical stories in *Weird Tales* see footnote 6.

from past centuries.[14] *Weird* was establishing a lineage for what it published.

Weird 1926 issues included writing by Sir Walter Scott, Edgar Allan Poe (twice), Charles Kingsley, Baudelaire (twice), Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, Théophile Gautier, William Blake ("Tyger! Tyger!"), Guy de Maupassant, Percy Bysshe Shelley ("Ozymandias"), Charles Dickens, Daniel Defoe, and Friedrich von Schiller.

Weird 1927 included Poe again, William Coleridge (twice), Wilkie Collins, Washington Irving, John Keats, Leonid Andreyeff, Robert Louis Stevenson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ivan Turgenev, Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Alexander Pushkin, Elizabeth Gaskell, Bram Stoker, and Shakespeare (a fairy lullaby from A *midsummer night's dream*).[15]

Weird 1928 included Poe, Gautier, Washington Irving, Baudelaire, Flaubert ("St. Julian" from *Three Tales*), and Hawthorne. In September 1928 *Weird* included Bram Stoker and, again, Washington Irving. For the rest of 1928 *Weird* did not include such "classic" fantastic literature.

There was less historic writing in *Weird*'s 1929 monthly issues. In February, a short story by the 19th century Spanish novelist Alarcón appeared in *Weird*. A poem by Baudelaire appeared that May and a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne was published in *Weird* that July. In 1930, *Weird*'s historic writing was made up of only three entries, written by Dickens, Guy de Maupassant, and Mark Twain.

There was also, perhaps, a personal connection for Williams to *Weird*. In October 1925 and September 1926 *Weird* published the poetry of Sidney Lanier (1842 -1881).[16] This would mean something special to Thomas *Lanier* Williams, whose middle name honored his father's side's connection through his great-grandfather's mother[17] to the same Lanier family as Sidney. In later years he would mention his connection as a distant cousin to Sidney Lanier, "Georgia's greatest poet," as it says on the 1972 US stamp in Lanier's honor.[18]

Reading *Weird*, Williams would have noticed the work of popular authors like silent film stars, now mostly forgotten, whose writing appeared repeatedly in the 1920's:

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[14] Conveniently in the public domain.

[15] In 1963, *Gamma 1*, a science fiction fantasy magazine that could be considered the intellectual heir to *Weird*, published Shakespeare's fairy lullaby in their second issue. The first issue included Williams' Nitocris story.

[16] Lanier's poem "Song of the Hound" was reprinted in: *Weird Tales*, v. 6, n. 4, p. 505, October 1925. Lanier's poem "Barnacles" was reprinted in: *Weird Tales*, v. 8, n. 3, p. 401, September 1926.

[17] Rebecca Lanier Williams, Rebecca Lanier, b. 27 Jan. 1757, d. 20 Mar. 1823.

[18] Williams was honored with a stamp in 1995.

Seabury Quinn, Greye La Spina (born Fanny Greye Bragg),[19] and John Martin Leahy, among others. Some 1920s *Weird* writers—Robert E. Howard (the creator of Conan the Barbarian) and H.P. Lovecraft—attracted fan bases that survived well past the 1920s and even now grow larger.

Can we suppose bookish 15-year-old Tom read as far as the second paragraph of "The tomb" by H.P. Lovecraft printed in *Weird* Jan. 1926?

> From earliest childhood I have been a dreamer and a visionary … temperamentally unfitted for the formal studies and social recreations of my acquaintances, I have dwelt ever in realms apart from the visible world; spending my youth and adolescence in ancient and little-known books … . I do not think that what I read in these books or saw in these fields and groves was exactly what other boys read and saw there (Lovecraft, 1926b, p. 117).

Did Williams glance at the opening sentence of "The outsider" by H.P. Lovecraft published in *Weird* April 1926?

> Unhappy is he to whom the memories of childhood bring only fear and sadness. Wretched is he who looks back upon lone hours in vast and dismal chambers with brown hangings and maddening rows of antique books … And yet I am strangely content and cling desperately to those sere memories … (Lovecraft, 1926a, p. 449-53).

Perhaps Williams didn't see these stories. Perhaps Lovecraft and Williams were just like-minded individuals. Surely Williams would have no way of knowing that Lovecraft wrote "Imprisoned with the pharaohs," about King Khephren and "his ghoul-queen Nitocris," supposedly a first-person account of the great magician/escape artist Houdini that appeared as the cover story of *Weird* in the summer of 1924.[20]

In Lovecraft's telling, Nitocris is a figure in a fright show, framed by the story of "Imprisoned with the pharaohs"[21] The plot spins out from a fact: Houdini, between engagements in England and Australia,[22] decided to relax by visiting the historical sites of Egypt, including of course Giza and the Sphinx. He was at first unimpressed.

> Then we saw the vast pyramids at the end of the avenue, ghoulish with a dim atavistical menace which I had not seemed to notice in

[19] Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greye_La_Spina.

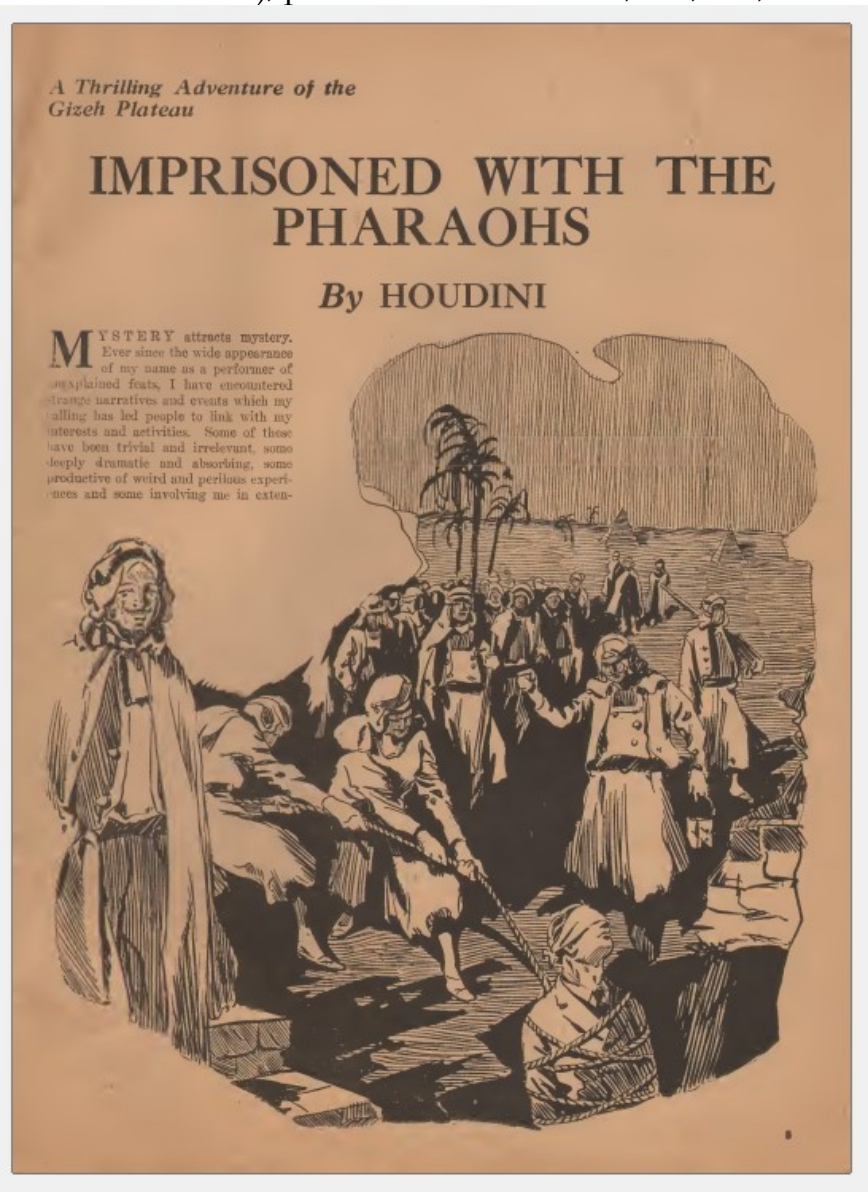
[20] "Imprisoned with the pharaohs" by Harry Houdini. *Weird Tales*, v. 4, n. 2, p. 3-12, May-July 1924. Citations from this short-story in this paper will be credited as Lovecraft (1924) and in the References will be noted that the first writing credit was to Houdini.

[21] Lovecraft received writing credit in the *Weird* 1939 reprint.

[22] In 1910.

the daytime. Even the smallest of them held a hint of the ghastly—for was it not in this that they had buried Queen Nitocris alive in the Sixth Dynasty; subtle Queen Nitocris, who once invited all her enemies to a feast in a temple below the Nile, and drowned them by opening the water-gates? I recalled that the Arabs whisper things about Nitocris, and shun the Third Pyramid at certain phases of the moon. It must have been over her that Thomas Moore[23] was brooding when he wrote of a thing muttered about by Memphian boatmen—'The subterranean nymph that dwells 'Mid sunless gems and glories hid—The lady of the Pyramid!' (Lovecraft, 1924, p. 6-7).[24]

Figure 2 - First page of "Imprisoned with the pharaohs", by H.P. Lovecraft (first credited to Houdini), published in *Weird Tales*, v. 4, n. 2, Summer 1924



A Thrilling Adventure of the Gizeh Plateau

IMPRISONED WITH THE PHARAOHS

By HOUDINI

MYSTERY attracts mystery. Ever since the wide appearance of my name as a performer of unexplained feats, I have encountered strange narratives and events which my calling has led people to link with my interests and activities. Some of these have been trivial and irrelevant, some deeply dramatic and absorbing, some productive of weird and perilous experiences and some involving me in exten-

Source: Author´s collection.

[23] Thomas Moore (1779 –1852). Moore was an Irish writer.

[24] The lines quoted are an excerpt from Thomas Moore´s poem *Alciphron* (1839).

When the great magician gets kidnapped by Bedouins they tie him up and toss him down a stone shaft into part of the Sphinx's barrier wall.[25] Like Juliet scaring herself into drinking poison by imagining the tomb of the Capulets, Houdini faints after recalling what he has overheard whispered.[26]

> They even hint that old Khephren—he of the Sphinx, the Second Pyramid, and the yawning gateway temple—lives far underground wedded to the ghoul-queen Nitocris and ruling over the mummies that are neither of man nor of beast.
> It was of these—of Khephren and his consort and his strange armies of the hybrid dead—that I dreamed, and that is why I am glad the exact dream-shapes have faded from my memory (Lovecraft, 1924, p. 9).

Of course Houdini escapes. Even on vacation what else would you expect a great escape artist to do? As Lovecraft has it:

> Wriggling flat on my stomach, I began the anxious journey toward the foot of the left-hand staircase, which seemed the more accessible of the two. I cannot describe the incidents and sensations of that crawl, but they may be guessed when one reflects on *what I had to watch steadily in that malign, wind-blown torchlight* in order to avoid detection (Lovecraft, 1924, p. 11).

What he "had to watch" (in italics) was the sight of the strange armies of the hybrid dead offering sacrifice to "something quite ponderous… yellow and hairy … as large, perhaps as a good-sized hippopotamus…with five separate shaggy heads…" (Lovecraft, 1924, p. 12). He fled.

> It must have been dream, or the dawn would never have found me breathing on the sands of Gizeh before the sardonic dawn-flushed face of the Great Sphinx (Lovecraft, 1924, p. 12).

Egyptian stories in *Weird* were a consequence of the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, news of which triggered what has been called Egyptomania, fueled by sensational headlines with variations on "The curse of the pharaohs!" that erupted when the tomb's discoverer, Lord Carnarvon, suddenly died.

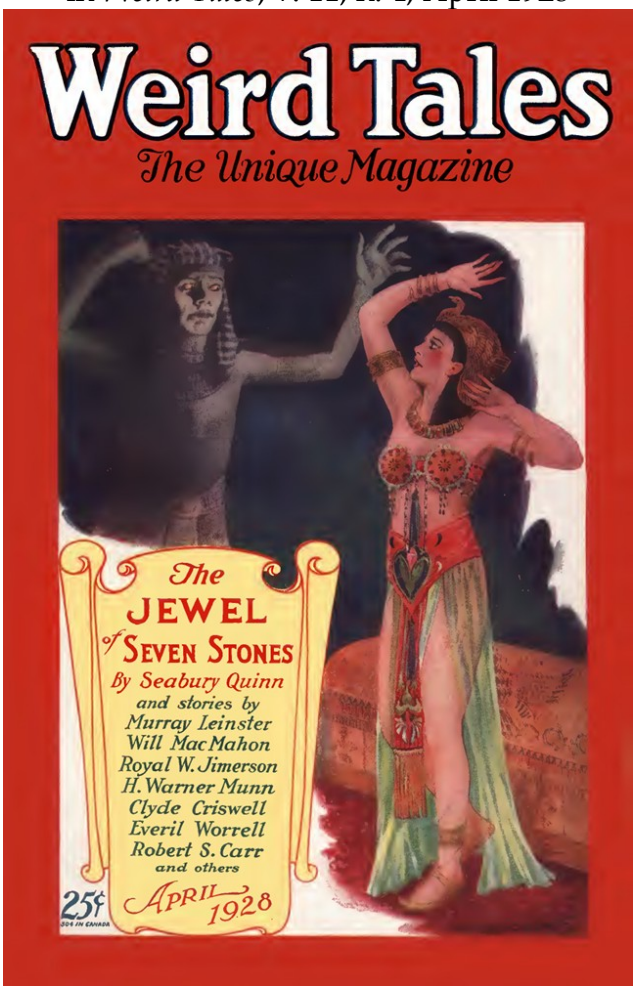
Other *Weird* Egyptian tales from the Roaring Twenties, included with their descriptions in the magazine:

> 'Spider-Bite' by Robert S. Carr, *Weird Tales* June 1926 (*Great White Egyptian Tomb-Spiders – a Resurrected Mummy – and the Jewels of*

[25] This part about the Bedouins is a story Houdini himself told.
[26] "the ghoul-queen Nitocris and ruling over the mummies that are neither of man nor of beast." is quintessential Lovecraft prose.

Ahma-Ka in the Chamber of the Pool)
'The Grinning Mummy' by Seabury Quinn, *Weird Tales* December 1926 (*The solution of the weird death that struck down Professor Butterbaugh*)
'The Bride of Osiris' Otis Adelbert Kline, *Weird Tales* August, September, October 1927 (*A three-part Egyptian serial story of Osiris, the Festival of Re, strange murders, the Am-mits, and the dungeons of Karneter*)
'The Jewel of Seven Stones' by Seabury Quinn, *Weird Tales* April 1928 (*A tale of revivified mummies*)

Figure 3 - "The jewel of seven stones", by Seabury Quinn, in *Weird Tales*, v. 11, n. 4, April 1928



Source: Author´s collection.

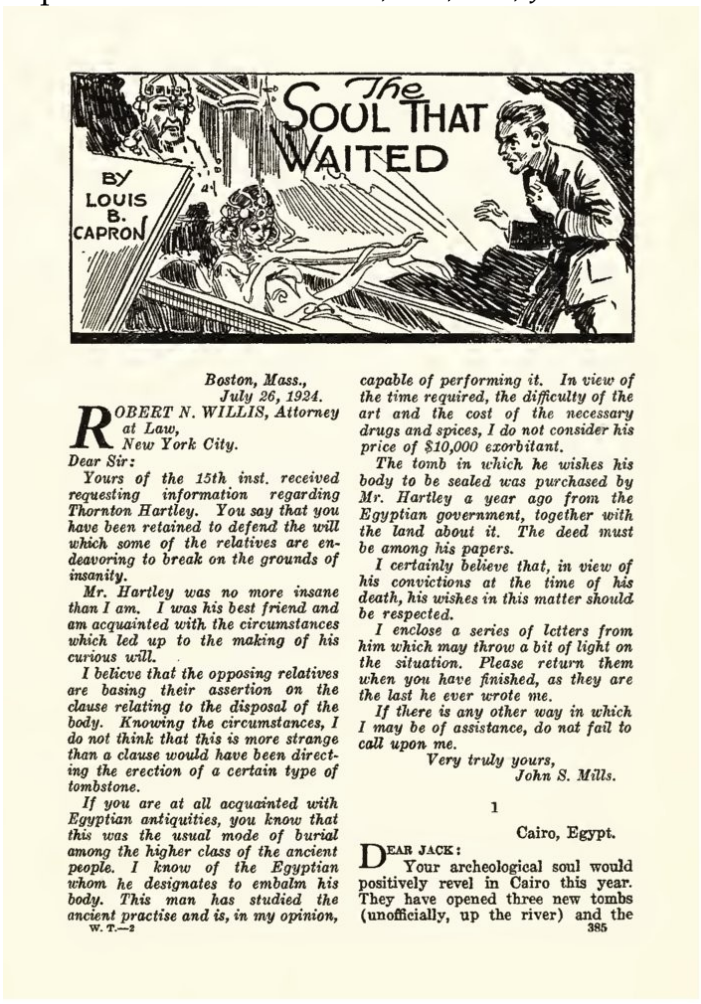
Weird Tales cover art in the 1920s often featured paintings of Egyptian princesses in Egyptian princess drag: transparent skirts, bejeweled brassieres, and ankle bells. There was a taste for this kind of exotica, though, well before Lord Carnavon's pneumonia. More than eighty years before, in 1840, French author Théophile Gautier wrote "The mummy's foot" ("Le pied de momie") which was reprinted in *Weird* April 1926. The blurb in *Weird*'s Table of Contents sums up the story neatly: "Hermonthis, princess of Egypt, returns for her lost foot."

In addition to "Imprisoned with the pharaohs" there was a third Nitocris story published in *Weird*: "The soul that waited: a passion for a mummy" by Louis B. Capron, included in *Weird* June 1925.

The frame for Capron's story is a series of letters a rich American named Thornton Hartley sends to his lawyer. Thorn, as he signs himself, was previously uninterested in women until he bought a ring in Cairo from an antique dealer, a ring with a beautiful portrait of a girl. On the back of the stone Thorn could read the cartouche with her name: Nitocris:

> She is far too sweet to be the Nitocris of Egypt who retaliated in kind on the murderers of her brother. No, Jack, it's some other Nitocris.
> Why, I half believe I'm in love with her now. Laugh, darn you, laugh! I guess I have a right to fall in love with a woman three or four thousand years old (Capron, 1925, p. 386).

Figure 4 - First page of "The soul that waited", by Louis B. Capron, published in *Weird Tales*, v. 5, n. 6, June 1925



Source: Author´s collection.

In and around Cairo, Thorn comes across a votive bowl from the tomb of Nitocris and a scrap of papyrus with more of her story. Then he finds her statue in a museum. He learns the location of her tomb. He buys the site, excavates the tomb, and sleeps in it. In his last letter to his lawyer, Thorn claims to see Nitocris in his dreams and reveals his plans to die in her tomb.

> We are waiting. When my soul shall be freed, we shall begin our journey through the underworld, together, and together we shall stand in the judgment hall of Osiris (Capron, 1925, p. 392).

Most *Weird* stories about Ancient Egypt, like Capron's (and even Théophile Gautier's story from 1840) have to do with love affairs (gone right or wrong) between a (light-skinned) scholar/tourist/explorer/scientist/or artist and some (usually darker-skinned) beautiful mummified ancient Egyptian princess who, for better or worse, haunts the poor guy.

> I saw the folds of my bed-curtain stir, and heard a bumping sound, like that caused by some person hopping on one foot across the floor. I felt a strange wind chill my back… The bed-curtains opened and I beheld a young girl of a very deep coffee-brown complexion …possessing the purest Egyptian type of perfect beauty (Gautier, 1926, p. 530).

Thomas Lanier Williams' version of Nitocris has no such frame. Williams, aged sixteen, created a heroine who is very much not a passive woman come to life as a result of some man's dreams. She's the all too active chooser of her own destiny and not so by the way, other people's destinies. She drowns her dinner guests!

Capron wrote about a Nitocris waiting centuries for a man to come for her, Williams has a powerful woman who masters time for her own purposes. Lovecraft has Houdini see the rat-eaten mummy of Nitocris. Williams wrote about a forever beautiful Nitocris, who isn't buried alive as Houdini/Lovecraft tells the tale, but as Williams tells it in *Weird Tales* "resolved to meet her inevitable death in a way that befitted one of her rank" lit a lot of incense and "flung herself down upon a couch" so that "In a short time the scorching heat and the suffocating thick fumes of the smoke overpowered her. Only her beautiful dead body remained for the hands of the mob" (Williams, 1928, p. 288).

Figure 5 - Last page of "The vengeance of Nitocris", short story by Williams, published in *Weird Tales*, v. 12, n. 2, August 1928

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Next Month

The

DEVIL-PLANT

By

JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS

IN THE tangled jungles of the upper Amazon River, far from the haunts of men, a great botanist had built his strange laboratory, and there he created his garden of horrors—weird monstrosities, eery giants, nightmare plants and horrible man-eating flowers. Into this terrible garden came a beautiful Portuguese girl, bearing food for that blood-chilling plant-horror whose foul breath tainted the evening breeze, and then—but that is the story.

A WEIRD-SCIENTIFIC tale of powerful interest, about a plant that was more animal than it was plant—a vegetable thing that left the place where it was grown and went stalking forth into the night in search of human food. This story will be printed complete in the

September issue of

WEIRD TALES

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The Vengeance of Nitocris

(Continued from page 260)

revelers and all had been killed. However, this theory was speedily dispelled when a voyager from down the river reported having passed the temple in a perfectly firm condition but declared that he had seen no signs of life about the place—only the brightly canopied boats, drifting at their moorings.

Uneasiness steadily increased throughout the day. Sage persons recalled the great devotion of the queen toward her dead brother, and noted that the guests at the banquet of last night had been composed almost entirely of those who had participated in his slaying.

When in the evening the queen arrived in the city, pale, silent, and obviously nervous, threatening crowds blocked the path of her chariot, demanding roughly an explanation of the disappearance of her guests. Haughtily she ignored them and lashed forward the horses of her chariot, pushing aside the tight mass of people. Well she knew, however, that her life would be doomed as soon as they confirmed their suspicions. She resolved to meet her inevitable death in a way that befitted one of her rank, not at the filthy hands of a mob.

Therefore upon her entrance into the palace she ordered her slaves to fill instantly her boudoir with hot and smoking ashes. When this had been done, she went to the room, entered it, closed the door and locked it securely, and then flung herself down upon a couch in the center of the room. In a short time the scorching heat and the suffocating thick fumes of the smoke overpowered her. Only her beautiful dead body remained for the hands of the mob.

Source: Author´s collection.

Consistently, where the progression of certain fantasy images in *Weird Tales* leads to withering death and punishment in hell, the same fantasy imagery included by Williams in his plays, poetry, and fiction progresses to flourishing life and, even in death, as in the death of Nitocris, self-defined accomplishment and satisfaction.

Ghost stories and stories of the living dead often appeared in *Weird Tales*. Alvin F. Harlow's monthly "Folks used to believe" essay sometimes retold traditional folk tales of ghosts and *Weird Tales* carried forward literary traditions of ghostly horror by reprinting

nineteenth century stories written by Edgar Allan Poe and assorted European virtuosos of terror, including Mary Shelley with her cadaverous collage of a monster created by Dr. Frankenstein (reprinted in *Weird* in installments from May through December 1932). In Mary Shelley's novel, what should be dead – what deserves to be dead – isn't dead, just like Kilroy's frisky cadaver in Williams' *Camino Real* (which steals its own heart during an autopsy and runs off) or the pirouetting apparition of Nijinsky in Williams' *A cavalier for milady* (Williams, 2008a). Williams had a fondness for dancing ghosts: the ghost of Zelda Fitzgerald pliés in *Clothes for a summer hotel* (wearing a bedraggled gray tutu) (Williams, 1983); the soon to be dead (or is he dead already?) ballet-boy Kip practices a pavane in *Something cloudy, something clear*; and undead Nijinsky leaps in *Aimez-vous Ionesco?* (Williams, 2016), another play by Williams. Less athletic ghosts also materialize in plays by Tennessee Williams, including Vincent Van Gogh[27] and Tallulah Bankhead.[28] Williams' onstage ghosts are not so much horrific, as entertaining. They're often benevolent. The apparition of Arthur Rimbaud, called forth during a séance in *Will Mr. Merriwether return from Memphis?* (Williams, 2008b), agrees to recite a poem. The blessedly silent apparition of Williams' own grandmother in *Vieux Carré* floats in the alcove of a New Orleans flophouse, offering comfort.[29]

As with beneficent ghosts and self-sufficient Egyptian princesses who appear in fiction and plays by Williams, just so with the Williams' witches: they reverse or expand on *Weird* expectations and formulae. Witches usually came to a bad end between the covers of *Weird Tales*. The Salem Massachusetts witch trials of 1692, during which nineteen people were judged to be witches—and hanged —were reported on extensively by *Weird Tales* perennial contributor Seabury Quinn in *Servants of Satan*, five non-fiction accounts published in *Weird Tales* from March 1925 ("The Salem horror"(Quinn, 1925b, p. 73-77)) through July 1925 ("The end of the horror" (Quinn, 1925a, p. 121-124)).[30] Alvin F. Harlow's essay in April 1928 *Weird*, "Folks used to believe: the familiar," recounted the history of the Salem Witch trials and defined a familiar as "A Spirit or Devil supposed to attend on

[27] In *Will Mr. Merriwether return from Memphis?* (Williams, 2008b).

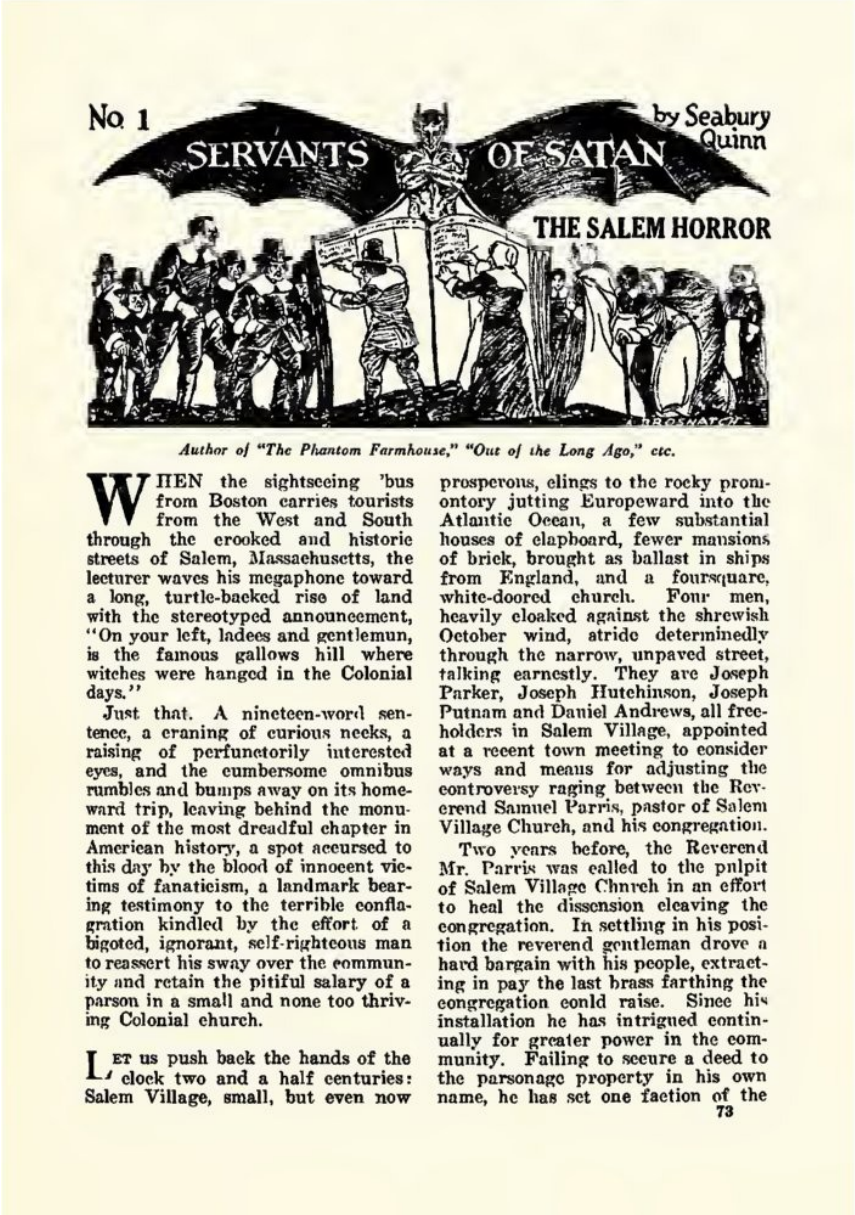
[28] In *Something cloudy, something clear* (Williams, 1995).

[29] [She] "materialized soundlessly. Her eyes fixed on me with a gentle questioning look which I came to remember as having belonged to my grandmother during her sieges of illness, when I used to go to her room and sit by her bed and want, so much, to say something or to put my hand over hers, but could do neither, knowing that if I did, I'd betray my feelings with tears that would trouble her more than her illness . . . Now it was she who stood next to my bed for a while" (Williams, 1979).

[30] The Salem witch trials also gave background to H.P. Lovecraft's "Pickman's model" published in *Weird* October 1927 and Lovecraft's "The Dunwich horror" published in *Weird* April 1929.

Witches, Wizards, etc." The essay included the report of a woman in Salem who had a familiar "in the shape of a bird 'yellow in colour, about the bigness of a crow'" (Harlow, 1928, p. 542). A variation of the yellow bird's appearance had already appeared in the first installment of *Servants of Satan*, in *Weird* March 1925 (Quinn, 1925b, p. 49).[31]

Figure 6 - First page of *Servants of Satan*, by Seabury Quinn, beginning with the story "The Salem horror", published in Weird Tales, v. 5, n. 3, March 1925



No. 1

SERVANTS OF SATAN

by Seabury Quinn

THE SALEM HORROR

Author of "The Phantom Farmhouse," "Out of the Long Ago," etc.

WHEN the sightseeing 'bus from Boston carries tourists from the West and South through the crooked and historic streets of Salem, Massachusetts, the lecturer waves his megaphone toward a long, turtle-backed rise of land with the stereotyped announcement, "On your left, ladees and gentlemun, is the famous gallows hill where witches were hanged in the Colonial days."

Just that. A nineteen-word sentence, a craning of curious necks, a raising of perfunctorily interested eyes, and the cumbersome omnibus rumbles and bumps away on its homeward trip, leaving behind the monument of the most dreadful chapter in American history, a spot accursed to this day by the blood of innocent victims of fanaticism, a landmark bearing testimony to the terrible conflagration kindled by the effort of a bigoted, ignorant, self-righteous man to reassert his sway over the community and retain the pitiful salary of a parson in a small and none too thriving Colonial church.

LET us push back the hands of the clock two and a half centuries: Salem Village, small, but even now prosperous, clings to the rocky promontory jutting Europeward into the Atlantic Ocean, a few substantial houses of clapboard, fewer mansions of brick, brought as ballast in ships from England, and a foursquare, white-doored church. Four men, heavily cloaked against the shrewish October wind, stride determinedly through the narrow, unpaved street, talking earnestly. They are Joseph Parker, Joseph Hutchinson, Joseph Putnam and Daniel Andrews, all freeholders in Salem Village, appointed at a recent town meeting to consider ways and means for adjusting the controversy raging between the Reverend Samuel Parris, pastor of Salem Village Church, and his congregation.

Two years before, the Reverend Mr. Parris was called to the pulpit of Salem Village Church in an effort to heal the dissension cleaving the congregation. In settling in his position the reverend gentleman drove a hard bargain with his people, extracting in pay the last brass farthing the congregation could raise. Since his installation he has intrigued continually for greater power in the community. Failing to secure a deed to the parsonage property in his own name, he has set one faction of the

73

Source: Author´s collection.

[31] "The Salem Horror" by Seabury Quinn. *Weird Tales*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (March 1925) Page 75. One of the "bewitched" girls suddenly rose to her feet and cried, "Look where she sits upon the beam!" "Who? Who?" asked the congregation excitedly, for they, of course, saw no one seated on the ceiling Another girl, also eager to be noticed, rose with a wild shriek and exclaimed, "There is a yellow bird sitting on the minister's hat!"

"The yellow bird" is the title of a story by Tennessee Williams published in June 1947,[32] not in any pulp, but in the upscale glossy magazine *Town & Country*. The history of the Salem witch trials fills the first paragraph, in which readers learn that the heroine of Williams' story, an Arkansas minister's daughter named Alma Tutwiler, is descended (through her father's line) from a Puritan minister who denounced his wife, Goody, during the Salem witch trials. Goody was accused by the Circle Girls, a clique of children who claimed to fall into fits in the presence of witches.

> One of them declared that Goody Tutwiler had appeared to them with a yellow bird which she called by the name of Bobo and which served as interlocutor between herself and the devil to whom she was sworn. The Reverend Tutwiler was so impressed by these accusations, as well as by the fits of the Circle Girls when his wife entered their presence in court, that he himself finally cried out against her and testified that the yellow bird named Bobo had flown into his church one Sabbath and, visible only to himself, had perched on his pulpit and whispered indecent things to him about several younger women in the congregation (Williams, 1985, p. 221).

Alma Tutwiler defies the modern-day Puritans of her family, but she isn't hanged. She leaves Arkansas to become a successful whore in the French Quarter of New Orleans. There, she bears a son without knowing who the father might be. Her illegitimate son brings her riches, probably pirate's plunder, "fists full of gold and jewels" (Williams, 1985, p. 227). Williams pointed out the difference between his fantasy fiction and historical fantasies.

> This child of Alma's would have been hanged in Salem. If the Circle Girls had not cried out against Alma (which they certainly would have done), they would have gone into fifty screaming fits over Alma's boy. He was thoroughly bewitched (Williams, 1985, p. 227).

When Alma dies her fortune

> was left to The Home for Reckless Spenders. And in due time the son … came home, and a monument was put up (Williams, 1985, p. 228).

On one side of the monument a name was inscribed:

> The odd name of Bobo, which was the name of the small yellow bird that the devil and Goody Tutwiler had used as a go-between in their machinations (Williams, 1985, p. 228).

[32] *A streetcar named Desire* opened on Broadway in December 1947.

The fantastic sight of Goody Tutwiler's yellow bird Bobo (even if invisible to everyone but her husband and the Circle Girls) led to Goody's hanging. In Williams' story, Alma Tutwiler's connection with Bobo is also invisible, but memorialized with honor. "Some people don't even die empty-handed" (Williams, 1985, p. 227) the apparition of Alma's late husband says, as he pours out a cornucopia of treasure on her deathbed, another example of Williams' beneficent ghosts.

In *Weird Tales* the efforts of vampires (commingled with sexual urges) to drain blood and vital energy are thwarted over and over again,[33] whereas vampires in plays and stories written by Williams (and there are many[34]) often succeed in their pursuits, erotic and otherwise.[35] The vampire's name in *Will Mr. Merriwether return to Memphis?* is Emerald Eldridge. Eldridge! Shades of H.P. Lovecraft! Lovecraft used "eldritch," the old Scottish word for *weird,* in over a dozen stories, used the word so often that eldritch became synonymous with Lovecraft and the writers inspired by him who wrote for *Weird*.[36] Speaking of Emerald Eldridge:

> NORA: Everyone that knows of her, they say she sits motionless in a Tiger Town saloon till she spots a black man that attracts her. Then rises, with difficulty, hisses between her teeth like a serpent, raises her arms and sets the silver bells ringing. Out she goes then. The unfortunate young man follows. She whisks him away to her mansion, and he's never the same after that. His youth is confiscated, his youth is drawn out of him like blood drawn out by leeches or vampire bats, and there I've told you her story and I know it, I know her story (Williams, 2008b, p. 280).

In *Weird Tales,* women who run with wolves are caught or killed, as in "Wolf-Woman" by Bassett Morgan (Grace Ethel Jones) the cover story of *Weird* September 1927. Women with wolves made for memorable *Weird* cover art, not only for the "Wolf-Woman" cover where the lady with the wolves is half-naked, but in December 1930 where the *Weird* cover lady with the wolves is elegantly dressed, and again in March 1933 where the *Weird* cover lady with the wolves is nude. Coincidence or not, in Williams' full-length play, *The Red Devil Battery sign* (Williams, 1988), after a woman escapes the attempts of a military-industrial complex to capture and silence her, she meets up with a street gang, whose leader is named Wolf. The final tableau is set up with a stage direction:

[33] Vampires were the subject of *Weird*'s "Folks used to believe" essay volume XI, number 3 (March 1928).

[34] As examples, see *Sweet bird of youth* and the short story "Miss Coynte of Greene." Williams's use of vampires for character relationships was inspired, in part, by August Strindberg's ideas about vampires.

[35] More than once Williams used the metaphor of satisfied vampires to write about race relations in America.

[36] Lovecraft's followers included August Derleth and Clark Ashton Smith.

> [The play stylistically makes its final break with realism. This break must be accomplished as if predetermined in the *mise en scene* from the beginning] (Williams, 1988, p. 92).
> Wolf, the gang leader, declares to his gang the fugitive woman 'is Sister of Wolf!' A flare goes off and the muted sound of an explosion.
> [She throws back her head and utters the lost but defiant outcry of the she-wolf. The cry is awesome] (Williams, 1988, p. 94).

Awesome in its defiance, not (yet) caught or killed.

Figure 7 - Memorable Weird cover art showing women with wolves, published in v. 1, n. 3, September 1927 (left) and v. 21, n. 3, March, 1933 (right)

Source: Author´s collection.

That Williams consistently found his own vision, upending *Weird* associations, extended in creative ways to the poetry he wrote.

Weird Tales published Walt Whitman for his death verses, headlining sections of Whitman's "Leaves of grass" as "Whispers of heavenly death" (Whitman, 1925, p. 699) and the following excerpt from "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd" as "Death

carol" (Whitman, 1926, p. 398):

> Praised be the fathomless universe, For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious; And for love, sweet love — But praise! praise! praise! For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.[37]

Williams, inspired by Whitman and "Leaves of grass", issued affirmations of brotherhood in the verses he wrote that appear among the drafts for the unpublished *The men from the polar star*:[38]

> The wide and complete devastation, the living will rise
> Ineluctable, shining as glass, as jewel,
> As radiant spring in the roots of the purified grasses,
> To raise no walls, but to plant tall forests about them,
> To live and to love, and to chant our anthems forever, Love, love, love![39]

In December 1926 *Weird Tales* published a Gothic Christmas poem by H.P. Lovecraft:

> Yule-Horror
>
> There is snow on the ground,
> And the valleys are cold,
> And a midnight profound
> But a light on the hilltops half-seen hints of feastings unhallowed and old.
> There is death in the clouds,
> There is fear in the night,
> For the dead in their shrouds
> Hail the sun's turning flight.
> And chant wild in the woods as they dance round a Yule-altar fungous and white.
> To no gale of Earth's kind
> Sways the fort of oak,
> Where the sick boughs entwined
> By mad mistletoes choke,
> For these pow'rs are the pow'rs of the dark, from the graves of the lost Druid-folk (Lovecraft, 1926c, p. 846).

Williams' 1966 play *The mutilated* begins with a Christmas carol. Williams gave the carolers a poem to sing that, consciously or not, extends and reverses Lovecraft's imagery.

> I think the strange, the crazed, the queer will have their holiday this year,
> And for a while a little while there will be pity for the wild.

[37] "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd" was first published in 1865.
[38] Written in the 1940s.
[39] Page 22 from the unfinished story/play *The men from the polar star*. The last words are underlined in the manuscript.

A Miracle, A Miracle!
A sanctuary for the wild…
The constant star of wanderers will light the forest where they fall
And they will see and they will hear a radiance, a distant call
A miracle, A miracle!
A vision and a distant call (Williams, 2000b, p. 585).

The strange, the crazed, the queer is, after all, perhaps another way of saying w*eird*.[40]

A NOTE: Did Williams read the other science fiction and fantasy pulp magazines of the time: *Astounding Stories* and *Amazing Stories*?

There were some differences between the three similarly titled pulps: *Weird Tales*, *Astounding Stories*, and *Amazing Stories*. To begin with, they varied in the number of pages and entries they offered. *Weird* ran around 148 pages with as many as fifteen entries—stories, poems, sometimes a short play—per issue. *Astounding* also ran to 148 pages. Its editors favored long fiction, and *Astounding* collected about six entries in each issue. *Amazing* ran to around 100 pages and, like *Astounding*, published mostly longer stories. An *Amazing* Table of Contents in the 1920s listed an average of eight, sometimes as few as six or even four items.

The nature of the contents differed.

Amazing Stories, under its editor and founder Hugo Gernsback, called the genre it offered "scientifiction." This neologism was easier to read than to say and Gernsback came to accept, prefer, and promote the term Science Fiction. Gernsback eschewed fantasy. In

[40] For Williams, sanctuary is temporary, as in the version of the poem published in *The collected poems of Tennessee Williams,* edited by David Roessel and Nicholas Moschovakis (New York: New Directions, 2002):
I think the strange, the crazed, the queer
will have their holiday this year,
I think for just a little while
there will be pity for the wild.
I think in places known as gay,
in secret clubs and private bars,
the damned will serenade the damned
with frantic drums and wild guitars.
I think for some uncertain reason,
mercy will be shown this season
to the lovely and misfit,
to the brilliant and deformed –
I think they will be housed and warmed
And fed and comforted awhile
before, with such a tender smile,
the earth destroys her crooked child.

Fed and comforted only for a while? As Kilroy says in *Camino Real*, Block Ten:
"Everything's for a while. For a while is the stuff that dreams are made of, Baby!"

the magazine's fourth issue, July of 1926, he announced:

> We reject stories often on the ground that, in our opinion, the plot or action is not in keeping with science as we know it today. For instance, when we see a plot wherein the hero is turned into a tree, later on into a stone, and then again back to himself, we do not consider this science. but, rather, a fairy tale, and such stories have no place in AMAZING STORIES.[41]

Gernsback was drawing a distinction with *Weird Tales*,[42] whose editor, Farnsworth Wright, had declared *Weird*'s contents came from "a deathless realm of fancy" including stories about werewolves, vampires, and "the cream of the weird-scientific fiction" (Weird…, 1928, inside cover).

Amazing premised what it published on scientific probabilities ("Extravagant Fiction today … Cold Fact Tomorrow"). Crimes in *Amazing* detective stories were solved by sleuths with a sphygmograph[43] or "the X-ray, finger prints and the phonograph."[44] Here's a summary of a story from *Amazing* August 1929 that gives a sense of what the magazine's editors thought would interest its readers:

> THE GRIM INHERITANCE, by Carl Clausen. It is almost appalling when you consider the deleterious effect a minute defective ductless gland can have on the well-being and health of an individual. The endocrine gland is particularly interesting and the author of this story has aptly used it in a scientific detective story of definite merit.[45]

Young Tom Williams, who was looking to sell what he wrote, would not have been encouraged to submit to *Amazing Stories*. *Amazing* mostly published known and established sci-fi authors: H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Edgar Rice Burroughs (the creator of Tarzan, Burroughs also thought up John Carter of Mars). In March 1927, *Amazing* published H. G. Wells's sinister surgery story, "Under the knife," whetting reader's appetites a month before publication: "While gruesome to an extent, it is the weird experiences of the patient that stand out rather than the gruesome-ness."[46]

---

41 *Amazing Stories*, v. 1, n. 4, p. 291, July 1926. The masthead for the page has "Extravagant Fiction Today …. Cold Fact Tomorrow" and under that Gernsback's editorial is headlined FICTION VERSUS FACTS.

42 *Astounding Stories* wasn't yet published.

43 Measures blood pressure in "The hammering man," by Edwin Balmer and William B. MacHarg. *Amazing Stories*, March 1927.

44 "the X-ray, finger prints and the phonograph" assist the "scientific detective" of "The white gold pirate" by Merlin Moore Taylor. **Amazing Stories**, March 1927. The same *Amazing Stories* issue contains H.G. Wells' sinister surgery story, "Under the knife."

45 The summary of "The grim inheritance" appeared in *Amazing Stories* July 1929, a month before the story was published.

46 *Amazing Stories*, February 1927, the month before the story was published.

Amazing wasn't going to publish a sinister surgery story by an unknown teenager. It's safe to say Tom Williams at least looked at *Amazing* before deciding that he wasn't welcome.[47]

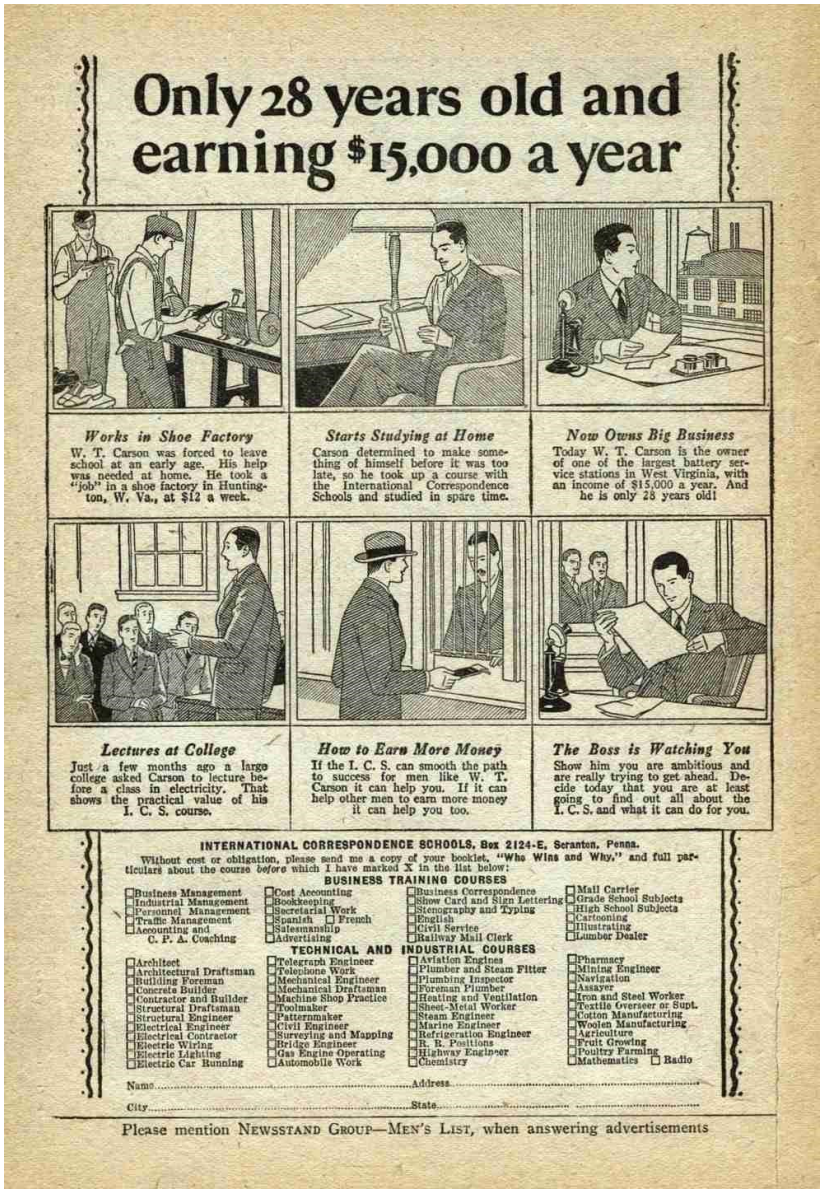
Figure 8 - An illustration of the short story "The face of Isis", by Cyril G. Wates, published in *Amazing Stories*, v. 3, n. 12, p. 1085, March 1929

Source: Author´s collection.

[47] *Amazing Stories* published an Egyptian tale in March 1929. "The face of Isis" by Cyril G. Wates. Two archaeologists discover an inscription, realize it is a diagram for an Egyptian spaceship, build the spaceship, launch it but realize after it crashes and burns that the secret of its anti-gravity mineral has been lost in time.
"Let me ask you a question," said the Professor, sitting up in his deck chair. "Suppose you mounted an electromagnet on the edge of a large wheel and caused a piece of soft iron to adhere to one pole of the magnet. When the wheel is rotating, in what direction would the piece of iron move, if you suddenly shut off the magnetizing current?"
Courtland thought for a moment.
"Why, at a tangent to the rim of the wheel, I suppose," he offered, finally.
"Exactly! And when we shut off the force of gravity between our car and the earth, it will move away."
From: *Amazing Stories*, v. 3, n. 12, p. 1095, March 1929.

Astounding Stories of Super-Science began publishing in 1930. It was a men's magazine – not so much for boys, as is clear from the ads for shaving cream, hernia trusses, and railway safety inspection jobs. Editor Harry Bates laid out the policy of *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* in the first issue (with "Phantoms of reality" by Ray Cummings on its cover): "[…] a magazine whose stories will anticipate the super-scientific achievements of To-morrow—whose stories will not only be strictly accurate in their science but will be vividly, dramatically and thrillingly told."[48]

Figure 9 - Add published in *Astounding Stories*, v. 1, n. 2, p. 152, February 1930



Source: Author´s collection.

[48] *Astounding Stories*, v. 1, n. 1, p. 7, January 1930.

Williams might have read *Astounding Stories*: there are points of contact and coincidence in his work.

In *Astounding*'s second issue, February 1930, page five was given over to a full page ad with cartoon panels depicting the plight of a young man who had to drop out of school to work in a shoe factory, a parallel to the fictional narrator of *The glass menagerie*, Tom Wingfield, and a parallel to the real life of Tom Williams, the author.

At the top of the page, six cartoon boxes are arranged in two rows of three. The first box is captioned "Works in Shoe Factory" and text beneath the caption informs readers: "W.T. Carson was forced to leave school at an early age. His help was needed at home. He took a 'job' in a shoe factory in Huntington, W. Va., at $12 a week."

Captions underneath the boxes that follow announce Carson's rise to riches from "Starts Studying at Home," to "Now Owns Big Business, Lectures at College." Lectures on electricity. The last box of the six is captioned "The Boss is Watching You" and text below suggests "Show him you are ambitious and are really trying to get ahead."

In *The glass menagerie* (set in 1936, written in 1945) Tom Wingfield tells his mother, Amanda, that he has invited an eligible bachelor to meet his unmarried sister Laura. Amanda asks about the gentleman caller's prospects.

> TOM: I think he really goes in for self-improvement.
> AMANDA: What reason have you to think so?
> TOM: He goes to night school.
> AMANDA [beaming]: Splendid! What does he do, I mean study?
> TOM: Radio engineering and public speaking!
> AMANDA: Then he has visions of being advanced in the world! Any young man who studies public speaking is aiming to have an executive job some day! And radio engineering- A thing for the future!

The facing page six of February 1930's *Astounding Tales* was filled with an ad promoting a school for radio engineering as "the road to success," that sounds much like the Gentleman Caller in *The glass menagerie:*[49] "JIM: [His eyes are starry.] Knowledge – Zzzzzp! Money – Zzzzzzp! - Power! That's the cycle democracy is built on!" (Williams, 2000a, p. 454).

May we fantasize, or did Tennessee Williams fantasize, that the Gentleman Caller had seen the ad for the International Correspondence School? Below the cartoons there was a form to be mailed in for "full particulars" about whatever courses interested a

[49] *Weird Tales* also printed full-page ads for Radio Science and Public Speaking as the keys to success.

reader. Among the forty-choices are five Electrical courses and one course in Poultry Farming. These kinds of ads appear in other pulps.

When the lights in the Wingfield apartment go out (which is what happens when you don't pay the bill) Amanda is alone at the fuse box with the Gentleman Caller.

> AMANDA: Isn't electricity a mysterious thing? … We live in such a mysterious universe, don't we? Some people say that science clears up all the mysteries for us. In my opinion it only creates more! (Williams, 2000a, p. 445).

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