



Clive Barker: The Dark Fantastic: The Authorized Biography

By Douglas E. Winter

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Clive Barker: a modern myth-maker, explorer of our darkest instincts and ultimate fears, the writer who -- more than any other contemporary figure -- has shaped our nightmares through diverse media. Novelist, playwright, scriptwriter, artist and director, he is a master at twisting the mundane to make it fantastic, frightening and ultimately meaningful.

Douglas E. Winter's detailed and highly literate biography, made possible by unprecedented access to Barker and his closest friends and family, offers readers a privileged insight into Barker's own story: his Liverpool childhood and adolescence; his forays into the world of theatre, mime and direction; his meteoric rise to fame as the author of the *Books of Blood* and *Weaveworld*, and the director of *Hellraiser*; his move to Hollywood to pursue a film career and his growth as an artist in many different media, which has taken him from theatre -- the first form of human expression -- into the digital age.

Interwoven with this revealing and personal journey into Barker's life is a grand tour through all of his fiction and film, from his earliest unpublished work -- including the short story "The Wood on the Hill," which is published here for the first time -- up to his most recent novel, *Coldheart Canyon* and beyond, giving a tantalising glimpse of things to come.

Clive Barker: The Dark Fantastic unlocks the beating heart of a polymath, a creator, a true artist, and reveals at last a man with one of the twentieth century's most phenomenal imaginations, and the vision to lead us on many strange and fabulous journeys in the years ahead.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Douglas E. Winter, author of *Stephen King: The Art of Darkness* and editor of two major dark-fiction anthologies (*Prime Evil* and *Revelations*), may be the reigning expert on modern horror. If his book *Clive Barker: The Dark Fantastic* is not the definitive biography of that polymathic author-playwright-auteur, it is only because the volume appeared when its subject was still in his late forties.

At 501 pages, plus 50 pages of endnotes and nearly 100 pages of Primary and Secondary Bibliography, *The Dark Fantastic* is an impressively thorough document. It covers Clive Barker's life from before birth (giving background on his parents, grandparents, and the hometown he shares with the Beatles) through the early years of struggle to his successes as an internationally bestselling author, Hollywood screenwriter-producer-director, and family man. The biography makes it clear that Barker has always had exceptional talent. (*The Dark Fantastic* includes, as an appendix, a previously unpublished story, written in Barker's early teens, "The Wood on the Hill." This uneven but fully developed fable of hubris is a tale authors twice as old would be proud to have written.)

Readers expecting a tell-all biography will be disappointed. A good portion of *The Dark Fantastic* is devoted to summaries and assessments of Barker's creations in many media. However, Winter's critical examinations are interesting, sympathetic, and honest. *The Dark Fantastic* is a must for all Barker fans and all serious scholars of horror and the fantastic. --Cynthia Ward

From Publishers Weekly

Since his advent as the enfant terrible of horror fiction in the 1980s, Clive Barker has adopted nearly as many guises as his polymorphic *Nightbreed*: novelist, playwright, illustrator, screenwriter, director, producer and actor. Like his restlessly creative career, this comprehensive critical biography is ambitious if a bit unwieldy. Winter takes the same tack he followed in his exemplary *Stephen King: The Art of Darkness* (1984), interweaving detailed critical study of his subject's work with appreciative biography and cultural critique to fashion a portrait of the artist. The book's structure is dictated by Barker's primary texts in fiction, film and theater. Winter evaluates each in chronological order, as successive steps in Barker's ongoing evolution as an artist of "the fantastique." Though there are many illuminating insights on how Barker's fiction has been shaped by his private life including his childhood in Liverpool, his homosexuality and his love-hate relationship with Hollywood the book's obligatory biographical content reads mostly like an addendum to the critical analysis. Hyperbole is inevitable in some estimations the transgressive tales in Barker's groundbreaking *Books of Blood* are credited with "redeeming the literature of the dark fantastic from the confines of mass marketing" but Winter's explication of a coherent vision that unifies Barker's work and elevates it above much in the genres to which it is pigeonholed is persuasive and corroborated by an abundance of Barker's own articulate observations ("All horror heals. It opens some wounds and shows you how to close them again"). Barker, who will turn 50 this year, is himself still a work in progress. At the very least, this rewarding book offers an attractively posed snapshot of his creative life to date.

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From Library Journal

Clive Barker enjoys cult-figure status on today's literary horror scene. His "adrenalin stories" are highly visual, darkly imaginative tales full of violence and sexuality meant not to terrify "but to excite." This book, written by a friend and editor, traces Barker's journey from bullied Liverpool schoolchild to today's master of

popular fiction and film. Winter traces Barker's retreat to the world of imagination and his passion for Marvel comics, which ignited a love of drawing, early stage experiments with neo-Grand Guignol entertainments, and then increasing success in short stories, novels, and films. Barker discusses his writing methods and defines differences between his body of work and that of Stephen King (King writes "healing stories," while Barker does not). Barker also reveals what terrifies him ("Absence ... the worst monster in the world is better than a blank space, to my mind"). He's comfortable in his identity as a gay man, though he admits that the gay scene doesn't attract him. Barker enjoys the collaborative process of moviemaking but declares it an "indulgence," a distant second to the pleasure of writing. His fans will rejoice in the wealth of biographical and critical material to be found here, but others may find the book overlong and the author's tone overly effusive. Still, this is easily the most comprehensive study available of Barker, and as such it's recommended for college and public libraries. Stephen Rees, Levittown Regional Lib., PA
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