

UNMASKED FIRE

BY JOSEPH S. PULVER, SR.

*Along the shore the cloud waves break,
The twin suns sink beneath the lake,
The shadows lengthen*

In Carcosa.

*Strange is the night where black stars rise,
And strange moons circle through the skies
But stranger still is*

Lost Carcosa.

*Songs that the Hyades shall sing,
Where flap the tatters of the King,
Must die unheard in*

Dim Carcosa.

*Song of my soul, my voice is dead;
Die thou, unsung, as tears unshed
Shall dry and die in*

Lost Carcosa.

*Cassilda's Song in "The King in Yellow"
Act 1, Scene 2.*

The black stars are up.
Upon the shore of madness, the cloud waves break.
The thunder of her song rises.
Cassilda is an avalanche.

From the breast of experience, from the shadows and tatters of the mind wounded, come the laughter and the tears now grasped by the fallen leaves of Trakl's autumn. Cassilda's complicated sisters, unwill-

ing to be hidden away and boarded up, sound the thunder. Hot and colorful, in full view and shaded by the aroma of discord, they stand before you unmasked.

No mere *True Detective* fans, they have gone back to (fallen literary titan) Robert W. Chambers' 1895 weird fiction collection, *The King in Yellow* ('...a series of vaguely connected short stories having as a background a monstrous and suppressed book whose perusal brings fright, madness and spectral tragedy, really achieves notable heights of cosmic fear.'—H. P. Lovecraft), in search of heart and soul, device and detail, and returned transformed by the cosmic horrors lurking behind the Yellow Sign. Within the four core *King in Yellow* tales, "The Repairer of Reputations", "The Mask", "The Court of the Dragon", and "The Yellow Sign", Cassilda's daughters found spectral tragedy, dread, madness, and 'dark hints' into the *anti-prudence* yearnings of the Other Victorians, and steeped in and empowered by Chambers' timeless renderings, they allowed the unsettling, dark menace of his decadence to soar.

The 1895 release of Chambers' best-remembered work of *weird fiction* was salted with nihilism and ennui, and ripe with *derangement*, haunting beauty, and eerie torments. Poe's influence was present in the core tales and one could easily argue Chambers may have been influenced by the French Decadents and the disquieting transfigurations of the Symbolists. All this and more can be said of the works collected in this anthology. Carcosa, accursed and ancient, and cloud-misted Lake of Hali are here. The Hyades sing and the cloud waves break in these tales. The authority of Bierce's cosmic horror is here. The talismantic Yellow Sign, and the titular 'hidden' King, and The Imperial Dynasty of America, will influence and alter you, as they have the accounts by these writers. Cassilda and other unreliable narrators, government-sponsored Lethal Chambers, and the *many* mysteries of the *mythical* Play, are boldly represented in these tributes to Chambers.

Of Chambers' female characters, Frederic Tabor Cooper said, "They are all of them what men like to think women to be, rather than the actual women themselves." Not so here, for the Sisters of the Yellow Sign have brought their talents (and important, dynamic talents they are—*many* women are at the heart of the *Weird Renaissance* we are currently delighting in) and visions to center stage. Come. Delight! Not content to be seamstresses and cleaning ladies and set dressers,

the contributors to *Cassilda's Song* have claimed the canon and are now the lead actors; they have created the sets and stages and written the dialogue. They control the productions.

There are no pretenders here. The Daughters of the Yellow Sign, each a titan of unmasked fire in their own right, have parted the curtains. From Hali's deeps and Carcosa's gloomy balconies and Styx-black towers, come their lamentations and rage and the consequences of intrigues and follies born in Oblivion. Run into their embrace. Their carriages wait to take you from shadowed rooms and cobblestones to The Place Where the Black Stars Hang.

Have you seen the Yellow Sign? The Daughters of Carcosa know its message, every wound and poison, and are about to reveal its gravity to you.

Have your covert desires ridden the currents of the River of Night's Dreaming? They are about to.

Cassilda is burning, threatening... The knots and scars of her plans and schemes, her choices, the path to the doorsteps cracked by the clock and the rain, are full of memories and fear. She cries your name. Come, the thunder rises. There is a song of beauty, of power—a cascade of heartthrobbing passions, in the air.

Upon the shore of madness, Cassilda walks—*UNMASKED!*

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