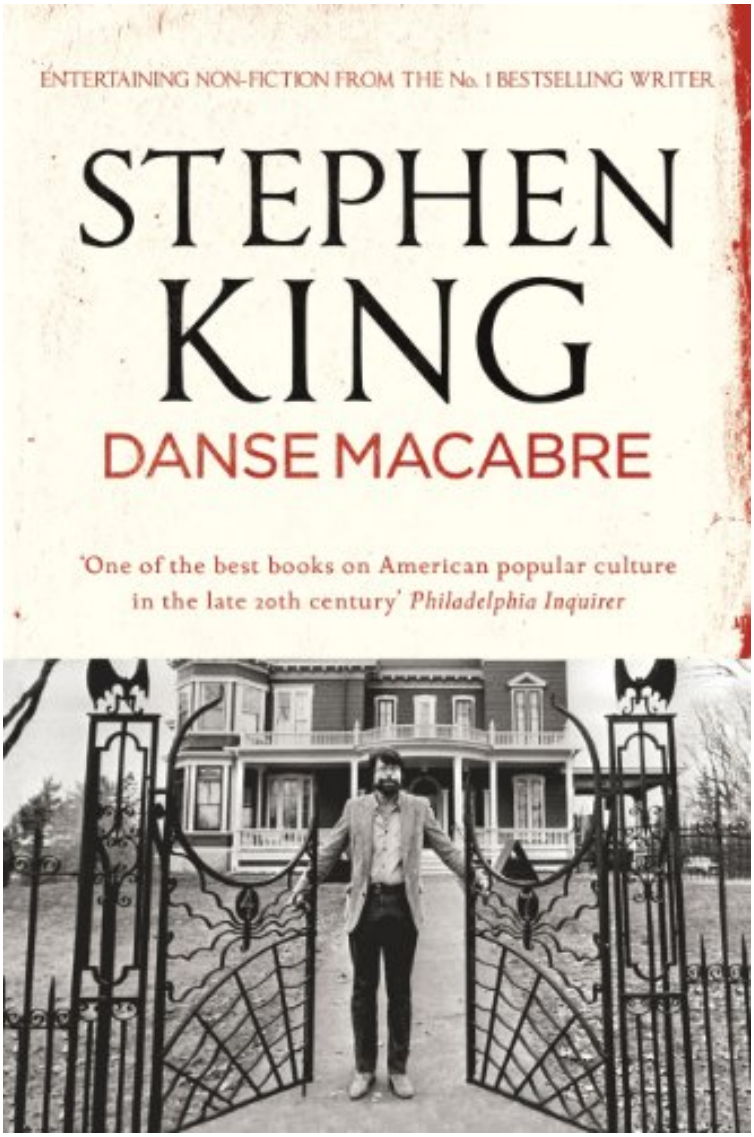
Danse Macabre (English Edition)



Par Stephen King
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[Library ebook] Danse Macabre (English Edition)

Par Stephen King : Danse Macabre (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Danse Macabre (English Edition):

Description : Description du produitStephen King explores the phenomenon of horror in a century of film, television, radio, and literature. Who better than King to investigate what terrifies his fans? "One of the best books on American popular culture in the late 20th century." (The Philadelphia Inquirer) "A labor of love." (The Washington Star)

Prsentation de l'diteurIt was not long after Halloween when Stephen King received a telephone call from his editor. 'Why don't you do a book about the entire horror phenomenon as you see it? Books, movies, radio, TV, the whole thing.'The result is this unique combination of fantasy and autobiography, of classic horror writing honed to an unforgettable edge by the bestselling master of the genre.DANSE MACABRE ranges across the whole spectrum of horror in popular culture from the seminal classics of Dracula and Frankenstein. It is a charming and fascinating book, replete with pertinent anecdote and observation, in

which Stephen King describes his ideas on how horror works on many levels and how he brings it to bear on his own inimitable novels.There is a reason why Stephen King is one of the bestselling writers in the world, ever. Described in the Guardian as an author who 'knows how to engage the deepest sympathies of his readers', Stephen King writes books that draw you in and are impossible to put down..comIn the fall of 1978 (between The Stand and The Dead Zone), Stephen King taught a course at the University of Maine on "Themes in Supernatural Literature." As he writes in the foreword to this book, he was nervous at the prospect of "spending a lot of time in front of a lot of people talking about a subject in which I had previously only felt my way instinctively, like a blind man." The course apparently went well, and as with most teaching experiences, it was as instructive, if not more so, to the teacher as it was to the students. Thanks to a suggestion from his former editor at Doubleday, King decided to write Danse Macabre as a personal record of the thoughts about horror that he developed and refined as a result of that course. The outcome is an utterly charming book that reads as if King were sitting right there with you, shooting the breeze. He starts on October 4, 1957, when he was 10 years old, watching a Saturday matinee of Earth vs. the Flying Saucers. Just as the saucers were mounting their attack on "Our Nation's Capital," the movie was suddenly turned off. The manager of the theater walked out onto the stage and announced, "The Russians have put a space satellite into orbit around the earth. They call it ... Spootnik." That's how the whole book goes: one simple, yet surprisingly pertinent, anecdote or observation after another. King covers the gamut of horror as he'd experienced it at that point in 1978 (a period of about 30 years): folk tales, literature, radio, good movies, junk movies, and the "glass teat". It's colorful, funny, and nostalgic--and also strikingly intelligent. --Fiona WebsterExtraitDanse Macabre CHAPTER I October 4, 1957,and an Invitation to Dance For me, the terrorthe real terror, as opposed to whatever demons and boogeys which might have been living in my own mindbegan on an afternoon in October of 1957. I had just turned ten. And, as was only fitting, I was in a movie theater: the Stratford Theater in downtown Stratford, Connecticut. The movie that day was and is one of my all-time favorites, and the fact that itrather than a Randolph Scott western or a John Wayne war moviewas playing was also only fitting. The Saturday matinee on that day when the real terror began was Earth vs. the Flying Saucers, starring Hugh Marlowe, who at the time was perhaps best known for his role as Patricia Neals jilted and rabidly xenophobic boyfriend in The Day the Earth Stood Stilla slightly older and altogether more rational science fiction movie. In The Day the Earth Stood Still, an alien named Klaatu (Michael Rennie in a bright white intergalactic leisure suit) lands on The Mall in Washington, D.C., in a flying saucer (which, when under power, glows like one of those plastic Jesuses they used to give out at Vacation Bible School for memorizing Bible verses). Klaatu strides down the gangway and pauses there at the foot, the focus of every horrified eye and the muzzles of several hundred Army guns. It is a moment of memorable tension, a moment that is sweet in retrospectthe sort of moment that makes people like me simple movie fans for life. Klaatu begins fooling with some sort of gadgetit looked kind of like a Weed-Eater, as I recalland a trigger-happy soldier-boy promptly shoots him in the arm. It turns out, of course, that the gadget was a gift for the President. No death ray here; just a simple interstellar cure for cancer. That was in 1951. On that Saturday afternoon in Connecticut some six years later, the folks in the flying saucers looked and acted a good deal less friendly. Far from the noble and rather sad good looks of Michael Rennie as Klaatu, the space people in Earth vs. the Flying Saucers looked like old and extremely evil living trees, with their gnarled, shriveled bodies and their snarling old mens faces. Rather than bringing a cure for cancer to the President like any new ambassador bringing a token of his countrys esteem, the saucer people in Earth vs. the Flying Saucers bring death rays, destruction, and, ultimately, all-out war. All of thismost particularly the destruction of Washington, D.C.was rendered with marvelous reality by the special effects work of Ray Harryhausen, a fellow who used to go to the movies with a chum named Ray Bradbury when he was a kid. Klaatu comes to extend the hand of friendship and brotherhood. He offers the people of Earth membership in a kind of interstellar United Nationsalways provided we can put our unfortunate habit of killing each other by the millions behind us. The saucerians of Earth vs. the Flying Saucers come only to conquer, the last armada of a dying planet, old and greedy, seeking not peace but plunder. The Day the Earth Stood Still is one of a select handfulthe real science fiction movies. The ancient saucerians of Earth vs. the Flying Saucers are emissaries of a much more common breed of filmthe horror-show. No nonsense about It was to be a gift for your President here; these folks simply descend upon Hugh Marlowes Operation Skyhook at Cape Canaveral and begin kicking ass. It is in the space between these two philosophies that the terror was seeded, I think. If there is a line of force between such neatly opposing ideas, then the terror almost certainly grew there. Because, just as the saucers were mounting their attack on Our Nations Capital in the movies final

reel, everything just stopped. The screen went black. The theater was full of kids, but there was remarkably little disturbance. If you think back to the Saturday matinees of your misspent youth, you may recall that a bunch of kids at the movies has any number of ways of expressing its pique at the interruption of the film or its overdue commencementrhythmic clapping; that great childhood tribal chant of We-want-the-show! We-want-the-show! We-want-the-show!; candy boxes that fly at the screen; popcorn boxes that become bugles. If some kid has had a Black Cat firecracker in his pocket since the last Fourth of July, he will take this opportunity to remove it, pass it around to his friends for their approval and admiration, and then light it and toss it over the balcony. None of these things happened on that October day. The film hadnt broken; the projector had simply been turned off. And then the house-lights began to come up, a totally unheard-of occurrence. We sat there looking around, blinking in the light like moles. The manager walked into the middle of the stage and held his hands upquite unnecessarilyfor quiet. Six years later, in 1963, I flashed on that moment when, one Friday afternoon in November, the guy who drove us home from school told us that the President had been shot in Dallas. 2 If there is any truth or worth to the danse macabre, it is simply that novels, movies, TV and radio programseven the comic booksdealing with horror always do their work on two levels. On top is the gross-out levelwhen Regan vomits in the priests face or masturbates with a crucifix in The Exorcist, or when the raw-looking, terribly inside-out monster in John Frankenheimers Prophecy crunches off the helicopter pilots head like a Tootsie-Pop. The gross-out can be done with varying degrees of artistic finesse, but its always there. But on another, more potent level, the work of horror really is a dancea moving, rhythmic search. And what its looking for is the place where you, the viewer or the reader, live at your most primitive level. The work of horror is not interested in the civilized furniture of our lives. Such a work dances through these rooms which we have fitted out one piece at a time, each piece expressingwe hope!our socially acceptable and pleasantly enlightened character. It is in search of another place, a room which may sometimes resemble the secret den of a Victorian gentleman, sometimes the torture chamber of the Spanish Inquisition... but perhaps most frequently and most successfully, the simple and brutally plain hole of a Stone Age cave-dweller. Is horror art? On this second level, the work of horror can be nothing else; it achieves the level of art simply because it is looking for something beyond art, something that predates art: it is looking for what I would call phobic pressure points. The good horror tale will dance its way to the center of your life and find the secret door to the room you believed no one but you knew ofas both Albert Camus and Billy Joel have pointed out. The Stranger makes us nervous... but we love to try on his face in secret. Do spiders give you the horrors? Fine. Well have spiders, as in Tarantula, The Incredible Shrinking Man, and Kingdom of the Spiders. What about rats? In James Herberts novel of the same name, you can feel them crawl all over you... and eat you alive. How about snakes? That shut-in feeling? Heights? Or... whatever there is. Because books and movies are mass media, the field of horror has often been able to do better than even these personal fears over the last thirty years. During that period (and to a lesser degree, in the seventy or so years preceding), the horror genre has often been able to find national phobic pressure points, and those books and films which have been the most successful almost always seem to play upon and express fears which exist across a wide spectrum of people. Such fears, which are often political, economic, and psychological rather than supernatural, give the best work of horror a pleasing allegorical feeland its the one sort of allegory that most filmmakers seem at home with. Maybe because they know that if the shit starts getting too thick, they can always bring the monster shambling out of the darkness again. Were going back to Stratford in 1957 before much longer, but before we do, let me suggest that one of the films of the last thirty years to find a pressure point with great accuracy was Don Siegels Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Further along, well discuss the noveland Jack Finney, the author, will also have a few things to saybut for now, lets look briefly at the film. There is nothing really physically horrible in the Siegel version of Invasion of the Body Snatchers;1 no gnarled and evil star travelers here, no twisted, mutated shape under the facade of normality. The pod people are just a little different, thats all. A little vague. A little messy. Although Finney never puts this fine a point on it in his book, he certainly suggests that the most horrible thing about them is that they lack even the most common and easily attainable sense of aesthetics. Never mind, Finney suggests, that these usurping aliens from outer space cant appreciate La Traviata or Moby Dick or even a good Norman Rockwell cover on the Saturday Evening Post. Thats bad enough, butmy God!they dont mow their lawns or replace the pane of garage glass that got broken when the kid down the street batted a baseball through it. They dont repaint their houses when they get flaky. The roads leading into Santa Mira, were told, are so full of potholes and washouts that pretty soon the salesmen who service the townwho aerate its municipal lungs with the life-giving atmosphere of capitalism, you might saywill no longer bother to come.

The gross-out level is one thing, but it is on that second level of horror that we often experience that low sense of anxiety which we call the creeps. Over the years, Invasion of the Body Snatchers has given a lot of people the creeps, and all sorts of high-flown ideas have been imputed to Siegels film version. It was seen as an anti-McCarthy film until someone pointed out the fact that Don Siegels political views could hardly be called leftish. Then people began seeing it as a better dead than Red picture. Of the two ideas, I think that second one better fits the film that Siegel made, the picture that ends with Kevin McCarthy in the middle of a freeway, screaming Theyre here already! Youre next! to cars which rush heedlessly by him. But in my heart, I dont really believe that Siegel was wearing a political hat at all when he made the movie (and you will see later that Jack Finney has never believed it, either); I believe he was simply having fun and that the undertones... just happened. This doesnt invalidate the idea that there is an allegorical element in Invasion of the Body Snatchers; it is simply to suggest that sometimes these pressure points, these terminals of fear, are so deeply buried and yet so vital that we may tap them like artesian wellssaying one thing out loud while we express something else in a whisper. The Philip Kaufman version of Finneys novel is fun (although, to be fair, not quite as much fun as Siegels), but that whisper has changed into something entirely different: the subtext of Kaufmans picture seems to satirize the whole Im-okay-youre-okay-so-lets-get-in-the-hot-tub-and-massage-our-precious-consciousness movement of the egocentric seventies. Which is to suggest that, although the uneasy dreams of the mass subconscious may change from decade to decade, the pipeline into that well of dreams remains constant and vital. This is the real danse macabre, I suspect: those remarkable moments when the creator of a horror story is able to unite the conscious and subconscious mind with one potent idea. I believe it happened to a greater degree with the Siegel version of Invasion of the Body Snatchers, but of course both Siegel and Kaufman were able to proceed courtesy of Jack Finney, who sank the original well. All of which brings us back, I think, to the Stratford Theater on a warm fall afternoon in 1957. 3 We sat there in our seats like dummies, staring at the manager. He looked nervous and sallowor perhaps that was only the footlights. We sat wondering what sort of catastrophe could have caused him to stop the movie just as it was reaching that apotheosis of all Saturday matinee shows, the good part. And the way his voice trembled when he spoke did not add to anyones sense of well-being. I want to tell you, he said in that trembly voice, that the Russians have put a space satellite into orbit around the earth. They call it... Spootnik. This piece of intelligence was greeted by absolute, tomblike silence. We just sat there, a theaterful of 1950s kids with crew cuts, whiffle cuts, ponytails, ducktails, crinolines, chinos, jeans with cuffs, Captain Midnight rings; kids who had just discovered Chuck Berry and Little Richard on New Yorks one black rhythm and blues station, which we could get at night, wavering in and out like a powerful jive language from a distant planet. We were the kids who grew up on Captain Video and Terry and the Pirates. We were the kids who had seen Combat Casey kick the teeth out of North Korean gooks without number in the comic books. We were the kids who saw Richard Carlson catch thousands of dirty Commie spies in I Led Three Lives. We were the kids who had ponied up a quarter apiece to watch Hugh Marlowe in Earth vs. the Flying Saucers and got this piece of upsetting news as a kind of nasty bonus. I remember this very clearly: cutting through that awful dead silence came one shrill voice, whether that of a boy or a girl I do not know; a voice that was near tears but that was also full of a frightening anger: Oh, go show the movie, you liar! The manager did not even look toward the place from which that voice had come, and that was somehow the worst thing of all. Somehow that proved it. The Russians had beaten us into space. Somewhere over our heads, beeping triumphantly, was an electronic ball which had been launched and constructed behind the Iron Curtain. Neither Captain Midnight nor Richard Carlson (who also starred in Riders to the Stars; and oh boy, the bitter irony in that) had been able to stop it. It was up there... and they called it Spootnik. The manager stood there for a moment longer, looking out at us as if he wished he had something else to say but could not think what it might be. Then he walked off and pretty soon the movie started up again. 4 So heres a question. You remember where you were when President Kennedy was assassinated. You remember where you were when you heard that RFK had taken a dive in some hotel kitchen as the result of another crazy. Maybe you even remember where you were during the Cuban missile crisis. Do you remember where you were when the Russians launched Sputnik I? Terrorwhat Hunter Thompson calls fear and loathingoften arises from a pervasive sense of disestablishment; that things are in the unmaking. If that sense of unmaking is sudden and seems personalif it hits you around the heartthen it lodges in the memory as a complete set. Just the fact that almost everyone remembers where he/she was at the instant he/she heard the news of the Kennedy assassination is something I find almost as interesting as the fact that one nerd with a mail-order gun was able to change the entire course of world history in just fourteen seconds or so. That moment of

knowledge and the three-day spasm of stunned grief which followed it is perhaps the closest any people in history has ever come to a total period of mass consciousness and mass empathy andin retrospectmass memory: two hundred million people in a living frieze. Love cannot achieve that sort of across-the-board hammerstrike of emotion, apparently. Mores the pity. Im not suggesting that the news of Sputniks launching had anywhere near the same sort of effect on the American psyche (although it was not without effect; see, for instance, Tom Wolfes amusing narrative of events following the successful Russian launch in his superlative book about our space program, The Right Stuff,) but I am guessing that a great many kidsthe war babies, we were calledremember the event as well as I do. We were fertile ground for the seeds of terror, we war babies; we had been raised in a strange circus atmosphere of paranoia, patriotism, and national hubris. We were told that we were the greatest nation on earth and that any Iron Curtain outlaw who tried to draw down on us in that great saloon of international politics would discover who the fastest gun in the West was (as in Pat Franks illuminating novel of the period, Alas, Babylon), but we were also told exactly what to keep in our fallout shelters and how long we would have to stay in there after we won the war. We had more to eat than any nation in the history of the world, but there were traces of Strontium-90 in our milk from nuclear testing. We were the children of the men and women who won what Duke Wayne used to call the big one, and when the dust cleared, America was on top. We had replaced England as the colossus that stood astride the world. When the folks got together again to make me and millions of kids like me, London had been bombed almost flat, the sun was setting every twelve hours or so on the British Empire, and Russia had been bled nearly white in its war against the Nazis; during the siege of Stalingrad, Russian soldiers had been reduced to dining on their dead comrades. But not a single bomb had fallen on New York, and America had the lightest casualty rate of any major power involved in the war. Further, we had a great history to draw upon (all short histories are great histories), particularly in matters of invention and innovation. Every grade-school teacher produced the same two words for the delectation of his/her students; two magic words glittering and glowing like a beautiful neon sign; two words of almost incredible power and grace; and these two words were: PIONEER SPIRIT. I and my fellow kids grew up secure in this knowledge of Americas PIONEER SPIRITa knowledge that could be summed up in a litany of names learned by rote in the classroom. Eli Whitney. Samuel Morse. Alexander Graham Bell. Henry Ford. Robert Goddard. Wilbur and Orville Wright. Robert Oppenheimer. These men, ladies and gentlemen, all had one great thing in common. They were all Americans simply bursting with PIONEER SPIRIT. We were and always had been, in that pungent American phrase, fastest and bestest with the mostest. And what a world stretched ahead! It was all outlined in the stories of Robert A. Heinlein, Lester Del Rey, Alfred Bester, Stanley Weinbaum, and dozens of others! These dreams came in the last of the science fiction pulp magazines, which were shrinking and dying by that October in 1957... but science fiction itself had never been in better shape. Space would be more than conquered, these writers told us; it would... it would be... why, it would be PIONEERED! Silver needles piercing the void, followed by flaming rockets lowering huge ships onto alien worlds, followed by hardy colonies full of men and women (American men and women, need one add) with PIONEER SPIRIT bursting from every pore. Mars would become our backyard, the new gold rush (or possibly the new rhodium rush) might well be in the asteroid belt... and ultimately, of course, the stars themselves would be oursa glorious future awaited with tourists snapping Kodak prints of the six moons of Procyon IV and a Chevrolet JetCar assembly line on Sirius III. Earth itself would be transformed into a utopia that you could see on the cover of any 50s issue of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Amazing Stories, Galaxy, or Astounding Science Fiction. A future filled with the PIONEER SPIRIT; even better, a future filled with the AMERICAN PIONEER SPIRIT. See, for example, the cover of the original Bantam paperback edition of Ray Bradburys Martian Chronicles. In this artistic visiona figment of the artists imagination and not of Bradburys; there is nothing so ethnocentric or downright silly in this classic melding of science fiction and fantasythe landing space travelers look a great deal like gyrenes storming up the beach at Saipan or Tarawa. Its a rocket instead of an LST in the background, true, but their jut-jawed, automatic-brandishing commander might have stepped right out of a John Wayne movie: Come on, you suckers, do you want to live forever? Wheres your PIONEER SPIRIT? This was the cradle of elementary political theory and technological dreamwork in which I and a great many other war babies were rocked until that day in October, when the cradle was rudely upended and all of us fell out. For me, it was the end of the sweet dream... and the beginning of the nightmare. The children grasped the implication of what the Russians had done as well and as quickly as anyone elsecertainly as fast as the politicians who were falling all over themselves to cut the good lumber out of this nasty deadfall. The big bombers that had smashed Berlin and Hamburg in World War II were

even then, in 1957, becoming obsolete. A new and ominous abbreviation had come into the working vocabulary of terror: ICBM. The ICBMS, we understood, were only the German V-rockets grown up. They would carry enormous payloads of nuclear death and destruction, and if the Russkies tried anything funny, we would simply blow them right off the face of the earth. Watch out, Moscow! Here comes a big, hot dose of the PIONEER SPIRIT for you, you turkeys! Except that somehow, incredibly, the Russians were looking pretty good in the old ICBM department themselves. After all, ICBMS were only big rockets, and the Commies certainly hadnt lofted Sputnik I into orbit with a potato masher. And in that context, the movie began again in Stratford, with the ominous, warbling voices of the saucerians echoing everywhere: Look to your skies... a warning will come from your skies... look to your skies... 5 This book is intended to be an informal overview of where the horror genre has been over the last thirty years, and not an autobiography of yours truly. The autobiography of a father, writer, and exhigh school teacher would make dull reading indeed. I am a writer by trade, which means that the most interesting things that have happened to me have happened in my dreams. But because I am a horror novelist and also a child of my times, and because I believe that horror does not horrify unless the reader or viewer has been personally touched, you will find the autobiographical element constantly creeping in. Horror in real life is an emotion that one grapples withas I grappled with the realization that the Russians had beaten us into spaceall alone. It is a combat waged in the secret recesses of the heart. I believe that we are all ultimately alone and that any deep and lasting human contact is nothing more nor less than a necessary illusionbut at least the feelings which we think of as positive and constructive are a reaching-out, an effort to make contact and establish some sort of communication. Feelings of love and kindness, the ability to care and empathize, are all we know of the light. They are efforts to link and integrate; they are the emotions which bring us together, if not in fact then at least in a comforting illusion that makes the burden of mortality a little easier to bear. Horror, terror, fear, panic: these are the emotions which drive wedges between us, split us off from the crowd, and make us alone. It is paradoxical that feelings and emotions we associate with the mob instinct should do this, but crowds are lonely places to be, were told, a fellowship with no love in it. The melodies of the horror tale are simple and repetitive, and they are melodies of disestablishment and disintegration... but another paradox is that the ritual outletting of these emotions seems to bring things back to a more stable and constructive state again. Ask any psychiatrist what his patient is doing when he lies there on the couch and talks about what keeps him awake and what he sees in his dreams. What do you see when you turn out the light? the Beatles asked; their answer: I cant tell you, but I know that its mine. The genre were talking about, whether it be in terms of books, film, or TV, is really all one: make-believe horrors. And one of the questions that frequently comes up, asked by people who have grasped the paradox (but perhaps not fully articulated it in their own minds) is: Why do you want to make up horrible things when there is so much real horror in the world? The answer seems to be that we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones. With the endless inventiveness of humankind, we grasp the very elements which are so divisive and destructive and try to turn them into toolsto dismantle themselves. The term catharsis is as old as Greek drama, and it has been used rather too glibly by some practitioners in my field to justify what they do, but it still has its limited uses here. The dream of horror is in itself an out-letting and a lancing... and it may well be that the mass-media dream of horror can sometimes become a nationwide analysts couch. So, for the final time before we push on, October of 1957; now, absurd as it looks on the face of it, Earth vs. the Flying Saucers has become a symbolic political statement. Below its pulpy invaders-from-space storyline, it becomes a preview of the ultimate war. Those greedy, twisted old monsters piloting the saucers are really the Russians; the destruction of the Washington Monument, the Capitol dome, and the Supreme Courtall rendered with graphic, eerie believability by Harryhausens stop-motion effectsbecomes nothing less than the destruction one would logically expect when the A-bombs finally fly. And then the end of the movie comes. The last saucer has been shot down by Hugh Marlowes secret weapon, an ultrasonic gun that interrupts the electromagnetic drive of the flying saucers, or some sort of similar agreeable foolishness. Loudspeakers blare from every Washington street corner, seemingly: The present danger... is over. The present danger... is over. The present danger is over. The camera shows us clear skies. The evil old monsters with their frozen snarls and their twisted-root faces have been vanquished. We cut to a California beach, magically deserted except for Hugh Marlowe and his new wife (who is, of course, the daughter of the Crusty Old Military Man Who Died For His Country); they are on their honeymoon. Russ, she asks him, will they ever come back? Marlowe looks sagely up at the sky, then back at his wife. Not on such a pretty day, he says comfortingly. And not to such a nice world. They run hand in hand into the surf, and the end credits roll. For a momentjust for a momentthe

paradoxical trick has worked. We have taken horror in hand and used it to destroy itself, a trick akin to pulling ones self up by ones own bootstraps. For a little while the deeper fearthe reality of the Russian Sputnik and what it meanshas been excised. It will grow back again, but that is for later. For now, the worst has been faced and it wasnt so bad after all. There was that magic moment of reintegration and safety at the end, that same feeling that comes when the roller coaster stops at the end of its run and you get off with your best girl, both of you whole and unhurt. I believe its this feeling of reintegration, arising from a field specializing in death, fear, and monstrosity, that makes the danse macabre so rewarding and magical... that, and the boundless ability of the human imagination to create endless dreamworlds and then put them to work. It is a world which a fine poet such as Anne Sexton was able to use to write herself sane. From her poems expressing and delineating her descent into the maelstrom of insanity, her own ability to cope with the world eventually returned, at least for awhile... and perhaps others have been able to use her poems in their turn. This is not to suggest that writing must be justified on the basis of its usefulness; to simply delight the reader is enough, isnt it? This is a world Ive lived in of my own choosing since I was a kid, since long before the Stratford Theater and Sputnik I. I am certainly not trying to tell you that the Russians traumatized me into an interest in horror fiction, but am simply pointing out that instant when I began to sense a useful connection between the world of fantasy and that of what My Weekly Reader used to call Current Events. This book is only my ramble through that world, through all the worlds of fantasy and horror that have delighted and terrified me. It comes with very little plan or order, and if you are sometimes reminded of a hunting dog with a substandard nose casting back and forth and following any trace of interesting scent it happens to come across, that is fine with me. But its not a hunt. Its a dance. And sometimes they turn off the lights in this ballroom. But well dance anyway, you and I. Even in the dark. Especially in the dark. May I have the pleasure?