

World Supernatural Literature

Dowling, Terry (Terence William) (1947-), Australian writer, freelance journalist, award-winning critic, editor and reviewer, one of Australia's most awarded and highly-regarded writers of speculative fiction. (His fiction has won eleven Ditmar Awards, two Readercon Awards, three Aurealis Awards, a Prix Wolkenstein, and earned two World Fantasy Award nominations). He is author of *Rynosseros*, *Blue Tyson*, *Twilight Beach* and *Rynemonn* (forthcoming)(the Tom Rynosseros saga), *Wormwood*, *The Man Who Lost Red*, *Antique Futures: The Best of Terry Dowling*; and co-editor of *Mortal Fire: Best Australian SF* and *The Essential Ellison*. Dowling has been a musician, songwriter and teacher. He presently teaches a Communications course at the June Dally-Watkins Business Finishing College and is completing a doctorate in Creative Writing which may result in further horror-oriented work. In recent years it has become apparent that despite his acclaimed work as science fiction and fantasy writer having brought him most attention, the supernatural is an integral part of his *oeuvre*, and is significantly employed by Dowling as one of the modes by which he seeks to resensitise readers to the world about us.

Dowling, a writer of formidable intelligence and admirable narrative control, had published many stories with elements of fear and haunting prior to 1995, but *An Intimate Knowledge of the Night* (Aphelion, 1995) was the first of his works to concentrate almost exclusively on horror. An ambitiously literary work, it presents a series of chilling reality-testings which deal with rapture, fear, the secret, darkest mysteries of the world and the human spirit. The individual tales include "The Bullet That Grows in the Gun," "The Maze Man"," The Daemon-Street Ghost Trap", "The Terrarium"," They Found the Angry Moon", "The Gully", "The Last Elephant", "The Echoes," "The Third Gift", "The Quiet Redemption of Andy the House", "The Mars You Have in Me", "The Rediscovery of Tutankhamen's Tomb "and "Scaring the Train', The frame story concerns an author who sits down to write the linking pieces for the stories in his new book, planning to do it by the hours of the night observed by medieval scholars; he is soon interrupted by phonecalls from Ray, a former mental patient obsessed with finding order in a chaotic psychic landscape. Dowling's express agenda in his writing is that of creating for his readers a resacralisation of the world that works for them, that jerks them out of their quotidian slumber, that awakens them to the infinite possibility immanent in the world and its variety. This essentially moral purpose, while possibly unfashionable in postmodern times, is effective in the hands of a writer as skilled as Dowling. The volume won the Aurealis Award for Best Horror Novel in 1996.

Dowling's second significant book in the horror genre is *Blackwater Days* (Eidolon, 2000). The collection won the Ditmar for Best Collection 2001, and from it, "Jenny Come to Play" won the Aurealis Award for Best Horror Short Story (1997) and "The Saltimbanques" won the Ditmar Award for Best Short Story (2001). It features seven closely-linked stories set around the Blackwater Psychiatric Hospital at Everton in the Hunter Valley, featuring Dr Dan Truswell and his two 'psychosleuths', Peter Rait and Philip Crow. "Downloading" is a chilling exercise in murder and possession. "Beckoning Nightframe" plays with narrative framing devices in the atmospheric story of a woman convinced there is a presence behind the fluttering curtain of a shed visible from her

home. "Basic Black" is a complex serial killer tale in which (mistaken) identity plays a pivotal role. "The Saltimbanques" features the otherworldly impact of a troupe of travelling carnival players on some youths of a small Australian outback town. "Jenny Come to Play" is a bizarre reconciliation of opposites in the story of sisters conjoined by more than simply flesh; "Light from the Deep Pavilion" is another disturbing tale about ritualistic murder and psychic detection; and "Blackwater Days" draws the threads of the book together, an unforgettable tale of dioramas, catatonic withdrawal, mystery and madness.

Dowling's work in the supernatural forms the most sophisticated and extensive use of the weird mode in contemporary Australian literature. His stories (the most recent being the horror tale "Stitch" in the *Sixteenth Annual*) have appeared seven times in the Ellen Datlow/Terri Windling-edited *Year's Best Horror and Fantasy*.

Dowling also regularly conducts writers' workshops around Australia. Forthcoming projects include CHAMELEON (a sequel game to his award-winning computer game SCHIZM: MYSTERIOUS JOURNEY) and a second novel set in the Wormwood universe. Forthcoming horror stories include "One Thing About the Night" in Ellen Datlow's THE DARK. .

BIBLIOGRAPHY: The first full-length monograph on Dowling is Leigh Blackmore & Dr Van Ikin, *The Eternal Yes: The Affirmations of Terry Dowling* (forthcoming). Entries on Dowling appear in the following: Clute, John *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*. **(details)**; Clute, John and Peter Nicholls. *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Orbit, 1993), p. 351; Collins, Paul (ed) MUP Encyclopedia of Australian Fantasy & Science Fiction (Melbourne Uni Press, 1998). pp.54-55; Ikin, Van and Sean McMullen. *Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction* (Greenwood Press, 1999) pp. 164-68. Pringle, David. *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. ["Movers and Shakers" section] p.?. **(details)**; Pringle, David (ed). *St James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers* (St James Press, 1998), pp. 189-91 (entry by Steven Paulsen and Sean McMullen); Watson, Noelle and Paul E. Schellinger (eds). *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers*. (St James Press, 19??.)p.? (entry by Van Ikin). Magazine interviews with Dowling have appeared in publications such as *Locus*, *Interzone*, *Eidolon*, *Aurealis*, *Sirius* and *Men's Journal Quarterly*. Useful bibliographies of Dowling's work may be found in *The Man Who Lost Red* (Mirrordanse, 2nd ed, 2003) and Leigh Blackmore, *Ellison/Dowling/Dann: A Bibliographic Checklist* (R'lyeh Texts, 1996) and at www.eidolon.net. His personal website is at <http://eidolon.net/terrydowling>