

Brief Review

By Tony Fonseca

Pugmire, W. H. *Tales of Love and Death*. North Webster, IN: Delirium Books, 2001. 72 p.

Wilum Hopfrog Pugmire is a strange amalgamation of talent: He borders on writing splatterpunk, as he seems enamored of gore and necrophilia, yet his writing style is more reminiscent of Henry James. And then there's his subject matter, which is a combination of Poe's (I am thinking here of his penchant for writing about obsessive/compulsive behavior) and Lovecraft's (the Cthulhu Mythos). One would think that such hybridization would result in original and fascinating tales, and to a very small extent, it does. Very few tales can emote the despair and eeriness that Pugmire manages in "Pale Trembling Youth." But this "haunted industriplex" story makes up only one of the sixteen in *Tales of Love and Death*, a collection which chronicles the relationship between the living and the dead, the real world and the supernatural. The other fifteen tales are absolutely unremarkable.

The problem lies in Pugmire's style: he writes brief prose images rather than developed stories, with emphasis on atmosphere, emotion, and language. One would have to look hard to find any characterization in the other fifteen tales, and without characterization there is no motivation for action, and no reason, to put it bluntly, why readers should care about what happens to these fictional beings. I eventually found myself skimming, thinking, "Oh no .not another image about kissing a dead relative or lover". Ironically, comparing reading this collection to kissing the dead is perhaps the most fitting way to describe *Tales of Love and Death* □ one is left with a cold and distant feeling, leaving with only what s/he brought to the experience. There is no sense of having realized anything about life or the human condition, nor is there any sense of having been moved emotionally.