



The Night Life of the Gods

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Thorne Smith's rapid-fire dialogue, brilliant sense of the absurd, and literary aplomb put him in the same category as the beloved P. G. Wodehouse. *The Night Life of the Gods*, the madcap story of a scientist who instigates a nocturnal spree with the Greek gods, is arguably his most sparkling comedic achievement.

Hunter Hawk has a knack for annoying his ultra respectable relatives. He likes to experiment and he particularly likes to experiment with explosives. His garage-cum-laboratory is a veritable minefield, replete with evil-smelling clouds of vapor through which various bits of wreckage and mysteriously bubbling test tubes are occasionally visible.

With the help of Megaera, a fetching nine-hundred-year-old lady leprechaun he meets one night in the woods, he masters the art (if not the timing) of transforming statues into people. And when he practices his new witchery in the stately halls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, setting Bacchus, Mercury, Neptune, Diana, Hebe, Apollo, and Perseus loose on the unsuspecting citizenry of Prohibition-era New York, the stage is set for Thorne Smith at his most devilish and delightful.

The Night Life of the Gods Details

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From Reader Review The Night Life of the Gods for online ebook

Tosh says

The word "Madcap" was invented for books like "The Night of the Gods." The title sounds kind of serious - but it's about a doctor who invented a ray that can turn people into statues - which he gladly tested on his family. Somewhere down the line he meets a super cute nude (if memory serves me correctly) fairy - who then both went to a big museum in NYC to zap the God Statues with his ray - which made them come to life.

So with the Nude cute fairy on hand, the mad scientist, with Zeus, Mercury and others go bar hopping in Manhattan. Thorne Smith always had lots of drinking in his books as well as a touch of pure fantasy mixed in with the love of the female nude. Or nudes for that matter. Words can't describe how much I love this book. Like his "Topper" series another mess of genius is let loose in the 20th Century.

Henry Avila says

Hunter Hawk is an unsuccessful inventor, he has seven explosions to prove this fact, causing much damage to his home, the now destitute silly sister , Alice, incompetent brother-in -law, Alfred Lambert, who squandered all their money not a businessman, the brat nephew Junior and nice niece Daphne...oh can't forget crusty grandpa Lambert, live with their rich, reluctant relation...not very well though, except for Daphne they detest each other. The latest unfortunate incident shattered the peace of the residence, no surprise, and all (old grandpa stays behind) , go to the basement to see the results...Hoping for the best, which to them means the worst, however the scientist, an amateurish tinker is still kicking, when the smoke vanishes, the disappointed mob were already making new plans for the mansion, when from above in the rafters, the unhurt man's, (just torn clothes) voice sounds the alarm , no joy...The niece is delighted, the rest in despair. Still Blotto, Mr. Hawk's loyal dog has quite a shock...his tail has turned to stone, the perplexed animal goes wild, wouldn't you? It seems that the great Hunter Hawk new invention a ray, can turn any kind of them into concrete, even humans. For what purpose you may ask? This makes for many funny situations...The rather tipsy, unconventional Hunter soon afterwards takes a protracted walk at night, under the yellow moon, in a neighbor's cornfield, he lives in the country, and wants to be alone, get away from his irritating relatives. He finds a disheveled, crying little man trying to steal a scarecrow's uniform, sure enough a leprechaun, thousands of years old with an un-Irish name of Ludwig Turner, who leads him to a hole in the ground, his home and the gorgeous daughter (Meg)aera... well you can guess the rest...Thorne Smith the author of many amusing books from the 20's and 30's, cornered the American market, in drunken characters doing outlandish things during Prohibition, with a little slice of spice, that is sex , naked bodies, beautiful women walking around while ordinary people gawk. Now add Greek gods and goddesses, unfrozen from a museum with the help of Mr. Hunter, coming alive, down from their pedestals and you will comprehend the mayhem unleashed, the public unprepared for Venus, Diana, Hebe, each in a state of shall we say, lack of proper attire, not to mention Mercury, Apollo, Perseus, Neptune, and Bacchus doing their best to make up for the long dry spell, drinking any potent alcoholic beverages they can discover . Mr. Hawk has taken them and a few others, a servant and friend to a posh New York City hotel, after fleeing the local police. And anything can and will happen, the always intoxicated guests even bring a cow in an elevator to their room...why? Why not...The highlight is a fish fight where fish actually fly, with happy Neptune leading the way against the merchants selling them...For readers who like to view chaos from a safe distance...and laugh.

Joseph Pinchback says

What a fun little book. I think our culture has moved beyond the point where anything can be ribald any more. Things are either explicit or they aren't. And that's a bit of a shame, because there's some fun to be had with subtlety. You feel like you're getting away with something. At any rate, *The Night Life Of The Gods* was written in 1931, and it is ribald as all hell. It centers around a guy who can turn people to stone and stone statues to people. From this rather ridiculous premise comes a pretty entertaining novel that urges you to have more fun in life. There's actually some pretty deep ideas buried in there, such as a discussion about the nature of sin and the overarching idea that morality is for suckers. Thorne Smith seems to be mostly forgotten nowadays, and that's a shame. I can think of quite a few people who would benefit from a bit of ribaldry every once in a while.

Eleanor says

Was I reading the same book as those who rated it as four stars? Clunky writing and way too much scene setting. It takes half of the book to get to the gods. However there were some slightly amusing happenings once they joined the cast of characters.

I think Smith, like Nevil Shute, had better plot ideas than ability as a writer, based on this book. This might make a very funny film with good scriptwriters.

Kay says

One of Thorne Smith's better outings. When a scientist pairs up with a witch with the ability to bring statues to life, chaos ensues. The two decide it would be a good idea to bring the statues of the gods at the Metropolitan Museum to life. But the gods, it turns out, are too human by half -- they immediately start to cavort, bicker, drink, and carry on in a spree of epic proportions. The word "romp" could easily have been invented just to describe this sort of book.

I wonder whether the fairly innocuous Disney comedies of the fifties/sixties such as "The Absent-Minded Professor" were patterned on this sort of comic predecessor. Probably not, but that same spirit of befuddlement in the face of mounting chaos and delight at everything going topsy-turvy is definitely there in both. And, needless to say, everything always works out in the end.

Marc says

First published in the early 30s, this comic fantasy about a drink-loving American inventor who brings statues of the gods back to life for some louche adventures is pretty creaky. He's no Wodehouse and the plot seems at times like he was making it up as he went along. However there are some nicely witty and/or sarcastic lines scattered throughout and it passed the time well enough - and the Rodin-esque final scene was charming.

Charlie says

Reasons for picking it up: Saw it on a random favorites list on GoodReads, thought it would be fun to read.

Where did I get it from: Purchased it on Amazon for the Kindle.(If you choose to read the book you can read it directly from the GoodReads website for free.)

What this book is about:

What happens when a scientist discovers how to turn living material into stone and back again at will and decides to bring the Greek Gods to life.

My opinion:

Originally written in the 1930s (published in '31) by Thorne Smith, I was uncertain if it would hold my attention long enough to finish. I was pleasantly surprised by this novel. The language wasn't stale. Even though there are clear references to the time period it was written in (step-ins, Emperors, bathtub hooch), the book could have easily been written in this decade.

Smith's quick witted dialogue is really refreshing. There is never a moment where a character doesn't say what they are thinking. (Unless they happen to be related to Mr. Hawke.)

There is quite a bit of lead-up (half the book at least) to the arrival of the Greek Gods, but once they are introduced things pick up at an exponential rate. There is just enough time to enjoy meeting them and the antics that ensue before things come to an end.

If you are looking for a quick, lighthearted, and funny read I would recommend picking this up.

WT Sharpe says

Night Life of the Gods had me rolling. Although Thorne Smith died in 1934, his humor has lost none of its edge. Perhaps that's because he focused on those timeless themes that speak to readers across the generations; sex, drinking, and non-stop partying. Highly recommended, as is his better known book Topper, in which two fun-loving ghosts attempt to pull the conservative and straitlaced banker Cosmo Topper into a life of, well... sex, drinking, and non-stop partying.

(First read in July of 2011, re-read for the MobileRead Book Club March 14, 2016.)

Paul says

2.5 stars rounded up to 3

I must admit, I knew very little about Thorne Smith before I picked this one up as a second hand penguin

book. It is an oddity and Thorne Smith is much better known in America. He wrote semi-science fiction/fantasy novels. His best known creation is *Topper*, a much more well-known novel and a ghost story. Smith is a comic novelist, and has been compared to P G Wodehouse. He died in 1934 and this one was published in 1931 I think.

This offering is set in and around New York. It concerns Hunter Hawk a middle aged and eccentric inventor. He is plagued by his sister, brother-in-law and nephew who disapprove of him, but likes his niece. He invents a small portable device that can turn living things into stone and vice versa. After some fun with his family he meets a leprechaun and his daughter. He strikes up a relationship with the daughter (a mere 900 years old). They journey to New York with Hunter's niece and her boyfriend after some unfortunate incidents at a party.

In a museum Hunter has the bright idea of bringing to life some statues of Greek gods. He chooses Diana, Hebe, Venus, Bacchus, Mercury, Neptune, Perseus and Apollo. A series of adventures follows which mainly involve lots of alcohol, fighting, sex (not explicit), fish and casual shoplifting and pickpocketing. A series of what might be described as high jinks follows.

This isn't P G Wodehouse and isn't really that funny. The plot has enough holes to steer a supertanker through. It's formulaic and some good ideas are badly used. I think my 13/14 year old self may have enjoyed this more. It is essentially farce and comic book and very much of its time.

Hákon Gunnarsson says

I read this because Thorne Smith has been compared to one of my favorite writers, P.G. Wodehouse. When I began reading *The Night Life of the Gods* I didn't know anything about the writer, but my dad remembered having read *Topper*. He didn't remember if he had liked it or not though because nearly half a century had passed.

I'll say this for *The Night Life of the Gods*: it begins well enough with a comic "mad scientist" scene.

The scientist succeeds in what he had been working on, and has to celebrate his grand victory. He does it very thoroughly, he basically goes on a bender, and the story slowly gets stuck on a single idea. There is drinking, then there is looking for more booze, booze found, hurrah, then there is more drinking, and then there is drinking with Greek gods who have come alive, and then . . . Well, you get the point. It's pretty much non stop drinking from start to finish.

It's all supposed to be very funny, but it just didn't work for me. I think I may have read it at the wrong time. There was a time when I watched a lot of party movies where people drink a lot a beer, drive bikes into houses, jump of roofs into the pool, and so on. At a time I thought those movies were very funny and if I had read *The Night Life of the Gods* at that time I might have enjoyed it immensely, but that phase had passed when I read this novel so I can't say I liked it.

It has one, or two interesting ideas, the occasional funny line, but Thorne Smith isn't Wodehouse. Far from it. Finishing it felt like waking up with a hang over after having been to a very bad party. Well almost.

Marvin says

Thorne Smith's *The Nightlife of the Gods* is the literary equivalence of a Frank Capra's screw-ball comedy film. Smith loved his drunken debaucheries, his mean-spirited pranksters, his heathenistic mythological creatures and of course all that drinking and sex. Classy double-entendre styled sex of course. This was the early 20th century. Yet he was also making lots of social commentary, much of it skewering the American upper-class and their often hypocritical morals. Thorne Smith certainly knew the territory, having hung around Dorothy Parker and James Thurber, usually with way too many cocktails. His writings were often in the same territory as his colleagues. Smith is at his peak in *The Nightlife of the Gods* as he successfully mixed zany humor with the battle of the classes and sexes. This is one of his best and I give it four and a half stars only because I enjoyed the *Topper* series just a bit more.

Richard says

Thorne satirises nearly everything in this generally enjoyable bit of fluff. Sometimes he is very funny but just as often can become laboured and tiresome. The novel is episodic and I feel that it would have gained by pruning. The book is a pleasant period piece but not a classic.

Stuart says

This book suffers from a bad case of being nowhere near as funny as it thinks it is. The story is okay, but most of the characters are not terribly likable (and many can barely be told apart) and the wit falls flat because it's fairly juvenile and sort of elitist at the same time (you definitely get the impression that no one is cool enough to hang out with these people- cool being defined as heavy drinking and irresponsible, naturally). Additionally, despite little moments and gems of wisdom, the narrative prose is dense and difficult to read, making what should be light-hearted and quick feel mostly like a chore with very little recompense.

Arlen says

This is a great period book, but also one (for my personal taste) that started out highly imaginatively, but ran out of gas somewhere about 2/3 of the way through. I'm betting the author didn't quite know where he was headed with it. But the opening stuff is extremely imaginative and creative and fun. Definitely worth picking up just for the first parts.

Trenton Hayes says

This book I just adored, about the time I was in 8th grade. The humor was 'adult' and it is clever and imaginative and still has much to recommend it. An 8th grader, it seems, is scandalized almost exactly as much by louche behaviour and sexual licentiousness as the anticipated reader in the 30s was, seemingly.

Rereading this one was a bit disappointing. It plays a bit like a 30s bedroom comedy--which makes a lot of sense--but my tastes have changed long ago, and what seemed daring and smart and clever at 12 seems tired and quaint and dated to my adult eyes.

Still, a very clever and funny book, and one I am surprised was never adapted for the screen like Topper and Turnabout. It would have fared very well, and I have imagined which golden age actors might have made a good Poseidon or Bacchus. I can almost see the RKO picture header...a film by George Cukor or Howard Hawks....
