PLANETS & DIMENSIONS

Clark Ashton Smith

BERSERKER

BOOKS

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Introduction

This book brings together most of the important non-fiction prose of Clark Ashton Smith. With the recent publication of his SELECTED POEMS, the various new editions of his short stories, and *festschriften* such as the recent IN MEMORIAM, the SELECTED ESSAYS AND CRITICISM makes available most of the writings that Smith intended be made public. There remains, of course, Smith's personal letters, his notebooks, and various incomplete or unpublished manuscripts. but these items more properly belong in a study of Smith as a personality. It is through his published works that Smith, like any artist, exerted the most influence in his chosen field of writing.

The guiding principle behind the selection of these essays was quite simple: each piece included was designed as some sort of public statement, or was presented as a public statement with Smith's approval. This means that the SELECTED ESSAYS AND CRITICISM includes not only the formal, eloquent essays and book reviews that Smith wrote for the various fan magazines, but also a series of long published letters, actually self-contained essays, that Smith sent to various commercial magazines, such as *Wonder Stories* and *Amazing Stories*. At times these letters were part of a longer debate being conducted in the letters columns, and when Smith's letters fit into such larger contexts, I have attempted to sketch in the background in the Appendix. I have also included a series of rather short excerpts from Smith's letters which were printed in various magazines and therefore got wide circulation. For some of these essays which originated as published letters, it has been necessary to devise

suitable titles; titles not of Smith's own hand, therefore, appear in parentheses.

Unlike his close friend and correspondent H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith did not write many essays on topics of general interest; he did not seem to be very interested in the art of the essay as such. Most of his writings in this volume stem from quite specific occasions, and reflect ideas Smith felt most passionately about. The essays range in time from 1927, when Smith was a young poet of thirty, to 1953, when he was a respected writer and artist of sixty. The essays thus reflect Smith's entire life, though the most interesting of them date from the 1930s, which, not coincidentally, was Smith's greatest period of productivity of short fiction. The subject matter includes homages to literary influences. Some literary influences, like George Sterling and H. P. Lovecraft, Smith knew as personal friends; indeed, the two essays on Sterling are two of the longest pieces included, and the three different tributes to Lovecraft attest to the effect Lovecraft's death in 1937 had on Smith. Other literary influences are simply writers whom Smith read and studied; these include the British scholar and writer of ghost stories, M. R. James; Ambrose Bierce, and Edgar Allan Poe ("Atmosphere in Weird Fiction"); William Hope Hodgson; and Donald Wandrei. The subject matter also includes personal statements about Smith's life and career, and several cogent comments about some of his more important individual tales. One subject rather conspicuous by its absence is a discussion of poetry itself; Smith thought of himself primarily as a poet, and turned to short-story writing only as an expediency. Yet, aside from his tribute to Sterling's poetry, and his review of a book of poems by Marianne Moore, there is little here about Smith's first love. Perhaps he felt his verse was sufficient testimony for itself.

By far the most frequent topic in these essays is Smith's own theories about weird fiction and speculative fiction in general. In the early 1930s Smith, in a sudden creative spurt, composed over half his corpus of short stories, and published a good many of them in magazines at that time; it is not unusual, therefore, to see him also turning with interest to critical justification for his work during that time. These critical statements are of interest

to any student of imaginative literature, in that they provide one of the most cogent and well-informed aesthetics evolved and articulated by any major writer of speculative fiction. Smith was a poet and well-versed in literature; as such, he was more able than many of his peers to fit his craft into a larger perspective. For instance, Smith was able to see that the demands for "realism" in his genre were contradictory to the basic spirit of fantasy; he stubbornly asserted the validity of the romantic tradition at a time when this tradition was much in disfavor with the mainstream of literary thought. If "realism" was part of "high culture," then Smith wanted no part of "high culture." Also Smith repeatedly insisted upon the all-important distinction between realism as a literary school and simple writing proficiency; much of the criticism of science fiction and fantasy, he suggests, would be eliminated if the writers and editors would simply write better, not write in a different mode.

We know today that history has vindicated Smith's stubborn refusal to acknowledge realism as the ultimate development of literature; for today the cycle has come full circle again, and the romantic tradition, represented by the increasing popularity of fantasy and science fiction, as well as a strong fabulist and neo-romantic tradition in mainstream writers, dominates the literary scene again. Smith's defense in itself is important, but he offers a coherent and extremely valid system of aesthetics *within* this tradition. For the best exemplification of this system, we have Smith's collected body of stories; for Smith's own account of what he was trying to do, we have these present essays. Seldom do we find any serious discrepancy between intention and accomplishment.

To some this collection may appear to be a rather ragged assortment of bits and pieces, of marginalia and uneven documents. However, the collection comprises one of the few articulate critical testimonies we possess from a major writer of science fiction and fantasy of the 1930s and 1940s. Few at that time took science fiction or fantasy seriously enough to interview its creators or even treat them as serious artists, and Smith's explanations of his craft survive only through letter pages of magazines and the graces of the fan magazine movement (and no student of imaginative literature can fail to feel grateful

for what the fanzines did do with such limited resources. But even if we possessed lengthy autobiographies of every major science fiction writer of the time, Smith's essays would still be of interest today; his growing popularity with new generations of readers, and the increasing recognition he is receiving around the world as a master of fantasy, justifies the issuance of this collection).

Charles K. Wolfe
Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

March 1972

Planets and Dimensions

George Sterling–

An Appreciation

Among the various literary fervors and enthusiasms of my early youth, there are two that have not faded as such things most often fade, but still retain in these latter years a modicum of their "fringing flames of marvel." Unique, and never to be forgotten, was the thrill with which, at the age of thirteen, I discovered for myself the poems of Poe in a grammar-school library; and, despite the objurgations of the librarian, who considered Poe "unwholesome," carried the priceless volume home to revel for enchanted days in its undreamt-of melodies. Here, indeed, was "balm in Gilead," here was a "kind nepenthe." Likewise memorable, and touched with more than the glamour of childhood dreams, was my first reading, two years later, of "A Wine of Wizardry," in the pages of the old *Cosmopolitan*. The poem, with its necromantic music, and splendours as of sunset on jewels and cathedral windows, was veritably all that its title implied; and–to pile marvel upon enchantment–there was the knowledge that it had been written in my own time, by someone who lived little more than a hundred miles away. In the ruck of magazine verse it was a fire-opal of the Titans in a potato-bin; and, after finding it, I ransacked all available contemporary periodicals, for verse by George Sterling, to be rewarded, not too frequently, with some marmoreal sonnet or "molten golden" lyric. I am sure that I more than agreed, at the time, with the dictum of Ambrose Bierce, who placed "A Wine of Wizardry" with the best work of Keats, Poe and Coleridge; and I still hold, in the teeth of our new Didactic School, the protagonists of the "human" and the "vital," that Bierce's judgment will be the

ultimate one regarding this poem, as well as Sterling's work in general. Bierce, whose own fine qualities as a poet are mentioned with singular infrequency, was an almost infallible critic.

Several years later—when I was eighteen, to be precise—a few of my own verses were submitted to Sterling for criticism, through the offices of a mutual friend; and his favorable verdict led to a correspondence, and, later, an invitation to visit him in Carmel, where I spent a most idle and most happy month. I like to remember him, pounding abalones on a boulder in the back yard, or mixing pineapple punch (for which I was allowed to purvey the mint from a nearby meadow), or paying a round of matutinal visits among assorted friends. When I think of him as he was then, Charles Warren Stoddard's fine poem comes to mind. I take pleasure in quoting the lines:

To George Sterling

"The Angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures."

Spirit of fire and dew,
Embodied anew.

Vital and virile thy blood—
Thy body a flagon of wine
Almost divine:
Thou art a faun o' the wood,
A sprite o' the flood,
Not of the world understood.

Voice that is heard from afar,
Voice of the soul of a star.
From thy cloud in the azure above
'Tis thy song that awakeneth love—
Love that invites and awe that retards—
Blessed art thou among bards!

My astral is there where thou art,
Soul of my soul, heart of my heart!

Thou in whose sight I am mute,
In whose song I rejoice;
And even as echo fain would I voice

With timbrel and tabor and flute,
With viol and lute,
Something of worth in thy praise–
Delight of my days–
But may not for lack of skill–
For the deed take the will:

Unworthy, ill done, incomplete,
This scroll at thy feet.

Always to me, as to others, he was a very gentle and faithful friend, and the kindest of mentors. Perhaps we did not always agree in matters of literary taste; but it is good to remember that our occasional arguments or differences of opinion were never in the least acrimonious. Indeed, how could they have been?–one might quarrel with others, but never with him: which, perhaps, is not the poorest tribute that I can pay to George Sterling. . . . But words are doubly inadequate, when one tries to speak of such a friend; and the best must abide in silence.

Turning today the pages of his many volumes, I, like others who knew him, find it difficult to read them in a mood of dispassionate or abstract criticism. But I am not sure that poetry should ever be read or criticized in a perfectly dispassionate mood. A poem is not a philosophic or scientific thesis, or a problem in Euclid, and the essential "magic" is more than likely to elude one who approaches it, as too many do, in a spirit of cold-blooded logic. After all, poetry is properly understood only by those who love it.

Sterling, I remember, considered "The Testimony of the Suns" his greatest poem. Bierce said of it, that, "written in French and published in Paris, it would have stirred the very stones of the street." In this poem, there are lines that evoke the silence of infinitude, verses in which one hears the crash of gliding planets, verses that are clarion–calls in the immemorial war of suns and systems, and others that are like the cadences of some sidereal requiem, chanted by the seraphim over a world that is "stone and night." One may quote from any page:

How dread thy reign, O Silence, there!
A little, and the deeps are dumb–

Lo, thine eternal feet are come
Where trod the thunders of Altair!"

Crave ye a truce, O suns supreme?
What Order shall ye deign to hark,
Enormous shuttles of the dark,
That weave the everlasting dream?"

In the same volume with "The Testimony of the Suns" is a blank verse poem, "Music," in which the muse Terpsichore was hymned as never before or since:

Her voice we have a little, but her face
Is not of our imagining nor time.

Also, there is the gorgeous lyric "To Imagination," and many chryselephantine sonnets, among which "Reincarnation," "War," and "The Haunting" are perhaps the most perfect.

As I have already hinted, I feel a peculiar partiality for "A Wine of Wizardry," the most colorful, exotic, and, in places, macabre, of Sterling's poems. (This, however, is not tantamount to saying that I consider it necessarily his most important achievement.) Few things in literature are more serviceable as a test for determining whether people feel the verbal magic of poetry—or whether they merely comprehend and admire the thought, or philosophic content. It is not a poem for the literal-minded, for those lovers of the essential prose of existence who edit and read our "Saturday Reviews" and "Literary Digests." In one of the very last letters that he wrote me, Sterling said that no one took the poem seriously any more, "excepting cranks and mental hermits." It is not "vital" poetry, he said, as "vital" is used by our self-elected high-brows (which probably, means that it is lacking in "sex-kick," or throws no light on the labor problem and the increase of moronism). I was unable to agree with him, Personally, I find it impossible to take the "vital" school with any degree of seriousness, and see it only as a phase of materialism and didacticism. The proponents of the utile and the informative should stick to prose—which, to be frank, is all that they achieve, as a rule. Before leaving "A Wine of Wizardry," I wish, for my own pleasure, to quote a favorite passage:

Within, lurk orbs that graven monsters clasp;
Red-embered rubies smoulder in the gloom,
Betrayed by lamps that nurse a sullen flame,
And livid roots writhe in the marble's grasp,
As moaning airs invoke the conquered rust
Of lordly helms made equal in the dust.
Without, where baleful cypresses make rich
The bleeding sun's phantasmagoric gules,
Are fungus-tapers of the twilight witch,
Seen by the bat above unfathomed pools,
And tiger-lilies known to silent ghouls,
Whose king hath digged a sombre carcanet
And necklaces with fevered opals set.

No, "A Wine of Wizardry" is not "vital verse." Thank God for *that*, as Benjamin de Casseres would say.

Notable, also, in Sterling's second volume, is the lovely "Tasso to Leonora" and "A Dream of Fear." His third volume, "A House of Orchids," is compact of poetry; and, if I were to name my favorites, it would be equivalent to quoting almost the entire index. However, the dramatic poem, "Lilith," is, I believe, the production by which he will be most widely known. One must go back to Swinburne and Shelley to find its equal as a lyric drama.The tragedy and poetry of life are in this strange allegory, and the hero, Tancred, is the mystic analogue of all men. Here, in the conception of Lilith, the eternal and ineluctable Temptress, Sterling verges upon that incommensurable poet, Charles Baudelaire. In scene after scene, one hears the fugue of good and evil, of pleasure and pain, set to chords that are almost Wagnerian. Upon the sordid reality of our fate there falls, time after time, a light that seems to pass through lucent and iridescent gems; and vibrant echoes and reverberant voices cry in smitten music from the profound of environing mystery.

One might go on, to praise and quote indefinitely; but, in a sense, all that I can write or could write seems futile, now that Sterling is "one with that multitude to whom the eternal Night hath said 'I am.' " Anyway, his was not, as Flecker's,

The song of a man who was dead
Ere any had heard of his song.

From the beginning, he had the appreciation and worship of poetry lovers, if not of the crowd or of the critical moguls and pontiffs.

Of his death—a great bereavement to me, as to other friends—I feel that there is really little that need be said. I know that he must have had motives that he felt to be ample and sufficient, and this is enough for me. I am totally incapable of understanding the smug criticism that I have read or heard on occasion. To me, the popular attitude concerning suicide is merely one more proof of the degeneracy and pusillanimity of the modern world: in a more enlightened age, felo-de-se will be honored again, as it was among the ancients.

In one of Bierce's books is a trenchant article entitled, "The Right to Take One's Self Off." Here is the final paragraph:

> Why do we honor the valiant soldier, sailor, fireman? For obedience to duty? Not at all, that alone—without the peril—seldom elicits remark, never evokes enthusiasm. It is because he faced without flinching the risk of that supreme disaster—or what we feel to be such—death. But look you: the soldier braves the danger of death; the suicide braves death itself! The leader of the forlorn hope may not be struck. The sailor who voluntarily goes down with his ship may be picked up or cast ashore. It is not certain that the wall will topple until the fireman shall have descended with his precious burden. But the suicide—his is the foeman that never missed a mark, his the sea that gives nothing back; the wall that he mounts bears no man's weight. And his, at the end of it all, is the dishonored grave where the wild ass of public opinion
>
> *Stamps o'er his head*
> *But cannot break his sleep.*

THE OVERLAND MONTHLY, March 1927*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 79.

(Where Fantasy Meets Science Fiction)

I have purchased many of the issues of your magazine, and have read everything in them, including the letter columns, with great interest. I have particularly enjoyed certain stories, such as "The Forgotten Planet," "The Jovian Jest," and "The Planet of Dread," in which genuine imaginative quality was combined with good writing. Many other tales, not so well written, I have enjoyed for their fantasy, their suggestive ideas.

In following "The Reader's Corner" I have noted the objection to so-called "impossible" stories, voiced by some of your readers. Stories thus classified, one would infer, are tales dealing with the marvelous and the mysterious in which the author has not attempted to give a naturalistic or scientific explanation of his wonders and mysteries. In other words, he has not rendered them in terms of the test-tube. He has admitted the inexplicable, the "supernatural."

Personally, I enjoy stories of this type, as well as those that are written with the purely scientific approach. I suspect that those who condemn them are suffering from a rather amusing—and pathetic—sort of unconscious hypocricy. I think that people who read your magazine, as well as Science Fiction magazines in general, are people with the ingrained human love of wonder and mystery; but some of them are afraid to accept and enjoy anything—even a fairy tale—that is not couched in the diction of modern materialistic science, with a show of concern for verified credibilities. Probably, in most cases, they would like and praise the very stories that they condemn if the writer had used a different terminology, and had offered explanations that were even superficially logical according to known laws.

Please do not think that I am decrying, or even criticizing, Science Fiction. I consider it a highly important and significant branch of present-day writing, and have hopes of contributing to it myself. I am merely advocating an attitude of mind and imagination. For those who think that the "impossible" requires justification—I would suggest that the only impossible thing is to define and de-limit the impossible. In an infinite, eternal universe, there is nothing imaginable—or unimaginable—which might not happen, might not be true, somewhere or sometime. Science has discovered, and will continue to discover, an enormous amount of relative data; but there will always remain an illimitable residue of the undiscovered and the unknown. And the field for imaginative fiction, both scientific and non-scientific, is, it seems to me, wholly inexhaustible.

ASTOUNDING STORIES, July, 1931.

Beyond the Singing Flame

To introduce this story, the marvelous sequel to "The City of the Singing Flame," we can do no better than to quote in full Mr. Smith's letter to us.

In "Beyond the Singing Flame," I have found it advisable to maintain the same suggestive vagueness that characterized the other story; though I have explained many things that were left obscure in the other. The description of the Inner Dimension is a daring flight; and I seem almost to have set myself the impossible task which Dante attempted in his account of Paradise. Granting that human beings could survive the process of revibration in the Flame, I think that the new-sense-faculties and powers developed by Hastane, Angarth and Ebbonly are quite logical and possible. Most writers of trans-dimensional tales do not seem to postulate any change of this nature; but it is really quite obvious that there might be something of the kind, since the laws and conditions of existence would be totally different in the new realm.

I hope that "The City of the Singing Flame" was well-received by your readers. It has brought me several highly laudatory letters from strangers, together with requests for a sequel.

WONDER STORIES, November 1931*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 79.

("On Garbage-Mongering")

I should like to say a few words anent one or two points which P. Schuyler Miller raises in his interesting letter in the June *Wonder Stories*.

Personally, I cannot see that science fiction is, as he puts it, is "unfortunately limited" in its range of expression. At least, I do not think that a type of literature so avowedly imaginative would benefit materially by invading, as so much modern fiction has done, the field of clinical analysis and sex-physiology. That sort of thing has been done *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseum* by non-imaginative writers, such as are favored by the professional "intelligentsia" of our sex-demented republic; and one of the most refreshing things about science fiction, and fantastic fiction in general, is the avoidance of such triteness.

To me, the best, if not the only function of imaginative writing, is to lead the human imagination *outward*, to take it into the vast external cosmos, and *away* from all that introversion and introspection, that morbidly exaggerated prying into one's own vitals–and the vitals of others–which Robinson Jeffers has so aptly symbolized as "incest." What we need is less "human interest," in the narrow sense of the term–not more. Physiological–and even psychological analysis–can be largely left to the writers of scientific monographs on such themes. Fiction, as I see it, is not the place for that sort of grubbing.

Certainly I do not think that H. G. Wells, in the tedious analytic novels of his later phase, would be a good model for an imaginative writer. Wells, in his earlier years, wrote some marvelous fantasies. But afterwards, he was more and more seduced

into sociology, psychoanalysis, etc., etc., till his stories became a truly awful example of everything that fiction should not be. No doubt, they are excellent treatises, but as tales they are simply unreadable.

What science fiction chiefly needs, I should say, is a rigorous raising of literary standards, an insistence on good English as opposed to the jargon of magazine hackwriting. Form and finish are all too often lacking in stories otherwise excellent.

As to gaining the recognition of the "highbrows"–well, I hope that science fiction will never gain it, if the winning of this guerdon must involve an emulation of the squalors and tediosities, the highbrow pornography and general garbage-mongering of the current school of realistic novelists.

Re the celebrated strictures of one Mr. Schwartz, it appears to me that they hardly need refuting, since they are patently ridiculous. "Slack-mouthed" youths and mental subnormals in general are not likely to be interested in either science or imagination, such as is purveyed by *Wonder Stories* and other magazines of the same type.

WONDER STORIES, "The Reader Speaks," August 1932, p. 281*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 80.

(Fantasy and Human Experience)

I should like to point out a few considerations which, apparently, have been overlooked by Mr. Julian Gray in his thoughtful and well-written criticism of science fiction in the letter columns of the June *Amazing Stories*.

To begin with, it seems to me that his definition of literature as being exclusively a study of human reactions and character-development is rather narrow and limited. Literature can be, and does, many things; and one of its most glorious prerogatives is the exercise of imagination on things that lie *beyond* human experience—the adventuring of fantasy into the awful, sublime and infinite cosmos *outside* the human aquarium. In this genre, of which science fiction is one branch, the main interest lies in other elements than mere character-reaction and development, such as would properly be emphasized in a tale of ordinary events and conditions.

Of course, science-fiction can, has been, and will be written with a close attention to verisimilitude in such matters. But for the initiate in this type of fiction, and highly imaginative and fantastic fiction in general, the real thrill comes from the description of the *ultrahuman* events, forces and scenes, which properly dwarf the terrene actors to comparative insignificance. For many people—probably more than Mr. Gray realizes—imaginative stories offer a welcome and salutary release from the somewhat oppressive tyranny of the homocentric, and help to correct the deeply introverted, ingrowing values that are fostered by present-day "humanism" and realistic literature with its unhealthy materialism and earth-bound trend. Science fiction, at

its best, is akin to sublime and exalted poetry, in its evocation of tremendous, non-anthropomorphic imageries. To demand in such tales the intensive earthly observation of a Hardy is idle and beside the point; and one who approaches them from this angle will miss the true value and beauty.

It seems to me, too, that Mr. Gray makes a pretty sweeping statement in his remarks about science fiction authors. Doubtless there are hacks in this branch of writing, as in all others; but, on the other hand, there are sincere imaginative artists. One only has to name A. Merritt (at least in his earlier work, such as the original novelette version of "The Moon Pool"), Stanton Coblentz, who has written some gorgeous fantastic satires, John Taine, a master of authentic science, and H. P. Lovecraft, whose "The Color Out of Space" goes infinitely beyond anything of H. G. Wells in its sheer imaginative scope and creation of atmosphere. To say that science fiction writers are "men of doubtful education and still more doubtful intelligence" because they prefer imaginative happenings, cosmic forces, atmosphere, etc., to psychological analysis, is an utterly pointless and senseless statement. But, since there is a fixed gulf, wider and deeper than Erebus, between imaginative people and those who lack imagination, it is no doubt equally senseless to argue this question.

Certainly, however, one must admit that there is vast room for improvement in the general body of science-fiction. This improvement, it seems to me, could lie in the direction of more skilful and finished writing, the exclusion of the trite and overworked, and the elimination of many stories which, on close analysis, are revealed as mere gangster tales or ordinary adventure stories with a futuristic or ultra-planetary setting. A few editorial measures of this sort would go far to remove the reproach which can justly be brought against science-fiction magazines. As a well-wisher, a reader—and also a writer of this genre—I sincerely hope that such an improvement will in time be brought about.

There is one other matter that I should like to touch upon. Mr. Gray's preliminary remarks about the general development of literature. To judge from these, one would think that the world's literature is marked off in perfectly distinct, geological strata! and that all the former, more primitive layers are now hermetically

sealed beneath a deep and solid stratum of realism. This, however, is not the case. Romanticism, both in novels and short magazine stories, is still the most popular and widely read genre; and as for the supernatural, which Mr. Gray puts at the Archean bottom—well, even that despised branch of literary endeavor is having its innings, both with writers and readers. Apart from folk-lore, the literature of the supernatural is almost a modern invention anyway; and some of the best work in that genre is being done at the present time. Realism, even though it is the only form favored by the alleged "quality magazines" and the self-appointed critical pontiffs, certainly doesn't have the field to itself. And I think one can safely predict that it never will. The intolerable conditions of modern life and mechanistic civilization, will, one thinks, be more and more conducive to the development of a literature of imaginative "escape."

There is still another angle which occurs to me, *apropos* of Mr. Gray's letter. After all, why shouldn't literature, or at least one literary genre, emphasize what he calls the "inhuman," which, more properly, is the non-human or extra-human? Isn't it only the damnable, preposterous and pernicious egomania of the race, which refuses to admit anything but man's own feelings, desires, aims and actions as worthy of consideration?

This egomania, alas! is manifested in other ways than through literature, and lies at the bottom of that ruthless aggrandization, that maltreatment of weaker life-forms, that presumptuous meddling with the delicate balance of planetary forces, which may sweep our present-day civilization into the limbo of the dinosaurs. I fear that many super-scientific tales, which depict a world-wide catastrophe as the result of human meddling with nature, may prove to be all too prophetic. Any type of writing that would serve even in the smallest degree as a brake on the madly careening wheels of this racial egomania, is, it seems to me, more than praiseworthy from a moral standpoint if from none other.

Clark Ashton Smith

Auburn, California

P. S. On re-reading Mr. Gray's letter, I find that I have forgotten to mention the matter of H. G. Wells, which he brings up.

Doubtless it is the particular trend of Wells' mental development that has led him, in later years, to abandon the writing of science fiction for that of sociological novels. Wells, when he wrote the marvelous "Time Machine," "The War of the Worlds," and other fine fantasies, had in him much of the artist, perhaps a little of the poet. These, however, have been progressively smothered and drowned out by the growth of the pedagogue, the utilitarian "humanist."

As to Aldous Huxley, I have not read his "Brave New World," which, I should judge from reviews, is marked by the same congenital pornography as Huxley's ordinary novels. Satire, of course, is a well-recognized function of much science fiction, and perhaps some of it has been a little too subtle for Mr. Gray's apprehension. He seems to have missed Stanton Coblentz, of whom I have already spoken. If I cared to, I could name others in whom the satire is even more subtle and implicit.

If Mr. Gray should find my language somewhat violently polemical in places, he must realize that I have merely availed myself of that parliamentary privilege which he, in his own letter, has already avowedly pre-empted.

In conclusion, let me recommend to Mr. Gray, and to others who are similarly minded, the perusal of imaginative fiction for what it really is rather than for what it isn't. Also, he should realize that there are intelligent (and not necessarily immature) people who have the courage to dissent from the limited and grossly materialistic definition of literature which he has laid down, and who, moreover, are not overawed by the burden of present-day authority.

AMAZING STORIES, "Discussions," October 1932, pp.670-71*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 81.

(The Tale of Macrocosmic Horror)

I have read with much interest the fine letter from A. Lewis in the "Cauldron."

Mr. Lewis, in laying down rules for the development of the weird tale, has presented a viewpoint which will no doubt seem impregnable to the average intelligent person, in whom exclusively humanistic values of thought have been inculcated.

At the same time, however, I should like to indicate certain weaknesses and limitations which I see in this viewpoint, especially in regard to the tale of macrocosmic horror and fantasy. This type of story, because of its very character and purpose, should not, it seems to me, be bound strictly by "the practical requisites of literature in general." In a tale of the highest imaginative horror, the main object is the creation of a supernatural, extra-human atmosphere; the real actors are the terrible arcanic forces, the esoteric cosmic malignities; and the element of human character, if one is to achieve the highest, most objective artistry, is properly somewhat subordinated in a tale of ordinary and natural happenings. One is depicting things, powers and conditions that are beyond humanity; therefore, artistically speaking, the main accent is on these things, powers and conditions.

A sense of the superhuman is to be conveyed; therefore one does not want the human—at least, not to an extent that would impair and detract from the proper focus of interest. For this reason, I fear that the weird tale, if written mainly as psychological analysis, would tend to forfeit some of its highest and rarest values. Modern literature has become so thoroughly

subjective, so introverted in its tendencies, so preoccupied with the anthropocentric, that it seems desirable for one genre, at least, to maintain what one might call a centrifugal impetus, to make "a gesture toward the infinite" rather than toward the human intestines.

This is not saying that Weird Fiction would not gain by more verisimilitude in the presentation of its terrene actors. But their reactions can be indicated more succinctly, with more stress on events, outward forces and atmosphere, than in fiction dealing with the natural and the normal.

For instance, let us take some concrete examples from modern Weird Fiction. In authors such as Algernon Blackwood and Walter de la Mare, it seems to me that the accent is primarily on human character. But in their work (at least, in any of it that I have read) one fails to find the highest imaginative horror, the overwhelming sweep of black, gulf-arisen wings, such as is conveyed in the best tales of Ambrose Bierce, Poe and H. P. Lovecraft, where human character is treated more briefly and subversively.

STRANGE TALES, January 1933*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 82.

(Realism and Fantasy)

Mr. Miller's very able and urbane letter in the December issue makes me feel that my own recent letter on the problem of realism versus fantasy might be supplemented and qualified by a few remarks.

First of all, it should not be inferred that I have the least desire to prescribe limits for the development of science fiction or any form of fiction. On the contrary, I believe that all possibilities should be sounded and explored. When I decried realism in my letter, I was inveighing mainly against what I see as the limiting and sterilizing influence of a too slavish, uninspired literalism in modern writing. It did not, and does not, seem to me that science fiction would benefit by the adopting of such fetters—or, to vary the image, a clipping of the eagle's wings to a conformity with those of the barnyard fowl. Such literalism, as in the case of Zola, is the most quickly outmoded of literary forms. On the other hand, I do not think that the genuine, imaginative realism of Hardy, including an ever-present apprehension of the cosmic mysteries and fatalities that environ life, will ever be outmoded.

Also, in my letter, as Mr. Miller implies, I was considering ultimate artistic values, and not the question of expediency. Undoubtedly the realistic wave is entering science fiction, and the trend will have to work itself out. Like all other trends, it has both good and evil possibilities. I have merely tried to warn against the evil ones. The best possibilities lie in the correlation of observed data about life and human problems with inspired speculation as to the unknown forces of cosmic cause and effect

that undoubtedly surround and play upon life. The evil lies in a meaningless Dreiserism, an inartistic heaping of superficial facts or alleged facts, which, after all, through our perceptual limitations, may be erroneous, or, at least, too incomplete to permit the safe drawing of dogmatic inference.

Tomorrow, the accepted theories of science and human psychology may be superceded by a brand-new lot; and it is partly because of this shifting, unstable ground on which the thing called realism stands, that I regard pure, frank fantasy as a more valid and lasting art-expression of the human mind.

In one sense, fantasy of one kind or another is about all that is possible for us, handicapped as we are by a partial and lopsided sense-equipment, and occupying a highly precarious position amid infinities and eternities whose concerns are perhaps wholly alien to our welfare or comprehension. Any true realism, it seems to me, must include a facing of this position, and not a treatment of life as if it were an air-tight compartment shut off from the unknown cosmos, and complete and independent in itself.

Mr. Miller's definition of the three main stages in literary evolution is well-drawn, I think. It may interest him, and others, to know that my own final preference for fantasy was reached through a varied course of reading that followed pretty much the outlines he has indicated. I began with children's fairy tales, went on through Haggard, Kipling, Balzac, Flaubert, France, etc. But through it all I have kept a profound admiration for Poe. My present enthusiasms include Blackwood, Lovecraft, John Taine, Machen, etc.—and, of course, Dunsany. I have also succumbed to the pervasive charm of Merritt.

To go back to the matter of realism, as an expedient for the furthering of science fiction, I must admit that I will not quarrel with Mr. Miller's viewpoint. And most assuredly I will not fling any stones or bouquets of asparagus at fellow-scribes who can win the attention of the main-guard of criticism. More power to them, if they can. I reserve the right to join the fray myself.

I am going to make a suggestion, which is, that the treatment of human "realities" through imaginative satire could well play an extensive part, as a corollary of this development. Perhaps, just as the present time, it would be more valuable than stuff

done in the Hemingway vein. It could conceivably reach, I am sure, a large and receptive audience. We are badly in need of a new Swift, who could write the Gulliver's Travels of current folly, corruption, dullness and madness. Stanton Coblentz has done some fine things of this type; but there are vast, unsounded possibilities.

I feel like a Time Traveler, after reading Mr. Miller's quite flattering classification of my own work as being ahead of the age! Howbeit, perhaps I am merely one of those unfortunate and perverse individuals who are constitutionally "agin the Government." When fantasy is acclaimed by Irving Babbitt, and is published regularly in *Harpers* and *The American Mercury*, I may take refuge in the writing of case-histories! That is to say, if I have not emigrated to the Abbey of The Theleme or gone to Mohammed's paradise in the meanwhile. Literature is a grand old merry-go-round; and like the serpent of eternity, it always has its tail in its mouth. Also, as Mr. Miller hints, there may be some additional hoops in the ringsnake.

My apologies for pied metaphors; also for the Einsteinian liberties I have taken with Mr. Miller's curve.

WONDER STORIES, February 1933*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 83.

(The Validity of Weird Stories)

A letter from Clark Ashton Smith contains an interesting thumbnail essay on the validity of weird stories, which we are passing on to you. Mr. Smith's comments are valuable, as he is one of the great masters of the weird tale—a classification which includes H. P. Lovecraft, Algernon Blackwood, Arthur Machen, and one or two others.

Mr. Smith writes: "It seems to me that the real validity and value of weird, imaginative literature has never been sufficiently affirmed. In these days, when the burden of critical so-called authority is cast almost wholly on the side of the so-called 'realism,' it might be especially pertinent to point out one or two considerations. Weird, fantastic writing, by its emphasis of the environing cosmic wonder and mystery of things, may actually be truer to the spirit of life than the work which merely concerns itself with literalities, as most modern fiction does. Only a dullard, it seems to me, would despise and decry fantasy on the oft-alleged score of superficiality or remoteness. If anything is superficial, it is the grossly external and factitious realism of the modernists, who, abnegating the one gift that raises man above the other animals, can see nothing but the bare physical facts of existence. Whether or not one believes in the 'supernatural,' it seems to me that the infinite eery mystery that presses upon us is an ineluctable thing that can not be dissipated by test-tubes or Freudian analysis. Also, in spite of those who would limit literature to psychographs and genre studies, it will always afford a fascinating and inexhaustible field for the human imagination."

WEIRD TALES, February 1933.

Horror, Fantasy, and Science

THE BOILING POINT

Only the hottest of controversies will be printed in this column—radical arguments that will bring your blood to "The Boiling Point." We start this department off by presenting one of the most blasphemous articles it has been our pleasure to read. It is by Forrest J. Ackerman, and he calls it

A Quarrel with Clark Ashton Smith

No doubt this will be the commencement of a lively discussion between the readers. It is the editor's intention to print the most interesting arguments on both sides of the case. I have this to say: it seems to me that *Wonder Stories* is going far afield when it takes such a horror story as Mr. Smith's "Dweller in Martian Depths" and, because it is laid on the Red Planet, prints it in a magazine of scientific fiction. Frankly, I could not find one redeeming feature about the story. Of course, everything doesn't have to have a moral. The thrilling scientifilm, "King Kong," for instance, has no moral to it—except, perhaps, to be careful of Fay Wray, if you are a great prehistoric ape—but it has a point at least: to interest. And "Dweller in Martian Depths" didn't interest me. I don't know, maybe it did others. But it disappointed me very greatly to find it in a scientifiction publication. In *Weird Tales*, all right. I don't like that type of story, I wouldn't read it there. I fail to find anything worth-while in an endless procession of ethereal lites, phantastic visions, ultra-mundane life, exotic paradises, airy vegetation, whispering

flutes, ghastly plants, and dirge-like horrors. May the ink dry up in the pen from which they flow! Or, at least, Mr. Smith, direct those tales elsewhere—NOT to a stf publication, because I do like your science fiction like "Master of the Asteroid" and "Flight into Super Time." But "stuff" like "The Light from Beyond" . . .

Well, let's hear from someone in favor.

Make "The Boiling Point" boil, you indignant fans. Don't let this guy Ackerman get away with it. Your replies will be published in this department. We would especially appreciate a reply from Mr. Smith himself in defense of his stories.

THE FANTASY FAN, "The Boiling Point," September, 1933.

THE BOILING POINT

You will remember the terrific outburst Forrest J. Ackerman made upon Clark Ashton Smith's stories and weird tales in general in last month's column. Shortly after the issue went to press, we received the following postscript to his article which he requested to have printed at the beginning of this month's column.

I could as well pick on John Taine—a favorite author, mind you—for "The Time Machine" in *Wonder Stories*, another story considered doubtful science fiction. My only interest is to keep stf. in the stf. publications, and let fantasies and weird tales appear in the magazines featuring that type.

It is to be hoped that Mr. Smith will discover many of his admirers thru the writings of readers caring to present arguments.

It is only fair that Mr. Smith himself should have the first blow against Mr. Ackerman's argument, in defense of his own stories. He calls (it)

Horror, Fantasy, and Science

Mr. Ackerman's fervent and ebullient denunciation of my stories, followed by Editor Hornig's invitation to join the melee, is not to be resisted.

I infer that Forrest J. Ackerman considers horror, weirdness

and unearthliness beyond the bounds of science or science fiction. Since horror and weirdness are integral parts of life (as is well known to those who have delved beneath the surface) and since, in all likelihood, the major portion of the universe is quite unearthly, I fail to understand the process of logic or syllogism by which he has arrived at this truly amazing proscription.

Let me recommend to Mr. Ackerman, and to others like him, a more scientifically open and receptive attitude of imagination. If Mr. Ackerman were transported to some alien world, I fear that he would find the reality far more incredible, bizarre, grotesque, fantastic, horrific, and impossible than any of my stories.

In regard to "The Light From Beyond," I cannot see that this tale is any more fantastic and unreal than others dealing with unknown dimensions or planes of hyper-space. Physical entry into such planes is impossible, but form an alluring theme for fictional speculation.

It is curious that Mr. Ackerman should profess to like "Flight Into Super Time," a story which is wilder, if anything, than the ones he has denounced. I might also add that it was written as a satire on time-travelling, and should not have been read too seriously.

Of course, it is Forrest Ackerman's privilege to dislike my stories, and to express his dislike whenever he chooses. I have merely tried to point out that he is in error when he condemns them as being inherently unsuitable for a scientifiction magazine.

At this point editor Charles Hornig printed part of a letter from H. P. Lovecraft in which Lovecraft defended CAS, saying that "Dweller in Martian Depths" was "really splendid, except for the cheap ending on which the Editor of Wonder Stories *insisted."*

THE FANTASY FAN, "The Boiling Point," October, 1933.

Lovecraft also wrote in the November, 1933 issue of FANTASY FAN ("The Boiling Point"), bitterly denouncing Forrest J. Ackerman. In the December 1933 and again in the January 1934 issues Ackerman responded, directing his attack not so much at CAS but rather Lovecraft. Both Lovecraft's and Ackerman's letters contained rather personal attacks on each other.

In his January, 1934 letter, however, Ackerman did go so far as to say that since Weird Tales *occasionally published science fiction, perhaps* Wonder Stories *should be allowed to publish weird tales. Also in December, 1933, was a letter from Donald Alexander in which he attacked CAS and Lovecraft for "descending to personalities" and concluded that "Smith, in my opinion, is a poor writer. His stories are all like the ravings of some fearfully diseased mind."*

In the January 1934 issue Lovecraft again answered Ackerman by reminding him that his original attack on "Dweller in Martian Depths" was not based on whether or not the story was suitable for a science fiction magazine, but rather was an attack on the story itself.

Editor Hornig at this point decided the debate had gone far enough and was perhaps threatening to get out of hand; he served notice that the issue would be dropped after the February issue of FANTASY FAN. In that February issue, CAS—who had remained out of the most acrimonious part of the debate—published a letter concerning Donald Alexander's charges.

Donald Alexander's letter caused me to reread carefully my own answer to Forrest Ackerman's epistolary critique. Since my one concern was to meet Mr. Ackerman's arguments on their own ground, I am puzzled by the assertion of Mr. Alexander that I made a fool of myself by descending to personalities. Offhand, I should have said that my letter was about as free of that sort of thing as it could conceivably have been. Perhaps there were a few mildly ironic touches; but certainly nothing of an insidious nature was implied or even intended. I do not think that any good purpose is ever served by abusive personalities. If my letter was derogatively personal, I really wonder how Mr. Alexander's should be classified.

Clark Ashton Smith

In the same issue was a brief note from August Derleth saying he was "squarely on Smith's side." The debate concluded with this note from Editor Charles Hornig:

We stated last month that the Smith-Ackerman debate would end in this issue—and so it has. Many of our readers have started

to get bored with it–and more than that, some ill-feeling has been aroused.*

*THE FANTASY FAN is attempting to bind the lovers of science and weird fiction tighter together with friendship, and not to separate them thru dislike of each other's ideas. However, to take the place of "The Boiling Point" we are starting a new department next month entitled "Your Views." This will not contain any debates, but the opinions of you, the readers, on various subjects we will nominate.

THE FANTASY FAN, November 1933–February 1934.**

**For further information about the debate, see "Appendix," p. 83.

(On the Forbidden Books)

"Necronomicon," "Book of Eibon," etc., I am sorry to say, are all fictitious. Lovecraft invented the first, I the second. Howard, I believe, fathered the German work on the Nameless Cults. It is really too bad that they don't exist as objective, bonafide compilations of the elder and darker Lore! I have been trying to remedy this, in some small measure, by cooking up a whole chapter of Eibon. It is still unfinished, and I am now entitling it "The Coming of the White Worm." . . . This worm mentioned in Eibon is Rlim Shaikorth, and comes from beyond the pole on a strange, gigantic iceberg with a temperature of absolute zero.

THE FANTASY FAN, November 1933*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 84.

The Weird Works of M. R. James

The four books of short stories written by Montague Rhodes James, Provost of Eton College, have been collected in a single but not overly bulky volume under the imprint of Longmans, Green & Co. One can heartily recommend the acquisition of this volume to all lovers of the weird and supernatural who are not already familiar with its contents.

James is perhaps unsurpassed in originality by any living writer; and he has made a salient contribution to the technique of the genre as well as to the enriching of its treasury of permanent masterpieces. His work is marked by rare intellectual skill and ingenuity, by power rising at times above the reaches of pure intellection, and by a sheer finesse of writing that will bear almost endless study. It has a peculiar savour, wholly different from the diabolic grimness of Bierce, or the accumulative atmospheric terror and rounded classicism of Machen. Here there is nothing of the feverish but logical hallucinations, the macabre and exotic beauty achieved by Poe; nor is there any kinship to the fine poetic weavings and character *nuances* of Walter de la Mare, or the far-searching, penetrative psychism of Blackwood, or the frightful antiquities and ultra-terrene menaces of Lovecraft.

The style of these stories is rather casual and succinct. The rhythms of the prose are brisk and pedestrian, and the phrasing is notable for clearness and incisiveness rather than for those vague, reverberative overtones which beguile one's inner ear in the prose of fiction-writers who are also poets. Usually there is a more or less homely setting, often with a background of folklore

and long-past happenings whose dim archaism provides a depth of shadow from which, as from a recessed cavern, the central horror emerges into the noontide of the present. Things and occurences, sometimes with obvious off-hand relationship, are grouped cunningly, forcing the reader unaware to some frightful deduction; or there is an artful linkage of events seemingly harmless in themselves, that leave him confronted at a sudden turn with some ghoulish specter or night-demon.

The minutiæ of modern life, humor, character-drawing, scenic and archaeological description, are used as a foil to heighten the abnormal, but are never allowed to usurp a disproportionate interest. Always there is an element of supernatural menace, whose value is never impaired by scientific or spiritualistic explanation. Sometimes it is brought forth at the climax into full light; and sometimes, even then, it is merely half-revealed, is left undefined but perhaps all the more alarming. In any case, the presence of some unnatural but objective reality is assumed and established.

The goblins and phantoms devised by James are truly creative and are presented through images often so keen and vivid as to evoke an actual physical shock. Sight, smell, hearing, taction, all are played upon with well-nigh surgical sureness, by impressions calculated to touch the shuddering quick of horror.

Some of the images or similes employed are most extraordinary, and spring surely from the demonic inspiration of the highest genius. For instance, take the unnamable thing in *The Uncommon Prayer* Book, which resembles "a great roll of old, shabby, white flannel," with a kind of face in the upper end, and which falls forward on a man's shoulder and hides this face in his neck like a ferret attacking a rabbit. Then, in *Mr. Humphreys and his Inheritance* (one of subtler and more inferential tales) there is the form "with a burnt human face" and "black arms," that emerges from an inexplicable hole in the paper plan of a garden maze "with the odious writhings of a wasp creeping out of a rotten apple." In *The Tractate Middoth* one meets an apparition with thick cobwebs over its eyes—the lich or specter of a man who, obedient to his own rather eccentric instructions, had been buried sitting at a table in an underground room. And who, upon reading *The Diary of Mr. Poynter*, can fail to share Denton's revulsion when he reaches out, thinking that a dog is beside his chair, and touches a crawling figure covered with

long, wavy, Absolom-like tresses? Who, too, can shake off the horror of Dennistoun, in *Canon Alberic's Scrap Book*, when a demon's hand appears from beneath on the table, suggesting momentarily a pen-wiper, a rat, and a large spider?

Reading and re-reading these tales, one notes a predilection for certain milieus and motifs. Backgrounds of scholastic or ecclesiastic life are frequent and some of the best tales are laid in cathedral towns. In many of the supernatural entities, there recurs insistently the character of extreme and repulsive *hairiness*. Often the apparition is connected with, or evoked by, some material object, such as the bronze whistle from the ruins of a Templars' preceptory in *Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad*; the old drawing of King Solomon and the night-demon in *Canon Alberic's Scrap Book*; the silver Anglo-Saxon crown from an immemorial barrow in *A Warning to the Curious*; and the strange curtain-pattern in *The Diary of Mr. Poynter* which had "a subtlety in its drawing."

In several stories there are hints of bygone Satanism and wizardry whose malign wraiths or conjured spirits linger obscurely in modern time; and in at least one tale, *Casting the Runes*, the warlock is a living figure. In other tales, the forgetful and vanishing phantasms of old crimes cry out their mindless pain, or peer for an instant from familiar pools and shrubberies. The personnel of James' *Pandemonium* is far from monotonous; one finds a satyr dwelling in a cathedral tomb; a carven cat-like monster that comes to life when touched by a murderer's hand; a mouldy smelling sack-like object in an unlit well, which suddenly puts its arms around the neck of a treasure-seeker; a cloaked and hooded shape with a tentacle in lieu of arms; a lean, hideously taloned terror, with a jaw "shallow as that of a beast"; dolls that repeat crime and tragedy; creatures that are dog-like but are not dogs; a saw fly tall as a man, met in a dim room full of rustling insects; and even a weak, ancient thing, which being wholly bodiless and insubstantial, makes for itself a body out of crumpled bed-linen.

The peculiar genius of M. R. James, and his greatest power, lies in the convincing evocation of weird, malignant and preternatural phenomena such as I have instanced. It is safe to say that few writers, dead or living, have equalled him in this formidable necromancy and perhaps no one has excelled him.

THE FANTASY FAN, February 1934.

(The Psychology of the Horror Story)

Mr. Lovecraft has stated very lucidly and succinctly the essential value and validity of the horror story as literary art, and there is no need to recapitulate his conclusions. It has often occurred to me that the interest in tales of horror and weirdness is a manifestation of the adventure impulse so thoroughly curbed in most of us by physical circumstances. In particular, it evinces a desire—perhaps a deep-lying spiritual need—to transcend the common limitations of time, space, and matter. It might be argued that this craving is not, as many shallow modernists suppose, a desire to escape from reality, but an impulse to penetrate the verities which lie beneath the surface of things; to grapple with, and to dominate, the awful mysteries of mortal existence. The attitude of those who would reprehend a liking for horror and eeriness and would dismiss it as morbid and unhealthy, is simply ludicrous. The true morbidity, the true unhealthiness, lies on the other side.

THE FANTASY FAN, May 1934*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 84.

The Family Tree of the Gods

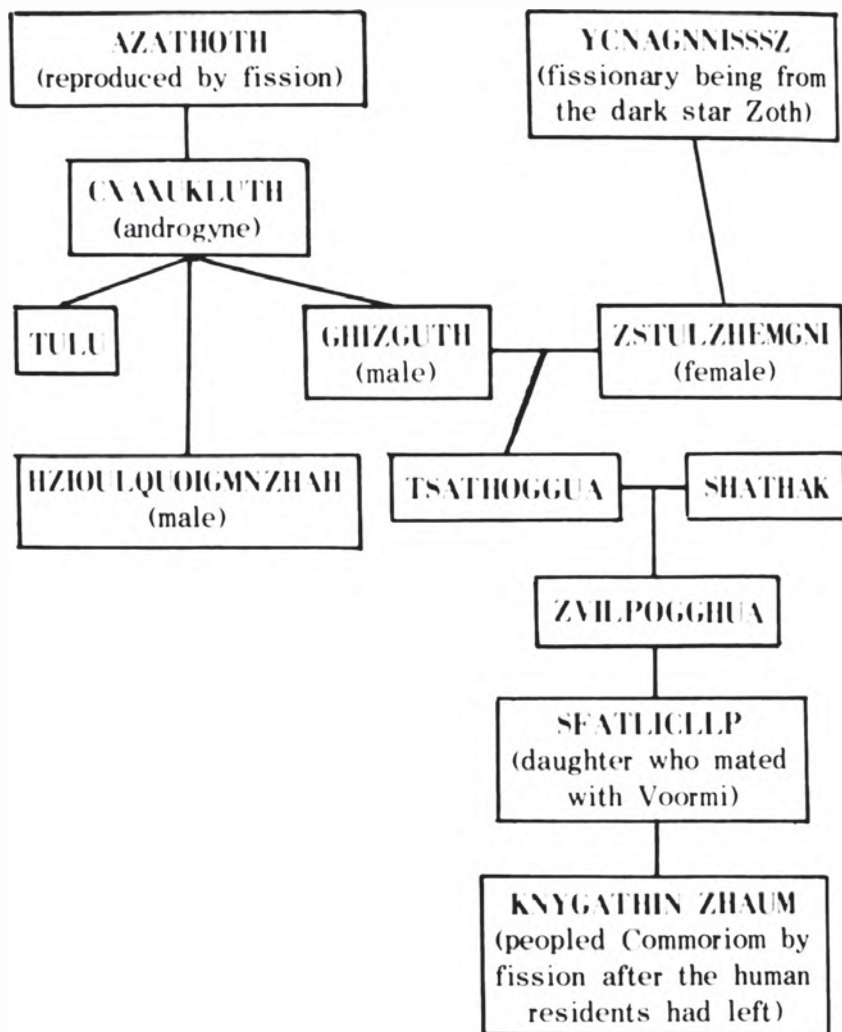
. . . I have filled out the "style-sheet" with such annotations and details concerning Tsathoggua as I am at present able to furnish. Some of these have required considerable delving into the *Parchments of Pnom* (who was the chief genealogist as well as a noted prophet) and I am well aware that certain of my phonetic renderings from the *Elder Script* are debatable. You raise some interesting points with your questions. Azathoth, the primal nuclear chaos, reproduced of course only by fission; but its progeny, entering various outer planets, often took on attributes of androgynism or bisexuality. The androgynes, curiously, required no coadjutancy in the production of offspring; but their children were commonly unisexual, male or female. Hzioulquoigmnzhah, uncle of Tsathoggua, and Ghizghuth, Tsathoggua's father, were the male progeny of Cxaxukluth, the androgynous spawn of Azathoth. Thus you will note a trend toward biological complexity. It is worthy of record, however, that Knygathin Zhaum, the half-breed Voormi, reverted to the most primitive Azathothian characteristics following the stress of his numerous decapitations. I have yet to translate the terrible and abominable legend telling how a certain doughty citizen of Commoriom (not Athammaus) returned to the city after its public evacuation, and found that it was peopled most execrably and numerously by the fissional spawn of Knygathin Zhaum, which possessed no vestige of anything human or even earthly.

Ech-Pi-El, I am sure, can furnish much fuller data concerning the genesis of Tulu (Cthulhu) than I am able to offer. It would seem, from the rather oblique references of Pnom, that Tulu was

a cousin of Hzioulquoigmnzhah, but was somewhat closer to the Azathothian archetype than Hzioulquoigmnzhah. The latter god, I learn, together with Ghisghuth, was born of Cxaxukluth in a far system. Cxaxukluth came *en famille* (family already included Ghisguth's wife, Zstylzhemgni, and the infant Tsathoggua) to Yuggoth (where, I may add, Cxaxukluth has most mercifully continued to sojourn throughout the aeons). Hzioulquoigmnzhah, who found its parent slightly uncongenial owing to its cannibalistic habits, emigrated to Yaksh (Neptune) at an early age; but, wearying of the peculiar religious devotions of the Yakshians, went on to Cykranosh, in which he preceded by several aeons his nephew Tsathoggua. (Tsathoggua, with his parents, lingered a long while in Yuggoth, having penetrated certain central caverns beyond the depredations of Cxaxukluth.) Hzioulquoigmnzh, a rather reflective and philosophic deity, was long worshipped by the quaint peoples of Cykranosh but grew tired of them even as of the Yakshians; and he had permanently retired from active life at the time of his encounter with Eibon as related in *The Door To Saturn*. No doubt he still resides in the columned cavern, and still quenches his thirst at the lake of liquid metal—a confirmed bachelor, and *sans* offspring.

My account of Tsathoggua's advent can readily be reconciled with the references in *The Mound*. Tsathoggua, travelling through another dimension than the familiar three, *first entered* the Earth by means of the lightless inner Gulf of N'Kai; and he lingered there for cycles, during which his ultraterrestrial origin was not suspected. Later, he established himself in caverns nearer to the surface, and his cult thrived; but after the coming of the ice he returned to N'Kai. Thereafter, much of his legend was forgotten or misunderstood by the dwellers in the red-litten Caverns of Yoth and blue-litten Caverns of K'n-Yan. Through such mythopoetic variations, Gll'-Hathaa-Ynn came to tell the Spaniard Zamarcoma that only the images of Tsathoggua, and not Tsathoggua himself, had emerged from the inner world. . . .

Genealogical Chart of the ELDER GODS



THE ACOLYTE, Summer 1944.
(from a letter to R. H. Barlow dated "June 16th, 1934")*

*Also see "Appendix," p. 84.

Clark Ashton Smith–

An Autobiographette

I am inclined to think that my life is a pretty good exemplification of the theories propounded by Lester Anderson in his interesting and provocative article on Superstition. Anyhow, I was born on Friday the 13th, under Capricornus and Saturn, and have been flirting with most of the orthodox jinxes ever since. I do not whistle in the dark, I have never gone in for Dream Books or psychoanalysis, and I make a habit of walking under ladders when it is more convenient to do this than circumambulate the obstruction. As to black cats—well, I have owned one for many years—a most sinister-looking creature, with all the aspects of an old-time wizard's familiar. Perhaps all this may help to explain the kumiss in the cocoanut, and may account for my ability to peruse the most horrendous stuff without batting an eyelash. Also (since there are modern superstitions as well as ancient ones) it may throw a light on my complete lack of faith in the Five year plan, EPIC, and all other cockeyed Utopian schemes. Moreover, it may help to explain my open mind in regard to all *outre* and inexplicable phenomena, and the fact that I can take the theories of Einstein, as well as of modern science in general, with a salutary pinch of saline seasoning.

THE FANTASY FAN, November 1934.

On Fantasy

We have been told that literature dealing with the imaginative and fantastic is out of favour among the Intellectuals, whoever they are. Only the Real, whatever that is or may be, is admissible for treatment; and writers must confine themselves to themes well within the range of statisticians, lightning calculators, Freud and Kraft-Ebbing, the Hearst and McFadden publications, NRA, and mail-order catalogues. Chimeras are no longer the mode, the infinite has been abolished; mystery is obsolete, and sphinx and medusa are toys for children. The weird and the unearthly are outlawed, and all mundane impossibilities (which, it may be, are the commonplaces of the Pleiads) have been banished to some limbo of literalistic derision. One may write of horses and hippopotomi but not of hippogriffs; of biographers, but not of ghouls; of slum-harlots or the hetairae of Nob Hill but not of succubi. In short, all pipe-dreams, all fantasies not authorized by Freudianism, by sociology, and the five senses, are due for the critical horse-laugh, when, through ignorance, effrontery, or preference, they find a place in the subject matter of some author unlucky enough to have been born into the age of Jeffers, Hemingway, and Joyce.

Let us examine these amazing dicta, fathered, as they must be, by people whose literal-mindedness can be surpassed only by that of their "four-footed betters." Surely it is axiomatic that in thought or art we deal not with things themselves, but with concepts of things. One may write, like Villon, of Muckle Meg and the Fair Helm-Maker; or, like Sterling, evoke Lilith and the blue-eyed vampire: in either case, only figments of the poet's

mind are presented. It is for the creator, not the critic, to choose that image or symbol which suits him best. People who cannot endure anything with a tinge of trope or fantasy, should confine their reading to the census-returns. There, if anywhere, they will find themselves on safe ground.

To touch on other considerations: why this thirst for literalism, for nothing but direct anthropological data, which would proscribe the infinitudes of imagination, would bar all that can lift us, even in thought, above the interests of the individual or the species? Does it not imply a cosmic provincialism, an overweening racial egomania?

Indeed, if all things fantastic or impossible are to be barred as literary subject-matter, where is one to draw the line? Many thinkers who lived before Freud, and some who live contemporaneously with him, have maintained that the world itself is a fantasy; or, in De Casseres' phrase, a "superstition of the senses." Gautier has pointed out that we live only by illusion, by a process of seeing ourselves and all things as they are not. The animals alone, being without imagination, have no escape from reality. From paretic to psychoanalyst, from poet to rag-picker, we are all in flight from the real. Truth is what we desire it to be, and the facts of life are a masquerade in which we imagine that we have identified the maskers. The highest intellects have always delighted in poetic fancy and philosophic paradox, knowing well that the universe itself is multiform fantasy and paradox, and that everything perceived or conceived as actuality is merely one phase of that which has or may have innumerable aspects. In this phantom whirl of the infinite, among these veils of Maya that are sevenfold behind sevenfold, nothing is too absurd, too lovely, or dreadful to be impossible.

FANTASY FAN, November 1934*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 85.

The Demonian Face

About 1918 I was in ill health and, during a short visit to San Francisco, was sitting one day in the Bohemian Club, to which I had been given a guest's card of admission. Happening to look up, I saw a frightful demonian face with twisted rootlike eyebrows and oblique fiery-slitted eyes, which seemed to emerge momentarily from the air about nine feet above me and lean toward my seat. The thing disappeared as it approached me, but left an ineffaceable impression of malignity, horror, and loathsomeness. If an hallucination, it was certainly seen amid appropriate surroundings; if an actual entity, it was no doubt the kind that would be likely to haunt a club in one of our modern Gomorrahs.

THE FANTASY FAN, November 1934.

The Favorite Weird Stories of C. A. Smith

(Courtesy of H. Koenig)

"The Yellow Sign" by Chambers

"The House of Sounds" by Shiel

"The Willows" by Blackwood

"A View from a Hill" by James

"The Death of Halpin Fraser" by Bierce

"The House of Usher" by Poe (i. e., "The Fall of the Hous of Usher")

"The Masque of the Red Death" by Poe

"The White Powder" by Machen

"The Call of Cthulhu" by Lovecraft

"The Colour Out of Space" by Lovecraft

FANTASY FAN, December 1934

An Autobiography of Clark Ashton Smith

I was born on January 13th, 1893, in Long Valley, California, of English and Yankee parentage. Most of my formal education was received at the little red schoolhouse of the precinct. As a schoolboy, I believe that I was distinguished more for devilment than scholarship. Much of my childhood was spent in the neighborhood of an alleged gold mine; which may be reason why the romance of California gold mining failed to get under my skin.

My first literary efforts, at the age of 11, took the form of fairy tales and imitations of the Arabian Nights. Later, I wrote long adventure novels dealing with Oriental life, and much mediocre verse. At 17, I sold several tales to *The Black Cat*, a magazine which specialized in yarns of the unusual. Then, for some reason, I lost interest in fiction-writing and confined my efforts to poetry for more than a decade. A volume of verse, *The Star-Treader and Other Poems*, appeared at the end of my 19th year. A little later, my health broke down, and for ten years my literary production was more or less limited and intermittent. My best poetry, however, was written during this period. A small volume, *Odes and Sonnets*, was brought out by the Book Club of California in 1918. In 1922 I published *Ebony and Crystal*; in 1925, *Sandalwood*.

At the beginning of the Depression in 1929, I resumed fiction-writing and have since turned out more than a hundred short stories and novelettes, nearly all of which can be classed as weird or science fiction. Most of these tales have somehow gotten themselves into print. Six tales, *The Double Shadow and*

Other Fantasies, which I printed at my own expense, are among the best. Of the tales published in science fiction magazines, *The Eternal World* and *The City of the Singing Flame*, are in my opinion, the most outstanding.

Apart from writing, I have made hundreds of fantastic paintings and drawings; also, more than a hundred small sculptures and carvings of imaginative type. I find the making of these far easier and more pleasurable than writing.

My poems have appeared in 30 or more magazines, in 10 or 12 anthologies; and some have even been used in school readers. I have done a number of translations from French poetry, and have dabbled, rather ineptly no doubt, in the writing of French verse. Aside from the aforementioned arts and avocations, I have done, at times, much hard manual labor, such as woodcutting and fruit picking. I have learned to cook, after a fashion, and have made many kinds of wine.

THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN, August 1936.

Story-Writing Hints

The main objective of the short story is to stir the reader's emotions. How you stir them or what emotion you stir is not so important as the fact that to hold the reader's interest you must stir his emotions. You must be able to create various emotional effects thru your characters, action, description, setting, etc.

Constant practice is the key to success. You cannot learn music without practicing it, neither can you learn to write without writing. I suggest that, for your own benefit, you write a few hundred words depicting an emotional experience. Write up one of your own experiences or invent one. But remember that you are writing it with the purpose of stirring an emotion in the person who reads it. The sketch is not to be a story but merely an incident–no opening explanations are necessary.

When you are reading a story watch for the passages in which the author is relating an emotional experience and inducing the emotional feeling in you. By studying how that particular author is doing it you will be better able to do it in your own work.

I believe that the following partial quotation from "The Double Shadow" will serve to illustrate the building up of emotional feeling:

> . . . a second day has gone by like a sluggish ooze of horror . . . I have seen the . . . identification of the shadow with the flesh of Avyctes . . . I have seen the slow encroachment of the . . . umbrage, mingling . . . with the lank shadow and . . . bituminous body of Oigos, and turning them to . . . the thing which Avyctes has become. And I have heard the mummy cry out like a living man in great pain and fear . . . And verily I know not if the thing that has come to us be one or several . . .

But these things . . . I shall soon know; for now, in turn, there is a shadow that follows mine, drawing ever closer. The air congeals and curdles with an unseen fear . . . and the great marble women seem to tremble where they stand along the walls. But the horror that was Avyctes, and the second horror that was Oigos, have left me not . . . And their stillness is more terrible than if they had rended me limb from limb. And there are strange voices in the wind, and alien roarings upon the sea; and the walls quiver like a thin veil in the black breath of remote abysses.

TESSERACT, January 1937.

In Appreciation of William Hope Hodgson

Among those fiction writers who have elected to deal with the shadowlands and borderlands of human existence, William Hope Hodgson surely merits a place with the very few that inform their treatment of such themes with a sense of authenticity. His writing itself, as Mr. Lovecraft justly says, is far from equal in stylistic merit: but it would be impossible to withhold the rank of master from an author who has achieved so authoritatively, in volume after volume, a quality that one might term the realism of the unreal. In some ways, Hodgson's work is no doubt most readily comparable to that of Algernon Blackwood. But I am not sure that even Blackwood has managed to intimate a feeling of such profound and pervasive familiarity with the occult as one finds in *The House on the Borderland*. Hideous phantoms and unknown monsters from the nightward gulf are adumbrated in all their terror, with no dispelling of their native mystery; and surely such things could be described only by a seer who has dwelt overlong on the perilous verges and has peered too deeply into the regions veiled by invisibility from normal sight.

However, *The House on the Borderland*, though probably the most sustained and least faulty of Hodgson's volumes, is far from being his most unique achievement. In all literature, there are few works so sheerly remarkable, so purely creative, as *The Night Land*. Whatever faults this book may possess, however inordinate its length may seem, it impresses the reader as being the ultimate saga of a perishing cosmos, the last epic of a world beleaguered by eternal night and by the unvisageable spawn of darkness. Only a great poet could have conceived and written

this story; and it is perhaps not illegitimate to wonder how much of actual prophecy may have been mingled with the poesy.

The books above mentioned are, in my opinion, Mr. Hodgson's masterpieces. However, the first portion of *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig"* maintains a comparable level of imaginative power; and one regrets that the lost mariners should have escaped so soon from the malign and mysterious dimension into which they were carried. One must also accord a more than formal praise to *The Ghost Pirates*, which is really one of the few successful long stories dealing with the phantasmal. Its rout of ghastly and persistent specters will follow the reader long after they have seized the haunted ship!

It is to be hoped that work of such unusual power will eventually win the attention and fame to which it is entitled. Beyond doubt, accident and fatality play a large part in such matters; and many meritorious books and works of art are still shadowed in obscurity. Hodgson, though little known, is in good company. How many, even among fantasy lovers, have heard of the great imaginative artist, John Martin, or the equally great and macabre imaginative poet, Thomas Lovell Beddoes?

THE READER AND COLLECTOR, June 1944*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 85.

In Memoriam:

H. P. Lovecraft

Howard Phillips Lovecraft passed away on March 15th, after a month of painful illness. His death will be a personal bereavement to all lovers of fine imaginative writing as well as to the friends who were privileged to know and esteem and love him. Among these friends must be counted many who never met him face to face, but who found in him the princeliest of all correspondents: a mind of unequalled brilliance and erudition, fired with manifold enthusiasms, given to the "noble pleasure" of praising where praise was in any wise due; a source of never-failing inspiration, illumination, generosity, helpfulness, enheartenment to others. The loss is profound and irreparable for us who remain behind: for it is safe to say that his peer will not be found again.

His published writings require no enconium, since they are familiar to all who will read this page. They are comparable to Poe on the grounds of merit but are wholly individual and unique. Their classic style, their consummate realism of detail, their intense distillation of atmosphere, their sustained wing-flight on the black outer cosmos or into stark prehuman antiquities, all combine to the creation of a new literary dimension. Like the personality that produced them, they will never be duplicated.

TESSERACT, April 1937.

(On H. P. Lovecraft—I)

I am profoundly saddened by the news of H. P. Lovecraft's death after a month of painful illness. The loss seems an intolerable one, and I am sure that it will be felt deeply and permanently by the whole weird fiction public. Most of all will it be felt by the myriad friends who knew Lovecraft through face-to-face meeting or correspondence: for in his case the highest literary genius was allied to the most brilliant and most endearing personal qualities. I—alas!—never met him, but we had corresponded for about seventeen years, and I felt that I knew him better than most people with whom I was thrown in daily intimacy. The first manuscript of his that I read (probably in 1920) confirmed me in the opinion of his genius from which I have never swerved at any time. It opened a new world of awesome speculation and eery surmise, a new imaginative dimension. Since then, he has written scores of masterpieces that extend the borders of human fantasy and conquer fresh empires amid the extra-human and ultra-terrestrial infinities. Among these, I might mention *The Outsider, The Call of Cthulhu, The Color Out of Space, The Rats in the Walls, The Dunwich Horror, Pickman's Model* and *The Dreams in the Witch-House* as being special favourites. However, there are few tales of his that I have not read and re-read many times, always with that peculiar delight given by the savor of some uniquely potent distillation of dreams and fantasy. Leng and Lomar and witch-ridden Arkham and sea-cursed Innsmouth are part of my mental geography; and dreadful, cyclopean R'lyeh slumbers somewhere in the depths. Others will venture into the realms that the Silver Key of his mastery has unlocked; but none will read them with the same wizard surety, or bring back for our delectation essences of equal dread and beauty and horror.

WEIRD TALES, "The Eryie," July, 1937.

(On H. P. Lovecraft–II)

Perhaps by this time you will have heard the sad news of Lovecraft's passing. He died on Monday morning, March 15th, from gastro-intestinal and kidney trouble (chronic Bright's disease) from which he had suffered for years. The news is infinitely depressing, and all who knew him personally or even by correspondence are stunned by the shock. . . . He made clinical notes of the progress of his malady for the doctor till the pen dropped from his fingers.

Plans are already under way for the publication of an omnibus volume of H. P. L.'s work, to contain about thirty of his stories, his best poems, and essays; his own written choice to be followed as much as possible in the selection. August W. Derleth and Donald Wandrei are in charge of the undertaking. Wandrei is also planning to publish privately a selection of H. P. L.'s letters. This last, I venture to say, will establish him as one of the greatest letter-writers who ever lived, and will exhibit manifold angles of his astounding genius. Unparalleled erudition, scholarship, critical ability, wit, humor, fancy, generosity–a hundred other admirable traits are displayed to the fullest in the correspondence to which he gave, toward the end, at least half of his time. He gave untiring and invaluable mentorship to many young writers; and I know of at least one occasion where he played, with infinite wisdom and thoughtfulness, the difficult role of father-confessor to a young woman. The loss to literature is incalculable; but the heritage he has left will establish him among the greatest writers of modern times.

SCIENCE-FICTION CRITIC, May 1937*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 85.

Atmosphere in Weird Fiction

The term *atmosphere*, in application to fiction, is often used in a somewhat vague or restricted sense. I believe that it can be most profitably defined as the collective impression created by the entire mass of descriptive, directly evocative details in any given story (what is sometimes known as "local color") together with all that is adumbrated, suggested or connoted through or behind these details. It can be divided roughly into two elements: the *kinetic* and the *potential*; the former comprising all the effects of overt surface imagery, and the latter all the implications, hints, undertones, shadows, nuances, and the verbal associations, and various effects of rhythm, onomatopoeia and phonetic pattern which form a more consistent and essential feature of good prose-writing than is commonly realized. Many people would apply the word *atmosphere* only to the elements defined here-above as potential; but I prefer the broader definition; since, after all, the most intangible atmospheric effects depend more or less upon the kinetic ones and are often difficult to dissociate wholly from them through analysis. An attempt to achieve purely potential writing might result, I suspect, in something not altogether dissimilar to the effusions of Gertrude Stein! Or, at least, it would lead to an obscurity such as was practiced by the French Symbolist poet, Mallarme, who is said to have revised his poems with an eye to the elimination of kinetic statement whenever possible.

A few examples of the use of atmospheric elements, taken from the work of recognized masters, should prove more illuminative than any amount of generalization. Take, for instance,

this paragraph from Ambrose Bierce's tale, *The Death of Halpin Frayser*, one of the most overwhelmingly terrific horror tales ever written:

> He thought that he was walking along a dusty road that showed white in the gathering darkness of the summer night. *Whence and whither it led, and why he traveled it*, he did not know, though all seemed simple and natural, as is the way in dreams; for in the Land Beyond the Bed surprises cease from troubling and the Judgement is at rest. Soon he came to the parting of the ways; leading from the highway was a road less traveled, *having the appearance, indeed, of having been long abandoned, because, he thought, it led to something evil*; yet he turned into it without hesitation, *impelled by some mysterious necessity.*

Note here the *potential* value of the italicized clauses. The element of dream-mystery is heightened by the unknown reason for traveling the road, by the "something evil" which has no form or name, and the unparticularized necessity for taking the abandoned way. The ambiguity, the lack of precise definition, stimulate the reader's imagination and evoke shadowy meanings beyond the actual words.

In the paragraph immediately following this, the potential elements are even more predominant:

> As he pressed forward he became conscious that *his way was haunted by malevolent existences, invisible, and whom he could not definitely figure to his mind. From among the trees on either side he caught broken whispers in a strange tongue which yet he partly understood. They seemed to him fragmentary utterances of a monstrous conspiracy against his body and his soul.*

Here, through the generalized character of malevolence imputed to things unseen and half-heard, images of almost illimitable spectral menace are conjured up. It should not be inferred, however, that precise statements and sharply outlined images are necessarily lacking in potential quality. On the contrary, they may possess implications no less frightful or mysterious than the wildly distorted shadow cast by some monster seen in glaring light. To illustrate this point, let me quote again from *The Death of Halpin Frayser*:

> A shallow pool in the guttered depression of an old wheel rut, as from a recent rain, met his eye with a crimson gleam. He

> stooped and plunged his hands into it. It stained his fingers; it was blood. Blood, he then observed, was about him everywhere. The weeds growing rankly by the roadside showed it in blots and splashes on their big broad leaves. Patches of dry dust between the wheelways were pitted and spattered as with a red rain. Defiling the trunks of the trees were broad maculations of crimson, and blood dripped like dew from their foliage.

This, it would seem, is a prime example of kinetic atmospheric description, owing its power to a visual definitude and exactness rarely equaled. Consider a moment, however, and you will realize the added potential element which lies in the unexplained mystery of the bloody dew, and the abnormally strange position of many of the sanguine maculations. Things infinitely more dreadful and more horrible than the blood itself are somehow intimated.

In much of Poe's best work, the atmospheric elements are so subtly blended, unified and pervasive as to make analysis rather difficult. Something beyond and above the mere words and images seems to well from the entire fabric of the work, like the "pestilent and mystic vapor" which, to the narrator's fancy, appeared to emanate from the melancholy House of Usher and its inexplicably dismal surroundings. The profuse but always significant details evoke dimly heard echoes and remote correspondences. Suggestion is less easily separable from statement, and becomes a vague dark irridescence communicated from word to word, from sentence to sentence, from paragraph to page, like the play of lurid gleams along somber jewels cunningly chosen and set. To this suggestive element the rhythms, cadences and phonetic sequences of the prose contribute materially but more or less indeterminably. As an illustration of well-nigh perfect atmospheric writing, embodying the qualities I have indicated, I quote from *The Fall of the House of Usher* the description of the room in which Roderick Usher receives his guest:

> The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eyes, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies

> hung upon the walls. *The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique and tattered.* Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to lend any vitality to the scene. I felt I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. *An air of stern, deep and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.*

Note here the carefully built impression of spaciousness combined with gloom and confinement, of lifeless and uncomforting luxury. Through the choice and emphasis of material details, an air of spiritual oppression is created, and the idea of a mysterious and monstrous unity between the building and its hypochondriacal owner is cautiously foreshadowed. I have italicized two sentences in which I seem to find a very subtle congruity between the actual sound of the words and their sense. In the first, the frequent repetition of the consonants r, s, fs and t somehow emphasizes the image of "profuse" furniture; and the sharp dentals and sibilants add to the impression of things time-eaten and "comfortless." In the last sentence, the repeated letters, n, r, d, l, m, and v, are all of a heavy or deep-sounding character, giving, with the long, close and sonorous vowels, a hollow and funeral clang that echoes the meaning. Here, too, the very movement of the sentence is like the dropping of a pall.

From certain of Poe's tales and prose-poems, such as *The Masque of the Red Death*, *Silence* and *Shadow*, one can select even more obvious and overt effects of atmospheric color supplemented by sound and rhythm. For illustration, I shall quote a single sentence from the prose-poem, *Silence*, and leave its analysis to the reader: "And overhead, with a rustling and loud noise, the grey clouds rush westwardly forever, until they roll, a cataract, over the fiery wall of the horizon."

From such instances as these, it will be seen how large a portion of the atmospheric elements in writing can sometimes be contributed by the mere sound of words apart from their meaning. The values implied are vaguely akin to those of music; and it should be obvious that really fine prose cannot be written without an ear for pitch, tone, movement and cadence.

AMATEUR CORRESPONDENT, November-December 1937.

The Decline of Civilization: A Note on "The Dark Age"

"The Dark Age" was written to illustrate how easily scientific knowledge and its resultant inventions could be lost to the human race following the complete breakdown of a mechanistic civilization such as the present one. The tale seems far from fantastic or impossible; and I have tried to bring out several points and to emphasize the part played by mere chance and by personal emotions and reactions.

I have shown the old knowledge conserved by a select few, the Custodians, who, in the beginning, are forced to isolate themselves completely because of the hostility displayed by the barbarians. Through habit, the isolation becomes permanent even when it is no longer necessary; and with the sole exception of Atullos, who has been expelled from the laboratory-fortress by his fellows, none of the Custodians tries to help the benighted people about them.

In the end, through human passion, prejudice, misunderstanding, the Custodians perish with all their lore; and the night of the Dark Age is complete. The reader will note certain ironic ifs and might-have-beens in the tale. Other points that I have stressed are the immense, well-nigh insuperable difficulties met by Atullos in his attempt to reconstruct, amid primitive conditions, a few of the lost inventions for the benefit of the savages; and the total frustration of Torquane's studies and experiments through mere inability to read the books left by his dead father.

Also I have shown how a chemical, such as gunpowder, might be used by one who had learned its effects but was wholly ignorant of its origin and nature.

> *THRILLING WONDER STORIES*, "The Story Behind the Story, April 1938*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 85.

Planets and Dimensions

In writing fantastic science tales, two themes have attracted me more than others, and have seemed to offer the amplest possibilities and the deepest stimulus to imagination: the interplanetary and the inter-dimensional themes. Among those of my stories that can be classed, more or less accurately, as science fiction, the majority have dealt either with worlds remote in space, or worlds hidden from human perception by their different vibratory rate or atomic composition.

I am glad that my tale of life on Venus, "World of Horror," found favour with many readers of *Tales of Wonder*. I hope to return presently to this type of story, which, though exploited by so many authors, is still rich in unsounded potentialities. Indeed, there are no limits to their development except those of the writer's imagination. Here, however, lies the difficulty, since it is impossible for one to conceive forms and conditions of life, matter and energy that are wholly diverse from all terrestrial states and forms.

And yet, when one considers the fantastic variations of life on this one tiny planet, there seems little reason to presuppose that life on other worlds will necessarily repeat, or even resemble, the types known to us. In future ages, when space-transit has become a reality, our wildest fictions may seem feeble and commonplace beside the fantasies of Nature itself that explorers will discover on alien globes.

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*An alternate title for "The Immeasurable Horror," originally published in *Weird Tales*, Sept. 1931, and in OTHER DIMENSIONS (Arkham House, 1970).

Among my several inter-dimensional stories, I think "City of Singing Flame" is the best. I owe its inspiration to several camping sojourns amid the high Sierras, at a spot within easy walking distance of the Crater Ridge described by Angarth and Hastane. The Ridge is a wild eerie place, differing wholly in its geology and general aspect from the surrounding region, exactly as pictured in the story. It impressed my imagination profoundly, suggesting almost at first sight the contiguity of some unknown, invisible world to which it might afford the mundane approach and entrance. And, since I have never explored the whole of its area, I am not altogether sure that the worn, broken column-ends found by the story's narrators do not really exist somewhere among the curiously shaped and charactered stones that lie in such strange abundance there!

All fantasy apart, however, it seems to me that the theory of interlocking worlds in one that might be offered and defended. We know nothing of the ranges of vibration, the forms of matter and energy, that may lie beyond the testing of our most delicate instruments. Spheres and beings whose atomic structure removes them from all detection may float through or beside the Earth, no less oblivious of our existence than we of theirs. Transit between planes of space, though filled with obvious material difficulties, is at least more readily comprehensible than time-travelling.

TALES OF WONDER, Summer 1940 (No. 11).

George Sterling: Poet and Friend

My sixteen years' friendship and correspondence with George Sterling began, like so many human relationships, through another friendship. In 1911, when I had reached the age of eighteen, Miss Emily J. Hamilton, late of Oakland, was teacher of English literature at the Auburn High School. Though not one of her pupils (since my formal schooling was already finished) I had been showing her my verses for some months. These verses she was so good as to criticize and, on occasion, praise. One day she said: "Why not send some of your poems to George Sterling?"

The suggestion both delighted and dismayed me. It seemed rather like venturing to address a demigod, and I was a little doubtful whether the deity could even be reached through a medium so mundane and prosaic as the mails. Since my fifteenth year I had sought, read and admired with almost acolytish fervor everything published by Sterling in current magazines, together with his two early volumes of poetry. It was anomalous, even fabulous that such poetry could be written by a contemporary. How could I find the presumption to approach this Apollonian being with my own Marsyas-like crudities?

My friend reassured me. The demigod not only had a local habitation but was, she hinted, very human—almost, if anything, too human. He was gracious, kindly, helpful, to the novices of the Muse. She had known him in his Piedmont days, with Jack London, Joaquin Miller, Herman Whitaker, Herman Scheffauer. If I wished, she would write him a letter introducing my verses and me.

This began a correspondence that was to end only a week

prior to Sterling's death in November, 1926. From the first, his letters showed the interest of a master in a promising pupil; and soon they were tinged with the affection of an older brother writing to a younger. I believe he regarded me as standing, in relation to him, somewhat as he had been in relation to Ambrose Beirce; and sought to pass on, in his turn, the critical help, encouragement and praise he had received from Beirce. His letters were rich in technical instruction and correction, though perhaps over-encomiastic. They chronicled his movements, the poems he wrote, the people he met; they flashed with incisive observations, admonitions, touches of gentle humor, epigrams of pagan philosophy or timely comment. They were marked by unfailing solicitude and thoughtfulness. They contained snatches of self-revelation that were boyishly frank. Unconsciously, they sketched the outlines of a character brave, noble, generous in the antique manner; self-forgetful to a fault; modest for himself but eager to proclaim a friend's worth; responsive to beauty in every living nerve, whether the beauty was that of an ocean sunset, a line of poetry, a mountain, or a woman's face.

My first meeting with Sterling was delayed till late in June, 1912, when, at his long-repeated invitation, I went down to spend a month with him in Carmel. I remember well the circumstances. Sterling had come with a horse and wagon to meet my train in Monterey but had somehow missed me at the station. [NB, CAS was told by the train conductor to get off at San Jose, and had to purchase another ticket to Monterey, to get a later train, or so he confided many years later to his wife. He had delayed accepting GS's invitation until GS finally understood the delay, and sent him ten dollars to pay train fare. The cost of the second ticket took the remainder of his money. He never, of course, told Sterling that he'd walked to Carmel because he'd had no money left, nor of why he was late. Ed.]

Giving him up after a few minutes' wait, I decided to walk the four miles over the ridge to Carmel, and started in the thickening dusk through a country that was thrillingly new and strange to me. Some dweller on the outskirts of Carmel steered me vaguely in the general direction of Sterling's house. The road ran obscurely through a black forest starred with infrequent lights, and seemed to end at the last visible light. A woman

(Mrs. Michael Williams, I believe) redirected me. I had only to cross a wooden footbridge and follow a narrow, winding path down the ravine. There, in the pine-fragrant darkness, I came to the blurred outlines of a cabin and a house; I knocked on the cabin's door. A high, cracked, New England voice sang out, "Come in, Clark Ashton Smith!"

The cabin's kerosine lamp revealed a figure which, after all the years, and after the very silence and absence of death, seems much more presently alive and vital than many that walk the earth today. About him there was something of the world's youth, something of kinship with its eternal life and the agelessness of the sea. His fine brown acquiline features, his strange mingling of grace and vigor, made one think of a beardless Sylvan or Poseidon. Somehow, in spite of its modernness, his very costume contributed to the impression of viability: he wore golf clothes and stockings of dark green, with a green bow tie and brown canvas shoes. In lieu of a leopard-skin, of wreath of vine-leaves or sea-wrack, the garb was not too inappropriate.

His first gesture, after our greetings and explanations, was the pouring of a joint libation from a wicker-covered gallon demijohn filled with muscatel. The spicy golden wine was indeed the nectar of Parnassus. It was made, I believe, in Monterey; but no muscatel of these latter seasons has ever had quite the same savor and potency.

Thus, for me, began a month of rare companionship and happiness. At that time Carmel consisted merely of one main street and a woodland in which the scattered houses were mostly lost to sight. On one side, between Sterling's house and the main street, the pine forest stretched unbroken, peopled only by jays and quail and rabbits. Here Sterling could hunt game or collect pine-knots and logs for fuel. The sea, though hidden from view, was not far distant; and its murmur mingled always with the murmuring of the tree-tops. It was a milieu of enchantment for a boy who had lived wholly heretofore amid inland hills.

Robinson Jeffers has written of Sterling's Indian-like familiarity with the coast about Carmel. Truly, he was the genius of that scene and nothing escaped his observation and knowledge. I remember the hidden sea-cavern that he showed me below Point Lobos; the places where wild strawberries grew the thickest;

the abalone-reefs; and the furtive incursions of a strange lurid red fungus that he pointed out to me on the Lobos cypresses. This fungus, in latter years, has increased so much it seems to illume the boughs and boles of certain trees as with the reflection of hellish fires; but in 1912 it was confined to a few scattered thumbnail patches.

Like all who love life greatly, Sterling loved the sea: its changing moods and colors and voices; and the things that lurked in its ultramarine depths or were cast up on its tawny beaches. Almost it seemed at times that he was native to that third element, like one of the Swimmers in his own weird and lovely poem.

At the time of my visit, Sterling had given the use of his house to John Kenneth Turner, author of BARBAROUS MEXICO, and Turner's wife and children, Turner being in temporary financial difficulties. Sterling was occupying the little cabin he had built for Nora May French; but, turning this over to me, he moved into a little tent for the duration of my stay.

He spoke often of Nora May French, that strange and tragically gifted girl who had ended her life with poison in the same bed in which I slept nightly. She had, it seems, previously attempted to shoot herself with his revolver and had brought him a tress of her ashen-blonde hair clipped away by the bullet. He showed me the very spot beside the path up the ravine where this attempt had occurred, according to her statement. But, oddly, there had been no powder marks on her hair. I do not recall that he attributed her suicide to unrequited love for James Hopper; but there had been other reasons . . . perhaps sufficient ones.

She was, he said, the most changeable person he had ever known: incredibly radiant and beautiful at times; at others, absolutely dull and colorless in her appearance. One day he brought out a manuscript of hers dictated during the delirium of illness. It was full of an otherworld weirdness; but I can remember nothing of it, but that it was "such stuff as dreams are made of" and therefore immemorable as dreams.

On one occasion, I recall that George told me to keep the cabin door shut at night. "If you don't," he warned, "the cat will come in and jump on the bed. You'll think it's Miss X__ trying to climb into bed with you, and you'll be scared." "Oh,

no," I rejoined, "I'll probably think it's Nora May's ghost, and I won't be scared at all. I'm sure that her ghost would be a lovely one." "You certainly have an imagination," he commented, half admiringly, half deprecatingly.

Sterling was alone then; his wife Carrie (who I never met) being in Oakland. I have said that he was the *genius loci* of that coast: he was also the presiding genius among the artists in Carmel, who included Fred Bechdolt, Michael Williams, Herbert Heron, Redforn Mason, John Northern Hilliard, Grace McGowan Cook, and Chris Jorgensen. George was their leader in a standing feud with the forces of realty and "civic progress," headed by Perry Newberry, who wished to urbanize Carmel and promote a boom in lot-buying and house-building. The war was fought lustily and bitterly; and the two factions were scarcely on speaking terms.

Life, however, seemed simple and leisurely there. Almost every morning, if I recall rightly George took me on a round of calls, often distributing surplus game among his friends. There were wagon-rides up the Carmel valley, along the 17 mile Drive to Point Lobos, and a sea-fowl haunted spot several miles below Lobos where we picnicked with the Turner family. There were mussel-stews and incredibly complicated "mulligans" cooked amid the white sand-dunes; there were walks to Pebble Beach and in the woodlands carpeted with yerba buena and wild strawberry plants.

Also, there were rituals to be observed, such as the pounding of abalone steaks with a big wooden mallet on a boulder in the back yard; and the making each afternoon of a huge pitcher of punch, compounded subtly with Bourbon and soda, sliced pineapple and mint from the meadow-bottom below the house. I was priviledged to purvey the mint. George often commented on my temperance, since I would never exceed a fourth glass of that delectable brew.

I do not recall any excessive drinking on George's part; unless the term can be applied to his consumption of numerous bottles of beer at a beach picnic. Later he apologized, saying that beer was a swinish drink. But the Saxons (he believed himself to be mainly of Saxon blood) had always been prone to it. Either on this occasion or some other, he maintained the

superiority of the Saxon over the Gaelic peoples. Perhaps he had this prejudice in mind when he wrote the lines of that splendid lyric, *The Princess on the Headland*.

Anyway, his prejudices were always strongly held and stoutly supported. Among others, he frankly despised the men of mere affairs and money-making divorced from all else. "They are mutts," he said, "That's what their women call them. . . ."

Regarding women, his advice was often sage, and often exquisitely raffish. . . . "Don't ever let a woman get the upper hand of you," he counseled. "Rule them with a rod of iron."

His physical fitness was remarkable but he told me that he had not always been as robust. He brought out a photograph taken during his Piedmont period—"Look how thin I was then!" Indeed, the picture was all profile—an esthetic-looking shadow. He attributed the improvement in his health to a system of exercises devised by Sanford Bennett, a San Francisco business man who claimed to have rejuvinated himself when past fifty. The exercises were based on a principle of alternate tension and relaxation; and one in particular involved massage of the abdominal muscles under tension. It was supposed to strengthen the digestive powers.

Many years later I began to experiment with Bennett's system myself, and can testify that its claims are far from exaggerated.

At the end of my Carmel stay, Sterling accompanied me to San Francisco, from which city I returned shortly to Auburn. We spent a night in Oakland as the guests of George's friend, Roosevelt Johnson, who seemed as distinctly an incarnation of the old Roman world as George was of the Greek.

A. M. Robertson, Sterling's publisher, had agreed to bring out my first volume of verse, THE STAR TREADER AND OTHER POEMS.

George was indefatigable in assisting me with the endless correction of galley and page proofs exchanged by mail. Previously, he had advised me in the choice of poems for the collection. The numerous letters that he wrote me at this time, as well as these in regard to my subsequent volumes of verse, testify eloquently to his unbounded generosity and helpfulness toward a fellow-aspirant to the Muses' laurels.

Our next meeting occurred early in 1914, just prior to Sterling's

departure for New York after his final separation from Carrie. After visits to Colt Bierce and Jack London, he stopped in Auburn and spent some time with my parents and me. I remember that he was "on the wagon" at the time but had brought along an immense box of chocolate candy, most of which he consumed himself, with the result of a sleepless night! During that brief visity he endeared himself greatly to my parents.

He was vastly interested in a mining-shaft which my father and I had started, and often referred to it in his subsequent letters from the east. He sent me from New York the ms. of a mining story he had written, and asked me to revise it in regard to the correct legal points of claim-staking and filing. These details my . . .

Here the manuscript stops short. It resumes on p. 11 of the manuscript.

[Sterling also assisted me in choosing the poems for ODES AND SONNETS, published by the[1] Book Club of California for which Sterling wrote the preface. Three years later he was to write the foreword for my third volume, EBONY AND CRYSTAL.

I made occasional visits to San Francisco during those years, and George was always my companion and cicerone. He was then domiciled permanently at the Bohemian Club. Many of my memories of him are associated with the Club, and with such favorite latin restaurants as the Trattoria Bolognese (more familiarly known as the Bologna) presided over by the affable Bigin. Here, as elsewhere in San Francisco, the spirit of Bohemia was not unduly subdued by the devastations of the Volstead Act.

I recall, too, that George took me on charming visits to Mrs. Travis (Lawrence Zenda) and the tall, statuesque blond Mrs. Warlock, whom he called "Boadicea."

One day, in that den of silence and solitude, the Bohemian Club library, he gave me the manuscript of "Lilith" to read.

Either I did not wholly grasp the play's tremendous import and poetic opulence at that first hasty reading, or else I was backward in expressing my appreciation; for, after its publication, he seemed surprised at the enthusiasm with which I wrote of it in a letter. Truly, it is a magnificent thing, and without parallel in modern literature, apart from the poetic plays of

Swinburne and D'Annunzio.

I like to recall those evenings at Bigin's, which have about them the charm of a time irretrievably vanished and remote.

George, a little grey, was still master of the revels. Stella was gone, but there were other dancers in that world such as Marie Parmalee, and the two Nicol girls, Margaret and Amaryllis, whom I had known during their childhood in Auburn.

George Sterling died in 1926 [*burn*] [The last] time that my friend and I met face to face was during , between Christmas and New Years. He was ill in bed at the Bohemian Club: the result of an over-successful Yuletide celebration. I remarked then at the semi-monastic bareness of his room, aside from the pictured constellations of feminine beauty on the walls. There were few books. He told me that he no longer cared to accumulate many possessions. Long since, . . .

Here the manuscript ends in burned fragments. It is a tragedy that miscellaneous works as these had to be lost in whole or in part, but instead of crying over the irretrievable, let us be thankful for what we have left.

MIRAGE, Winter 1963-1964*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 86.

The Philosophy of the Weird Tale

(An extract from The Black Book *of Clark Ashton Smith)*

The weird tale is an adumbration or foreshadowing of man's relationship–past, present, and future–to the unknown and infinite, and also an implication of his mental and sensory evolution. Further insight into basic mysteries is only possible through future development of higher faculties than the known senses. Interest in the weird, unknown, and supernormal is a signpost of such development and not merely a psychic residuum from the age of superstition.

THE ACOLYTE, Fall 1944*

*Also see "Appendix," p. 86.

Review of Marianne Moore's *Nevertheless*

The six pieces in this tiny volume, written by a winner of numerous prize-awards, impress the present viewer as being fairly mild examples of modernist decadence. That is to say, they are as far from good poetry as they are from the absolute deliquescence of thought and language in such a writer as E. E. Cummings. One finds thought and observation in Miss Moore: but hardly such as to reward one for breaking the gnarled and spiny husk of diction. There is, as in so many other "modernists," an attempt to give distinction to the undistinguished through a sharp dislocation of rhythm and an eccentricity of image and phrase often carried to the verge of the ludicrous. For example, take the opening of the first poem, so eloquently entitled *Nevertheless*

you've seen a strawberry
that's seen a struggle; yet
there was, where the fragments met,

a hedgehog or a star–
fish for the multitude
of seeds.

After puzzling out the various turns and twists of this knotty effusion, one finds only a bit of commomplace didacticism, summed up in the sentence

Victory won't come
to me unless I go
to it.

WINGS, Summer 1945

(On Grotesque Carvings)

I have worked entirely on carving since December, and so far have turned out about twenty-six new pieces. Only a few of these are grotesques, since I have got to experimenting with the ornamental possibilities of my materials and have made small flower-vases, trays, liquor-cups, candle-sticks and even rings and a brooch on a scarf-pin. Also there are six tobacco-pipes, three of which have been disposed of. One of the remaining pipes is a grotesque which I call *Water Wizard*: the bowl representing the wizard's head, and the mouthpiece his familiar in the shape of a black fish. The stem is made from a rare species of bamboo with yellow and purplish mottlings. I am planning more pipes, one to represent Tsathoggua, and the other an inhabitant of Innsmouth. Among the other new carvings I have a figurine entitled *Primal Fish*, which I am pricing at $8.00; a bust entitled *Visitor from Outside* at $6.50; and a half-length statuette, *Progeny of Azathoth*, which is a little on the lines of *The Elder God*, though with more animation in face and tentacles; this I am pricing at $8.00.

THE ARKHAM SAMPLER, Spring 1949

A Cosmic Novel:

The Web of Easter Island

THE WEB OF EASTER ISLAND

This first novel by Donald Wandrei is embued throughout with the same unique qualities of cosmic imagination that distinguished *The Red Brain*, *Earth Minus*, *Finality Unlimited*, and numerous other short tales by him. The mystery of the megalithic remains of Stonehenge and Easter Island has been woven into a narrative that involves ulterior dimensions and endlessly repeated cycles of time and super-time.

The novel begins with the mysterious and disastrous events that follow the finding of an anomalous green image by a child in a long-disused and ill-reputed graveyard at Isling, England. This image is the Keeper of the Seal, mentioned in an Asian manuscript written in a tongue far older than Sanskrit:

> Out of crypts deeper than the clouds are high shall the Keeper of the Seal issue forth a summons to the Titans. The Keeper of the Seal shall become even as the Titans and take his place on Crltul Thr.

Drawn by a newspaper account of the strange events at Isling, Carter Graham, a museum curator, investigates the unused graveyard, and becomes the temporary possessor of the Keeper of the Seal. Later, having fortunately lost the image, he descends with a companion into a vault of prodigious depth and extent beneath the graveyard, a vault designed as a sort of time-trap by the macrocosmic titans who had built it a million and five hundred years ago for their own sinister but scientific purposes. Graham escapes from the trap by a narrow margin of time, but

his companion suffers the same doom that had overtaken numberless others, both men and the ancestors of men.

In the meantime, a fugitive wife-murderer has become the involuntary and unwitting owner of the green image. He meets on shipboard a strangely beautiful woman, with hair half white, half black, who, it seems, has made a surreptitious disposal of her husband. Their meeting affords a highly piquant episode–a spice of mundanity amid elements of ultraspatial terror and super-human vastness.

The tale unravels a web far-spun in time and place, and mounts to a stupendous climax on Easter Island, where Graham goes to confront the returning titans from the macrocosmos. Its premises, events and implications are among the most staggering in imaginative literature. Wholly original in style and concept, it is a worthy congener to such Lovecraft masterpieces as *The Call of Cthulhu*, *The Colour out of Space*, and *The Shadow out of Time*.

THE ARKHAM SAMPLER, Autumn 1948

(On Science Fiction History)

I have read the symposium on science-fiction the Winter 1949 issue with great interest. Since you have summed up so ably in your editorial the main deductions to be drawn, I will content myself with a few footnotes, so to speak. For one thing, it struck me that most of the contributors (Dr. Keller excepted) failed to emphasize sufficiently the historical aspect of the theme and were too exclusively preoccupied with its contemporary development. Yet surely, for the proper understanding of the genre and of fantasy in general, some consideration should be given to its roots in ancient literature, folklore, mythology, anthropology, occultism, and mysticism.

I was quite surprised that no one mentioned Lucian, Apuleius and Rabelais among the forefathers of the genre, since all three are of prime importance. Lucian was a satirist and skeptic who, in the form of imaginative fiction, endeavored to "debunk" the religious superstitions and contending philosophies of his time; being, one might say, somewhat analogous to Aldous Huxley, who in turn has satirised modern science. Apuleius, borrowing a plot from Lucian in *The Golden Ass*, expressed, on the other hand, the power and glamor of a sorcery that was *regarded as science* by the moiety of his contemporaries; and his book, in its final chapter, plunges deeply into that mysticism which is seemingly eternal and common to many human minds in all epochs. The omission of Rabelais is particularly surprising, since he was not only the first of modern satiric fantaisists, but also one of the first writers to develop the Utopian theme (so much exploited since) in his phalanstery of Theleme—which,

I might add, is the only fictional Utopia that I should personally care to inhabit!

Another thing that struck me was the ethical bias shown by some of the contributors, a bias characteristic of so many science-fiction fans, as opposed to the devotees of pure fantasy. Such fans are obviously lovers of the imaginative and the fantastic, more or less curbed in the indulgence of their predilections by a feeling that the fiction in which they delight should proceed (however remote its ultimate departure) from what is currently regarded as proven fact and delimited natural law; otherwise, there is something reprehensible in yielding themselves to its enjoyment. Without entering into the old problem of ethics plus art, or ethics versus art, I can say only that from my own standpoint the best application of ethics would lie in the sphere where it is manifestly *not* being applied: that is to say, the practical use of scientific discoveries and inventions. Imaginative literature would be happier and more fruitful with unclogged wings; and the sphere of its enjoyment would be broader.

What pleased me most about the symposium was the prominence given to Wells and to Charles Fort, and the inclusion of your anthology, *Strange Ports of Call*. I could mention books, out of my own far from complete reading of science-fiction, that were missed or slighted by the contributors. Of these, Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* is perhaps the most salient from a literary perspective. It is a gorgeous and sumptuous satire on the results of self-achieved immortality. Leonard Cline's *The Dark Chamber* could be mentioned, too, since it depicts with singular power the retrogression of a human being to the primal slime. Incidentally, one ought to mention Lucian's *True History*, for it contains what is probably the first interplanetary tale, a fantastic account of a voyage to the moon. And sometimes I suspect that Freud should be included among the modern masters of science-fiction! But one could multiply titles without adding anything of permanent literary value and significance.

ARKHAM SAMPLER, Spring 1949

Why I Selected:

The Uncharted Isle

Although better known for my writings in the fantasy field, I have at different times turned out what is called the straight science fiction story. After due thought I have chosen THE UNCHARTED ISLE as my best—or, at least, my favorite—for several reasons. Of these, the first is that, while having a basis in theoretic science, the tale is not merely an ordinary science fiction story, but it can be read as an allegory of human disorientation.

Then, too, it is written in what I think is a literate style while at the same time being free from conventional plot complications. Neither is it cumbered with pseudo-technical explanatory matter. And lastly, because my work is always selected for fantasy, this story has not been selected for inclusion in other anthologies, leaving me happily free to offer it herewith as a fresh science fiction item.

I hope you enjoy the reading half as much as I enjoyed the writing.

MY BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORY. AS SELECTED BY 25 OUTSTANDING AUTHORS. Edited by Leo Margulies and Oscar J. Friend. New York: Merlin Press, Inc., 1949, p. 402*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 87.

About

"The Plutonian Drug"

THE PLUTONIAN DRUG is, in my opinion, among my best in the genre of science-fiction. For one thing, it is the sort of tale that can hardly become "dated" in spite of changing vogues and varying themes. And it has the advantages of conciseness and brevity.

The field of speculation that it opens is a fascinating one, and hardly to be exhausted. Benjamin Paul Blood (and, no doubt, others) has hinted that our deepest perceptions of reality may come to us beneath the influence of drugs: a proposition equally impossible to prove or disprove. *Quien Sabe?*

THE OUTER REACHES: FAVORITE SCIENCE-FICTION TALES CHOSEN BY THEIR AUTHORS. Edited by August Derleth. New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1951*.

*Also see "Appendix," p. 87.

(On Tales About the Cthulhu Mythos)

As to the Cthulhu Mythos, I believe I added as much to it as I borrowed. Tsathoggua and the Book of Eibon were my own inventions, and were promptly utilized by Lovecraft. In turn, I borrowed the Necronomicon, which, in its original Arabic, was featured in my yarn *The Return of the Sorcerer*. Also, I used a quotation from the Necronomicon for a heading on another tale, *The Nameless Offspring*. Tsathoggua made his debut in *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros*, and also played some part in *The Door to Saturn* and *The Seven Geases*. *The Coming of the White Worm* was supposedly a chapter from the Book of Eibon; and the book was also featured in *Ubbo-Sathla* and in *The Holiness of Azederac* (which latter story mentioned two Lovecraftian deities under the slightly altered names of Iog-Sotot and Kthulhut). Eibon himself entered prominently into *The Door to Saturn*. All of these underlined [italicized] titles, then, can be considered as having more or less relationship to the Cthulhu Mythos.

Dated July 21, 1953
BIBLIOGRAPHIES/VOLUME VII/THE LOVECRAFT COLLECTORS LIBRARY/Edited by George Wetzel, in section entitled "Stories by Other Authors Related to the Cthulhu Mythos or Influenced by Lovecraft's Work."

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