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H. P. Lovecraft and the *Fungi From Yuggoth* Sonnets: Part One--The Initial Frame Poems

The poems of the sonnet sequence, *Fungi from Yuggoth*, are likely Howard Phillips Lovecraft's most anthologized poetic works and the most broadly known examples of his skill at versification. The narrative poem in any form diminished greatly over the twentieth century (indeed it can be argued that poetry in general has diminished over that period), but HPL's use of the sonnet as a vehicle for narrative would make these poems interesting and worthy of note if only for variance from the tradition of the sonnet as lyric.

But these poems are interesting for several other reasons, revealing, under scrutiny, things deeper and more significant of Lovecraft's philosophy, his scholarly erudition, and some possible influences upon his poetic work.

The sonnet is the most ubiquitous fixed poetic form in Western literature. Since its birth and early development as a love lyric during the Italian Renaissance (Petrarch, Dante, and Michelangelo specifically helping to form the bases of its tradition), it has been adapted to various purposes and has been the subject of continued experimentation and innovation.

The roughly square outline of text that the 14 lines of (usually) iambic pentameter has been found to be the perfect "paragraph" of verse, allowing for a great deal of reflection and suggestion in a constrained and compacted space. It has justly been seen as a true test of poetic skill by most of the poets in Western literature.

While HPL's closest correspondent and *ami de plume*, Clark Ashton Smith, was creating quality poetry in the newer modes and freer forms of the new century (also largely overlooked by "serious" critics of American poetry), Lovecraft chose the challenge of the traditional sonnet as the form for a goodly portion of his poetic achievement.

With the *Yuggoth* poems, we have an interesting mix of sonnets in both content and form. While most, as noted above, are sonnets used as narratives, indeed as either stanzas of a longer narrative passage or as self-contained micro-narratives, a few are decidedly lyric and evocative of Lovecraft's philosophy and cosmic vision.

HPL further makes use of several sub-types of the traditional sonnet, with no consistent rhyme scheme throughout the sequence. He shows himself thus to be a poet solidly based in tradition, but one who is, at the same time, no slave of tradition. In many poems, HPL is testing the limits of the form and seeing what subtle nuances, especially narrative possibilities, are available therein. In this he was, I believe, also influential in his work with the sonnet. Another of the "*Weird Tales* Triumvirate," Robert E. Howard wrote many examples of the sonnet form in general — but, I believe, was influenced to use the form as a narrative, at least to some significant degree, by the inspiration by HPL's *Yuggoth* sequence.

Also important for Lovecraft's series, since the sonnets eventually form a true sequence, each poem of the group can be and should be seen in the context of the collection as a whole. The resonances within the sequence are potentially as important as any single poem.

With the first five poems, Lovecraft is clearly establishing the "frame" of the chiefly narrative sequence. The present essay on *Fungi from Yuggoth* will focus on this establishing series, examining each of the poems in the opening, how they interrelate, and also some possible influences on Lovecraft's broader eventual sequence.

I. THE BOOK

(First publication in *The Fantasy Fan*, 2 No. 2, October 1934, p. 24.)

The place was dark and dusty and half-lost
In tangles of old alleys near the quays,

Reeking of strange things brought in from the seas,
And with queer curls of fog that west winds tossed,
Small lozenge panes obscured by smoke and frost,
Just showed the books, in piles like twisted trees,
Rotting from floor to roof—congeries
Of crumbling elder lore at little cost.

I entered, charmed, and from a cobwebbed heap
Took up the nearest tome and thumbed it through,
Trembling at curious words that seemed to keep
Some secret, monstrous if only one knew
Then, looking for some seller old in craft,
I could find nothing but a voice that laughed.

In the first poem in the sequence, “The Book,” Lovecraft varies the Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet form by concluding the sestet with a couplet [abbaabba cdcdee]—something the true Italian sonnet does not allow. From the beginning, he displays his sense of tradition by generally conforming to the rules of the iambic pentameter and following the 8-6 division of the poem (octave and sestet). But he also demonstrates that he is not a slave to tradition by varying the sestet rhyme and also by breaking from the regular meter (especially in lines 3, 7, and 11). He displays an early fondness for metrical variation by the use of the inverted foot, as in all three of the lines referenced.

He also shows his fondness for alliteration early and often in this opening poem which serves as a narrative frame story to lead into the several separate “micro-stories” which comprise much of the rest of the sequence. He tends to alliterate in pairs: *dark-dusty*, *strange-seas*, *west-winds*, *lozenge-like*, *twisted-trees*, *thumbed-through*, *some-secret*, with a nice chiasmus of alliteration in the last two lines of the octave—*looking-craft* & *could-laughed*. Also, he makes some use of internal rhyme as in lines 7 and 8 with *lore* and *floor*.

Though the poems in the sequence are a mixture of sonnet subtypes as far as form, HLP always makes use of the Italian-Petrarchan 8-6 division. This division is almost always not merely a rhyme scheme shift, but also an indication of a shift in the sense of the content, an indication of transition. As in this first poem, the octave presents the I-narrator looking in the window of the book store and observing the books, the “piles like twisted trees,” and the sestet begins with his entrance into the store.

As with all horror writing, atmosphere and vivid descriptive imagery are important. Lovecraft does a fine job in utilizing the sonnet as a form for the compressed image and creates an initial impression of weirdness. The typical Horror motifs of THE STRANGE/EXOTIC PLACE (ably painted) the THE DISEMBODIED VOICE are the main essences of this early atmosphere.

Just as important is the reflexive symbol of the book itself as a means of transport. Just as the first-person narrator is about to use this magical tome to travel to Yuggoth and to rend other veils in the fabric of the known universe, so the reader of this poem is performing a similar act. Reading as a way of going to what Keat’s called “the realms of gold” but what here we might call the “realms of weird.” Hence, we have emphasized a nice reflexivity.

II. PURSUIT

(First published *The Fantasy Fan*, 2, no. 2, October 1934, p. 24.)

I held the book beneath my coat, at pains
To hide the thing from sight in such a place;
Hurrying through the ancient harbour lanes
With often-turning head and nervous pace.

Dull, furtive windows in old tottering brick
Peered at me oddly as I hastened by,
And thinking what they sheltered, I grew sick
For a redeeming glimpse of clear blue sky.

No one had seen me take the thing—but still
A blank laugh echoed in my whirling head,
And I could guess what nighted worlds of ill
Lurked in that volume I had coveted.
The way grew strange—the walls alike and madding—
And far behind me, unseen feet were padding.

The second poem, “Pursuit,” is clearly a continuation of the story begun in the first sonnet, “The Book.” In form, it is an English or “Shakespearean” sonnet [ababcdcd efefgg], except for the octave-sestet division in both sense and rhyme shift.

Again we see the tendency to alliterate in pairs: *book-beneath*, *pains-place* (although later “p” sounds in the poem also relate), *hurrying-harbour* (also with later “h” alliteration).

The book is now quite clearly a book of magic or some doorway to “nighted worlds of ill.” And we are now sure that the book has been the object of a dark quest, the narrator’s “coveting”/theft of the tome compounding the sense of dread. Now too, compounded with the echo of the “blank laugh” we have the pad of “unseen feet.” The *motifs* of PURSUIT/FLIGHT and again, the DISEMBODIED VOICE and FOOTPADS add to the atmosphere. The labyrinthine nature of the lanes and alleys emphasizes this atmosphere as well, the motif of the MAZE or MYTHIC LABYRINTH is present.

Lovecraft also gives evidence of his considerable reading in and fondness for the literatures of England and France (especially the fantastic and weird literature, of course) in his affectation of the British (from French) “harbour” rather than the American “harbor.” We should also consider the etymological senses of “harbour” and realize the likely subconsciously derived sense of things harboured or hidden, things held or safely confined for a while, but now about to be set loose upon the world—at least upon the world of this narrator, the transgressor, the thief of forbidden knowledge.

III. THE KEY

(First published *The Fantasy Fan*, 2, No. 5, January 1935, p. 72.)

I do not know what windings in the waste
Of those strange sea-lanes brought me home once more
But on my porch I trembled, white with haste
To get inside and bolt the heavy door
I had the book that old the hidden way
Across the void and through the space-hung screens
That hold the undimensional worlds at bay
And keep lost aeons to their own demesnes.

At last the key was mine to those vague visions
Of sunset spires and twilight woods that brood
Dim in the gulfs beyond this earth's precisions
Lurking as memories of infinitude
The key was mine, but as I sat there mumbling
The attic window shook with a faint fumbling.

The third poem of the initial frame, “The Key,” is an important poem in several ways. In form, it repeats the pattern of “Pursuit” in that it is an English sonnet, but divided 8-6 as the typical Italian. Alliteratively too, **it keeps with what we may now consider a Lovecraftian tendency in verse: the use of alliterative doublets**. We have again the practice of alliteration done in pairs: *windings-waste, strange-sea-lanes, vague-visions, sunset-spires, mine-mumbling, faint-fumbling*.

Regarding content, the atmospheric depiction is continued by excellent word choices, decidedly in keeping with Poe’s frequent suggestion that everything in a work should contribute to a single, preconceived effect. Little things, but important things for the atmosphere of awe and dread, like the fact that the “heavy door” to the narrator’s home can be “bolted” (we must believe with a heavy bolt) add to the overall effect already established in the preceding sonnets.

The “faint fumbling” at the attic window reminds us of Poe’s “The Raven” and the rapping and tapping of the bird upon the pane — and no doubts exist about the influence of Poe upon HPL.

Also, this nicely continues the DISEMBODIED VOICE motif from poems one and two. In the first poem, the “voice that laughed” is static; in the second, the footpad of “unseen feet” is dynamic and shows pursuit; in this third poem, the fumbling announces the arrival of the pursuer.

In this poem, most importantly, we have as nice an encapsulation of Lovecraft’s cosmic vision as we might wish for. We discover that this book, “the key” tells “the hidden way / across the void and through the space-hung screens / that hold the undimensioned worlds at bay, / and keep lost aeons to their own demesnes.” **Here we see typical and recurring essentially Lovecraftian motifs:**

1) the motif of THE VOID AND VAST REACHES OF THE COSMOS (of “unplumbed space” elsewhere called);

2) the motif of UNDIMENSIONED REALMS where our sense of a three-dimensional universe would be shattered;

3) the motif of THE VEIL or SCREEN or crystalline CELESTIAL SPHERE which can be rent or shattered allowing back THE OLD ONES from THE LOST AEONS.

And in the sestet, we have the marvelous line that subsumes all of Lovecraft’s specific visions in crystal brevity: the idea of things “beyond this earth’s precisions.”

Though a difficult assertion to support, I think it likely that HPL’s word choice in line 8 of “demesnes” shows the influence of the Keats poem already alluded to above: “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer,” which begins:

“Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many good states and kingdoms seen
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold,
And deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne.”

There is, I believe, ample evidence of the heroic-epic tradition in Lovecraft’s sonnet sequence. There is no doubt of his classical erudition and broad reading of the great books of the past as well as the far more specialized fiction of his taste and preference.

First, in the symbol of the book as vehicle for the great journey of the mind, I believe that Lovecraft is suggesting much the same thing as Keats in his great sonnet, “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer”—books can transport us *elsehow* to places *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*. And certainly with the mythic, fantastic, and horrific modes, we may also be transported as *elsewhos* to encounter *elsewhats* beyond our own particular visions of reality. The power of words to perform a sort of magic is resonant in both Keats and Lovecraft. Else why read?

IV. RECOGNITION

(First published *Driftwind*, 11, No. 5, December 1936, p. 180.)

The day had come again, when as a child
I saw-just once- that hollow of old oaks,
Grey with a ground-mist that enfolds and chokes
The slinking shapes which madness has defiled
In that the same-an herbage rank and wild
Clings round an altar whose carved signs involve
That Nameless One to whom a thousand smokes
Rose, aeons gone, from unclean towers up-piled.

I saw the body spread on that dank stone,
And knew those things which feasted were not men;
I knew this strange, grey world was not my own,
But Yuggoth, past the starry voids-and then
The body shrieked at me with a dead cry,
And all too late I knew that it was I!

With the fourth sonnet, "Recognition" repeats the variant Italian form of the first poem with its irregular sestet ending in a couplet.

The title of this poem is significant and important. While it seems a great shift of setting has taken place, this shift is a mental journey of *deja vu* in which the narrator is made sure that his childhood vision was indeed a premonition of the real supernatural journey to come. Haunted since that childhood by a desire for secret knowledge, the day has indeed come when that premonitory journey will at last be made.

The motif of THE NAMELESS ONE (making use of the mythic-folk belief that names are powerful things and that names of gods must not be pronounced [reference: YHWH in Hebraic texts] is present. Also working here is the motif of THE GHOUL as a frequent object of Lovecraftian horror. The motif of the STARRY VOIDS is again echoed.

This sonnet is important too in that the sequence-titling name "Yuggoth" is first introduced. One gets the impression that this word has been a part of the narrator's dreams and dreads since the childhood vision.

V. HOMECOMING

(first published *The Fantasy Fan*, 2, No. 5, January 1935, p. 72)

The daemon said that he would take me home
To the pale, shadowy land I half-recalled
As a high place of stair and terrace, walled
With marble balustrades that sky-winds comb,
While miles below a maze of dome on dome
And tower on tower beside a sea lies sprawled.
Once more, he told me, I would stand enthralled
On those old heights, and hear the far-off foam.

All this he promised, and through sunset's gate
He swept me, past the lapping lakes of Flame,
And red-gold thrones of gods without a name
Who shriek in fear at some impending fate
Then a black gulf with sea-sounds in the night"
"Here was your home," he mocked, "when you had sight!"

“Homecoming,” the fifth and final poem of what I am here considering as “The Initial Frame” for the sonnet sequence, is a good example of Wyatt’s Sonnet, in many ways the first English form derived from the Italian original. Sir Thomas Wyatt was the early translator of the sonnets of Petrarch and helped to establish the form and popularize its use in the tardy English Renaissance that followed the Italian and French. Wyatt’s rhyme scheme [abbaabba cddcee] keeps the octave of the Petrarchan-Italian form while breaking the sestet prohibition against the concluding couplet [most Italian sonnets ending cdcdcd or cdecde]. Lovecraft here makes use of this form, also following the example of John Donne who early used Wyatt’s form as well. The “Recognition” of the fourth sonnet is here continued, as the daemon is going to transport the narrator “to the pale, shadowy land [he] half-recall[s].”

It is here that we can see again the classic literary influences upon Lovecraft, for, with the actual inclusion as a present entity of this daemon (we suppose the voice, the footpad, the fumbler at the attic window of the earlier poems), the narrator now has a “guide” for his mythic journey or quest. This motif is not ubiquitous but widely prevalent in the world’s mythic literature [see Joseph Campbell, *Hero With 1000 Faces* for his discussion of “the monomyth” and the “Hero’s Journey”]. Almost certainly we may also see a derivation from or analogue with Dante’s *Inferno*, where the poet-narrator is transported from the “dark wood” where he finds himself “midway through the journey” of his life [Lovecraft’s: “hollow of old oaks” in poem four?]. The daemon becomes the narrator’s guide through infernal regions [“past lapping lakes of Flame” and those who “shriek in fear”]. We may see the daemon as Virgil and our narrator as Dante, as the one guided mystically to the amazing but awful and terrible otherworld to a place “beyond this world’s precisions.”

The depiction of the long dead great city is likely based on the vision implanted early in Lovecraft’s mind by the writings of Ambrose Bierce, specifically, “An Inhabitant of Carcosa,” and of Robert W. Chambers, specifically the various related stories in *The King in Yellow* [see the introductory poem in that collection by Chambers, referenced as from “Cassilda’s Song”] and the short story “The Yellow Sign” in particular, themselves partly derived from and inspired by Bierce’s earlier mini-story. Poe’s “Ulalume” is also resonant in this vision of the lost ancient city and the weird otherworld. Poe’s “dank tarn of Auber” by the “ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir” is present in Lovecraft’s otherworldly vision, as are Bierce’s aeons-aged city of Carcosa refined in vision by Chambers who adds, like Poe, the lake to the vision of the city.

So, we may make a few concluding observations about this introductory set of poems. Following this initial group of five sonnets, Lovecraft’s sequence is a medley of individual and distinct micro-narratives blent with a few lyrical ponderings. But these first five form an admirable beginning to this often overlooked and decidedly under-appreciated poetic work. They form a clear point of departure demonstrating Lovecraft’s erudition as a scholar of the great traditions of poetry and of myth. They nod admiringly at the tradition of the sonnet but do not bow in submission to it, offering a departure from it in an interesting and ultimately important exploration of the form’s narrative possibilities.

By the end of this introductory group of sonnets the narrator’s psychopomp has taken his hand and the weird journey has begun.

Frank Coffman; First appeared in *Star-Winds* 1:1.

By the Ghostly Sea: a Reading of Clark Ashton Smith's "Midnight Beach"

In a sense how a poem means is as important as what a poem means. If we look at how one poem employs imagery of the fantastic, to help convey its themes, we can do likewise with other poems. Looking, then, at Clark Ashton Smith's "Midnight Beach", we can begin to see how its fantastic imagery, as well as other aspects of its language, help convey its messages about the nature of the bonds between lovers, of love itself. Hopefully, we can learn something from this that we can apply into our own studies of speculative poetry, for this poem, whilst not well known, is indicative of the wider body of Smith's speculative poetry. Such a study, of course, must start with the speculative imagery employed.

Whilst not strictly speculative as such, "Midnight Beach" uses speculative imagery to develop its themes. The speculative nature of this imagery is clearly noticeable in the language that the poet employs. For example, the sea is called "ghostly" (ll. 1, 21)--"like a ghost". Note, too, the later "phantoms" (l. 9): this helps set up a dichotomy between the lovers and the external world. That world becomes, like the sea, immaterial, nothing compared to the lovers themselves.

Likewise, we read, later, these lines: "runes a magian might unroll / Upon some old unfading scroll" (ll. 7-8). The imagery here emphasises the fantastic elements by reference to typical aspects of fantasy magic--the runes, the mage, and the scroll. We also read of the "great, unspoken gramarie" (l. 11), that is, a form of magic or wizardry (Webster's). This magic has "exorcised that incubus, / The world" (ll. 12-3); it has driven out from the lovers the physical world, making it, though, not something tangible but something intangible. It mirrors, too, the earlier and later "ghostly" and the earlier "phantoms loosed from earthly dole" (l. 9). The world, we find, and its sorrows, are equated with an evil yet seductive demon. What is this magic? Clearly, it is the love that binds the lovers together.

Similarly, the word "reborn" (l. 14) brings to mind both reincarnation and Nietzsche's eternal return. The image here is, in a sense, of eternity. This is a reading reinforced by the lines "Full-petaled, past all worldly blight, / Love bloomed an amaranthine flower" (ll. 19-20). It is an unfading and eternal love, and, again, we find a freedom from the world. Note especially how this is not "like", but almost literally as a flower. In these ways, then, you can find fantastic imagery employed in service of the poem's themes. What the poet does, then, is to make us comprehend the lovers' love in fantastic terms, in terms that bring to mind something especially not mundane, not worldly, but, rather transcendent. This brings us to consider other uses of language to heighten the imagery.

You can see that the eternal and unique aspect of the scene is reflected in the phrase "lone, unending strand" (l. 3). This is further reinforced in line 6, by the following description of the lovers: "Aloof we seemed, from time and change". This sense of eternally unchangableness is, as we have seen, reflected in the "amaranthine flower" (l. 20) that is love. Note, too, how the stars are "wan" (l. 5), how they possess an "unnatural or sickly pallor" (Macquarie), and how this reinforces the speculative elements, and the motif of immateriality. Yet, it echoes, too, the lovers: they "raced or paused as we" (l. 5). Further, the hour is "mystic" (l. 16). It is marked by a complexity and ambiguity of meaning, and it is both "spiritually significant" and "marked by mysteries only known to initiated" (Macquarie). This heightens the "mystery religion" aspect of the bond between the lovers; it speaks, again, not of the mundane nature of their ties, but, rather, of those ties' ineffable nature. Finally, you may note how the almost envelope structure of first & fifth stanzas reinforce the sense of this moment as something apart from time, as almost like a bubble in the flow of life. It is eternal, that is, and apart from the current of change. In these ways the imagery is reinforced and made stronger, thereby heightening the poem and its messages to us.

As we have seen, both the speculative, the fantastic imagery and other aspects of the language combine to help convey the poem's themes. It shows us that how a poem means can be as important as what a poem means. Since, if we look at how "Midnight Beach" employs its imagery of the fantastic, to help convey its themes, we can do likewise with other poems. We can look at how other examples of speculative poetry employ their imagery to tell us about our world. Such is

not the exclusive domain of Smith's poem, or even this one poem, but such is applicable, in theory, to all forms of speculative poetry; it is up to us to begin that wider study, and progress onwards from our currently limited body of analysis.

Phillip A. Ellis

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On Poetry And Inspiration

Where does inspiration come from? Some people get it from their dreams while others get it from their experiences in life. As for me, mine comes from the imagery around me. When a nice word or image comes to me, I usually keep it in mind or write it down so I can refer to it at night. That's when I do all my poetry. I let ideas percolate in my mind, stimulate my muse by reading so it will perform for me, and then, at night, I let my poetry come out.

Sometimes I will write for a magazine in mind, sometimes I won't. Most of all I let myself slow down so that magic can happen. I lead an idyllic life, take leisurely baths about once a week, and am not in a hurry to do anything. That's when my poetry comes, and when it does, it comes out steadily. At my peak my poetry will come out night after night, and I keep a notepad and pen by my bedside. And what helps it along is when I read. I usually like to read a novel, a fantasy for instance, and when a nice image comes along I go with it and see where it takes me.

Sometimes I'll do some dark poetry, fantasy, or something I consider mainstream. I let it all come out and try not to do anything that will stop the flow. For instance, if a poem comes after I've finished reading some poetry at twelve thirty at night, then I'll stay up and wait till I've completed my poem. My bedtime is at twelve thirty, so I keep a flashlight by my bed and will keep doing my poetry as long as it keeps coming freely. I then sleep in the next day, get up at eleven, do my exercise, etc., and type what I've done on my computer. My husband is the first one who sees my poetry and he makes suggestions every now and then, most of which make sense. I make small changes here and there, try to make the lines a bit longer, and place them in a neat pile. And I make two piles. One pile is for poetry which I will send out to places, and another is for poetry which has already been sent out. I use post-it notes with dates on them so I know when my submissions have been sent. The ones that have been sent I keep in a box, and the ones I want to send out I keep stacked on top of the box. Every now and then I'll go back over a few of my poems and try fixing them up even more. Plus what helps is a dictionary. I'll look up new words to use in my poems, and for a while I was even into crossword puzzles. When an enticing new word comes to mind a poem will likely soon follow or if I see something in a movie or on TV, it will also inspire a poem. One time I saw the movie "The Exorcism of Emily Rose" for the second time in a row. I wrote three religious poems, two of which I sold to Superior Christian News.

Once in a while if I'm not pleased with a poem or two I'll throw them out, knowing I'll do something much better given time. I won't push myself either; that way I'm able to write without any problem. Plus looking at shows on The Food Network even helps. Watching "Iron Chef," for instance, really gets my energy and creative juices flowing. I love the artistry that goes into making the dishes, the dedication and love the chefs put into it. And just seeing Rachael Ray on her show "Thirty Minute Meals" reminds me of how much fun it can be to be turning out something worthwhile. Plus I like to cook. It lets me know there are more fulfilling ways to spend my life. I even have two beautiful paintings of the muses (no, I'm not a painter) that remind me of my destiny. When I look at them I always make sure I'm doing my poetry.

Bobbi Sinha-Morey

Creature once Divine

An ancient crone beside a lake
Warns against the path I take,
Her gnarled finger pressed
Hard against my chest.

There's an image in the water
Of destruction and slaughter,
Wrought by your hand
All across the land.

The mist billows around your flesh,
Caressing your sleek nakedness.
Jewel of the night,
Glistening so bright.

I can see Inanna in your eyes --
That is part of your disguise.
The power of your gaze
Puts my mind into a daze.

I hear your minions creeping
Whenever I try sleeping.
Then, you haunt my dreams,
You're never what you seem.

There are devils calling out to you
That angels fall because of you.
Temptress from afar,
You're my fallen star.

Leading me into the earth,
You revel in your silent mirth.
I'm never going back,
You have sprung your trap.

Many watchful eyes are burning,
With a tangible yearning.
It's you that they despise,
But they dare not steal your prize.

You are reaching out to hold me
And I feel your arms enfold me.
My final hour is here,
But I feel no fear.

I feel my heartbeat growing weak,
A lone tear trickles down my cheek,
For the love you've spurned,
But the wheel of time has turned.

In the Attic

The creatures breed day and night.
I hear them in their birth throes, the birth fluid
Usually seeps into the ceiling, imparting a
Thick putrid smell to the old wood,
The older ones tiptoe in the night,
Fornicating with the females in a moist
Violent rut that lasts till morning.
The females give birth to larval masses
Of heads and limbs and blinking eyes
During the course of the day.
These creatures do not care about being seen.
They multiply with the carelessness and
Smug determination of animals in heat.
I only wish they will never come down
To fill up the whole house.

Kristine Ong Muslim; First appeared in *Horror Carousel 2* (Fall 2004)

Visions of Darkness

This city is nameless,
Dead like the others.
The rubble dominates
At the wasted maw
Of the world.

Skeletons, humanlike
And reptilian, litter
The once paved ground
That waits for the sun
To beat it
Into a scorched husk.

He walks alone, diseased feet
Staggering with hopelessness,
Gasping and dreaming
In relentless pursuit
Of a new world.

Kristine Ong Muslim; First appeared in *Revelation* 1:4 (June 2004)

The Black Galaxy

O midnight mystery! That links the soul with sight
Like winds upon a mountain's side
Glares your deepest sapphire eyes—;
Here is Pandora's pyre,
Where chariots fly through nebulas.
O midnight mystery! Here is the Black Galaxy?

Dennis Siluk

Moiromma's Dawn

[Arctic planet on the rim, between two solar systems, ours being one]

Forlorn, the empires of this planet
Forgotten, is its sun, under its innumerable clouds
Arctic nights, sink below its morning star
And never a soul, shall ever know
The yearning of Moiromma's people...!

Dennis Siluk

"It was in the lost kingdom now sunken,"

It was in the lost kingdom now sunken,
the mist-shrouded kingdom now sunken,
where crimson the poppies had slumbered
with opiate attar to drink deep,
where slumbered the lakelets of crystal
on which the white swans would but wander,
of mythical, rumoured Atlantis,
where king and queen wandered we lovers,
we lovers of beauty and pleasure,
the pleasure of decadent ages,
of kingdoms of orient beauty,
of kingdoms of glorious beauty.
We beautiful gardens encountered,
mysterious grottoes encountered,
the caverns in which we would witness
unearthly delights that the daemons
had delved in a quest for perfection,
and moulded with play of the waters
that formed of the the fountains and rivers
a fair subterranean mirror,
of faery enchantment and pleasure,
of glorious beauty and pleasure
that rivalled the beauty of Mavryn,
my queen and my lover called Mavryn.
And ever was Mavryn my lover,
and ever was queen of my kingdom,
a maiden of beauty all-rumoured,
a beauty of mystery's glamour,
for fair would she speak, and with glamour
of naiads, oreads and dryads,
with glamour of nymphs of the fountains
that sparkled and glimmered beside the
red lotus that shimmered with scents that
seduction would number the fairest.
And ever was Mavryn my lover,
that garlanded, glorious Mavryn,
that maiden I dream in my passion,
the depths and the heart of my passion,
and ever was she my beloved
of ages uncounted and glitter
of gold and of emeralds, rubies
murmuring sagely and sweetly,
from ages when earth was unpeopled
till ages when universe falter,
for none will be fair as my maiden,
my glorious, love-sheltered maiden,
my maiden of beauty all-rumoured,
my maiden I number the fairest
of maidens of rumoured Atlantis,

the lost-now and sundered Atlantis.
And dwelt we together in beauty,
with peacock of milky-white glory,
and parrots of crimson and scarlet
that squabbled whilst their acrobatics
amused that fair maiden I held to,
as lover will hold his beloved,
and dwelt we together in glory,
the sunsets of crimson and of gold,
the innocent children of ages,
the heirs of the glory and kingdom
of mythical, rumoured Atlantis,
the drowned and forgotten Atlantis,
and dwelt we here ever and ever
the innocents fair of Atlantis,
at peace with the fields and the jungles
where monkey and ocelot wandered,
at peace with the seas and the oceans
where hippocamp warred with the kraken,
at peace with the mountains and ranges
where lindwurm would war with the cyclops,
where unicorn lay by the fountains,
where maidens would sing by the fountains
a song as of mystery boundless,
the love that I knew from my maiden.
At peace were we, both and the kingdom,
with garlands of sunset-crowned poppies,
adrift on the raft on the rivers
where nenuphars blossomed in beauty--
how oft would we float as the twilight
would slip to the song and the glory
of nightingales singing of love and
the stars in their glory and sweetness,
the beautiful stars in their sweetness.
Such days are forever forsaken,
such nights are forever forsaken,
Atlantis the beautiful's fallen
Atlantis the rumoured has fallen,
and memories only remain.

Phillip A. Ellis; 8 June 2006

"I have dreamt, and in dreaming have known that my demon has gone"

I have dreamt, and in dreaming have known that my demon has gone
far to another demesne wherein no dreamer may know
of a world that is fairer than reveries, fairer than light
fretted by mist and the song sung by the magpies unseen.

Such a dream, such a dream I have dreamt! It was fine as her voice
haunting my heart. And ashamed lie I tonight like a lord
who has lost in his lady a leman so fair and with grace
even the angels would weep if she eternally sleep.

And my demon were sweetness, perfection, my demon were love
known by no anchorite made holy, devoted to God,
and my demon's corruptions were glory compared to which saints
tawdrily seemed, as a cheap tinsel of holiness false.

I have dreamt, and in dreaming have known that my demon has gone
far to another demesne wherein no dreamer may know
of a world that is fairer than reveries, fairer than light
fretted by mist and the song sung by the magpies unseen.

Phillip A. Ellis; 21 March 2006

A Sorceress Sings

Bobbi Sinha-Morey, *Songs of a Sorceress* (Cambridge, MD : Cambridge Books, 2006) ISBN 1-59431-319-9.

Bobbi Sinha-Morey should be familiar to attentive readers of *Calenture*. Certainly, her frequent appearances in these pages should serve as testament that I find her poetry enjoyable, and worthy of a wider reading. Those familiar with my reviewing work for SFReader.com would also know that Bobbi has been published in a number of chapbooks from ebooksonthe.net—in fact, I recommend getting hold of them, as a matter of course. So it is with joy that I find myself reviewing Bobbi's first full-length book of poetry, *Songs of a Sorceress*.

Songs of a Sorceress sees Bobbi collecting a number of poems from the earlier chapbooks, and adding newer ones, in a reasonably lengthy collection of 328 pages. For the most part, readers of those earlier chapbooks will be familiar with the themes, imagery and techniques of these poems. There is the same diversity of themes, though there is, here and there, a tendency to accumulate poems too alike in imagery and diction. And there is more than enough here to make an extended read of the book a daunting prospect. It is easy to find a surfeit of poems, enjoyable though they be.

Readers of my other reviews know my essential problem with Bobbi's poems. I do not feel that I should repeat myself here, only to say that those poems where there is a thinness of lines could do well with a recasting. Such would bring out the rhythmic patterns, and the over patterns of sense and sound into sharper relief. There are, though, a number of poems where the line length is such to counter that problem. These tend to be the more successful of the poems, as they allow Bobbi the room to develop her rhythms and images.

On the whole, though, this is a very enjoyable collection. It has afforded me much pleasure, and I am sure that this same pleasure will belong to other readers. It serves as a good encapsulation of Bobbi's career thus far. Where she will go after *Songs of a Sorceress* has yet to be seen: let us hope that she takes the chance to challenge herself, and to develop technically as a poet. Poems such as "The Power of Benjamin Franklin" demonstrate the abilities and strengths of Bobbi as a poet; the ending deserves to be quoted in full:

the core will
hold tiny
chunks of ore.

There are more than tiny chunks of ore here, more like solids reefs of pure gold. Further, the opening lines of "Winter Muse" beckon likewise, with sweet promises:

Alone in the snow
warming herself
in the bonfire's
glow muse plays
a hymn on her
flute

If only I could write lines as simple and resonant!

Though the collection could do with indices, given the number and diversity of the poems, *Songs of a Sorceress* is one book that reveals its richnesses to us from the first page. It is a book well worth pursuing, indeed, well worth acquisition. This a book to share, too, with other poetry lovers, and the fantastic elements make this a treat for lovers of those forms of speculative literature. Read it, though, at the very least, and I am sure that you will agree with me in saying that Bobbi's *Songs of a Sorceress* deserves a wide audience.

An Unearthly Delight

Ilona Hegedus, *Unearthly Companion* (Ilona Hegedus, 2005).

Unearthly Companion is Ilona Hegedus' first, self-published book of her poetry. It displays the range of her interests in speculative poetry, from straight horror, as in the opening "Ghost Story", to science fiction, as in "Ruler", or "Museum". Yet, although there is this variety of sub-genres amongst them, the poems are unified by a distinct vision, and a relatively uncommon facility with free verse. They read, that is, as a unity, a unified collection, and this sense of unity is integral to the success of any chapbook of poetry.

Unfortunately, though, the poems themselves occasionally fall flat from an otherwise level standard of excellence. The closing line of "Ghost Story", for example, is one such occasion; its "and I will scare them to death," whilst bringing into play the theme of revenge, does so in such a manner as to seem forced and artificial to the end. The poem could have gone in any number of directions; this reads more as a failure of nerve than ability. Ilona, that is, needs to work harder at the imagery and themes, and she could also concentrate more upon the atmosphere of the poems. Many tend to read as straightforward narratives or situations, and a stronger emphasis upon the atmosphere of speculative poetry is essential to a more emotive and enthralling experience.

This is very much a first collection, yet it avoids some of a first collection's flaws. The unity of *Unearthly Companion* is one aspect, and there is a definite maturity of voice in Ilona's poems. These do not read as her apprentice pieces; they are works of some ability and maturity of voice. Where *Unearthly Companion* falls, chiefly, is in the distinctiveness of the speculative element. We have read similarly, in terms of mood, place, and more experience and more practise with English would work wonders. There is no real sense that what we are reading is Ilona's unique vision of the world. This may be in part due to difficulties in obtaining a wider sense of what speculative verse has already done, which is understandable given where and how Ilona writes.

Ilona is working in her native Hungary, where the speculative element of poetry is not as strong, or secure, as it is in fiction, moreso than in the Anglophonic countries. Working, also, in a language other than her native tongue will bring its own problems to the fore; but Ilona has sidestepped these linguistic problems for the most part in *Unearthly Companion*. It does not read as if written by anyone other than a native speaker of English. With time, with luck, and with encouragement, Ilona Hegedus has the possibility of becoming a major speculative poet. Surely, it is our pleasure and duty to help her succeed, even if only through the medium of a review.

Unearthly Companion is available through [Lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com).

Phillip A. Ellis

Attaining an Immortality of Sorts

David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (eds.), *The Shadow of the Unattained: the Letters of George Sterling and Clark Ashton Smith* (New York : Hippocampus Press, 2005) ISBN 0-9748789-3-6.

George Sterling, pure poet and protege of Ambrose Bierce, became the close friend and poetic mentor of the young Clark Ashton Smith. Indeed, that latter was to come to outstrip him as a poet, and become a significant force in the development and history of speculative poetry. But the relationship between the two was always going to be obscured until their collected correspondence had been published. Which it is now.

The Shadow of the Unattained, the collected correspondence of George Sterling and Clark Ashton Smith was always going to be required reading for any lover of speculative poetry. Not only does it give insights into their work and imagination, it helps us understand the relationship between two geniuses of verse, one, Smith, who was destined to eclipse his mentor. What we have here is a volume that allows us this level of insight, and it gives us a sense of intimacy between the two. We also gather valuable insights into the creation of some of Smith's most distinctive poetic works, insights we should be thankful to now have.

This volume has more than just the letters to commend it. It has examples of Smith's artwork. It contains the poems that Smith addressed to Sterling, miscellaneous prose relating to both Smith's and Sterling's views and promotion of the other, it lists the extant enclosures by both poets, and an invaluable bibliography and index finish the volume. This is an invaluable volume for all these reasons, and also because it gives us a glimpse into the birth of a legend of speculative poetry: Smith himself.

Both Sterling and Smith were pure poets, now, alas, a rare and scattered breed. There are so few now who follow their lead in placing beauty above everything else, but those few of us will adore this volume for the riches that it contains. Further, the scholar of Smith will have much to rejoice in here, as will those rarer Sterling scholars. The letters here, in conjunction with the Arkham *Selected Letters* should give the Smith scholar much more material to work with than before, and the editors should be commended for their (pun intended) sterling work.

As with the other Hippocampus Press volumes, *The Shadow of the Unattained* is an affordable yet attractive work. It belongs on the bookshelves of Sterling fans and scholars, Smith fans and scholars, indeed, and fan and scholar of speculative poetry. It is an exemplar, too, of how such volumes of poetry should be made. Both Schultz and Joshi have done an excellent job here, a stellar performance from them both.

Buy *The Shadow of the Unattained*. Borrow *The Shadow of the Unattained*. Read *The Shadow of the Unattained*.

Phillip A. Ellis