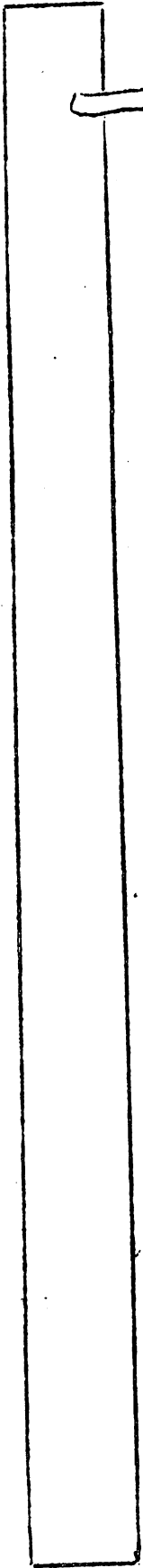


TUMBRILS



#2

SHAW

TUMBRILS

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I expect most of the next TUMBRILS to be devoted to K'TAÖGM-M No. 2, but pages are
always open to contributions of a serious nature. Copyright will be released to all
Vanguard contributors upon publication. Thanks are extended to Henry E. Sostmann and
Robert W. Lowndes for permission to use their poems in the present issue.

FAPA AND THE PAMPHLETERS

If one is to look askance at the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, as the Vanguardists did, by implication by their very establishment, certain exceptions will have to be made. Not counting the literate fan material (upon which the Futurian Society never had anything like a monopoly, anyhow,) there were still a number of FAPA papers what were interesting to read, whose material frequently went outside the marble-sized cosmos of fantasy into realms where the mentally active more usually dwell. This was as it should have been, even in an organization which by definition was fantasy-centered - it is, for instance, impossible to criticize or even to appreciate fantasy without some knowledge of other branches of literature, some understanding of sociology and philosophy, some acquaintance with the basic sciences. Had the horizons of the statistical FAPA been broader in a literary sense, for example, the proposal to call fans "ims" (meaning "imaginists") might have been laughed out of existence much earlier; instead it was made in a practical vacuum, where ignorance of the history and purposes of des Imagistes rendered it tenable - a perfect instance of what semanticists call "specious abstract validity."* For this reason, despite the self-analysis which D.A. Wohlheim deprecates in K'TAOGM-M No. 1, it was always a pleasure to read the Speer-Rothman debates. It would be difficult, I think, to type them in the category of three-dots journalism. Neither of the two ever gave in to the notion, as common in fandom as in any other press group, that they had any single-sentence thoughts worth writing down; and their arguments dealt with material of concern to everyone, even the politically unconscious.

Still and all, though it is the kind of thing one likes to read (and rarely can) in a letter, I wonder if it could not have been done better for an audience that calls itself a press association.

*Of course this in turn involves some knowledge of Pound, a kind of information no-one interested in true Americanism and the Century of the Common Man would want; but it seems to me that I have mentioned this somewhere else.

Putting out a paper with pocket money, and using reproducing methods that invite last-minute additions, has always been a temptation to laziness in a literary sense - but is it, after all, worth the work, if no care is expended in the writing? I don't think so, myself; if I have any ideas that are strong enough to impel me to publish them (even for only 50 people) I incline naturally to something rather formal as a vehicle for them. Perhaps they haven't the weight for a classical essay, but even the lightest of notions gains by judicious organization.

I put this problem because I've observed that it is a rare man who understands what a tiger he has by the tail when he grasps the crank of a mimeograph machine. I'm not speaking now of the Power of the Printed Word and its emasculation with the novels of strip-teasers; but of the specific power of the pamphlet cheaply printed by the man who wrote it. Nobody in 1760 was writing or reading any Main Kampfs, but men like Thomas Paine were shaping the formamentis of a new nation with little crumbly papers that contained no more than one essay apiece. How did this craft get lost so quickly?

Poor Richard's Almanack and its luxurious progeny had something to do with it. When a man must write something witty every week whether he actually has something to say or not, the product is more than likely to lose much of its impact. Critics shake their heads over Addison and declare that he hadn't the material to handle it; but his "grandson" was little better for all Johnson's erudition and it seems to me to be obvious that no-one can handle it. Witness the invariable deadliness of the daily editorial, despite the authorship of a corps of trained men spelling each other at the job. When the periodical came in, the occasional, with its aura of something-to-say, was forced out; and most modern contact with pamphleteering is limited to advertising throwaways and gruesome invitations to be washed in the Blood of the Lamb.

It's true that there are some notable exceptions. Stuart Chase comes to mind, and the present Insanity has sir-

ed some capable pamphlets. When Anne Lindberg's nibble at the edge of intelligence was published, at least two of the expected refutations appeared unexpectedly in pamphlet form. Henry Miller (partly through necessity) has made good use of the medium in "What Are You Going to Do About Alf?" and "The Plight of the Creative Artist in the U.S.A." Better things may follow. One may expect anything of a situation wherein the accustomed outlets for thought are being stifled by a paper shortage, and when the baffled writer surveys the books which have been allotted paper, the resultant harvest of indignation should prove most nourishing to ideas of self-publication. A sense of wrong is the pamphlet's natural atmosphere, anyhow.

But self-publication does not mean pamphleteering, as I have pointed out above. The closest approach to it I have seen in any FAPA mailing was the Rothman-Speer discussion - two out of forty men who seemed to be working for something besides the fun of it. I see nothing in the least wrong with writing for the fun of it but I dislike waste and it seems that thirty-eight men all trying to be whimsical or reporting personal items about each other is a redundant procedure. With a magnificent instrument like the mimeograph a man could knock over mountains like tents - yes, even with a circulation of fifty. For many of us the presses of book companies are stopped until the war's end, and there are no longer so many fantasy pulps that some of them will print Sam Moskowitz; Vanguard is the natural home of many an otherwise orphaned idea, and neither humbleness of format nor limit of audience should discourage.

Indeed, it should do quite the opposite. Other amateur press associations have found that the given conditions often stimulate the best efforts of their members - few of the print-shop lads in the NAPA, I venture to guess, ever do as perfect a job for a customer as they regularly turn out for their organization. (Miller's publisher, Bern Porter, took shrewd advantage of American reading habits by issuing the pamphlet he was most anxious to have read by every-

body in a limited signed edition.) Here in Vanguard is an hypercritical audience and an ideal laboratory. Surely we can do more with it than describe declaredly dull visits to unknown people and scatter broadcast our relative's aversions to Navy food. Such prattle has proven itself to be self-perpetuating, all right, but one detects a marked sterility in other directions - and we cannot depend upon the provisions of our constitution to eradicate it as long as the people in control have a personal liking for its perpetrators. Vanguardists might profitably bear three facts in mind: first, the nearly complete intellectual freedom afforded them by a medium like the pamphlet; second, the wider horizons opened to them by the composition of the VAPA, which no longer restricts them to a danocentric universe; and third, the enormous influence the so-called "little magazine" has exerted in American arts and letters.... Members may be permitted to waste their money as they choose, of course, to whatever extent the tolerance of the incumbent officials can be tried, but the one who puts nonsense in the mailings is wasting the money of others as well.

Well, he's wasting mine, at least.

PROPHECY

I will remember in those latter years,
When all the stars have fallen from the
sky,
That once you smiled for me.

I will remember, when the moon no more
Lodestones the cuckold sea
What your eyes told.

Old is the world and long the night
When the last men fall, when the last
men die;
Long was the world and old the night
And bleak the expanse of the starless
sky.

I will remember, and Time's mindless
blast
Will fail and bow before our love at
last.

- Robert W. Lowndes

THE

FOLD

L

THE

Q

UIET

A poem on the problems of expression

By HENRY E. SOSTMANN

I.

Presence has form and weight and hue and shape
 symmetry of the globed suspended grape
 negative mass of mantles flung aside
 presence is spirit grossly clarified

and then it builds a bridge for one to walk
 spins a tangible and certain span
 slender and bold; the wire is spun of the soul
 one end is that and the other is in the presence.

Spirit, however closer to the Real
 the quick flame in the dark, the prisoned light
 the essence of vitality fine-drawn
 has never tangent self except in words
 when presences decay and disappear.

Over such chasms as these that time creates
 steps must be high and sinewy and subtle
 only we know that under the wrist was the pulse
 and under the ribs the heartbeat, the bright blood
 that flushing or else failing might have shown
 an inward window once...

now who can say
 what is the wisdom of eternal loss?
 a wet leaf, rose-leaf, clings to the rain-cold walk,
 the night is dense, the cold familiar wind
 fins beaten into the gutted crumbling fountain,
 there is a light heard step, the orange-coloured
 petal shiver, the olive-petals fall;
 from the drenched garden of an old hotel
 stepping, the empty night is dumb and dark...

Dark mirror, flattering never, frightful need
 inexorable, cathartic, necessary,
 dissect this silence, split this silence, spill
 sound into void! Fill up the forms with sound
 or in the osseous architectonic brain
 let there be necessary petric silence.

What is a voice when it is not the voice;
 why is a silence if it is not still;
 what these dim sounds that mock the polished mind;
 why do we have the presence and the soul
 and then no presence and the imaged word
 alone to wear a weight it hardly bears?

Why the obscure unhandsome syllables
 as sad apology for the denied
 beauty our transient eyes might have descried?

II.

Let me lie quietly and dream
 since then the careless sudden-spawning sun
 since then the bright beams lancing through the boughs
 the white smells of fertility, the brown of death
 let me lie quietly, I say, and dream.

There is a voice in the evening, soundless voice
 rising from somewhere at the roses' roots
 speaking insistently through shadowed sleep,
 there is a pale-borne flame-thin voice in evening
 of music softly blown through vibrant waters
 golden husky-timbred voice through shadows

there is a voice in this evening, restless voice
 saying there are hands paler than white roses
 paler than lilies, paler than all other whitenesses
 that there are hands paler than drops of blood
 that fall with white rose leaves,
 that there are hands cooler than the sea at evening
 cooler than white hands rising from the sea.

I, closed fast in dreams... I, shadow-snarer,
 bounded in silence, shattered in with night
 lakes that desolately endlessly outspread
 their lonesome waters, hooded shapes that start
 and gustily noisily swoon past the sightless watcher
 through the mephitic shadows of tall trees
 dimly tossed the insistent voice still flitting
 so what deep pools where time is always twilight?
 what place where music softly heard in distance
 coolly blown sings calmly through clear waters?

the shapes dissolve in music vaguely heard
 I see a face reflected in a crystal
 the water bottomless, the face is masked.

Now turn the page, and clap the covers to;
 I think to move among a world of ghosts
 of love and ghosts of sun and ghosts of sound.
 I shall rear scrupulously in my mind
 the very luminous in emptiness.

Strange was that dream. If it was more than dream...

though the dome shatter to diamonds overhead
 the shadows are obscure, the night is dark.

III.

The revolving
 mute hugeness of the depth
 presses more than earth
 presses the organism

have ever on such fertile pastures fed
 sightless white slugs, the emperors of the tomb
 and cropped the dominant grass-blades to the roots
 and left the soil barren?

or the locusts
 descended on the earth and left it ruined
 the grain gone
 and the children of earth hungry
 the horizon blank and same
 and the children lonely
 met the trees

the leaves stripped
 and the clear anatomy through?
 the rapid foot quick to react to rhythm
 silent for want of music
 the supple knee
 cold in the earth, that instead was meant to be
 warm in the soft of the bed where his love lies dreaming
 grinning ribs
 with the silt sifting slowly through
 sand choking the treacherous lungs?

Spring may force presence through death's iron crust
 steel-bright lilies push through the soldered dust
 let them grow lush as they will
 heedless of us who should pluck them
 we who have heard
 the beat and beat and miss of a heart in silence
 who have counted the crafty clock in the dark night hours
 who know the worms

teaching the bright brain-bone by own metaphysic
 how strong is a chain
 or a verse or a ship or a man.

IV.

Tragedy is not the running down of clocks
 nor the tipping over of candles; stumblings
 of knaves; neither the force which tugs the heart
 weakly in evening, caught in jelling fear
 when somewhat fingered spirits stave and another
 in the pale miles of perishing air; air haunted
 with wishless hollow huddling melancholy
 looming at twilight; or when in pedal blackness
 down cornered smirks; when misery whittles life
 down to eternity, and we deed in our wills
 our brains to stand in a gallery of memories
 neatly emblamed. For us dead eyes this night
 are licked in partisan flame, as glimmers break
 from ash the eyelids of defeated caves.

Grief's smarting condiment may satisfy
 their hearts to lord the wry blasphemal scheme
 who falling do not arrow like a star
 through the sharp night crying as heroes die
 but go creeping down the air on little feet;

but there are those whose days are as roses of fire
 flaring to heads of blood shrieking for blood
 with the tongues of bronze-bound justice; men are swords
 but gods are the eye and the arm. In these slow deep
 impartial deaths of kings, see in what dark
 beginnings hide sequential glowing ends
 wielding a poem vaster than the grave

I grow not out of salt nor out of soil
but out of that which pains me...

out of such
 black waters and deep nighted hills men rise
 of whose blind heads each world of blood is made
 whose death-struck songs are moving in this night:

white in its madness wind broke oceans, tore
 trees from their sockets, hills hurled from their beds
 and strewed the alive black air with writhing skies
 to suffer nothing save their destiny.

Men in the bitter sky are striding and feasting
 in bright armour with darkness; outside the stars
 the motionless timeless center and white of flame.
 Violence, forgotten now, has learned
 the present granite moment all its might
 and death is triumph men are pushed to pay
 for learning blood and strength and quietness
 and the gods with red-rimmed eyes dark in all doorways.

Someone is climbing the stairs
 someone is climbing the carpeted stairs
 flight after flight in stillness climbing the stairs
 the muffle stairs of fear. One afternoon
 being a decent creature and having thought
 hanged myself under the stairs. I depend and hear
 someone is scuffing wearily up the stairs

One's mind is a prisoner of its lovely self
 (climbing mysteriously the empty stairs)
 and there are no walls to shut it anywhere.
 If there were walls it would not be so alone;
 nothing is more precisely horrible
 than to be quite alone, and to watch despair
 mimic a street; mute signs and empty shops,
 asphalt, bright cold sunlight, ghosts embracing
 at 'bus-stops. All the toughness of this stair
 droops with dead things across the narrowing hours
 and brittle emblems carp incessantly
 poured through the dusty mystery of light.

Frailties of dimension grow about us;
 looking at lilies, suddenly tasting worms;
 since time is not for us, are purple roses
 deeper to one, to another perhaps are sweeter
 which a man of folded paper carries climbing
 the speaking stairs. Do your proud fingers tremble
 watching the letters squirm beneath your thumb?
 What do you read, my lord? Words, words, words, words.

We learn from words, but never learn much more
 than that from time to time the same things happen.
 Let us suggest that we should hide ourselves
 in sleep and hunger; build simplicity
 a wall, to live alone and secretly
 against the charity of ritual;

or turn the mood, and say: I am a door
 without another door at the end of the stairs;
 I lift a finger and the sharp world splinters
 like cloven stone; my song destroys the day;
 untwist me to slow music of strings and pipes.

We who have lived so far beyond the clock
 are dead in spite of mirrors. Lexicons
 are all confusion, though heredity
 proposing love presumes coherent speech.
 We who are dead are rotting with split tongues.
 When shall we speak again? When shall the day
 sing to the silent sparrows in the park,
 and they sing back; We hear and understand,
 we sing, we sing. When shall there flow
 rivers of sound of such vast throaty voice
 as dwarf the stars? When shall we live again?

For their essential wreckage was not ours
 but the accident the same, the death is ours.
 They were bewildered by the shall and shan't
 and we by the yes and no; we pick our way
 tapping in the street, behind dark eyes
 looking for what was lost; deep night in flesh
 crying to disappear. The night comes on,
 on cold comes on while we bandy act with word;
 choosing no master which, it is too late;
 the speech grows slower and the arm grows stiff,
 and finally both speech and deed are done,

and the world is ready to begin again.

V.

One sharp top of a crystal globe presents
 the far-struck image that this stellar heart
 enfolds is psalms of light and opal seas,
 irradiant protagonist of bells.

What parallel commensurable with this,
 that from the slow-along sleep-drenched continent
 blundering counter-clockwise gently tugs
 some reaching hand the apron of the sun?
 So is the primote breath inscrutable,
 so is the gleam the dawn-moon draws through pools
 alike unsearchable. Strange tongues are in
 the air, to swell from epicycloid beams
 the organ diapason of grand ease.

What will make wings of words and words of wings?
 go out and build a barrier against day,
 walk on a beach, or walk in the night in the rain,
 see in your pitiful dial the vague sad shapes
 of willows, curving the alphas of the world;
 enjoy a tapestry of consciousness
 and stars and night

then visage, if you can
 or if you care, that huger form that floats
 swimmingly up in the flood-tide of the sea,
 ragged stripped shape of vast unshaped desire
 piecing together planlessly from bits
 of drift-float flotsam you and I and we,
 ordering us by accident

and giving tongue
 to those mute meanings that we call ourselves
 to score with steps the sheer blank walls about us
 and fabricate to give ourselves a name
 and order, fitting us to fill a need,
 which satisfied absolves us to forget...

* * * *

One of the Pleiades once had a string of pearls
but dazzled tossing it carelessly snapped the string
and lucent seeds scattered ~~the~~ upbent floor
where ungatherable they set up a mighty song
eloquent on the veined and marbled stone.

Somehow, the voice which speaks its minute hour
in blood-blunt type, reciting apologues
of glee or pain in a twisted paper mask,
blankly, revolves sidereally to find
that voice again, through empyreal walls
greeting the cognisance of brotherhood,

at once a kingship and a martyrdom.

THREE-DOTS

The publishers of John Franklin Hawkins' Four Poets and Psychoses of War (the former with additional material by Henry E. Sostmann, who is represented in this issue of TUMBRILS) hope to be able to get them past the paper famine early next year. I have seen both books in manuscript and recommend them enthusiastically; this column will carry the exact date of publication, with other information, as soon as it is announced.

* * *

Lesson in Infant Feeding: The Reader's Digest has now grown so powerful through the purveying of pre-masticated ideas that the New Yorker and the New Republic last year refused to supply it any longer. To the statisticians from Fortune magazine who essayed to demonstrate that the PeopleYes' mental age was not as low as 13, this cartelization of the pur-see industree must have proven dismay-
ing.

* * *

Wanted: copy of Astounding Stories containing Kelly's "Star Ship Invincible," or clipped-out story itself, in any readable condition... Original illustrations for "Solar Plexus," "The Real Thrill," and/or "The Solar Comedy," cash or exchange... Polydor-Brunswick phonograph records 90130-34 (Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme) and 85025-26 (duets from Arabella). The

Victor Gentilhomme, under Clemens Krauss, would be acceptable.....Cigarettes, any brand but Mapleton.

* * *

The First Hailing: Generally up to the level promised by the propoganda, I think. There will be some disagreement, inevitably, over what Shaw calls poetry; Wilsey's ineluctable Noes are mildly interesting, but in general I conceive the discovery of vers libre by adolescence as occasion for insatiation, not publication..... IT is typical FAPA material, about which I have spoken earlier.....question: Just how did the editor of the extremely feminine-subjectivist 211 earn the tag of "most objective mind in fandom?".....Michel at his shocking-pink best - even when rumbling "Art must serve the needs of the people - or perish," a borborygmus if ever I heard one, and fair game for Emden's sottis-lier.

* * *

Addendum to D. Knight's "The Cowflop Hour:"

"When after-dinner gasses rise
I swell up like a toad."

"Let Alka-Seltzer bring relief
And end the episode."

As observed in the B'Way-7th Ave Express shortly after breakfast. Retching in the outer lobby only.

* * *

E
B L I S I N B A K E L I T E

The shadow of that Dody heer you find
Which ferves but as a cafe to hold his mind,
His intellectuall part be pleas'd to looke
In lively lines described in the Booke.

- Thomas Cross: In Effigem Nicholai
Culpeper Equitis (A Phyficall
Directory, 1649)

Clark Ashton Smith has been called "the greatest American poet" by Edwin Markham, and while it is obvious from internal evidence that "The Man with the Hoe" was a fluke, it is possible for a man to be right twice in his life. Benjamin de Casseres, once a considerable figure in American letters before he took a job with one of Hearst's brotels, spoke for Smith in glowing terms; David Warren Ryder and George Sterling, as well as Samuel Loveman, may be added to the list of discerning people who have found things in Smith's work to admire. If one adds to this list the nearly endless columns written about Smith by fantasy fans from Lovecraft on down, it becomes evident that this one man has been one of the most extravagantly eulogized figures in American literary history - the sheer wordage concerning him nearly equals that written about Branch Cabell, a truly fantastic numeral if one attempts, as I have, to run most of it down.

In the attempt another fact soon becomes evident; except for one or two short articles, totalling perhaps 2000 words, no ture criticism of Smith ever has appeared in professional or amateur print. I have sought nearly fruitlessly for paragraphs about the man which set forth a clear perception of the kind of work he does, its relationship to the rest of literature past and present, its antecedents and progeny; for any paragraph about him not crammed with sweeping dogmatic statements, false associations, bases of judgement that shift at the whim of the writer sometimes in the very course of a line, report of estimates without documentation or demonstration, and emotional assessments which clearly indicate nothing save that their author likes fantasy no matter who writes it, or how badly. More; until last year, despite the fact that Smith has been active for more years than most fans can remember, there was no anthology of Smith's work, nor did any general anthology include a line of his much-lauded poetry - nor are any of the latter ever likely to do so now, since the Arkhem bookbinders in their expected way have crammed every turkey egg Smith ever laid into print without the slightest discrimination, so that Smith in book form actually means less than Smith hidden from sight in pulp, amateur and private publications.

It would be interesting to compile a list of representative paragraphs from some of the best articles about this man with comments appended in the style of the Institute of Propaganda Analysis, but the space limitations of TUMBRILS being what they are, a bibliography must serve. In the meantime, the pertinent question is: Does Smith deserve the damnation his admirers have visited upon him? And the business with which I concern myself is to answer this question in a milieu as remote as possible from the unselective happiness with which the average Weird Tales reader has greeted every tale of Xothique or Averogne, upon the premise that such an estimate is grossly unfair to the poet and scholar which is Smith at his best.

For Smith at his best is a fine creative scholar. I know of no more impressive way to introduce Smith to a stranger than with The Kingdom of the Worm, which was published in THE FANTASY FAN many years ago. The episode was perfectly in the style of its ostensible period; it could have been slipped into The Voyage and Travel of Sir John Mandeville, Knight without the unwary reader's detecting it in his perusal of that recondite volume; as an entity in itself it held together beautifully, and preserved throughout that atmosphere of naive wonder mixed with uneasiness which is the literary signature of

the great French liar - and a far more difficult thing to achieve than a mere parrotting of stylistic tricks. Some time later, in R. H. Barlow's excellent mimeographed magazine LEAVES, Smith addressed himself to the fragmentary narratives of the prisoners of Eblis which Beckford had planned for Vathek but never included. If anything this performance was the more exacting of the two; Vathek anticipated the main course of literary development by a century in several ways, but in general Mandeville's way of doing things is much closer to what we know as the "Smith style" than Beckford's, since the last-named remained always an undoubted child of the Eighteenth Century, wherein neither Smith nor Lovecraft, despite the propaganda, could reasonably be expected to feel at home; but Smith carried it off with manifest ease and pleasure.

One of the consequences of these observations is to separate his poetry rather sharply from his prose, in a manner which will become clear in a moment. A study of the poetry will convince anyone seriously interested that its idiom is the product of a pyramid of influences - Poe and Wilde particularly, and then Shelley, Milton, James Thompson and a lengthening list of stragglers, who exert their effects not in concert but one at a time in the most marked fashion. The Constellations of the Law, for instance, is The Massacre at Piedmont to the life; Satan Unrepentant advertises its parentage too loudly for me even to bother naming it; Requiescet is Wilde's, well-thumbed; and so on. It is not so easy to attach single names to individual prose stories of Smith's, though the influences are plain enough (I am not counting, naturally, the prose-poems, though even there Lanier occasionally nibbles at the edge of the Baudelaire.) One expects poets, however, to be an ancestor-worshipping race, and if Smith appears to be more than a little overly sensitive to the decadent-Romantic universe of discourse, still and all such a pressure is not lightly to be shrugged off. In addition, the synthesis of the best of bygone poems, up to and including direct quotation, has become through The Waste Land and the Cantos a nearly standard Twentieth Century technique; and Smith has occasionally achieved some really moving effects with such eclectic material - witness the ending of Medusa, or In November, or even more markedly, in Chant of Autumn where the intoxication is no less magical for being the heritage of Swinburne. Occasionally the results are more unfortunate and Smith gushes forth a Hashish-Eater - "perilous nightmares of superterrestrial fairylands accursed," in Lovecraft's mashed-potato language, but to the sober reader merely the sewage of a plastic-and-chromium Eblis.....The matter, it appears, is not entirely under Smith's control, and until he decides just who he is, we must be content to spear the effective poems like fishes as they float by.

In prose the matter is entirely under Smith's control. In the two works I have named above, and in one or two others, he has demonstrated conclusively that he has the sensibilities and the sensitivity to handle nearly any prose style that happens to appeal to him, excepting only the very tightest and sparest of modern idioms. The inevitable conclusion is that his characteristic prose manner, with its material drawn exclusively from the Poe horror story and the Wilde fairy tale, and its style from the glaucous logorrhea of Sir Thomas Browne's Hyrotaphia, is a conscious choice. And from almost any angle it is a bad one. It is incomprehensible and boring to the pulp readers whom he has - perhaps perforce - addressed most often. It is moribund and intolerably "arty" to a literate reader. The best he can hope from it is that it will please the very tiny segment of the reading public which is made up of men like Derleth and Lovecraft, who, incapable of distinguishing the artistic from the arty, can pass it through their digestive tracts and absorb from it the little nourishment that it contains.

As a product of irresistible influences and inclinations it might have been forgivable. As the conscious choice of a man who has shown that he can do better, it is funny. And tragic? Yes; if you think Smith could do that much better. When the laughter is over it might also be counted as evidence for damnation, however; and probably it is better, in the long run, to let his admirers attend to that.

(Bibliography upon request.)

13

BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE

Hugo von Hofmannsthal
(1874-1929)

"Beautiful" -- that is one of the words people use most fluently, and of which they think the least, and "beautiful language" or "beautifully written" is a proper perplexity-word that comes into their mouths, given them by no book, nor spoken in any bit of prose. And yet there is no beautiful, no meaningful context without a genuinely beautiful presentation, for context first represents the world, and a beautiful book without beautiful language can exist no more than a beautiful picture without beautiful brushwork; and the precise criterion of the beautifully-written book is that it says much to us, the repugantly-written one little or nothing -- nothing whatever intermediary to our understanding, whatever matters of fact it may bring before our eyes. The theologian or the anthroposophist presents to us whatever he has apprehended as the highest insight or transcendental presentiment -- and what higher subject could be conceived than the links of our nature with that of God? -- but if he couches it in a merchant's tone, in threadbare journalness, or in a stale stammering picture-language, it is gone; whereas Boccaccio has so inscribed his narratives that their content is all eternal, though their subjects are the combats of lovers, the gulling of noblemen and other contemptible pranks; of their spirituality and immortality nothing else can be said than that these frivolous narratives have the spiritual grace of the Dialogues of Plato, whose context is of the sublimest. As one nears the vicinity of Thought, no subject exists as elevated or debased in itself, but only as reflections of the incomprehensible spiritual-sensual principles in the individual, and these reflections are of infinitely variable rank and value, even as the constitution of the mirrored spirit.

From the contexts our survey slips back abruptly to the mouth addressing us. Montaigne's "Tel par ta bouche que sur le papier" is a subtle truth which also requires understanding, for it is a certainty constituting the deepest magic of the beautifully-written book, a kind of indirect oratory, a species of unveiling of the spiritual identity through speech; but this oratory presupposes an audience; through it all that is written is become dialog rather than meditation. Out of this insight, like a multitude of lights through a hitherto-unopened window, certain pre-eminent occur to me by which we may recognize well-written books, the well-written page of prose -- for it is prose, not poetry, with which we are here concerned throughout -- and to which we are wont to call special attention. To unite convincingly the charming and the bold, the gratifying conception and the pithily significant epigram; well-handled masses, a pleasant consonance between the weighing of the concept and the weight of the presentation; the space between the author and his theme, between himself and the world, between himself and his reader, the constancy of the contact with this audience which one senses as an ineluctable concentration; all these are clear impressions which show the path to duplication of the delicate familiar circumstance, and to paraphrase in some measure that illumination of the spiritual and the familiar which gives prose utterance to the astral body; and there are none of these that are not as easily to be marked in the style of Robinson Crusoe as in that of Voltaire, in the dialectics of Lessing as in Kierkegaard's dissertations.....They all amount to the same thing upon

contact with an ideal listener. This listener is, so to speak, the representative of humanity, and to create with him and to preserve the vital sentiment of his presence is perhaps first and greatest of the privileges of the creative art of the prose-writer. For this listener must remain so sharply sensitive, so quick of perception, so qualified of attention, so thoughtful in head and heart, that he seems well-nigh to stand above those who speak to him, or it would not be worth the trouble to write for him; and, conversely, he must expect a certain perfection of those who have worked for him; at the least a definite perfection of exposition, since he finds initial guidance to significance to be most noteworthy; a mighty Nativity that he would have flourish amid the very burden of the book, and thereby be borne toward whatever is essentially new. Perhaps one could establish a complete hierarchy of the book-world, to demonstrate quite particularly how sensitively and how meaningfully the relationship to the audience may be fulfilled; wherein nothing would abase a book more quickly than the detection in the head of its author of a ragged, inattentive and disrespectful approach to these, his invisible protagonists. These protagonists are always two: one, he who writes or speaks; and one, he who reads or hears, and upon the contact between these two the decision rests; for this contact has value, in whatever higher sphere it moves, in proportion to the superiority of presentation, while in these higher spheres the concepts themselves may easily become ever lighter and slighter to the very point of extinction.

Even as Goethe declares that whenever he opens a page of Kant, it seems to him that he has entered a bright room, thus a brilliant spirit presents itself to us, a spirit in communication with the primordial wellspring of all illumination. But just as we sense this property as light, in other great writers we perceive other superior qualities of the spirit: the strength which accompanies internal order; the true concentration which accompanies reverence; the rare glow of spiritual passion. In the embodiment of one such spirit we may be said truly to conceive the universe; yet we attain to it not only in the context which he calls to our notice, since all that he leaves unstated is also involved. Just this craftsmanship and elevation allows the demonic chaos of Objects to pass uncounted - yet not forgotten, as would the methodology of the weak and distracted soul, but set aside with an understanding resignation; the knots and ties, at once secure and elastic, which appear suddenly and adroitly between each aspect; finally a catholicity and even a capriciousness, which can frequently be charming; all these belong in the spiritual portrait of the writer, in the portrait which we conceive as identical with a mirroring of the world itself. As a rope-dancer prances before us upon a thin cord stretched from steeple to steeple; the terror of the abyss, into which he might plunge at any moment, seems to be non-existent for him, and rude gravity, which drags the rest of us down, seems powerless against his body. With fascination we follow his steps, each one seeming so remote from the earth; just as this man progresses, thus flows the pen of the great writer through its rhythm, which similarly charms us, and has a similar identity with the human fate, a balanced tread which follows its appointed road untroubled through the terrors and attractive powers of a world; and a beautiful style is the evidence of an inner equilibrium, attested under astonishing conditions, under a multitude of menaces, seductions and assaults of all kinds.