

The fallen American Adam in Clark Ashton Smith's *The Maze of the Enchanter*

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ABSTRACT

In some of Clark Ashton Smith's texts we can find the concept of the American Adam, which is also present in most of American narrative literary works. In general terms, this concept is presented as the portrayal of a unique American hero or protagonist, who must go through a series of trials to achieve his goal. However, this idea has not been developed within what is commonly known as Weird Tales. This article will show that, despite the pessimistic lens upon which the author constructs his work, it is possible to find an adamic and optimistic hero in *The Maze of the Enchanter*. Along the analysis of this text, together with the definition of what an American Adam is, we will show the correspondence between one and the other. This approach is intended to open new pathways to the analysis of fantasy, horror and science fiction, considering that these themes are mostly rare in this type of literary works.

Keywords: Weird Tales, American Adam, innocence

RESUMEN

En algunas de las obras de Clark Ashton Smith podemos encontrar el concepto del Adam americano, que está presente en muchos textos de la narrativa norteamericana. En términos generales, este concepto se presenta como el retrato de un héroe o protagonista que debe atravesar una serie de pruebas para alcanzar su objetivo. Dado que esta idea no ha sido desarrollada completamente dentro de lo que comúnmente se conoce como historias de “Horror sobrenatural” (Weird Tales), este artículo intentará demostrar—a través del análisis de la novela *The Maze of the Enchanter*—que, a pesar de la perspectiva pesimista sobre la que Ashton Smith construye su trabajo, es posible encontrar un héroe adámico y optimista en su obra. La propuesta pretende abrir

otras vías al análisis de los textos de fantasía, terror y ciencia ficción, teniendo en cuenta que estos temas son en su mayoría poco frecuentes en este tipo de textos literarios.

Palabras claves: Historias de horror sobrenatural, Adam americano, inocencia

THE JOURNEY OF THE ADAMIC PALADIN TO AN ELDRITCH WORLD

“All human thought, all science, all religion, is the holding of a candle to the night of the universe”

Clark Ashton Smith

From the middle of the last century to the present day, works that fall within what is called horror literature have become a prominent object of study in academic studies, thus being part of what is today known as the literary canon. Likewise, the mere fact that they are worthy of analysis allows us to use our own criteria and methodologies and discover problems that had not been considered before. Within the field of horror, we can find what is known as Weird Tales, generally, and not mistakenly, associated with the American author Howard Philip Lovecraft, also extensible to the circle of writers with whom he was in contact and who proliferated from the first half of the twentieth century to the present. Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961)¹ stands out within the group because he is considered, together with Howard Philip Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard, as the writers who declared their absolute rejection and fear of the modernity that technology brought along, even being called the “Three Musketeers” (7) by L. Sprague du Camp in Scott Connors’ *The Freedom of Fantastic Things Selected Criticism on Clark Ashton Smith* (2003).

In Connors’ study, it is suggested that Smith is probably the most important author of this triumvirate for being “the most responsible for shaping American weird fiction since his time” (Connors 7). As the author rightly points out, “[Smith] was always the least celebrated of the three writers, partly because his style is virtually inimitable. Although there are certain recurring patterns in his work it has not the kind of homogeneity and stereotypy which would be capable of mass-production” (149). When reading his work one can appreciate the unique style, like looking through a canopy: the image is not sharp and the forms seem familiar, but when we pull it back, we discover

¹ Clark Ashton Smith lived in physical and intellectual isolation in Auburn, California (USA). Predominantly self-educated with no formal education after grammar school, Smith wore out his local library and delved so deeply into the dictionary that his richly embellished yet precise prose leaves one with the sense that they are in the company of a true master of language. For further information about this author and his works, we recommend <http://www.eldritchdark.com/>

with horror, the putrefaction of something that breathes “a sense of brooding malignity” (Manning 71).

Analyses of this author's works have been somewhat delayed but are present in publications like *The Freedom of Fantastic Things Selected Criticism on Clark Ashton Smith* (2016) and *Weird Tales of Modernity the Ephemerality of the Ordinary in the Stories of Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith and H.P. Lovecraft* by Jason Ray Carney (2019), primarily due to their association with H.P. Lovecraft. Despite being referenced in these texts, a comprehensive assessment of the works has not been conducted, with the focus often shifting to other pieces. This could be because there are longer or deemed more significant works to explore, as suggested by the author of these texts. Nevertheless, a recent examination by Germán Biener Camacho in 2022, titled “The Reversion of The Myth of Theseus and The Minotaur in Clark Ashton Smith's ‘The Maze of The Enchanter’,” offers a comparison between the analyzed work and the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.

In this article, through the story *The Maze of the Enchanter*, we can visualize the idea of the American Adam described by R.W.B. Lewis in his canonical *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955), which also represents the idea of this Adamic hero in a twisted Eden presented with the characteristics of the works of Clark Ashton Smith, although the original concept envisions a hopeful idea for this hero, and as pointed out by C. Van Woodward, “the burden of innocence is heavier than the burden of guilt” (34). Van Woodward suggests that even if Paradise is a hell, hope is an inherent characteristic of the human being and, therefore, it will always be more important. Through the relationship we establish between the protagonist of Smith's tale and the concepts of American Adam and Weird Tales, as part of horror literature, we will deliver our own image of this hero and thus clarify whether he fulfills the characteristics that would lead him to the assignment of an American Adam. This idea has not been developed within what is commonly referred to as Weird Tales, so we pose the following questions: Can we draw a parallel between the protagonist of *The Maze of the Enchanter*, Tiglari,² and the concept of American Adam? What is the scope of this Adamic character? Is the protagonist an American Adam in this twisted Eden?

To understand this idea of American Adam we will take the birth of the concept from the forementioned book by R. W. B. Lewis, who brings together the ideas that had been formed in the

² Tiglari is the protagonist of the story, who, despite not being up to the evil wizard, decides to go to the rescue of his beloved partner Athlé, facing all the trials that arise to reach her.

nineteenth century in the United States, with respect to this fresh-faced person who was born in the New World and who had to forge his own destiny in a land not yet fully discovered. "A century ago, the image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas was that of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (Lewis 1), a new Adam in this new Eden that was North America. This myth "described the world as beginning again under a new initiative, in a second chance divinely granted to the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously wasted in the dark Old World" (Lewis 5). We must keep in mind the concept that was and is, to this day, certainly America, there is no doubt that remains as an exceptional place, somehow different from all others, but it is not the result of modern American nationalism or recent political rhetoric. As old as Western history, it is an invention of Europe (Ruland and Bradbury 5), synonymous with new beginnings and adventures, an image that has been maintained over time and has been reflected not only in North American literature, but also in other expressions of the American culture.

This mythical idea that persists in our times and that got that name thanks to R.W.B. Lewis, comes from the representation that Ralph W. Emerson had in mind of an individual born in this New Land that is America: "Here's for the plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world" (Lewis 6), the new hope that could emerge in a new place, as a tabula rasa where to start the brand-new society. Clearly, his outlook was positive, so he advocated a new beginning, without excluding the memory and the undeniable that the past could also offer. This also included Thoreau and Whitman, and, therefore, a key word linking them to the concept of American Adam was innocence. Let us recall that Thoreau in "Walden" strongly recommends us to "the total renunciation of the traditional, the conventional, the socially acceptable, the well-worn paths of conduct, and the total immersion in nature" (Lewis 21) in order to free ourselves from material bonds and get in direct contact with our spirituality in order to transcend. On the other hand, Whitman gives us a complete portrait of this American Adam in his work *Leaves of Grass*: "the liberated, innocent, solitary, forward-thrusting personality that animates the whole of that long poem" (Lewis 28) and who must move "forward because it was the only direction in which he could move" (Lewis 44). Whitman states that there is no past to return to and because the future that awaits them is forward, they must face whatever they have to face, fully hopeful for the New World.

However, not all the writers or thinkers of the time considered it the same. The writer Henry James was the bearer of a tragic optimism, believing that innocence was exposed to tragic

collisions that could well come from the course of life as caused by humanity itself in its eagerness to reach this paradise (Lewis 7). Another author who also shares this disillusionment, contrary to Emerson's optimism, is the poet Robert Frost, for whom "disillusionment apparently comes from the lack of society formed on a common ground" (Crawley 37), alluding to the balance that should exist between freedom and equality, since the individual is constantly experiencing alienation and isolation by the society where he is immersed.

Nevertheless, the protagonist of Clark Ashton Smith's work should rather be seen as an American Adam "replaced by the American as Laocoon"³ (Lewis 197), since like the character in Greek mythology he will meet a sinister end, moving away from the Emersonian idea of free and innocent man connected to nature with a bright future ahead. Lewis, on the contrary, points out that we live in an Age of Containment and, therefore, rather than looking hopefully towards what is to come, we look with gloom at our history as if it were rather the taint we would like to hide (198).

"The myth of the American Adam was simply a formula for the way life felt to alert and sensitive Americans during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century" (Lewis 154), just as the protagonist, even knowing that he is facing superior forces and that he cannot immediately understand, has decided to fight and face the challenge of rescuing the woman he loves. That is the hope that drives the man and that is the concept the American Adam conveys.

THE WEIRDNESS IN HORROR TALES

The concepts above pave the way to now concentrate on Weird Tales as a literary subgenre. This is contained within what is known as the "horror" genre and, as its name indicates, it tries to produce in the reader a particular affect inspired by its name. In these works, horrific creatures seem to be considered not only as inconceivable but also as unclean and disgusting. With this in mind, the author we bring up is the American writer Howard Philip Lovecraft and the circle of

³ During the Trojan War, Laocoön, a priest of Apollo in Troy, warned his fellow Trojans against accepting the wooden horse left by the Greeks. Athena and Poseidon, allies of the Greeks, sent two massive sea-serpents that entwined around Laocoön and his sons, leading to their tragic end.

See more on <https://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/museo-pio-clementino/Cortile-Ottagono/laocoonte.html>

writers who followed his footsteps. Even the same author in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature" elaborates this concept stating that,

El verdadero cuento sobrenatural contiene algo más que muertes secretas, huesos ensangrentados o una forma envuelta en sábanas y agitando cadenas, según los cánones establecidos. Ha de estar presente cierta atmósfera de inquietud e inexplicable miedo a fuerzas desconocidas y ajenas, y ha de haber un atisbo, expresado con la apropiada seriedad y sentido de portento, de esa concepción, supremamente terrible, del cerebro humano, que es la de la maligna y específica suspensión o abolición de esas leyes inmutables de la naturaleza que constituyen nuestra única salvaguarda contra el ataque del caos y los demonios del espacio insondado. (129)⁴

With this, what Lovecraft establishes is to dissociate himself from what at that time was commonly called Pulp⁵ literature. His type of horror lies in the inexplicable and indescribable, a literary style that has deliberate inaccuracies of his creatures that, in some cases, do not have a name, always with the idea of insinuation. "Lovecraft's supernatural stories draw upon his study of astrophysics, Newtonian physics, and complex geometry to ponder the existence of alien beings on faraway planets or in the fourth dimension" (Sperling 77).

However, to do this, it was necessary to create creatures other than the Old World, since "the New World is new, unhaunted, in that it lacks these constant reminders of past events that are embodied in the ruin or the castle, which haunt the Old World" (Manning 71), even suggesting that nature itself could harbor a kind of ruin, something we will see in Smith's story.

Another definition we can consider, equally related to the previous one, is "weird fiction is defined by a 'liminal' space of contact between a diegetic world of prosaic realism and an other world or an otherworldly element" (Manning 83), realities of exotic delicacy that are beyond time

⁴ All translations from primary sources are ours. The translation of this citation is: "The true supernatural tale contains more than secret deaths, bloody bones, or a form wrapped in sheets and waving chains, according to established canons. There must be present a certain atmosphere of uneasiness and inexplicable fear of unknown and alien forces, and there must be a glimpse, expressed with appropriate seriousness and sense of portent, of that supremely terrible conception of the human brain which is that of the evil and specific suspension or abolition of those immutable laws of nature which constitute our only safeguard against the onslaught of chaos and the demons of unfathomed space."

⁵ Pulp refers to a type of wood pulp that was used to make yellowish, crumby and very poor-quality paper. This cheap paper was used at the beginning of the 20th century for the publications of the time, the so-called "pulp magazines". In the words of Fernando Savater "the content of the pulps would be an extrovert type of literature, that is to say, one that focuses on the action itself and places little emphasis on the springs that move it or the elementary assumptions: it gives priority to the 'what' and even more to the 'how' over the 'why'; it likes bright colors, strong spices, agile rhythm, and prefers muscular exhibition to emotional analysis" (Iglesias).

and space, as the author will show us in the story. He transformed this savage setting into a kind of “ruin,” not a picturesque ruin on a human scale, but a kind of “cosmic ruin characteristic of Lovecraftian tales of cosmic horror” (Manning 86).

The weird underlies what we cannot name, “that which presents itself as a horizon for thought” (Thacker 23), that which we cannot properly describe, and not because it does not have a body to be described, but because it presents “the possibility of a logic of life, though an inaccessible logic, one that is absolutely inaccessible to the human, the natural, the earthly—an 'entelechy of the weird'” (Thacker 23), since the way to access that thought is beyond time and space with beings whose biologies do not even belong to our dimension.

Graham Harman, an American philosopher, points out in his book *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (2012) that rather than seeking a representative realism, H. P. Lovecraft sought in the idiom of a weird realism (21), which meant not giving his creatures the exact characteristics of their figure, but rather giving vague ideas and expecting the reader to work out the rest. Since any overly detailed description would in no way be true to the spirit of the thing, what the American writer wanted to give his readers is what is called “the general outline of the whole.” This is an idea that describes in a straightforward and simple way what the beings in *Weird Tales* must be like in order to be credible.⁶

Clark Ashton Smith had also developed the idea of what we should accept as a weird tale:

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. (Connors 309)

“Agitating features like torture, suicide, murder, or eroticism are never at center stage, nor are they simply sidelights. They are blended in ‘to achieve a more varied sensation of weirdness’” (Connors 173), which initially classified him as an author of pulp literature, but with a more in-depth analysis, he could certainly depart from that type of literature, not just “showing” these features, but using them as the staging of a play, and thus delivering to his reader a more finished

⁶ Graham Harman gives a detailed account of his theory of Weird Realism, using the works of H. P. Lovecraft to exemplify his point, so this book is highly recommended to readers interested in this topic.

and credible world than what could be appreciated at first glance. The same was true of his use of language, both in the creation of names and in the description of his worlds: "his painstaking attention to phonetic pattern, often fashioned to the point of ostentation, is combined with an abundance of visual detail and figurative language" (Connors 168).

H.P. Lovecraft already admired Ashton Smith's work and style, "De entre los más jóvenes americanos, nadie pulsa tan bien la nota del terror cósmico como el poeta, artista y escritor californiano Clark Ashton Smith, cuyos extraños escritos, dibujos, pinturas y relatos son la delicia de unos pocos selectos" (196).⁷ The multiplicity in his art gave him a certain advantage over other writers. As it has been noted by Connors, "His phantasmagoric Decadent Romanticism was directed to the ultimate purpose of building dream-worlds stranger and more bizarre than had ever been described before" (149). H. P. Lovecraft, the Providence writer, goes on to note "En cuanto a la capacidad de crear una extrañeza acerba y demoniaca, y en lo tocante a la fecundidad en la creación, el señor Smith no es quizá sobrepasado por ningún otro escritor vivo o muerto"⁸ (196) and that is what we can perceive from the work: the grotesque and supernatural feeling that emanates from his creation.

THE FALLEN AMERICAN ADAM IN A WICKED EDEN

In Smith's *The Maze of the Enchanter*, the main character, Tiglari, a jungle hunter, decides to save the woman he loves, Athlé, from the clutches of a devious wizard, Maal Dweb, who rules the planet Xiccarph with an iron fist. Every so often, he selected the most beautiful single woman of the tribe, who was never seen again, just like the men who came to her rescue. So, Tiglari arms himself and climbs the mountain in order to rescue her.

When we read this summary of the work, we can immediately associate the sense of Pulp magazines. However, as noted above, Smith's style of portraying this wicked Eden and what unfolds there, is what—Lovecraft and the others—will take away from this type of writing and bring closer in what we have already defined as Weird Tales.

⁷ "[A]mong younger Americans, no one strikes the note of cosmic horror so well as the California poet, artist and writer Clark Ashton Smith, whose strange writings, drawings, paintings and stories are the delight of a select few."

⁸ "[I]n capacity for creating an acerbic and demonic strangeness, and in fecundity of creation, Mr. Smith is perhaps surpassed by no other writer living or dead."

R.W.B Lewis defines the American Adam as “[t]he proper inhabitant of such a frontier Eden [...] innocent, vigorous, bright with hope, confidently intimate with his environment” (108). This notion is reflected in the following lines of Smith's story: “But Tiglari, the jungle hunter, skilled in the slaying of fierce and crafty beasts, was undeterred by the more than hideous probabilities before him” (Smith 137). This is the first entry where we can find an initial description of our hero, or even in a paragraph before, where he states: “Tiglari's naked body was smeared from crown to heel with the juice of a jungle plant repugnant to all the fauna of Xiccarph” (137), appealing to his ingenuity to adapt to his environment, something he already knows or at least has an idea of.

We understand that the protagonist is a skillful man who is ready to do his job: “the hero is willing, with marvelously inadequate equipment, to take on as much of the world as is available to him” (Lewis 199). Our hero has his body smeared with a sap to ward off the creatures that live there, he carries “a coil of woven root-fiber, wonderfully strong and light, and weighted with a brazen ball at one end, for use in climbing the mountain” (Smith 137) and, in addition, he is armed “in a sheath of chimera-skin, he wore a needle-sharp knife that had been dipt in the mortal poison of winged vipers” to confront a wizard and his “silent, colossal iron servitors” (Smith 137) as “the simple genuine self against the whole world” described by R.W.B. Lewis. This also alludes to Smith's rejection of the excessive mechanization that society was experiencing at the time, “his fear of the effects of mechanization” (Carney 1), confronting it in a genuine and simple way like Tiglari.

At some point in the story, we learn that the hero is doomed. While wandering through the labyrinth looking for Athlé, he was captured by monstrous plants that poured a transparent liquid on his feet and ankles: “he saw that his legs had undergone a mysterious and horrifying change [...] a dark and shaggy pile like the fur of apes; the shanks themselves had somehow shortened; and the feet had grown longer, with uncouth finger-like toes such as were possessed by the animals of Maal Dweb!” (Smith 147). The horror of the recognition of not identifying one's own body is caused by the mutation undergone. “The American Adam kills the wild thing that he loves, but learns thereby a deeper wisdom. Achieving a new maturity, he does not reject all innocence, but consciously chooses a wiser innocence” (Carpenter 606). Tiglari will try to free himself from this conundrum, but will only succeed in having the liquid continue to cover him. However, he will become wiser, because he will learn new knowledge, although it will not be of any use to him later on, since it is too late to reverse his destiny.

When Maal Dweb, through his eldritch flora, has turned Tiglari into a creature that is neither man nor beast (as one of the creatures in his hanging gardens and terraces), it is then that we feel the loss of our (hero's) humanity. "You, Tiglari, unlike the others, shall at least remain a man from the neck upward; and you are free to resume your wanderings in the labyrinth, and escape from it if you can" (Smith 149). He is condemned to be accepted neither by one nor the other and to wander until he finds death or goes elsewhere. We ask ourselves; would not fate be worse than death? Then, like the protagonist, we feel the weight of the sentence: "standing alone in the presence of God and Nature" (Lewis 105). Evidently, the half-demoniac sorcerer and scientist is not the Christian God, benevolent and compassionate, to whom the quote refers, but rather, the God of the Old Testament in the Bible, the God of Noah, whose punishment would sweep away everything, like "[Maal Dweb] who punished the rebellious and the disobedient with a doom of falling fire that was swifter than the thunderstone" (Smith 139). In Smith's story, he would obliterate Tiglari's humanity, but not totally, so that he could be aware of his defeat, "his native fierceness, his savage volition, were tamed by the enchanter's languid will" (Smith 149). Here is the downfall of our American Adam.

Tiglari's horror is not to be found in the journey he has just undergone, since in one way or another he sensed it, but rather in the bodily change that took place against him. Let us imagine, for a moment, the picture of an ape with a human head or also, a man with an ape's body, "the horror implicit in the weird is therefore the body's complete enmeshment with the environment; the site of the breakdown between what was once thought of as the 'natural' and what can no longer be staved off as the 'supernatural'" (Sperling 98). This is genuine horror, and the image of that end for the hero is etched in our minds. Being separated from his "humanity," understood as belonging to a group or tribe, and as what gives him the quality of being human—both physically and psychologically—because he is neither one nor the other, leads to the emergence of the concept of the weird. We are witnesses of his alienation.

Once we have reviewed the weirdness in the protagonist, let us see how this is also reflected in the environment of the story. Xiccarph is an exotic planet with three moons. We know of its unique and quirky flora and fauna because Smith gives us several examples in the story about this as it is shown in the following fragments: "Evading the sharp and semi-metallic leaves that seemed to slash downward as the tree bent limberly with its dangling weight" (138); "the heavy-hooded blossoms that leaned from a winy gloom in venomous languor, or leaned toward him with open corollas that exhaled a narcotic perfume or diffused a pollen of madness" (138); "Other [trees]

crouched with radiant limbs that were like the hairy limbs of colossal arachnids” (138); “Before him was an open meadow, covered with strange grass that writhed like innumerable worms under his bare feet” (140); “Certain large, shadowy animals, which he took for the ape-like monsters of Maal Dweb, passed by him in the gloom. They were hairy and coarse, with bowed heads. Some of them ran on all fours, while others maintained the semi-erect posture of anthropoids” (140); “like fleshy nightmares of rooted flesh, which wallowed and struggled and mated in a stinking ooze [...] living parasitic mosses of crimson crawled over vegetable monsters that swelled and swelled behind the columns of accursed pavilions” (146). All these images remind us of what Connors points out, in that “Smith's unique exotic and poetic vision, the notion of a universe ‘queerer than we can imagine’, contributed a new mythological framework to modern fantasy” (217). Here, we obtain an idea of the vegetation in the premises of Maal Dweb, but most likely it is not exactly the one the author had in mind but a close idea. The general outline of the whole we have mentioned before, not only applies to the creatures, but also to the unearthly and uncanny vegetation.

However, we cannot leave aside what Paul Manning points out in his text, the idea of the English writer John Ruskin regarding the New World “as a truly alien world in which the landscape is entirely devoid of sympathetic human presence” (78). Reading again the pieces that describe this jungle, is where we notice the radical difference between our conception of paradise and the one that Smith shows us.

Nevertheless, we can also associate it with the idea that as this Eden was in the concept of the American Adam, “the paradise to be sought by the mythical American Adam has usually been described in terms of an actual ‘primitive’ past” (Carpenter 603), all this fauna is presented to the reader as if it were a primitive world. In fact, the description of the protagonist supports this, except for Maal Dweb and everything associated with him, since he is superior in every way. His iron servants, the vegetation dominated to shape the labyrinth, sorcerer and demonic scientist, the transfer of trees and flowers from the outside world, his omnipresence and omnipotence, in short, everything that makes him be far above the inhabitants of the tribes that live in Xiccarph and for which, every so often, some woman chosen by him goes to his abode so as not to unleash his wrath: “it has been, as you know, my caprice to eternalize the frail beauty of women [...] to turn men into beasts [...] so that their outer semblance should conform strictly to their inner nature” (Smith 149).

As Tiglari is imprisoned in his transformation process, he can see Athlé looking into what appears to be a mirror, but what is remarkable here is “a row of six slender brazen columns, topped with graven heads like demoniac Termini⁹, rose at broad intervals and faced toward alternately the hunter and the girl” (Smith 147). In this twisted labyrinth, the heads act as narrators of events as they reveal to him what has happened to his beloved partner: Her eternalized beauty turned into a marble statue. “The weird is the discovery of an unhuman limit to thought, that is nevertheless foundational for thought” (Thacker 23). Smith occasionally makes us see and feel the weirdness in the landscape, it is not only the flora and fauna that is preternatural, but also the structures and the environment in general that make up a whole.

We can indicate that the columns with Termini's head represent what we pointed out earlier, through Lewis, the memory of the burden now carried by the American Adam becomes present, yet the protagonist would rather not know it. Once the transformation is complete, Tiglari is released and the columns express “The hunter Tiglari has been washed in the nectar of the blossoms of primordial life, and has become in all ways, from the neck downward, even as the beasts that he hunted” (Smith 148). They do not speak to him directly (because he is now part of the “setting”) but to everyone as a warning, to anyone who wishes to hear it. He is trapped in his fate, as it has happened to others who have ventured to this place, a warning of an end from which there is no escape.

Our hero has fallen as the original Adam did: “Ours is a new Adam, created (or imagined) consequent to the fall of the first. And the American Adam seeks to regain the paradisaical innocence enjoyed by his predecessor, along with the wisdom of the serpent” (Carpenter 602). Tiglari's quest leads him to expose himself beyond his physical and mental capacities, even in the knowledge of his limitations, and knowing the fate of his predecessors (or sensing it), who did not return. He ventures into the premises of Maal Dweb seeking not only the wisdom that he will receive, but will not be able to use in his future, but also with the hope that it is possible that the enterprise will be a success, which we know in the end will not happen. As Connors points out, “In Smith's world, the amoral flourish and the good are the victims of ironic fates. In *The Maze of the Enchanter* and *The Demon in the Flower*, the protagonists ultimately fail to rescue their lovers. Smith's fatalistic vision can only generate a decadent sort of fantasy [...] in which gloom, tomb, and doom prevail” (217). The decadence represents a defeat, because there is no change in the course of events, this situation

⁹ The Roman god Terminus protected boundary markers. These boundary markers (termini) were frequently topped with a bust of the god. (Note from *The Dark Eidolon and other fantasies* by Clark Ashton Smith).

has been repeated before, as in his search for Athlé, Tiglari finds a hall full of women from other tribes turned into marble statues with equal results. The protagonist is turned into a beast conscious of his state from now on.

CONCLUSION

Through the review of Smith's text, we are able to encounter the American Adam in a work of horror and corroborate that this concept can be found throughout American literature, not with the hopeful sense that the transcendentalists tried to convey in the mid-nineteenth century, but rather with the catastrophic lens of the second half of the twentieth century: an alienated society that some writers of the supernatural managed to visualize several years earlier.

The weird makes us have an alert attitude, we cannot let our guard down at any time, just like Tiglari while going through the labyrinth, because in those nooks and crannies is when we can find the discomfort or weirdness that Clark Ashton Smith and authors like H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard managed to cultivate so well, and make us believe so far in the verisimilitude of their proposals.

Clark Ashton Smith shows us his version of the American Adam in a pessimistic way, not to give him a happy ending, but rather to show us that this hero can no longer return to his tribe and, in addition, to emphasize that although he may have learned something from his experience, he did not have the opportunity to reverse his destiny; therefore, he did not become wiser, as the original idea of the concept suggests.

It is important to open new questioning veins to texts that are not generally considered for this purpose, such as fantasy, horror and science fiction literature, since, like many literary works, they also raise a concern that the author wishes to make visible, whether it is a specific theme of his time or some other that appears cyclically in the history of mankind.

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