

Texas Talespinner: Robert E. Howard's Ways With Words

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The literary achievement of Robert E. Howard, primarily the virtuosity and variety of his prose fiction, has been increasingly recognized as significant over the 70 years since his death in 1936. More and more critical voices have joined in a general, though not universal, mantra of praise for the work of this young prodigy of the pulp era who “splashed the field” of the popular magazines of his day and demonstrated adeptness at a number of genres beyond *Sword & Sorcery*—the genre he is credited with originating.

Much of the critical appreciation of Bob Howard's work has been either strictly aesthetic—admiring the author's skill at captivating story-telling and mastery of weaving yarns of action and adventure. Many other critics have approached his work from either biographical or psychological avenues of exploration or a combination of those two, perhaps too often focusing on the end of Howard's short life, his close ties with his ailing mother and his role as her principle care-giver, often dwelling too much on the fact of his suicide and hypothesizing on the motivations for it.

There is no doubt that much has been written about the impact of Howard's fiction upon the reader. Much of the critical comment, evaluation, and appreciation has been from those schools of criticism that range from “fanist” [if not fanatic] blindly enthusiastic effusions, or—at best—“Reader Response” in today's critical sense.

Certainly the effect of the stories upon his readers and the study of Howard himself as writer—*Readership responses* on the one hand and *examinations of the Author* on the other—have provided the bulk of the comment thus far. This has left, I believe, too little critical attention to *the works themselves*—attention to the necessary middle of things, the Texts, lying between the Author and his Readers. Although it must be said that, over the past decade or two—and certainly as this, the centennial of his birth has approached—more attention has been given to the stories and poems and letters themselves (though it must be said that they have never been totally neglected and significant collections, essays, introductions, prefaces, and forewords have addressed the texts, if only tangentially in places).

Comparatively little has been said so far about the specifics of Robert E. Howard's style. While many have pastiched his work—especially, of course, in the many Conan books (some supposedly “completed” by de Camp and Carter, others indisputably knock offs, purportedly “original

tales" by Wagner, Nyberg, Carpenter, Anderson, and others)—none, I will submit, have come close to matching it, let alone surpassing it.

But, sadly, most readers have looked at the finished canvases as whole cloth, the pastiches becoming conflated with the "pure Howard." Too little has been devoted to a study in detail of the original Howard texts themselves, a scrutiny of the actual "brush strokes" of Howard's literary and highly individualized techniques.

It is with some of the discovered nuances of Howard's *ways with words* that the present writing is concerned.

Likely I should, at this point, identify my own critical positions and the particular avenues of approach to Howard's prose that will follow. While I have spent a great deal of time studying Howard's poetry which lends itself quite readily to what the "New Critics"¹ called a "close reading," it has always been difficult—until fairly recent times—for the formalist or more scientific critic (the one, such as myself, who sees a story as an artifact of literature to be examined and deciphered) to examine longer texts with the detail that can be afforded to a poem.

But the advent of the increasingly powerful personal computer and the great advantage of digitized text have opened up new avenues for critical appreciation and the exploration of works of prose that would have been prohibitively lengthy only a couple decades ago. Such *computer-assisted literary criticism*—what I call "C.A.L.C."—reveals some interesting potentials for evaluation and interpretation.

Digital texts have also facilitated the growth of textual examination known as "stylometric analysis." While these objective and statistical methods have been primarily used thus far in efforts to attempt to show or "prove" authorship of Biblical, classical, Renaissance, and historical texts², there are other things that *stylometry*, the mathematical objectification and measurement of stylistic patterns and tendencies through statistics, can reveal about known authors. Other, simpler methods such as simple word searches using the word processor's "Find" command or the investigation of concordances can lead to further interesting discoveries.

Let's move on to a discussion of some discoveries about the writing style and artistic tendencies of Robert Ervin Howard. The first of the sections to follow is, to a significant degree, subjective, but based upon leaps from observations about the text to surmises and possibilities worth discussion. They are more an example of *rhetorical criticism*. The later examples move more and more into the discoveries and potentials for investigation and discovery by more purely scientific, computer-assisted methods and true *stylometry*. The possibility of a system of "themetrics" and actual interpretative activities via computer will also be touched upon.

The Promise of “Spear and Fang”: An Example of *Close Reading* and Conjecture upon Howard’s First Sale

“The result was crude, but gave evidence of real artistic genius, struggling for expression.”

—Robert E. Howard, “Spear and Fang”

Eighteen-year-old Robert Ervin Howard achieved his first commercial success as a “fictioneer” when *Weird Tales* purchased his story “Spear and Fang” which was to see publication in the July issue for 1925. The story is interesting for many reasons beyond the distinction of primacy. In its short span, the young Howard displays some traits that will remain with him as an author throughout the few remaining years of his short life and the rest of his fictional output. The story gives early testament to many of the virtues that made Howard popular then and since, and it also exhibits a few of the narrative “nods” or possible “flaws” to which he was prone—and perhaps even one or two which he never overcame.

First of all, as a work of Howard's *juvenilia* (if any time of his brief life might qualify to be called such) it must be seen as exceptionally well wrought and certainly far surpassing the minimal standards of *Weird Tales*. It exhibits a command of grammar and stylistic sophistication that are extremely rare in one so young. Overall, the tale must be commended for the typical leap into action and fast continued pace that were to characterize the vast majority of his fiction.

The flaws are, to some extent, the typical ones of the writer just breaking into publication. There is a tendency to “overwrite” a bit as far as the style is concerned. There are some sophistications of speech that are, at best, unlikely as effusions of Cro-Magnon man. But the evidence of good “homework” done, good *writerly* research—based on the limited knowledge of the prehistoric which his era had acquired—is also present.

But let us examine some particulars, for there are many other interesting aspects of the writer and man that Robert E. Howard was to become lying within the text of this tale. If we perform a close but eclectic³ reading of “Spear and Fang,” a few surmises can be made as well as more solidly evidenced points established. In the spirit of critical discussion, let’s allow that the surmises might prompt either assent or disagreement, but, at the very least, be worthy of prompting some further thought. Perhaps some assertions to follow will be enough to convince the reader.

The story is brief enough that we may attempt a linear examination with threads of critical approach weaving through the discussion, but not

formatted into blocks or segments of critical text. The discussion will flow, perhaps wander a bit, but essentially linearly, following the plot lines of the story text.

First of all, *regarding the practice of naming characters*, the young REH seems taken with the need to hyphenate, perhaps emphasizing a notion that primitive peoples likely built language from agreed upon monosyllables that eventually became compounds. This notion, of course, even today would be mere conjecture, but still not an unlikely possibility. Regarding the names used, I find the one for the main character “Ga-nor” to be most interesting. Whether the young Howard intended (or subconsciously “subtended”) the name to be a pun for “Gainer” (in other words, “one who gains, or attains”) will never be known, but I put this forward as a possibility [I did mention there would be some few “wild surmises”⁴—to use Keats’s phrase].

Beyond this, and a bolder assertion to make, I see Ga-nor as emblematic (and perhaps not merely subconsciously so) of the young Robert E. Howard himself. Clearly the analogy holds quite well: both are young artists, testing and extending the “boundaries” or customs of their respective crafts; both work “laboriously” at their art, and it might be said that both Ga-nor and Howard give “evidence of a real artistic genius, struggling for expression.”

As for the girl, A-ÆA, the young artist is “too occupied with his work to notice her,” which might very neatly summarize the answer to the question that still fascinates Howardian scholars: “What about Bob Howard’s relationships (or the lack thereof) with women?” Yet through the tone of the piece, the desire might well be seen—a desire I believe evident through much of Howard’s work—that he be admired by women, perhaps by all who might admire art, but, nonetheless, that he be or become a person worthy of admiration. We also see the dilemma of an early awareness of ones Art getting in the way of ones Life, a fate that many would ascribe to REH—and by no means a conflict unique to Howard. It is an old question for the artist: “Shall I be involved in Life, or in my Art?” It has always been difficult, if not impossible, to be completely true to both.

The metaphor of the cave painting is also indicative. Howard could not have known of the Lascaux, France cave paintings (discovered 1940) but he must have been aware of the archeological explorations and discoveries of the prehistoric world with which he would become so fascinated and which were quickly advancing in the early 20th century. The fact that such had survived for tens of thousands of years appealed to the young artist in Howard in the way that art lures many, perhaps most artists—at least one appeal is the potential through ones art for a relative “immortality,” a *living on* through ones artistic works or accomplishments.

Interesting also is the degree of social progress supposed by the young REH in this story. Was the society of early man sophisticated enough for the following to be true of A-Æa?:

“. . . [She] should have played the modest, demure maiden, perhaps skilfully [SIC] arousing the young artist's interest without seeming to do so. Then, if the youth was pleased, would have followed public wooing by means of crude love songs and music from reed pipes.”

Here, though again presenting a far more structured civilization than existed and a possible conflation of Classical Greek myth [reed pipes/Pan] and a supposedly stone age setting, Howard tells us something else about himself as well. He depicts a “backstory” of developed traditions of the tribe, but we are told, “little A-Æa was herself a mark of progress”—in other words the bold and forward and assertive woman. Howard is, I believe, making an interesting parallel to the girls he would have known in the “Roaring 20's” in general [remember that the little, essentially conservative town of Cross Plains was, in Howard’s early days, an oil boom town with all the accompanying vices, inclusive of more “liberal” as well as more “liberated” women].

The story then shifts to A-Æa's retreat from what we might call the “cave of creativity”⁵ for Ga-nor and the character development of these two *avant garde* cave dwellers—artist and assertive woman—to the foreshadowing of danger and adventure with the mention of the “gur-na's” and the discovery of the “Neandertal's” footprints.

Interestingly, the narrator ascribes to these “man apes” the beginnings of the Cro-Magnon (*homo sapiens*) legends of “ogres and goblins, of werewolves, and beast men.” Also, of course, we may see the emergence of the thread of species (race?) superiority and the decided notion that there are (at least were) distinctions between the human and near human—and that Cro-Magnon man was superior.

We then meet Ka-nanu [“canine”?, the “dog”?, at least the cur, the cad]. And we begin to see a few “nods” by the young REH. First of all, the sophistication of Ka-nanu's words to A-Æa, “Turn not away, fair maiden . . . It is your slave, Ka-nanu” is not only so much out of keeping with the prehistoric society that Howard hopes to depict, but it is also far out of character for the Ka-nanu we have just been introduced to (“He wooed her with a mocking air, as if he did it merely for amusement and would take her whenever he wished, anyway. He seized her by the wrist”). And, to top that off, A-Æa has been described as anything but “fair”—“A-Æa herself was very easy to look upon. Her hair, as well as her eyes, was *black* and fell about her slim shoulders in a rippling wave.” (emphasis added)—unless

“fair” might be meant in the other sense as the antonym of “foul.” Right after this, Ka-nanu calls her “moon of delight,” which is more metaphoric than we might imagine from a troglodyte, but which does give interesting evidence of one of REH's decided and well-attested⁶ early literary influences, Edward Fitzgerald's translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*—specifically Section 74 of the First Edition:

“Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again:
How oft hereafter rising shall she look
Through this same Garden after me--in vain!”

And not much later, Ka-nanu calls A-Æa “my little antelope.” A lovely metaphor, but simply too poetic for this boorish thug.

A telling passage about the differences between Ga-nor (can we read his as Howard?) and Ka-nanu and their attitudes regarding women follows:

“Ga-nor was known to be gentle with women, if careless of them, while Ka-nanu, thereby showing himself to be another mark of progress, was proud of his success with women and used his power over them in no gentle fashion.”

Is Ga-nor's gentle carelessness perhaps the truth about Howard in a very interesting way, about the young artist so caught up in his art and that mission that no woman could distract him long from either? And could Howard possibly have seen Ka-nanu's callousness typical of the “progressive” attitudes of his own era—another proof of the Barbaric? It seems from the positioning of the clauses that Ka-nanu must be the “progressive” one here, but is this perhaps a grammatical nod? We can but speculate.

With the next transposition of scene, Ka-nanu is leading hapless A-Æa off into the forest to do his worst, when the first passage of what is to become distinctive Howardian style strikes us between the eyes:

“... in the midst of a glade he paused, his hunter's instinct alert.
From the trees in front of them dropped a hideous monster, a hairy,
misshapen, frightful thing.

“A-Æa's scream re-echoed through the forest, as the thing approached. Ka-nanu, white-lipped and horrified, dropped A-Æa to the ground and told her to run. Then, drawing knife and ax, he advanced.

“The Neandertal man plunged forward on short, gnarled legs. He was covered with hair and his features were more hideous than an ape's because of the grotesque quality of the man in them. Flat, flaring nostrils, retreating chin, fangs, no forehead whatever, great, immensely long arms dangling from sloping, incredible shoulders, the monster seemed like the devil himself to the terrified girl. His apelike head came scarcely to Ka-nanu's shoulders, yet he must have outweighed the warrior by nearly a hundred pounds.”

Here we have four of what I will call “markers” of Howardian style sprung full-blown in his first sold story.

First of all, we have the characteristic technique that could be called by various names but I will define it as “action-packing.” To be more specific about this, we may add that its achievement is often effectively carried out by what, in most writers, is a flaw, but which Robert E. Howard gets away with beautifully, again and again through the entire body of his fictional work—the tendency toward what I term “hypermodification” through the liberal use of adjectives and adverbs. This *hypermodification* can occur: 1) serially (“serial modification”) as we see in such strings as “hairy, misshapen, frightful” or 2) in frequent “compound modification” (usually done by two qualifiers linked by the word “and.”

This we can see as one *marker* of REH's style throughout the remainder of his life. Somehow he usually (I will not say always) keeps it from cloying or being overdone. Samuel Clemens once wrote, “If you can catch an adjective, kill it.” and creative writing coaches everywhere suggest that one should write in vivid nouns and action verbs and modify sparingly. But Robert E. Howard achieves both economy of words and compression of excitement in his practices *action-packing* and *hypermodification*.

A second marker of his style is the use of *nominal (nouns) and verbal (verbs) compounding*. Suffice it to say that, in the majority of Howard's action scenes, he will frequently use compound nouns and/or compound verbs in his sentences, each of the members of the compound receiving the usual hypermodification as well.

Third, in keeping with the catalogue lists of Homeric style (see the “role call of heroes” as part of the formula of classical epic in the cataloguing of the hosts of the Greeks in *The Iliad*⁷), Howard will not infrequently run through a *listing of details* as we see in the vivid depiction of the Neandertal:

“Flat, flaring nostrils, retreating chin, fangs, no forehead whatever, great, immensely long arms dangling from sloping, incredible shoulders”

This *listing of descriptive details* in quick succession adds to the pace of the story. The young Robert E. Howard already displays his sense of scenic depiction and narrative pace (along the lines of Aristotle's *mimesis* [mimicking of "real time" action and dialogue] distinct from *diegesis* [the summary or digest of information by the narrator] as noted in *The Poetics*). Howardian scenes of action and danger and physical encounter to the death strive to keep "reading pace" parallel to the "story pace." Thus, his language must be as packed as the action depicted.

Fourth, we see the young writer's virtuosity with the language and a very sophisticated command of the possibilities and "flexibilities" of English grammar. He exhibits complexity and diversity in his phrasing and clausal arrangements. He likes the effect of the "periodic sentence"—of saving the main clause until that last part of the sentence—always a way to build suspense. He uses interjected appositives and inversions of syntax well, both in this early tale and throughout his work. Other distinctive stylistic features include the frequent use of both metaphor and simile and the occasionally use of compound subjects, compound verbs (already noted in the second point above), and compound (connected with "and" as opposed to serial [divided by commas]) modifiers. He also makes frequent use of the classical rhetorical device of *tricolon* or three-part parallel structure as in the following passage:

On he came like a charging buffalo, [simile] and Ka-nanu met him squarely and boldly [compound adverbs]. With flint ax and obsidian dagger [compound subject] he thrust and smote [compound verbs], but the ax was brushed aside like a toy [simile] and the arm that held the knife snapped like a stick [simile] in the misshapen hand of the Neandertaler. The girl saw the councilor's son wrenched from the ground and swung into the air, saw him hurled clear across the glade, saw the monster leap after him and rend him limb from limb [tricolon of clauses with the first and last exhibiting compound verbs]. (emphasis mine)

Now there's nothing new about rhetorical devices such as the *tricolon* for example. The ancient Greek rhetors gave names to these things more than two millennia ago. They were "old school" when Caesar was a schoolboy: "Veni, vedi, vici." The tricolon was a favorite device of Abraham Lincoln: "of the people, by the people, for the people" or "we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground." But Howard's rhetorical flair shows clearly a deep love of language and an early study of literature and both literary and classical rhetorical style.

Ga-nor's successful pursuit of the kidnapping "Neandertaler," his close-call defeating of the man-beast, and the rescue of A-Æa mark the culmination of the narrative. Not to be overlooked is Howard's "sprinkling in" of various beasties and dangers to add to the atmosphere of the tale: mammoth, tiger, python. He gets in his gory details (especially noteworthy is the offer of a morsel from the monster to A-Æa after he has her in his lair—the uncooked meat being "the arm of a Cro-Magnard child" calling up the suggestion of cannibalism as well as presenting the immediate grisly detail). The brush strokes of horror and danger as well as action-packed adventure are already being practiced and developed by the young Texan.

And we have the marker that perhaps makes Robert E. Howard stand out most as the young man who would become the pre-eminent writer of adventure fantasy for the pulp market of his day and the popular market since: *the scintillatingly brilliant image* that simply reaches from the page and grabs the reader and captivates and even enthralls. The depiction of Ga-nor after he finds the remains of Ka-nanu's dismembered corpse shines like the frequent diadems of words waiting to be wrought by the later Howard as he continues to develop:

"He was racing now, and his face was a devil's mask, for he had come upon the bloody glade and had found the monster's tracks leading away from it."

That metaphor of the "devil's mask" and the lovely poetic inverted consonance echoes of the "l" and "d" sounds in "bloody glade" are also *markers* of his style. Howard had a genuine vision of his creations in action as well as a keen poet's ear for the music of words as well as their meaning, for their sound as well as their sense. Moreover, he was able to transform that vision through the medium of literature—mankind's most potent artistic medium because it is wrought of the very stuff of human thought, language itself.

The battle scene itself is one grand example of how even the young Howard could visualize and mentally choreograph (we know, of course, that he often physically "choreographed") his action stories. Howard had a cinematic imagination: the mind's eye of a director of film (one can only speculate how interesting might have been his possible eventual attention to screenplay writing and/or direction). Howard's stories (to play off the famous line of Hamlet's) never "lose the name of action."

At the end, the battle and the girl are won. "What I have fought for I will keep," says Ga-nor, who, like the heroes of a legion of legends⁸, wins the battle over the evil and daunting adversary and wins "a lover and a

mate”—the frequently seen hero’s reward of the hand of the “princess.” The last sentence has the final tone of a story of legend: “And so it was ...”

Stylometric and Thematic Approaches

The study of Stylometrics and the methods of Stylometry evolved from the now-validated assumption that writers create distinctive patterns of language (vocabulary, grammatical construction, rhetorical device, structural tendencies, average sentence length, etc.) which are as unique as fingerprints. Initially, this study was used in the process of attempting to identify the authorship of unattributed or debated texts and to inquire into such scholarly questions as: “Was there a single poet involved in the compositions of *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*, and, if so, was it the same poet at work in both of these epics?” [Most stylometrists answered yes to both of these, by the way—whether or not his name was Homer].

Another example of the use of stylometry in this fashion was the verification—at least the very great likelihood, which is really all that what I’ll call “Identification Stylometrics” can offer without other evidence—of a poem discovered with the signature “W. S.” as, indeed, or at the very least, most likely, the work of William Shakespeare.

But the kind of stylometry that I’m interested in as it might be applied to the work of Robert E. Howard (or any other *known* author) is not primarily used to try to prove that he wrote the stories attributed to him (except in possible rare cases of found fragments, etc. after major parameters of REH’s style are fully delineated). Rather my focus has been the application of statistical techniques in trying to discover, by means of what I’ll call “Investigative” or “Exploratory” or “Critical Stylometrics,” the narrative and poetic methods used and even themes inherent in his literary compositions. The latter of these moves into the area that I call “Themetrics,” a shift from the study of Howard’s methods to the study of Howard’s meanings. We may hope to discover nuances and formulae and some statistically demonstrable truths about both the “palate” and the “brush strokes” of this artist with words—perhaps something also about the man behind the methods and the meanings.

A bit of stylometric theory will, I believe, help to ground the following discussion. The discussion of “Spear and Fang” in the first example offers some initial hypotheses that are almost wholly subjective, based simply upon the normal critical methods of approach used to study the work of REH and also on simple “gut feelings” based upon reading his poems and stories. That analysis exemplifies a more Rhetorical Criticism.

In searching for stylometric methods that are “Content-significant” we

must move away from the mere Identification Stylometry of analysis of grammar which is, by its very nature merely “Form-significant,” but which does not pretend to be “Content- or Theme-significant.”

I see a great potential in the use of the computer as a critical tool. By using an *idiosyncratic brand* of Stylometry and some initial premises about the possibility of Themetry, I believe that CALC (“Computer-Assisted Literary Criticism”) is a pathway into profitable discoveries about the methods, meaning, and mind of Robert Ervin Howard.

What needs to be done to any text for this sort of close analysis includes the following:

1. the creation of a KWIC [“Key Word In Context” Concordance, inclusive of all words used and shown in their context, along with the creation of a word frequency list (how often each word is used in any given text);
2. the creation of a Letter Concordance to show the frequency of letter distributions in a text (how many “As,” how many “Bs,” etc.) (While this is also an important aspect of Identification Stylometry, the sounds represented by the letters do have content-significance, often at a subconscious level. These sometimes afford interesting benefits when approached from the perspectives of psycholinguistics);
3. the division of the text into sentences (prose) or lines (poetry) for close analysis, and, subsequently;
4. the objective and subjective “tagging” and indexing (spreadsheet and/or other possibly custom-designed software) of fictional narrative and/or poetic attributes through a close investigation of each sentence or line;
5. the comparison of anything discovered with reference to a particular story against a group (i.e. the Conan stories) or the whole body of work (i.e. all REH’s prose fiction) to find common denominators. I call these common denominators “DNA” (“Distinctive Narrative Attributes”)—with reference to poetry, the comparison of any given poem to, say, other sonnets, or to the whole body of REH’s poetic output, thus discovering “CPA” (Common Poetic Attributes));
6. the comparison of results with those found from using the same method of study on the works of other authors—especially *ones who might have been influential upon REH* (London, Mundy, Burroughs, Kipling, Chesterton (poetics), Lovecraft, Smith, etc.), but also on *those who are consciously derivative of him* (the pastiche writers and other Sword & Sorcery followers, for example)

7. the comparison of results from various stages of REH's own work to see what, if any, aspects of his methods and messages changed over time;
8. the more subjective assessment, by pretty much any critical methods already in use or ones yet to emerge, of the messages or themes of the text, the author's tone as seen through the text, etc.—these too can be analyzed by the imposition of an objective/numerical schema upon the subjective observations (this last point deals with the extension of method into Themetrics).

Some Examples of Objective Criteria

Among the objective criteria that can be “tagged” or noted for commentary are such numerically definite parameters as:

1. *average number of syllables per word*;
2. *average number of words per sentence*;
3. *average number of sentences per paragraph* (differentiated among dialogue and action and narration and narrative digression [if any]);
4. *average number of rhetorical devices per sentence/per paragraph/per story, etc.*;
5. *kinds of and frequencies of rhetorical devices* (similes, metaphors [lots of “lithe” and “supple” cats here, I suspect, etc.], alliteration, parallel structures; etc.);
6. *the ratio of Mimesis to Diegesis* (Aristotle's words in *The Poetics* for “Scene” [dialogue and real time action] vs. “Summary” [words of narration and summary of events and description, etc.]; a side by side comparison of “Mimetic Density” and “Diegetic Density” as I call them);
7. *the distinctive uses of attribution* (“tagging” in the presentation of dialogue, according to the following distinction into varieties:
 - *unattributed* (where the dialogue alone is given, with no attribution wording whatsoever)—
 - *regular* (use of attribution through the “normal” words: “said,” and “asked”—
 - *irregular* (use of attribution through any variant words: “shouted,” “queried,” etc.—
 - *simple* (the only words breaking up the dialogue or used with the dialogue are the “tag words” to identify the speaker)—

- *complex* (something else is done along with the dialogue, such as *delivery of narrative content* ["Follow me!" he shouted, meanwhile cleaving a foeman's skull to the teeth with his scimitar.] or *descriptive detail* ["This is the Lost Valley of Yazdik lore," Nanok said, as they beheld a luxuriantly green expanse below them, divided by a narrow but rapid river, so different from the barren and bleak wastelands through which they had wandered the past weeks.] or *character development* ["You must be Nanok," she said, moving, he knew, intentionally between him and the great glowing hearth to reveal the curves of her young, lithe body through the gossamer-woven stuff of her gown.]
 - Clearly, combinations of the above varieties can and does occur, so that dialogue tagging may be called, for example: "regular complex," "irregular simple," etc.
8. *the frequency of and position of modification* (adjectives and adverbs) in relation to the words modified (nouns, verbs, adjectives, other adverbs)
 9. *the examination of story openings, closings, and transitions* to see if there are *structural formulae* at work (something like what Doyle succeeds with in the Sherlock Holmes stories—lots of variant plots built upon the framework of motifs that work again and again). [I believe, for example, that REH uses most often what I'll call the "Action Opening" as opposed to the "Dialogue Opening" or the "Establishment of Setting Opening" or "Characterization Opening" or other possible varieties. Howard can be objectively and statistically shown to get right into Action and Character. Transitions are often Descriptive. Endings often are Dialogic];
 10. *the comparison of results against the great theories already developed regarding mythic and folkloric and traditional material* (Rank, Raglan, Frazer, Campbell, Frye, Todorov, Thompson, Aarne, Propp, etc.)⁹ to see how much REH makes use of traditional material and how closely his work—instinctively or purposefully—follows the mythic-traditional bases which I believe are the foundations for all popular imaginative literature seen as the extension of the mythic, legendary, folkloric, and traditional into the Age of Print and the Age of Mass Literacy (1440 on and 19th century on, respectively).

There are, of course, other objectifiable items, including sentence types according to various principles of classification: Simple, Compound,

Complex, Compound-Complex; Loose, Cumulative, Periodic, Inverted; Declarative, Interogative, Exclamatory; etc. and other aspects undiscussed here and almost certainly others as yet unimagined and, hence, untried.

Examples of Subjective Criteria Objectified

Moving into the realm of Themetrics—which I'll define as *computer-assisted scientific, statistical study for the purpose of interpretation of literary texts* (as opposed to the similar stylometric study of style and structure—means moving into the area of “Subjective Tagging” of sentences of prose or lines of poetry.

The concept of subjective tagging of a text allows for thematic investigation and interpretation from many/any angles of approach or schools of literary appreciation and criticism. The critic may bring any method or agenda to bear upon the material. The key element and key requirement in each and every case is the consistency of criteria and the uniform application of the tags.

To give an example of an imposed statistical method upon the “action sentences” of a piece of narrative fiction (the “action” part of Mimesis/Scene as opposed to the “dialogue” part; the what-characters-are-doing as opposed to what-they-are-saying), we might assign numbers in increasing order to the intensity of action depicted:

- 0 = stasis, rest, inactivity, sleep, trance
- 1 = awake and aware but stationary, watching, talking, etc.
- 2 = moving at a relatively slow pace, walking, journeying, travelling
- 3 = moving with haste, chasing, being chased, rushing to battle, etc.
- 4 = actually engaged in battle, fight for survival, etc.
- 5 = slaying, being slain, etc.

While the example numbers are entirely arbitrary and might serve only a particular story or type of story, they can be used, nonetheless to establish frequency and distribution of action throughout a tale. In all likelihood, a system requiring maybe 10 classes rather than five might help to refine the statistics. The key would be the consistent “tagging” of the text. If patterns emerge across stories, the numbers would indicate such. Note that the numbers need not relate to intensity or relative significance (although that makes very fine sense, when possible). What is important is that they be applied consistently—*whatever they represent*. When compared against

graphs of distribution of occurrence with other stories, consistencies and structural formulae might be perceived, similarities and differences will become apparent.

The same sort of “imposed tagging” and arbitrary designations could be done with almost any aspect of the theme or symbolism of the tale, or when a significant believed-to-be-distinctive trait is observed. Wherever a thematic or possibly symbolic portion of a story or a distinctive auctorial trait might be subjectively discovered or observed by the critic, a number could be assigned to that theme or symbol or trait. After that, what initially seemed subjective, can be numerically analyzed and—at least to a greater degree than before thought possible—objectified.

One could assign numbers to the variety of themes often perceived in the stories, poems, and letters of Robert E. Howard, assigning numbers to “Barbarism triumphant over Civilization,” “Fearlessness in the Face of Death,” “Reincarnation,” “The Nature of Life and Death,” “Suicide,” “Societal Decay and Decline,” and so on. The text would then be tagged accordingly with these consistently-applied representative numbers.

Of course the Feminist critic of Howard or of any author would most likely apply different tags from the Structuralist whose tags would differ from the Psychoanalytic critic, who would in turn differ in tag choice and numbering system used from the Myth critic or the Historical or Biographical Critic—but the results CAN be quantified. And that is the very heart of the study of literature via the computer.

By the Numbers: Some Examples

One essential tool of the student of style by computer is a software application known as a “concordancer.” The most useful kind of concordance is the type known as a KWIC (“Key Word in Context”) concordance. Let’s look at some examples from “Spear and Fang,” the early Howard story addressed in the first section above. The software used was Conc 1.80b3 (a free download for the Macintosh platform: <http://www.sil.org/computing/conc/conc.html>). [Similar applications are available for free download or as shareware in both Macintosh and IBM/PC platforms.

First, let’s look at some examples of the young REH’s ways of showing attribution—who is speaking—in a dialogue. The following is but a partial example of the words both before and after some uses of the word “said” where “said” is the Key Word we’re examining and the words on either side are the Context (keeping in mind that this is only a partial listing, used for example):

Line 91	He seized her by the wrist. "Turn not away, fair maiden,"	said he. "It is your slave, Ka-nanu." "Let me go," she answered. "I must go to the spring
Line 114	dissuade him. "I am not powerful enough to resist you," she	said , "but I will accuse you before the tribe." "You will never accuse me, little antelope
Line 116	the tribe." "You will never accuse me, little antelope," he	said , and she read another, even more sinister intention in his cruel countenance. On and
Line 253	the girl in his arms. "What I have fought for I will keep,"	said he. And so it was that the girl who went forth into the forest in the arms of an

One distinctive feature of style is the way in which attribution of speaker or "tagging" of dialogue is done. Above, the young Robert E. Howard's tendency is to frequently use what I call *medial regular attribution* (the "regular" word signaling attribution, "said," breaks up the dialogue by coming in the middle "medial position" of the character's words) or *terminal regular attribution* (the tag line comes at the end of the sentence).

Interestingly, the young REH uses *inverted regular attribution* here in the first and last examples above: "said he" rather than "he said." All examples here are "REGULAR" in that the normal and generic word "said" (or "answered") is used instead of some variant or more specific word indicative of the tone of voice, manner of saying, emotional state of the speaker: *shouted, whispered, screamed, said sarcastically, queried nervously* etc..

Other concordance analysis shows, for example, that Howard uses "And" to begin sentences ten different times in "Spear and Fang" over 183 sentences. This shows Howard's tendency to use what I call "conjunctive openings" or "initial conjunction" or, as it might rightly be termed in the proper traditional rhetorical Greek: "*prosyndeton*" ("conjunction first"). [NOTE: *prosyndeton* is derived from the traditional Greek rhetorical figures of *asyndeton* ("no conjunctions," no synthesizing words) as in Mark Twain's, "All the grace, the beauty, the poetry, had gone out of the majestic river" and *polysyndeton* ("many conjunctions," using conjunctions almost wherever possible) again as in Twain's ". . . a day came when I began to cease from noting the glories and the charms which *the moon and the sun and the twilight* wrought upon the river's face... ."] While I'm sure most readers will remember some English teacher or another telling them,

“Never, never, never begin a sentence with a conjunction!” clearly, this “rule” does not apply to polished stylists who use “And,” “But,” “Yet,” and “So,” etc. quite often to being sentences.

Prosyndeton is also used with the conjunction “But”—as seen in the sentence starts in the following example, but not as frequently as we find him using “And.” A close inspection of Howard’s stories will find him exhibiting this sentence start with “And.” Howard accumulates and piles up action: “Take that AND that AND that AND this—all on the level of extreme tension and excitement, of heavily involved action and danger.

70	them, until sullenly they had withdrawn far into the deep forests.	But the fear of them remained with the tribesmen, and no woman went into the
101	taller even than Ga-nor, and more handsome in a reckless, cruel way.	But A-Æa loved Ga-nor and she was afraid of Ka-nanu. Her very fear of him kept
162	that it would not be well to interfere with a son of a councilor.	But Ga-nor had few interests, and once his interest was roused he was inclined to
243	effort he reached down over the monster's arm and found his ax.	But so close were they clinched together that he could not draw it. The
245	man set himself to break his foe to pieces as one breaks a stick.	But Ga-nor's elbow was thrust under his chin, and the more the Neandertal man

A check in any concordance for the similetic connectives *like, as, than,* and *so* will quickly retrieve examples of the SIMILE and possibly indicate tendencies in comparative thinking and typical associations on the part of the author.

Just as *like, as, than, so* can be used in a concordance search to find similes, so too can *to be* verbs be used to quickly discover many metaphors. The *simile* says that things are “similar,” the metaphor says that things are equal (*is, are, was, were* and usually *was, were* in a past tense narrative). Hence, “He fought like a tiger” is a simile; “He was a tiger” a metaphor.

With WWI occurring in REH's formative years, it is interesting to note that the NeandertalERS are given the hard Germanic “T” and the German “-er” ending, while the Cro-Magnon/Cro-Magnards keep the distinctive “-on” and “-ard” of French. Of course the origins of these two words might have something to do with it, but, especially in “Neandertaler” the German ending seems intentional in tone. Possibly a contrast (possibly

subconscious) between the barbaric, savage “Hun” as depicted in allied propaganda of the Great War versus the more civilized French?

Concordances may also be made on frequency of letter distribution, as follows (again stats from “Spear and Fang”:

a	(1150)	
b	(157)	
c	(292)	
d	(613)	
	(1673)	The most often occurring letter in English (see Poe's “The Gold Bug” for a nifty story of ciphers and letter frequencies, and, of course, Doyle's Holmes story “The Dancing Men” as a rip-off of Poe). The vocalic percentages and ratios between vowels will, I believe, also be a marker of style. Also the ratios between vowels and consonants
e		
f	(318)	
g	(346)	
h	(938)	
i	(782)	
j	(9)	The low density of Js is very interesting and likely a distinctive marker of the early REH.
k	(93)	
l	(445)	
m	(315)	
n	(942)	
o	(908)	
p	(195)	
q	(4)	The low number of Qs is to be expected in most writers, but the Q-words over several texts would be worth examination.
r	(901)	
s	(760)	
t	(1118)	The very high number of Ts is possibly a marker of style, possibly distinctive of the early REH.
u	(329)	
v	(113)	
w	(302)	
x	(11)	
y	(154)	
z	(12)	

This study of the frequency of letter distribution is seen more and more by stylometrists as a highly distinctive feature in author identification and determination of some stylistic tendencies.

Also, the relative densities of the vowels A, E, I, O, and U can frequently offer a distinctive pattern.

Subdividing the consonants into groups as follows, will also be productive:

- nasals and “hums” (N and M)
- liquids and sibilants and aspirants (L, R, F, V, S, Z, [also SH and ZH patterns] H, TH, W)
- plosives (B and P)
- stops and gutturals (D, G, K, Q, T)

Also emerging as solid evidence of individuality of style is an author’s frequency of use of “function words”—words that carry in and of themselves no (or minimal at best) content significance: “the,” “and,” “very,” etc.

Another typical set of criteria developed with the computer-assisted investigation of text is the following (the example, again, is “Spear and Fang”):

- Total Number of Letter Characters 12880
- Total Number of Words = 3043
- Total Number of Unique Words = 971
- Total Number of Sentences = 183
- Total Number of Paragraphs = 72

So:

- average word length in letters is = 4.233
- average # of words/sentence = 16.628 (always an important number)
- average # of unique words/sentence = 5.306
- average total words/unique word = 3.134 (an indication that every third word in the style is unique)
- average # of sentences/paragraph = 3.514 (always an important element of stylistic

Fictional Style as Discovered in “The Devil in Iron”

A fairly good sense of an author's distinctive characteristics or attributes can be observed by the simple close reading of a text and the familiarity gained by reading multiple texts by the same author. Mannerisms of an author's characteristic tale spinning may be derived, provided the reader has the conceptual framework and nomenclature for the study of narratics, stylistics, and rhetorical maneuver when it is observed.

Lacking conceptual bases for the varieties of narrative patterns and techniques, lacking even the specialized jargon (adopted, adapted, or created) for the purpose of looking AT language—rather than THROUGH it—the observer literally lacks the vocabulary to describe what is being seen.

Richard Lanham (in his fine book, *Analyzing Prose*) notes this modern tendency for us to look *through* rather than *at* language, further aggravated by the gradual decline in formal instruction in the ways, means, and terminology of stylistic and structural discussion in our schools, has made us, generally, a society of readers unable to “pin down” exactly what it is about a text that we wish to convey—or even to understand.

Examining the fictional style and method of Robert E. Howard, I believe that the short story “The Devil in Iron” is typical of his work in many ways. I will try in what follows to briefly discuss some of REH's “distinctive narrative attributes” (“DNA”).

First, regarding story starts or openings, most critics recognize that there are at least two possible methods: the leap into action or the more slowly paced “exposition,” laying out background, likely setting, and also likely some characterization. Howard, the great majority of the time, eschews a plodding, expository introduction. He prefers the ACTION OPENING, often inclusive of some characterization, sometimes even a characterization of a minor character rather than the central figure. We see this approach in “The Devil in Iron”:

The Fisherman loosened his knife in its scabbard. The gesture was instinctive, for what he feared was nothing a knife could slay, not even the saw-edged crescent blade of the Yuetshi that could disembowel a man with an upward stroke.

We have the typical HYPERMODIFICATION as a marker of Howard's style. He tends to modify most nouns and most verbs, often with plural modifiers (adjectives and adverbs). For example, as above, “. . . the saw-edged crescent blade.” Not much farther into the story we have another good example of REH's tendency never to leave a noun or verb unattached (I've underlined the adjectives for emphasis):

A storm had blown his frail fishing craft far from his accustomed haunts, and wrecked it in a night of flaring lightning and roaring waters on the towering cliffs of the isle.

Early in section 4 of the story we have a good example of Howard's typical verbal elaboration:

As he climbed the cliff, one of these men breathed deeply and stealthily [SIC] lifted a bow.

Examples are plentiful, and I invite the reader's perusal of pretty much any Howard text. ACTION-PACKING of the plot (with compound, modified, and multiply modified verbs) and DETAIL PACKING of descriptive passages are part and parcel of Howard's ways with words.

There is no doubt in my mind that Robert E. Howard was a devotee of the TRICOLON as a device for narrative presentation.

I will give some illustrative examples, especially a few that are elaborated by other devices typical of Howard's style and ample evidence of his rhetorical groundings (either self-taught or from formal schooling back in the early 20th century when such things were still a significant and normal part of formal rhetorical instruction in English). The following tricolons are broken into three parts for illustration:

1) He had climbed the cliffs,/
passed through the jungle that bordered them,/
and now stood surrounded by evidences of a vanished state.

2) Broken columns glimmered among the trees,/
the straggling lines of crumbling walls meandered off into the shadows,/
and under his feet were broad paves, cracked and bowed by roots growing beneath them.

3) But they revolted,/
and burned,/
and slew.

4) So he stood up in the shape and aspect of a man, but his flesh was not flesh,/
nor the bone, bone,/
nor blood, blood.

[This last example also makes use of the ABSOLUTE structure which removes the necessity for repeating an understood verb—in this case “was” or even longer structures: “nor was his blood, blood” OR “and his blood was not blood”]

5) Then he was writhing on the glass steps with fold after slimy
fold knotting about him,
twisting, /
crushing, /
killing him.

[This also makes use of the device called ASYNDETON (Gr.: “no conjunctions”)—we’re all taught to put the “and” before the last item in a series, but it’s not essential. REH uses this device on occasion for variation.]

6) Then it fell, shearing through
the scales/
and flesh/
and vertebrae.

[Here making use of the opposite device of POLYSYNDETON (Gr.: “many conjunctions”). Howard shows both his knowledge of this device and its opposite by showing his virtuosity with both.]

Howard also liked ALLITERATION as a sound effect and frequent occurrences of it are to be found in his work. Passages such as the following are common:

It was forged of a meteor which flashed through the sky like a
flaming arrow and fell in a far valley.

Of course here also we have heavy alliteration on the letter “f,” but also nice CONSONANCE with the embedded “l” sounds.

The reader of Howard is invited to do a close reading with your next encounter with a favorite story [I would certainly discourage any attempt at a “close reading” the first time you meet one of Howard’s (or anyone else’s) stories: it spoils the “magic” of the fresh experience.]. But in rereading, attempt to identify the various rhetorical patterns that will almost certainly be there in any given run of two to three pages of text

What this kind of specialized language allows—the classical Greek

jargon of stylistic and rhetorical figures —is a means whereby we can discuss the actual maneuvers and stylistic tactics of Howard or any author. A developing structural vocabulary like my assertion of ACTION OPENING can also be identified—hence, eventually, objectified and examined statistically.

Traditions of narrative may also be noted for analysis or more subjective reflection. I'll give a few examples of typical Narrative Traditions that I see evidenced in the fiction of Robert E. Howard. These suggest that Howard was a keen student of narrative—to a great extent self-taught through voracious and broad reading. I believe that he certainly must have had a grounding in the Classics in his formal education, certainly in the works of Homer, Shakespeare, etc.

One adaptation from narrative tradition is Howard's use of what is normally called the EPIC SIMILE or, just as often, the HOMERIC SIMILE, after the famous early story teller whose works have influenced all of Western Civilization. The EPIC/HOMERIC SIMILE is a simile that has been elaborated with detail [which contains more than "tenor" the thing being compared to something and "vehicle" the something to which the tenor is being compared]:

As a panther strikes down a bull moose at bay, *so* he plunged under the bludgeoning arms and drove the crescent blade to the hilt under the spot that a human's heart would be.

[The "as"-*"so"* pattern is typical of this elaborate simile and is plentiful in Homer, although not universally used. The simple simile above would have been "As a panther kills a moose"—or something to that effect.]

Also Homeric and traditional of the epic narrative is the use of EPITHETS or "other names" by which a character or a thing is to be known or is known by the characters in the story. So Zeus is "The Cloud Gatherer" and Hector is "Tamer of Horses" and Achilles is "Son of Peleus." Howard does this on occasion also:

Men called it Xapur, the Fortified . . .
OR, "the Cimmerian," etc. for Conan

Another device from traditional narrative is the use of FLYTING (boastful and taunting dialogue and verbal "bashing" between foes, often preparatory to the physical fight):

"Dog!" he taunted. "You can't hit me! I was not born to die on Hykanian steel! Try again, pig of Turan!"

Howard also frequently makes use of the Structure for his narratives that Eugene Vinaver named, writing on Arthurian Romance, "THE INTERLACE"¹¹. Simply stated, interlaced structure does the old "Meanwhile, back at the ranch" thing, as we shift from one character's or group's perspective and physical setting to another's.

We jump from:

- Section 1 in the story: action opening, suspense over the nature of the supernatural danger, and death of the fisherman to
- Section 2 Jehungir Agha, the mention of "that devil Conan" (for now still "offstage") and the coercion of Octavia by the threat of rape to
- Section 3 the stranding of Octavia on the island, setting the trap for Conan to
- Section 4 where we finally meet Conan, follow his encounter with the ghost of Yateli and the finding of the iron giant to
- Section 5 with the giant serpent and the growing mystical understanding of Khosatral Khel to
- Section 6 where we are back with Jehungir Agha at his arrival at the island with his men, Conan's meeting with Octavia, and the culminating victories over Jehungir and Khosatral.

As is typical in the INTERLACE, the various strands of narrative, and the various separated characters, are knotted together in at the finale.

The "castellated" nature of Xapur as Howard imagined it gives us another fairly typical device of REH. He often uses what I'll call "DESCRIPTIVE RESONANCE" achieved by echoing or reiterating with subtle variety the description of a place or person. We have:

"castellated,"

"some ancient ruins upon it,"

"rises sheer out of the sea . . ."

"castle-like cliffs."

These iterations come, I believe, from the vividness with which Howard envisioned his fictional world.

Traditional and mythic-folkloric MOTIFS often make up a great deal of the plot of Howard's stories. This is not to imply that Howard has some notion of a motif index, or planned to incorporate certain elements from myth and folklore in his tales. Rather, more naturally and organically, I think, the stuff of myth, legend, and folklore simply came to him archetypally or unconsciously (at least subconsciously) from the vast repository of story he had acquired from his appetite for reading. "The

Devil in Iron" includes the following *motifs*: damsel in distress, the pursuer, the magic blade, the magic castle, etc. An examination of the body of Howard's work with the aid of Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature* and Annte Aarne's *Types of the Folktale* might prove very profitable.

To summarize, a close reading and subjective rhetorical analysis of a text can be accompanied by a much more objective stylometric examination. Themetrics is, I have contended, also a possibility. Once some numerical equivalencies are assigned to aspects of narrative and consistently practiced, the "markers" of any given author's "DNA" as I've called it can be "lined up"—say in a bar graph—against other works by the same author, or, for comparison and contrast, against a set of results for another author. Just as with actual DNA comparisons of genetic patterns, precise results are, theoretically, possible.

One interesting exploration for the future would be the examination of Howard's texts over time to see what changes occur in his techniques, what developments in his style. Another path would be to compare and contrast—once both the body of Howard's fiction AND that of his pasticheurs are digitized—the original against the imitators.

Pastiches, in and of themselves, are interesting from at least one critical standpoint [even though the present author—and many others—are believers in the publication and perpetuation of "pure Howard"]. They do, at least, show which elements each individual pasticheur believes to be especially essential in an author's stylistic tendencies.

Robert E. Howard's Conan might be the second most pastiched character in English behind Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. But the key difference is that almost all Sherlockian imitators have shown the humility of the bow to Doyle as innovator and master. Howard's array of story "completers" and pasticheurs have too often suggested that they've finished or continued what Robert E. Howard did—and, which is more arrogant, have sometimes suggested that their work is on a par with or even surpasses that of the young genius who began it all. Occasionally Howard's name as originator of the character has not even been credited.

I am certainly not alone in the firm belief that Howard's ultimately inimitable stylistic, structural, and imaginative techniques surpass those of all who followed him. I also believe that more critical attention to his texts and more scientific, computer-assisted, statistical explorations into his style, his fictional structuring, and his various themes and messages will one day prove the superiority of his skill as well as providing valuable insights. Such critical explorations will allow us a clearer vision of the amazing breadth and depth and significance of his achievements and a far greater understanding of his ways with words and the methods through

which he brought forth the great harvest of his fertile imagination.

NOTES

¹ see I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) and John Crowe Ransom, *The New Criticism* (1941).

² See the groundbreaking work by Mosteller, F. and Wallace, D.L., *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist*, Reading: Addison-Wesley, (1964).

And *Federalist Papers* online:

<http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers> .

³ While I agree with the notion of “close reading” espoused by the “New Critics,” I am decidedly not in agreement with their curious notions and “fallacies” centering around the premise which might best be put: “The text is ALL.” The “intentional fallacy” suggested by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their essay of the same name, and the later asserted “affective fallacy” don’t hold water. Of course the author’s life and milieu and intentions make a difference in the text and are relevant (to whatever degree they may be known or discovered). Of course, without readers, there is, for all intents and purposes, no story—let alone effect. It’s the old “If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one to hear it—does it make a noise?” The answer is, most likely, “Yes!” but absent the hearer it makes no difference.

⁴ My referencing of “wild surmise” is to Keat’s famous sonnet, interestingly about the “travel” one can do vicariously through reading. The “realms of gold” are the gilt-edged pages of rare books. Bob Howard knew and wrote of this means of travel also, in poems like “Adventure.”

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western Islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet never did I breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific - and all his men
Looked at each other with a *wild surmise*
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

(emphasis added)

⁵ This coming forth from the cave, symbolic (literally) of “enlightenment” makes one wonder if Bob Howards was thinking of Plato’s famous cave of the parable in the *Dialogues*.

⁶ Regarding Howard’s knowing Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* there is clear evidence in a letter to Tevis Clyde Smith written during the week of 20 February 1928 [Howard age 22]:

“I have carefully gone over, in my mind, the most powerful men—that is, in my opinion—in all of the world’s literature and here is my list:

“Jack London, Leonid Androyev [sic], Omar Khayam [sic], Eugene O’Neill, William Shakespeare.

“All these men, and especially London and Khayam [“Khayyam”], to my mind stand out so far above the rest of the world that comparison is futile, a waste of time. Reading these men and appreciating them makes a man feel life not altogether useless.”

(*Robert E. Howard: Selected Letters 1923-1930*, ed. Glenn Lord, West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1989.)

⁷ See the famous “roll call” list of warriors and their numbers of ships sailing to Troy in *The Iliad*, Book II.

⁸ Works on the “Hero of Tradition” and the notion of an essential human archetypal story: Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Jurgen von Hahn, *The Aryan Departure and Return Formula* [loose trans. from the German], Lord Raglan, *The Hero*. Joseph Campbell, *Hero With 1000 Faces*, Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale*. Also profitable would be a study of Howard’s Mythopoeic (“Myth Creating”) and “Mythomorphic” (“Myth/History Reshaping”) fiction: Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (6 vols.) and Annti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale*.