

A Daydreamer's Antiquity:
The Classical World of Edward Lucas White

Edward Lucas White taught Latin in several Baltimore area private schools (1892-1934), published articles in *Classical Weekly* (1918-19) and earned a BA from Johns Hopkins (1888) but had to abandon a PhD program due to ill health which plagued him throughout his life. He committed suicide on the seventh anniversary of the death of his beloved wife Agnes, whom he adoringly memorialized in *Matrimony* (Norman 1932) his ode to monogamy. He is well known to some classicists of a certain age as the author of the historical novels *The Unwilling Vestal* (Dutton 1918), *Andivius Hedulio* (Dutton 1921) and *Helen* (Doran 1925), perhaps some of his poetry and short stories set in antiquity but probably not his Gibbon tribute *Why Rome Fell* (Harper 1927). His works sold well at the time, and he had many admirers, especially for his second novel. He had hoped to be renowned for his poetry, as represented by his collection *Narrative Lyrics* (Putnam 1908) and those included in *Matrimony*.

Over a century after his heyday, White is the focus of intense admiration for his works of fantasy and horror, now part of the genre of *Weird Fiction*. Many of his stories have appeared in anthologies of other weird stuff, especially "Lukundoo" and "The House of the Nightmare". George T. Wetzel was working on a comprehensive biography but had only reached 1909 when he died. A preliminary version based on archives now held by Johns Hopkins Library was serialized in *Fantasy Commentator*. Critical appreciations have begun to appear, notably by Mike Barrett (*Doors to Elsewhere* Alchemy Press, 2013) and S.T. Joshi in the introduction to his edited collection *The Stuff of Dreams: The Weird Stories of Edward Lucas White* (Dover Publications 2016). Thus far this resurgent admiration has not extended to his historical fiction or

poetry, with the exception of the short story “The Song of the Sirens” included in his own collection (Dutton 1919) of mostly classically set tales.

This paper will demonstrate that many of those elements of his weird stories most admired by current critics are also present in the historical novels, short stories and poetry set in Antiquity. It will also maintain that White’s work still has much to recommend it to modern readers as much in spite of his arcane language, anachronisms and hostility toward Christianity as because of his elegant prose, cultural relevance and deep sympathy a world he loved and understood. A handout will include a complete bibliography, which will also be included in the PPT presentation.

Reception Studies

No sound required.