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Recommended Citation

Boyle, Tanner, "The Fortean Connection: Science Fiction's Ties to Charles Fort" (2018). *Spring 2018*. 12.
https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2018/12

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THE FORTEAN CONNECTION: SCIENCE FICTION'S TIES TO CHARLES FORT

Tanner Boyle

Mentor: Gary Wohl

This paper tracks the influence of esoteric non-fiction writer Charles Fort on science fiction from its early days in the pulps to contemporary sci-fi writers Arthur C. Clarke and Philip K. Dick. The thematic elements of Fort's work are explored in contrast to the so-called "scientific dogmatism" of the time; his works take the outliers of data and scientific reports and develops theses from them. Also relevant is the prominence of what this paper deems "maybe-fictions" which developed alongside sci-fi. Through his appearance in the pulps and pulp sci-fi authors and editors' own admissions of influence, there is an omnipresence of Fortean themes in sci-fi works beginning with writers like H. P. Lovecraft and Eric Frank Russell. Due to later sci-fi figureheads like Clarke and Dick being heavily interested in pulp science fiction, these Fortean topics remain in their work as well. For Clarke, Fort's work and others like it are utilized as a wealth of sci-fi inspiration and as a matter of scientific interest. Dick, however, experienced firsthand a similar type of phenomena to that which Fort wrote about and gives an insight into the overlap between fiction and reality. Through careful chronological textual analysis, this paper reveals Fort's influence and its staying power from the initial publication of his works to the present.