

“Microscope” — A Lost Poem by Louis Ginsberg

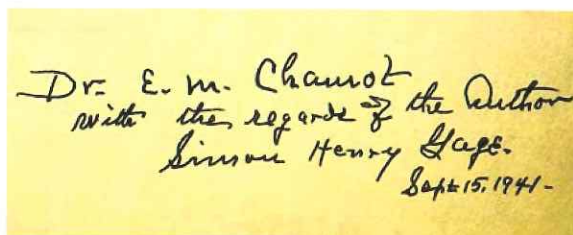
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Microscopists know that the world is both big and small.

Every year I take my light microscopy class to the Rare & Manuscript Collections at Kroch Library of Cornell University. David Corson, the curator of the History of Science Collections, shares his knowledge and love of books and science with my students. He makes it possible for my students to travel through time when he shows them Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia* (published in 1665, Christian Huygens’ *Traité de la lumière* (1690), Isaac Newton’s *Opticks, or, A treatise of the reflections, inflections and colours of light* (1704), Henry Baker’s *The microscope made easy* (1741), George Adam’s *Micrographia illustrata* (1746), his son George’s *Essays on the microscope* (1787), Thomas Young’s *A course of lectures on natural philosophy and the mechanical arts* (1807) and many other books on light and microscopy.

David usually brings in a surprise or two each year. This year he brought in the 17th edition of



Dr. E. M. Chamot
with the regards of the Author
Simon Henry Gage.
Sept 15, 1941-

Microscope

With bated breath and buoyant hope,
Man bends above the microscope;
The question, pulsing deep in dark,
Splinters to many a question mark.
He looks upon a point to check
The tiny, faint and finite speck;
And yet the more he stares and broods,
It swells into infinitudes.
The more he peers into the middle
Of particles that shape the riddle,
The lens, for all that he can see,
But magnifies the mystery . . .
LOUIS GINSBERG.

Photos courtesy of Randy Wayne

The poem “Microscope” by Louis Ginsberg was cut from a newspaper and pasted inside the book, *The Microscope* by Simon Henry Gage. Above the poem, Gage had written a presentation note to Émile M. Chamot, professor of chemical microscopy at Cornell University.

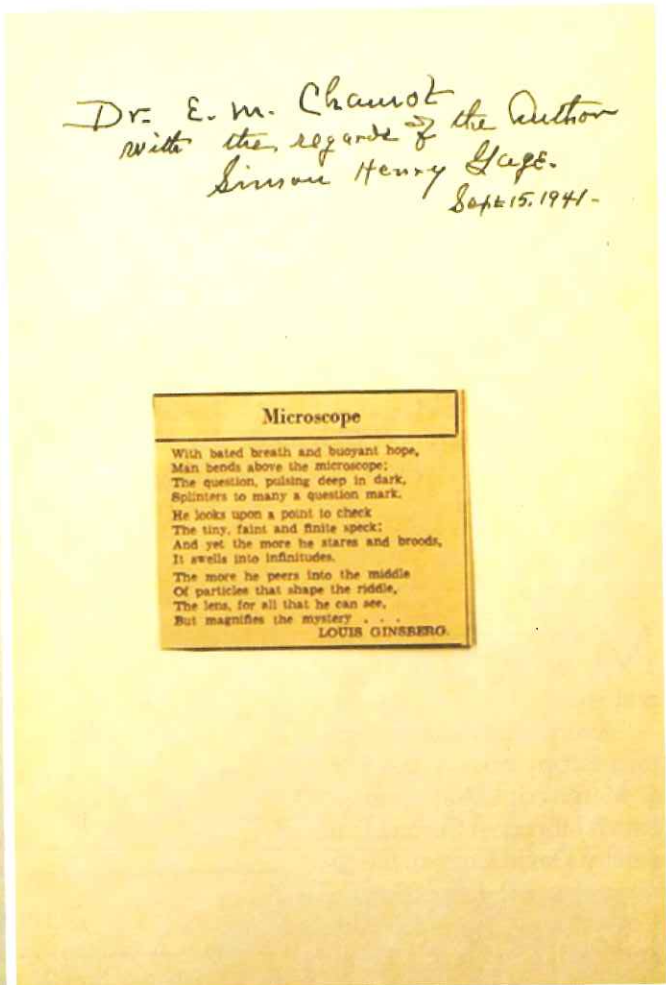
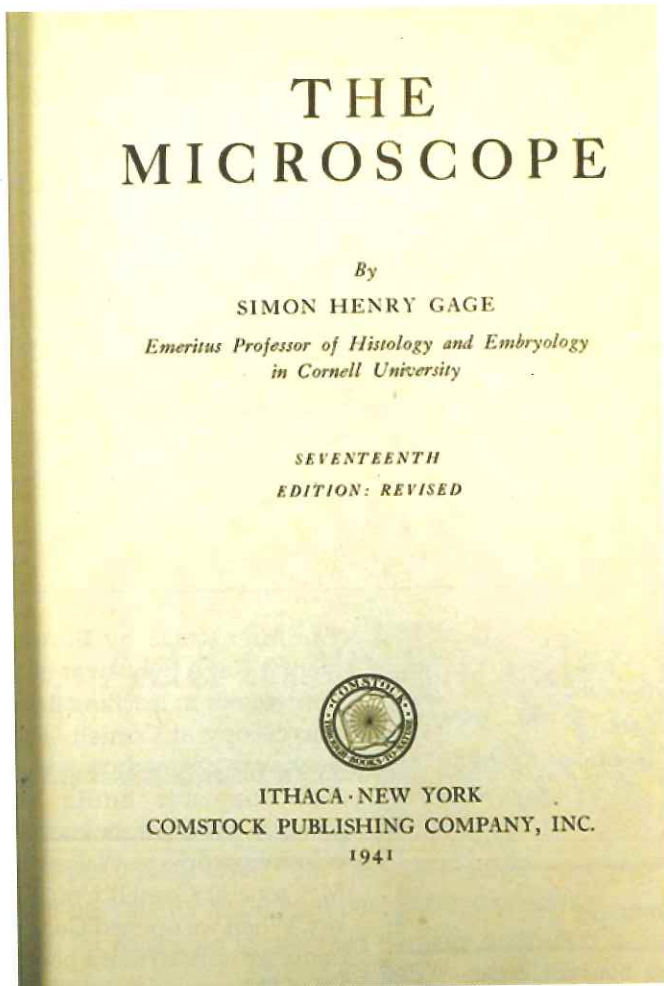
The Microscope by Simon Henry Gage, who was my predecessor in teaching light microscopy at Cornell. The book was a signed presentation copy for Émile M. Chamot, who taught chemical microscopy to Walter C. McCrone at Cornell University. When we opened Gage’s book, we noticed that a poem titled “Microscope” by Louis Ginsberg was cut from a newspaper and pasted into the book.

“Microscope” is a beautiful poem that captures the small and large world that microscopists know so well. Seeing that the poet’s name was Louis Ginsberg, I couldn’t help but wonder if he was related to Beat poet Allen Ginsberg (author of the epic “Howl”). He is. Louis Ginsberg is Allen’s father.

I got the *Collected Poems* of Louis Ginsberg, which was edited by Michael Fournier (Northern Lights:

Orono, ME, 1992) but noticed that the poem that was pasted into Chamot’s copy of Gage’s book did not appear in the *Collected Poems*. Instead, there was an

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Photos courtesy of Randy Wayne

The inside title page of *The Microscope* by Simon Henry Gage (left) and the entire page from Gage's book with his presentation note to Émile M. Chamot and the pasted newspaper cutout of Louis Ginsberg's "Microscope" poem.

epigram with the same title:

Microscope

The more man delves
Into the dark,
The more he enlarges
A question-mark.

Bent like a question
And wonder-eyed,
Man peers at himself,
Magnified.

I wrote to Michael Fournier asking him if he knew of the poem. He did not, and for that reason, I am happy that it will appear for all to see here in *The Microscope*

LOUIS GINSBERG
COLLECTED POEMS



Louis Ginsberg

Louis Ginsberg's *Collected Poems*, edited by Michael Fournier (Northern Lights), doesn't contain the poem pasted in Gage's book but includes an epigram also titled "Microscope" (left).

journal. I invite those who attend the McCrone Research Institute's Chemical Microscopy course, taught annually at Cornell University, to stop by the Kroch Library's Rare & Manuscript Collections and see the poem "Microscope" in Chamot's copy of Gage's book, *The Microscope*.

To add another piece to this small-world story, Fournier is himself a poet, who has written a book of verse titled, *Einstein* (Northern Lights: Orono, ME, 1991). We all know Albert Einstein as the discoverer of the quantum of light. He is also an inspiration to poets.

And, oh yes, I bought the *Collected Poems* by Louis Ginsberg online for a few dollars, and to my joy, I found that it had been autographed by his son, Allen Ginsberg. It sure is a big and a small world.

I thank David Corson for showing me the book, Michael Fournier for his help in trying to find the original newspaper source of the poem and Peter Wittich for photographing the poem.

Editor's note: Randy Wayne also submitted the following poem by Robert Frost:

A Considerable Speck (Microscopic)

A speck that would have been beneath my sight
 On any but a paper sheet so white
 Set off across what I had written there.
 And I had idly poised my pen in air
 To stop it with a period of ink
 When something strange about it made me think,
 This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,
 But unmistakably a living mite
 With inclinations it could call its own.
 It paused as with suspicion of my pen,
 And then came racing wildly on again
 To where my manuscript was not yet dry;
 Then paused again and either drank or smelt—
 With loathing, for again it turned to fly.
 Plainly with an intelligence I dealt.
 It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,
 Yet must have had a set of them complete
 To express how much it didn't want to die.
 It ran with terror and with cunning crept.
 It faltered: I could see it hesitate;
 Then in the middle of the open sheet
 Cower down in desperation to accept
 Whatever I accorded it of fate.
 I have none of the tenderer-than-thou
 Collectivistic regimenting love
 With which the modern world is being swept.
 But this poor microscopic item now!
 Since it was nothing I knew evil of
 I let it lie there till I hope it slept.

I have a mind myself and recognize
 Mind when I meet with it in any guise
 No one can know how glad I am to find
 On any sheet the least display of mind.