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LOVECRAFT:

A LOOK BEHIND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS

LIN CARTER



WHAT SOURCES SUPPLIED THE GREATEST HORROR WRITER OF ALL TIME WITH THE GRISLY BACKGROUNDS FOR THE CTHULHU MYTHOS?

Where did the Deep Ones come from?

What powerful youthful enthusiasms forged Lovecraft's great novella of Antarctic horror?

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THE TOMB AND OTHER TALES

THE DREAM-QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH

THE HORROR IN THE MUSEUM AND OTHER REVISIONS

THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD

THE DOOM THAT CAME TO SARNATH

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Lovecraft: A Look Behind the "Cthulhu Mythos"

Lin Carter

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This study of the Cthulhu Mythos is dedicated to the new generation of writers now contributing to it:

J. RAMSEY CAMPBELL

BRIAN LUMLEY

GARY MYERS

JAMES WADE
and
COLIN WILSON

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A word of thanks

In researching and writing this book, I have called on many friends and colleagues for advice and assistance. It seems only proper to thank them here for their many kindnesses. I am most grateful to Robert A. W. Lowndes and Frank Belknap Long for sending me copies of certain rare and obscure items in the Mythos, the texts of which I had else found it all but impossible to obtain; to L. Sprague de Camp, for lending me copies of certain unpublished letters written ness in supplying me with information on yet-unpub by Clark Ashton Smith to Lovecraft, and for permitting lished monograph on Lovecraft; to Donald A. Wollheim, for sharing with me some of his memories of Lovecraft; and to August Derleth, Robert Bloch, and Frank Belknap Long, for answering many questions and helping to resolve several difficult problems of Lovecraftian lore.

Above all, I am particularly grateful for the help, advice, encouragement and assistance of August Derleth, who died while this book was being written. Although his own work schedule was crowded, he was never too busy to answer an urgent telephone call for his opinion or data, or reply to a lengthy letterful of detailed questions. I particularly appreciate his kind-

ness in supplying me with information on yet-unpublished stories of his own, and lending me a xerox copy of a newly-discovered Mythos story by Robert E. Howard, and in reading and commenting critically on the first 103 manuscript pages of this book. He did not live to read the remainder of this book, but I hope he would have approved of it.

In a rather large part, it is due to the interest and the generosity of such men as these that this book is as complete, as authoritative, and as accurate as it is. Without their help it would have been a weaker book by far.

This book is a history of the growth of the so-called Cthulhu Mythos, and it does not purport to be a biography of H. P. Lovecraft. It reflects my own interest and enthusiasm in that curious and delightful sub-literature, and is, therefore, rather subjective. Many of the value judgements expressed herein are a matter of personal opinion. August Derleth, commenting on the first half of the manuscript, took me severely to task for the predominance of personal opinion in what he felt should be an impersonal work of scholarship. Those who desire impersonality in their literary histories must, I fear, seek elsewhere for it. For better or for worse, this book has evolved out of my personal involvement in the Mythos and out of my own fascination for the marvelous stories therein, which were among the chief delights of my early reading. So—*caveat emptor*; and read on!

—LIN CARTER

Introduction:

The Shadow Over Providence

Our century has seen some of the finest craftsmen who ever worked in the tradition of the weird tale. My own list would begin with Arthur Machen and M. R. James, and would contain such names as Ambrose Bierce, Algernon Blackwood, and perhaps Robert W. Chambers. But each connoisseur will have his own particular favorites, and another enthusiast might well select A. E. Coppard, Saki, Walter de la Mare or others to head his own list.

The fame, artistry and renown of these writers assumed, it is all the more remarkable that, of them all, probably the best known, the most popular, and certainly the most widely published and most frequently anthologized writer of weird fiction in this century has been an eccentric recluse named H. P. Lovecraft, a pulp magazine writer who died in relative obscurity in Providence, Rhode Island, some thirty-four years ago, and whose posthumous fame has eclipsed that of every other weird-fiction writer since Edgar Allan Poe.

The extent of Lovecraft's success becomes all the more amazing the deeper you look into it. Beyond the enthusiastic acclaim of the readership of such fiction magazines as *Weird Tales,* Lovecraft never achieved a

large general readership or any real recognition by the literary establishment in his entire career. Not only did he never write a best-seller like *Rosemary's Baby,* to choose a recent example, but, outside of a few anthology appearances, hardly anything of his achieved the dignity of hardcovers at all; indeed, only two books of his were published in his lifetime, and these were but slender efforts, privately printed, of which only a few hundred copies were circulated.

Today, thirty-four years after his death at the early age of 47, virtually every word Lovecraft ever set on paper is in print. Whole volumes of his verse, essays, and letters have been published. As for his fiction, *everything* is in print—his mature work, juvenilia, unfinished fragments, collaborations, revisions, and even his rough notes and commonplace book. The complete Lovecraft *oeuvre* is in print in hardcover and paperback not only in this country, but in England as well.

His work has been translated to virtually every medium, including comic books. It has been read or dramatized on radio, television, and even on phonograph records. At least four or five movies have been filmed from his stories, and more are in the works. His fiction has appeared in several foreign countries and in many languages, including Portuguese, German and Polish. Pirated Lovecraftiana has been printed in some Iron Curtain countries, such as Yugoslavia.

Lovecraft has won a most extraordinary following among European intellectuals and members of the *avant-garde* (the two terms not always being synonymous). Particularly in France, Italy, and Spain, a number of translations—reportedly very good ones—have been made. Marc Slonim, who writes the "European Notebook" feature for *The New York Times Book Review,* discussed this extraordinary literary phenomenon in one of his 1970 articles. He points out that not only are these translations "widely read in Paris, Rome

and Madrid, but Lovecraft is also hailed by the leading critics as superior to Poe. The Spanish essayist José Luis Garcia recently included Lovecraft in a list of 10 best writers of the world, and the French sophisticated periodical *L'Herne* dedicated a special large issue to this 'greatest American master of supernatural literature.' "

Also in 1970, Lovecraft virtually dominated a mammoth, 700-page dictionary of "the marvelous, the erotic, the surrealistic, the unusual"—a book called *Arcana,* published by the Milanese firm of Sugar and hailed as a literary event by Italian critics. Fifty writers contributed to the compilation, and the article by Sebastiano Fusco, on H. P. Lovecraft, was the longest in the entire work.

The posthumous success of Lovecraft, and his triumph over far more gifted writers in the genre, also comes as a surprise when you take a clear look at his work. He has no ability at all for creating character, or for writing dialogue. His prose is stilted, artificial, affected. It is also very overwritten, verbose, and swimming in adjectives. His plotting is frequently mechanical, and his major stylistic device, which becomes tiresome, is the simple trick of withholding the final revelation until the terminal sentence—and then printing it in italics, presumably for maximum shock value.

In all fairness, let me point out, however, that none of the remarks in the foregoing paragraph really means much. Thomas Wolfe was also verbose and frequently employed a plethora of adjectives—none of which keeps him from being a great American novelist. Faulkner wrote an affected, artificial style, at least part of the time, and one of his stylistic tricks—even more annoying than most of Lovecraft's—was the concocting of elaborate sentences running to a hundred words and more. And as for character, dialogue, and even plot,

many respected modern writers totally dispense with these, with no visible damage to their reputations.[1]

The secret of Lovecraft's success, and perhaps that of his popularity as well, lies in innovation. Where Coppard, James, and many of the other perhaps more gifted macabre writers of the century were, in the main, content to rework the familiar themes of ghosts, werewolves, vampires, hauntings, and so on, Lovecraft struck boldly into fresh new paths. Lovecraft seems to have realized that any dreary hack could raise a crop of gooseflesh with a tale of black-cloaked vampires set in dim Transylvania, or a story of shaggy, flame-eyed werewolves prowling the dark forests of the Rhine. These things had been done, and they had been done to death. Lovecraft did not have a particularly high estimate of his own fiction, but he refused to do over again what others had already accomplished.

"I refuse to follow the mechanical conventions of popular fiction or to fill my tales with stock characters and situations," he once wrote in a letter to a friend. "But [I] insist on reproducing real moods and impressions in the best way I can command."

Since anyone could turn out horror tales in the conventional settings, he seems to have set himself the task of making horror convincing in the *here and now.* Time and time again, in the pages that follow, we shall see Lovecraft taking the most unpromising of locales —sleepy old Colonial New England seaports, the verdant hills of Vermont in the 1930's, even the brick labyrinths of modern Brooklyn—and striving to rouse the reader to shuddersome thrills.

Lovecraft, whatever his failings as a human being and even as a writer, possessed a first-class intelligence —cold, analytical, shrewd—when applied to the study of weird fiction. His scrutiny of the entire range of su-

[1]Such as William Burroughs, Samuel Beckett, and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

pernatural horror in literature, which in time resulted in the brilliant monograph of that title, exemplifies his critical standards. Elsewhere on the subject of "how to pull the trick off," he wrote:

> To make a fictional marvel wear the momentary aspect of exciting fact, we must give it the most elaborate possible approach—building it up insidiously and gradually out of apparently realistic material, realistically handled. The time is past when adults can accept marvelous conditions for granted. Every energy must be bent toward the weaving of a frame of mind which shall make the story's single departure from nature seem credible—and in the weaving of this mood the utmost subtlety and verisimilitude are required. In every detail *except* the chosen marvel, the story should be accurately true to nature. The keynote should be that of scientific exposition—since that is the normal way of presenting a 'fact' new to existing knowledge—and should not change as the story gradually slides off from the possible into the impossible.

This notion of utilizing something akin to scientific exposition in building a tale of supernatural horror was not precisely new to the genre. Bulwer-Lytton had attempted something of that nature in his fine tale, *The House and the Brain;* even *Frankenstein* employs surgical and electrical information to build credibility. But Lovecraft carried the idea to its logical extremes, and the result was a new form of supernatural horror in fiction.

Strictly speaking, Lovecraft's best work should not be described as *supernatural* at all: stock spooks, clanking chains, ancestral curses, and familiar monstrosities seldom enter his tales at all. In fact, his essential themes are more closely akin to science fiction—so closely that it might well be said that he indeed wrote science fiction, although it is the science fiction of horror and thus, technically, a new genre in its own right. In his letters he frequently remarked: "All my stories, uncon-

nected as they may be, are based on the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practicing black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live on outside ever ready to take possession of this earth again." I submit that, excepting only the bit about "black magic," this is essentially a science fictional concept.

In his fiction, Lovecraft developed this theme with stories that were very much more explicit. In the ages before the evolution of man on this planet (his stories reiterate), the earth was visited and colonized, conquered and ruled, by successive waves of completely alien beings of superior intelligence and awesome longevity and other powers, who came down to this planet from other planets or distant stars or beyond the three-dimensional universe, the space/time plenum itself.

Such a theme, found in the pages of E. E. Smith's epic "Lensmen" series, or Olaf Stapledon's titanic novel, *Star Maker,* would be accepted as science fiction without qualm or reservation. Taken in the mood, the style, the context of tales of horror, it is shocking and new. It is largely in this respect that we consider Lovecraft as an innovative writer who brought something thoroughly new to the genre of the macabre.

For, as he began to evolve his Mythos stories, we learn that Cthulhu and Tsathoggua and the other members of the Lovecraftian pantheon are not really gods, not even demons—they are *nonhuman extraterrestrial invaders.* One wave of this invasion came from Yuggoth (Lovecraft's name for Pluto, the ninth and outermost known planet of our system), as revealed in a story called *The Whisperer in Darkness;* another race gained possession of the earth in remote geological epochs and came from a planet called Yith (as *The Shadow Out of Time* tells); and as Lovecraft's story-series now stands, the powerful beings who were long ago expelled from this world are not far away, and many of them lurk on the worlds of such nearby stars

as Aldebaran, Fomalhaut, and so on, while their adversaries dwell on a planet of the star Betelgeuze. Clearly, these concepts are those of science fiction, not supernatural horror.

While most of Lovecraft's fiction is worth the reading, and much of it has permanence, his major fame rests on those stories which we call "the Cthulhu Mythos." Oddly enough, while Lovecraft wrote about fifty-three stories (not including prose poems, juvenilia, fragments, revisions or posthumous collaborations), only a dozen or so belong to the Cthulhu Mythos. Indeed, many of his most famous stories have nothing at all to do with the Mythos, tales such as *The Outsider, The Rats in the Walls, Pickman's Model, The Horror at Red Hook,* and many more.

In this book I propose to explore the Cthulhu Mythos —what it is, how it evolved, why it is so brilliant and successful an achievement. For the Mythos has other claims to fame beyond rendering internationally famous the obscure pulp-magazine writer who first conceived it. It is as remarkable a literary phenomenon as this century has seen. And this seems as good a place as any to explain precisely what we mean by this term "the Cthulhu Mythos." In the first place, the word *mythos* does not exactly belong to the English language. Neither is it a neologism, a coined word. *Mythos* is Greek and can mean "myth, fable, tale, talk speech," or so my Webster's Collegiate informs me.

In discussing a certain body of interconnected stories by H. P. Lovecraft and other writers, we use the word in a special sense, which might be defined as: "a corpus of fictitious narratives which share as their common background a system of invented lore." Lovecraft certainly did not invent the term, and he never once used it in print, not even in his voluminous correspondence. (In fact, he seems to have been completely unaware that certain of his stories could be singled out as belonging to the Cthulhu sequence: As far as he

was concerned, *all* of his work was interconnected.)

The term came into use among Lovecraft's correspondents as a convenient label. No one today seems to remember who used it first. But it was most likely August Derleth who first used the term in print; Derleth himself thought it was first used in his biographical/critical monograph, *H.P.L.: A Memoir,* published by Ben Abramson in New York in 1945. But my researches have uncovered an earlier use of the word "mythos" to describe the story sequence, and the actual phrase "the Cthulhu Mythology" used in the same manner, in the Derleth-Wandrei introduction to *The Outsider and Others,* which was published in 1939.

Perhaps the most unique thing about the Mythos is the fact that it spread beyond Lovecraft himself. Other writers became caught up in it, wrote stories based upon it, extended and elaborated and developed the background lore which Lovecraft invented. At first, it was only some of Lovecraft's closest friends and correspondents who wrote new stories in his Mythos—writers like Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, Frank Belknap Long, Robert Bloch, August Derleth. But before long, writers like Henry Kuttner, Gardner Fox, Hugh Cave, Manly Wade Wellman, Robert W. Lowndes, Henry Hasse, and Robert Johnson—who had little to do with Lovecraft, in the main—began contributing stories and poems which have been described as belonging to, or bordering upon, his Mythos. And today, writers who never knew him and in some cases were not even born until after his death, are writing new chapters in the history of the Cthulhu Mythos: Colin Wilson, J. Ramsey Campbell, and even myself.

Lovecraft left twelve stories in the Mythos. August Derleth alone has by now written seventeen, not counting his posthumous "collaborations" with Lovecraft.[2]

[2]Excluding the novel *The Lurker at the Threshold,* which contains fragmentary passages found among Lovecraft's papers consisting of about twelve hundred words and which Derleth

Indeed, a recent index to the Mythos, compiled and published by Robert Weinberg of Hillside, New Jersey, in 1969, titled *A Reader's Guide to the Cthulhu Mythos,* lists a total of ninety stories, including full-length novels, as belonging to the Mythos. (I disagree with Mr. Weinberg's judgment in many cases; my own index to the complete Mythos to date will be found at the back of this book, as an appendix.)

What is the power—the fascination—which the Cthulhu Mythos exerts over an ever-expanding readership? Why has it gripped the attention of many thousands of readers, and why does it continue to do so three and a half decades after the demise of its founder?

It has fascinated me since my teens. I cannot help but feel that many of Lovecraft's contemporaries were far superior writers—Clark Ashton Smith, A. Merritt —and certainly many of them have won even more gigantic followings—Edgar Rice Burroughs, perhaps Robert E. Howard—but it is Lovecraft alone who has achieved the international popularity *and* the critical acclaim. Why?

Howard's success, and the popularity of his own school of "Sword & Sorcery" may be, probably are, transient phenomena. But Lovecraft's ever-widening fame has never faltered and continues to grow. How?

The answer may perhaps be discovered in this book.

At least, to find that answer, this book was written.

LIN CARTER

Hollis, Long Island, New York
March–August, 1971.

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skillfully wove into the fabric of that novel, most of these so-called "collaborations" have been almost wholly the work of August Derleth, although based on story ideas left undeveloped in Lovecraft's notebooks. This will be gone into in greater detail further on in this book.

Lovecraft: A Look Behind the "Cthulhu Mythos"

1. The Visitor from Outside

To begin at the beginning: Howard Phillips Lovecraft was the only child of Winfield Scott Lovecraft and Sarah Susan (Phillips) Lovecraft.

Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890, at 194 Angell Street, Providence, Rhode Island. This was the home of Mrs. Lovecraft's family; H.P.L.'s parents actually resided in Dorchester, Massachusetts, at this time.

To place Lovecraft's birth in perspective, I might mention that at this date A. Merritt was a six-year-old boy living in Beverly, New Jersey, and Edgar Rice Burroughs was a youth of fifteen, then having the time of his life on a ranch in Idaho. Some two years after this, J. R. R. Tolkien would be born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and the year following, Clark Ashton Smith would be born in California.

Lovecraft was of predominantly British stock on both sides of his family. His father was the son of an Englishman who had lost his fortune and emigrated from Devonshire to New York in 1847 and married a girl of British descent—an Allgood from Northumberland, descended from a former British officer who remained in the United States after what Lovecraft himself, ardent Anglophile that he was, would term "the disastrous Revolution." On his mother's side, Lovecraft

was, in his own words, "a complete New-England Yankee, coming from Phillipses, Places, & Rathbones."

H.P.L.'s mother came of genteel, rather cultured stock. In his excellent biographical monograph, *H.P.L.: A Memoir* (1945), August Derleth described her father as "a man of modest means and a voluminous library, which often harbored the young Lovecraft."

We may assume that Lovecraft's father was from a somewhat lower level of the social strata. His profession, at least, was rather inelegant. He was a traveling salesman.

The boy did not have a particularly happy or wholesome or even a very normal childhood. His father was seriously ill—he was, in fact, a paretic—and when Lovecraft was only a child of three years, his father's illness had advanced to a point at which he was not considered competent to handle his own affairs, and he was committed to the care of a legal guardian. Winfield Scott Lovecraft grew progressively worse, steadily more abnormal in his behavior, and died five years later in 1898, leaving the eight-year-old boy fatherless.

As for Lovecraft's mother, she appears to have been one of those grasping creatures who smother their sons with ultra-protectiveness. Derleth says: "Sarah Phillips Lovecraft was a psychoneurotic, determined to shelter her son from the rigors and dangers of life." For the rest of his life, Lovecraft showed the marks of this, living like a sickly semi-invalid, avoiding the everyday world around him.

Lovecraft spent his infancy in Auburndale, Massachusetts, where the family came to live in the home of a minor poetess, a friend of Lovecraft's mother, named Louise Imogen Guiney. In 1915, Lovecraft recalled this period in an autobiographical document (written at the request of his friend and fellow-member of the United Amateur Press Association, Maurice W. Moe of Milwaukee): "It is around the life in Auburndale that my earliest recollections centre. The Guiney

House, with its tower chamber, and the huge St. Bernard dogs which the authoress used to keep about the place, are distinct memories of a two-year-old. We there met the aged Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes shortly before his death, though I admit having no independent remembrance of seeing him."

As a boy, Lovecraft was sickly, sensitive, bookish, preferring the society of adults to that of other children. And he was precocious to a fault. "I had learned the alphabet at two, and at four could read with ease, though making the most absurd errors in the pronunciation of the long words I loved so well."

Having learned to read so young, he naturally turned to writing. He wrote a lot of very mediocre verse, and some early short stories survive, the earliest being *The Beast in the Cave* (written in 1905) and *The Alchemist* (1908). Of course, these stories reveal the marks of the amateur in every line, but they are a fair indication of things to come. Regrettably, he did not pursue this direction any further for some years; in fact, he abandoned fiction entirely. A letter dated March 7, 1920, discusses this period: "I dropped fiction in the nine years between 1908 and 1917. Somehow or other, I conceived the idea that my stories were poorer even than my verse and essays," he wrote to his friend, Reinhardt Kleiner.

Elsewhere, speaking of his grade school and high school years, Lovecraft wrote: "Most of my incessant, voluminous writing was scientific and classical, weird material taking a relatively minor place." A juvenile enthusiasm for astronomy led him to the publishing of a hectographed periodical called *The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy;* by the time he was sixteen he was writing a monthly column on current developments in astronomy for the Providence *Tribune.*

Lovecraft's health as a boy did not allow him to continue on to college. He lived at home, increasingly under the maternal influence not only of his mother,

but of fondly doting female relatives (his aunts, Mrs. Franklin C. Clark and Mrs. Edward F. Gamwell, the latter of whom was to survive him). Then, in 1914, his interest in such amateur publishing ventures as the *Journal of Astronomy* led him to the United Amateur Press Association, a band of kindred literary souls among whom he found his earliest and firmest friends. Publishing his own amateur magazine, *The Conservative,* and contributing (under a variety of pseudonyms) to the magazines printed by his new friends whetted his writing interest and experience. He contributed reams of verse, brief articles, and his first few stories to these non-paying markets. It was to be some years before Lovecraft's writing earned him his first dollar, and in many ways, throughout his brief career, he remained very much the amateur writer, the dilettante, the dabbler—although a dabbler whose strange, darkling talents bordered on a kind of genius.

It is not my intention to write a biography of H. P. Lovecraft. I have no talent for biography, and my interest in Lovecraft's life and personality is secondary to my interest in his writings. There are others more suited to the task than I, and I gladly leave it to them.[1]

But the sources of the Cthulhu Mythos lie in Lovecraft's earliest experiences. Some of the names and mysterious symbols that were later incorporated into the Mythos date far back into his childhood, even, in some cases, to his infancy. Thus some cursory biographical treatment is required at the opening of my explorations.

[1]I once read in manuscript an unpublished full-length biography of Lovecraft, written as a thesis by Arthur Tao Koki, then a postgraduate student at Columbia University. Unfortunately, I read it many years before I conceived of this present book, and thus cannot draw from my notes or memory for data. Until a full-scale biography is published, August Derleth's *H.P.L.: A Memoir* (Ben Abramson, New York, 1945) will serve excellently.

Perhaps the first germ of the Mythos can be dated to 1895. Years later, Lovecraft recalled it in a letter to Frank Belknap Long, dated January 26, 1921. Discussing his story *The Nameless City* (which, as we shall see, was the first story ever written in the Mythos), Lovecraft wrote: "At the risk of boring you will enclose my latest—just finished and typed—*The Nameless City*. This had its basis in a dream, which in turn was probably caused by contemplation of the peculiar suggestiveness of a phrase in Dunsany's *Book of Wonder*—'the unreverberate blackness of the abyss.' The character of the 'mad Arab Alhazred' is fictitious. The lines are mine[2]—written especially for this story—and Abdul Alhazred is a pseudonym I took when I was about five years old and crazy about the *Arabian Nights*."

Elsewhere, he expands a bit on this item of information. Amidst a long, chatty letter, written on February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird, first editor of *Weird Tales*, Lovecraft tells: "By the time I was five . . . I favoured the *Arabian Nights*. . . . I formed a juvenile collection of Oriental pottery and objects d'art, announcing myself as a devout Mohammedan and assuming the pseudonym of 'Abdul Alhazred'—which you will recognise as the author of that mythical Necronomicon which I drag into various of my tales."

Yet another germ appeared the following year. Those weird winged beings called "night-gaunts," who first made their debut in Lovecraft's fiction in the pages of his abortive "Dunsanian period" novella, *The Dream-*

[2]Lovecraft is referring to the famous couplet which reads:

That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die.

The couplet, which makes its first appearance in print in this story, is often quoted in later tales.

Quest of Unknown Kadath (1926),[3] derive from his childhood nightmares. "In January, 1896," he wrote to Maurice W. Moe, in the same autobiographical document alluded to above, "the death of my grandmother plunged me into a gloom from which it never fully recovered. . . . I began to have nightmares of the most hideous description, peopled with *things* which I called 'night-gaunts'—a compound word of my own coinage." Lovecraft was only a child of six at this time.

Quite a bit of Lovecraft's juvenile writings have been preserved, and from a study of these early tales, as from the contents of his *Selected Letters,*[4] a fairly adequate picture of how the Cthulhu Mythos evolved can be pieced together. In certain areas of this study I will be covering data not previously available to earlier Lovecraftian scholars, and I will correct errors or inaccurate assumptions in those writers from time to time. The letter quoted above, which alludes to the invention of the name "Abdul Alhazred," is a case in point. One researcher pointed out, in an article published before the first volume of the *Selected Letters* saw print in 1965,

[3]Throughout this book you may take it for granted that a date in parenthesis after the title of one of Lovecraft's stories is the date the story *was actually written,* and not the date of its first appearance in print. In many cases the stories were not published until years after they were written—as was the case of *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath,* for instance; it was not published anywhere until 1943—seventeen years after it was written.

[4]Arkham House, the publishing firm founded by two of Lovecraft's writer friends, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, for the express purpose of preserving in hardcover editions his best work, has, at the date of this writing, published two volumes of the *Selected Letters.* The first volume covers the period of 1911-1924, and the second, the period 1925-1929. The publishers have yet a third volume in press, which may become available to me before this book reaches completion. I have also had access to certain letters by some of Lovecraft's friends, letters unavailable to previous researchers, for the use of which I am most grateful.

that among the several old lines in Lovecraft's ancestry is the Hazard family; thus "Al-hazred" might be a self-imposed pun of sorts. But Lovecraft makes no mention of this; the genesis of the name may have escaped his recollection.

After writing a short tale called *The Alchemist,* Lovecraft put aside fiction and turned to verse. For the next nine years, he tells us, he wrote no more stories. It is interesting to contemplate what levels his fiction might have reached if he had only followed through on the head start his precocity had given him; unfortunately, he did not.

Lovecraft's verse need not concern us here. For the most part it had nothing at all to do with the themes later developed in his fiction[5] and the bulk of his early verse, at least, consisted of excruciating imitations of the worse sort of poetry (to my taste, anyway); that is, the polished, elegant "occasional" verse written by 18th Century gentlemen. A sample *followeth* here:

On Receiving a Picture of Swans

With pensive grace, the melancholy Swan
Mourns o'er the tomb of luckless Phaëthon;
On grassy banks the weeping poplars wave,
And guard with tender care the wat'ry grave.
Would that I might, should I too proudly claim
An Heav'nly parent, or a God-like fame;
When flown too high, and dash'd to depths below,
Receive such tribute as a Cygnus' woe!
The faithful bird, that dumbly floats along,
Sighs all the deeper for his want of song.

Lovecraft wrote that when he was twenty-five.

It is much to his credit that Lovecraft seems not to have taken himself very seriously as a poet. (I

[5]With the exception of the *Fungi From Yuggoth* sonnets and a few other poems, such as the verse narrative *Psychopompos.*

may, however, be reading too much into the typical "modesty" affected by most authors, whether sincere or not.) At least, he was nothing if not candid about such effusions as the swan-lyric above. Discussing the poem, and his favorite sort of poetry in general, he wrote to Kleiner: "Impromptu verse, or 'poetry' to order, is easy only when approached in the cooly *prosaic* spirit. Given something to say, a *metrical mechanic* like myself can easily hammer the matter into technically correct verse, substituting formal poetic diction for real inspiration or thought. For instance, I lately received a post-card bearing the picture of swans on a placid stream. Desiring to reply in appropriate verse, I harked back to the classic myth of Phaethon and Cygnus, handling it as follows: (here he quoted the poem I have just given, concluding)—"This required about 10 minutes for composition."

At the age of twenty-seven Lovecraft returned to his experiments with fiction. He was now living at 598 Angell Street in Providence, Rhode Island, which would remain his address for many years.

His approach to writing was shadowed by his fondness for certain writers. I do not feel that Lovecraft was intrinsically an original writer; he seems basically eclectic (a polite euphemism for "imitative"), i.e., so intensely enthusiastic over a few favorite story-tellers, that he permitted this enthusiasm to stampede him headlong into derivative efforts of his own along similar lines.

Of course, eclecticism is not always a destructive trait in a writer, providing the writer has the good sense, or the ability, or both, to *absorb* his models, transmute them into new material, and *use* his sources, rather than merely to continue copying them. Both A. Merritt and Edgar Rice Burroughs fell under the influence of the great H. Rider Haggard and picked up the "lost race" romance from the point at which Hag-

gard had left it. Both, however, transmuted their original enthusiasm for Haggard into very original and personal creations. In fact, most writers begin as eclectics. That is, it is very frequently a young reader's enormous enthusiasm over a writer or writers which provides the original stimulus for the lifelong process of turning *himself* into a writer. This would seem to be the case with Lovecraft.

"Regarding early reading," he wrote to Kleiner in a letter dated January 20, 1916, "when I was about twelve I became greatly interested in science, specialising[6] in geography (later to be displaced by astronomy), being a Verne enthusiast. In those days I used to write fiction, and many of my tales showed the literary influence of the immortal Jules. I wrote one story about that side of the moon which is forever turned away from us—using, for fictional purposes—the Hausen theory that air and water still exist there as the result of an abnormal centre of gravity in the moon. I hardly need add that the theory is really exploded—I even was aware of that fact at the time—but I desired to compose a 'thriller' . . . When I write stories today Edgar Allan Poe is my model."

Elsewhere, on the same subject, he reiterated: "I used to write detective stories very often, the works of A. Conan Doyle being my model so far as plot was concerned. But Poe was my God of Fiction. I used to love the horrible and the grotesque—much more than I do now—and can recall tales of murderers, spirits, reincarnations, metempsychoses, and every shudder-producing device known to literature!"

[6]*Sic.* Lovecraft affected English grammatical forms. In scrupulous fairness it might be added that despite some time spent at Hope High School in Providence, Lovecraft's formal schooling went no further than that, and he was largely self-educated (as was his good friend Clark Ashton Smith). He acquired his formidable vocabulary from extensive reading—especially English literature of the previous century or two.

The earliest of Lovecraft's tales demonstrate not only this fondness for the uncanny and the macabre, but also the slavish imitating of Poe. The point has been much argued in articles pro and contra Lovecraft's work, but actually the resemblances between the two writers are several and are other than merely coincidental. Poe perfected a style of the short story and wrote most of his prose in briefer lengths; so did Lovecraft. Poe's only sizable attempt at a novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,* was abandoned; as we shall see, Lovecraft felt uneasy in the novel form and never wrote anything longer than about thirty thousand words. Lovecraft's diction is closely similar to that of Poe's, but this may have been partly an accidental result of H.P.L.'s affecting 18th century prose style. Of course, both wrote horror stories.

1917, the year of Lovecraft's return to fiction, proved interesting if not remarkably productive. He composed a brief, very Poe-esque tale, *The Tomb,* followed by *Dagon,* an excellent short story about a sailor who escapes from German capture in a small boat and comes aground on an island of black mud or slime which is covered with the reeking carcasses of decaying fish. He conjectures that the island had been long underwater, that "through some unprecedented volcanic upheaval, a portion of the ocean floor must have been thrown to the surface, exposing regions which for innumerable millions of years had lain hidden under unfathomable watery depths." He discovers a carven monolith, hieroglyphic inscriptions in an unknown system, and titanic bas-reliefs of repellent horror.

It is an interesting prefiguring of themes later to emerge in his Cthulhu stories. The volcanic upheaval that temporarily exposes long-drowned horrors above the waves, for example, reappears in *The Call of Cthulhu* (1926); Dagon himself, the Philistine sea-god, later became one of the minor godlings of the Lovecraftian pantheon.

The next year, Lovecraft wrote *Polaris,* the first of his "Dreamlands" fantasies, and properly the beginning of what we call his "Dunsanian period."[7] This tale is languorous, dreamy, and melancholy, written in an affected poetic diction, yet not without considerable charm. It is the only one of his tales laid in the imaginary prehistoric polar kingdom of Lomar, which he frequently mentions in the later Cthulhuoid stories.

Lovecraft had not quite completely absorbed these early influences by 1919.

In that year he made his greatest discovery—the writer who was to influence him more deeply and basically than any he had encountered since Poe himself.

The discovery was profound; it reshaped his directions in fiction and left an impression that was to eventually bring about the invention of the Cthulhu Mythos.

[7]That is, it would have been except for the fact that Lovecraft had yet to discover Lord Dunsany, whom he did not read until 1919.

2. Intimations of R'lyeh

There are few connoisseurs who would disagree with me when I say that the greatest fantasy writer who ever lived was an Anglo-Irish baron named Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, the internationally known poet, translator of the *Odes* of Horace, playwright, novelist, autobiographer, and short-story writer known to millions as Lord Dunsany.

Dunsany, eighteenth baron of his ancient house, was born in 1878. His early short stories brought him little fame; it was the success of his plays that earned his reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. These plays, first performed at the famed Abbey Theatre in Dublin, or on the London stage, survived the trans-Atlantic crossing unimpaired in their wit, their charm, their lyricism. Indeed, Dunsany once had no fewer than *five* plays running on Broadway at the same time.

Lord Dunsany was more than just a Neil Simon of the '20s, however. He was a fantasy writer of brilliant genius, and his influence on his fellow fantasists of the first half of this century was decisive and critical—probably comparable to the influence J. R. R. Tolkien will exert on the fantasy writers of the last decades of this century.

In 1919 Dunsany was forty-one years old and at the

height of his fame. His American tour during that year was doubtless very popular and successful, although he could not have dreamed just how curiously significant it was later to prove.

Dunsany's American tour included a date to speak at the Copley-Plaza Hotel in Boston. He entered late, accompanied by Professor George Baker of Harvard, who made the introductions. Dunsany spoke extempore for a bit, touching on his ideals and methods; then, hitching a chair up to his reading table, he took his seat, crossed his long legs, and read aloud his short play *The Queen's Enemies,* drawn from the anecdote in Herodotus' Book II about the Egyptian Queen, Nitocris.

Listening intently from his seat in the first row, only ten feet away from the speaker, a lantern-jawed young man of twenty-nine drank in the mellow, cultivated British voice, completely enthralled. Finishing the play, the baron read selections from various of his other works, including the short story *Why the Milkman Shudders When He Sees the Dawn.* The audience was large and obviously enjoyed themselves; after the program concluded, Dunsany was surrounded by people who wanted to meet him, speak with him, and get his autograph. The young man in the first row—he had come all the way from Angell Street in Providence, Rhode Island, for this momentous occasion—was too diffident to go up and shake Lord Dunsany's hand. But he never forgot that evening.

Dunsany's great fantasy is contained in six or seven little books, published in this country by the Boston firm of Luce, now long out of business. These short stories are written in an extremely lucid, dreamy, lovely sort of fluid prose—a prose influenced as much by Herodotus as by the King James Bible. They are tales of quest and magic and adventure in small imaginary kingdoms in an Orient that never was, a gorgeous and

twilit realm that lies "in the Third Hemisphere . . . at the Edge of the World."[1]

Dunsany's first book, however, was something quite oddly different. This slender little volume, *The Gods of Pegāna,* had been published (at the expense of its author) in 1905; Dunsany wrote it the year before, while staying at Rood Ashton in Wiltshire. Padraic Colum once described this first book, and its relation to Dunsany's later fantasies, thusly:

> His work began like an ancient literature with mythology. He told us first about the gods of the lands where his priests and kings and shepherds were to abide.

This is literally what Dunsany did: A sequence of brief prose-poems or sketches presents the gods of his imaginary kingdoms, outlines their legends, and the whole has a very Biblical flavor to it. And for some time, in the stories he wrote after this book, Dunsany utilized this "Pegāna pantheon" in his tales; eventually, he drifted apart from Pegāna, obviously feeling too tied down by a pre-conceived mythos.

This notion fascinated Lovecraft, although it was not to turn up in his fiction in recognizable form for some years. But the basic notion of *an invented mythology* used as the background lore for fantasy stories intrigued him greatly, and thus was planted the seed that would eventually mature into what we now call the Cthulhu Mythos.

Lovecraft's indebtedness to Dunsany for this essential idea is clear from Lovecraft's own words. In *H.P.L.: A Memoir,* August Derleth quotes from one

[1]Thirty of Dunsany's most brilliant and memorable short fantasies were collected in a book entitled *At the Edge of the World,* published by Ballantine in their Adult Fantasy Series in 1970. A second volume of similar selections, to be called *Beyond the Fields We Know,* will be published in 1972.

of Lovecraft's letters[2] which states that it was Dunsany, whom he discovered in 1919, "from whom" Lovecraft "got the idea of the artificial pantheon and myth-background represented by 'Cthulhu,' 'Yog-Sothoth,' 'Yuggoth.' " Derleth further quotes him as admitting that the perusal of Dunsany's work "gave a vast impetus" to his own weird writing.

Although the impact of his discovery of the basic seed-idea behind the Cthulhu pantheon did not at once show up in his stories, the influence of Dunsany's prose upon Lovecraft's became visible very quickly. He had been writing brief fables, such as *Polaris,* before discovering Dunsany's fiction, and these tales were strikingly similar to the style of Lord Dunsany. While this similarity was completely coincidental, it made Lovecraft all the more receptive to Dunsanian influence when he finally did encounter the work of the great Irish master of fantasy. His discovery of Dunsany, in books like *A Dreamer's Tales* and *The Book of Wonder,* and their closeness to the style and mood of his own work at this period, sent him off into a "Dunsanian phase" that was to dominate his work until 1926.

Undoubtedly, actually seeing and hearing Dunsany read in person greatly added to the impact of this discovery. I myself heard Dunsany read on his last American tour—unlike Lovecraft, I went up and met him, shook his hand, and asked him to autograph a stack of his books—and I can testify to the charm of Dunsany's manner and presence. He was a very impressive and wonderful gentleman.

At any rate, Lovecraft came back to Providence afire with enthusiasm for things Dunsanian. His letters at this period strongly demonstrate his admiration for

[2]The quotation may be found on page 66 of *H.P.L.: A Memoir*; as for the letter itself, I have not seen the complete text of it. The early volumes of Lovecraft's *Selected Letters* do not seem to include it.

the Irish baron. "There are many highly effective points in Dunsany's style, and any writer of imaginative prose will be the better for having read him," he advised a correspondent towards the end of that year; and: "You surely must read Dunsany—in places his work is pure poetry despite the prose medium."

Starting in 1919 and continuing through 1920, Lovecraft's production of fiction surged ahead, owing largely to the stimulus of Lord Dunsany's superb stories. Lovecraft still had sold nothing—his stories appeared in various United Amateur Press Association magazines—but at least he had returned from his sojourn among the versifiers, and he now tackled the muse of the short story with redoubled enthusiasm.

During those two years, Lovecraft produced a considerable body of work. About sixteen short stories or prose poems were written then, among them (in order) *Beyond the Wall of Sleep, The Doom That Came to Sarnath, The Statement of Randolph Carter, The White Ship, Arthur Jermyn, The Cats of Ulthar, Celephais, The Picture in the House, The Temple, The Terrible Old Man,* and *The Tree.* I see no point in synopsizing all sixteen stories here. For one thing, Lovecraft's early fiction is not really the subject of this book, and need not concern us greatly; for another, most if not all of these stories I have already put back into print[3] and are readily available to interested readers.

But it is interesting to note the first appearance of many names, places, personages and symbols later to

[3]I have already edited two volumes of Lovecraft's early Dunsanian fiction for Ballantine's Adult Fantasy Series. The first volume, *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1970), contains, besides the title novel, which H.P.L. wrote in 1926, such stories as *Celephais* and *The White Ship.* The second collection, *The Doom That Came to Sarnath* (1971), contains, besides the title story, eleven stories written between 1917 and 1920, plus several more.

be met with in the Cthulhu Mythos tales. *The Doom That Came to Sarnath* contains Lovecraft's first mention of "Mnar" and "Sarnath" and "Ib," while "Randolph Carter" makes his earliest appearance in *The Statement of Randolph Carter,* a very Poe-esque horror tale, which had its origin in a vivid nightmare. *Celephais* contains Lovecraft's earliest reference to that mysterious and not-quite-human high priest or lama, whose features go ever masked in yellow silk, who dwells alone in a prehistoric stone monastery on the cold desert plateau of Leng—later a familiar staple of the Cthulhuoid fiction. "Arkham" and the valley of the "Miskatonic" first appear in *The Picture in the House,* while the neighboring town of "Kingsport" is introduced in *The Terrible Old Man.*

More significant than these, however, is the first appearance of "Nyarlathotep." He appears in a story fragment (prose poem?) called *Nyarlathotep,* and those already familiar with the figure of this devil god, one of the most prominent in Lovecraft's later pantheon, will be surprised to see him appear in this brief tale or sketch as a sort of traveling showman or charlatan. The story (or whatever it is) is unfinished; it is most unsatisfactory, too, and its flawed ineptitude seems to have haunted Lovecraft. He turned the initial impulse behind the yarn into a sonnet (one of his *Fungi From Yuggoth* sonnets) and later employed Nyarlathotep in the Cthulhu stories and elsewhere, as if the original germ of the story, which he had left undeveloped in his initial treatment, haunted him and would not let him move on to other things until he had utilized it to the hilt.

Judging from his own correspondence, this seems to be more or less the case. He discussed the matter in yet another of his letters to Reinhardt Kleiner, this one dated December 14, 1921. Because of the relevance I shall quote most of the letter here, despite its considerable length:

598 Angell
December 14, 1921

Venerated Viscount:—

Nyarlathotep is a nightmare—an actual phantasm of my own, with the first paragraph written *before I fully awaked.* I have been feeling execrably of late—whole weeks have passed without relief from head-ache and dizziness, and for a long time three hours was my utmost limit for continuous work. (I seem better now.) Added to my steady ills was an unaccustomed ocular trouble which prevented me from reading fine print—a curious tugging of nerves and muscles which rather startled me during the weeks it persisted. Amidst this gloom came the nightmare of nightmares—the most realistic and horrible I have experienced since the age of ten—whose stark hideousness and ghastly oppressiveness I could but feebly mirror in my written phantasy . . . The first phase was a general sense of undefined apprehension—vague terror which appeared universal. I seemed to be seated in my chair clad in my old grey dressing-gown, reading a letter from Samuel Loveman. The letter was unbelievably realistic—thin, 8½ x 13 paper, violet ink signature, and all—and its contents seemed portentious. The dream-Loveman wrote:

> Don't fail to see Nyarlathotep if he comes to Providence. He is horrible—horrible beyond anything you can imagine—but wonderful. He haunts one for hours afterward. I am still shuddering at what he showed.

I had never heard the name NYARLATHOTEP before, but seemed to understand the allusion. Nyarlathotep was a kind of itinerant showman or lecturer who held forth in publick [*sic: see previous note on Lovecraft's affectation of obsolete English grammatical forms*] halls and aroused widespread fear and discussion with his exhibitions. These exhibitions consisted of two parts—first, a horrible—possibly prophetic—cinema reel; and later some extraordinary experiments with scientific and electrical apparatus. As I received the letter, I seemed to recall that Nyarlathotep was already in Providence;

and that he was the cause of the shocking fear which brooded over all the people. I seemed to remember that persons had whispered to me in awe of his horrors, and warned me not to go near him. But Loveman's dream-letter decided me, and I began to dress for a trip down town to see Nyarlathotep. The details are quite vivid—I had trouble tying my cravat—but the indescribable terror overshadowed all else. As I left the house I saw throngs of men plodding through the night, all whispering affrightedly and bound in one direction. I fell in with them, afraid yet eager to see and hear the great, the obscure, the unutterable Nyarlathotep. After that the dream followed the course of the enclosed story almost exactly, save that it did not go quite so far. It ended a moment after I was drawn into the black yawning abyss between the snows, and whirled tempestuously about in a vortex with shadows that once were men! I added the macabre conclusion for the sake of climactic effect and literary finish. As I was drawn into the abyss I emitted a resounding shriek (I thought it must have been audible, but my aunt says it was not) and the picture ceased. I was in great pain—forehead pounding and ears ringing—but I had only one automatic impulse—to *write,* and preserve the atmosphere of unparalleled fright; and before I knew it I had pulled on the light and was scribbling desperately. Of what I was writing I had very little idea, and after a time I desisted and bathed my head. When fully awake I remembered all the incidents but had lost the exquisite thrill of fear—the actual sensation of the presence of the hideous unknown. Looking at what I had written I was astonished by its coherence. It comprises the first paragraph of the enclosed manuscript, only three words having been changed. I wish I could have continued in the same subconscious state, for although I went on immediately, the primal thrill was lost, and the terror had become a matter of conscious artistic creation. . . .

At this point in his career, it should be noted that Lovecraft had already created a considerable portion of

the apparatus of his Cthulhu Mythos, although he had yet to pull the scattered and diverse elements into coherent shape.

The key factor was the profound influence of Lord Dunsany. The notion of writing otherwise unconnected stories linked by their common reliance on a background mythology which the author himself had invented evolved slowly in Lovecraft's mind from his first excitement over Dunsany's innovation. As noted above, Dunsany himself abandoned his idea quite early on, probably because it seemed too confining. But Lovecraft must have mulled it over in his mind, instinctively realizing what a good idea Dunsany had toyed with.

In 1921, Lovecraft entered upon a most important new phase. He wrote seven stories that year, and began work on a more lengthy and ambitious story than any he had previously attempted. The first story, *The Moon-Bog,* is a trivial exercise; the second, *The Music of Erich Zann,* is actually a quite excellent Poe-esque little story, frequently anthologized today, and probably the most "commercial" story he had written up to that point.

The third story was called *The Nameless City.* This is now universally recognized as the first of the stories in the Cthulhu Mythos—although it is so recognized only in hindsight. Actually, it is not much of a story—*as a story,* that is; it has only one character, the unnamed narrator, and stylistically it derives largely from Poe.

The tale tells of a traveler from far lands who discovers the "nameless city" amidst the sands of the Arabian desert. It has been lost for countless ages and was forgotten before history began. Vivid atmospheric touches swiftly build a mood of haunting terror: The visitor discovers an ancient temple in the city, and therein he finds the mummified remains of a prehuman race more reptilian than mammalian. Further, antique

frescos hint at hidden cities in a subterranean abyss beneath the city. The final horror comes with his discovery of just such an abyss, and the shocking revelation that the unthinkably ancient race yet lives in the bowels of the earth and has not died with the passage of incalculable eons.

The story is overwritten, over-dramatic, and the mood of mounting horror is applied in a very artificial manner. Rather than creating in the reader a mood of terror, Lovecraft *describes* a mood of terror: the emotion is applied in the adjectives—the valley in which the city lies is "terrible"; the ruins themselves are of an "unwholesome" antiquity; certain of the altars and stones "suggested forbidden rites of terrible, revolting, and inexplicable nature." Of course, if you stop to think about it, such terms are meaningless. A stone is a stone, a valley is a valley, and ruins are merely ruins. Decking them out with a variety of shuddersome adjectives does not make them intrinsically shuddersome. Throughout most of his subsequent career, Lovecraft had to struggle against this tendency to tell his readers that such-and-such were horrible, loathsome and shocking, rather than making the reader *feel* these qualities. It was one of the bad habits he fell into, and, perhaps, it is a flaw of the amateur.

The Nameless City itself is essentially a trivial exercise in Poe-esque gothica; whatever importance now accrues to it derives, as I have said, from hindsight. But in this slight tale can be seen the first emergence of some of the themes that were later to occupy much of Lovecraft's attention.

For example, the narrator refers back to certain old books and to certain writers, not to document the historical milieu of the ancient ruined metropolis but to echo his own emotions of gathering fear. A line is quoted from one of Lord Dunsany's tales; a verse from Thomas Moore is quoted; and there are cryptic references to books less familiar, such as "the delirious

Image du Monde of Gauthier de Metz" and "paragraphs from the apocryphal nightmares of Damascius." (Neither writer can be identified with ease.)

Most important of all, *The Nameless City* is the first tale of Lovecraft's to mention the name of Abdul Alhazred, who later, of course, appears as the author of one of the most significant of all the imaginary literary authorities for the cosmology of the Cthulhu Mythos, the infamous *Necronomicon* itself. Lovecraft does not here identify Alhazred as the author of the *Necronomicon;* here he is simply referred to as "the mad Arab" and "the mad poet." But the tale is also the first in which is quoted that famous couplet from the *Necronomicon* which goes:

> *That is not dead which can eternal lie,*
> *And with strange aeons even death may die.*

Lovecraft also uses this tale to make references back to earlier stories of his own. By way of emphasizing the antiquity of the city, the narrator "thought of Sarnath the Doomed, that stood in the land Mnar when mankind was young, and of Ib, that was carven of gray stone before mankind existed."

This use of his own imaginary inventions in the same breath—actually in the same sentence—with references to known historical kingdoms such as Chaldea is a technique Lovecraft would later develop more fully.

For all the flaws that I have noted, the story is not without some effectiveness. Told in the form of a monologue by a single character, it has something of the evocative power of a coherent nightmare, and in this it hearkens back to some of Poe's more effective tales, such as *The Tell-Tale Heart.*

Lovecraft himself was powerfully moved by an emotion of awe and fascination when contemplating the mysterious ruins of unthinkable antiquity. This emotion he manages to convey in a sort of dreamlike man-

ner, despite his coldly clinical use of adjectives. The mood *is* there; it is part of the style.

This, the first story in the Cthulhu Mythos, and in retrospect, the most important of Lovecraft's early tales, went virtually unnoticed at the time of its appearance. It was published in a science fiction fanzine read by a couple hundred people at most.

The story behind its publication is an amusing anecdote, and it underscores the essentially amateurish nature of Lovecraft as a writer. Instead of seeking a professional market for the tale, he gave it away, years after it was written, to a fan friend who asked for a short story. This fan, a young man of about twenty at the time, was named Donald A. Wollheim, and he was editing a fanzine called *Fanciful Tales*. Some time during the 1920s, Lovecraft had permitted the story to appear in a very obscure amateur magazine called *Transatlantic Circular*.[4] Later, when Wollheim asked for a story of Lovecraft's, H.P.L. sent him *The Nameless City*, which Wollheim published in the issue dated fall, 1936. A decade or more had passed since the first publication of the tale, and in all that time Lovecraft had not sought to sell the story professionally!

Don Wollheim later became a distinguished editor of science fiction magazines and editor-in-chief of Ace Books, and he did not forget the kindness Lovecraft showed towards an unknown boy scarcely out of his teens. Years later, when he had the honor of editing the first science fiction anthology ever published in hardcover—the important and historically influential *Novels of Science* (Viking Portable Library, 1945)—Don Wollheim repayed the favor by including in the anthology Lovecraft's finest story, *The Shadow Out of Time*.

[4]So obscure, in fact, that no Lovecraft authority seems to know even the date of the issue in which the tale appeared.

3. The Thing on the Newsstand

With the writing of *The Nameless City* in 1921, the Cthulhu Mythos was launched—although no one in the world suspected at the time that this innocuous little tale signified the birth of a rather remarkable and long-lived literary phenomenon (least of all its author, to whom it was but another story).

The following year was a landmark year in Lovecraft's career for several reasons. The first event of importance was the writing of *The Hound,* which is of significance to us as it was the second story written in the Mythos.

Here I must enter into a digression of some length to discuss the importance of *The Hound*: bear with me, if you will. This minor little tale was even slighter in substance and more slavishly Poe-esque in style than *The Nameless City.* The studied effects of baroque, decadent interior decor, in fact, are strongly suggestive of the gloomy and luxurious interiors in *The Fall of the House of Usher.* The sole importance of the tale lies in its relation to the birth of the Mythos, and in calling it the second tale in that sequence I diverge completely from the concerted opinion of most Lovecraftian bibliographers, including August Derleth him-

self, who was generally conceded to be the final authority on such matters.

There have been several attempts, before the writing of this book, to catalogue or list those of Lovecraft's stories which formed the original nucleus of the Cthulhu Mythos and which represent his own contributions thereto.

The earliest such list known to me is that compiled by Derleth and given by him on page 69 of *H.P.L.: A Memoir*. His list runs to thirteen titles,[1] and it does not include *The Hound*.

The second such list known to me was compiled by Robert E. Briney and is found at the end of his excellent bibliography of Lovecraft, which appeared in Vol. VII of a mimeographed pamphlet series known as "The Lovecraft Collectors Library," first published in a limited edition of seventy-five copies in 1955. Briney singles out fourteen stories by Lovecraft as the original nucleus of the Mythos; he differs from Derleth only by including the posthumous collaboration, *The Lurker at the Threshold*, which was published in the same year as *H.P.L.: A Memoir*.

Briney also fails to consider *The Hound* a Mythos story.

The third major list known to me was put together by Jack Laurence Chalker in 1962. It subsequently was revised and appeared in the Arkham House book, *The Dark Brotherhood and Other Pieces*, in 1966. I mention it here only because I shall be referring to it

[1]The passage reads: "The primary stories of the Cthulhu Mythos written by Lovecraft include thirteen definite titles—*The Nameless City, The Festival, The Call of Cthulhu, The Colour Out of Space, The Dunwich Horror, The Whisperer in Darkness, The Dreams in the Witch-House, The Haunter of The Dark, The Shadow Over Innsmouth, The Shadow Out of Time, At The Mountains of Madness, The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, and *The Thing on the Doorstep*." I disagree with several entries given here as definitely being stories in the Mythos, but I shall discuss each in its place.

again: while it lists the Cthulhuoid stories and poems written by most of the other contributors to the Mythos, it neglects to single out Lovecraft's own tales therein, and thus need not occupy us any further in this place.

Finally, there is *A Reader's Guide to the Cthulhu Mythos* by Robert Weinberg, privately published as a mimeographed pamphlet in 1969. This list contains twelve Lovecraft stories[2] and differs considerably from the Derleth and Briney lists. However, like them, it declines to consider *The Hound* as a component of the Mythos.

There are yet other lists of Mythos stories, but these are the three most accessible.

Now, what exactly does it mean to say a story belongs to the Cthulhu Mythos? In order to so qualify, obviously a given tale must do more than just mention one of the Lovecraftian gods, such as Nyarlathotep (otherwise *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* qualifies; Nyarlathotep is one of the characters who appears therein), or one of the Lovecraftian place-names (otherwise *The Picture in the House*, set in Arkham, qualifies). The tale must, I think, present us with a significant item of information about the background

[2]They are *The Call of Cthulhu, The Shadow Out of Time, At the Mountains of Madness, The Whisperer in Darkness, The Thing on the Doorstep, The Dunwich Horror, The Shadow Over Innsmouth, The Case of Charles Dexter Ward, The Dreams in the Witch-House, The Challenge from Beyond, The Haunter of the Dark,* and *The Nameless City*. This is a most remarkable list: Weinberg omits *The Colour Out of Space* and *The Festival,* which both Derleth and Briney accept as Mythos tales, and includes *The Challenge From Beyond,* considered Cthulhuoid by neither. *Challenge,* incidentally, is a round-robin story composed of segments by C. L. Moore, A. Merritt, Robert E. Howard, H.P.L., and Frank Long. (The Weinberg listing gives it as published in *Fantastic,* May 1960; Chalker says *Fantastic,* July 1960.) If he means the Lovecraft segment alone, his claim may be valid; if he refers to the whole tale, Lovecraft is not sole author.

lore of the Mythos, thus contributing important information to a common body of lore.

By this standard, *The Hound* fully qualifies for inclusion in the Mythos, as did *The Nameless City,* which preceded it, and *The Festival,* which followed it. If you will examine these three stories in sequence, you will see how the Mythos began to grow, each tale adding more background information to that established in earlier tales. *The Nameless City* is the first tale to mention Abdul Alhazred; *The Hound* is the first tale to mention the *Necronomicon* and to identify Alhazred as its author; and *The Festival* sums up the previously given information about Alhazred and the *Necronomicon* and is the first tale to give a lengthy quotation from the imaginary book and to tell us something about its history (i.e., that Olaus Wormius translated it into Latin). It is also the first Mythos story to use witch-haunted Arkham as a setting.

It was in this manner that the Mythos was launched, each new tale repeating the lore given before, adding new information, and passing the whole along to the next. Lovecraft continued in this way until the body of his background lore became excessively complex, whereupon he became more selective.

Like most of Lovecraft's fiction prior to 1922, *The Nameless City* had first appeared in an obscure amateur publication of uncertain viability and very limited circulation. Had Lovecraft continued giving away his tales to friends with printing presses involved in the amateur journalism movement, he would never have reached his wider audience or come to the world's attention. What was needed was for him to find a professional market for his stories: this he did in 1922, which, as mentioned, was a landmark year for him in several ways. Thus *The Hound* and *The Festival* were luckier than the tales that preceded them, for they were first published in a genuine newsstand-

distributed, money-paying magazine, not in mimeographed fanzines. And thus, Lovecraft finally, at the age of thirty-two, became a professional fiction writer. In a letter written to Frank Belknap Long, he described how this first happened:

> Our mutual friend George Julian Houtain has just embarked on a professional magazine venture, founding a piquant monthly to be called *Home Brew* . . . for this periodical he wishes me to write a series of gruesome tales at $5.00 each—a series of at least six.

The six-part series was called *Herbert West—Reanimator,* and it ran in six consecutive issues of *Home Brew* during 1922. It was Lovecraft's first sale, and it is not really bad stuff—a sort of fast-moving and light-handed parody on the old Frankenstein theme—written with a delightful verve and gusto.

But Lovecraft himself professed to be most unhappy about the whole affair. As he remarked in a letter to Long:

> This is manifestly unartistic. To write to order, and to drag one figure [*i.e., the protagonist*] through a series of artificial episodes, involves the violation of all that spontaneity and singleness of impression which should characterise short story work. It reduces the unhappy author from art to the commonplace level of mechanical and unimaginative hack-work. Nevertheless, when one needs the money one is not scrupulous. . . .

In this amusing preoccupation with his "art" and the deplorable circumstance of having to accept an assignment, Lovecraft displays another hallmark of the amateur.

The publication of this series in *Home Brew* led to the birth of his professional career. And the following year he sold Houtain another yarn. This one was called *The Lurking Fear,* and while it is a more serious study

in traditional horror, it lacks the light, almost joyous touch of *Herbert West. The Lurking Fear* ran in *Home Brew* in four parts, from January through the April issue.

Home Brew did not for long survive its rather shaky financial underpinnings. However, there also occurred in 1923 an event even more momentous than these first professional sales, and that was the founding of the most brilliant and durable publication in the history of horror fiction, the immortal *Weird Tales.* In the pages of this, possibly the greatest of all the pulp magazines (as far as the fantasy enthusiast is concerned), more than four-fifths of Lovecraft's lifework was to appear, and it was with this magazine that his name was to be principally identified.

Weird Tales was founded in 1923, and its first issue appeared on the newsstands dated March of that year. The magazine's first editor was Edwin Baird, and it was actually Baird who discovered Lovecraft, not his more famous successor, Farnsworth Wright, as is sometimes mistakenly repeated. The first issue, now a priceless collector's item, was not promising. A glance at the contents reveals stories with such obvious titles as *The Grave, The Place of Madness, The Ghoul and the Corpse,* to which are affixed the bylines of a number of writers unknown to most connoisseurs. The only story of any consequence in that first historic issue was the cover story, *Ooze,* by Anthony Rudd, which has since not infrequently been reprinted and anthologized. There were twenty-four stories in that first issue, which ran to 192 pages and sold for 25¢. The magazine looked, and was, shaky. Few readers could have foreseen that it would continue for over thirty years and would publish two hundred and seventy-nine consecutive issues.

In 1923, Lovecraft entered into his major phase. As the saying goes, he began to come out of his shell—

with a vengeance. There were several factors that contributed to a tremendous spurt of creative activity at this time. In the first place, his jealously over-protective mother had, over the preceding several years, gone into a serious decline; in 1919 she had entered Butler Hospital "mentally and physically exhausted" (as Derleth describes it in *H.P.L.: A Memoir*), manifesting symptoms of considerable mental instability. For the next two years Lovecraft strove to pay the hospital bills, renting himself out as a professional ghost-writer and launching a literary revision service. In May, 1921, she died.

His revision work led to a creative acquaintance with the young poet and fiction writer, Frank Belknap Long, who would be remembered as an early disciple of the "Lovecraft Circle" and as the first contributor to the growing Cthulhu Mythos. Also in 1921 Lovecraft had come into contact with a dark, vital, handsome and vigorous widow, Sonia H. Greene, then President of the United Amateur Press Association. Their friendship ripened throughout the year, and repeated references to her crop up in Lovecraft's letters thereafter. She visited Lovecraft in Providence that September; she visited the city again the following June, and in August of 1922 he visited her in New York. They eventually married.

Another factor in Lovecraft's shifting into literary high gear was his discovery of Clark Ashton Smith. The California painter, poet and short story writer—Lovecraft's junior by three years—had been discovered by Samuel Loveman, a New York poet who had known Ambrose Bierce and Hart Crane. During the New York trip, Lovecraft visited both Long and Loveman; Loveman showed him some of Smith's verse and drawings and Lovecraft was properly ecstatic. He sensed immediately that here was a kindred spirit. In a letter dated August 12, 1922, Lovecraft first wrote to Smith. His letter, phrased in stiffly formal language very un-

like the slangy, loquacious tone his personal letters usually adopted, praises those of Smith's poems and drawings Lovemen had shown him, concluding:

> I should deem it a great honour to hear from you if you have the leisure & inclination to address an obscurity, & to learn where I may behold other poems by the hand which created such works of art as *Nero, The Star-Treader,* & the exquisite sonnets which companion them. That I have not work of even approximately equal genius to exhibit in reciprocation, is the fault of my mediocre ability & not of my inclination.

I suspect that Lovecraft was genuinely sincere in expressing such sentiments, rather than fashionably modest. For the poems, such as *Nero,* are amazing productions, written when Clark Ashton Smith was about 18, and are infinitely superior in every way to any of Lovecraft's verse, with the sole possible exception of the "Fungi from Yuggoth" sonnets (at this point yet unwritten). And of all the writers who were to belong to the Lovecraft Circle, Smith was the only one whose talents were equal if not superior to Lovecraft's own. The two men became very good friends, although the harsh realities of geography kept the Rhode Islander and the Californian from ever actually meeting, and their letters depict a charming, old-fashioned literary friendship. Smith and Lovecraft were to influence each other's work to a considerable degree. Moreover, in Smith Lovecraft had finally found a friend whose aspirations lay beyond the futilities of amateur publishing. It is very possible that the example of his new-found friend led Lovecraft to turn his attention seriously to professional writing, for Smith, although younger than Lovecraft, had made influential literary friends in the arty Bohemian set in San Francisco, had already published three books of poems professionally, and had even sold a couple of prose poems to H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan of

The Smart Set. Smith was well on his way; Lovecraft could not fail to be impressed.

These varied stimuli spurred Lovecraft to a surge of renewed activity. For the first time he set to work on a novel, experimenting with the opening pages. It would be called *Azathoth* and would be written like *Vathek,* without division into chapters. The theme, he wrote in a letter to Frank Long, dated June 9, 1922, would be "imagination is the great refuge." He confided to Long that he had planned the novel long ago but "only began work—or play—on it a few days ago. Probably I'll never finish it—possibly I'll never get even a chapter written[3]—but it amuses me just now to pretend to myself that I'm going to write it."

He dug up some early tales and sped them off to professional markets. *Dagon* went to *Black Cat* and was rejected; *The Tomb* was sent to *Black Mask,* an adventure pulp; and as soon as *Weird Tales* appeared on the newsstands, Lovecraft, in a fine burst of energy, dispatched no less than five tales to Edwin Baird, the founding editor. These five stories were *The Hound, Arthur Jermyn, The Statement of Randolph Carter, The Cats of Ulthar,* and *Dagon,* (on the rebound from *Black Cat*). In typical fashion, Lovecraft, as usual his own worst enemy as a writer, had apparently submitted them typed, but typed *single-spaced;* that is, instead of skipping a line between each typed line (standard manuscript form which aids readability), he had simply typed the manuscripts as one would type a personal letter. Editors prefer to handle double-spaced manuscripts, which gives them space to alter a phrase or to add instructions for the printer, and so on. It was another mark of the amateur that Lovecraft either did

[3]Nor did he; however, an experimental draft of these opening pages survives in a fragment titled *Azathoth,* dated circa 1922, which was found at Lovecraft's death among his papers. The fragment consists of about five hundred words.

not know or could not be bothered with this simple professional courtesy.

Consequently, Baird sent the stories back, with a note saying that, although he liked them, he could not consider them unless Lovecraft gave him double-spaced copies. Lovecraft regaled Frank Long with this anecdote in a letter of May 13, 1923. He added a note—which must have positively devastated Long, who aspired to professional writing and probably knew such things and accepted them as a matter of course—saying, "I am not certain whether or not I shall bother. I need the money badly enough—but ugh! how I hate typing!"

He did, however reluctantly, retype one of the five tales—*Dagon.* Baird promptly bought it and asked for more; and so Lovecraft's first *Weird Tales* story appeared during that magazine's first year, in the issue of October, 1923. As if the magazine somehow knew its future was intimately bound up with Lovecraft, the issue presented him with a bit of fanfare, devoting a whole page in its readers' department, the Eyrie, to the new writer, and quoting from his letters. Lovecraft, in a fine glow of enthusiasm, fired off a letter to Long suggesting that he submit something to *Weird Tales,* and another letter to Baird, replete with samples of Smith's verse, suggesting that the editor get some fantastic poetry from Smith.[4]

Lovecraft was such a bundle of contradictions that he will be the despair of his eventual biographer. How does one deal with a man so quirky and changeful and perverse that within a month after selling his first story to *Weird Tales,* he turns around and writes a piece of snobbish idiocy to Long such as the following?:

[4]Which, in fact, impressed Baird so much that he broke his own rule not to publish poetry, and wrote to Smith immediately, requesting some samples.

> I am well-nigh resolv'd to write no more tales, but merely to dream when I have a mind to, not stopping to do anything so vulgar as to set down the dream for a boarish Publick. I have concluded, that Literature is no proper pursuit for a gentleman; and that Writing ought never to be consider'd but as an elegant Accomplishment, to be indulg'd in with Infrequency, and Discrimination.

In that passage you have much of what I would call the worst of Lovecraft, his weakness and his folly: the absurd pretentions to gentility on the part of a man who had lived barely above the level of utter poverty for three years; the ludicrous self-delusion of thinking himself an "artist"—the snobbishness of spelling "literature" with a capital L—and the silly affectation of 18th-century spelling and grammar. What an infuriating poseur he sounds from his letters!

And within the next eleven days—such was his capacity for changeableness!—he sat down and wrote two tales—one of them a minor effort, *The Unnameable;* the other, one of the finest stories of his entire career, *The Rats in the Walls.*

Despite a single mention of Nyarlathotep, *Rats* need not concern us here, as it does not belong to the Cthulhu cycle. But it demonstrates that Lovecraft was back to work again. He fired off story after story to *Weird Tales,* despite much groaning over the labor of handling a typewriter, a task with which he never bothered to familiarize himself. Sometimes he coaxed his friends into typing up his tales for him: he describes, in another letter to Long dated that October, how a Providence friend named C. M. Eddy typed *The Hound* for him in exchange for Lovecraft helping to revise Eddy's story, *The Ghost-Eater. The Hound* is only a couple of thousand words long; only ten or eleven double-spaced pages in typescript. It should have taken at most an hour or two to type.

Whatever Lovecraft's personal affectations might have been, the readers of *Weird Tales* responded with electric enthusiasm to their first taste of his work, and Baird bought story after story from his new discovery. Throughout 1924, Lovecraft virtually took over the magazine. He had *The Picture in the House* in the January issue, and *The Hound* in February; in March, *Weird Tales* published *The Rats in the Walls;* and in the April issue Lovecraft was doubly represented by a poem called *Nemesis* and by *Arthur Jermyn* which Baird unsubtly retitled *The White Ape,* much to Lovecraft's distress.

The next issue was a monster. Marking the first anniversary of *Weird Tales,* an extra-large issue went on sale, rather confusingly dated "May-June-July" and selling for 50 cents. Lovecraft had a story, *Hypnos,* in that issue, as well as an extraordinary piece of ghost-writing which bore the name of the celebrated stage magician and escape artist, Harry Houdini, and the title *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs.* It was actually one of the best things Lovecraft had written up to that time, but it was not identified as Lovecraft's work for some years after.

Despite the fact that Baird had turned out some fine issues and had discovered and printed some exciting talent, of which H.P.L. was probably the best, the first year of *Weird Tales* was almost its last one. Never very soundly financed, the magazine was losing money rapidly (from a reputed $11,000 capital, the magazine had run into debt to the tune of $40,000). Apparently in an effort to attract some attention to the magazine, a department called "Ask Houdini" was to be added. This led to the notion of printing a bogus supernatural adventure, presumably a first-person narrative that was purported to have happened to Houdini during a trip to Egypt. It seems that something or other rather odd actually happened to the famous magican in the land of the pharaohs, but in the form in which Houdini had

told the yarn orally to the publisher of *Weird Tales,* a gentleman named Henneberger, it was unpublishable. Henneberger, who was very impressed with Lovecraft (and went so far, in a note to H.P.L., as to call *The Rats in the Walls* the best story *Weird Tales* had ever received), thought Lovecraft would be just the writer to touch the yarn up and put it into usable form. Lovecraft, quite amused at the whole idea and jubilant over the offer of advance payment, described the affair to a correspondent thusly:

> *Weird Tales?* Boy—What I told yuh afore was only the beginnin'! I'm hearing damn near every day from Henneberger—the owner of the outfit—and just had a special delivery order to collaborate on an Egyptian horror with this bimbo Houdini. It seems this boob was (as he relates) thrown into an antient subterraneous temple at Gizeh (whose location corresponds with the so-called *Campbell's Tomb* . . . betwixt the Sphinx and 2nd pyramid) by two treacherous Arab guides—all bound and gagged as on the Keith circuit—(him, not the guides) and left to get out as best he might. Now Henneberger (who is beginning to do some personal directing over Bairdie's head) wants me to put this into vivid narrative form . . . and Oh Gawd—I forgot to tell ya that Henny has *come acrost* wit' a cheque for ONE HUNDRED BERRIES!

Having, as this bubbling letter denotes, a marvelous high time, Lovecraft settled down with, very likely, some travel books and perhaps a copy of Baedeker's guidebook to *Egypt and the Sudan*[5] from which to mine nuggets of local color, and dashed off the ghostwritten article/story, *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs.* As I included this piece of superlative ghostwriting in the second Ballantine collection of Lovecraft's early work

[5]Which my friend L. Sprague de Camp finds very useful as a source for specific geographical data on terrain when writing historical novels set in that corner of the globe.

(*The Doom That Came to Sarnath,* Ballantine, 1971), I will refrain from describing it here. But no one interested in Lovecraft should overlook it: as I remarked earlier, the mystery and romance of antiquity stirred Lovecraft deeply, and the glamorous Egyptian setting of this fictionalized narrative touched creative wellsprings within him, producing one of his most powerful and evocative pieces. It is a remarkable job, and both *Weird Tales* and Houdini himself were impressed by it.

Henneberger (as the above-quoted letter suggests) was not only very favorably impressed by Lovecraft, but was becoming quite unhappy with his editor, Edwin Baird. While it is true that during his year of editorship Baird had procured such outstanding talents as those of Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith (to say nothing of Seabury Quinn, the most durable and lasting of all the *Weird Tales* writers, or Frank Owen, for that matter), it is also true that during that same first year of his editorship, *Weird Tales* and its publisher lost fifty-one thousand dollars. Baird had edited thirteen issues, his last being that giant anniversary number; at that point Henneberger fired him.

To replace Baird as *Weird Tales*' editor, Henneberger had a brilliant idea.

He would hire H. P. Lovecraft!

4. The Horrors of Red Hook

Yes, Lovecraft had certainly come out of his reticent shell with a vengeance!

In March of 1924, with *The Rats in the Walls* on the newsstand and the manuscript of *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* in his suitcase, Lovecraft surprised his friends by moving to New York City, leaving behind his beloved Providence. But there were even greater surprises to come very shortly.

On March 3rd, a Monday, Lovecraft and Sonia H. Greene were married at Saint Paul's Chapel, at Broadway and Vesey Street, by Father George Benson Cox. The couple took up residence in south Brooklyn, at 259 Parkside Avenue.

I have no doubt that his most intimate friends were staggered, if not stunned, at the news, for women had been thoroughly absent from Lovecraft's adult life up to this time. Now, at 34, with checks rolling in from *Weird Tales* and exciting things promising for the future, Lovecraft got married.

No one has ever seriously suggested that H. P. Lovecraft was a homosexual (active or latent), but then, no one has ever seriously suggested he was a Casanova (active or latent) either. He seems to have been fairly neutral on the whole matter.

His marriage must have taken his friends by surprise. H.P.L.'s letters frequently ranted about the vir-

tues of the Nordic race, its clear superiority to the "mongrel hordes" of Asia, and so forth. A typical passage, from a May 1923 letter to Long, raves on like this:

> Nothing must disturb my undiluted Englishry—God Save the King! I am naturally a Nordic—a chalk-white, bulky Teuton of the Scandinavian or North-German forests—a Viking—a berserk killer—a predatory rover of the blood of Hengist and Horsa—a conqueror of Celts and Mongrels and founder of Empires—a son of the thunders and the arctic winds, and brother to the frosts and the auroras—a drinker of foemen's blood from new-picked skulls—

And so on and on, like some hairy-chested barbarian warrior in one of Robert E. Howard's tales of rip-roaring heroica. A bulky Teuton, a Viking sea-rover, a brother to the frosts, indeed! Lovecraft was unnaturally pale, emaciated, and sickly; anything having to do with the sea, even its odor, made him deathly ill; and far from being a brother to the frosts, he wilted at the slightest touch of coolth, and kept the house uncomfortably overheated all winter.

Therefore, it was surprising, to say the least—what with this almost Nazi-like identification with and glorification of the so-called Nordic "race"—that the (now) Mrs. H. P. Lovecraft was a Jewess of Ukranian stock. She was also about ten years older than Lovecraft, a business woman, an executive with a fashionable Fifth Avenue store, and a widow with a grown daughter.

However, they met, they fell in love, and—however improbable it may seem, considering Lovecraft's lifelong lack of interest in women—they married.[1]

[1]Reading the first draft of this manuscript, August Derleth remarked that there was nothing really so surprising in all of this. "Sonia was a magnetic, sexually and physically attractive woman of more than average mental endowment—she was just the type of woman who *could* attract H.P.L.," he noted.

The girl born Sonia Haft came to the United States when she was nine years old, and described herself as "a White Russian of the old Czarist regime" in a brief but informative memoir of her days with Lovecraft. When she was sixteen she and a fellow-countryman who had adopted the last name of a Boston friend, Greene, were married; he died seventeen years later in 1916. She first met Lovecraft at a Boston convention of the United Amateur Press Association. It was Lovecraft's old friend and correspondent, James F. Morton, Jr., who introduced them. Mrs. Greene tells that she admired Lovecraft's personality, but admits "frankly, at first, not his person." She describes Lovecraft's voice as "clear and resonant when he read," but "thin and high-pitched in conversation, somewhat falsetto." He had also a great prognathous jaw and a broken nose, gotten, he said, during a boyhood accident on a bicycle and aggravated—he may have been joking here—because he looked at the stars every night through his telescope.

Lovecraft seems to have been rather sensitive about his appearance; or, at any rate, quite conscious of the fact that he in no way resembled the Apollo Belvedere. He made joking references to his "awful looks" and Mrs. Greene describes one occasion, during Lovecraft's initial visit to New York, when Lovecraft encountered a beautiful Persian cat belonging to her neighbor. "When Howard saw that cat he made love to it. He seemed to have a language that it understood and it immediately curled up in his lap and purred," she recalled. "Half in earnest, half joking, I said, 'What a lot of perfectly good affection to waste on a mere cat—when a woman might highly appreciate it!' He said, 'How can any woman love a face like mine?' "

Mrs. Greene well knew that Lovecraft was in an awkward position for marriage. His grandfather Phillips' estate now stood at some $20,000. That was supposed to last the rest of the lives of himself and the

aunts with whom he had been living. Sonia was at this time earning close to $10,000 a year at her work, and assumed—correctly, since that was a splendid income for 1924—that they could both live quite comfortably on her income together with his small income from his inheritance and whatever money he earned by writing.

She figured, as it turned out, without taking into consideration Lovecraft's stiff, old-fashioned Yankee pride and sense of family position. But at first all was well. And there was that tempting offer of the editorial job at *Weird Tales* in the offing. . . .

It would seem that Henneberger was quite anxious to secure Lovecraft for *Weird Tales.* For one thing, Lovecraft had already displayed excellent editorial judgment in suggesting that Edwin Baird solicit Clark Ashton Smith as a contributor. Smith proved enormously popular with the *Weird Tales* readership, and the literary superiority of his verse (at first) and his prose (later on) was blatantly obvious when compared to the sort of stuff that generally came in, not only in the slush pile, but also from the regular contributors. Lovecraft had also recommended his Providence friend C. M. Eddy, and one of Eddy's stories, a piece called *The Loved Dead,* has since been credited with saving the magazine and helping it to survive its first, all-but-disastrous crisis.

The story appeared in that same giant anniversary issue which also featured the Lovecraft/Houdini tale *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* and the Lovecraft story, *Hypnos.* Eddy's tale, it seems, was ghoulishly gruesome in the extreme—a bit too much so for some of the more squeamish readers. There were some organized attempts to have the issue removed from some newsstands, and it has been claimed (by Eddy, incidentally) that the publicity generated by these moral vigilantes may have been enough to save *Weird Tales* from extinction. (What the readers did not know, but

Henneberger probably did, was that Lovecraft had played a part in this, too, as *The Loved Dead* was one of those stories in which he had taken a revisionary hand).

If perhaps not exactly a "born editor," Lovecraft certainly had a good eye for fiction and the rare ability to infect other writers with his own enthusiasm, frequently rewriting their stories (and probably improving them considerably in the process) and on more than one occasion passing along a valuable idea to one of his writer-friends (as, for example, suggesting to Henry S. Whitehead the idea behind one of Whitehead's most masterly tales, the haunting novelette, *Cassius*).

Henneberger was hot to get Lovecraft, I repeat. He tried to sell Lovecraft on the notion of writing a short novel of some 25,000 words for the magazine. Lovecraft, who was still convinced he was someday going to write the novel *Azathoth,* set that notion aside and briefly thought about a novel-idea entitled *The House of the Worm;* a dilatory writer at best, he wrote neither.

Impressed with the manner in which Lovecraft had whipped the Houdini narrative into shape (Henneberger hopped a train to Tennessee to show the manuscript to Houdini himself; Houdini lapped it up, and wrote Lovecraft a grateful note) he offered H.P.L. the editorship of the magazine, suggesting that Lovecraft take it in hand and reshape it into an entirely new publication: "He has in mind a brand new magazine to cover the field of Poe-Machen shudders," wrote Lovecraft in a letter to Long on March 21. But the offer was made with the proviso that the Lovecrafts move to Chicago, where the editorial offices were then located.

It is fascinating to contemplate how Lovecraft's entire life, it's direction and shape and impetus, might have been radically changed had he and *Weird Tales'* publisher managed to come to terms. Imagine the sheltered, coddled, sickly semi-invalid suddenly thrust into

brawling, industrial Chicago, at the helm of a great magazine, enjoying for the first time in his life a responsible, decently paid job for which his literary taste and artistic enthusiasm superbly fitted him!

Cthulhu only knows what would have happened—Lovecraft might have taken hold, delighted in his new maturity and position, and he might have built *Weird Tales* into a great institution. He might, in fact, still be alive today (Sonia Greene still is), and might even at 82, still be writing.

But everything went wrong. Lovecraft had come out of his shell, but not far enough: the prospect of moving to Chicago (of all places!) shook him to the heart. "This I can hardly contemplate without a shiver," he wrote to Long in that same letter quoted above; "think of the tragedy of such a move for an aged antiquarian" [he was, of course, only 34 at the time, but one of his affectations was to write and to think of himself as a very old gentleman] "just settled down in enjoyment of the reliques of venerable New-Amsterdam! S. H." [by these initials he refers to his wife] "wouldn't mind living in Chicago at all—but it is Colonial atmosphere which supplies my very breath of life. I would not consider such a move, big though the proposition would be . . . without previously exhausting every sort of rhetoric in an effort to persuade Henneberger to let me edit at long distance. . . ."

For the next five months or so, Lovecraft dithered and Henneberger dangled. *Weird Tales* hung in temporary suspension—the issue which eventually followed that king-sized May-June-July number bore the date of November, 1924—and then the roof fell in.

First, Sonia launched forth on a solo business venture, starting her own hat shop. It soon foundered, and with no checks coming from *Weird Tales* during its period of suspension, the money grew very tight. Lovecraft actually went out looking for work, prowling around publishers' offices and answering advertise-

ments, which must have galled his sensitive, gentlemanly soul. Things went from worse to even worser: the Lovecrafts sold Sonia's piano, and Lovecraft himself became so desperate for employment that he actually applied for, and got, a job as a door-to-door salesman! Lovecraft was about as unfit for such a job as he would have been for the profession of dock stevedore or Arctic explorer, and he realized it before the first exhausting and humiliating day was finished.

Mrs. Lovecraft soon found what she described as "an exceedingly well-paid job out of town." She, quite naturally, expected Lovecraft to follow her out, once she was settled; he balked, saying he loathed the midwest, and expressed the desire to remain in New York where he had a few good friends. She acquiesced, perhaps unwisely; for they began to drift apart, seeing each other only at intervals, when she could make the trip to Brooklyn. Lovecraft's aunts suggested he store Sonia's furniture and find a place of his own so that he could live with the old, familiar furniture he had used back in Providence; he amiably went along with this idea, moving to a new address on Clinton Street, where he lived quietly while she sent him weekly checks to live on.

While New York had many fine old colonial churches and similar landmarks he joyed in, the city began to cast a suffocating pall over his spirits, now that he was without Sonia's bracing presence. He hated the subway crowds, the foreigners in the parks, the noisy children playing in the Brooklyn streets. All through the 1920s, New York was continually inundated with wave upon wave of new immigrants, few of whom spoke English well. Lovecraft despised them. The "beady-eyed, rat-faced Asiatics," he called them, principally referring to the Semitic peoples. To his turn of mind, all foreigners were lumped under a single, unappetizing label—"mongrels."

Forgive me if I seem to malign the dead, but it must be admitted frankly that Lovecraft's dislike of anyone who could be described as a "foreigner"—and of Jews in particular—is inadequately described by so mild a verb as *dislike*. *Detestation* or *loathing* describe his emotions more accurately; *hatred* sounds very ugly, but it is a just choice.

Sonia mentions an incident which occurred long before their marriage, when, in a personal letter he remarked, concerning his friend Samuel Loveman, for whom he had a great and genuine admiration, that the only "discrepancy" he could find in Loveman was that he was Jewish. Sonia replied with utter amazement at such blatant prejudice, and reminded him firmly that she herself came of Jewish parentage. During their friendship, and perhaps even their marriage, she was forced repeatedly to call this to his attention, for his revulsion at people or things Jewish evidently cropped up frequently.

From the descriptions I have read of Lovecraft's racial and religious prejudices, as well as from the frequent ranting passages in his letters which laud what he deems "the Nordic race" in terms that would not sound out of place in the mouth of the late Dr. Goebbels, his loathing for "Jews and foreigners" was something more than merely the snobbery of one of "pure" English descent, soured by the provincialism of his Rhode Island background. It was, I suppose, nearly if not actually pathological.

Sonia Greene describes Lovecraft in one of these moods. "Whenever we found ourselves in the racially mixed crowds which characterize New York, Howard would become *livid with rage* [the italics are my own —L.C.] He seemed almost to lose his mind."[2]

[2]In a letter to me, Derleth remarked on this point: "The key to this dislike lies in what the foreign element did to the old quarters and areas Lovecraft loved—it was not ethnic at base, and this should be made clear."

Before long, Lovecraft felt he could no longer tolerate living in New York. His disgust at the modern city, the vastly overgrown metropolis, with its thronged and labyrinthine ways, its dehumanizing atmosphere, all brick and dingy stone and dismal squalor, had germinated in him, producing a piece of literary vitriol called *The Horror at Red Hook*. Sonia was now firmly ensconced in Cincinnati. The long-proffered editorial position at *Weird Tales* was now lost—whether from his own inability to make up his mind or through the publisher's failure to offer proper terms, history has failed to make clear, but anyway the job had gone to Farnsworth Wright, whom Lovecraft disparagingly refers to as "a mediocre Chicago writer". At Sonia's own suggestion (she records) he moved back home to Providence. It split a marriage that was already somewhat divided. Lovecraft said to her: "If I could . . . live in Providence, the blessed city where I was born and reared, . . . I am sure, there, I could be happy."

She replied: "I'd love nothing better than to live in Providence . . . if I could do my work there."

And so he returned to the comfortable life of his familiar old residence, surrounded on all sides by motherly and doting aunts. Lovecraft seemed content with things as they were—happy, you might say, to conduct their marriage through the medium of correspondence. Eventually, Sonia made a final attempt to bring them together again. "We held a conference with the aunts," her memoir records. "I suggested I take a large house in Providence, hire a maid, pay the expenses, and we all live together; our family to use one side of the house, I to use the other for a business venture of my own. The aunts gently but firmly informed me that neither they nor Howard could afford to have Howard's wife work for a living in Providence."

To which Sonia added a succinct colophon: "That was that."

Technically, the marriage lasted for some years

more, and the final divorce did not come until 1929. The parting was very amicable; they continued to exchange letters, even occasional small gifts. Sonia recalls that when she visited Europe three years after their divorce, she wrote him from England, Germany and France, and "sent him books and pictures of every conceivable thing I thought might interest him."

The marriage had probably been doomed from the start. In fact, its very beginning was hedged about with ominous signs of trouble. The night before he left for New York and the solemnities at St. Paul's Chapel, Lovecraft stayed up till dawn typing the Houdini ghostwriting job for which *Weird Tales* was waiting. Then he lost it in the cavernous, echoing barn that was the Providence railroad station, so H.P.L. and his wife spent their first married night together, she reading his notes which he had prudently carried with him on the train, "while he pounded at a typewriter borrowed from the hotel in Philadelphia where we were spending our first day and night," her memoir recalls. It has an ironic postscript: "When the manuscript was finished we were too tired and exhausted for honeymooning or anything else."

So Lovecraft returned to Providence, to his aunts, to his old familiar haunts, and to the way of life to which his long bachelorhood had accustomed him. As for Sonia, she eventually married a former professor at the Berkeley campus of the University of California.

But Lovecraft, his one venture into the world a failure, went back into his shell again. This time for keeps.

5. The Coming of Cthulhu

Once back in his beloved Providence, surrounded and coddled by his aunts, in the environment he knew and loved so much, the noisy outside world hidden away behind the window curtains, Lovecraft settled down and experienced a spurt of creative activity quite unusual for him.

In one single year, 1926, he produced a literary outpouring of prodigious wordage and importance. During that year he wrote *The Call of Cthulhu, Cool Air, The Descendent, Pickman's Model, The Silver Key, The Strange High House in the Mist,* and the 38,000 word short novel, *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath.*

That is an impressive list of remarkable stories. *Cool Air* and *Pickman's Model,* neither of which belongs to the Mythos, are the most "professional" examples of weird fiction he had yet produced; they have both since been anthologized over and over again in standard collections of horror fiction, and they have been extremely popular. Unlike the Mythos tales, which draw upon and themselves lend strength to each other, these two tales stand alone, absolutely self-contained. They are quite good stories, although perhaps *Cool Air* does somewhat too closely savor of Poe's *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.*

As for *The Silver Key,* it is a lovely little fable in the mood and style of *Celephais,* and *The Strange High House in the Mist* is also strongly Dunsanian. But by this point, Lovecraft had almost gotten through his Dunsanian period, and he would shortly thereafter have absorbed and transmuted the influence of the great Anglo-Irish fantasy writer whose work had for so long molded and influenced his style. The final Dunsanian venture, the culmination of this phase of his career, came in the writing of that extraordinary *Vathek*-like short novel, *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath.* As the complete text of this little-known fantasy novel appeared in the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series in 1971, and as it is not a part of the Cthulhu Mythos itself, I do not feel I need to describe it at any length here. But it is noteworthy that, having launched the Mythos and its system of internal references whereby the stories in the Mythos are interconnected, Lovecraft seems to have been in a "codifying" mood and to have used *Dream-Quest* as a means of tying together more or less thoroughly all of the stories of his Dunsanian period. If you will examine the novel carefully, you will note therein references to cities, characters, places and symbols that appear in the other Dunsanian stories—particularly *Polaris, The Doom That Came to Sarnath, The White Ship, The Cats of Ulthar, Celephais, The Other Gods,* and *The Strange High House in the Mist.*

But even while writing this prodigious dream-fantasy, certainly the most ambitious literary project on which he had yet embarked, Lovecraft was thinking about the Cthulhu Mythos somewhere in the back of his mind. Ideas kept occurring to him, which he inserted into *Dream-Quest* rather at random, or so it looks in hindsight, and many of them he returned to again to develop as contributions to the background lore of the Mythos.

The personages, place names, elder texts, and sym-

bols that are mentioned for the first time in the pages of *Dream-Quest,* and which were all later absorbed into the apparatus of the Cthulhu Mythos, include: *The Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan,*[1] the Sign of Koth, the dholes, the Shantak-birds, the gugs and the ghasts, the Elder Sign, the Peaks of Throk, and the divinity Azathoth itself, later to become the progenitor of the Great Old Ones. Azathoth enters the tale in a superb burst of florid rhetoric that is Lovecraftian hyperbole at its adjective-studded best (or worst), to wit:

> That shocking final peril which gibbers unmentionably outside the ordered universe, where no dreams reach; that last amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the centre of all infinity —the boundless daemon sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud, and who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time amidst the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums and the thin, monotonous whine of accursed flutes.

What with all the Cthulhuoid nomenclature clanking around within the interminable paragraphs of *Dream-Quest,* and especially considering those names listed above which make their debut therein, you might expect *Dream-Quest* to be included in my list of the tales in the Mythos. However, it is not. Despite the criteria established in my discussion of *The Hound,* we cannot consider the dream-novel as part of the Mythos —except in a certain sense, as being on its periphery.

Let me see if I can phrase the distinction succinctly: Lovecraft wrote two cycles of tales; both cycles interconnect in certain places; both cycles certainly share the same universe in common; but each cycle is and must be considered peripheral to the other. Despite the

[1]Which Lovecraft curiously prefigured five years earlier in a reference to "the seven cryptical books of earth" in *The Other Gods* (1921).

fact that *Dream-Quest* contains the first appearance of the names listed above—to say nothing of the other Mythos names it mentions (names first mentioned in earlier stories), such as Arkham, Kingsport, Innsmouth, Nyarlathotep, Nodens the Lord of the Great Abyss, the *Pnakotic Manuscript,* the Plateau of Leng and its silk-masked, mysterious lama, the "hairy cannibal Gnophkehs,"[2] and Kadath in the Cold Waste itself—*Dream-Quest* most definitely does not belong to the Mythos.

This is the opinion, not only of myself, but also of those other authorities who have attempted to isolate on one list the Cthulhu tales, such as Briney and Weinberg, and of course, August Derleth.

I have a letter from Derleth, dated January 7, 1971, discussing this very point. It reads:

> I write two kinds or two series or two sagas in my historical novels series. One is the Sac Prairie Saga, the other the Wisconsin Saga. Characters from both intermingle; yet one is definitely SP, the other definitely Wisconsin. In the same way HPL's Cthulhu Mythos is related to the predominantly "non-Mythos" tales like *Dream-Quest.* In spite of the appurtenances you list [that is, the Cthulhuoid names and symbols used in the novella—L.Q.] we just don't consider *DQ* a Mythos tale because it relates to the Randolph Carter vein; they are "related" tales, but *DQ* isn't integrally a Cthulhu Mythos tale. . . . *DQ* was never in HPL's mind "finished" and he never revised it. It was early work . . . and the Cthulhu Mythos appurtenances were rather lifted from it than the other way around.

If *Dream-Quest* really does not belong to the Mythos, another story written that same year, 1926, genuinely and importantly does. I refer to a 13,000 word novelette entitled *The Call of Cthulhu.*

[2]Much later, by a most amusing error, to be mistakenly incorporated into the Mythos as an individual being, Gnoph-Keh, one of the minor members of the Great Old Ones.

This is the story from which the Mythos took its name. That is, it was after the first magazine appearance of this story—in *Weird Tales,* the issue of February, 1928—that Lovecraft's readers began to recognize that certain of his tales formed a connected sequence. This became obvious in the recurrence of names and symbols peculiar to Lovecraft—Arkham, the *Necronomicon,* Dunwich, Shub-Niggurath, and (especially) Cthulhu. They became aware, say, with the appearance of *The Dunwich Horror* on their newsstands in 1933, that here was "another Cthulhu story." Lovecraft's correspondents, fellow *Weird Tales* writers, and literary friends, began referring to these stories as "the Cthulhu Mythos stories," and the name caught on.

But this was a gradual, private thing. Lovecraft himself never mentioned the Cthulhu Mythos by name, and it was (as I have elsewhere remarked) August Derleth who seems to have been the first to use the term in print.

The Call of Cthulhu was the fourth story written in the Mythos, and it was the first really major story. For these reasons, let us look at it in some detail.

As in the previous Mythos tales, the actual plot of the story is probably its least important element: an unnamed narrator inherits a clay tablet bearing unknown hieroglyphs and the portrait of a hideous monster in relief. Also in the collection he inherited the narrator finds newspaper clippings and other documents which seem to have a mystic relationship with the image on the tablet—among them, the account of a New Orleans police inspector who broke up a degenerate bayou cult that conducted human sacrifices before a similar idol, while chanting a meaningless phrase. Yet further evidence of a world-wide monster-worshipping cult emerges: the same phrase the police inspector heard howled in the swamps of Louisiana—*"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn"*—had also been heard uttered by an Eskimo wizard in

the frozen Arctic. Finally the last link in this chain of incidents is found in a newspaper clipping that tells of a mysterious tragedy at sea in which a ship sights an unknown and unmapped island covered with Cyclopean ruins, dripping with ooze as if just emerged from beneath the sea, and several sailors are chased by a horrible monster resembling the idol found in the Louisiana bayous and on the bas-relief.

Not much plot here at all, really. But the thing that gives the story its drama and impact is the suggestive style in which it is told and the peculiar, almost *documentary,* technique used in telling it.

Lovecraft seems to have figured out that it was easy enough to give your readers the spooky shudders with a tale laid in the spider-haunted ruins of a crumbling castle in Transylvania, but quite another thing to raise gooseflesh with a tale firmly set in the sunlit world of today. In order to perform this feat, he deliberately tantalizes the reader with mysterious hints as to exactly what is going on in the story; the tale progresses in a broken and jumbled sequence of bits and pieces of evidence, and Lovecraft virtually leaves it up to the reader to piece the scattered jigsaw fragments together himself into a coherent pattern. There is considerable fascination in this kind of writing; it certainly jars the reader from his complacency, and involves his intelligence in active participation in the story. In fact, it is not unlike the technique used by certain very excellent mystery writers—such as John Dickson Carr, the mighty master of the locked room puzzle story.

Moreover, the peculiar documentary technique adds considerable verisimilitude to the incredible marvels that lie at the center of the story. Lovecraft shoves detailed evidence into the reader's hand at every step of the way. The narrator inherits the papers and the bas-relief from a deceased relative—now Poe, concerned entirely with mood, would have stopped right there—but Lovecraft goes on to document this item of data

by stating that the dead man was the narrator's grand-uncle, "George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages in Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island." He even goes on with further information, saying, "Professor Angell was widely known as an authority on ancient inscriptions, and had frequently been resorted to by the heads of prominent museums; so that his passing at the age of ninety-two may be recalled by many." You will observe that this is the dry, factual tone of voice used by newspaper articles. Not only is there nothing here for the reader to disbelieve, but much for him to recognize: Providence, Rhode Island, is a real city; Brown University is a real university.

The same technique is employed throughout the novelette. At every turn the reader is supplied with precise, factual information. Consider the clay tablet which bears the image of Cthulhu in bas-relief. Lovecraft informs you that it is "a rough rectangle less than an inch thick and about five by six inches in area." At no point in the story does Lovecraft begin to fudge on the documentation: the man who heard the Eskimo wizard chanting the peculiar phrase is identified with precision as "the late William Channing Webb, professor of anthropology in Princeton University," and so on.

As the possibility of a worldwide Cthulhu cult begins to emerge, Lovecraft further buttresses the supposed fact of its existence by name-dropping the titles of learned-sounding books. And here we can see clearly the cleverness of our author, for among those books to which the narrator refers are Scott-Elliott's *Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria,* the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* and Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe.* Of course, the *Necronomicon* is purely an invention of Lovecraft's imagination, but it gains an illusory reality by being mentioned in context with the books by

Scott-Elliott, Frazer and Margaret Murray (which are real books and may be found in most libraries).

When the development of the story approaches its most sheerly fantastic element—the submerged island which is temporarily raised to the surface, exposing its oozy shores and tumbled ruins of Cyclopean stone to the gaze of awe-struck sailors—Lovecraft does everything possible to convince the reader that this, too, is fact. The incident enters the story in the form of a newspaper clipping, which Lovecraft quotes in full, adding the information that the item appeared in an Australian newspaper, *The Sydney Bulletin,* in the issue of April 18, 1925. The circumstances surrounding the island's discovery are reported with an enormous effort at factual documentation. Lovecraft gives the name of the ship, the company to which it belonged, the port from which it sailed and the port to which it was bound, the dates involved, the names of the individuals concerned, and even the exact latitude and longitude at which the island was found:

> The *Emma* . . . was delayed and thrown widely south of her course by the great storm of March 1st, and on March 22d, in S. Latitude 49° 51′, W. Longitude 128° 34′, encountered the *Alert* . . .

This kind of writing was not new to horror fiction —*Dracula* is given in the form of excerpts from diaries and letters, and several of Arthur Machen's best stories are supported by an internal structure of scholarly references (*The Novel of the Black Seal,* for example)— but the readers of *Weird Tales* were not accustomed to find this kind of writing in the pages of their favorite magazine. The story made a great stir, and it marked the birth of a new era in the writing of supernatural literature.

What Lovecraft actually achieved in *The Call of Cthulhu* was to perfect a remarkably clever and subtle

technique of exposition. There is hardly any plot to the story at all—it is concerned almost entirely with conveying information about this world-wide Cthulhu cult. As the tale opens, neither the narrator nor the reader know anything about this cult; step by step, Lovecraft leads the reader through the jumble of seemingly isolated bits of data, until both reader and narrator begin to perceive a frightening *pattern* behind these cryptic incidents.

Lovecraft was to use this narrative technique in story after story from this point on. His readers, by then very much on the alert for any hints concerning "Arkham" or the *Necronomicon* or any of the other tags and references, experienced the repeated thrill of discovery with each recognized symbol. To the intellectual pleasure of the detective work involved in putting clue and clue together was added the terrific suspense of *knowing things the narrator did not:* an innocent Lovecraft character might find a certain ancient book mouldering in the attic; in idle curiosity he turns the pages, while (as it were) the readers, peering over his shoulder in helpless suspense, held their breath waiting for the shattering horrors they knew were coming. It was very much the same sort of pleasure we took as kids watching a film like *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein:* poor, fat, lovable little Lou Costello is wandering through the old, dark, spooky mansion—he is oblivious to the fact that lumbering out of the shadows *behind* him is the Frankenstein monster—which we, the audience, can see from *our particular viewpoint,* but he cannot.

With the writing of *The Call of Cthulhu,* Lovecraft added considerably to the growing system of internal lore. The tale contains the first appearances in print of Cthulhu, R'lyeh, and also, insofar as I have been able to discover, the first use of the term "the Great Old Ones."

Although the story ties itself to *The Nameless City* and the preceding Mythos tales with references to Alhazred, the *Necronomicon,* Irem the City of Pillars, etc., you will notice that it oddly fails to utilize the other names thus far invented in the Mythos. That is, the story takes place in Lovecraft's own city of Providence instead of his imaginary Arkham, and it does not mention Azathoth or Nyarlathotep or even the *Pnakotic Manuscript.* These facts clearly indicate that Lovecraft himself was not yet aware that his works were beginning to divide into two bodies of interrelated fiction: the Dunsanian "Dreamlands" cycle and the Cthulhu Mythos cycle. He would simply pick up bits of data from either cycle to mention in a new story, as in *The Call of Cthulhu,* without thinking anything about it.

In the following year, 1927, he wrote two stories which display this unawareness of exactly what he was doing. In that year he wrote the short story *The Colour Out of Space* and began work on a short novel entitled *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward,* which he did not complete until 1928.

Both stories demonstrate his growing mastery of the techniques of storytelling. *Colour* is a real story, unlike *Call,* which is merely a body of exposition disguised as a story by appearing in narrative form.

Derleth and Briney consider *The Colour Out of Space* to be part of the Mythos; Weinberg does not. I agree with Weinberg. To be considered part of the Cthulhu Mythos, a story must share the background lore given in earlier stories, and must build upon this basis by presenting us with yet more information. *Colour* does not do this at all; it is a completely self-contained story which does not rely upon any of the background lore previously established in the Mythos. The plot is concerned with a meteorite and the strange infection or contamination it brings to earth. There is not a single reference in the tale to Cthulhu or Aza-

thoth or Nyarlathotep, to Abdul Alhazred or the *Necronomicon,* to R'lyeh or Irem or the Great Old Ones. The only point at which the tale relates at all to the Mythos is that it is set "west of Arkham."

Let's be clear on this point: the mere *mention* of a Mythos name in an otherwise self-contained story cannot be taken as proof that the tale belongs to the Mythos. You will recall the many names and symbols of the Mythos which appeared in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath;* if the mere mention of Arkham or the Miskatonic is to be construed as sufficient reason to include a story in the Cthulhu Mythos, then we have abundant reason to so include *Dream-Quest,* which contains ten times as many Mythos names as does *The Colour Out of Space.*

The obvious test for a borderline Mythos tale like *Colour* is, simply, would you still consider it as belonging to the Mythos if its references to Arkham were changed to read, say, *Boston?*

Of course you would not; hence I can see no reason for including *Colour* in the Mythos.

The same test, when applied to *Charles Dexter Ward,* eliminates it, too, from consideration as a tale in the Cthulhu Mythos.

Ward is a splendid novel. It is a real story, with a plot and characters; it is much more than merely exposition presented in a narrative form. But—and this is most significant—the novel *develops its own internal mythos,* that of an old author named Borellus and of a secret system of reviving the dead from the "essential salts" which remain after a body has decomposed. The plot of the novel does not borrow from or build upon the system of the Mythos, and neither does it contribute a new portion of background lore to future stories in the Mythos. Lovecraft did not return to Borellus and his grisly mode of reviving the dead in other stories. The novel is, therefore, self-contained.

Derleth, Briney and Weinberg all agree in considering *Ward* as a Mythos story—but why? Outside of twice mentioning the *Necronomicon,* and an occasional reference to Yog-Sothoth,[3] the story bears no further connection to the Mythos. In fact, it has more internal references to the material of the "Dreamlands" stories. That is, Randolph Carter appears herein as the friend of one of the characters, and there are mentions of the Sign of Koth and of a certain black tower described in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath.*

The fact of the matter is that Lovecraft was not deliberately writing a series of Mythos stories—he was just writing stories. A name or a symbol or an imaginary book mentioned in one story might well be mentioned again in another story very different from the first in style or mood or setting.

Authors are a lazy tribe and frequently plagiarize their own works, unaware or uncaring what confusion this practice may cause later scholars who scrutinze their texts, looking for internal connections. A good example of this is Ambrose Bierce. His famous tale, *An Inhabitant of Carcosa,* introduced a passage from an ancient sage or prophet named Hali, and also has reference to a spiritualist medium named Bayrolles. Bierce wrote no more tales about Carcosa, but another tale, *The Death of Halpin Frayser,* contains another mention of Hali, while yet a third tale, *The Moonlit Road,* mentions yet again the medium Bayrolles.

These three stories have *absolutely* no connection with each other, except for this overlapping use of certain names.

Lovecraft did exactly this same sort of thing, and it is only in retrospect that we can leaf back through his

[3]This is Lovecraft's first use of Yog-Sothoth in a story; the name is merely mentioned and is peripheral to the central matter of the tale.

stories and see that certain tales do indeed contribute to and share a common body of lore, while others simply do not, even though they may at times mention one or another name from it.

6. Acolytes of the Black Circle

In many ways, Lovecraft was his own worst enemy. It is true that, in his attempt to do something genuinely new and original in weird fiction, he suffered because of the inability of others to see what he was trying to do. But he also failed to follow up his few successes and the opportunities they opened for him. He would expend enormous amounts of time and energy in the creation of a story, then would display total indifference as to whether or not it was purchased. *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath,* for example: he never really finished with it, never bothered to revise it, and certainly made no effort to get it published. (In fact, it was not published until many years after his death.)

Furthermore, despite the fact that new magazines devoted to the varieties of fantastic fiction were appearing on the stands, Lovecraft remained bound to *Weird Tales* and to the erratic whims of its editor, Farnsworth Wright. Wright often rejected Lovecraft's manuscripts on one pretext or another—for instance, incredible as it may seem, he rejected *The Call of Cthulhu* —whereupon Lovecraft would simply sulk, become despondent, and, convinced that his fiction was no good, would write to his correspondents that his work was "a failure" and that he was "finished for good."

Instead of doing the sensible thing and sending the tale to other magazines (such as Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories,* which made its first appearance on the newsstands in 1926), he would just mope and waste his time revising other people's stories for mere pennies[1] rather than turning out stories of his own. This was a colossal waste of time: 1927, the year in which he wrote *The Colour Out of Space* and began *Charles Dexter Ward,* began the last decade of his life. Those two stories completed, he almost entirely wasted the final ten years of his life, during which he wrote only *eight* stories.

For Lovecraft to have considered *Weird Tales* as his only market was a most regrettable error. Farnsworth Wright was a great editor, but he had his blind spots, and one of them was Lovecraft. He turned down many stories later recognized as among Lovecraft's very best, and his decisions were oddly facile. Sometimes he would flatly reject a story, then, months or even years later, ask to see it again and, occasionally, purchase it. But Lovecraft remained tied to *Weird Tales* and did not like to send his tales elsewhere.

At times, he would even neglect to submit his stories to *Weird Tales,* as in the case of *Charles Dexter Ward.* This short novel is, as I have already pointed out, a very well done piece of story-telling, one of the best and

[1]Lovecraft seems to have considered his revisionary service as his main work and his own stories as ephemera. When given a story to edit, he would often completely rewrite it, using only a minimum of the original author's plot or idea. In effect, he became a ghost-writer—a lamentable waste of a potentially brilliant talent!—and, even more lamentable, he charged such low prices that he could hardly even support himself by his revisions unless he devoted almost all of his time and effort to them. His charges began at an eighth of a cent per word. Eventually, he was charging a quarter of a cent a word, but this hardly adds up to a decent wage. As late as 1933 we see Lovecraft rewriting *an 80,000 word novel*—for $100.00!

most professional tales Lovecraft had yet written. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that he ever submitted the novella to Farnsworth Wright or, in fact, to anyone else. Even his correspondents, to whom he circulated most of his stories in manuscript, sometimes years before they ever appeared in print, never saw this story and heard very little concerning it in his letters from this period.[2]

We have no idea why Lovecraft set this short novel aside without seeking publication, involving such an apparent waste of his time and effort. He may have worried that the story would be too lengthy for Farnsworth Wright, whose most frequent reason for rejecting Lovecraft's stories was their extended wordage. But if so, why did he fail to send the story elsewhere, to another magazine that did not mind serials? The only conceivable reason is this reluctance of his to submit his work to "commercial" periodicals.

The futility of this way of thinking becomes obvious when you consider that the other magazines were happy to get Lovecraft stories and bought his stuff whenever they could get it—and would probably have taken more from him if they could have. *Amazing Stories* bought the *The Colour Out of Space* after Farnsworth Wright had rejected it (Wright also rejected *Polaris* and *In the Vault* at the same time), but it never occurred to Lovecraft to send his other tales to *Amazing*. In part, this was because of his innate amateurism (a true professional does not let one rejection discourage him but sends the manuscript around to everyone else in sight until eventually someone buys it), and, in part, because of his snobbery. Here, that favorite affectation of his interfered with his work.

[2]Derleth says flatly that *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* "was never submitted to an editor during his lifetime," and that Lovecraft was "comparatively reticent" about the tale, "other than to refer to its length and to his reluctance to prepare a typescript from the manuscript."

Lovecraft was a gentleman, an aristocrat, and while it was all right for him to "play" with literature, it could never be more than an amusement of his leisure hours, and it could certainly never be considered as a *job.* Gentlemen did not work for a living; Lovecraft was a gentleman. *Q.E.D.*

This lack of any concerted effort to sell his stories, together with his story revising work for which he charged such small fees, meant that Lovecraft could barely subsist on his small income. And indeed, he lived like a miser. In one of his letters he describes, with seeming pride, his method of subsisting on the cheapest and sparsest diet that would sustain life:

> Fortunately I have reduced the matter of frugal living to a science, so that I can get by on as little as $1.75 a week by purchasing beans or spaghetti in cans and cookies or crackers in boxes.

How foolish all of this looks in retrospect! Other magazines, such as *Astounding Stories,* which was founded a little later, not only paid better word-rates than *Weird Tales* but would doubtless have been less finnicky about buying his work than Farnsworth Wright was, if only Lovecraft had bothered to submit manuscripts to them.

But to do so—to "hawk" his own work—would have damaged Lovecraft's carefully cultivated self-image as a gentleman-amateur. Then again, he conceived of *Weird Tales* as being several cuts above the other magazines in its literary excellence (and in this, for what it's worth, he was quite correct), and he despised similar magazines as crude, commercial pulps for which only mass-production hacks would write.

So he toyed with writing, vastly preferring to revise the work of another to producing original work of his own, and what little leisure and energy he had was expended mostly on his correspondence. Letter-writing

rapidly came to occupy a major portion of his time; I suppose it became a substitute for the personal friendships most of us enjoy in our everyday lives. Lovecraft, who had no normal social life at all, poured his frustrated energies into his correspondence—which very soon got completely out of hand. His epistolary output became prodigious, both in the number of letters he wrote and in their *length.* Derleth remarks that his "growing tide of correspondence . . . steadily mounted to ten, then fifteen, and even twenty or more letters a day," and that these letters sometimes "covered thirty, fifty, or seventy typewriter-size pages closely written." Clark Ashton Smith once said that his letters from H.P.L. averaged 40,000 words a year, and L. Sprague de Camp estimates that Lovecraft wrote to between fifty and one hundred regular correspondents, and that this mad craze for writing letters consumed about half his working hours.

Any author will tell you that writing letters is an insidious temptation and a trap into which writers all too frequently fall. A novelist myself, I know the temptation all too well. I don't know about my fellow writers of fantasy or science fiction, but my own fan mail averages about two letters a day, day after day, week after week, month after month. Left unanswered, this soon accumulates into a hefty pile of letters. Tackling such a mass of mail easily consumes my working day, and yet to answer it as it comes in also cuts into my work since one almost inevitably goes on to write a few more letters to literary friends.

This is precisely the trap into which Lovecraft fell, and in part this staggering epistolary production accounts for the fact that Lovecraft's literary output in his final decade consists of only a few stories.

In a certain sense, though, Lovecraft's fantastic worldwide correspondence had a very beneficial and stimulating effect on his Cthulhu Mythos. This came

about in a rather circuitous way. Many of Lovecraft's closest friends were young men of literary interests who were beginning to become writers and make professional sales. The earliest of these disciples was Frank Belknap Long, whom he had met through the United Amateur Press Association as far back as 1920. The next of these was the gifted California poet, artist and sculptor, Clark Ashton Smith, whom he engaged in correspondence beginning with a letter dated August 12, 1922.

And in 1926 he encountered an enthusiastic teenaged boy in Wisconsin named August W. Derleth. Of his most recent discovery, he wrote to Smith on October 12th of that year: "I have just discovered a boy of seventeen who promises to develop into something of a fantaisiste. He is August W. Derleth, whose name you may have seen as author of some rather immature stories in *Weird Tales*. Finding my address through the magazine, he began corresponding with me; & turns out to be a veritable little prodigy; devoted to Dunsany & Arthur Machen, & ambitious to excel in their chosen field."

Lovecraft encouraged these and other writer-friends to try their hands at selling to *Weird Tales*. I have already mentioned how Lovecraft persuaded Edwin Baird to pursue young Smith, and how Baird purchased some of Smith's verse for the magazine. Before long Smith began attempting fiction, and the first story he ever sold to *Weird Tales* was a minor effort called *The Ninth Skeleton,* which appeared in the September, 1928 issue. Smith was a slow starter, and it was to be some years before he followed this initial sale to *Weird Tales* with more of the same. However, during the next decade he contributed scores of excellent tales to the magazine and became one of its most popular writers, before allowing his production of fiction to fall off—for fairly mysterious reasons still not fully explained—

whereupon he lapsed into obscurity again, save for his verse and sculpture.

By this time Lovecraft had also made such friends as Donald Wandrei and Zealia Bishop, perhaps the most talented of his revision clients. Many of these friends began appearing in *Weird Tales,* and before long some of them were contributing new ideas to his Cthulhu Mythos, broadening its base, so to speak, and enriching its lore.

Donald Wandrei was a young man in the midwest. Lovecraft found him congenial company (through the medium of letters, mostly) and encouraged Wandrei's early fiction. In fact, he became largely responsible for the sale of Wandrei's most famous story, *The Red Brain.*

Wandrei had submitted to Farnsworth Wright a manuscript entitled *The Twilight of Time,* which Wright rejected, as was frequently his wont. Lovecraft admired the story and urged Wright to reconsider it. Wright eventually did, and this time he bought it, although changing the title to *The Red Brain.* In a letter to Smith, Lovecraft jubilantly enthused over this—as he always enthused over his friends' good luck—and remarked: "I am almost flattering myself that a letter of mine in praise of Wandrei may have had something to do with the change of attitude."

Zealia Bishop is a case in point. Early in 1928 he revised her story *The Curse of Yig,* selecting the title himself. The story was published in *Weird Tales* the following year. In a letter to Donald Wandrei written in March, 1928, he revealed that he wrote the story from Miss Bishop's synoptic notes, adding that "all of the writing & most of the plot are mine." Another letter, written that same month to Miss Bishop, discussed his "revision," and tells us much about Lovecraft's contribution to the story in question. He wrote:

> The deity in question is entirely a product of my own imaginative theogony—for like Dunsany, I love to invent gods and devils and kindred marvellous [*sic*] things. However, the Indians certainly had *a* snake-god; for as everyone knows, the great fabulous teacher and civiliser of the prehistoric Mexican cultures (called Quetzalcoatl by the Incan-Aztec groups and Kukulcan by the Mayas) was a feathered serpent. In working up the plot you will notice that I have added another "twist"—which I think increases the effectiveness of the impression. I took a great deal of care with this tale, and was especially anxious to get the beginning smoothly adjusted.

For this considerable job of writing Lovecraft asked a fee of $17.50.

This story, *The Curse of Yig,* is a very effective and even powerful tale of supernatural retribution, but it finds a place in the list of Cthulhu Mythos stories only in retrospect. That is, it mentions no single place-name or symbol from the Mythos, but later (in 1930, when he came to write *The Whisperer in Darkness*) Lovecraft mentioned the serpent-god Yig in such a manner as to incorporate the story into the Mythos after the fact, as it were.

Several other stories by his writer-friends which appeared in *Weird Tales* became part of the growing Mythos in exactly the same manner. The earliest published of them all was Frank Belknap Long's famous story, *The Hounds of Tindalos* (from the March, 1929, *Weird Tales*), followed by Robert E. Howard's first "King Kull" story, *The Shadow Kingdom* (from *Weird Tales* for August of that same year). From these three stories, the first three Mythos tales that bore names other than Lovecraft's in their bylines, H.P.L. selected "Yig" and Howard's "serpent-men of Valusia" and Long's "Hounds of Tindalos" for mention in *The Whisperer in Darkness,* thus putting his imprimatur on these stories. He encouraged his fellow writer-friends to add to the Mythos and gladly accepted their contributions

by referring to the newly-invented names and symbols in his own stories.

In this way the Mythos began to grow beyond Lovecraft's own fiction. The process is still in action today among writers who never knew him at all; writers who, in some cases, were not even born until after his death.

The same year, 1928, that saw his revisions on *The Curse of Yig* saw Lovecraft produce the fifth of his Mythos tales, *The Dunwich Horror.*

Dunwich is very much in the vein of *The Call of Cthulhu,* and it might seem typical of Lovecraft's perversity that he wrote another major story—*The Dunwich Horror* runs to something like 18,250 words—in the style of a story Farnsworth Wright had already firmly rejected. However, the always-fickle Wright had in the interim asked to see *Call* again, and this time he decided to purchase it.

Lovecraft was in high good humor, as his letters from this period reflect. Wright had paid him $165 for *The Call of Cthulhu*—an amount Lovecraft acknowledged as being "entirely adequate remuneration"—and exciting things were in the offing. An amateur friend with his own printing press was anxious to issue Lovecraft's story, *The Shunned House,* in book form. About 250 copies of this slim little book were printed in hand-set type by the Driftwind Press in Athol, Mass. Technically, this was Lovecraft's first "book"[3]— although, of course, it received hardly any distribution at all.

Perhaps more exciting was the occurrence of Lovecraft's first anthology sale. An anthologist named Christine Campbell Thompson bought *The Horror at Red Hook* for her collection of terror tales, which was

[3]Not counting an essay in pamphlet form, *The Materialist Today,* which appeared in 1926.

published under the title, *You'll Need a Light,* by Selwyn & Blount in London during 1928. This editrix seems to have been rather impressed with the little-known American master of the macabre whom she was the first to anthologize; she bought *Pickman's Model* and *The Rats in the Walls* for two other anthologies, all published that same year. And as if these triumphs were not enough for any one year, Lovecraft also received in 1928 a genuine literary honor when two of his tales were "triple-starred" in the honor roll in the annual O'Brien collection of the best short stories of the year.

Thus, it is not surprising that Lovecraft faced his writing-desk with new enthusiasm, producing *The Dunwich Horror,* which he began work on in June. The 48-page manuscript was finished by the end of August, and Lovecraft circulated it among some of his friends for their comments. He doubtless felt confident that "Farnie" Wright would not reject this one. *Weird Tales* had suffered a sort of change of heart about Lovecraft; not only was Wright no longer capriciously bouncing Lovecraft's best stories, but he was searching them out with vigor. *The Lurking Fear* had been resurrected from the pages of the now-defunct *Home Brew* and had appeared in Wright's magazine.

I don't know why Farnsworth Wright suddenly became so receptive to Lovecraftian submissions, but he may have become just a bit worried about losing Lovecraft. After all, *Amazing Stories* had taken *The Colour Out of Space,* and, more recently, a brand new magazine devoted to horror fiction—and thus a direct competitor to *Weird Tales*—had recently appeared on the scene. The new magazine was *Tales of Magic and Mystery,* and its editor had promptly snapped up an unpublished Lovecraft story called *Cool Air.* At any rate, for whatever reasons, Farnsworth Wright was suddenly interested in the gentleman from Providence, and *The*

Dunwich Horror was *not* rejected; Wright bought it on the spot.

The Dunwich Horror is an excellent tale. In it Lovecraft began to explore his mythical region of Massachusetts—which I like to call "Miskatonic County," although he never did—much of it set down on paper for the first time. There had been occasional references in earlier tales to such communities as Arkham and Kingsport, but here we get a guided tour in depth of the "Lovecraft region" and learn much we did not previously know about its geography.

The tale is a back-country scandal: the cretinous Lavinia Whateley is "a somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of 35, living with an aged and half-insane father about whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth." This unappetizing damsel produces a child of unknown parentage, causing the village gossips to whisper scandalous things. The boy grows into a brilliant, remarkably ugly and repellent young genius, and the story follows his studies in certain forbidden subjects. In particular, his researches center about that abhorrent and blasphemous *Necronomicon,* and for the first time we learn that an English translation exists, that of an Elizabethan scholar, Dr. Dee. We also learn of the few libraries wherein copies of the *Necronomicon* are preserved in its various translations. We hear of the Miskatonic University Library in Arkham, for example, which crops up in most of the latter stories.

The first really major quotation from Alhazred appears in this fifth Mythos story—some three hundred and eighty words from a single passage is quoted—and we notice here how Lovecraft is still using his technique of building on the lore he has given in earlier tales, for Cthulhu is mentioned, and so is Kadath, and a new divinity, Shub-Niggurath, makes her debut in print in this tale. But the center of the story is occupied by

Yog-Sothoth, who was first introduced in a non-Mythos story, *Charles Dexter Ward,* as you will recall. Here we learn that Yog-Sothoth is one of the Great Old Ones and that he is considered "the key to the gate" and "the guardian of the gate," by which word Lovecraft obviously means to suggest some sort of shortcut between the dimensions—a "Door to Outside."

The librarian at Miskatonic U, Dr. Henry Armitage, begins putting two and two together, much in the same manner as the nameless narrator of *The Call of Cthulhu*—but whereas that tale was pure exposition disguised as story, this one is all story, although containing relevant exposition. A mood of tension and gathering horror permeates the story, which culminates in a shattering climax when it gradually comes to light that this oddly repulsive, overgrown, and strangely mature youth is a half-human hybrid begotten upon the flesh of poor Lavinia Whateley by Yog-Sothoth himself.

The ultimate horror lies in the discovery of the youth's twin brother, kept imprisoned and pent up from the light of day all these years. In familiar fashion, Lovecraft reserves the full revelation for the final sentence, italicized for maximum impact. The towering, hideous, extraterrestrial monster thus discovered—

"It was his twin brother, but it looked more like the father than he did."

7. The Gathering of the Shadows

As was ever his way, Lovecraft followed a period of renewed creativity with a period of dithering, self-doubts, and nonproductivity. As though the extraordinary efforts involved in writing so major a story as *The Dunwich Horror* had for a time exhausted his imagination, he produced nothing whatsoever in the following year, 1929.

For one thing, he worried much about what he felt was a lack of originality in his work. He talked of his early imaginative feats by which he had projected himself into the colonial atmosphere of New England, and in a letter to Miss Elizabeth Toldridge, dated March 8, 1929, discussed how his romantic antiquarian interests dominated his own talent.

> My writing soon became distorted—till at length I wrote only as a means of re-creating around me the atmosphere of my 18th century favourites. . . . everything succumbed to my one intense purpose of thinking & dreaming myself back into that world of periwigs & long s's which for some odd reason seemed to me the normal world. Thus was formed a habit of imitativeness which I can never wholly shake off. Even when I break

> away, it is generally only through imitating something else!

And to this plaint he added a most revealing cry—

> There are my "Poe" pieces & my "Dunsany" pieces —but alas—where are my Lovecraft pieces?

As most authors will agree, this sort of doubt in one's own powers or in the value of one's own work can be very self-defeating. Many an author's block has been born in such moments of inner doubt. Self-confidence is basic equipment, and part of every professional's gear.

But Lovecraft had other problems besides this lack of confidence. The British anthologies that had reprinted some of his stories from *Weird Tales* had failed to pay for them, and Farnsworth Wright contemplated legal action against the publishers involved and attempted to enlist Lovecraft as a co-plaintiff. Lovecraft rather reluctantly agreed, but he was in particularly poor financial condition at the time and dared not risk incurring any expenses. Early in 1929 he wrote to Farnsworth Wright, agreeing to join the suit, saying:

> I suppose it's all right so long as there is positively no obligation for expense on my part in case of defeat. My financial stress is such that I am absolutely unable to incur any possible outgo or assessment beyond the barest necessities. . . . Therefore—it being understood that I am in no position to share in the burthens of defeat—you may ask for me if you wish.

He added with the pessimism typical of this low period, "I doubt if my profits will amount to very much in case of victory. . . ."

The creative energy he would ordinarily have poured into his own work was diverted into other channels.

The letters he wrote during 1929 became longer and longer; one of them, written during February and March of that year, sprawls across twenty-eight *printed* pages in the second volume of the *Selected Letters*. We can, I think, get a glimpse of the sort of internal self-questioning Lovecraft seems to have been suffering through all that year from a phrase or two in a letter he wrote to Clark Ashton Smith on March 22nd. Smith had sent him a sheaf of recent poems, and Lovecraft replied:

> There isn't one which failed to charm me . . . your never-ending genius & fertility are both marvelous and enviable. I can't write except when blessed with reposeful leisure—haven't produced a thing since *The Dunwich Horror*.

Despite his chronic state of impecuniosity, Lovecraft did a bit of traveling that year. In early spring he ventured to Yonkers for a brief visit with a friend named Vrest Orton.[1] The trip soon turned into an antiquarian orgy: he visited his favorite museums and old buildings, noting with a pang of dismay how the quaint colonial appearance of certain portions of Greenwich Village were swiftly passing. Then, with Orton, came a motor trip to visit W. Paul Cook in Athol, Massachusetts.

This lengthy excursion was followed by even more extensive travels, for in late April he went to Philadelphia and then on to Richmond, Virginia—quite a change of pace for Lovecraft, who never spent a single night away from his own home until he was fully thirty years old! His letters from Virginia enthuse over the antiquarian treasures of Williamsburg and Yorktown and their wealth of historical associations. He becomes almost ecstatic when visiting Jamestown:

[1]"It is a curiously ironic circumstance that the numerical majority of my friends live in & near New York—a town I detest so heartily!" he wrote that April, concerning this trip.

> Jamestown is one of the most powerful imaginative stimuli I have ever received. To stand upon the soil where Elizabethan gentlemen-adventurers first broke ground for the settlement of the western world is to experience a thrill that nothing else can give.

This he wrote to Elizabeth Toldridge on May 4. Still more travels followed—to Washington, to Philadelphia again, and from thence back to New York, where Frank Belknap Long and his parents drove Lovecraft up the Hudson to Kingston, the home of his and Long's correspondent-friend, Bernard Austin Dwyer, whom neither he nor Long had met. They visited Dwyer for several days, Lovecraft digging with great curiosity into the early colonial and even Indian history of the region. His description of the towns around Kingston and their history filled ten full pages in another letter to Elizabeth Toldridge, written May 29th when he was back in Providence.

Most likely, Lovecraft's only fiction during 1929 was his lengthy and poorly-paid revisions of the work of others. He seems to have been sorely missed, and his absence from the pages of *Weird Tales* may have fomented something in the nature of a crisis.

Farnsworth Wright had published *The Call of Cthulhu* in his issue for February, 1928. Even that major piece of Lovecraftiana did not satisfy the readers for long, and they were clamoring for more. Wright had only two unpublished Lovecraft manuscripts on hand, one being *The Silver Key,* a Dunsanian fable completed three years before. Wright ran that minor tale in his January, 1929 issue, but that was only a stopgap. The readers wanted more Cthulhu! So Wright included *The Dunwich Horror* in his April 1929 issue. If anything, this new tale was even more of a major work than *Call,* so instead of glutting the hunger of Lovecraft's readers, *The Dunwich Horror* exacerbated it, and the demand increased.

But Farnsworth Wright had no more unpublished Lovecraft on hand, and none seemed forthcoming from Providence. So, for his September issue, Wright did something quite unprecedented and reprinted *The Hound.* This becomes all the more unusual upon recalling that Wright had first published this tale only a few years before, in his February 1924 issue. I think the fact of this surprising reprint suggests quite definitely that *Weird Tales* was receiving an extraordinary spate of letters demanding more and more Lovecraft.

At any rate, the following year saw Lovecraft, his year-long "vacation" concluded, return to work on his own fiction once again, and that year he produced yet a third Mythos tale of considerable length: *The Whisperer in Darkness.*

Lovecraft had been steadily getting further and further away from the short story lengths he had first mastered—following Poe's brilliant examples of horror fiction in the shorter lengths. *The Call of Cthulhu* had totaled about thirteen thousand words; *The Dunwich Horror* had exceeded eighteen thousand; now, with *Whisperer,* Lovecraft produced a tale of twenty-five thousand words, his longest story in the Mythos yet. It is, I think, the opinion of most authorities that, in achieving novella length, Lovecraft found the perfect story size to fit his particular kind of writing. With 25,000 words to play around with, he could not only develop plot and characterization—both of which had from the first been his major lacks—but he also had the space to fit in the sort of elaborate background lore and exposition he needed for the stories in the Mythos.

Whisperer is a very good story, one of his best. As the plot goes, Professor Wilmarth, folklorist and literature instructor at Miskatonic University, is studying obscure superstitions in backwoods New England. A correspondence springs up between Wilmarth and an eccentric Vermont recluse named Akeley, whose researches along the same lines have led him to the brink

of astounding and terrible discoveries. Through an exchange of correspondence (which Lovecraft quotes verbatim), Akeley tantalizes Wilmarth's curiosity with cryptic references to certain ancient books, among them the *Necronomicon.* It becomes gradually apparent that the hilly region in which Akeley makes his home is a focal point of activity by strange forces and even stranger beings, monstrous and shadowy things which, legend whispers, came down from the stars in the Elder Days, and which may have broken through the barriers again.

Lovecraft develops the subtle mood of tension beautifully, using his now-familiar documentary technique. Akeley sends Wilmarth photographs of his discoveries, and even a phonograph recording of a strange ritual overheard by night in the woods. Lovecraft reproduces a complete transcript of this recording. Names begin to appear in the narrative, names with which Lovecraft's readers had by now a shuddering familiarity—Yog-Sothoth, R'lyeh, Nyarlathotep, the *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred, Cthulhu, the *Pnakotic Manuscripts.*

Wilmarth, his curiosity stimulated, travels into the ancient wooded hills of Vermont to visit Akeley, for suddenly the note of gathering horror that has rung through the letters from the recluse vanishes, and is replaced by a very untypical acceptance of the mysterious phenomena. The culminating horror comes when Wilmarth, now a guest in Akeley's home, discovers that his host has been done away with and that it is one of the monsters from beyond in disguise that he has taken for Akeley all this while.

In many ways, *The Whisperer in Darkness* is a tale of pivotal significance in the history of the Mythos and its evolution. I have already remarked that in this tale Lovecraft, by quoting names and symbols invented by his friends, incorporated (after the fact, as it were)

several of their stories within the context of his own Mythos—such stories as Howard's *The Shadow Kingdom* and Long's *The Hounds of Tindalos* and Bishop's *The Curse of Yig.* But in this tale he goes further even than that. In a spate of enthusiasm he mentions Hastur and Carcosa and Hali, inventions of Ambrose Bierce. He was not the first to do so: before him, the turn-of-the-century American novelist, Robert W. Chambers, had also borrowed these names from Bierce, spinning them into the context of his own early stories, published in book form under the title *The King in Yellow.* We sometimes call these interconnected Bierce/Chambers stories the "Carcosa Mythos." (As I have already reprinted several of these tales in a recent anthology called *The Spawn of Cthulhu,* I will not linger over the matter here. See my notes to that anthology.)

Lovecraft also uses *Whisperer* to tie together most of the scattered bits of lore he had used in earlier stories. Azathoth reappears herein; so does that mysterious Plateau of Leng, first mentioned ten years earlier in *Celephais.* New names are produced, such as Yuggoth,[2] the dark planet on the rim of the Solar System; and a system of subterranean cavern-worlds beneath the earth's crust—"blue-litten K'n-yan, red-litten Yoth, and black, lightless N'kai"—later explained in Zealia Bishop's short novel *The Mound,* another Lovecraft revision.

Rather curiously, this story also marks the first appearance in print of Bran and Tsathoggua, the brain-children, respectively, of Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith. According to Howard, Bran was a mighty chieftain of the Caledonian Picts in ancient times, and his name lived long in the ancestral legends

[2]Lovecraft's name for the planet Pluto, discovered the same year in which he wrote *Whisperer* and promptly snapped up by him as part of his apparatus. Lovecraft was always interested in astronomy; it was a favorite boyhood hobby.

of his people.[3] No story in this cycle had yet been published when Lovecraft wrote *Whisperer;* the first such tale, *Men of the Shadows,* did not find its way into print for many years, and the first published tale of Howard's to mention Bran was thus *Kings of the Night,* which appeared in the November, 1930 issue of *Weird Tales.* How, then, did Lovecraft know of Bran? The answer is simple: just as he circulated his manuscripts among his writer-friends for their comment, so they sent their stories to Lovecraft.

The same held true in the case of Tsathoggua. This entity was introduced in one of Smith's gorgeous Hyperborean fantasies. The story in which Tsathoggua made his debut was *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros,* which did not appear in *Weird Tales* until the issue of November, 1931—a year after Lovecraft mentioned him in *Whisperer.*

Neither Bran nor, for that matter, Tsathoggua are presented by Howard or Smith in those initial stories as members of the Cthulhuoid pantheon. They were "appropriated" by Lovecraft, who mentioned them in *Whisperer,* as he also mentioned Yig and the Hounds of Tindalos and others, as a sort of compliment to his writer-friends, and also as a sort of in-joke whose point would be gotten only by members of the Lovecraft Circle.

For although his stories are solemn and quite humorless, Lovecraft's letters display a delightful sense of humor and a fondness for jokes. Most of the straight-faced in-jokes he inserted into his stories went unnoticed by the readers of the day—such as naming his character, in *The Call of Cthulhu,* George Gammell "Angell" after Angell Street, his address in Providence for so many years.

Other in-jokes were subtly worked into the texture of

[3]The central stories in this cycle were collected into a book entitled *Bran Mak Morn* (Dell Books, 1969).

his Mythos tales. In *Whisperer,* for example, he has Akeley toss off a pseudo-learned reference: "It's from N'kai that frightful Tsathoggua came—you know, the amorphous, toad-like god-creature mentioned in the *Pnakotic Manuscripts* and the *Necronomicon* and the Commorion myth-cycle preserved by the Atlantean high-priest Klarkash-Ton." I have already noted that Tsathoggua is a demon-god of elder Hyperborea, invented by Clark Ashton Smith for his cycle of tales set in such immemorial (and imaginary) cities as Commoriom and Uzuldaroum. In a straight-faced manner, Lovecraft pretends these Hyperborean stories are redactions of genuine ancient myth. But the in-joke here is that "Klarkash-Ton" is Lovecraft's pet nickname for Smith. Similarly, he was later to call August Derleth "the Comte d'Erlette" and incorporate him into the Mythos as author of the equally imaginary *Cultes des Goules,* yet another of those eldritch books of forbidden lore.

Lovecraft had nicknames for all of his correspondents: Donald Wandrei became "Melmoth the Wandrei," a pun on the title of the old Gothic masterpiece, *Melmoth the Wanderer;* Frank Belknap Long became Romanized into "Belknapius," and so on. Entering into the spirit of the thing, his correspondents vied with one another to make jokes on his own name, frequently referring to H.P.L. as "Eich-Pi-El." It was the young Robert Bloch, however, who topped them all: in a shuddersome yarn called *The Grinning Ghoul* he refers to another tome of nameless lore—"the grotesque *Black Rites* of mystic Luveh-Keraphf, the priest of cryptic Bast." The pun on Lovecraft's name is a trifle broad, but anyone who loved cats as much as Lovecraft could aptly be termed a priest of Bast, the Egyptian cat goddess.[4]

[4]Writing elsewhere, Bloch solemnly extended the joke yet another notch by adding the information that Luveh-Keraphf was "apparently contemporaneous with Klarkash-Ton."

Farnsworth Wright was still striving to satisfy the ravenous demands of his readers for more Lovecraft. While waiting for H.P.L. to finish puttering around with the text of *Whisperer,* he was forced to revive yet another story from the recent past, and thus *The Rats in the Walls,* which had appeared in *Weird Tales* only six years earlier, reappeared in the pages of the June 1930 issue.

Lovecraft discovered that working in the novella length cut down his story productivity. Always a dilettante, a putterer, a "gentleman toying with letters," with little ambition and no real faith in his own abilities, Lovecraft only finished a story or two a year during his final phase. And he did not always bother trying to sell even the few stories he did produce.

In 1931, for example, he wrote two stories, both of them very long tales. The first was a 26,000-word novella entitled *The Shadow Over Innsmouth,* which was the seventh story he wrote in the Mythos. The eighth Mythos tale, written that same year, was the great novella of Antarctic horror, *At The Mountains of Madness.*

Shadow revives the imaginary "Miskatonic County" town of Innsmouth, first mentioned in *Celephais* (1920). In it, the narrator becomes involved in genealogical research concerning the Marsh family, whose fortunes were founded by the South Seas merchant captain, Obed Marsh. It gradually comes to light that the Marshes intermarried with mysterious ocean-dwellers called "the Deep Ones," producing recurrent hybrid births in each generation and gradually undermining the town, eventuating in a decadent cult called "The Esoteric Order of Dagon." The rambling gossip of a half-crazy old derelict named Zadok Allen provides some colorful, slangy dialogue and in time reveals the full horror of this genetic "shadow" which has blighted the once-great Massachusetts seaport. Cthulhu and R'lyeh are mentioned again, and "Father Dagon and

Mother Hydra" are introduced as minor members of the Cthulhuoid pantheon, here appearing in print for the first time as leaders of the Deep Ones, the sea-dwellers who serve as Cthulhu's minions. Also mentioned for the first time in this tale are the submerged city of Y'ha-nthlei and the devil-beasts Lovecraft called "shoggoths."

Derleth has praised this story for "the powerful hold it has upon the imagination of its readers," calling it "a dark, brooding story, typical of Lovecraft at his best." Farnsworth Wright did not think so, however, and rejected it (probably on the basis of its length, generally a point of contention between Lovecraft and the editor of *Weird Tales*). An amateur writer at heart, Lovecraft was always plunged into despondency at a rejection, and thus he made no further attempt to sell the story elsewhere. He gave it to an amateur printer in Everett, Pennsylvania, a friend of his from the United Amateur Press days who ran the so-called Visionary Press. The tale was illustrated by Frank Utpatel and published as a slim little book in a very limited printing in 1936, the year before Lovecraft's death.

Only about 200 copies of the book were bound and circulated—initially at $1.00 each—although many more copies were printed. For some reason, they were sold without a dust-jacket, although jackets do exist for this rare little book, which now commands fabulous prices as a rarity among collectors of Lovecraftiana. Since only two hundred readers saw the book at best, the impact of this major addition to the Mythos was vitiated. In a word, when Farnsworth Wright returned the story, Lovecraft virtually threw it away!

The second story written during 1931 was saved from sharing the same fate by a fluke—or rather, by the efforts and devotion of one of Lovecraft's friends, Donald Wandrei. I refer to *At The Mountains of Madness,* which must be the longest work of fiction Lovecraft ever attempted—it totals about 39,600 words. In

it he brought to bear several interests which he seldom utilized: his youthful enthusiasm for geology and the history of Antarctic exploration, and his extreme fondness for Poe's unfinished novel of South Polar mystery, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym.*

Lovecraft loathed cold weather, and this was more than just an emotional aversion: he suffered violent physical reactions if exposed to low temperatures. It has been suggested that his hypersensitivity to cold weather was either an allergic reaction or perhaps psychosomatic—neither allergies nor psychosomatic medicine had moved from the textbooks into general medical practice as early as the 1930s—but at any rate, Lovecraft flourished best at temperatures around 90° F. Below 80° F he became increasingly uncomfortable; at 70° F he was "stiff, sniffling, and gasping." An incident is related in which Lovecraft went out one evening into the Providence streets on an errand of mercy of some sort. The temperature, which had been around 60° F when he left the house, dropped before long to 30° F. Lovecraft collapsed in the street and was carried unconscious into a drugstore, where a passing physician revived him.

The loathing and horror that extreme cold evoked in him was carried over into his writing, and the pages of *Madness* convey the blighting, blasting, stifling sensation caused by sub-zero temperatures in a way that even Poe could not suggest.

The story is immensely complex, the plot sluggish and slow-moving in the extreme. It tells of an expedition to Antarctica launched by some scientists from Miskatonic University in Arkham, and their discovery of a prehistoric city, dead for geological eons, long buried beneath the ice fields. Lovecraft used the story to reveal a considerable portion of earth's prehistoric lore, working this into the Mythos and dropping hints he would later develop when he came to write *The*

Shadow Out of Time. In the course of the tale he brings in the shoggoths, first introduced in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth,* and develops hints from earlier tales about primordial and pre-human races which came to this planet from distant stars and worlds before the evolution of man.

Lovecraft thought quite highly of this short novel and sent it off to Wright. Wright, of course, rejected it flatly, thus plunging the sensitive gentleman-author into another prolonged fit of depression. To one of his friends, Lovecraft wrote:

> *At the Mountains of Madness* represents the most serious work I have attempted, and its rejection was a very discouraging influence.

So discouraging that Lovecraft withdrew it from submission and let it gather dust on the shelf.

But this particular incident had a happy ending. Lovecraft's friends admired the story and eventually pried it away from him, and it was submitted through an agent, Julius Schwartz, to a science fiction magazine called *Astounding Stories.* This was, by the way, the one and only time Lovecraft ever used an agent to sell one of his stories.

Astounding bought the yarn and serialized it in somewhat abridged form in the issues dated February, March, and April, 1936.

And here again we can see how Lovecraft's lack of professionalism hampered what little career he had. Wouldn't you think that, having sold a story through an agent, he would have continued to let an agent handle his stories, thus relieving him of the drudgery of bookkeeping and shielding him from the psychic shock of rejection?

He never used an agent again.

And wouldn't you also think, considering how

promptly *Astounding Stories* bought a tale rejected as unpublishable by *Weird Tales,* that Lovecraft would have sent more stories to that new market?

He never again submitted a story to *Astounding.*

8. The Spawn of the Old Ones

Despite his occasional trips to old cities of antiquarian interest, Lovecraft persisted in locking himself away and living in the interior realms of his own imagination, rather fastidously avoiding the noisy, brawling, daylit world around him.

He had so very few personal friends even in Providence that it can truthfully be said that he was an outsider in his own home town, and he lived and died in the Rhode Island metropolis largely a stranger to his fellow inhabitants.

All of his frustrated friendly inclinations he poured into his correspondence, writing thousands of affectionate, self-revealing, chatty letters to men he would never meet in person.

Many of these correspondents were writers of weird fiction and contributors to *Weird Tales*. Lovecraft had already paid small joking compliments to some of them by considering various of their imaginative inventions worthy of praise and making straight-faced references to these in his Cthulhuoid stories, as mentioned earlier. Thus, when Clark Ashton Smith invented his Hyperborean demon god, Tsathoggua, Lovecraft gleefully adopted Smith's creation into the growing pantheon of the Old Ones. In fact, Lovecraft invited his writer-

friends to invent new things for the Mythos, to write stories within it, or to utilize some of his apparatus in stories of their own.

Probably the first of his friends to do so was Clark Ashton Smith. In the September 1931 issue of *Strange Tales,* Smith published a very successful horror story called *The Return of the Sorcerer.*[1] The story tells of a young scholar hired by a wealthy recluse in Oakland, California—who promptly sets him to work at translating passages from the *Necronomicon.* And there, smack in the middle of a story by Smith, baffled readers encountered a long passage of ominous and enigmatic Alhazredic prose, which must have roused questions in their minds, such as: If two different writers quote from the same book, is it possible that the *Necronomicon* is a real book?

Smith followed this tale into print a couple of months later with the earliest of his Hyperborean stories, introducing Tsathoggua as a dark demon god worshipped in remote eons. Another tale in the same sequence, called *The Door to Saturn,* which appeared in the January 1932 issue of *Strange Tales,* introduced Eibon, the famed Hyperborean wizard, and presented the reader with more data on Tsathoggua, naming the beings that had spawned him in elder eons, the planet from which he had descended to earth, etc. In this story Smith revealed that Tsathoggua's worship was "incalculably older than man," and that he "had come down by way of other worlds from a foreign universe, in primeval times when the earth was still no more than a steaming morass"—all of which is very Lovecraftian in tone.

And only a few months later, Smith presented an-

[1]The story has since been reprinted and anthologized a number of times, and during the 1940s it was dramatized on a radio program called *The House of Mystery.* Lovecraft's own story, *The Rats in the Walls,* was once performed on another program, called *Suspense,* by a cast headed by Ronald Colman.

other story in *Strange Tales* called *The Nameless Offspring,* which opened with a weird, mysterious quotation, given as epigraph to the story:

> Many and multiform are the dim horrors of Earth, infesting her ways from the prime. They sleep beneath the unturned stone; they rise with the tree from its root; they move beneath the sea and in subterranean places; they dwell in the inmost adyta; they emerge betimes from the shutten sepulchre of haughty bronze and the low grave that is sealed with clay. There be some that are long known to man, and others as yet unknown that abide the terrible latter days of their revealing. Those which are the most dreadful and the loathliest of all are haply still to be declared. But among those that have revealed themselves aforetime and have made manifest their veritable presence, there is one which may not openly be named for its exceeding foulness. It is that spawn which the hidden dwellers in the vaults has begotten upon mortality.

This story-heading bears the solemn ascription: "from the *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred."

These were only the first of the ten or so stories Smith was to contribute to the Cthulhu Mythos. In them, Smith set the pattern for later writers, and his contributions formed the prototype of the other non-Lovecraft tales which would be written. Rather than remain content to merely use the apparatus of names and books and places thought up by Lovecraft himself, Smith devised an apparatus of his own and established his own little private corner of the Mythos. To the central apparatus Smith contributed the several "new" members of the pantheon—first Tsathoggua, then Ubbo-Sathla, Abhoth, and Atlach-Natcha; and, rather than merely continue to invent quotations from Lovecraft's *Necronomicon,* Smith made up a text of nameless lore all his own called the *Book of Eibon,*

written by that powerful Hyperborean wizard he had introduced in *The Door to Saturn.* In a later story, *Ubbo-Sathla* (which introduced the dark divinity of that name and first appeared in *Weird Tales* of July 1933), Smith invented two quotations from this "collection of dark and baleful myths, of liturgies, rituals and incantations both evil and esoteric."[2]

Others among Lovecraft's writer-friends were soon to follow Smith in contributing to the Mythos, and, like him, they preferred to invent their own apparatus of gods and books and symbols, rather than merely to imitate what Lovecraft had already done.

Thus, Frank Belknap Long wrote a short novel called *The Horror From the Hills* (serialized in *Weird Tales,* the issues of January, February and March, 1931), the germ of which was a long, complicated "Roman dream" that Lovecraft had experienced and described in a lengthy letter, the text of which Long had inserted, virtually intact, into his novella. In this story Long introduced a new member of the pantheon called Chaugnar Faugn.

And Robert E. Howard was not long in joining in the game. The earliest story of his that was deliberately written as a contribution to the Mythos was a short tale called *The Children of the Night* (*Weird Tales,* April-May, 1931). In that story he mentioned the *Necronomicon,* Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, and Tsathoggua, and invented a minor godling called Gol-goroth and another of those ancient books of eldritch lore, the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten,* by a German scholar named Von Junzt.

In writing these Lovecraftian tales, Howard and his colleagues generally followed Lovecraft's example. A case in point is this tome by Von Junzt. In another Cthulhuoid story, *The Black Stone* (*Weird Tales,* No-

[2]Another Hyperborean story, *The Coming of the White Worm,* which was not published until 1941, was actually presented as an entire *chapter* from the *Book of Eibon!*

vember, 1931), Howard picked up and elaborated on the data presented in the earlier story: the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (he tells us) was published in Düsseldorf in 1839; the title translates as *Nameless Cults;* the tome is sometimes known as "the Black Book"; a cheap and faulty English translation was pirated in London by Bridewall in 1845; a carefully expurgated edition appeared from the Golden Goblin Press of New York in 1909. All of this *specific* data—places, dates, names of translators, bibliographical data on editions—tends to half-convince the reader that the book in question is real. In fact, unless you happen to be a bibliographical expert, you are hard put to say with any certitude whether this or that book mentioned in a Mythos story *is* real or was invented by the author of the story!

Also in *The Black Stone* Howard invents a "mad poet" of his own, a sort of English-speaking version of Abdul Alhazred named Justin Geoffrey, author of a nightmarish poem entitled "The People of the Monolith." A versifier of considerable gifts, Howard gives us a morsel of Geoffrey's talent by quoting a few lines of his as the heading to this story:

> They say foul beings of Old Times still lurk
> In dark forgotten corners of the world,
> And Gates still gape to loose, on certain nights,
> Shapes pent in Hell.

Another story, *The Thing on the Roof,* picks up and elaborates on both Justin Geoffrey and Von Junzt, and introduces Xuthltan, who plays a major part in yet another tale, *The Fire of Asshurbanipal,* not to be published for some years. Thus, just as Smith carved out a niche of his own in the Cthulhu Mythos, and placed therein the *Book of Eibon,* Tsathoggua, Ubbo-Sathla, etc., so did Howard make his own niche, with the *Nameless Cults* of Von Junzt, Gol-goroth, the mad

poet Justin Geoffrey, Xuthltan, and so on. From this point on, most of the members of the Lovecraft Circle who added substantially to the Cthulhu Mythos followed this method, and it is still being followed to this day.

As for Lovecraft's own writing, he produced two stories during 1932.

The first of these[3] was *The Dreams in the Witch-House,* the ninth story Lovecraft wrote in the Cthulhu Mythos. A minor effort, although totaling 15,400 words, *Dreams* is set in "legend-haunted Arkham, with its clustering gambrel roofs that sway and sag over attics where witches hid from the King's men in the dark, olden days," and concerns a student who becomes gradually affected by the residue of ancient horrors yet clinging about the fabric of an old house. Lovecraft used this story to mention in print—and thus give the imprimatur of his approval to—Howard's inventions, the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of Von Junzt,and Smith's *Book of Eibon,* both here mentioned by Lovecraft in a story for the first time.

Despite all that this story has going for it, it remains singularly one-dimensional, curiously unsatisfying. Lovecraft did not really have his heart in it, and it shows.

That same year he also produced a story called *Through the Gates of the Silver Key,* written in collaboration with his old friend and fellow *Weird Tales* veteran, E. Hoffman Price. A sort of sequel to one of the last of the Dreamlands stories written during his Dunsanian period (*The Silver Key,* 1926), it is not

[3]Happily for us long-suffering Lovecraft scholars, in the last year of his life Lovecraft set down in a letter to a friend a list of his completed stories (fifty in all), with the date of the writing of each story; so we do not have to comb his correspondence in an effort to establish the correct dating of his tales.

properly speaking a part of the Cthulhu Mythos, although it does present the reader with some new Cthulhuoid data.

It seems that Price became intrigued with the loose ends of the plot Lovecraft had left dangling in *The Silver Key* and urged H.P.L. to write a sequel to that tale. Well past his Dunsanian period and deeply into developing the Mythos, however, Lovecraft never got around to doing so. Finally, Price wrote a sequel himself and showed it to Lovecraft.

Price recalls the events leading up to this collaboration in a memoir of his friendship with Lovecraft which first appeared in a fanzine called *The Acolyte* in 1944. "One of my favorite HPL stories was, and still is, *The Silver Key,*" he wrote. "In telling him of the pleasure I had had in rereading it, I suggested a sequel to account for Randolph Carter's doings after his disappearance. My interest in the story stimulated him, and his appreciative response in turn stimulated me, so that before the session was over, we had seriously resolved to undertake the task. Some months later, I wrote a six thousand word first draft."

Rarely able to leave another writer's story untouched, Lovecraft began playing around with Price's tale, eventually revising and expanding it thoroughly. "Thoroughly" may perhaps be an understatement—"completely" is more like it, for, as Price tells the anecdote, "he mailed me a 14,000 word elaboration, in the Lovecraft manner, of what I had sent him. I had bogged down, of course. The idea of doing a sequel to one of his stories was more fantastic than any fantasy he has ever written. When I deciphered his manuscript, I estimated that he had left unchanged fewer than fifty of my original words: one passage which he considered to be not only rich and colorful in its own right, but also compatible with the style of his own composition."

Having myself collaborated with another writer on a

few short stories and a couple of novels, I know that few professionals would accept with equanimity a revision so drastic. Price was the exception, however, as his generous comments indicate: "He was right of course in discarding all but the basic outline. I could only marvel that he had made so much of my inadequate and bungling start. What I had done, in effect, was to prod him, by that start, into creating something. Today, I like to tell myself that that one short passage of mine which he incorporated into the script must have been good; and that without doubt, I fared better than any of those others whose botched beginnings he rewrote bodily."

The story appeared two years later in *Weird Tales* under a dual byline as a genuine collaboration—the only time, in fact, that any of Lovecraft's revisions were openly admitted to be the work of two writers. Without exception, the other tales, such as those written with Hazel Heald or Zealia Bishop, were published without public acknowledgement of Lovecraft's share in the task.

Through the Gates of the Silver Key has the most confused plot imaginable, and since it is not really a part of the Cthulhu Mythos, but only a borderline tale, we need not linger over it here with any lengthy synopsis. But I must add a note about the amusing origin of two of the characters in the story—one of them "the distinguished Creole student of mysteries and Eastern antiquities, Etienne-Laurent de Marigny," the other, "an elderly eccentric of Providence, Rhode Island" named Ward Phillips.

De Marigny was invented by Price and Lovecraft as a sort of pen-name. They had decided at one point in their friendship that it would be a good idea to collaborate on many stories—to capitalize on what Lovecraft called Price's speed of composition. Rather than use a dual byline, they planned to create a joint nom-de-plume, "Etienne Marmaduke de Marigny," and in

this mood of grandiose whimsy (as Price calls it), they decided that de Marigny's output would "conservatively estimated, amount to a million words a month." This plan eventually fell through, but the name itself, slightly altered, was preserved as that of a character in the one fiction upon which they did collaborate.

The other name, Ward Phillips, which is, of course, drawn from the middle of "Ho*ward Phillips* Lovecraft," is a very early pen-name of Lovecraft's own devisal. Several pieces of his amateur work were signed with that name, such as the poem "Astrophobos," first published in 1918.[4]

This collaboration is primarily of interest to us as it gives a new quotation from the *Necronomicon,* mentions the Elder Sign, and refers to the otherwise unknown "Yian-Ho, the hidden legacy of eon-old Leng." Also, recalling the planet Yuggoth which Lovecraft introduced in *Whisperer in Darkness,* this yarn cuts loose with a slather of new planets—enough to fill a medium-sized solar system—"Kythamil, the double planet that once revolved around Arcturus," "transgalactic Stronti," as well as "Yaddith, Mthura, Kath, the triple star Nython, Kynarth," and other worlds in "the twenty-eight galaxies accessible to the light-beam envelopes of the creatures of Yaddith."

Price, something of an amateur Orientalist, used a lot of Eastern lore and mysticism in his own stories, and some of this sort of thing seeped over into *Through the Gates of the Silver Key.* Price also knew quite a bit about modern occult literature—far more than Love-

[4]Years after Lovecraft's death, when August Derleth came to compose the novel *The Lurker at the Threshold,* which was published in book form by Arkham House as a posthumous collaboration, he used "the Rev. Ward Phillips" as the author of one of those imaginary tomes wherewith the Lovecraftian library is so richly filled: *Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New-English Canaan.* It reads rather like a work of Cotton Mather, from the few quotations from it we possess.

craft, anyway—and some of the terms from this wide reading got into *Gates* and, through *Gates,* into the Mythos proper—such terms, for example, as "the primal Naacal language," which came from Churchward's "Mu" books, or the reference to "the Children of the Fire Mist [who] came to Earth to teach the Elder Lore to man," which Price got from Madame Blavatsky, it being part of the rather gaudy and spectacular cosmogony of the Theosophical system. Thus, tainted with mysticism, a confused jumble of complex plot, *Gates* is a weak, even a bad, story.

All in all, then, 1932 was not a good year as far as Lovecraft's writing went.

9. The Elder Gods

Although Lovecraft himself was writing fewer and fewer stories in the Cthulhu Mythos, his writer-friends, and in particular his younger protégés, became more and more fascinated by the wealth of background lore the Mythos contained, and by the plot potentials it offered them.

I get the feeling that they contributed new stories, new symbols, new books and demons to the Mythos rather in a sense of play. Some of the members of the Lovecraft Circle to whom I have written assure me of this. Nobody, they tell me, took the Mythos seriously (least of all Lovecraft), and they began to vie with one another to build up the pantheon and add to the gradually evolving mythology. This they did very much as a sort of game, and it is quite significant that after Lovecraft's death the game lost its savor for many of them. The Mythos stories written when he was no longer alive to enjoy them were done more in a spirit of commemoration than in fun, Robert Bloch tells me. But we shall look into this later on.

Among the younger protégés of Lovecraft, the first to make a major contribution to the Mythos was August Derleth. He began collaborating on short stories

with Mark Schorer during the summer of 1931. The two had first become friends during their high-school years, and the friendship persisted and began to bear fruit as each of the young men became apprentice writers. An entire book of Derleth/Schorer tales has recently been published by Arkham House.[1]

In their preface to that book, August Derleth and Mark Schorer recalled the circumstances that led to their decade of collaboration: "That summer," they wrote, "one of us was home from a year of teaching at a military academy in Missouri and preparing for post-graduate work at Wisconsin and Harvard," while "the other was back to stay in Sauk City, Wisconsin, having resigned an editorial position with Fawcett Publications in order to do or die as a writer." Both young men had their homes in Sauk City, but, as Derleth recounted it, "we chose not to work in them but to rent what had once been a summer cottage on the village's main street. . . . Into this cottage we moved typewriters and all the paraphernalia incidental to writing, and got to work."

One of the first of the collaborative efforts produced in this manner was a story in the Cthulhu Mythos—Derleth's first, so far as he was able to recall. *The Lair of the Star-Spawn* was its title, and it appeared in the August 1932 issue of *Weird Tales*. In it the two authors introduced some innovations. An explorer named Eric Marsh penetrates the hidden depths of jungled Burma and discovers the mysterious Plateau of Sung, where dwell the legended "Tcho-Tcho people" in the age-old lost city of Alaozar. "Not without base do ancient legends of China speak of the long-lost city on the Isle of Stars in the Lake of Dread," as a character in the tale remarks; and Marsh soon discovers that this is the

[1]I refer to *Colonel Markesan and Less Pleasant People*, which Arkham House published in 1966. The collection includes seventeen stories, first published between 1930 and 1939 in *Weird Tales*, *Strange Stories*, and similar magazines.

dominion of two of the Great Old Ones—Lloigor and Zhar, "the Twin Obscenities," who came down from the stars ages before, with Cthulhu and other beings. This tale is the first in all the Mythos to recount how the Elder Gods battled against and overwhelmed the Great Old Ones, with the result that "Hastur was exiled to Hali in the Hyades, Cthulhu was banished to the lost sea kingdom of R'lyeh, while Lloigor and Zhar were buried alive in the inner fastnesses of Asia—beneath the accursed Plateau of Sung!"

This rather slender and seemingly innocuous little story, which went unreprinted, completely neglected, and virtually forgotten for decades until revived in book form in 1966, is actually one of the most overwhelmingly important of all the tales that comprise the Mythos.

It was the first story to introduce Lloigor and Zhar, and also the first story in which "Hastur the Unspeakable" is set forth as a member of the pantheon.[2] It was also the first tale to mention the Tcho-Tcho people, here given as minions of Lloigor and Zhar, just as the Deep Ones are minions of Cthulhu.

Star-Spawn also merits our attention as being August Derleth's initial effort in the growth of the Mythos. Derleth, in the years that followed, became the most indefatigable of Lovecraft's disciples, reshaping and guiding the development of the Mythos after the death of Lovecraft, and eventually becoming the second most important writer to contribute thereto. In the light of his later significance, this story is feeble and confused.

[2]In *The Whisperer in Darkness,* written two years before the publication of *Star-Spawn,* Lovecraft had first mentioned Hastur, Carcosa and Hali in passing, but had done nothing further with the names. He listed them in a sequence of names which included some borrowed from Dunsany, Howard and other writers—he, himself, had gotten them from Bierce and Chambers—but it was Derleth and Schorer who firmly fixed Hastur in place as a member of the Great Old Ones and explained Carcosa and Hali as the places of his banishment.

Derleth did not keep his terminology straight; he used such phrases as "the Old Ones," "the Elder Gods," and "the Ancient Ones" interchangeably, creating a bit of a mix-up. In later stories, of course, he resolved his name system and established his terms firmly.

Lovecraft, of course, must have seen *Star-Spawn,* but no record is extant of what he thought of it or of his opinion of what Derleth had done to the Mythos. Derleth himself cannot recall H.P.L.'s reaction, which is a great pity. Lovecraft, as we have seen, frequently set his seal of approval on some of his friends' contributions to the apparatus of the Mythos by using the new additions in one of his own Mythos stories: It may, or it may not, be significant that he did not in any future story mention this theme of the Elder Gods v. the Great Old Ones; neither did he incorporate references to Hastur, Zhar or Lloigor in any story of his, although he did pick up the Tcho-Tcho people. I think it rather likely, though, that this failure to use Derleth's then newly-coined apparatus in one of his stories was just an oversight on Lovecraft's part. Lovecraft did not take the Mythos at all seriously and vigorously encouraged his friends to use it as they liked in their own stories, so it can be safely assumed that whether or not he approved of Derleth's simplistic cosmic war theme, he really did not care.

The following year, 1933, Lovecraft wrote only one story, *The Thing on the Doorstep.* This low rate of production seems inexplicable, but we must keep in mind that, to Lovecraft, his own stories were of minimal importance: he continued to regard his revisions of the stories of others as his prime work.

He had at this time just finished revising a story called *Out of the Eons* by a new client, Hazel Heald. It was a delightful story, and as it stands, I imagine it is at least 60 percent Lovecraft. He poured into it any number of references to the staples of the Mythos—

the *Necronomicon,* "black, formless Tsathoggua, many-tentacled Cthulhu," the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of Von Junzt, the *Book of Eibon,* and so on. He also used the opportunity afforded by this revision to add to the canon Long's devil-god from *The Horror from the Hills* in a reference to "proboscidian Chaugnar Faugn," which, in context, indicates that this entity was a member of the Great Old Ones. In the same tale appears a reference to the Derleth/Schorer story *Lair of the Star-Spawn,* confirming that Lovecraft had in fact seen it: "Do you remember what I told you about that ruined city in Indo-China where the Tcho-Tchos lived?" asks one of the characters. There is also a reference to "Gnoph-keh, the hairy myth-thing of the Greenland ice," which hearkens back to *Polaris* of many years before.

Out of the Eons concerns the discovery of a dead city frozen under the Arctic ice, forgotten for three million years, and thus forming a rather amusing counterpart of the lost ice-buried city in the Antarctic, the setting for *At The Mountains of Madness.* The story is chiefly significant in that it adds a new divinity to the pantheon: Rhan-Tegoth, a member of the Great Old Ones who came down to this earth from Yuggoth.

Yet another new devil-god made his debut, in the January 1933 issue of *Strange Tales,* in a new story by August Derleth (a solo performance, this time) called *The Thing That Walked on the Wind.* This tale marks the first appearance of Derleth's Ithaqua the Wind-Walker, a variation on the familiar Wendigo myth popularized by Algernon Blackwood in his famous horror tale, *The Wendigo.*[3] Derleth established here, for the first time in the Mythos, the notion that the various

[3]This is doubtless where Derleth got the idea. At least, he knew the tale, for in this story he has one of his characters remark, "Blackwood has written of these things."

members of the pantheon, or some of them at least, are elementals; Ithaqua is referred to as an air elemental. Derleth later developed this theme more fully. References to Leng, the Tcho-Tcho people of Burma, and "accursed R'lyeh, where slumbering Cthulhu is waiting to rise and destroy the world," anchor the story firmly within the context of the Mythos.

But to return to Lovecraft. His tale, *The Thing on the Doorstep,* is, again, curiously minor and somehow unsatisfying. Perhaps we readers had been spoiled by such superlative stories as *The Call of Cthulhu, The Dunwich Horror,* and *The Whisperer in Darkness:* we expected each new tale in the cycle to be even bigger and better than the one before. At any rate, *Thing* fails to electrify the imagination. From themes of cosmic horror and cataclysmic (impending) doom, the scope here has dwindled to a sordid little domestic tragedy that might be dismissed as the tale of a man with an overdomineering wife, if one wished to sound facetious.

Some amusing things crop up in this tenth Mythos tale, however. Lovecraft's protagonist is a young poet of near genius named Edward Derby, and we are told that "in his eighteenth year his collected nightmare-lyrics made a real sensation when issued under the title of *Azathoth and Other Horrors.*" Then, remembering Robert E. Howard's mad poet in *The Black Stone* and other stories, Lovecraft adds with a straight face: "He was a close correspondent of the notorious Baudelairean poet Justin Geoffrey, who wrote *The People of the Monolith* and died screaming in a madhouse in 1926 after a visit to a sinister, ill-regarded village in Hungary."

Although a grisly shocker in the approved tradition, the tale is insignificant and wholly lacking in the sort of cosmic vision that makes Lovecraft's best stories so memorable. It is less than ten thousand words long.

Otherwise not very important, as far as things Lovecraftian go, 1933 is worthy of note because of a new friend H.P.L. made that year. This was a fifteen-year-old boy in the midwest, with whom Lovecraft began a correspondence that was to continue steadily throughout the final four years of his life.

His new correspondent was named Robert Bloch.

Bloch was, at this time, just a high-school boy living in Milwaukee. He had been born in Chicago in 1917, but he grew up in Milwaukee. He began to correspond with the older writer when he was about fifteen, and this provided the stimulus and encouragement he needed to begin seriously working towards a professional career in fiction, just as similar correspondence had for Long and for Derleth himself. Lovecraft's friendship seems to have done this sort of thing for lots of young beginners.

At any rate, young Bloch became in time another Lovecraft discovery, and one of prime importance. Like Derleth, Robert Bloch sold his first story to *Weird Tales* while he was still in his teens, and he eventually became a member of Farnsworth Wright's "stable," contributing scores of tales to the magazine over decades.

Sometime after young Bloch first became acquainted with Lovecraft through the medium of letters, his family moved to upstate Wisconsin, and he thus came into much closer contact with Derleth, due to their proximity. Lovecraft had "introduced" the two budding authors, Bloch tells me, by mail, as was his usual fashion. The Providence writer also performed the same service on Bloch's behalf with Clark Ashton Smith, J. Vernon Shea, Jr., and several other members of Lovecraft's private literary salon. But it was Derleth with whom Bloch formed the closest friendship. "Since Derleth lived just a few hours' bus-ride away from me," Bloch informed me in a recent letter, "I visited him at his home and he in turn met with me in Milwaukee."

Bloch and Derleth, in fact, planned at one point to get Lovecraft out to Wisconsin—which is not really as far-fetched as it might seem, for, even considering his sedentary and almost hermitlike mode of life, Lovecraft did some extensive traveling in his last years. He visited Robert H. Barlow in Florida, and Barlow has left us a memoir of the visit. And he was visiting friends in New Orleans—of all places!—when he first met E. Hoffman Price. In fact, it was during his visit to New Orleans that Lovecraft and Price first discussed the notion of a sequel to *The Silver Key,* a meeting which, as mentioned earlier, resulted in their collaboration on *Through the Gates of the Silver Key.*

But the Wisconsin trip was never to come to pass, and although Bloch was to exchange many letters with Lovecraft during the older writer's last few years, the two were never to meet in person, which Bloch deeply regrets to this day.

10. Invaders from Yesterday

As he came nearer to the end of his life, Lovecraft's production of stories, never exactly prodigious, slowed almost to a standstill. In 1934, for example, he toyed with a story called *The Book* but set it aside languidly and never returned to it. He also sketched out a little tale called *The Thing in the Moonlight,* whose origin can easily be traced to the horribly vivid dreams from which he suffered all his life. This sketch, too, he set aside and did not try to sell—did not even finish, in fact.[1]

But that same year he shrugged off the feeling of lassitude or futility and produced his eleventh and next-to-last story in the Cthulhu Mythos—*The Shadow Out of Time.*

Not only is this one of the longest of his stories—running to about 24,600 words—but it is one of the very best. In my opinion, for what it's worth, *The Shadow Out of Time* is, in fact, his single greatest achievement in fiction. The form and substance of this extraordinary novella, its amazing scope and sense of

[1]Four years after his death, this story found its way into print in a fantasy fanzine called *Bizarre,* dated January, 1941. It was the very last of his amateur press appearances.

cosmic immensitude, the gulfs of time it opens, the titanic sweep of the narrative—these elements convince me that here is one of the most tremendously exciting imaginative experiences I have yet found in fantastic fiction, and the story has haunted me for years.

The tale is intricately and carefully plotted and includes an element of suspense seldom found in Lovecraft. Quite literally, the tale is constructed in the style of a detective story—like one of those intellectual puzzles John Dickson Carr puts together with such enormous skill. Both the reader and the narrator are ignorant of what has happened; piece by piece the evidence fits together until the final shattering revelation. As an exercise in plotting ingenuity alone, the tale would be a delight; as a glimpse of the cosmic horrors that may lie hidden in the remoteness of time, geological epochs from our own day, and of the unguessable and terrible secrets earth's unknown past conceals, the story is a thing of mounting horror and tension screwed to the last notch of suspense.

Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee, an instructor in political economy at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Mass., was struck by a sudden and inexplicable attack of total amnesia while in the midst of a lecture. Five years later he regained his memory, lacking the slightest hint as to events during this lengthy period. His own memory of that time is a confused jumble of chaotic dreams —vivid and detailed dreams, to be sure, but dreams of such bizarre and monstrous surroundings and such strange beings that they must be the illusions conjured up by a disordered brain.

He discovers that his behavior during this five-year-long bout of total amnesia was bizarre in the extreme. He had collapsed on the podium during a lecture, fallen into deep unconsciousness, and was gradually aroused by physicians. However, when he was brought back to consciousness, the doctors were amazed to discover that their patient seemed to be unfamiliar with the uses of

his own body. His speech was awkward, as if his use of his vocal organs was a new experience to be carefully mastered; his diction was stilted and foreign, as if he had learned the English language from books alone. Even his expressions and gestures were clumsy and untrained, and he seemed almost to require re-education in the use of his arms, legs and hands. Once up and around, Peaslee began studying subjects oddly at variance with his earlier pursuits of history, science, art, language, folklore. Never in the slightest having evinced any interest in the occult "sciences" or mystical subjects, he began exploring strange old books, consorting with the most unlikely cultists, and, in time, he embarked on a series of travels seemingly at random—to the Himalayas, where he spent a month, through the unexplored desert wastes of Arabia, even to the remote Arctic and the vast limestone caverns of Virginia—travels without apparent purpose. Eventually, as if disappointed at the lack of results from these studies and journeys, Peaslee was observed to fall into a sort of ennui; he spoke vaguely (and, many thought, insincerely) of flashes of returning memory. Then followed his construction in secret of an odd mechanism, which later vanished quite mysteriously. And, just as mysteriously, Peaslee suddenly regained his memory—except for any knowledge of his activities during the period of amnesia.

Gradually the full truth emerges, and the reader is treated to one of Lovecraft's most spectacular creations: "the Great Race of Yith," nonhuman entities of pure mind who migrate across the ages, inhabiting the bodies of race after race. Centered in a prehistoric city in the wastes of inner Australia, one of these mental invaders had stolen Peaslee's body in order to research his particular era. During the interim, Peaslee's own intelligence was housed in one of the cone-shaped host-bodies possessed by the Race.

Lovecraft exposes the full impact of this discovery

in a sequence of tantalizing hints; it adds up to a sensational work of imagination—so sensational that Farnsworth Wright (by this time one could almost add, "of course—") rejected it.

In all fairness to the memory of a great editor, however, there may have been extenuating circumstances. Derleth has recorded (in *H.P.L.: A Memoir*) that Lovecraft often submitted manuscripts in a state of very unprofessional sloppiness:

> It must be pointed out that Lovecraft, burdened with his revision work, often sent out manuscripts in a bad state of disrepair. I saw *In the Vault* after its rejection by Wright, and found it all but unreadable; I retyped it, sent the new copy off to Wright, and in a short time Lovecraft had Wright's letter of acceptance. Donald Wandrei did the same thing with other manuscripts and arranged for their sale to *Astounding Stories*. Rejection of a tale which had involved considerable creative energy was a harsh blow for Lovecraft; he had none of the ego, so necessary to writers, to sustain him in the face of rejection; however much he assailed the judgment of the editor in question, everything he said and did goes to show that secretly he believed the editor might very well be right, because this was what he himself thought.

Wright may have rejected *The Shadow Out of Time* because the manuscript was all but illegible, or because of its extreme length (at nearly twenty-five thousand words, it is one of Lovecraft's longest stories). At any rate, this would seem to be one of the stories rescued from oblivion through the kind offices of Donald Wandrei, for it eventually wound up in *Astounding Stories* two years later.

The evidence suggests that Lovecraft had a lot of fun with this story; at least, more of his playful in-jokes and complimentary references to the members of his salon appear therein. He refers again to Howard's

Valusian serpentfolk, and to Smith's Hyperborean devil-god, Tsathoggua, and to the *Unaussprechilichen Kulten* of Von Junzt.

He also seems to have used this story to give his imprimatur to the Derleth/Schorer collaboration, *The Lair of the Star-Spawn,* which was, as mentioned in the preceeding chapter, the story that introduced the concept of the Elder Gods v. the Great Old Ones. That story also introduced the dreaded Tcho-Tcho people, and it is the Tcho-Tchos that Lovecraft mentions here.

He also added a new book to the ever-growing library of nonexistent tomes so frequently cited in Mythos yarns, in his passing reference to "the Comte d'Erlette's *Cultes des Goules.*" This is a rather complicated in-joke, the point of which was probably lost on most readers. It is not so much a pun on Derleth's name as a reference to Derleth's family history: Derleth was descended from French aristocracy (there really *were* Comtes d'Erlette before the storming of the Bastille). The family fled the country to avoid the wholesale slaughter of the aristocrats that occurred with the French Revolution; they took refuge for some time —generations, I gather—in Bavaria, and there the name became Germanicized into "Derleth." So, by using the obsolete form of the name for the author of an imaginary book of eldritch lore, and the extinct title, Lovecraft was making a joke few readers outside of actual members of the Circle could possibly have understood.

In the same story Lovecraft mentioned two other books: Ludvig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis* and "the disturbing and debatable Eltdown Shards." Both Ludvig Prinn and his *Mysteries of the Worm* were the inventions of young Robert Bloch. Bloch introduced Prinn and his book in a story first published in Wright's magazine the following year, 1935, which means that he had either discussed his contributions to the Mythos

with Lovecraft in advance, or showed him the manuscript of the story a year or more before it finally got into print.

While working up my research notes for this book, I became curious as to the exact process used by members of the Lovecraft Circle in making their additions to the lore of the Mythos. I wrote to some of them asking just how they had gone about inventing the imaginary books, authors and devil gods, and to what extent they had discussed their innovations in advance with Lovecraft.

Derleth replied that, in general, "We usually showed him our stories before they were printed." He recalled seeing a lengthy exchange of correspondence between Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard, in which the two worked out the details of the latter writer's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of Von Junzt. (The Lovecraft side of this particular sequence of letters will probably be included in the third volume of the *Selected Letters,* not yet available as I write this.) However, as Derleth recalled it, Smith did not do this. He felt that Smith's contributions to the Mythos were not seen by Lovecraft in advance, and that Lovecraft was not consulted during their creation.

Robert Bloch, however, had a different story to tell. In a letter dated June 7, 1971, he wrote to me on this point as follows:

> As I recall, I came up with Ludvig Prinn's *Mysteries of the Worm* and HPL quickly supplied me with the Latinized title; we had some minor discussion of the volume's publishing history, I believe, but it was tongue-in-cheek.

Bloch adds that it is rather hard to recall these things in any detail after a span of something like thirty-six years, admitting that "such a time-span tends to dim one's flashes of recall." But, continuing on the subject

of Ludvig Prinn and *De Vermis Mysteriis,* he remarks that both Kuttner and Earl Peirce[2] also picked up Prinn and his eldritch tome, mentioning them in some of their stories. (Henry Kuttner, then a young fan, began corresponding with Bloch from California in early 1936; before long he, too, moved into the Lovecraft Circle. Derleth was of the opinion that Henry Kuttner corresponded with Lovecraft very slightly, perhaps only during "the last eighteen months or so of Lovecraft's life.")

Bloch himself was only eighteen years old at this point; he eventually became one of the most prolific of the important writers who contributed to the Cthulhu Mythos, and between 1935 and 1951 he published no less than eleven tales which are firmly a part of the literature of the Mythos, together with a number of borderline stories. In time, his complete contribution to the literature of the Mythos proved larger than either that of Robert E. Howard or Clark Ashton Smith, and much larger than that of Long. In fact, only August Derleth wrote more Mythos stories then he.

As for those "disturbing and debatable Eltdown Shards," they first made their appearance in this story, if my chronology is correct. However, they also appear in one of the Lovecraft revisions, *The Diary of Alonzo Typer,* by William Lumley, published in *Weird Tales* for February, 1938. Since it sometimes took Farnsworth Wright a year or two, or even three, to get around to publishing a story he had purchased, it is altogether possible that the Shards were invented by Lumley. Anyway, they made yet a further appearance a year after this in *The Challenge From Beyond.*

While *The Shadow Out of Time* languished unpublished, Lovecraft turned his attention to an amusing

[2]In later years to become one of Bloch's discoveries, a young Milwaukee protégé of his own.

idea suggested by a prominent fanzine of the period called *Fantasy Magazine.*

This was one of the more ambitious of the fan productions, and it was printed in hand-set type, featuring articles, poems and stories by both amateur and professional writers in the related fields of fantasy and science fiction. To highlight their third anniversary issue, the editors of *Fantasy Magazine* suggested a round-robin story. Each author would write a segment and pass it along to the next. The same sort of thing had been done with considerable success with a science fiction epic called *Cosmos,* to which eighteen writers had contributed, among them such famous names as A. Merritt, E. E. Smith, Edmond Hamilton, and Otis Adelbert Kline.

The new story would be called *The Challenge from Beyond,* and for it the editors of the fanzine had coaxed contributions from a staggering array of the more celebrated authors of the *Weird Tales* group—A. Merritt,[3] H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, C. L. Moore, and Frank Belknap Long. It was Miss Moore who opened the story, followed by Merritt. Lovecraft's segment is a bit more rounded than the other contributions and could perhaps be published as a short story in its own right.

The story as a whole is not only remarkably brief for a round-robin yarn spun done by five writers—it is only about 6,400 words long—but it also hangs to-

[3]It is not generally remembered that A. Merritt was indeed a *Weird Tales* writer. Although the bulk of his stories and novels appeared in the mass-market adventure pulps of larger circulation, like *Argosy* and *All-Story Weekly,* one of the loveliest of his rare short stories, *The Woman of the Wood,* appeared in the August 1926 issue of *Weird Tales.* I say "rare" because Merritt wrote only six finished short stories, not counting the opening segments of a couple of his novels which appeared separately, with the continuation of the novel published as a sort of "sequel."

gether remarkably well. Lovecraft's contribution to it is rather interesting; he wrote the central portion of the story, and his episode is about three times longer than that of any of the others. He obviously wrote his portion while at work on *The Shadow Out of Time,* because he goes into the history of the Great Race (left unnamed in his text, but obviously that) and tells quite a bit more about "those debatable and disquieting clay fragments called the Eltdown Shards, dug up from pre-carboniferous strata in southern England thirty years before." Because it embroiders on Mythos lore established elsewhere, I cannot help but consider that *The Challenge from Beyond* qualifies as a Mythos story.

It seems to me rather odd that Clark Ashton Smith was not invited to contribute a segment to this famous round-robin story. But perhaps he was, and declined. By 1935, by his own count, Smith had written about one hundred short stories and was very near the end of his interest in this form.[4] From the partial list of dates, it looks to me as if he wrote no stories at all between 1933 and 1937. This falling off of production may have been why he declined to contribute a segment to *The Challenge from Beyond* (if indeed he had been asked to do so, which is probably the case).

Most of Smith's contribution to the Mythos appears in his Hyperborean story cycle, which introduced such demonic entities as Tsathoggua, Abhoth, Ubbo-Sathla, and Atlach-Natcha to the pantheon, and the *Book of Eibon* to the library. By 1935, Smith had completed

[4]Smith kept a careful list of his stories, with the day, month and year of the writing of each tale, and the date of later revisions, if any. This document, two sheets of paper titled "Completed Stories," was found among his papers after his death by Roy A. Squires of Glendale, California, who had known Smith, and who for a time after the writer's demise took care of the Smith papers. Squires, who has passed a copy along to me, has numbered the stories in chronological order by date of composition; with a few holes, the list totals 111 titles.

the entire cycle, save for a last story, *The Theft of Thirty-nine Girdles,* which was a late tale, not published until 1958. (Unfortunately, we do not have the date of composition for this tale.)

Smith did a lot of his work in story cycles, such as his several tales about Poseidonis—his name for the last isle of foundering Atlantis—and the Zothique stories. Neither of these utilized the Cthulhuoid apparatus. But Smith also wrote a sequence of tales set in Averoigne, an imaginary province of Medieval France. Most amusingly, he decided to include some of his Hyperborean material in these stories, making one of his characters, Gaspard du Nord, the translator of the elder *Book of Eibon* from Latin (in which tongue it is known as the *Liber Ivonie*) into 13th-century French, as the *Livre d'Eibon.*

A number of the characters in Smith's Averoigne tales are Medieval wizards, and it is amusing to hear them invoke "Zhothaqquah," "Yok-Zothoth," and "Kthulhut"—which I assume are the French "translation" of Tsathoggua, Yog-Sothoth and Cthulhu.

As for the other writer-members of the Lovecraft Circle, Derleth had published his second Mythos tale, *The Thing that Walked on the Wind,* in 1933, and it would be some years before he returned to take up his work in the Lovecraft vein. Long was busied with other affairs, too.

Howard had just about exhausted his ideas for Cthulhuoid stories and had moved on to other and undoubtedly better things. I refer, of course, to his Conan stories. The first of these, a rip-roaring swashbuckler entitled *The Phoenix on the Sword,* had seen the light of print only three years before, in the December 1932 issue of *Weird Tales.* The response from readers had been wildly enthusiastic. Earlier, Howard had dabbled rather unsuccessfully in the field of the

heroic fantasy tale set in imaginary prehistoric kingdoms with a couple of yarns about an Atlantean savage named Kull, who single-handedly invaded the mainland and usurped the throne of the ancient and wealthy realm of Valusia. Possibly inspired by certain very similar stories of his friend, Clark Ashton Smith—who was doing much the same sort of thing with his Hyperborea and Zothique yarns—Howard had belted off a bundle of these "King Kull" adventure stories to *Weird Tales*. In typical fashion, Farnsworth Wright had looked them over with a sour eye and belted them right back—all but two, which he eventually printed. One of the lucky two was *The Shadow Kingdom,* and you will recall how Lovecraft borrowed the serpentfolk of Valusia from that yarn to add to his growing corpus of Mythos lore.

I have seen the bundle of rejected King Kull stories —in fact, I edited, rewrote and finished some of them when the complete saga was eventually published (the book was called *King Kull,* published by Lancer in 1967; there have been a couple of printings since then, and I believe the book is still in print). They are not bad at all; a couple of them are superb vintage Sword & Sorcery tales, as good as anything Howard ever wrote. I am at a loss to understand why Farnsworth Wright refused them.

Howard evidently felt much the same way. He took one of the better yarns, *By This Axe I Rule!,* and rewrote it, keeping most of the names and much of the plot but introducing into the turmoil of the story a certain burly Cimmerian adventurer named Conan. Then he retitled it and shot it off to Farnsworth Wright, and this time it was snapped up. And *that* is how the first Conan story came to be written!

With Howard busily creating his world of the Hyborian Age and the saga of its mightiest hero, only Robert Bloch was left to work in the Lovecraftian

vein. Bloch was corresponding very steadily with Lovecraft, and under the stimulus of the older writer's encouragement, he was turning out stories for *Weird Tales* at a furious rate. The very first story he wrote which at all used the apparatus of the Cthulhu Mythos —or at least the very first one to get into print—was a comparatively minor effort called *The Secret in the Tomb,* which Wright ran in his May 1935 issue. This was followed by *The Suicide in the Study,* another Mythos tale, in the June issue. By this time, not only had Bloch invented Ludvig Prinn, author of the hellish *Mysteries of the Worm,* but he had picked up and was using Lovecraft's newest addition to the Cthulhuoid library, d'Erlette's *Cultes des Goules.*

1935 had yet some months to go, and Bloch got one more Cthulhu Mythos story into print in *Weird Tales* that year—a story called *The Shambler from the Stars,* which Wright printed in his September 1935 issue.

For that story, Bloch had the amusing idea of using Lovecraft himself as the main character. As Derleth described the incident,

> Robert Bloch, having proposed to have a little weird fun at Lovecraft's expense, wrote asking his permission to annihilate him in a story entitled *The Shambler from the Stars.* Lovecraft's fine sense of humor brought forth permission not only signed by Lovecraft, but also by his prime creation, the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, and by others of the Cthulhu Mythos—von Junzt, du Nord, and the Tcho-Tcho lama of Leng.

This "document" was reproduced in 1944 from the original Lovecraft letter and served as one of the illustrations in a book called *Marginalia,* an omnibus volume of odds and ends of fiction, verse and articles by and about Lovecraft. The letter reads like this:

Providence, R. I.,
April 30, 1935

To Whom it May Concern:

This is to certify that Robert Bloch, Esq., of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A.—reincarnation of Meinheer Ludvig Prinn, author of *De Vermis Mysteriis*—is fully authorised to portray, murder, annihilate, disintegrate, transfigure, metamorphose, or otherwise manhandle the undersigned in the tale entitled *The Shambler from the Stars.*

(signed) H. P. LOVECRAFT

Attest: Abdul Alhazred Gaspard du Nord
(translator, *Le Livre d'Eibon*)

Fvindvuf von Junzt Tcho-Tcho Lama of Leng
(Author: *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*)

These signatures (which, unfortunately, I cannot reproduce here) are also quite amusing. Alhazred's name is signed in what looks to me like decent Arabic, and Gaspard du Nord's signature is written in flowing swash characters that would not look out of place on a Medieval document. As for the signature of that mysterious Lama of Leng, whose features, you will recall, are ever hidden behind a mask-like veil of yellow silk, and who dwells alone in a prehistoric stone monastery, it is written in what appears to be Sanskrit characters, insofar as I can judge.

I can imagine with what delight Bloch received this tongue-in-cheek document. He sat right down to "annihilate" Lovecraft in his story. And thereby hangs a tale.

In fact, come to think of it, thereby hang *three* of them.

11. The Last Incantation

Actually, *The Shambler from the Stars* is three kinds of fiction at once: a horror story, a pastiche on Lovecraft's style, and an elaborate joke. Bloch later became known as one of the very few fantasy or horror or science fiction writers who knew how to use humor; this tale demonstrates his talents superbly. The tone of voice is solemn enough, but the Lovecraftian hyperbole and rhetoric is ever so slightly overdone; almost, but not quite, to the point of caricature, as the following passage suggests:

> I yearned to know the terrors of the grave; the kiss of maggots on my tongue, the cold caress of a rotting shroud upon my body. I thirsted for the knowledge that lies in the pits of mummied eyes, and burned for wisdom known only to the worm. . . .

Lovecraft, in a typical burst of florid prose, might well have penned the first phrase of the above, but I believe even he would have refrained from yearning for "the kiss of maggots" on the tongue!

As Bloch's story progresses, his narrator, a writer of weird fiction in the manner of Poe and Machen (whose name is not given in the tale), makes a friend of "a

mystic dreamer in New England," which is very obviously meant to be Lovecraft. "It was from the latter that I learned of the ancient books that hold strange lore," says Bloch, very straight-faced, through the voice of his narrator. "He quoted guardedly from the legendary *Necronomicon* and spoke timidly of a certain *Book of Eibon* that was reputed to surpass it in the utter wildness of its blasphemy. He himself had been a student of these volumes of primal dread, but . . . he had heard many strange things . . . in witch-haunted Arkham, where the old shadows still leer and creep."

Then Bloch has his character go on a search in the local second-hand bookstores, trying to find the *Necronomicon*—a rather droll idea, if you have ever done much hunting through such establishments (you are more likely to find Volume VII of Motley's *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* than the works of the mad Arab). He does, in fact, turn up a mouldering copy of Ludvig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis,* tucked in between a couple of volumes of Shakespeare. (He remarks that the proprietor was "obviously unaware of its nature." Equally obvious is the fact that the poor man was unaware of its value, for Bloch's character buys the ancient tome for $1.00!)

Bloch's character can make nothing of this trove of hideous and blasphemous Elder Wisdom, so he zips off to Providence—a dead giveaway, of course—to consult his friend, who is more learned in the "dark knowledge" than he. Together they pore over the crumbling book. Bloch solemnly informs us that even before opening it they knew ". . . that it was evil. The musty scent that rose from those antique pages," he records, "carried with it the reek of the tomb. The faded leaves were maggoty at the edges, and rats had gnawed the leather." Still using delicate, unobtrusive touches of exaggeration for the subliminal lampoon effect, he adds at this point, "rats which perchance had a *ghastlier food* for common fare."

As you might expect, Bloch's character and his Providence pal translate some of the loathsome rituals in the book—and with the usual dire results. An invisible entity enters the room, and the hapless Providence scholar has his blood drained by a vampiric thing while dangling in mid-air before the horrified eyes of the narrator. People in such tales who dabble in the forbidden lore very generally come to a somewhat gory end. And thus Bloch annihilated Lovecraft in the September 1935 issue of *Weird Tales.*

Lovecraft found the story quite funny, and hastened to return the favor by annihilating Bloch in a manner even grislier, if possible. During the latter months of 1935 he wrote his twelfth and last Cthulhu Mythos story, *The Haunter of the Dark,* a minor effort which ran to under ten thousand words.

The Haunter of the Dark is an amusing reply to Bloch's pastiche. The protagonist of the tale is, in fact, the identical character of whom Bloch had written, and Lovecraft supplies him with an obvious name—"Robert Blake." Lovecraft's story picks up after the close of *The Shambler from the Stars,* which finished with the death of the Providence scholar, whereupon Bloch had his horrified and soul-shaken writer-hero burn down the house to eradicate all trace of the blood-drained corpse.

Lovecraft opens his tale with "Blake's" return to Milwaukee after his Providence visit to "a strange old man as deeply given to occult and forbidden lore as he—had ended amidst death and flame." Blake is the author of some splendid short stories of weird horror —with vast aplomb, Lovecraft follows this statement by inventing five imaginary stories, whose titles (*The Burrowers Beneath, The Stairs in the Crypt, Shaggai, In the Vale of Pnath,* and *The Feaster from the Stars*) are deliciously straight-faced parodies of the typical Cthulhuoid title. He tells how Blake is drawn back to Providence by his continuing interest in the forbidden

lore, becomes interested in the curious history of a queer, now-extinct cult called "the Starry Wisdom sect," and explores its deserted church, finding a library filled with the usual books—Von Junzt, Eibon, Alhazred, Prinn, the *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* and a newcomer called the *Book of Dzyan.*[1]

Up in the attic, or the steeple, or whatever it is, "Robert Blake" finds a curiously-angled stone pillar and a metal box "of peculiarly asymmetrical form." Within the box is an egg-shaped crystal of some kind. Documents turn up which relate the strange rise and peak of the Starry Wisdom sect and its collapse in scandal. The crystal is called "the Shining Trapezohedron," and it has an odd, colorful history:

> It was fashioned on dark Yuggoth, before ever the Old Ones brought it to earth. It was treasured and placed in its curious box by the crinoid things of Antarctica, salvaged from their ruins by the serpent-men of Valusia, and peered at eons later in Lemuria by the first human beings. It crossed strange lands and stranger seas, and sank with Atlantis before a Minoan fisher meshed it in his net and sold it to swarthy merchants from nighted Khem. The Pharaoh Nephren-Ka built around it a temple with a windowless crypt, and did that which caused his name to be stricken from all monuments and records. Then it slept in the ruins of that evil fane which the priests and the new Pharaoh destroyed, till the delver's spade once more brought it forth to curse mankind.

The Shining Trapezohedron, as it turns out, is associated with the worship of Nyarlathotep, and by fiddling around with it, poor Blake releases the Haunter of the

[1]Since these mouldering tomes of ancient lore turn up, in just about every Mythos story, in the collection of this or that eccentric recluse, cult or institution, I wonder why the members of the Lovecraft Circle keep telling us how fantastically *rare* they are!

Dark, which is supposed to be an avatar of the Crawling Chaos, and comes to the usual sticky end reserved for characters in a Lovecraftian tale—if anything, an end even stickier than that of the "old gentleman of Providence," who was, you recall, drained of blood while dangling in mid-air in the clutches of the Shambler from the Stars. Blake goes reeling off in mad terror, his mind crumbling as the Haunter of the Dark comes clawing in through the window—

> I am mad or going mad—the thing is stirring and fumbling in the tower—I am it and it is I. . . . There is a monstrous odor . . . senses transfigured . . . boarding at that tower window cracking and giving way . . . Ia . . . ngai . . . ygg . . . I see it com—coming here—hell-wind—titan blur—black wings—Yog-Sothoth save me —the three-lobed burning eye . . .

The story is an excellent one, and the elements of the in-joke are mostly too subtle to be easily seen. But when Lovecraft gives "Robert Blake's" address, "620 East Knapp Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin," he is of course giving Bloch's address at that time. He also slips in several references to Bloch's stories. For example, the stuff about the Pharaoh Nephren-Ka, whose "evil fane" was destroyed by the priests, is a sly reference to one of Bloch's best Mythos stories, *Fane of the Black Pharaoh,* which is all about Nephren-Ka.[2] Further references to the Blochian canon may be seen in the query, "Is it not an avatar of Nyarlathotep, who in antique and shadowy Khem even took on the form of man?" which refers to a cycle of Egyptian stories Bloch was writing, borderline Mythos material, centering around the place of Nyarlathotep in Egyptian his-

[2]Few of Lovecraft's readers could possibly have gotten the point of the joke, unless they were fortunate enough to have access to a time machine. The Bloch story, which Lovecraft doubtless read in manuscript, was not published until 1937.

tory. The last stories in this cycle did not reach print until 1938.

Just to make sure his readers got the joke, Lovecraft dedicated *The Haunter of the Dark* to Robert Bloch.

Bloch retaliated some years later in a final story called *The Shadow from the Steeple,* which forms a direct sequel to *The Haunter.* This time he turned the joke on himself.

In Bloch's story Edmund Fiske is investigating the death of his friend, Robert Blake, whom Bloch describes as "a precocious adolescent interested in fantasy-writing." Tracing the events surrounding his friend's demise, Fiske goes to Providence, digs into the history of the Starry Wisdom cult, and learns that the Shining Trapezohedron itself was carried off after Blake's death by a certain Dr. Ambrose Dexter. Fiske tracks down this Doctor Dexter and visits his home (finding his library filled, as one might suspect, with the usual run of "fabulously rare" ancient tomes). They talk, and here Bloch quite openly brings not only himself, Robert Bloch, into the story, but also Lovecraft as Lovecraft; among other things they discuss the Nyarlathotep legend, and Fiske even quotes from Lovecraft's sonnet, "Nyarlathotep"—one of his "Fungi from Yuggoth" sequence—a delectable bit of macabre versifying which includes the ominous lines:

> And at the last from inner Egypt came
> The strange dark One to whom the fellahs bowed;
> Silent and lean and cryptically proud,
> And wrapped in fabrics red as sunset flame.
> Throngs pressed around, frantic for his commands,
> But leaving, could not tell what they had heard:
> While through the nations spread the awestruck word
> That wild beasts followed him and licked his hands.

Fiske is not deceived by the suave physician. He pulls a gun on him—an unwise move—and Fiske drops dead of what seems to be a heart attack. As for the Doctor,

who is far more than just a Doctor, he goes out into the moonlit garden, where two escaped black panthers are roaming about; they spot him and advance, "eyes aglow, jaws slavering and agape." Bloch concludes the tale neatly:

> Doctor Dexter turned away. His face was turned in mockery to the moon as the beasts fawned before him *and licked his hands.*

Lovecraft wrote *The Haunter of the Dark* in 1935; it was the last of his Cthulhu Mythos stories. That same year he performed some extensive revisions on a science fiction horror tale a young correspondent named Kenneth Sterling had written. The story was called *In the Walls of Eryx,* and it appeared in *Weird Tales* as by "Kenneth Sterling and H. P. Lovecraft." It was the only one of his revisions to appear under a dual byline (not counting *Through the Gates of the Silver Key,* which is really a collaboration, not a revision).

Lovecraft wrote no more stories, *The Haunter of the Dark* being the last completed story to come from his hands.

The next year, 1936, members of the Lovecraft Circle were shocked and saddened to learn of the sudden death of Robert E. Howard. "Two-Gun Bob," as Lovecraft jokingly called him, was a hardy and robust Texan, but he had an unusually strong emotional attachment to his mother. Howard was capable of enormous effort—he created the mighty saga of Conan the Cimmerian in just four years[3]—but he was not able to sever this relationship. Mother and son were just too

[3]So well did he do the job that the famous barbarian is still very much alive and kicking today, thirty-five years after Howard's death. At the time of this writing, a new novel, *Conan the Buccaneer,* has just been published: It is a Howardian pastiche, written by L. Sprague de Camp and myself, who have picked up and continued the saga of the Cimmerian from the point at which Robert E. Howard left him.

close. After a lingering illness, Mrs. Howard died, and her son fell into a deep mood of despondency. Unable to endure the thought of life without her presence, Howard put a pistol to his head and blew his brains out at eight o'clock on the hot summer morning of July 11th, 1936. With his untimely death, *Weird Tales* lost one of the greatest writers ever to fill its pages with his surging narrative and glorious gusto.

Robert E. Howard was a writer of enormous verve and energy, and his production of stories was truly amazing. Between 1925 and 1936 he wrote something like 91 weird or fantastic tales, some of them book-length novels, mostly for *Weird Tales*. And this was only a fraction of his total output; it does not include his historical adventure stories, mysteries, sports and westerns, and other fiction. He also produced enough verse to fill at least two small volumes. Today he is chiefly remembered as the founder of the Sword & Sorcery school of heroic fantasy, whose members have included Henry Kuttner, C. L. Moore, Fritz Leiber, L. Sprague de Camp, Poul Anderson, Jack Vance, Michael Moorcock, Andre Norton, and others.

His death was a major loss to *Weird Tales*. Had it not been for his one fatal flaw—this unhappy emotional relationship with his mother—Howard would probably be very much alive today, and very likely, at only 65, would be still writing. Lord—I wonder what sort of thing he would be writing today, with all those years of experience behind him!

Lovecraft, who greatly admired Howard, despite the vast difference in temperament and life-style that existed between the two-fisted Texan and the sickly Rhode Island recluse, was very deeply moved by Howard's tragic death. For Julius Schwartz's *Fantasy Magazine* he composed a tribute, entitled *Robert Ervin Howard: A Memoriam*. It was a serious, thoughtful, appreciative study of Howard's writing, and it ran to around two thousand words. He noted Howard's "skill

and zest in depicting sanguinary conflict" and observed that his stories possessed "a vitality found in few of his contemporaries." In a shrewd analysis, he delved into the very heart of Howard's power as a writer: that he was, purely and simply, a story-teller. He wrote:

> It is hard to describe precisely what made Mr. Howard's stories stand out so sharply. But the real secret is that he himself is in every one of them, whether they were ostensibly commercial or not. Even when he outwardly made concessions to Mammon-guided editors and commercial critics, he had an internal force and sincerity which broke through the surface and put the imprint of his personality on everything he wrote. Seldom, if ever, did he set down a lifeless stock character or situation and leave it as such. Before he concluded with it, it always took on some tinge of vitality and reality in spite of popular editorial policy—always drew something from his own experience and knowledge of life. Not only did he excel in pictures of strife and slaughter, but he was almost alone in his ability to create real emotions of spectral fear and dread suspense. That such a genuine artist should perish while hundreds of insincere hacks continue to concoct spurious ghosts and vampires and space-ships and occult detectives is indeed a sorry piece of cosmic irony.

An even greater loss was to follow in the space of a very few months.

Lovecraft and his remaining aunt, Annie E. Phillips Gamwell, lived quietly in the old house at 66 College Street in Providence, which was Lovecraft's last home. He was fond of writing during the nighttime hours, and he took to drawing the window shades down by day and working by electric light. Although he wrote no new stories in the last two years of his life, he kept up a tremendous correspondence with about one hundred regular pen pals all over the world. Among these, towards the last, was a young fan in California named

Henry Kuttner, who was only twenty-three in that year of 1937. Although Kuttner only corresponded with Lovecraft during the last eighteen months or so of his life, he felt the same stimulation from the older writer's friendly encouragement that had helped August Derleth and Robert Bloch move into the ranks of professional writers while still in their teens.

And there were two other fledgling writers who joined the ranks of Lovecraft's innumerable correspondents during his last year or so. One was a young woman of 26 named Catherine Lucile Moore, or "C. L. Moore," as she signed her stories. She had been working in a bank in Indianapolis when she sold her first story to *Weird Tales.* It had appeared only four years before, in the November 1933 issue. Called *Shambleau,* the story had been a big hit with the readership, and C. L. Moore was well on her way to becoming one of the most popular of the new crop of *Weird Tales* writers.

Also among the last of Lovecraft's correspondents was Fritz Leiber, jr., the son of the celebrated Shakespearean actor (who can still be seen on the Late Late Show in such fine films as the Charles Laughton version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* and *Anthony Adverse*). Leiber, who was 27 in Lovecraft's last year, was to become very popular as a contributor, not to *Weird Tales,* but to its forthcoming (and, unfortunately, short-lived) fantasy competitor, *Unknown,* as well as to *Unknown*'s science fiction companion magazine, *Astounding Stories,* both under the creative editorship of John W. Campbell, jr.

I suppose C. L. Moore and Fritz Leiber corresponded too briefly with Lovecraft to fall under his spell as completely as had Bloch, Derleth, and the others. They never wrote anything that is, strictly speaking, part of the literature of the Mythos. Leiber, in fact, has written very little weird or horror fiction, and what few pieces he has done in the genre show no

traces of Lovecraftian influence. Indeed, that very fact is probably what makes his few weird stories so remarkable: the finest of them, the short novel *Conjure Wife*,[4] is as un-Lovecraftian as you can get—a bright, sunlit, everyday sort of horror story which takes place in the mundane atmosphere of a college campus. Un-Lovecraftian or no, it is a brilliant and exciting piece of fiction—all the more noteworthy in that it avoids the typically Lovecraftian excesses of using stock adjectives to suggest a mood of spectral terrors.

Writing letters filled the days; the nights Lovecraft loved to spend strolling the moonlit streets of Providence on solitary expeditions—the same streets that Poe had walked before him. Increasingly dissatisfied with his stories, he wrote less and less of them, and none at all came from his hand during the last two years of his life.

He lived like a hermit, a recluse, in self-imposed exile from his own world and his age, neither of which he enjoyed. Far rather would he have been born a cosmopolitan Roman of the late Empire, or an English squire in his beloved 18th century, or a colonial gentleman of the days before the Revolution. Alas, he was none of these things, except in his extraordinarily vivid dreams.

As time went on his health gradually worsened, although his letters to his friends reflect little of this. It was not in Lovecraft's nature to complain about his health any more than it was to complain about the low ebb of his finances, but one cannot sustain bodily

[4]Which has not only been adapted—and quite well adapted, too—into a television drama, but also has been made into a feature movie. The movie, oddly enough, was titled (for some reason known only to those students of abnormal psychology who have delved into the innermost psyche of film producers) *Burn, Witch, Burn*—which must have greatly confused any devotees of A. Merritt who happened to be in the audience.

health on the sort of diet of beans and other cheap foods his slender income could afford. His letters during 1936, said August Derleth, occasionally mentioned "little disabilities and annoying infirmities," but there was never a mention of the very serious nature of his illness, although he must have been aware that he was in truth seriously ill; Derleth mentions, in *H.P.L.: A Memoir,* how in a letter dated February 17, 1937, Lovecraft wrote, discussing a renewed interest in his old boyhood hobby of astronomy, "Funny how early interests crop up again toward the end of one's life."

Twenty-six days after writing those words, H. P. Lovecraft died in the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital in Providence, from a combination of Bright's disease[5] and intestinal cancer.

In simple language, August Derleth quietly described the end of the story. I cannot hope to improve upon his words, so I shall repeat them here:

> He was buried three days later, in his Grandfather Phillips' lot in Swan Point Cemetery, of which he had increasingly written in the last decade of his life, "where I shall someday repose." Though his name is inscribed on the central shaft, no stone marks his grave.

[5]A disease characterized by the presence of albumin in the urine and heightened blood pressure; it is named after the British physician who was the first to describe it.

12. Beyond the Tomb

When Howard Phillips Lovecraft died, early in the morning of March 15, 1937, he was only forty-six years and seven months old. I suppose it would be somewhat inaccurate to say that those who knew him were shocked and surprised to hear of his death at so early an age, although of course they were deeply saddened at the death of their dear friend and comrade. But Lovecraft had always been sickly and had lived much of his life like a semi-invalid. Donald A. Wollheim, who knew Lovecraft, tells me that it was quite obvious to anyone who met him during his last years that something was seriously wrong with his health. His sickly pallor, his thinnness, and his "air of an invalid" all suggested that he was not at all a well man.

The news, however, caught most of his friends unawares. August Derleth had gone into the country for the day; there, in the marshes below his home in Sauk City, Wisconsin, he had strolled with his morning's mail and a copy of Thoreau's *Journal,* heading for a favorite spot where it was his custom to sit in the sun and read. Among the day's mail was a letter from Donald Wandrei's brother, Howard, who was then in New York and who was one of the first to hear that Lovecraft was dead. Derleth recalled that he read the

letter during his walk into the marshes; stunned, his book set aside and forgotten, he sat down at a railroad trestle beside a brook and thought of his friend and mentor. It occurred to him then that Lovecraft's best stories should be rescued from the oblivion of old pulp magazines and preserved in the dignity of a hardcover book. He could not have dreamed at the time how this thought was to grow into a publishing enterprise that was to occupy much of his time for the rest of his life.

In Chicago, word of Lovecraft's death came to Farnsworth Wright, who was putting together his June issue. The two men had had their differences, surely, and it may have rankled Wright for a long time that Lovecraft had been Henneberger's first choice for the editorial chair of *Weird Tales*. But Wright sat down at his desk deeply moved and wrote a eulogy that ran to a column and a half:

> Sad indeed is the news that tells us of H. P. Lovecraft's death. He was a titan of weird and fantastic literature, whose literary achievements and impeccable craftsmanship were acclaimed throughout the English-speaking world. He was only forty-six years of age, yet had built up a following such as few authors ever had.

Wright went on to describe what he knew of Lovecraft's childhood and life interests, and to discuss his many accomplishments, concluding sadly:

> His death is a serious loss to weird and fantastic fiction; but to the editors of *Weird Tales* the personal loss takes precedence. We admired him for his great literary achievements, but we loved him for himself; for he was a courtly and noble gentleman, and a dear friend. Peace be to his shade!

I suppose the most deeply stricken of Lovecraft's friends were the younger writers, those still not quite

beyond the neophyte phase. Some, like Derleth, were beginning to find broader recognition of their talents than even the pages of *Weird Tales* could offer.[1] One such writer, just getting started, was Robert Bloch. Years later, Bloch was asked how much of an influence Lovecraft had been on his own work. He replied, "A tremendous influence. I consciously imitated him for several years, as did Henry Kuttner and a number of other, then-neophyte, writers. He criticized my writing and helped direct it through correspondence." Elsewhere, Bloch wrote that, had he known how serious Lovecraft's condition really was towards the end, he would if necessary have crawled on his hands and knees to have been at his bedside.

Letters from Lovecraft's fellow writers, both those whom he had known personally and those who had merely shared a contents page or two with him, began to pour into the office of *Weird Tales*—there being no better forum than the letters column of the magazine to which he had contributed so many stories. From New York City, Manly Wade Wellman wrote, sadly remarking: "I had hoped to meet Mr. Lovecraft, and mourn my ill luck in not doing so; I can say, at least, that he was my early inspiration and constant study in this field, as he must have been for many younger writers . . . let me express my shocked feeling of sorrow and loss at the passing of this consistently fine artist."

From California, Clark Ashton Smith wrote: "I—alas! —never met him, but we had corresponded for about seventeen years, and I felt that I knew him

[1]Derleth had turned, at least in part, from weird fiction to the writing of regional mainstream fiction, and he recalled that at the time of Lovecraft's death he was midway through the first draft of one of his most distinguished novels, *Wind Over Wisconsin*. His publishers were the famous firm of Charles Scribner's Sons, who became celebrated as the publishers of Thomas Wolfe and Ernest Hemingway. At an astonishingly youthful age, Derleth had already passed beyond the meagre accomplishments Lovecraft had achieved.

better than most people with whom I was thrown in daily intimacy. . . . there are few tales of his that I have not read and re-read many times. . . . I am profoundly saddened at the news of [his] death after a month of painful illness. The loss seems an intolerable one, and I am sure that it will be felt deeply and permanently by the whole weird fiction public. Most of all it will be felt by the myriad friends who knew Lovecraft through face-to-face meeting or correspondence."

Edmond Hamilton wrote from Pennsylvania: "I just heard the news of H. P. Lovecraft's recent death. This is quite a shock, coming so soon after the death of Howard. While I never met either of them, I have been appearing with them in *Weird Tales* for so long that I had a dim feeling of acquaintance. . . . It is too bad that he is gone—there will never be another like him."

Henry Kuttner, then living in Beverley Hills, California, wrote: "I've been feeling extremely depressed about Lovecraft's death. Even now I can't realize it. He was my literary idol since the days of *The Horror at Red Hook,* and lately a personal friend as well. The loss to literature is a very great one, but the loss to HPL's friends is greater. He seemed, somehow, to have been an integral part of my literary life—and the shock was more severe because I had not known that his illness was serious."

From Brooklyn, New York, Seabury Quinn wrote: "Lovecraft, whom I had the pleasure of knowing personally, was both a scholar and a gentleman, and his writings disclosed both his scholarship and his gentility, as well as a genius which has not been observable since the death of Poe and Hawthorne. We who knew him personally shall miss his quiet humor and his always-interesting conversation; thousands of those who had never met the man will join with us in deploring the loss of his contributions to a field of literature which he had made peculiarly his own. God rest his soul."

These are selections from only a few of the letters that came pouring into *Weird Tales* from famous writers and unknown readers alike, each letter filled with shock and sorrow and with the certain cognizance of the very great importance of Lovecraft's contribution to the literature of the macabre.

I think the most moving of all the tributes and eulogies was one written by Clark Ashton Smith.

Smith, himself rather frail and much of a recluse in those days, was living alone in a small rustic cabin in the wooded hills just outside of Auburn, a small California town, when the news of Lovecraft's death reached him. Because he was alone, we have no record of the emotion that shook him, but I feel certain that his fine aristocratic features saddened and that his eyes misted as he thought of the friend, only three years his senior, who now was gone.

He sat down at his desk and wrote:

Lover of hills and fields and towns antique,
How hast thou wandered hence
On ways not found before,
Beyond the dawnward spires of Providence?
Hast thou gone forth to seek
Some older bourn than these—
Some Arkham of the prime and central wizardries?
Or, with familiar felidae,
Dost now some new and secret wood explore,
A little past the senses' farther wall—
Where spring and sunset charm the eternal path
From Earth to ether in dimensions nemoral?
Or hath the Silver Key
Opened perchance for thee
Wonders and dreams and worlds ulterior?
Hast thou gone home to Ulthar or to Pnath?
Has the high king who reigns on dim Kadath
Called back his courtly, sage ambassador?
Or darkling Cthulhu sent
The sign which makes thee now a councilor

Within that foundered fortress of the deep
Where the Old Ones stir in sleep
Till mighty temblors shake their slumbering continent?

Smith completed the poem, with seventeen additonal lines, and mailed it to Farnsworth Wright.

Weird Tales published it in the July 1937 issue.

There were also tributes in verse from Emil Petaja and Francis Flagg, August Derleth and Henry Kuttner, Frank Belknap Long and Vincent Starrett.

But ultimately the most lasting and important of memorials to Lovecraft's memory was that created by Derleth and Donald Wandrei. It grew from the idea that crossed Derleth's mind as he sat there by the railroad trestle in that Wisconsin spring morning, holding Howard Wandrei's letter in his hand.

Years later Derleth recalled the thoughts that had run through his mind that day:

> I had no illusions about the difficulty of persuading a New York publisher to bring out such a collection, for, in the broadest sense, Lovecraft was relatively obscure, he wrote in a vein for which there has never been any very large audience in the United States, and all his previous submissions of book manuscripts to publishers like Putnam, Knopf and others had been futile—though it should be said in favor of the publishers and their readers that Lovecraft, negative in his attitude about his work, customarily submitted dog-eared, hardly legible, single-spaced manuscripts, which were certainly enough to discourage the most hardy readers and editors.

Derleth returned home and later in the day wrote to Donald Wandrei suggesting that something should certainly be done to keep Lovecraft's better stories in print. Wandrei replied to the effect that not only the stories but the poems as well, and even the "marvelously instructive and entertaining letters" Lovecraft had written to his many friends, should be preserved.

Derleth swiftly compiled the manuscript of a book of the better Lovecraft stories. The title was an obvious choice: *The Outsider and Others*—obvious not only because *The Outsider* was an all-time favorite among *Weird Tales* readers, but also because Lovecraft himself had been an outsider in his own time.

In his memoir of this incident Derleth neglected to record yet a third reason, which he may have forgotten—that *Weird Tales* at one time had briefly considered bringing out a Lovecraft book under the title *The Outsider*. This notion probably had been allowed to lapse because of *Weird Tales'* unfortunate experience with the one book of stories reprinted from early issues which they did publish. This volume, entitled *The Moon Terror,* included stories by Vincent Starrett and A. G. Birch, and that famous story, *Ooze,* by Anthony M. Rud, which was the only memorable tale in the historic first issue. (The book also included a story called *An Adventure in the Fourth Dimension,* by none other than Farnsworth Wright.)

Looking back on the event, I get the impression that *The Moon Terror* was one of the most resounding flops in the history of book publishing. The book is advertised in the earliest copy of *Weird Tales* in my collection, the issue of August 1928, and flipping through the years I notice those early ads vigorously hail the book as (variously) "The Popular Book of the Year" (1928), "While They Last! The Book Requested by Thousands" (1929), and "Tremendously Popular!" (1930).

By 1934, *Weird Tales* was getting a bit desperate, and offered the thing free if you bought a subscription to the magazine for $1.50. In 1935 poor Farnsworth Wright was pushing it in his December issue, obviously with an eye on the Christmas shopper, as "A Valuable Gift." By 1937 he was back to charging hard cash for it, with the headline "While They Last! At Special Close-out Price—50¢." They continued to "last" into

1939, and by 1940 Wright was warning his book-hungry horde of readers that "supplies are strictly limited," and I sometimes wonder if they ever *did* manage to unload the thing.

At any rate, you can readily understand why *Weird Tales* thought twice about bringing out another book.

Derleth sent the manuscript of *The Outsider and Others* to his own publisher: Scribners. "They were sympathetic to the project and recognized the literary value of Lovecraft's fiction; but in the end they were forced to reject the manuscript because the cost of producing so bulky a book, combined with the public's then sturdy resistance to buying short story collections and the comparative obscurity of H. P. Lovecraft as a writer, made the project financially prohibitive," Derleth later recalled. The book went to Simon & Schuster next, and drew much the same response.

As Derleth told the tale:

> It was at this point that the idea of publishing the omnibus under an imprint of our own occurred to me. I wrote again to Donald Wandrei, setting forth my plan. Both of us were impecunious writers—and how rare is the writer who is not!—but I was at that time building a home for which a local bank had advanced a considerable sum (not, however, without four times the amount of the loan in mortgage and insurance policies collateral, as is the invariable custom of banks), and it seemed to me that one manifest course was open to a would-be publisher—to advertise for advance prepaid orders, and to pay off the printer from the sum of my loan. To this, Donald Wandrei added what small sum he could scrape together at that time, at great personal sacrifice, amounting to 20% of the production cost; and, with the full co-operation of Lovecraft's surviving aunt, Mrs. Annie E. Phillips Gamwell, and Robert H. Barlow, whom Lovecraft had named his literary executor . . . the project took shape.

The two neophyte publishers chose "Arkham House" as the name of their newly-launched enterprise, which at that time they envisioned as lasting only long enough to publish three large-sized volumes of Lovecraftiana. Derleth recalled: "There was never any question about the name of our publishing house. Arkham House suggested itself at once, since it was Lovecraft's own well-known, widely-used place-name for legend-haunted Salem. It seemed to us that this was fitting and that Lovecraft himself would have approved it enthusiastically."

And so plans were underway to publish the first major collection of Lovecraft in hardcover. A printer and binder had to be located, money had to be raised to finance the project, advertising had to be planned—there were many things to be done.

But it was started. . . .

The young Florida poet and fantasy connoisseur, Robert H. Barlow, was the person named by Lovecraft to assume control over his literary properties. Barlow made the long trek up from Florida to pack up Lovecraft's voluminous papers, of which he was now in charge.

For months after Lovecraft's death the letters column of *Weird Tales* reverberated with his name, as readers and fellow-writers expressed their anguish at his death. Farnsworth Wright was anxious to preserve in print any unpublished material Lovecraft might have left. During Lovecraft's last year, he had published, in his January issue, *The Thing on the Doorstep;* in his March issue he had reprinted *The Picture in the House.* In the issue that followed the announcement of Lovecraft's death—July—Wright published a sonnet that H.P.L. had written to Virgil Finlay. Obviously, he could reprint more stories from past issues—but he was hungry to get new, unpublished stories with the Lovecraft byline.

Weird Tales, at this point, seems to have been having another bout of financial troubles of the sort that plagued the magazine off and on throughout its entire career. Trouble was again cropping up; the magazine had been sold to Short Stories, Inc., and the offices were moved to 9 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. Farnsworth Wright retained his position, even moving to New York himself, but he was an old man now, and beginning to fail. With a new management to satisfy, *Weird Tales* had to show some comfortable profits.

One thing that would help was new Lovecraft material, for not only had Lovecraft been one of Wright's most popular writers, with a large, devoted and enthusiastic following, but the grief of his loss was still fresh in the minds of the readers. Derleth and Wandrei were obviously the people to talk to, for, although Barlow had the manuscripts, it was the two older men who were actively engaged in preserving the work of their friend. Derleth obligingly sent Wright the text of a few of the early Dunsanian stories that Lovecraft had published decades before in some of the amateur magazines, and a batch of poems. Wright did not pass them up, but rushed them into print. Perhaps now he wished he had not so capriciously rejected all of those stories. . . .

Throughout that year, 1938, Wright published a Lovecraft poem in five different issues, besides reprinting *The Tree* and *The Nameless City,* which were the tales Derleth had sent him. Poems were all right—they kept Lovecraft on the contents page—but it was *stories* he really wanted. There was no telling what unpublished manuscripts lurked undiscovered among the Lovecraft papers which Barlow had carted home to Florida.

Barlow proved uncommunicative and uncooperative. He never catalogued the manuscripts, never seems to have even gone through them, and had no idea what was there. His distant manner and the time-lag in his

replies to a letter alienated both Wright and Wandrei, who found him impossible to work with; Derleth, on the other hand, carefully maintained a friendly relationship with the aloof Floridian and occasionally got some cooperation from him. But not much.

Early in 1939, Wright must have been delighted to receive in the mail an unpublished manuscript with the Lovecraft byline. It came from an old friend and correspondent of Lovecraft's and it was called *The Evil Clergyman.* Neither Derleth nor Wandrei had ever heard of it. While the story was so markedly inferior to the Master's later accomplishments as to rouse grave doubts of its authenticity in the mind of anyone but an editor, Wright snapped it up and rushed it into the April issue, changing the title to *The Wicked Clergyman,* for some Wrightish reason, and hailing it as "a brief posthumous tale by a great master of eery fiction." I get the impression that the tale was included in that April issue at the last moment—too late even to get Lovecraft's name on the cover. I may be wrong here, but significantly the story was not announced as forthcoming in the previous issue, which implies that it was a last-minute arrival.

The readers were probably puzzled at this inconsequential, unpolished little tale, which read so unlike the last few stories they had seen from Lovecraft's hand. There may even have been a few suspicions of a fraud; as it eventually came out, however, the story was genuinely the work of Lovecraft. Only—it was not a story at all, but a lengthy excerpt from one of Lovecraft's letters, describing a fantastic dream.

While Farnsworth Wright was struggling along with *Weird Tales,* Derleth and Wandrei were moving towards a momentous event, the publication of the very first book to bear the imprint of Arkham House. They selected "the nearest, most widely-known printer who could do a complete operation," the Collegiate Press

of the George W. Banta Company of Menasha, Wisconsin. His plant was a trifle over a hundred miles northeast of Derleth's home town of Sauk City, which he was shortly to put on the map. For the jacket designer, they selected the distinguished and popular magazine illustrator and gallery artist, Virgil Finlay, whose work had appeared for so many years in *Weird Tales* that he was an intrinsic part of the magazine in the minds of the fans.

The Outsider and Others was a whale of a book; they packed thirty-six of Lovecraft's stories into it, and his famous essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature," plus an introduction. The text ran to five hundred and sixty-six pages of type, and rather small type at that. (For *The Outsider,* they used a linotype Caslon typeface, although later books under the Arkham House imprint generally employed a Garamond face. The paper selected was White Winnebago Eggshell, which continued to be used throughout the history of the House; the binding was Bancroft Arrestox black natural finish, soon to be replaced with Holliston Black Novelex. Once the format was established, Arkham House books did not vary through the years; today the House still employs the same printer and uses the same typeface, paper and binding, which lends a remarkable air of continuity to its publications.)

Derleth and Wandrei began running large ads in *Weird Tales,* soliciting advance prepaid orders, using for incentive a reduced price. Copies ordered before publication cost only $3.50; copies ordered subsequent to publication would cost $5.00. In the last days of 1939, the books arrived at Derleth's home and shipments began.

Orders trickled in with astonishing slowness, considering the high regard *Weird Tales* readers had for Lovecraft, and the foofaraw resulting from his untimely demise. And depressingly small orders they were. Only 1,268 copies were bound in all, according

to Derleth, and the fans were so dishearteningly *un*-eager to purchase the volume that it took four solid years to sell out. The reader reaction to the birth of Arkham House must have been a genuine blow to Derleth and Wandrei, especially to Derleth, who had sunk a considerable sum in the venture and would have been in serious financial trouble if he failed to recoup his expenses. He has recorded that, by publication time, a mere one hundred and fifty advance orders had come trickling in; nor did post-publication orders exactly flood the local mails, despite good publicity and generous notice given the launching of the new venture in *Publishers' Weekly* and other trade media.

Hindsight usually gives an amusing perspective to events: Derleth recalls that some purchasers complained loudly over the price (and $3.50, for a book of such size and wordage, was a remarkably decent price even by the standards of 1939). Doubtless such parsimonius souls winced in horror years later, when copies of *The Outsider and Other* became scarce and much sought-after, often commanding prices many times the decent sum asked by Derleth and Wandrei in the beginning. Derleth laughingly remembers one would-be purchaser who wrote him a vituperative letter after publication, when Derleth returned his check for $3.50, explaining the post-publication price was $5.00. This particular gentleman, clutching his purse with an iron grip, stoutly swore he would never pay so inflated a price . . . yet ten years later, according to another letter, he felt fortunate to have found a copy on sale at only $25.00!

The rarity and value of *The Outsider* continued to climb steadily, until by now it has become one of the most sought-after collectors' items in the history of fantasy. Copies regularly go for $100 and even for $150; indeed, a recent article by collector-bookdealer Gerry de la Ree claims that by 1971, copies of *The Outsider* command prices such as $175—and even

prices as high as $250 are not unheard of. Many the impecunious collector and bibliophile have yearned for a time machine, if only to go back to 1939 and buy a dozen or so copies of *The Outsider* at pre-publication prices, and then return to the present time, in which the lot would be worth several thousand dollars.

13. The House in the Pines

Discouraging as the slow sales of the first Arkham House book were, Derleth and Wandrei felt committed to the task of preserving the best work of their friend and mentor in the dignity of hardcovers, and so persevered. They had discovered an interesting fact: there were just possibly enough enthusiasts of the macabre in the forty-eight states to make a small publishing program pay for itself (in time, anyway), so long as press runs were limited to something less than fifteen hundred copies and prices were held back to $3.50 a copy or less. It *was* possible to run a small publishing house on mail orders alone.

So they began, in a small, cautious way, to experiment. Two years after *The Outsider* launched the House, Derleth assembled a smaller book, a collection of his own supernatural fiction entitled *Someone in the Dark,* and they published it in a printing of 1,415 copies, priced at a mere $2.00 per copy. The following year, 1942, the partners put together a splendid first collection of Clark Ashton Smith's best fantasies and horror tales called *Out of Space and Time.* The book was a random sampling of Smith's work, covering the spectrum of his fiction, and included a few tales from each of his major story series, those of Zothique, Hy-

perborea, Averoigne, and Poseidonis, as well as some of his unaligned supernatural tales and a few pieces of his peculiar science fiction. The jacket was designed by the young Hannes Bok, a weird artist of extraordinary gifts whose talents had been brought to the attention of Farnsworth Wright by a then-teenaged, enthusiastic fan named Ray Bradbury. (Bok rapidly had come to rival even Virgil Finlay in the esteem of *Weird Tales*' readership, as we shall shortly see.)

In the beginning, at least, the new Arkham House was on shaky financial footing. The first printing and binding bills had been paid for through cash supplied by Donald Wandrei and through funds lifted from a large bank loan Derleth had secured in order to build his home. It was to be some years before *The Outsider* paid for itself, but Derleth paid back the loan through his own personal income from his writing. And in time he built his house, a gracious two-story wooden frame building set well back from the road and nestled under old pines on a country road some miles outside of Sauk City. The house had a thatched roof, a fieldstone chimney, and was paneled throughout in knotty pine; Derleth's office-*cum*-study was a long, low, slant-ceilinged room on the second floor, lined with his collection of Smith's sculptures, with a huge stone fireplace and French doors that opened to a vista of thick green pines and rolling prairie. He called his new home Place of Hawks, because of a hawk nest discovered when the contractors were clearing the land.

The big, cool, shady house in the pines was, in effect, Arkham House itself. Books were at first stockpiled in the finished basement, where Derleth kept his excellent collection of mystery and horror fiction; in time a special outbuilding had to be constructed to serve as the Arkham House warehouse. No one, back at the beginning, could have foreseen that the House would grow to such proportions as to require its own ware-

house; the venture had first been proposed merely to preserve Lovecraft's work in book form. But very soon, as we have seen, this limitation was wisely abandoned, and the scope of Arkham House widened broadly.

The experiment of widening their first conception of the purpose of Arkham House to include not just Lovecraft's work alone, but the work of a broad range of the more popular contributors to *Weird Tales* was a happy one. The originator of the idea was neither Derleth nor Wandrei, as it happened, but William C. Weber, then an editor at Scribner's, who had been handling Derleth's own work. Derleth apparently had submitted the manuscript of *Someone in the Dark* to Scribner's (as was and is customary, his contracts with Scribner's doubtless contained a clause to the effect that they were to have first refusal of his next book-length manuscript). Weber suggested the collection might best be published under the Arkham House colophon, since a small publishing house specializing in, and identified with horror fiction could probably do better at the task of reaching the right readership than could a large, unspecialized publisher like the big New York firm.

Over the years from that day to this, Derleth has frequently been accused—by innuendo, at least—of running Arkham House as "The August Derleth Vanity Press"; it is a pleasure to help scotch this allegation by explaining where the idea of the first non-Lovecraft book to be published by the House originated. Derleth himself had considerable qualms over the notion, as he noted in his memoir, *Thirty Years of Arkham House* (published in 1969).

> I had some soul-struggling to do about this proposal; for one thing, I disliked anything that smacked of vanity publication, but it was soon pointed out to me that the difference between sound business and vanity in publishing was the profit motive—and publication of *Someone in the Dark* did indeed prove profitable in the end,

much more so for me than if a New York publisher had done the book, for it was not necessary to share reprint earnings. Publication of this second book had the effect of keeping the Arkham House imprint before the public eye while other Lovecraft books were in preparation.

Shortly after Arkham House published its third book, the Clark Ashton Smith collection, Derleth lost the assistance of his partner and co-founder, Donald Wandrei. The United States had gone to war by this time, and Wandrei had been inducted into the Army, where he would be far too busy for the next four years or so, battling the Axis or whatever, to share in the publishing work. He ended up in the artillery and eventually became a sergeant; thereafter he limited his participation to work on the Lovecraft letters.

With the sales of *Out of Space and Time* rolling in a bit more briskly, perhaps, than Derleth had dared to hope, the experimental venture had become a pleasurable and demanding and even rewarding business. Derleth had learned by now, from hard facts and figures in his ledger, that $2.00 per book was too low a price for a comfortable ratio between costs and profits and $5.00 was too high a price for most readers—although, even at $5.00, *The Outsider* sold out to the very last copy. (In time, that is.) Derleth had learned an important fact of life in this kind of small specialty publishing: His books, unlike those issued by the major publishers, had no "season." They sold slowly, but steadily, all year round; and they kept on selling, year after year, until they sold out to the last copy. Derleth did not have to worry, as did major publishers, about the seasonal competition, the reviewers, the distributors. Nor, so long as he held a tight rein on his publishing schedule, did he have to worry about over-extending himself to the point where he owed more money than was coming in; by limiting his program to a book a

year, on the average, and by using a little patience, he managed to keep the House not only in the black—but also in business.

And so, in 1943, after the Smith book was a year old, Derleth published *Beyond the Wall of Sleep,* a second gleaning of Lovecraftiana which had been edited with Wandrei's help, even though the latter was now in khaki. *BTWOS* (as Arkhamophiles refer to it) was even slightly bigger than *The Outsider* and also sold at $5.00, but this time without the prepublication offer. Derleth had learned by then that if he simply waited long enough, such a book would sell out, and he would have ordered a print run totaling even more copies than were printed of *The Outsider* if he could have, but the wartime paper shortage was beginning to bite into the publishing business, and restrictions forced him to cut back his order to only 1,217 copies.

Beyond the Wall of Sleep was a mammoth book and represented a well-chosen sampling of what was left of Lovecraft. It covered the range of his work from some of his all-but-unknown marginalia, such as "Autobiography: Some Notes on a Nonentity," and his *Commonplace Book,* wherein he jotted down a lengthy compilation of unused story-ideas (which Derleth was, years later, to plunder for his "posthumus collaborations"), to a deliciously tongue-in-cheek spoof of serious bibliographical writing called "History and Chronology of the *Necronomicon.*" There were also no fewer than twenty-seven tales, including three short novels. These ran the gamut from Lovecraft's early Dunsanian fiction, such as *The Quest of Iranon* and *The Doom that came to Sarnath,* through prose poems, such as *Ex Oblivione* and *What the Moon Brings,* to straight horror tales like *The Unnamable* and *The Hound.* Also included in that total were some of his revisions, collaborations with Hazel Heald and Zealia Bishop. The collection was rounded out with two or three dozen of his poems, including the excellent and evocative *Fungi*

From Yuggoth sonnet sequence. The jacket art was a photograph of some of the weirder and more grotesque of the sculptures Lovecraft's friend Clark Ashton Smith had done.

With *BTWOS* on sale, the following year saw Derleth well in control of the publishing game, at least as far as the genre of the macabre went. He had succeeded in reaching the hard-core readership of *Weird Tales,* and had begun to cultivate thereamong a cult of devotees who could be counted on to purchase each and every Arkham House title. He also saw quite clearly that library sales and a certain percentage of "general" readers in bookshops could be counted on to squander a few dollars for some good supernatural fiction. A market for the macabre was there, all right, and no other publisher had ever bothered even to try to tap its sales potential. The larger publishing houses went after the big money, the best sellers, and, outside of an occasional anthology, and an even more infrequent original novel of the supernatural, did not think the horror fans worth bothering about. Here, in this neglected area of publishing, Derleth saw his chance. In his memoir on Arkham House he wrote:

> Since the general domain of the macabre was so limited, I felt that it would be necessary, if I meant to enter serious publishing, to effect as much of a "corner" of the market as possible. And to that end I signed to contracts the foremost authors on both sides of the Atlantic . . . modeling our contracts on those I had signed with Charles Scribner's Sons.

Derleth began cautiously and gradually stepping up his program. In 1944, the House released four books, collections by Donald Wandrei and Henry S. Whitehead, another Smith collection and a third volume of Lovecraft's odds and ends, aptly entitled *Marginalia.* In 1945, building his publishing program by small increments, he went up to five titles, including a first collection of Robert Bloch's stories, a second Derleth

collection, an original unpublished novel, *Witch House,* by Evangeline Walton. In 1946 he published eight books. Arkham House was off and running.

It soon became evident to fans, readers, and collectors that in Arkham House they had a unique and invaluable publishing venture—a publisher who specialized completely in fantastic literature. And, even more rare, a publisher who knew the good stuff from the bad stuff, and whose taste could be trusted.

Gradually, Derleth's overall conception of the purpose of Arkham House settled into a path from which it never diverged. His selection of books and authors became fairly evenly divided into two major groups. On the one hand, he created hardcover collections of the better work of most of the more popular and gifted authors in the *Weird Tales* stable, with considerable preference shown for those writers who had been friends and associates of H. P. Lovecraft.

In this area, before Arkham House had rounded out its first full decade with its forty-second publication, Derleth put into hardcover H. P. Lovecraft, August Derleth, Clark Ashton Smith, Donald Wandrei, Henry S. Whitehead, Robert Bloch, Frank Belknap Long, Robert E. Howard, Ray Bradbury, Carl Jacobi, and Seabury Quinn—eleven writers closely associated with the history of *Weird Tales.* (Derleth told me privately that he had very much wished, in those days, to preserve the best early work from *WT* of C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner but could not get them to agree to his terms.)

To these writers, primarily pulp fiction writers, he added a few others who were not so firmly identified with *Weird Tales.* In particular, he published a fine collection of stories by Fritz Leiber, most of which had first appeared in *WT*'s only main competitor of any quality, John W. Campbell, jr.'s *Unknown.* Derleth also, in 1946, ventured briefly into the burgeoning field of science fiction, which was then just beginning to come

to the attention of the New York publishers, by bringing out an historic first edition of A. E. Van Vogt's sf classic, *Slan,* from Campbell's other magazine, *Astounding Science Fiction.* Derleth had extensive plans for broadening the scope of Arkham House to include science fiction as well as weird fantasy. He injudiciously announced as forthcoming Fritz Leiber's novel *Gather, Darkness!* (also to have been a reprint from *Astounding).* With other books he planned to get an early corner on the rising popularity of sf; in this aim he was frustrated, however, since the New York publishers got *Gather, Darkness!* away from him.

The other major classification into which Arkham House authors fell during that first decade in the House's history was somewhat more literary. Along with the popular *Weird Tales* crew, Derleth approached the most distinguished of living weird fiction writers on the other side of the Atlantic. He was not rebuffed: his entry into those literary strata (a bit more elegantly rarified than the steamy pulp magazine lowlands) was eased by his own reputation and accomplishments, for Derleth was by now an internationally recognized author and poet; a regionalist, in the sense that Thomas Hardy was a regionalist.

Some of the writers he signed to contract did, however, tend to be a bit sniffy, dealing with a mere American. Especially those authors with titles. Derleth recently discussed this period with me and assured me that while Lord Dunsany was a delightful gentleman, as friendly and cooperative as one could have wished, other of the British gentry were a bit tough to bear, such as Lady Cynthia Asquith, who was not exactly over-cooperative—at first, anyway. "As soon as I caught on to the nature of the problem," Derleth told me with a smile, "I made certain that she understood that my great-grandfather had been a French count. We got along famously thereafter!"

Such problems quickly resolved, Arkham House

launched a series of books by many of the most celebrated of living writers, and before its first decade was concluded the House catalogue sparkled with such distinguished names as Algernon Blackwood, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, L. P. Hartley, William Hope Hodgson, A. E. Coppard, H. Russell Wakefield, Lord Dunsany, and S. Fowler Wright, to say nothing of Lady Asquith. Derleth has subsequently followed these names with those of Colin Wilson, Arthur Machen and Walter de la Mare, and has long since announced at least two books by M. P. Shiel.

As Arkham House grew and became increasingly a full-time occupation for Derleth, he did not neglect *Weird Tales,* where everything had begun. Wright's readers still yearned for more Lovecraft, and a poem or two now and then was not sufficient to still their cries. In desperation, Wright continued to turn to August Derleth, and Derleth continued to search out Lovecraftiana for the magazine.

Whenever possible, Derleth came up with a Lovecraft story; when such were not forthcoming, Derleth hearkened back to the days when he and Mark Schorer had ventured briefly into Lovecraftian territory with the writing of *The Lair of the Star-Spawn,* and concocted some Cthulhuoid fiction of his own for *Weird Tales.* The first of these was a quite respectable yarn called *The Return of Hastur,* which introduced a new divinity into the pantheon (new, that is, to the Mythos; Hastur had been invented more than forty years earlier by Ambrose Bierce). The tale appeared in the issue of *Weird Tales* dated March, 1939. It was followed by another, called *The Sandwin Compact,* in November, 1940.

These pastiches—rather good pastiches, in fact, although Derleth was to write very much better ones before long—helped to satisfy the readership a little (and, incidentally, helped to keep the memory of Lovecraft

fresh in the readers' minds—a fact certainly not overlooked in the mind of the publisher of *The Outsider and Others*!). But what was really needed was a good, solid work of Lovecraft's Cthulhuoid fiction.

And Derleth and Wandrei were hot on the track of just that: a lost Lovecraft masterpiece few eyes had ever seen and few people had ever heard of. I refer to *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward,* which Lovecraft had written a dozen years before but which had not ever been submitted anywhere, and which was presumed still extant. A careful going-through of the Lovecraft papers, which Barlow still held, turned up a chunk of the manuscript; desperate queries were fired off to all known Lovecraft correspondents; piece by piece a complete manuscript was painstakingly assembled and eventually dispatched to the *Weird Tales* offices at 9 Rockefeller Plaza.

I imagine Farnsworth Wright would have been delighted beyond words to receive *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward,* for as readers of that tale know well, it is a splendid work of fiction; one of the best things Lovecraft ever wrote. But it was a young woman named Dorothy McIlwraith who guided the tale through press, for Farnsworth Wright was dead. The old man who had commanded the helm of the magazine since Edwin Baird fell from favor in 1924 had long been failing. Now he was gone.

A moving eulogy by longtime *Weird Tales* contributor Seabury Quinn announced his death in the issue of November, 1940.[1] Quinn wrote:

[1]This book has not discussed Quinn, since he had little or nothing to do with Lovecraft and never wrote anything in the Mythos. But I must remark that Quinn was no stranger to the fine art of composing eulogies, and that he came by his interest in ghoulish fiction most legitimately. Quinn, you see, was by profession editor of *Casket and Sunnyside,* a trade journal for morticians; he had been writing tales for *WT* on the side, moonlighting all those years!

> There is today hardly a writer of fantasy whose success does not date from the encouragement he received from Mr. Wright, and there is certainly no one engaged in creative work who ever dealt with Farnsworth Wright who does not think kindly of him. To those of us who were privileged to know him personally, the loss is even greater. We knew him as a cultured gentleman, a charming host, an incomparably congenial companion, and a true and loyal friend . . . as for his abilities, his work provides the finest monument possible. In the old files of *Weird Tales* can be read the biography of a man whose genius made possible a magazine which was and is truly unique. As to his epitaph: if it is true that in imitation lies the sincerest form of flattery, Farnsworth Wright has been eloquently acclaimed. When he assumed the editorial chair of *Weird Tales* almost twenty years ago he was a lone adventurer setting out to bring a highly specialized form of entertainment to the reading public. A recent issue of *Author & Journalist* lists twenty-two magazines devoted exclusively to fantasy of pseudo-scientific fiction. Could any greater or more sincere compliment be paid his vision or his work?

Wright's health had been failing him for some time, and eventually he had been forced to resign his post and turn the magazine over to another hand to guide it. The last issue which carried his name on the contents page was dated March, 1940. As for the new editrix, Miss McIlwraith, she was a diminutive blonde Scotswoman with a wry, puckish sense of humor, and she took up her new executive tasks swiftly and professionally. If the readers, long familiar with the style and taste of Farnsworth Wright, had any qualms about what might happen to their favorite magazine under the aegis of a newcomer—a stranger; and a lady, to boot! —she soon laid their fears to rest. The magazine continued to print the same authors and the same kind of stories as it had during Wright's sixteen-year regime.

A few changes, unobtrusive ones, did soon emerge. The new artist Hannes Bok had done a cover or two

for Farnsworth Wright, indeed, one of his most gorgeous canvases adorned the last issue which bore Wright's name. Bok began to appear much more frequently thereafter. Another of his covers appeared on the first issue which carried Miss McIlwraith's name as editor, and he rapidly became the most popular cover artist of the magazine's new era. Miss McIlwraith seemed quite fond of his particular kind of art; he began to dominate the interior illustrations. As Margaret Brundage and Virgil Finlay began to dwindle, Bok was on the rise. With the third McIlwraith issue, the editrix had Bok design a colophon for the "Shape of Thrills to Come" page on which the stories in the next issue were plugged. For the fifth McIlwraith issue, he designed a new colophon for the contents page; the colophon was to head the contents page for the next ten years. The number of Bok illustrations in each issue rose rapidly. Under Wright he had been doing an average of three interior illustrations per issue; by the seventh McIlwraith issue, dated May, 1941, he was all over the magazine, and besides doing the cover and the headings for the contents page and the "Thrills to Come" blurb, he had no fewer than six interior illustrations.

Having just taken over the magazine, Miss McIlwraith was doubtless delighted to secure the "new" Lovecraft novel. It was a major coup for *Weird Tales,* and she was quick to capitalize on it to the fullest possible degree.

The magazine had always shunned the pulp practice of blurbing forthcoming yarns in bottom-of-the-page items, reserving such blurbs for a dignified page advertising the next issue. Breaking with this tradition, Miss McIlwraith ran a special half-page news item in her March issue, under a thundering headline that read

LOVECRAFT MANUSCRIPT DISCOVERED
Will Be Published for First Time
in WEIRD TALES

That was on page 45; on page 102, the regular "Shape of Thrills to Come" page, the news about Lovecraft shoved everything else in the next issue into a smallish box and most of the page was filled with headlines like

THE RETURN OF THE GREAT LOVECRAFT

—and so on. The excitement continued with a brief capsule interview with Derleth and Wandrei (reproduced below), which was featured under a headline that ran—

THE LAST OF THE LOVECRAFTS

> As far as is known, this is the "Last of the Lovecrafts" —although there is a bare possibility that *Weird Tales* may be able to present just one more at some future date. August W. Derleth, discoverer of *Charles Ward,* writes: "A year ago Donald Wandrei and I learnt that there existed two unpublished HOWARD LOVECRAFT novels, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath.* We found the first fifty-one pages of *Kadath,* and all of *Ward* last summer. To the best of our knowledge the remainder of *Kadath* has been lost, though we are still searching. There is no other Lovecraft story—and the possibility of *Kadath* turning up is remote."
>
> Here, then, is a chance that you cannot afford to miss —for this novel is the very last of the LOVECRAFT works . . . unless, of course, August Derleth's quest for *The Dream-Quest* should be successful.

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward certainly dominated the May, 1941 issue. The name LOVECRAFT stretched across the top portion of the cover in heavy block lettering, an incandescent canary yellow against a greenish black background, in letters three-eighths of an inch high—the largest type ever used on a *Weird Tales* cover to blazon forth the name of an author—*any*

author. Even Algernon Blackwood and William Hope Hodgson never had it so good, when they appeared in the august pages of *WT*.[2]

The amusing upshot of all the publicity was that *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* was eventually discovered and rescued from oblivion—and *Weird Tales* rejected it!

The novella did not vanish again, despite this rebuff. Derleth ran it in consecutive issues of *The Arkham Sampler,* a short-lived periodical which the House published during 1948 and 1949; and the complete text was preserved in the second of the two big omnibus volumes of Lovecraftiana, *Beyond the Wall of Sleep.*

While *Weird Tales* moved forward under new leadership, back in Sauk City in his big house amid the pines on a lonely country road, Derleth was hard at work building a publishing venture that was to be unique in the history of that enterprise. But his work with Lovecraft was not merely limited to the issuance of H.P.L.'s *oeuvre* in hardcover. Beginning in 1944 with *Sleep No More,* published in New York by Farrar & Rinehart, Derleth began an ambitious program of editing anthologies of science fiction and weird literature. In his first anthology, he included Lovecraft's *The Rats in the Walls.* In 1946 he included *The Shunned House* in another Rinehart anthology entitled *Who Knocks?;* in 1947 came an anthology of macabre verse, *Dark of the Moon,* with a hefty selection of Lovecraft's verse; and in swift succession there followed *The Night Side, The Sleeping and the Dead, Strange Ports of Call, The Other Side of the Moon, Night's Yawning Peal, Worlds of Tomorrow,* and *Dark Mind, Dark Heart.* Each of them contained a tale by Lovecraft. Anthology after anthology rolled from Derleth's assembly-line—twenty-four anthologies are

[2]And that goes for Tennessee Williams, Sax Rohmer, Ray Bradbury, and A. Merritt, too; each at one time or another contributed to *Weird Tales.*

known to me, and there may well be others—and the effects of this kind of "public relations" on the growth of Lovecraft's fame and popularity is incalculable.

It is to the indefatigable efforts of August Derleth, more than any other influence in the world, that the credit for making H. P. Lovecraft an internationally known writer belongs. In 1926, when he casually sent off a friendly reply to a fan letter from a seventeen-year-old reader in Sauk City, Wisconsin, Lovecraft could hardly have guessed that he had made the friend who was in time to make him famous.

14. End of an Epoch

By the early 1940's the Cthulhu Mythos had dwindled and very little new material was being written. Lovecraft's example and encouragement had stimulated several of his friends and fellow writers into adding new stories to the growing literature more as a sort of a private game between a small circle of colleagues than as a major literary movement. Now Lovecraft himself was dead, and Howard as well; Smith had completely stopped writing fiction years before; Long and Wandrei had never actually written stories *in* the Mythos, but had authored a tale here and there influenced *by* the Mythos. As for Robert Bloch, he had by the 1940s blossomed into a very popular pulp fiction writer, but his last Mythos story had been published in the year Lovecraft died. Bloch has told me that, for him at least, working in the Mythos was a sort of playful game—at least while Lovecraft himself was alive to appreciate it; once Lovecraft was no longer there, it became more solemn and less fun. The fun, the sense of play was gone. And, anyway, Bloch's career was rapidly expanding, bringing him further away from the pulps and towards his eventual fame in radio, movies, and television. By 1939 he was doing radio dramas, solicited from him by a Milwaukee advertising agency,

and in 1945 he was approached by a Chicago producer named John Neblett, who wanted him to adapt thirty-nine of his *Weird Tales* stories into radio plays for a new series called *Stay Tuned for Terror.*

But Derleth had, by now, a vested interest in keeping Lovecraft's name alive, and in keeping the Mythos in the public eye, so to speak. He began writing Lovecraftian pastiches for Dorothy McIlwraith, and they were quite popular with the readers. He wrote *Beyond the Threshold* for her September 1941 issue; a novelette entitled *The Trail of Cthulhu* followed. He used his new series of pastiches to rework the scattered data of the original Lovecraftian Mythos into a formal system. This had never really been attempted; Lovecraft had simply invented new data, new books and demon-gods, and new settings as each particular story needed.

Bloch wrote to me recently concerning this point. He explained how Lovecraft had assisted in the creation of the data about Ludvig Prinn and his *De Vermis Mysteriis,* and how other young writers on the edges of the Circle were just beginning to get into the swing of the game. "But by then HPL was gone," he said sadly. "I'm sure we would have, inevitably, worked out some sort of mutually-agreed-upon bibliography of books of evil wisdom. Probably we'd have set up a definitive pantheon, as well, had not Lovecraft's death taken such associational items out of the 'fun' category for those of us who mourned him. After his passing, I think most of us who continued briefly to use some of the Lovecraftian references did so in the spirit of commemoration more than anything else."[1]

Derleth began shaping the Mythos anew. It was Derleth who imposed the classification system upon the various members of the Lovecraftian pantheon. Based at first on hints and conjectures in the Lovecraftian stories, Derleth's own stories described Cthulhu as a

[1]Letter from Robert Bloch dated June 7, 1971.

water elemental, Shub-Niggurath as a fertility myth, Hastur as an air elemental, and so on, giving the data of the Mythos an overall flavor of formal anthropological relevance straight out of *The Golden Bough.* Much more so than had Lovecraft, Derleth built each new story on the data structure introduced in previous stories; new books or mythological entities mentioned in one yarn reappeared in fuller detail in the next. *The Dweller in Darkness* (November, 1944) had new things to say about Nyarlathotep; *The Watcher from the Sky* (July, 1945) took those things for granted. Derleth's pastiches were solidly constructed stories, not merely exercises in the Lovecraftian style; in fact, with rare perception, he chose *not* to attempt to imitate the convoluted and adjectival Lovecraftian prose, but to tell his own stories in his own quiet and understated prose.

Lovecraft's last surviving aunt died; Robert H. Barlow, the nominal executor of the estate, moved to Mexico and died under rather curious circumstances. Derleth eventually became both the legal executor and the owner of the estate itself, which greatly facilitated his work in this field from then on. Now that he had possession of the Lovecraft papers, he went through them and found fragments of stories as well as outlines and notes. Derleth explored these and was particularly attracted to a piece of writing, entitled *The Round Tower,* probably based on that minor enigma of American archaeology, the so-called "Round Tower" of Newport. Another fragment, bearing no obvious or textual relationship to the *Tower* fragment, discussed a curious "rose window." The two fragments together totaled about twelve hundred words. As Derleth recounted this incident, which was the genesis of *The Lurker at the Threshold:*

> The possibility exists that the two sets of fragments were for different stories; yet they appealed to me as mani-

festly related and as possible to connect, and out of them I constructed and wrote *The Lurker at the Threshold,* which had nowhere been laid out, planned, or plotted by Lovecraft, but was evoked from his fragments and notes.

Lurker was published as a full-length original novel, by Arkham House in 1945, under the dual byline of Lovecraft and Derleth. To my taste, is is certainly the best of all the several "posthumous collaborations" which have appeared since under the shared byline.[2]

Most of Derleth's new Cthulhu Mythos stories appeared in *Weird Tales:* between 1939 and 1949, Derleth contributed no fewer than ten stories to the growing Mythos, not counting *Lurker,* most of them novelette length, and all but one of them for *Weird Tales.* During that decade his was the name most intimately associated with Lovecraft's, and the two became virtually indistinguishable in the mind of the readers. In 1950, Bloch returned briefly to the Mythos with a new story called *The Shadow from the Steeple,* a nostalgic sequel to Lovecraft's last story, *The Haunter of the Dark.* That year and the year following, he contributed a couple of new Mythos stories, his last being *Notebook Found in a Deserted House,* which appeared in the issue dated May 1951. (Bloch was then becoming a familiar name on television, but as "a sort of permanent guest panelist," not as a writer quite yet. For six years during the decade of the '50s he appeared every week on a Milwaukee-based quiz show called *It's A Draw.*) During the same period, Derleth continued appearing in *Weird Tales* with new Mythos stories, such as *Something from Out There* in the January 1951 issue, *The Keeper of the Key* in the May issue, and *The Black Island* in the issue dated January 1952.

[2] I count eleven of these posthumous collaborations as definitely belonging to the Mythos (see this book's Appendix p. 192), although there are several others.

Weird Tales, then about twenty-eight years old, was in its final decade. During the late '40s and early '50s, the magazine had sunk into the doldrums, largely due, I suppose, to the decline in quality of its contributors. Over its long life *Weird Tales* had published an enormous number of writers, but it was Howard and Smith and Lovecraft, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Quinn and Hamilton and Derleth, who set the tone and style and flavor of the magazine; in a sense they *were* the magazine. By 1950, the great triumvirate of Howard, Smith and Lovecraft—Edwin Baird discoveries all—were gone. Edmond Hamilton had moved on to science fiction years before, and had become very popular in that field, eschewing the sort of weird fantasy he had long written for *Weird Tales,* stories based on the backgrounds of myth; he eventually had a whole science fiction magazine built around his continuing series of lead novels, *Captain Future.*

While Quinn and Derleth continued as faithful and steady contributors, they were not enough to carry the whole weight of the magazine. And none of the major writers that had been discovered by Farnsworth Wright —Robert Bloch, Fritz Leiber, C. L. Moore, Henry Kuttner, and so on—stayed with the magazine long enough to become as completely identified with it as had their great predecessors.

Moore and Kuttner first met in California back in 1937, when Bloch made the trek out to stay with Kuttner in Beverly Hills for an extended six weeks' visit two months after Lovecraft died. Catherine L. Moore came out to California at about the same time for a vacation, and dropped around to meet Kuttner and Bloch. Moore and Kuttner were married in 1940 and stayed in California, making their home in South Laguna. Both writers, under their own individual names and under a number of pseudonyms, became very popular and highly regarded science fiction writers for

Campbell's *Astounding,* and both before long ceased writing for *Weird Tales* entirely.

This was to be the peculiar doom of *Weird Tales,* and, in a word, it could be called "over-success." *WT* was the first of scores of pulp magazines devoted to one or another branch of fantastic literature; but in the days when Howard, Smith and Lovecraft dominated the magazine, *WT* had no real competition. You either sold your story to *Weird* or you put it back on the shelf to gather dust, as Howard retired all those unsold "King Kull" yarns that had been bounced by Farnsworth Wright. But by the 1940s there were plenty of other magazines around you could write for, and some of them, such as *Astounding,* paid better money. *Weird Tales* simply could not keep its authors: Bloch, for example, discovered that *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* would take humorous, weird, or sf short stories written in a slangy Damon Runyon style, and he began turning out dozens of such for them. Fritz Leiber was lured away by Campbell, and sold the first of his "Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser" tales to Campbell's prestigious *Unknown;* these were Sword & Sorcery tales, more or less in the vein of Robert E. Howard, and would have naturally found a home in the pages of *WT;* but *Unknown* got them, and *Astounding* got the bulk of the rest of his early work, which was science fiction. Many more *Weird Tales* writers found no point in limiting their sales exclusively to that magazine. Frank Belknap Long began selling heavily to such science fiction pulps as *Thrilling Wonder Stories,* and a bit later, when Ray Bradbury came along, he found a steady demand for his stories and could sell them to just about any magazine in sight—*Startling, Thrilling, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Planet Stories*—every magazine, in fact, except for those edited by John Campbell, who evidently found Bradbury's poetic style a bit hard to swallow. *Weird Tales*

got mostly his earliest work and he, too, left them before long.

Ray Bradbury and Manly Wade Wellman were probably the last important writers *Weird Tales* discovered; Wellman could sell science fiction if he wanted to, but his heart really belonged to *Weird Tales* and the best of his early work appeared therein, a series of linked stories about a sort of occult detective of the Jules de Grandin and John Silence variety called Joyn Thunstone. Such tales enlivened the last issues of *Weird Tales,* but the magazine was foundering by then, a victim of its own startling success. In proving there was a pulp magazine market for fantasy fiction, *Weird Tales* had encouraged a host of similar and competing publications which were to survive it.

As *Weird Tales* celebrated its thirtieth birthday with an anniversary issue featuring many famous names from earlier issues, the end was in sight. One by one the science fiction magazines were going into the smaller, more popular, digest size; the age of the old-fashioned pulp magazine was over. Towards the last, *Weird Tales,* too, adopted the smaller size, and by 1953 the magazine was in such sad straits that it had begun reprinting stories and even illustrations and cover art from earlier issues in an obvious attempt to economize. It limped along for a year or so longer and towards the end a few new writers of talent began to emerge, such as Joseph Payne Brennan and Manly Bannister, but they arrived a bit too late to save the doomed magazine.

Derleth had just begun a new series of stories with *The Survivor,* which appeared in the issue of July, 1954. This was the first of nine short stories or novelettes in the Cthulhu Mythos which were based on story ideas left undeveloped by Lovecraft. It was an exciting idea, and it makes me wonder why Derleth had not done it years before; but it was really too late to help *Weird Tales.*

The next issue was dated September, 1954. It had a lovely Finlay cover, one of those reprint covers the magazine relied on in its last year or so, and the magazine was curiously shrunken. It had only six stories and two poems in it, and two of the stories were old ones from earlier issues. But that was the end. *Weird Tales* had published two hundred and seventy-nine issues, and now had published its last. The best, the greatest, the most important and beloved of all the fantasy magazines was gone forever.

But in those two hundred and seventy-nine issues, *Weird Tales* had started something too big and too exciting to die with it, for the world of weird and fantastic literature had grown immeasurably in the thirty-one years since *Weird Tales* had been born, and many *Weird Tales* alumni had gone on to greater things. By 1954, August Derleth was the author of seventy-four books, a highly respected Wisconsin poet, regional novelist and anthologist, and a publisher of considerable repute (Arkham House issued its forty-eighth publication that year). Throughout its history, Arkham House continued to keep the memory of *Weird Tales* alive, by issuing collections of tales and poems by the great *Weird Tales* writers, even including the more recent discoveries, such as Fritz Leiber, Ray Bradbury, Joseph Payne Brennan and Manly Wade Wellman.

By 1954, Robert Bloch was approaching major success. He had made the easy transition from horror fiction to psychological suspense and mystery novels, and some of his books were beginning to go to Hollywood (such as *The Scarf*, which became a film starring Mercedes McCambridge—low-budget, black and white, but very effective). He was to hit the top of his profession in a rather ironic way, through a novel called *Psycho* which he published in 1959. Film rights to *Psycho* were purchased, at an unexciting sum, by one

of those faceless firms of go-betweens; in the case of *Psycho,* however, they were representing one of the greatest and most popular of all filmmakers, Alfred Hitchcock, who turned the film into a masterpiece which was to make more money than any other black and white film ever made.

Bloch, of course, had no share in the enormous profits; however, his agents quickly capitalized on the extraordinary success of the film, and something like twenty of his novels and collections of stories came pouring out of the paperback publishing houses, each labeled "By the author of *PSYCHO,*" in prominent letters. Bloch himself began writing for the movies and television but not, as is often erroneously said, because of the phenomenal success of Hitchcock's *Psycho.* The fact of the matter is that Bloch was already in Hollywood writing scripts when *Psycho* was premiered. On this point Bloch is most insistent:

> I secured an agent, the agent secured me several additional assignments, and on the strength of all this I determined to make the move West with my family. A Writer's Guild strike forestalled writing—so I stayed on the Coast and didn't bring the family out until July, shortly after the strike was settled. By this time I'd also received my first screen assignment at Warner Brothers, plus more television. . . . I go into this in detail, because most people think I was brought out to the Coast as a result of *Psycho.* Such was far from the case—and while this "by the author of *Psycho*" label did assuredly open doors in the years ahead, it really had nothing to do with my breaking into TV and films—I was already out here almost a year before the picture was released!

Bloch, in some cases, began writing movies based on his own stories, in others he wrote original screenplays —for such films as *The Cabinet of Caligari* (1962), *The Night Walker* (1964), and *Torture Garden* (1968). He went on to become one of the few screen-

writers truly adept at psychological horror and suspense. Far from bearing a grudge against Hitchcock for purchasing *Psycho* so obliquely (and so inexpensively), Bloch subsequently sold twenty scripts or stories to the television series, "Alfred Hitchcock Presents." His most recent movie is called *The House That Dripped Blood* (1971), a deliciously shuddersome screen anthology of Bloch's short stories, with an added attraction for nostalgic fans such as myself—for I remember reading these stories many, many years ago . . . in *Weird Tales*!

15 The La st Disciple

Derleth's tireless championing of H. P. Lovecraft eventually paid off in some rather surprising ways. All those weird fiction anthologies he edited served not only to keep Lovecraft's name alive, but to spread his fame among somewhat more literate circles than those of the readership of *Weird Tales.*

The anthologies were handsomely produced, containing stories of obvious quality and authors of known repute, and they were very well received. There had always been a small, select group of influential literary people who retained a connoisseur's affection for well-crafted tales of the macabre—gentlemen like Basil Davenport, a judge of the Book of the Month Club, and critic Vincent Starrett. By bringing Lovecraft to their attention, in the company of Algernon Blackwood and A. E. Coppard and "Saki" and other known writers, Derleth performed an invaluable service. Between the end of World War II and the present time, scores of paperback and hardcover anthologies of the macabre were published, and there is hardly a one of them that does not contain a story by Lovecraft. This is almost entirely due to August Derleth.

Even Hollywood, which is very far away from Arkham, Massachusetts, in most ways, discovered H. P.

Lovecraft. A comparatively new British movie company, Hammer Films, proved in the 1960s that the grand old Hollywood horror classics like *Frankenstein, Dracula, The Wolf-Man* and *The Mummy* could be remade anew in color and earn their keep. Homegrown competition emerged in a firm called American-International, which tried to reach the same market and found that just about every fantasy or horror classic from *King Kong* to *She* already was being refilmed. A director of considerable talents named Roger Corman turned to the works of Edgar Allan Poe and signed up Hollywood character actor Vincent Price, who appeared in swift succession as a Poesque villain-hero in such movies as *The Fall of the House of Usher, The Pit and the Pendulum,* and *The Masque of the Red Death.* When he found himself scraping the bottom of the bucket (Poe-wise), Corman was advised to turn to H. P. Lovecraft as the nearest next best. Five or six Lovecraft films have been made thus far, and not all of them are completely awful, although most of them sadly neglect the Lovecraftian mood and atmosphere, even those laid in "crumbling, witch-haunted old Arkham." Perhaps the best of the lot, certainly the closest to the real Lovecraftian vein, was scripted by magazine writer Richard Matheson, himself a *Weird Tales* alumnus; it actually mentioned Cthulhu by name, and showed briefly on screen a copy of the *Necronomicon.* (In typically klutzy Hollywood style, the film was released —so help me!—as "Edgar Alan Poe's *The Haunted Palace.*")

As the movies brought Lovecraft's name before the film-going public, Arkham House continued to keep his work alive and in print. All of his stories, even his notebooks and juvenilia, have been preserved in hardcover by now, as have his poems. To date, three volumes of his *Selected Letters* have been published, with several more to come. And the fame of Lovecraft has been spread by such ways into most unusual areas,

such as that of contemporary rock music. A rock group from Chicago, calling itself "The H. P. Lovecraft," has been rather popular, and albums of their music have been issued. The group knows what it's doing and did not merely pick the name at random or from idle whim. One of their songs is entitled "The White Ship," and the group's company is known as "Dunwich Productions," while their music publishing affiliate is named "Yuggoth"—with, it should be pointed out, the amused permission of August Derleth.

Unfortunately, even as Lovecraft himself was, the group seems to have been somewhat ahead of its time, and disbanded as recently as August, 1969. A new group is now recording for Warner Brothers under the name of "Lovecraft," a correspondent informs me, but it is not composed of the same people.

Through a unique combination of practical business acumen and inspired editorial taste, August Derleth guided Arkham House past every storm and shoal from 1939 to the present. He lost his "corner" on the market in the late 1940s when flocks of fantasy fans, then mature men with several years' back pay socked away in stateside banks, came back from the war to launch short-lived publishing ventures comparable to Arkham House. One- or two-man firms with such names as Gnome Press, Fantasy Press, Shasta Press, Fantasy Publishing Company, Hadley Publishing Company, Prime Press, Carcosa House, etc., sprang up all over the place. Some of them lasted for years, and while most of the small specialty houses dipped more into the science fiction classics than into the pages of *Weird Tales* for their material, there was more than one occasion on which Arkham House lost an author —as when Gnome Press carried off Robert E. Howard and C. L. Moore. One by one, however, all these publishing houses went under from a combination of bad luck, bad distribution, and want of sufficient funds. Only Arkham House has weathered the storm unim-

paired. Today a new crop of more-or-less competing houses has arisen, including Advent, a Chicago publisher which has thus far limited its program to science fiction criticism, bibliography and memoirs, and Jack Chalker's recently founded Mirage Press, which operates out of Baltimore. In time, I have no doubt, still other small firms specializing in science fiction, fantasy and weird literature or critica will arise; Arkham House (in 1972 in its thirty-second year) has shown that it *can* be done.

Derleth wrote a bookful of his posthumous collaborations with Lovecraft and issued it under the Arkham House imprint as *The Survivor and Others* in 1957. The readership for books with Lovecraft's name in the byline continued unappeased. Derleth had published various odds and ends of Lovecraftian criticism, memoirs and tributes for years, beginning with *Marginalia* in 1944, and continuing with *Something About Cats* in 1949. There was enough material around for several more of these, so he assembled *The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces* for publication in 1959; a last collection of miscellanea, *The Dark Brotherhood and Other Pieces* came out some years later. Early in 1962, or shortly before, he got the idea of editing an anthology for Arkham House of all-new stories by "Arkham authors," and solicited tales from Robert Bloch, Carl Jacobi, David H. Keller and H. Russell Wakefield for a book to be called *Dark Mind, Dark Heart.* He was also lucky enough to locate unpublished stories by Robert E. Howard, William Hope Hodgson and M. P. Shiel.[1]

Derleth added to the contents the eighth of his posthumous Cthulhuoid collaborations with Lovecraft a

[1]Shiel was an old friend of Derleth's and had especially revised his story, *Xélucha,* for publication; it was to appear as the title story in an Arkham House collection of his macabre tales; the book has yet to be published.

tale with the distinctly *un*Lovecraftian title of *Witches' Hollow,* and also included a brief tale of his own, written under his "Stephen Grendon" pseudonym. The book appeared in 1962. The most notable among the seventeen stories in the book, if not exactly the best of the lot, was a first story by an otherwise unknown young British writer named J. Ramsey Campbell, called *The Church in High Street,* which teemed with references to such familiar matters as the *Necronomicon,* Yog-Sothoth, the forbidden plateau of Leng, dark Yuggoth on the rim, Azathoth, Cthulhu and Nyarlathotep. It was surely a story in the Cthulhu Mythos; the first Mythos story by a brand new writer. No new writer had entered the Mythos since Henry Kuttner published *The Salem Horror* in the May 1937 issue of *Weird Tales.*

This was no mere one-shot appearance; two years later Arkham House published a whole bookful of Campbell's Mythos stories called *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants* (1964). J. Ramsey Campbell became the first of a whole new school of Mythos writers.

J. Ramsey Campbell—or *Ramsey Campbell,* as he now likes to sign his stories—is a young British Lovecraft fan, born in Liverpool in 1946. He began to write at the tender age of seven and sent Derleth some of his first stories in the Mythos when in his early teens; when Derleth published *The Church in High Street* in 1962, Campbell was only sixteen. Derleth told me that in those early stories Campbell made the mistake of attempting to use the familiar Arkham, Dunwich, Innsmouth locales without any real understanding or knowledge of the American landscape. Derleth sent them back with the suggestion that Campbell invent a British milieu for the stories, and this Campbell promptly did, inventing a mythical Severn Valley region which served as his own British version of the "Miskatonic County" invented by Lovecraft.

Campbell also began making additions of his own to the lore of the Mythos, and his next few tales introduced new divinities to the Lovecraftian pantheon, such as Glaaki and Daoloth, and a new tome of eldritch horrors, the *Revelations of Glaaki.* The young writer also picked up Bloch's inventions, Han and Byatis, embroidering the scanty lore concerning them with new information of his own, and even gave a new quotation or two from *De Vermis Mysteriis* and the *Necronomicon* itself. His collection, *The Inhabitant of the Lake* (1964), was a major addition to the literature of the Mythos, as it contained nine tales, all of them new and none of them available elsewhere.

Derleth published a second "all new" anthology that same year; it was titled *Over the Edge* and contained the tenth Campbell Mythos story, as well as the usual roster of old-time Arkham authors, Hodgson, Howard, Long, Wakefield, Leiber, Derleth, and so on, plus a new H.P.L./A.D. collaboration, *The Shadow in the Attic,* and a story by Clark Ashton Smith. That last was a bit of a surprise. It had been far too many years since Smith had written any new stories to speak of, and in 1961, after a long, storyless period devoted largely to poetry and sculpture, he died at the age of sixty-eight.

Another anthology of new tales of the macabre appeared a couple of years later under the title of *Travellers by Night* (1967), with a new story by Campbell and another Lovecraft/Derleth, *The Horror from the Middle Span,* which was to be the last of all the Derlethian posthumous collaborations, save only for *Innsmouth Clay* (although no one could have known it then).

Other young hopefuls were rising, inspired by the example of Ramsey Campbell, and when in 1969 Derleth published an ambitious omnibus under the title of *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos,* the volume contained not only Campbell's eleventh Mythos tale, a chiller

called *Cold Print,* but the first Mythos tale of another new writer, Brian Lumley.[2] In fact, not only did that book contain Lumley's first Mythos story, *The Sister City,* but also his second, *Cement Surroundings,* as well. Lumley, too, carved out new territory of his own in the Mythos, and those two tales introduced several bits of newly-invented lore, such as the city of Ephiroth, which Lumley presents as the long-lost "sister city" to Ib, a Lovecraftian invention from *The Doom That Came to Sarnath.* The second of his two stories in the book introduced another tome of eldritch horror, the *G'harne Fragments,* plus two new additions to the ever-growing pantheon, Shudde-M'elle and Yibb-Tstll.

This particular collection, *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos,* marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Mythos for many reasons, and one of the most important was that it introduced an extraordinary number of new writers in the Mythos. We have already discussed the two first Mythos tales of Brian Lumley, but have yet to mention J. Vernon Shea, whose first Mythos story—a sort of modern parody on the Lovecraftian style—also appeared therein, under the title of *The Haunter of the Graveyard* (certainly a title with a traditional Lovecraftian ring to it.)

Shea was not exactly a new writer, having begun to produce stories as far back as 1926, but this was his first Mythos story. Unlike the rest of the "New Lovecraft Circle," he actually had known H.P.L. very well and had corresponded with him for some years. I have seen no further stories under his byline, so it is impossible to tell whether or not his contribution to the literature of the Mythos will be significant.

The third of the new Mythos writers who made his first appearance in *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* was

[2]He does not seem to be related to Lovecraft's one-time revision client, William Lumley, whose only Mythos story, *The Diary of Alonzo Typer,* appeared in 1938.

James Wade, a 42-year-old Illinois-born writer, resident for the past decade or so in Seoul, South Korea. His first and only Mythos tale, a novelette entitled *The Deep Ones,* was possibly the best of the new stories in the book. It made quite a clever and very topical use of the recent experiments in the study of the extraordinary intelligence of dolphins.

As for *Cold Print,* the Ramsey Campbell story in the same volume, it adds new lore to his developing sub-Mythos, presenting some interesting new information on his main additions to the pantheon, Y'golonac and Glaaki, and a lengthy new quotation from his *Revelations of Glaaki.*

But *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* is perhaps most significant because a brilliant young "philosophical writer" or novelist of ideas, whose reputation is by now secure on both sides of the Atlantic, made his first appearance with a Mythos tale therein. The tale was a novella entitled *The Return of the Lloigor* and its author was the celebrated British novelist, critic and intellectual, Colin Wilson. It is a complex, interesting tale—a sort of intellectual puzzle mystery involving Mu, Churchward's "Naacal tablets," Lovecraftian divinities such as Ghatanothoa and Nug, Arthur Machen and Lewis Spence—and it's fun to read. Wilson is a writer of considerable power and his fiction generates as much excitement as his non-fiction; but he certainly plays fast and loose with the pattern of the Mythos. The tale is, at best, a borderline Mythos story.

Wilson tells an amusing anecdote to explain how he became embroiled in Lovecraftiana. His initial impact on the literary world was made through a book called *The Outsider;* somewhile after this he discovered *The Outsider and Others,* and was impelled to read it because of the similarity in titles. The character of Lovecraft fascinated him to the extent of writing a book called *The Strength to Dream* which was a study of the creative imagination, particularly in writers of fan-

tasy and horror stories. The book dealt in a very large part with Lovecraft. Wilson did not deny that the eccentric Providence recluse possessed "gloomy imaginative power that compares with Poe," but his innate taste forced him to admit he found Lovecraft "an atrocious writer." *The Strength to Dream,* of course, came to Derleth's attention, and he wrote a mildly reproving letter—but, as Colin Wilson recently noted:

> In due course, a copy of my book fell into the hands of August Derleth. And Derleth wrote to me, protesting that my judgement on Lovecraft was too harsh, and asking me why, if I was all that good, I didn't try writing a "Lovecraft" novel myself.

A couple of years later an idea occurred to him and engendered a novel.

> I cast it in the Lovecraft tradition, and it became *The Mind Parasites,* which was published in due course by August Derleth. Its reception by English critics was unexpectedly good; I suspect this is because I didn't sound as if I was serious.

Arkham House published *The Mind Parasites* in 1967; although it discusses Lovecraft and borrows some of the terminology of the Mythos, it is really an independent story and thus does not figure in our present study. But *The Return of the Lloigor* comes close enough to the Mythos to be admitted to at least the borderline of the canon, in the same sense that Henry Hasse's *The Guardian of the Book* is a borderline Mythos story.

In 1969, Wilson wrote another novel which closely borders on the Mythos, a book which shares the continuum of the *Lloigor* tale. This novel is called *The Philosopher's Stone* and it was published in an American edition in 1971. It discusses the *Necronomicon* and the Great Old Ones and Mu, but again it violates

too much the established lore to be other than a marginal work (although a very interesting novel, immensely entertaining in its own right).

As if the new talents of Ramsey Campbell, J. Vernon Shea, Brian Lumley, James Wade, and Colin Wilson, were not enough to launch the "new" Cthulhu Mythos, Derleth did not long delay before introducing his readers to yet other writers who were to contribute to the ever-growing literature.

After the war, Derleth had briefly experimented with a periodical called *The Arkham Sampler,* of which seven issues appeared during 1948 and '49. Towards the end of 1967 he tried it again, by issuing a smallish magazine of Arkham House news and notes called *The Arkham Collector.* Publishing at the rate of four issues a year, Derleth soon increased the size of the magazine to include short stories and verse largely by new writers, although some familiar names did make occasional appearances therein, such as Clark Ashton Smith and Carl Jacobi.

The sixth issue, dated "Winter, 1970," gave us a new Lumley tale, and yet another followed in #7, but that same seventh issue introduced a new writer named Gary Myers, with a story called *The House of the Worm.* I suppose this unusual little tale has to be considered a Mythos story for want of any other category wherein to lodge it; but what Myers actually did with that first story was to go all the way back to the Dunsanian "Dreamlands" fiction of Lovecraft's first period, and write new stories in the bejewelled style of those early yarns—stories utilizing many of the same characters and much of the same scenery of the Lovecraft tales, *but stories written in full knowledge of the later Cthulhuoid fiction.* The blend of styles and plot-material is deft and the stories themselves most attractive—so attractive, that I cannot help but consider Myers the best of the "New Lovecraft Circle" writers.

The following issue, #8, contained a second Mythos

story from Gary Myers, *Yohk the Necromancer,* in the same style and setting, and he had a third, *Passing of a Dreamer,* in the issues that have appeared since then, giving him three stories thus far into 1971. Derleth told me fairly recently that he had plans to issue a slim little book of Myers' tales, with delightful illustrations by a new artist.

All such plans came to an abrupt and shocking end on the fourth of July, 1971.

Derleth was by then 62 years old: a burly, hearty, robust man with enough drive and energy for three lesser men. As a writer and anthologist, he had produced about one hundred and fifty books. His output was truly prodigious; only Isaac Asimov, in our field, seems likely to have equaled his enormous production.

In 1969 he fell ill, seriously ill. He was hospitalized for a straight eighty-seven days and underwent four operations, including open heart surgery. But with his enormous, driving energy and will to live, he seemed to make an amazing recovery, and was soon back at work. However, he had received the sort of warning no man can easily ignore, and thus was forced to cut down somewhere. A young local Wisconsonian named Roderic Meng, who had worked for Derleth as a sort of shipping clerk during summer vacations during high school years before, joined the staff of the House as general manager, thus relieving Derleth of many tiresome routine chores.

During June, my wife and I stopped over at Sauk City to visit Derleth for the day, on our way back to Long Island following a science fiction convention in Minneapolis to which I had been invited as guest of honor. Derleth and I had exchanged letters for something like seventeen years, and during the six months in which this present book was researched and written, we had been in touch on an almost day-to-day basis, for Derleth was never too busy to fire off a letter full

of answers to my questions, or to give me information on the spot over the telephone. But we had never before met face to face, and I had long looked forward to that event. I found him genial and affable, a delightful host, a stimulating conversationalist.

Thirteen days later he was dead.

He had seen the first 103 pages of this book in manuscript, and had given me a very detailed, almost page-by-page critique. He was not overly pleased at some of the things I had said about Lovecraft as a writer, but he respected my point of view, and was most gratified to see someone like myself write a book on the Mythos and all its writers, not just on Lovecraft alone.

With the death of August Derleth, the future of Arkham House is thrown into question. It is far too early to be able to say how the loss of Derleth will affect Arkham House which he founded and guided so ably all those years. Perhaps it will not long outlast its founder; on the other hand, perhaps somewhere there can be found an editor of similar taste and knowledge in the field to carry it on through the years to come.

One thing is certain, anyway. The death of August Derleth is a far more serious event in the history of the macabre in America than were any of the events thus far depicted in this book. Popular weird fiction survived the demise of *Weird Tales* unimpaired; it will not so easily survive the death of August Derleth.

And now I come to the point in my story where, with some embarrassment, I must talk about . . . myself. For, the most recent addition to the growing ranks of Mythos writers is none other than Lin Carter.

I first got the idea of writing this book in March, 1971, and almost immediately signed a contract for it with Ballantine Books. It has not been an easy book to write, despite my knowledge of the subject and my enthusiasm for the stories and the writers discussed

herein. Writing fiction is much more to my taste, for I am most at ease when writing a story laid in a world of my own imagination, where my imagination itself is the only authority; non-fiction is ever so much more difficult to write. If this book is entertaining—if it is even readable—it is due to immense effort. The problem is not so much the lack of reference materials, as the plethora of them. I have several pounds of information on Lovecraft, *Weird Tales,* Lovecraft's fellow writers, Arkham House, and so on. The problem has been not to find such data, but to boil it down and digest it into concise and perhaps even enjoyable form.

From time to time over the last six months I have found myself turning away briefly from the grueling task of writing non-fiction to amuse myself by turning out a small morsel of fiction. Because I was soon up to my earlobes in data on the Cthulhu Mythos, I thought it would be fun to write some stories in the Mythos. I found myself attracted to what Clark Ashton Smith had done with a story called *The Coming of the White Worm.* (That droll and sparkling little gem of a tale he pretended was a translation from the *Book of Eibon,* an imaginary book he had himself invented.) At the same time I discovered in the text of *The Haunter of the Dark* Lovecraft's last story in the Mythos, a list of the titles of imaginary stories written by an equally imaginary writer, "Robert Blake." You may recall this list—*Shaggai, In the Vale of Pnath, The Burrowers Beneath,* and so on—a delicious passage in which Lovecraft indulged in self-parody, inventing titles which were if anything, over-typically Lovecraftian. I thought it would be amusing to write a short tale of the style and substance of Smith's little joke, and use for a title Lovecraft's little joke. So I "translated" from the *Book of Eibon* a thousand-word story called *Shaggai,* and, a bit later, a second such tale called *In the Vale of Pnath.* Since I was by this time writing long lists of questions about Lovecraftiana to Derleth

about twice a week, I included copies of these brief stylistic pastiches for his amusement; and when next the ennui of composing non-fiction began to get me down, I tried my hand at a few more "translations"—this time from the venerable *Necronomicon* itself—two stories called *The Doom of Yakthoob* and *The City of Pillars,* which purported to be drawn from the first pages of the *Necronomicon* and which were told in the first person by Abdul Alhazred himself. To my delight, Derleth liked them and purchased them for eventual use in *The Arkham Collector* and a forthcoming anthology of new stories he was then assembling under the title of *Dark Things.*

Shortly after this I got interested in the fascinating glimpse into elder and shadowy Mu given in the Heald/Lovecraft revision, *Out of the Eons.* Atlantis and Hyperborea had been done virtually to the point of exhaustion by Mythos writers, but Mu had scarcely been touched upon. So I conceived of a linked series of tales which would expand on this Muvian lore, and because my study of the Mythos had by now revealed annoying lacunae in the myth-patterns, I resolved to write new Mythos stories of my own which would answer some of the questions my research had raised. I wrote two short stories, *The Dweller in the Tomb* and *The Thing in the Pit,* and a ten-thousand-word novelette called *Out of the Ages* in which I expanded the Muvian lore to include two new additions to the Cthulhuoid pantheon, Zoth-Ommog and Ythogtha, who were the brothers of Ghatanothoa and the sons of great Cthulhu himself (this last datum was inserted with the advance approval of August Derleth). I also added a couple of new books to the library of forbidden tomes, namely the *Zanthu Tablets* and the *Ponape Scripture.* Derleth bought these as well, setting aside *Out of the Ages* (in consideration of its length) for an anthology, then in the planning stage, which he intended to call *New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos.*

Since Derleth passed away, I have written a new *Eibon* story, *The Descent into the Abyss,* and a first tale drawn from the *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* called *Acolyte of the Flame,* and I hope to eventually conclude my Muvian sequence with two more stories whose working titles are *The Burrowers Beneath* and *The Horror in the Gallery.* There will most likely be one more story from the *Pnakotic Manuscripts* as well. Derleth's death has cast the future of his publishing program in doubt, so it cannot be said for certain whether or not all of these tales will appear in print under the aegis of Arkham House. That, only time will tell.

I have dealt with my own modest additions to the canon of the Mythos at such length not because I believe my contributions to be of any particular importance, but simply because I have all the facts at hand. I very much doubt if I will for long remain the most recent addition to the "New Lovecraft Circle." It is most probable that young writers will continue to arise in the Mythos, as Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley, James Wade, Colin Wilson, Gary Myers and I have recently arisen. In all likelihood, Lovecraft's last disciple has yet to emerge.

So this book really has no ending. The story of the Cthulhu Mythos, that thoroughly fascinating and completely unique literary phenomenon, extends from this point into the future. It is now forty-six years since *The Call of Cthulhu* was written, and the curious school of macabre fiction launched by that excellent story is still alive and still growing, still entertaining new generations of readers and still attracting new generations of writers who, like myself, never knew Lovecraft personally, and either were small children during his lifetime or, in some cases, were not even born until after he died.

It would be nice if I could end this book with a

succinct and final appraisal of Lovecraft the writer, and could neatly and finally pigeonhole him in an appropriate niche. But this cannot be. For Lovecraft himself is still on the move, and his reputation and influence are still growing. The last word on this subject cannot be written at this time.

And may never be.

Appendix: A Complete Bibliography of the Mythos

There have been numerous attempts by various Lovecraftian scholars to list "all" the stories in the Cthulhu Mythos; generally I have found that such lists agree only in disagreeing with each other. The most authoritative known to me are those assembled by Robert E. Briney in 1955 and Jack L. Chalker in 1966 —those being the dates of the final definitive versions. There is also a pamphlet guide to the stories in the Mythos only, ignoring Lovecraft's other work, produced by Robert Weinberg in 1969.

While it is not my intention to denigrate the valuable work of these gentlemen, I must confess that in writing this book I have discovered their bibliographical studies almost completely unreliable. Chalker, for instance, fails to recognize Howard's *The Fires of Ashurbanipal* and Bloch's *Fane of the Black Pharaoh* as Mythos stories, and seems unaware that Derleth's *The Seal of R'lyeh* had a magazine appearance prior to its publication in book form. He is one month off in dating the first *Weird Tales* printing of *The Nameless City,* makes an error of *twenty years* in dating the magazine printing of Derleth's *House in the Valley,* and, incredibly, somehow manages to ignore the existence of *The*

Thing on the Doorstep in his list of Lovecraft's published stories.

Briney's list is about the same as far as accuracy goes. He is two years off in dating the first *Weird Tales* printing of H.P.L.'s *The Temple,* fails to recognize Bloch's *The Mannikin* and Howard's *The Children of the Night* as Mythos stories, is wildly inaccurate in dating the appearance of H.P.L.'s *At the Mountains of Madness* (which was a three-part serial in *Astounding*'s issues of February, March and April, 1936—Briney says it appeared in May, 1935!), makes an error of four years on the first appearance of *The Dunwich Horror,* and, incredibly, overlooks the existence of *The Dreams in the Witch-House* in his list of Lovecraft's professional fiction.

If anything, the Weinberg list is even more haphazard. He makes absurd errors, such as ignoring *The Curse of Yig* in his list of Mythos stories by various authors; he lists erroneous dates for the first magazine appearances of *Medusa's Coil* and *The Mound;* he overlooks such Mythos stories as the Derleth/Schorer collaboration, *The Horror from the Depths,* Derleth's *Ithaqua,* three Mythos stories by Kuttner and six by Smith. His date for the magazine serialization of *At The Mountains of Madness* omits the issue which included Part I, and so on.

I do not single out these mistakes, omissions, and errors for the purpose of ridiculing my predecessors, but to explain why I found it absolutely necessary to compile my own Lovecraftian bibliography, which has been checked and double-checked for accuracy and completeness. I might also point out that my list, compiled three years after publication of the Weinberg pamphlet, is therefore more complete, including mention of those tales and poems in the Mythos which have been published subsequently. I must admit that no one is perfect, least of all the present writer, and

that by the time this list leaves my desk and passes through the hands of copyeditor, typesetter, proofreader and printer, an error or two will undoubtedly have crept in. For this I apologize in advance.

Earlier in this book I have detailed my personal criteria for judging this or that story to be an integral part of the Mythos. I cannot realistically expect every Lovecraft scholar to agree with my opinions; many will not. However rigorously I have applied my standards to Lovecraft's own stories, excluding *The Colour Out of Space* and *Charles Dexter Ward* from the canon, and including *The Hound* (these being the items on which I am chiefly at variance with my predecessors), it should be noted that I have somewhat relaxed my criteria when considering the stories by the other contributors to the Mythos. I have, at times with reluctance, admitted to the fold such borderline cases as *The Challenge from Beyond* and Henry Hasse's *The Guardian of the Book*. And I have, at times ruthlessly, eliminated from my list those tales generally considered as "influenced" by Lovecraft, when it does not seem to me that they present a valid case for their inclusion here.

I have personally read every item here listed, with the sole exception of certain tales yet unpublished (such as the forthcoming Lovecraft/Derleth collaborative novel, *The Watchers Out of Time*). In certain cases, such as the recently-discovered Howard manuscript, *The House in the Oaks*, I have examined these tales in galley proof or in manuscript in advance of publication.

Knowledgeable students of Lovecraft will notice certain curious lacunae in this list, for example in the sequence of the posthumous Lovecraft/Derleth collaborations. I have discovered that not all of the collaborative stories Derleth has published relate to the Mythos: this is true, for instance, of *Wentworth's Day*,

The Ancestor, and *The Dark Brotherhood.* I can find in these tales no evidence to connect them to the Mythos, other than the occasional reference to "Arkham" and so on. (And the mere mention of a Mythos name does not make a Mythos tale.) I have also not listed *The Peabody Heritage* and *The Shadow in the Attic;* these tales seem to me merely on the periphery of the Mythos and not integral to it. They also are related to each other in that they list in common a number of imaginary books otherwise not mentioned in Mythos stories. I note this simply so that my reader will not think I have overlooked or forgotten about these posthumous collaborations.

You will notice that I have numbered each item consecutively. The Lovecraft stories are numbered in the order in which they were written; all other stories are numbered in the order in which they were published (with the exception of my own contributions to the Mythos, which are given in the order they were written).

In the light of my criticisms of Briney, Chalker and Weinberg at the beginning of this appendix, it might initially seem a trifle hypocritical that I here pay tribute to their pioneering work, but I am in fact very grateful to them. Their research has spared me many, many hours of work, and for this I am most appreciative. Factual errors can never be justified or forgiven in scholarly work, but we are all fallible. And on this note, let me add one final word: it is quite possible that genuine Mythos stories exist which I have not included on the list which follows. In order to be absolutely certain of this, one way or another, I suppose one would have to read carefully every single story in every one of the two hundred and seventy-nine issues of *Weird Tales,* to say nothing of every issue of *Strange Tales, Strange Stories, Black Cat, Tales of Magic and Mystery,* and all of the other fantasy or horror magazines

ever published in America and England and all of the other countries in the world. Let me confess that I have not done this; I doubt if anyone has ever done this, or will, or even could.

I have, however, done as much research in compiling the following list as was possible. I have carefully sought out every single story listed by each of my predecessors and perused it. Many of these tales were not easily available to me, and to obtain copies of them I had frequently to call upon the kindness of others. Robert A. W. Lowndes and August Derleth and Frank Belknap Long and Roy A. Squires were most helpful in procuring and/or lending me copies of such stories to read. You may rest assured than none of the stories below is here listed merely because it appears on other, earlier lists.

The bibliography would have been more complete than it is, had Derleth not passed away so abruptly during my writing of this book. He had announced for publication several stories and a couple of new books which may or may not be legitimate stories in the canon of the Mythos, and he had promised to send me galleys of these; but died before that promise could be kept. So the list below can only be considered as complete as of the date of its compilation (August, 1971), and may soon be out of date.

One final note concerning my own stories listed below. At this time, only the first three of them have actually been published. I have, however, listed them all, since most of them have already been accepted for publication by Arkham House, and all of them will eventually find their way into print. You will also notice that I have included two Lovecraft/Derleth stories on my list which have yet to appear in print; I refer to the short story, *Innsmouth Clay,* and the new novel, *The Watchers Out of Time.* Both are included here (although I have not read them) because they have

already been announced for publication by Arkham House. I assume Derleth completed his work on them, but at the time of the writing of this manuscript, and its delivery to my publishers, I do not know for certain.

A Complete Bibliography of the Mythos

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