

The LOVECRAFT Collector

"...many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore..." Poe

January, 1949

About the Collecting of Lovecraft

By Ray H. Zorn

If Sherlock Holmes were practicing his art today he would be expected to interest himself in investigating the disappearance of the book edition of *The Shunned House* by Howard Phillips Lovecraft; attempting to learn the title of the possibly unpublished Lovecraft manuscript destroyed in a mad moment by an amateur publisher; trying to locate Harold Farnese, a California composer who has vanished and seemingly taken important portions of his work with him;—or the good sleuth might even be put to composing a list of *all* the pseudonyms HPL used.

These and other mysteries confront the bibliographer who hopes to arrange in definitive description the original components of the collected and uncollected works of H. P. Lovecraft.

Lovecraft began writing at the age of seven. He was "publishing" at thirteen. Some of this early material has been preserved; much of it has been irretrievably lost, either destroyed by his own hand or absorbed into the obliterating maw of time and neglect.

In the original publication of it, a great deal of his work must be classed as ephemera. During his lifetime, his writings appeared almost exclusively in amateur journals and pulp magazines, in the latter class principally in *Weird Tales*. The preservation of such publications is a matter of interest only to devotees, and of these the constant are too few. Indeed, the physical attributes of these forms of literature

make their preservation difficult. Finding some of these items after a mere ten years is a troublesome task.

Even the appearance of Lovecraft's work in collected volumes has not made the collector's way too easy. These omnibus volumes are the backbone of any Lovecraft collection, beautifully and solidly made so that their preservation is assured, but the limitation of the editions may leave the new enthusiast luckless when he looks for a copy to preserve. The true collector must of course also seek out "first appearances"—the pre-collection items—and there he starts upon a search that will not soon end!

It is toward the goal of the Lovecraft completist that I aim. I may never attain that end—in truth, it is an unlikely end—but with the help of other collectors I hope to get within sight of that goal, close enough to compile a bibliography that will be reasonably definitive. Meanwhile this journal, *The Lovecraft Collector*, solicits and publishes information on Lovecraftiana, and hopes to aid in the enlarging of collections.

You may ask: why attempt to collect Lovecraft when the admitted difficulties are so many? when the man is probably an unimportant writer anyway? If you ask thus, you brand yourself as the dull clod who has never collected anything! (There must be only one of you in the world.) Your first query does not deserve an answer. If you ask the second question, you do

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Number 1.

Warke Beginneth

I am not the first collector nor the first bibliographer of H. P. Lovecraft, but I believe this journal is the first to be dedicated primarily to the collecting and bibliography of that Providence writer who in 1937 proceeded from this haunted world to join the haunTERS on the great outside.

Laney and Evans in the *Tentative Bibliography* (1943) and August Derleth in *H. P. L.: A Memoir* (1945) have laid excellent groundwork for the bibliographic study of Lovecraft, and I am much indebted to them for inspiration and guidance in my own attempt to make a definitive compilation.

An enormous amount of research remains to be done. The vast storehouse of amateur journalism is virtually unexplored in relation to Lovecraft. From 1914 onward, HPL contributed widely to amateur publications; after his death many tributes to him appeared and some of his writing was posthumously published. Collecting and classifying Lovecraftiana from the amateur presses is part of the task to which *The Lovecraft Collector* is dedicated.

Let this serve as an invitation to all collectors of amateur journals to search their files and report to this editor any and all items of Lovecraftiana. Findings will be published in future issues of this journal, with due credit to those who add to the store of information. I want to purchase items not already in my personal collection;

Market Trends In Lovecraftiana

By Ray H. Zorn

Swann Auction Galleries of New York City offered eight lots of Lovecraftiana in a recent sale. Prices realized indicate that rare book dealers have overpriced *The Outsider*, but that recent or currently in-print items can on occasion also demand a premium.

The items offered were in fine condition, with dust jackets where such were originally issued with the books; several were inscribed by August Derleth—conditions not unusual in the present stage of Lovecraft collecting. Following are the figures obtained at the Swann sale on November 11th, 1948.

The Outsider and Others, Arkham, 1939. Inscribed. \$22.50.

Beyond the Wall of Sleep, Arkham, 1943. With laid in autograph postcard by HPL. \$19.00.

Same; Derleth-inscribed copy of book only. \$17.00.

Marginalia, Arkham, 1944. Inscribed. \$7.00.

The Lurker at the Threshold, Arkham, 1945. Inscribed. \$7.00.

In Memoriam: H. P. Lovecraft, by W. Paul Cook. Driftwind Press, 1941. One of 94 copies. \$6.50.

Rhode Island on Lovecraft, Providence, 1945. First and second print-

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but I also want complete information on items with which the owners will not part. All letters anent Lovecraftiana will be answered.

This issue of *The Lovecraft Collector* is being circulated via the mailing bureaus to all members of the AAPA, NAPA, UAPA, and UAPA of A, as well as to a private list. If response is favorable, future issues will continue to appear in these a.j. bundles. Non-members who wish to receive this journal regularly must request a place on my private mailing list.

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not know Lovecraft. He is as important as Poe, Hoffmann, Ewers, Bierce, Machen, or Dunsany—perhaps you do not know some of these either. — Perhaps you prefer Westerns?

Let us consider that one of the marks of importance, if not of greatness, in a writer is that quality in his work that stimulates study of the below-surface content and motivates imitation.

The works of Shakespeare perennially serve as a bible for book-titlers and as the spring for an undrying river of controversy; Freud remains the fountain that waters the fruitful garden of the sex-mind; the adventurous spirit of Sherlock Holmes continues to attract to Baker Street legions of "Irregulars" who search his memoirs as thoroughly as ever he pored over the agony columns; James Joyce's partly-intelligible nightmare assumes position as the referential great modern history-of-mankind for the erudite. The haunted writings of Lovecraft seem destined to perpetuity as a mythology, for his worshippers have already catalogued his gods, mapped his shadowed country, used his tales as springboards, and placed his fictitious *Necronomicon* in booksellers' lists at fabulous prices.

He is mentioned in the same breath with Poe, even by those who recognize Lovecraft as a minor literary figure whose stodgy plodding style shows little gift for reporting conversation or for delineation of personal character, but yet has in it an unmatched genius for depicting the character of places. There is a power with the moods of things and a control of atmosphere that marks him as a master in the narrow fields he chose to explore. In his best tales, malignant untangible forces as in *The Colour Out of Space*, obscene entities as in *Pickman's Model*, or the air of evilness

over whole towns as in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, are portrayed or hinted at with a shudder success equal to the best of Poe or M. R. James.

His erudition in the antiquities of New England and in obscurities of literature and art adds to many of his stories overtones of interest to scholars in those fields. His initiation in some of his tales of the theme of the "elder gods" has prompted a number of minor prophets and several writers to the further development of what is termed the "Cthulhu mythos".

The investigation of Lovecraft, like the interpretation of Joyce, has only begun. Though their individual styles are incapable of comparison, both deal with ab-human aspects and affects of mankind, their separate followers display the enthusiasms of cultists, and their work is truly appreciated by few though their names fall glibly from the tongues of many.

August Derleth, to name only the best-known of the Lovecraft eulogists, has energy, an unfatigueable admiration for HPL, and a publishing house. Many others who knew Lovecraft or who have discovered the spell of his stories remain faithful to their belief in his superiority as a narrator in the weird genre. There is no doubt that the influence of these people will keep the name of Lovecraft alive in literate circles, even when the time comes that he will not be read except by the most exhaustive of connoisseurs. That fate has come to many better writers.

I myself confess to an incomplete reading and to little study of Lovecraft's tales. But I confess further to an avid interest in the hunt for the elusive fox of Lovecraftiana, and though I joined a bit late, I don't believe I am the rear hound in the chase by any means. The duty of reading, of tearing the fox to bits if you will follow the metaphor, must await the run-

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"Trends" (Continued from page 2)

ings, copy of each. \$3.00.

H.P.L.: *A Memoir*, by Derleth, N. Y., 1945. Also, reprint of *Best Supernatural Stories*. Both inscribed. \$3.50.

In view of these auction figures it would seem that when a dealer wants \$60 for *The Outsider* his price is twice what it ought to be. The figure for *The Lurker* is surprising, inasmuch as this title seems to be currently in print, or at least is available at the original published price of \$2.50.

It is difficult to guess what prices could be attached to certain rare Lovecraft titles that I never see at auction and seldom see in catalogs. A copy of the original book edition of *Shadow Over Innsmouth*, with errata leaf, recently sold readily for \$60.00. For a copy of the Futile Press edition of the *Commonplace Book* your guess is as good as mine; I've never seen one offered in the rare book market.

Products of the amateur press, the amateur journals with contributions by Lovecraft, do not nor ever will command comparatively high prices. That is because the potential supply from amateur collections is fairly large, while the demand is practically nil for this type of item. With a little searching, amateur publications of the past 20 years can be obtained at 25c to \$1.00 each, though certain elaborate or older items may bring more. For illustration: although Paul Cook's *In Memoriam* volume was limited to only 94 copies, I have found within a few weeks *three* copies for sale, the highest price being \$6.50. An indicated demand will bring such things to the market and their appearance in quantum will stabilize the price.

The Lovecraft collector, though he is at present up against a wave of collecting popularity, will find his searches rewarded with many interesting and unusual bits at reasonable outlay if he looks long and far enough.

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ning to earth, the successful termination of the chase. Not that my position is now a poor one: I have indeed many good glimpses of the fox: the Arkham collections, some private editions, and many magazines—these can be seen as the head and body of the fox. But I believe that the *Letters* will prove to be the great beautiful brush, and that the blurry hosts of amateur journals may be the swift little legs—so on with the chase! With open-country views now and then to spur him on, may my mount never tire! And when the fox is taken, if he be reasonably whole, the hunt is worth the while.

Pseudonyms of HPL

Lovecraft delighted in using nicknames when writing to his more intimate correspondents, the soubriquets by which he addressed his friends or the fanciful signatures closing his letters varying according to the person or to the mood of the moment.

Some of his work was published pseudonymously. At one time and another HPL appeared under the guise of these five names: Humphrey Littlewit, Gent.; Ward Phillips; Lewis Theobald, Jr.; Augustus T. Swift; Albert Frederick Willie. There were perhaps others. I would like to hear from anyone having information on specific instances of HPL's use of these or other pen names on his published work, for incorporation in an article.

A Lovecraft reprint appearance that does not seem to be generally known to collectors is *The Rats in the Walls* in Rex Stout Mystery Magazine, No. 3, February, 1946. If you're gathering "tributes" a copy can still be had from Avon Publications, 119 W. 57, NYC 19, for 30c.

Coming: *Printing for Lovecraft* by W. H. Shepherd; *The Lovecraft Myths* by August Derleth; *The Mystery of The Shunned House*; etc.

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