

The LOVECRAFT Collector

“ . . . mirages of hallucination and effects of terror . . . ” Huysmans

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No. 2

Myths About Lovecraft

By August Derleth

Within a year of the death of Howard Phillips Lovecraft on March 15, 1937, the myths about him began to grow. Perhaps there is no more valid testimony of his place—a minor one, to be sure, but a secure one—in the roster of notable Americans in literature than the fact that in the dozen years since his untimely passing, he has become an almost legendary figure, lending credence to Vincent Starrett's early judgment that Lovecraft was “his own most fantastic creation.” Moreover, the myths have spread to become associated with all who have had to do with Lovecraft or his work, and, like most such myths, they do him and his friends injustice either on the right or the left. An examination of them—or some of them—at this point, with a view to publishing the facts pertinent thereto, is appropos.

1) *That Lovecraft died of starvation.* Lovecraft had been an invalid through most of his early years, and he was not well during most of his life. He suffered from an allergy to cold and all its complications, and he died eventually at the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital in Providence of a combination of cancer of the intestine and Bright's disease. That Lovecraft spent days and perhaps weeks at a time in a state of undernourishment is probably true; it might be said that his condition was occasionally aggra-

vated by the irregularity of his eating habits; but that he died of starvation is untrue, and it would be going too far to suggest that Lovecraft lived in a state of chronic undernourishment, as some writers have suggested he did. To this legend, Lovecraft's one-time wife gave some unjustifiable support, for, while he attained some girth and was for a time almost fat during his marriage, his increased weight began in 1922, during which year his letters refer almost with embarrassment to his need for having his clothes altered, and not in 1924, the year of his marriage. Lovecraft lived with his wife less than two years, and his gained weight did not outlast his marriage. He was normally thin rather than heavy, though his aunt, with whom he spent his last years, was a plump woman, shorter in stature than he. His eating habits were often dictated by necessity, but just as often by choice.

2) *That Lovecraft committed suicide.* This legend was actually propagated by people who belong to that curious group of mentally unbalanced souls who are always somehow mysteriously “in the know” of facts or so-called facts no one else can ascertain. Fortunately, the records of the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital contain all the necessary details substan-

(Turn to page 3)

The Lovecraft Collector

Published occasionally in the interests of amateur journalism and to further the collecting of the works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, by Ray H. Zorn, Troy Grove, Illinois, who is a member of AAPA, NAPA, UAPA, UAPA of A, NFFF, National Association of Postmasters, 33rd Division War Veterans Association, and the James Joyce Society.

Intentions. . . . Honourable

I do not intend to let this journal become a battleground; squabbles do not amuse me. I am interested in facts of bibliography and in facts of biography.

A man and his work form a constant; death makes of them a whole thing which we cannot reduce. If we attempt to add, it is only the moss of particularization clinging to a rock; yet the rock may need touches of exploration and currents of interpretation to properly frame its beauty and grandeur.

Opinions vary; and they fractionalize. So I am interested in *facts* about H. P. Lovecraft for publication in this journal: *what, when, and how* he wrote. When I understand these things *fully*, there will be no puzzling *why*.

Though at first brush August Derleth's article in this issue might seem polemical, it is published here because it sprays some needed truths over a rank weedpatch of rumor.

Lovecraftiana Market Averages

By Ray H. Zorn

Sundry attitudes roused by my article on market trends in Lovecraftiana call for more information on the subject. One well-known fantasy book seller said it was "misleading"; and I agree that my choice of the word "trends" was inept. I reported

the results of one auction sale only, and though I pointed out that some of the figures were "surprising," I failed to remind my readers that prices realized at book auctions are not always accurate reflections of current dealer quotations.

Most pertinent comment came from Peter Curraugh, a Chicago collector, who sent the following compilation of prices seen in the book lists of 8 regular dealers and in personal observations since November 1948. Titles are given in brief form only. The figure in parentheses shows how many times the title appeared; the other figures are prices in dollars. PB means pocket-book edition.

Shadow Over Innsmouth, original edn. (4)—35; 50; 60; 100.

Commonplace Book (1)—15.

Outsider (7)—25; 35; 35; 44.90; 50; 50; 50.

Beyond Wall of Sleep (5)—20; 24.90; 25; 25; 35.

Supernatural Horror (6)—1; 2.50; 2.50; 2.50; 2.50; 3.

Marginalia (6)—4.90; 5; 5; 5; 5; 7.

Lurker at Threshold (5)—2; all others 2.50 each.

Best Supernatural Stories (7)—25c; 50c; 50c; 60c; 60c; \$1; 1.25.

In Memoriam by Cook.—(Curraugh had seen none offered, but I have seen three, at \$5, 6, and 6.50.)

H.P.L.: A Memoir by Derleth (3)—2.50 each.

Rhode Island on HPL in green wrapper (2)—5.00 each. In brown wrapper (3)—1; 1; 1.25.

Mountains of Madness in Astounding Science Fiction (2)—4.25; 6.

Weird Shadow PB (6)—5c; 15c; 50c; 75c; 90c; \$1.

Dunwich Horror PB (6)—5c; 15c; 20c; 50c; 75c; 95c.

Same; *Armed Forces* edn. (5)—25c; 75c; 90c; \$1; 1.25.

Myths (Continued from page 1)

tiating the facts of Lovecraft's death, and one can only wonder at the nightmarish temerity of deranged minds capable of conceiving this one.

3) *That Lovecraft was violently anti-Semitic.* Particularly in his earlier years, Lovecraft disliked anyone who failed to appreciate the old culture of New England and old things in general. It so happened that many of his favorite antiquarian haunts in Providence and vicinity were despoiled by foreigners who moved into the old houses; these foreigners were of various nationalities and races, and Lovecraft disliked them all impartially. His dislike, however, did not represent racial prejudice, but rather was a strong symptom of that fear of and dislike for *change*, which represents to all of us the passing of the familiar, and is in fact symptomatic, more deeply, of a basic sense of insecurity which is associated with the passing of familiar aspects of life which have come to represent security for those of us who are prone to such reactions. It is but natural, in the face of the facts about his sheltered early life, that Lovecraft's sense of security would be bound up with all the aspects of that life, with old things—houses, people, books, past time—just as it was. His early letters thus reflect his antipathy to things alien to the culture he loved and to which he fancied

Lurking Fear PB (3)—25c; 35c; 50c.

I might add that recently a copy of the little white brochure of poems known simply as *H P L* was offered at \$10; a copy of *The Recluse* was being held at \$15; and two copies of *The Conservative* could be had at \$1 each. All these will likely be sold before this sees print.

he belonged—and in a very real sense he did belong to it—and the careless reader might judge that Lovecraft was actually anti-Semitic, anti-Oriental, anti-Negro; but such racial prejudice is a symptom of something far more grave than a sense of insecurity associated with place; it is rather a symptom of a basic conviction of inferiority coupled with active fear. Lovecraft was modest, but he suffered no inferiority complex, and he had no fear of anyone. His later letters, fortunately, together with his marriage to a Jewess, prove that the charge is unfounded; for his expanding horizons enabled him to overcome his violent dislike of the changers; he regretted change, he expressed his regret in poem and story (as in *Brick Row*, for instance), but the violent antipathies were no more. Had he been truly racially prejudiced, this change would never have taken place.

4) *That Arkham House is making a fortune on the Lovecraft writings.* Not so much legend as downright slander has grown out of this point-of-view. Actually, the facts are quite the contrary. When ultimate publication of the Lovecraft letters is completed, Arkham House will probably be in the red by a sum in at least four figures. The facts, briefly, are these—as soon as possible after Lovecraft's shocking death, I arranged to take over and sell for Mrs. E. P. Gamwell, Lovecraft's surviving aunt and his direct heir, the unsold stories and poems he had left. All these manuscripts were carefully gone through, all were retyped, all were sold; Mrs. Gamwell realized a needed income of close to \$1000.00 through these efforts. No charge was ever laid against any such income for typing services, paper, postage, or time. At my own

(Turn to page 4)

Myths (Continued from page 3)

instigation, coupled with the help of Donald Wandrei, publication of the Lovecraft work was begun, and the first volume was dedicated to Mrs. Gamwell. As a result of our efforts, Mrs. Gamwell left a will in which the income from the Lovecraft writings was left to Donald Wandrei and myself with the understanding that such income was to go to the ultimate publication of all the Lovecraft works. That wish and intent is being carried out.

5) *That the Lovecraft writings are being "boarded."* This legend has grown out of the complaints of self-seeking individuals who want to seize on Lovecraft's fame and publish his work at no expense and at total profit to themselves. As representatives of the estate of H. P. Lovecraft, it is the duty and obligation of Arkham House to prevent any such publication; luckily, Supreme Court decisions have clearly supported every stand Arkham House has taken, and not even a letter by H. P. Lovecraft may be published without the consent of Arkham House. These unethical leeches, who call themselves "fans" (a slander against *bonest fans* as well), have made repeated attempts to break through the legal protection of the Lovecraft writings in order to publish and reap a profit; one of them even went so far as to claim that he intended to publish Lovecraft's work in the way it should be published, implying that Arkham House Lovecraft books were inferior products, when the fact was that all the claimant's publications to date had been nothing but badly mimeographed self-glorifications of one form or another.

6) *That Lovecraft left many unfinished manuscripts.* Actually, Love-

craft left no unfinished manuscripts. He left certain fragmentary ideas, but these were comparatively few in number. He left certain fragmentary writings—pages or paragraphs of stories which he hoped to write. The most complete of these was incorporated in *The Lurker at the Threshold*. One or two others may be similarly developed, time permitting. When *Something About Cats and Other Pieces* and the *Selected Letters* are published late in 1949, all the printable Lovecraft work will have appeared. Subsequent publications will be an illustrated Lovecraft collection in two volumes for collectors, all reprint material, and such developments of fragments as I may find time to write.

The Asheville Series

Through the courtesy of the reference assistant at the Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, N. C., I have the following information on a portion of Lovecraft's work that few, if any, of his present-day admirers have seen.

On February 16, 1915, H. P. Lovecraft began for the *Gazette-News*, now called the *Asheville Times*, a series of articles entitled *Mysteries of the Heavens Revealed by Astronomy*. The articles appeared in succession on each Tuesday and Saturday following, and were usually two or more columns in length, occasionally running to one-half page. The twice-a-week schedule varied somewhat after the first ten parts.

Fourteen parts were announced, and though the librarian was able to trace only twelve because of the incompleteness of the newspaper's files, it is, as she says, "reasonable to assume that your writer finished the series."