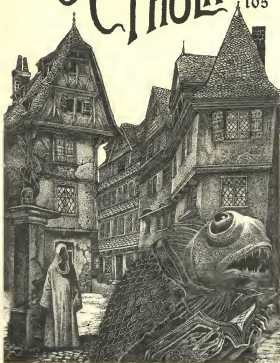


CRYPT of CTHULHU

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CRYPT of CTHULHU

A Pulp Thriller and Theological Journal

Volume 19, Number 3

Lammas 2000

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Dubious and Disquieting: **EDITORIAL SHARDS**

Some months ago I read the news that some toy company was planning to issue a line of Lovecraftian action figures, beginning with Great Cthulhu and a Deep One. For me this was good news indeed, since I am both a great collector of action figures (comic book superheroes) and (in case you didn't know it) a great fan of HPL and his Mythos. I certainly plan on buying every hard plastic Tsathoggua and Byakhee the toy company produces. I wouldn't be surprised if you did, too. I hope you will, because if sales aren't great, I imagine the company won't waste their money to manufacture more.

Why will, why do, such idols of plastic fascinate us? Some psychologists (Freudians, obviously) explain the collecting mania as a neurotic expression of a childhood "anal" fixation. I don't deny this, but I think this bit of developmental psychology explains only one important aspect of the collecting bug: completion. The completist is the collector who must have, in such a case as we contemplate, every figure in the series, whether or not an individual piece possesses any interest in its own right. If you must have all variants, all editions, you are a completist. And Freud would have you pegged.

But suppose you aren't a completist. And suppose you are not moved by every acquisition only to acquire yet more, as if to fill a bottomless Black Hole. But you do wish to admire, savor, value what you do have. In this case, I am inclined to accept the suggestion of Werner Muensterberger (*Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, 1994) that we collectors are ascribing to the objects of our interest a magical value, like the mono of Pacific Islanders. They have become fetishes to us. What is the nature of the power our collectibles are charged

with? Muensterberger says they have the power to stave off loneliness and anxiety. As such, the objects we collect are merely successors of our infantile security blankets and faithful Teddy Bears.

Often, I realize, collected objects are tokens of a past which we hope to arrest lest it vanish forever. In this way we seek to keep the past alive in more than memory. I regard this as neurotic only to the extent that we fear change, aka the future, and thus seek to retreat to a perpetual past. But it may not be that bad. One may live in the past, present, and future simultaneously, as Ebenezer Scrooge vowed to do, and I imagine this is the healthiest option of all. In this case, collecting tokens of an otherwise intangible lost world is no more neurotic than keeping a photo album.

With the Mythos figures I hope to collect, as well as the superhero figures I have been amassing for some fifteen years, there is this happy link to past associations, but there is more. Why did any of them ever mean enough to me that they are the tokens of the past I have chosen, and not something else?

I think it is because action figures are tangible tokens of the world of the imagination. It is like the fictional device whereby the protagonist awakes from a dream-clutching a material souvenir, like doomed dweeb Walter Gilman who realizes the oddly-angled world beyond Keziah Mason's attic wasn't just an out-of-focus nightmare, once he notices that metal effigy of a star-headed Old One he is holding.

Tangible tokens enable us to possess what would otherwise be fleeting. Protestants talk about "receiving Christ," but Catholics make it concrete by ascribing Christ-ness to a bit of bread that

(continued on page 21)

Death's Black Riders

By R. E. Howard and C. J. Henderson

The hangman asked of the carrion crow, but the raven made reply:
 "Black ride the men who ride with Death beneath the midnight sky,
 "And black each steed and grey each skull and strange each deathly eye.
 "They have given their breath to grey old Death and yet they cannot die."

Solomon Kane reined his steed to a halt. No sound broke the death-like stillness of the dark forest which reared starkly about him, yet he sensed that something was coming down the shadowy trail. It was a strange and ghostly place he found himself. The huge trees shouldered each other like taciturn giants. Their intertwining branches shut out the light so that the white moonlight turned grey as it filtered through, making the trail which meandered among the trees seem like a dim road through ghostland.

And down this trail, as Kane halted and drew his pistol, a horseman came flying. A great black horse, incredibly gigantic in the grey light, and on his back a giant rider. The massive figure crouched close over the bow, a shapeless hat drawn low, a great black cloak flying from his shoulders.

Solomon Kane sought to rein aside to let this wild rider go past, but the trail was so narrow and the trees grew so thickly on either side that he saw it was impossible—unless the horseman stopped and gave him time to find an open space. This stranger seemed to have no intention of doing.

They swept on, horse and rider a single, formless black object like some fabulous monster. Now they were only a few strides from the puzzled Kane, and he caught the glint of two burning eyes shadowed by the hat drawn low and the cape held high about the rider's face. Then, as he saw the gleam of a sword, he fired point-blank into that face. Instantly a blast of icy air engulfed him like the thundering surge of a cold river. Horse and man went down together, and

the black horse and its rider swept over them.

Kane scrambled up, unhurt but wrathful, and examined his snorting, quivering steed, which had risen and stood with dilated nostrils. The horse, too, was unharmed. Kane could not understand it.

The Englishman thought on the moment as he reloaded his pistol. Of a sudden a number of memories flooded his mind. No sound had issued from the rider—nor his steed, either. Not voice or hooves had Kane heard, not the sounds of cracking reins or of slapping breeches. Neither had the man uttered so much as a whisper when Kane fired a volley directly at him, nor did his horse complain when that same ball had exploded past the animal's ear. Adding that to the fanatical glow of the rider's eyes and the direction from whence he and his mount had come, and Kane thought he might understand.

Perhaps I am already too late, he thought. The notion gave him pause.

A tall, gaunt man was Solomon Kane. In his youth, his face had been a pallid thing housing deep brooding eyes—eyes made all the more somber by the drab, Puritanical garb he affected. That had been years earlier, though. Decades.

Now, after a lifetime of traveling through the vast and horrid stretches of the orient and the slave coasts, he had lost the stark pallor which had marked his English birth. His dark costume remained the same, but he did not.

A young man would have made it on time, a bitter voice within his mind spat. You're old, Kane.

Too old.

"I'll be too old when the Devon churchyard is my bed chamber," growled the Puritan. Then throwing himself back up into the saddle, he started once more for the destination that had borne him over half a continent.

As the grim ride began once more, a part of Kane's mind laughed at him. He well knew there would be no quiet, manicured grave by the sea for him. He had tried to go home, once, a handful or so years earlier. He had reached Devon, had vowed to stay a thousand times along the weary road back to the tiny town of his birth. But, once there, he had learned that his Bess had not waited for him. Time had stolen her, leaving him alone in the world.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, and the fairest fade," is all he said to those who gave him the heart-slicing news. He spoke no more of her that night, but instead merely told those gathered something of his adventures. Before long, however, the wind had howled in off the ocean like a pack of running hounds, the wet and salt of it dragging him up and out of his chair. In a moment his Spanish blade had hung round his waist once more and he had stepped out into the night for a breath of the haunting breeze.

Before the morning sun could find him the deck of a ship was beneath his feet and he had been on his way once more. Back into the world—back to wandering whichever path God lay before him, that he might do his Lord's work.

It did not occur to Kane until after the current had taken him completely away from land's sight that he had returned to England in the dark of a morning storm and taken his leave of her in the black before dawn. The Puritan had come and gone away without actually seeing his home. The notion did not disturb him. Within his soul Kane had always known he would never rest in the land of his birth.

"We'll go home someday," he told himself then. As the thought struck him, his face had actually broken into a thin sort of smile. And, as it did, he wondered if such an expression would ever come to him again.

"When we go home," he decided. "Then we'll smile."

After that, he had crossed his arms and looked out over the sea. After leaving Devon, Kane's wandering had taken him first back to the dark West Coast, up through the jungles beyond to the stretching desert. His crossing of both nearly killed him, but he barely noticed, so accustomed was he to the feel of steel on flesh and the howling of the damned. Through Egypt and across the sea he found more sand, more mountains, and always more killing. Month after month, Kane made his way forward, through the whirlwind of blood and hatred that infected the minaret-strewn region of the Ottoman's ending finally, years later, in the dark forests of the Holy Roman Empire.

And that was where his latest quest had begun. Days earlier he had ridden into the tiny Christian village of Kren, one so besotted with fear that its inhabitants were on the verge of madness. His curiosity aroused by their panicked state, the Puritan had questioned what manner of trouble could have created such a hysteria. That was when he learned of the thing from the sky.

When Kane had first ridden into the hamlet, none would even look upon him. Eventually some few risked speaking to the stranger long enough to tell him to leave their town for his own sake. After some coaxing, however, the chieftain of Kren told Kane their sorry story.

Some months earlier, there had been a great explosion in the night sky. Out of a terrible storming night, a thing of great size, streaming black and purple flames, crashed in the foothills beyond the

furthest claims made by the village's inhabitants. The noise of its landing was even greater than that of its arrival.

Those villagers who went out into the rain to investigate found a terrible ditch dug through the trees and earth and glacial boulders. Whatever had fallen from the heavens had torn apart the landscape plowing a straight and burning path through everything in its way. Those few hearty souls brave enough to explore had no trouble finding the area of disturbance. The ditch had torn its way across the road leading out of Kren to the next village. Leaving the road and following the burnt and ruined path back through the trees, they found that which had fallen from the skies.

"I could scarce believe my eyes," the dark-haired, younger man had told Kane. "A great and glowing stone we found at the end of the burning trail. Red it was, like a firepit ember, but massive in size and weight. The heat of it set the grasses and trees about to flame, despite the terrible rain that pounded at it, the drops fading to steam yards above it. The fire did not spread greatly, but perhaps it would have been better if it had. Better if Kren had been burned from the face of the Earth and all of us with it."

The chieftain told him of a great hole they had found in the opened ground, the uppermost roof of some ancient unsuspected cavern. He and his fellows had approached it mad with fear and wonder, not knowing what they might find within the great, gaping maw in the Earth. In truth, to a man they had wanted to turn back, all their instincts warning them to run for home—but forward they had gone, moving as if drawn to the wound in the ground by some uncontrollable compulsion.

"That was when it came at us."

A great and fantastic creature shambled forth from the opening, grabbing a man in each of its oversized hands. It was an obese, fur-covered thing, its squat corpulence

mounted by a plainly featured head most resembling a toad's—one with great bat-like ears. The thing had regarded its captives for only a moment, and then the slit line of its terrible maw opened and it crammed in first one man, and then the other.

Then, curiously, the great horror had crawled back down into its cavern and curled in a nesting position. Formless was its bulk then, a black, couchant mass that shuddered sonorously, emitting a bleak and rumbling echo that chased the survivors all the way back to their homes.

"Every new moon since then, the thing has awakened. It crawls forth from its lair and then . . . the noise begins, in your head. You fight it . . . you try . . . but soon it wins. One or two begin to walk, out to the road . . . out to that thing . . . out, out . . ."

The chieftain had screamed then, a loud bellowing wail of hate and self-pity which ended in a river of tears—an outburst that touched the usually stoic Kane deeply. He did not condemn the younger man for his fear. Most men could not stand the sight of Satan's beasts. This he knew. He had seen it a score of times in the past, those of weak faith, unprepared for the challenge—their eyes bulging, nerves melting, hands shaking—the sweat and drool and the never-ending screams.

Kane had left the chief sitting on his rough bench. The younger man did not note the Puritan's leave-taking. He merely sat where he had for days, dreading the new moon that would appear that evening.

Thus had Solomon Kane ridden with purpose out of Kren. For the first time in months he was no longer wandering, searching for the next challenge his Lord God might see fit to put before him. It was there, in that place, awaiting him down the old road the blubbering chieftain had indicated. He knew.

Kane had been heading for the

site with purpose when he had run into the black rider and his steed. For a moment the Puritan wondered how the two might be connected. A monster from beneath the ground and the noiseless, Hell-bent rider—he of the riveting eyes who neither feared nor felt pistol shot? Perhaps they were in some sort of damnable league, but Kane could address only one of them at a time. And, from what he knew thus far, the thing that lies ahead needed to be attended to first.

Less than half a mile down the grim forest road did Kane find the spot described to him by the young chief. Great was the destruction to the countryside. The giant, foreboding trees which had stood in the path of whatever had fallen from the sky had simply been destroyed—not shoved aside, but obliterated. The path gutted through them was no ragged tearing, but a clean, deft stroke, straight and smooth, extending back into the forest for hundreds of yards.

Without hesitation, Kane turned his mount and headed down the trench. The gash in the Earth did not move across the plane of the land, but rather dug down into the ground at a slight angle. After only a few moments of cautious riding, the Puritan found his head sinking below the level of the surface.

Kane did not move forward slowly out of fear. He was studying the great trench, trying to ascertain what exactly had happened. The tear in the Earth was nearly sixty feet wide. Kane noted that whatever had made it had cut cleanly through the trees and their roots, as well as the soil and rock with apparently little difficulty. He also noted that the walls and floor of the trench were not only burned black but that they were rather smooth as well. Then, the time for study was finished.

Solomon Kane pulled back on his horse's reins. Before them in the moonlight lie the end of the trench, and the opening described by the chieftain. Round it was, a near

perfect circle burned into the ground, leading into a darkly foreboding chamber beneath. The merest glance allowed the Puritan to know that the people had been mistaken. Whatever had dug the trench had not uncovered some forgotten chamber.

Kane found the great rock the chieftain had described. Although not cool, it certainly could be none other. What the younger man had not noticed was that the surface of the stone was smooth all over, except where something had gouged tears within it as deep as a pistol's barrel. Gouges that resembled nothing more than the marks that would have been left by claws—those of some passenger riding the massive rock through the sky. Kane could see that when the stone had come to a halt at that spot whatever it was that had ridden it to that spot had then simply burrowed straight down.

Knowing if he was to learn any more that he would have to do the same, Solomon Kane dismounted, secured his horse's tether within one of the gouges, and then headed for the dark circle. He checked the brace of pistols within his girdle, making certain they were both primed and secure. Then, he entered the beckoning hole before him and began to descend. He had gone but a few yards when the chanting reached his ears.

*la! la! Tsathoggua!
N'ggah-kthn-y'ihhu! Cthuo 'ih
gup r'ihob-g'ih'gg lgh thak!
G'Wh-yo, Tsathoggua! Y'kn'nh,
Tsathoggua!
It hath come!
Namage, Lord Tsathoggua, Fa-
ther of Night!
Glory, Elder One, First-born of
Outer Entity!
Hail, Thou Who wast Ancient
beyond Memory
Ere the Stars Spawned Great
Cthulhu!
Power, Hoary Crawler in Mu's
fungoid places!
la! la! G'noth-ykagga-ha!
la! la! Tsathoggua!*

Kane clung to the wall of the shaft, remaining as motionless as possible. Strange phosphorescent gemstones adorned the walls of the cavern below, giving off an eerie, pinkish light. Staring downward, as his eyes adjusted to the darkness they suddenly went wide with stunned surprise as Kane began to make out the scene below him.

The Puritan saw bones everywhere. He made out the remains of adults and children both, mixed in with those of animals and even some impossible bleached shapes he could not identify at all. The bones were not the most disquieting thing Kane could see, however. In fact, they were forgotten almost immediately when compared to that which they surrounded.

The bones were heaped and scattered around the outer fringes of the cavern. In the center, however, following some unknown geometry, a band of formless black entities moved in a strange pattern around a great but unidentifiable bulk. The black things were unlike any creatures Kane had ever seen before. They effected locomotion without any discernible limbs. They did not seem to possess eyes nor ears, and yet they did not collide with one another as they continued their bizarre dance. Nor, the Puritan noted, did they seem to have mouths, even though the chamber was filled with the sound of their chanting.

But Kane knew the weaving black things were not his concern. Instead, he turned his attention to the horrible heap of black fur piled on the cavern floor below him. That massive lumping was his enemy, he knew. In fact, somehow he could tell from the heat and smell and snoring sounds reaching him that it was the most fearsome, most unholy thing he had ever faced. How he knew this he could not say, nor did he care.

In his youth Kane might have marveled at the sight below him. His mind flashed with moments when he had stopped to ponder such mysteries in years gone by—

standing in the dust-haunted halls of Atlantean Negari, in Akaana and the Hills of the Dead. At all these places had he wondered on the horrors of the world—those of its ancient past and those constantly visited upon it anew—and on how man had come to dominate the Earth instead of them.

In his youth such things seemed important—the understanding of them somehow vital. Such considerations were unimportant to the old Puritan now, though. From whatever dim, outlived epoch the things below him had survived—from whichever godless hell the horror they danced about had been flung—he did not care. He had been led to them for a reason and, as long as strength still flowed through his limbs, as long as his heart still pumped within his chest, that reason would be met.

And then, below him, the black mass stirred. With infinite sloth a huge, toad-shaped head pushed its way free of the sloppy bulk. The head opened its eyes slowly, revealing two slits of oozing phosphorescence in its great, browless face. Its maw cracked wide then, and a terrible growl dragged its way out of the hellish throat.

All around the horror, the formless black things scurried off into the shadows. The thing's eyes opened wider. The last of the black servitors disappeared. Arms began to unfold from within the bulk. Kane knew that, even as slow as the monster below him moved, it would be fully awake and ready for him in only a few more moments.

"Then," said the Puritan, pulling his well-worn length of Spanish steel, "best to not give it any more moments."

Releasing his hand hold, Kane dropped toward the floor below, shouting, "For the Lord God, the Virgin Mother, and the one, true Christ!"

Kane's sword sank into the great creature's head, rammed deep to the basket of its hilt by the Puritan's weight. His boots drove far into the flesh of the thing as well,

his one leg sinking some inches past his ankle, the other to his knee.

The horror bellowed in shocked pain. Never had such an affront been given to it! Never had a simple thing of flesh—a creature whose life was measured in mere years—done such to it. Some great muscle within the mass spasmed, shaking Tsathoggua violently, flinging Kane across the chamber. He hit the ground hard, landing on his arm badly, his neck and head slammed against the rocky floor. In the center of the room, smoking, blue-black pus boiled up from the deep gash the Puritan had inflicted on the creature. It spluttered from the wound, splashing over the thing's black, almost feature-less face, down its back and over its shoulders.

Scrambling to his feet, Solomon Kane found his chest filled with pain. He had taken no injury, but the tumble from his horse earlier, coupled with his bad fall a moment ago were conspiring to hold him back. Sucking down a great breath, the Puritan snarled through clenched teeth.

"Stopped now, in the sight of Satan's henchmen? Stopped now in view of their damnable work? I say . . . thee nay!"

With a quickness belying his years, Kane pulled his two great Miquelets from his girdle. He staggered his shots, one after the other, sending two blasts of iron deep into the horror before him. Again the beast bellowed as both wounds erupted as had the first, splashing putrid ichor across the rocky floor. As the cavern filled with the hateful noise of Tsathoggua's cries, Kane tossed his pistols aside and, taking up his blade, moved on the thing once more.

He did not waste what little breath he had on words, but went straight to work, stabbing the creature again and again. Kane knew he had been led to the abomination by the hand of God while the monster still slept. His attack had been one of total surprise, a

fact for which the Puritan gave thanks to the Lord, praising God anew within his head with each blow he landed.

But, as devastating as his campaign against Tsathoggua had been up until that point, Kane could feel himself tiring. He found himself wishing he still had the constitution he had had even ten years earlier. He wished he still had the sword of good and light the ju-ju man M'Longa had given him. The Puritan could still see it, tumbling down a hill into a fire pit created by a different enemy long ago. The move had not saved the foul creature from Kane's vengeful wrath, but it had stolen his weapon away from him.

Could have writ finish to this thing by now if I still had it, he thought. Maybe I am getting too old.

And then, as if out of nowhere, one of Tsathoggua's great fists swung around and caught Kane a devastating blow. The Puritan felt things breaking within him as he flew through the air—felt more snapping as he hit the cavern floor, bouncing then rolling across the broken rock strewn everywhere.

Kane pulled himself upright over an eternity of seconds. Blood covered both his hands as he stared at them. His throat was filled with a salty taste his mind refused to acknowledge. He made to stand, but his legs protested sharply, the pain within them making him gasp despite his determination not to. And then, if all of this were not enough to bear, across the chamber, the horror that was Tsathoggua began to rise!

Many and great were the wounds Kane had inflicted upon the vile monster, but they had not been enough. The vast bulk dragged completely to its feet and then, setting its gaze directly on the Puritan, it began to make its way toward him. Forcing his head down to where it almost touched his head, Kane thought,

If this Hellspawn can stand,

then so . . . can . . . /!

His eyes filling with blood, his brain on fire with the agony wracking his body, Kane forced his weight onto one of his legs, then the other, shouting to the Heavens,

"Oh, Lord, I beseech you—give me Thy strength, but this one last time, that I might do Thy bidding this day!"

Turning, Kane dragged himself slowly, painfully, toward the shaft leading back up to the trench. He pulled his weight upward, hand over hand, biting back the spasms of cutting, grievous suffering piercing his body. He did not look back. He had no need. Even over the thunderous sound of his heart filling his ears, he could hear the sounds of Tsothoggua following him upward to the opening.

Kane could smell the oily fur of the beast drawing nearer. He tried to force his failing body to greater speed, only to be stopped by a sudden wracking spasm that expelled a vast quantity of blood and bile from his mouth. He dragged himself forth at a slower pace afterward, hoping to be able to stay ahead of the thing behind him. The expulsion helped Kane, however, for when Tsothoggua reached the spot it stopped to lick the fluids dribbling into the cracks of the rock wall with its great purple tongue.

Reaching the surface, Solomon Kane saw his horse waiting where he had tethered it. Desperately he made his way across the short expanse. By the time he reached the steed, the tips of Tsothoggua's bat-like ears were cresting the opening. Kane ignored the sounds of the approaching beast, turning all his attention to one of his saddlebags.

Not bothering to unlace the pouch, he cut open the thongs with his dagger and pulled forth the oversized pistol within it. A gift from a German weaponer he had helped, he had but two projectiles for it. The workman had called the pistol an experiment, cautioning Kane to use it only in a time of

great need. Sliding one of the vastly oversized shells down the muzzle, Kane gasped,

"Now, devil—let us see . . . if thou canst bleed thy final gallon."

Kane braced the weapon's overlong stock against his throbbing shoulder. Before him, bathed in the moonlight, Tsothoggua had cleared the edge of the pit and was taking his first steps out into the gloom. Closing one eye, Kane mouthed a short, silent prayer, then pulled his weapon's trigger. Within the wheellock, the pyrites slammed down, a spark was formed, and the night was rent by man-made thunder.

Smoke billowed from the weapon as the grenade was launched. The explosive detonated against Tsothoggua, blowing out the front of the creature's chest, knocking it back down into its chamber. Kane sucked down a weak breath. Barely able to stand, he made his way across the expanse to check his handwork—to make certain that the beast was actually, finally, dead. He did not like what he saw.

Tsothoggua had not been killed. Indeed, the thing was already clambering back up the shaft. Kane realized it would be upon him in less than a minute. With but moments left to him, his body throbbing, blood dripping from his lips, the Puritan knelt in the light of the moon and raised his folded hands as best he could to the sky.

"Forgive me, my Lord," he said humbly. "You have asked of me and I have failed. I deserve not Thy mercy, and I ask for it naught. My only . . . request . . . is for but a moment of strength, that I might smite this demon that preys on Thy children."

And then, having said his piece, the Puritan stood once more. He could tell the thing was growing closer from the noise of it echoing upward out of the shaft. As quickly as his shattered body would allow him, he crossed back to his mount, fumbling for the second shell to his last-remaining weapon. His fingers closed about it, pull-

ing it from his saddlebag. Before he could load it, however, a noise off to the side made him turn.

Suddenly, waiting calmly next to his own black charger was the darkly-garbed figure he had met on the forest road earlier. The man sat his horse, with a lean strength and steel-rod straightness Kane could only wish for. And then he realized, he had. Beyond the rider's black collar, Kane saw his own blood-filled eyes, young as the day he first left Devon.

Wordlessly, the shade of his youth reached behind its back and pulled a length of wood from the sheath that held it. Tossing it to Kane, the silent rider then nodded in the direction of the pit. Joyously, the Puritan understood. He had wished for his youth, wished for the great ju-ju stick given him by N'Longa, and they had been delivered unto him.

Why the figure had appeared

earlier to him, he did not know. Indeed, whether he was actually awash in the gifts of Heaven, or merely besotted with the hallucinations of the dying, he cared not. Grabbing up the carved length, he stared into the mysterious eyes of its cat-shaped head, whispering,

"I'm coming home once more, my sweet, good Bess. And this time, I shall find thee waiting."

Then, Kane shoved his second grenade down the muzzle of his weapon. The dark rider dismounted his horse, steel filling his hand. The two stood side by side, waiting for the approaching devil to reach them. After but a few, scant seconds, Tsathoggua pulled itself over the brim of the Earth and waddled forward.

And, without a moment's hesitation, Solomon Kane, the praise of his Lord, his God, bellowing from his grateful, smiling lips, threw himself into the fray once more.

XEROXING THE MECRONOMICON

That mad, poetic, mystic Yemenite
 The world imperiled by his treatise dread;
 For, heeding not the warnings of the dead,
 Rash mortals would annul by occult rite
 The magical restraints imposed in days
 Of old upon the Ancient Ones, who thence
 Would awfully appear. So governments
 Concealed the book or gave it to the blaze.

But with this photocopying device
 Ten thousand copies of this fearful work,
 With cantrips fell, about the planet lurk.
 One reckless spell would for our doom suffice;
 And soon or late, I feel it in my bones,
 The Ancient Ones will rise to claim their thrones.

—L. Sprague deCamp

Night of Samhain

By Carlos Orsi Martinho

Translated from the Portuguese
by Ricardo Madeira

The night was almost falling, but the bus had already crossed the last tunnel, entering the final coils of the asphalt spiral that ran through Serra do Mar. Unable to sleep, Rogerio Abrade looked through the window. The thick, multicolored smoke of the factories in Cubatão danced a surreal ballet in the atmosphere. Refinery chimneys spit jets of fire towards the skies.

It's hell, thought Abrade, incapable to refrain a shiver. How can anyone get used to living in such a place? An idiot question, as he well knew. How can anyone get used to poison, visible and palpable in the air? Or to the brainless children?

Living.

Rogerio's attention was drawn from the window to the paper in his hands. It was a letter, printed by a computer. An invitation to spend Christmas night on the beach. It had surprised him, no question about it; even more coming from whom it had.

It was not that Abrade and the author of the invitation, Guilherme Beromel, were enemies. They were just estranged since the death of Beromel's sister and Rogerio's girlfriend, Cintia, during an abortion attempt.

It had happened on a very hot afternoon, maybe one of the hottest of the year, in October. The phone had rung in the apartment that Guilherme shared with his sister since their parents' death. It was an anonymous call, a man's voice saying that "Cintia was having troubles," and giving the address for the clinic. Beromel was only able to find the place after an hour. The door was open and there was no one there. No one alive, besides

the fat bluebottle flies.

The smell was one of a slaughterhouse. Twisted over a table red with blood—naked, with some kind of metallic instrument emerging between her open and bent legs, in an image of tragic obscenity—lay the lifeless body of Cintia.

Then came the doctors and the police. Those responsible for the clinic had run away, and it was unlikely that someone would be arrested or punished. The autopsy revealed the presence of fetus remains in the victim's womb. An investigator asked Guilherme if he knew who the father of the child was; Beromel, after thinking for a while, said he didn't.

At the wake, Abrade had approached Guilherme to offer his condolences and to state that he had no knowledge of the pregnancy, that he hadn't suggested an abortion. Beromel, in turn, spent the whole time completely ignoring his friend's words and presence. They hadn't seen each other since then; a week before, though, the postman had brought the invitation.

Rogerio didn't know exactly why he had accepted it. Sympathy, maybe. With the death of his sister, Guilherme was completely by himself, without a family. *And it's terrible to be alone at this time of year,* Abrade was thinking. *God, I think I'm the closest thing to a relative he's got.*

The beach house of the Beromel family was a kind of circular tower with two floors, more wide than high, with round windows imitating the portholes of a ship and a door shaped like a pointed arch. The external wall was white, thick and rustic. Rogerio couldn't contain a smile while leaving the taxi and halting in front of the building, imagining that, some decades ago,

the aberrant—and definitely tasteless—design had been considered "in the vanguard" and "modern." The location of the house, though was irreproachable: the beach unrolled itself immediately behind that strange castle of sand and concrete.

The door stood at the end of a small, egrival corridor, about one and a half meters in length, and was, in fact, a mosaic of colored glass that displayed a green triton contemplating his own trident and blue waves against a golden background. On the wall to the right, inside the corridor, there was a button, possibly the bell. Abrade pressed it, readily hearing afterwards the pleasant, though muffled, sound of little bells chiming. The entrance was soon opened by a fat lady, of low height, with too much painting on her face and reeking of cheap makeup and perfume. She carried two loaded handbags, and left the house as she invited Rogerio in.

"The master is waiting inside. It would be nice if you could cheer him up," the woman sighed. "Well, Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas . . .," replied Abrade automatically, while the sturdy figure walked away. *The maid or housekeeper, he thought, going home to have supper with her family.*

Rogerio crossed the passage and found himself in an empty hall, overlaid in wood. He waited there for some minutes, but soon became convinced that no one would come to welcome him. He then decided to choose one of the four available doors in the room and explore the house in an attempt to find his host. The search wasn't one of the most complicated: Guilherme was in the dining room, right behind the only unlocked door in the entrance hall—except, of course, for the stained glass that led back to the street.

His host was sitting, downcast, on one end of a great ebony table; over the black piece of furniture rested, steaming, a sumptuous Christmas supper. Rogerio cleared

his throat to announce his entry and Guilherme rose up to welcome him.

Beremel had lost a lot of weight, really a lot, according to Abrade's recollections; as a result, his skin had wrinkled completely, having taken a sickly tone of a glossy, almost grayish yellow, and it enveloped little more than his naked bones and flaccid, dilated veins. Guilherme dressed in black suit, shirt, tie, socks and shoes.

"Welcome," said his host, extending his emaciated, bony hand in a surprisingly firm handshake. "Come on, sit down! You need to eat, I imagine."

"Me!" Rogerio laughed a little. Their friendship had once been solid enough to resist an exchange of ironies from one side to the other, and maybe it still was in spite of everything. The guest decided to take a chance and finished, "I'm not the one cultivating the Ethiopia-look."

"Really," he agreed. "Have you heard of inedia?"

"Don't you mean inanition? Or anorexia?"

The host shook his head negatively.

"Inanition is to die of hunger. Anorexia is an aversion to food. Inedia is the power, physical and psychic, to survive without food. Scientific records speak of at least three persons who managed to do it and for periods that vary from 20 to 50 years."

"And you decided to be the fourth."

"Oh, I don't have such a pretension. But the fact is that fasting has some interesting properties. For the initiated, of course."

"No doubt."

They sat at the table. Before Rogerio could help himself, however, Guilherme lowered his head, closed his eyes and muttered something that sounded like some strange prayer.

"*Gafn hupadgh Shub-Niggurath . . .*"

Abrade sat motionless and in silence for some time in considera-

tion for his companion's litany, but after two minutes he couldn't contain himself any longer. "What is it? Some new saint, or something like that?"

Guilherme lifted his head, stared at his friend, smiled and said, "In truth, almost that. Since Cintia died, I've been doing a little research about." He paused. "This is going to sound a little ridiculous for you, but it's alright." He took a deep breath. "The ultimate truths of existence."

Silence. Nobody laughed.

"I respect that," said Rogerio; he himself had gone through a period of religious self-evaluation after his girl friend's death. "But what happened? Have you been going back to Church, or . . ."

"No. But I went in search of other things, other beliefs. Other explanations. You know, for example, why *this* is Christmas night?"

"Something about pagan cults . . ."

"Exactly. The Nordic Yuletide, the Celtic Samhain. Among the pagan peoples of Europe there always was a tendency to celebrate the passage of the Winter solstice in a series of festivals which went from the first of November to the end of December. To compete with that, the Catholics invented All Souls Day, Christmas, New Year's Day . . . All celebrations with significances very close to those of the pagan festivals: death, fertility, rebirth.

"Fertility and death . . . it may seem weird that those two things are celebrated at the same season, isn't that right? But we now very well know how one can lead to the other . . . *isn't that right?*"

The way that last sentence was said—in a tone mixed with scorn and accusation—caused Rogerio to spring to his feet.

"Now listen," he said, almost shouting, "if you think that you still have some score to settle with me because of Cintia . . ." The guest stood silent and slowly raised a tense, clenched fist, his index finger held up, while he searched

for the right words. Finally he continued, "I slept with your sister, on various occasions, and she got pregnant and then died during an abortion attempt; if that is what you mean with that talk of 'fertility and death,' and if this supper is an effort to make me feel guilty, you should know that I already feel terrible, and without your help. You should know now that I never forced Cintia to do anything. If she wanted . . ."

"Liar."

What?—This isn't happening, yelled a voice inside Abrade's head. He doesn't know, nobody knows. No one could know, God Almighty.

"You demanded the abortion. She told me so."

The accusation left Rogerio dumfounded. He thought of denying everything, but the glow of conviction in Guilherme's eyes was too powerful. Slowly, the guest leaned against the wall, searching for support; he felt suddenly very tired.

"You knew? Before it all happened, you knew?" he managed to stammer.

"No. After."

Rogerio ignored that last statement. He just stood there, in the same place, shaking a little.

"The Celts," Guilherme was speaking in a neutral voice, devoid of any emotion; apparently, his role of prosecutor was over, "defined Samhain as a season when 'the barriers between this world and the one that lays beyond grow thin.' They were right, as you will soon find out."

And in that moment, Guilherme Beromet, the last survivor of a long lineage, reclined in his chair at the head of the table, threw his head back and said, "*Íó! Íó! Shub-Niggurath!*"

A heat wave spread through the room, making Rogerio step back, protecting his eyes with his forearm in an instinctive movement. Right afterwards, Beromet's body burst into flames, the big yellow flares freeing themselves from his epidermis. Disgusted, Abrade ran

in the direction of the door that led back to the entrance hall, and from there to the stained glass that separated him from the street.

The door, though, was locked. In panic, Rogerio used his own fists to try to break it—it was only tempered glass, after all—but he couldn't. Exhausted, he let himself fall down to the floor of varnished wooden plugs.

After a few minutes of taking deep breaths and trying to regain his sanity, the man decided to get up and search for another exit. He knew the only unlocked door in the hall was the one that led back to the dining room, but he couldn't resist the temptation of trying the doorknob of one of the others.

The door opened. For some reason, Abrade wasn't surprised.

It was a small room, with tiled walls—the bathroom. Nothing exceptional there, except for the small medicine cabinet, containing every kind of hormones and two unlabeled flasks, filled with a gray, slimy substance. Curious, Rogerio opened one of them to smell its content. What he smelt was a strong odor, damp and unpleasant, like that of a goat, dirty and in heat; a smell that rapidly spread itself out of the small flask until it impregnated the atmosphere all around him. Overcome with nausea, Abrade barely had time to reach the toilet before the contents of his stomach surfaced in his throat. The vomit came in two powerful and pungent gushes.

To wash his face or mouth was out of the question, as it looked like the smell of the damned flask was contaminating the water inside the pipes. Staggering, Rogerio left the bathroom and returned to the living room, where, in a reflex act, he sipped the entire contents of a bottle of wine. That, though, was useless: the odor had clung firmly to his clothes and hair.

His thirst satiated—and already used to the stench—Abrade started scanning the banquet room. At first sight there was no sign of the body or of the fire. The chair where

Guilherme Beronai had been consumed by the flames was nearly intact; the vinyl of the coating looked half-melted in some portions of the chair's back, but that was it. Fallen on the left side of the armchair, however, was a human hand, of yellowed, emaciated skin.

When, overcoming all repugnance, Rogerio decided to examine the piece, the stretches of epidermis that received the touch of his fingers crumbled in a thin cloud of almost microscopic ashes. Increasing the pressure, Rogerio crushed the member with ease, until there was nothing left but a few occicles in the palm of his hand.

Looking at those tiny bones, yellowed by the heat, Abrade started to wonder and, at last, he came to the conclusion that he couldn't be alone in the mansion. After all, someone had unlocked the door that led from the entrance hall to the bathroom; someone had removed or pulverized the rest of the body.

More importantly, someone possessed the means to get out of that house. The main question, then, was to find that person. Another question, secondary at the moment, was to find out how Guilherme came to know that Cintia had been compelled to have the abortion. Had he heard something about the fights, the screams? The threats?

About the punch—short, abrupt, violent?

Well, whatever it was his host knew, it had burned with him. But what about the accomplice? If there was another person orchestrating this morbid game, it could only be an agent of Guilherme's trust.

Very probably, someone who also knew.

Back in the entrance hall, Rogerio found another unlocked door. It gave access to the library.

It was an amazing sight: walls five, maybe six meters in height, totally covered with bookcases full of volumes. In the center of it all was a showcase with two Japanese swords—really a sword and a dagger—and a large writing desk, on top of which rested two open books.

One of them was a recent edition of *The Dictionary of Religions* by John Hinneals, a reference book about myths and cults from all over the world. The other one, written in German and with a more antique look, was called *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* by Friedrich Wilhelm von Junzt. Although Rogerio didn't understand German, the similarity of the title words with some others in the English language made him think that this second volume could be called in Portuguese *Cultos Indivizíveis* or something like that. On the page the tose was open to, there was a picture, very crude, of a man tied to a rock and with his abdomen abnormally bloated; the caption, in German, contained, among others, the words "Shub-Niggurath." Although disgusting, the scene had a certain sensual quality to it—in its outlines, maybe—that made it hard to turn the eyes away. Written down on a piece of paper was the annotation: "Shub-Niggurath, prehistoric god/goddess of fertility, that was afterwards softened and had its characteristics divided among several myths, like Astarte, Ishtar, Aphrodite, Pan and Persephone, but is in truth just a single one, the Great Dark Goat with a Thousand Young."

"Was it to this that he was praying?" Abrade whispered, astonished, while he stepped back.

Suddenly, Rogerio remembered the swords. He had no difficulty in removing the largest one from its sheath.

The blade was solid steel, but had no edge; it was nothing more than an ornamental piece.

"But it can act as a good club, too," he considered.

Back in the entrance hall once again, Rogerio positioned himself in front of the stained glass door. He held the fake samurai sword firmly in both hands. With a yell, he struck the glass barrier.

The clangor that followed reverberated a lot before it was absorbed by the soft wood coating of the walls, but the impact didn't produce

any considerable damage. Yet, in fact, a tiny crack appeared close to the eyes of the triton. That small change brought a more heedful—some could say ineful—look to the creature.

"Oh, shit . . .," Abrade said, in a whisper. "How the hell . . ."

Behind his back, loud and clear, he heard a metallic clicking noise, like a key in a lock. The last door was being unlocked.

As quickly as possible, Rogerio turned around and ran to grab the doorknob in an attempt to open the door unexpectedly and surprise Guilherme's accomplice. As soon as his hand touched the lock, though, Abrade felt the touch of short extremities against his back. Turning his body around with extreme care, he saw what could only be described as the product of a hallucinating mind: the green triton, with his trident in rest.

It wasn't, however, a mere animated version of the figure in the glass. The creature, alive, was much more hideous than the artist responsible for the mosaic had romantically supposed. The monster's face didn't exhibit any trace of human physiognomy: there was no nose; the mouth, filled with tiny sharp teeth, was twisted down, under the weight of the thick cartilage that gave shape to the cheekbones, the eyes were large and vitreous, two black hemispheres where Abrade saw his own terror reflected.

And yet, the thing possessed a body, disjointed, true, but with torso and limbs, it was something humanoid.

Without uttering a sound, the monster charged with the trident. Startled and terrified, Rogerio wouldn't have had the time to defend himself, at least, not if the attack was dealt with normal speed. The humanoid, however, showed himself exceptionally sluggish and clumsy in his attempts to impale its opponent. In fact, only two energetic strikes, dealt by the dull sword, were enough to make the creature draw back, screaming in

pain, and cower against the wall. The monster uttered crying shrieks, that terrified one even more for being so alike the screams of a child; if he closed his eyes, Abrade would be forced to believe he was torturing a newborn.

Stepping back without turning his back to the triton, Rogerio came closer to the door he was about to cross before the arrival of the monster. Groping behind his back with his left hand, he found the door-knob and turned it. A few moments later, he found himself on the other side.

It wasn't a room, but a corridor. To the right was another door—to the kitchen—and, ahead, a stairway leading upward. He decided to climb it.

On the top floor he found several locked doors, possibly entrances to different bedrooms, and only one unlocked door. He went through it.

What he saw on the other side finally lent some sense to Guilherme's madness, and to the various hints his host had made to pagan rites and "the barrier with the beyond." For that room contained a great black altar, almost the height of a man, carved into the shape of a goat's head. And over the altar, naked, pale as only death can be, but without showing any sign of decay, rested the body of Cintia.

Astounded, Rogerio dropped the sword. As if awakened by the sound of the weapon against the floor, the woman lifted half her body, propping herself on one of her elbows, and said, sleepily, "Who brings the perfume?"

Breathing deeply, Abrade again felt the smell of the gray substance, still impregnated in his clothes and hair. Now, though, the aroma didn't seem the least bit unpleasant.

"Ah! It's you!" The cadaver smiled and in a leap crouched over the altar. In that position, Cintia's knees pointed directly to Rogerio's eyes.

Slowly, the living-dead started to spread her legs, revealing the dark recess that stood between

them. "Come . . ." The voice passed to a more sensual register. "It's been so long . . ."

Part of Abrade's mind told him that this was madness, that the woman was dead, that the offer that came from that altar wasn't of passion, but of horror. Suffocated by the nauseating spirals of gray perfume, though, Rogerio readily lost the ability to distinguish between one thing and the other.

And he walked to the space that appeared between her thighs. Abrade felt the muscled legs cross each other behind the back of his neck and pressing his lips, with gentle urgency, against a pubis surprisingly warm and moist.

At the same time, Cintia screamed in a frenzy of ecstasy.

"*lâl lâl Shub-Nigguroth!*"

Outside on the beach, fires and cracklings celebrated the 1996th birthday of the Redeemer.

Today, Rogerio lives under the sea in a species of cocoon stuck to the rocks. He believes that the cocoon was once his skin, but he's not quite sure. Sometimes it's just so difficult to know what is really a skin. The memory is like that, it fails from time to time. It seems, anyway, that the triton (the same one that brings the food) took him there after everything was over. His recollections, anyhow, are confused; there was the room with the altar, and the thing, of course, that came through the vagina of the goddess dressed as Cintia; the thing that descended through his throat, creeping, and that ended up impregnating him. Now that hurt a little.

Today, as a result, a thousand eggs are incubating in his gut. Someday, surely, all of them will hatch. And on that day and afterwards for a million years, the brood of Shub-Niggurath will devour him, very slowly, from the inside out; now that will hurt a little.

And there's also a stained glass, universes away, that shows the calm blue sea, the golden sky and nothing more.

Just for the meantime, of course.

Lovecraft, Lacan and the Lurking Fear

By John Shire

In the beginning was "The Outsider." It tells of a being with no sense of its own origins or nature, which lives in perpetual twilight in a gloomy castle surrounded by forbidding trees. No light stars, moon or sun are ever seen, nor has the creature anything but vague intimations of its own self as there are no "others."

Such a lot the Gods gave to me
—to me, the dazed, the disappointed,
the barren, the broken.
And yet I am strangely content
and cling desperately to
these sore memories when my
mind momentarily threatens
to reach beyond to the other.

—Lovecraft

Finally driven to suicide (by what? traditional Romantic notions I'd wager. But I digress), it finds itself in a new place, unnerved and lost. In the company of others it finds itself in its reflection in a mirror. The action releases knowledge of self.

The Outsider resembles the Kleinian child which Jacques Lacan describes as a "fragmented body"¹ and which appears in dreams and analysis as "an aggressive disintegration of the individual"². The mirror gives limits, form and recognition. In Lovecraft it subjects the creature to a release of memory in which it (in this pre-gendered, pre-Oedipal state, the child/monster has no sexual identity in the story or story) accepts itself for what it is seen to be and, in doing so, loses any fear.

In the supreme horror of that
second I forgot what had hor-
rified me, and the burst of
black memory vanished in
a chaos of echoing images.

—Lovecraft

Finally it flees "in a dream."
As a metaphor for the initial

stages of child development, "The Outsider" exhibits further parallels on closer inspection. It speaks of youth and a lack of speech. If speech came (which, apart from one "ghastly ululation," it never does), in Lacan's terms it would signify an entrance into the Symbolic order (and the beginnings of the formation of the classic Oedipal triangle). In the story this is not to be; the subject/monster/child remains in the Imaginary which, in Terri Moï's view "is equivalent to becoming psychotic and incapable of living in human society"³. So the Outsider's appearance brings, in "human society," "a sudden and unheralded fear of hideous intensity" leaving it free to "play by day amongst the catacombs of Nephren-Ka . . ." In the following description of the new life, echoes can be heard of Lacan's suggested dream symbolization of the formation of the subject's "I":

I know that light is not for me,
save that of the moon over the
rock tombs of Neb, nor any
gaiety save the unnamed feasts
of Nitokris beneath the great
Pyramid.

—Lovecraft

. . . a fortress, or a stadium
—it's inner area and closure
surrounded by marshes and
rubbish tips, dividing it into
two opposed fields of conquest
where the subject flounders in
quest of the lofty, remote inner
castle . . .

—Lacan⁴

The motivatory emotions mentioned in the two passages provoke an even more curious parallel: in Lacan's scenario (which is presumably symptomatic of a problematized situation at this stage) the subject "flounders in quest"⁵ whereas the Outsider is seen to come to accept his "remote inner

castle" and still exhibits a bitter acceptance of his dark nature, seeing "gaiety" in unnamed feasts.

Lastly, the narrative structure itself is not enclosed in a construct that explains its own existence. It does not purport to be a diary or a warning or even a manuscript. It could not be, for it is the work of a monster, an outsider, a psychotic who has not yet gained proper access to language, a story which pre-"dates . . . the deflection of the specular" ¹ in to the social ¹.⁵

It resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present's feeling of being "at home" into an illusion. It lurks—this "wild," the "ob-scene," this "filth," this "resistance" of "superstition"—within the walls of residence, and, behind the back of the owner (the ego), or over its objections, it inscribes there the law of the other.

--Michel de Certeau⁵

Could you get more specific about the type of horror Lovecraft evokes?

The next stage of development is the entry of the child into the Symbolic Order. This involves the intrusion of the Father into the mother/child dyad and the initiation of the child into language. It is this process which occasions the production of the unconscious and also explains its structure (as "reflecting" language). The Symbolic Order is the patriarchal construct which separates, in its societally marked definitions, the "child" from the "mother," which orders that "desire must wait, that it must formulate in the constricting word whatever demand it may speak . . ." ⁶. This destroys the illusory completeness of the child's imaginary ego. There is no longer the illusion that all desires can be satisfied and instead they become helplessly structured by external relations and are thereby, inherently, unfulfilled. It is this gap, the gap between the demand for a "perfection" of

fulfilled desire and the restricting structures of language that force an unconscious into existence.

But the speech of the subject, his definition as being, is dependent on and continually invaded by traces of that imaginary, the dis-course of the Other: ". . . it's frenzy mocking the abyss of the infinite . . ." ⁷. That was Lacan by the way, not Lovecraft. It is part of Lacan's description of the nature of desire in the language-ridden subject, when with "elusive ambiguity the ring of meaning flees from our grasp along the verbal thread." ⁸

There is nothing in the unconscious which accords with the body. The unconscious is discordant. The unconscious is that which, by speaking, determines the subject as being, but as being to be crossed through with that metonymy by which I support desire, in so far as it is endlessly impossible to speak as such.

--Lacan⁸

So that, it seems, is the paradox of speaking. It is the only way left for the "unconscious" to "speak" and yet in doing so, by the very use of language it cannot achieve its desired aim. This also provides some insight into why the unconscious is sometimes seen as primal, old, basic and dark, something almost left behind (although Lacan does resist this view; he does not see the unconscious as the seat of human "drives"). Lacan's production of the subject rests on his acceptance as a being in society through language, on condition that its desires are perpetually curbed through language.

Lacan also says "the truth is always disturbing. We cannot even manage to get used to it. We are used to the real. The truth we re-press"¹⁰ which seems, uncharacteristically and unnervingly, quite clear for a change.

In Lovecraft the actions of the subject, initially well within the Symbolic order of normal, scienti-

ic domains, brings them inevitably closer to the "truth." The explorers in the Antarctic, the projects of the various scientists, the genealogical quests of young men, all lead them ever forward—to the past. In the city of the Old Ones a scientific origin is hinted at. In Lacan ". . . the slightest alteration in the relation between man and signifier, in this case the procedures of exegesis, changes the whole course of history by modifying the moorings which anchor his being."¹¹

It is these "procedures of exegesis" (which, once written, tend to be fatal to sanity then life) that Lovecraft's protagonists inevitably execute and undergo at the same time. On contact with the "true" nature of things they die, go mad or retire from life.¹² The cosmic horror so appreciated by Lovecraft is at the very nature of the universe in actuality. The (arguably) ultimate god of the Mythos, Azathoth, a psychoanalytic nightmare if ever there was one, consists of several almost arbitrary descriptions; scientific ("monstrous nuclear chaos beyond angled space"), poetic ("Mindless Daemon-sultan") and downright insulting ("blind idiot god"). So the "arcana of basic entity" is being brought very close to the surface of consciousness (and to the page) by these men and their strange desires. Even the *Necronomicon* is very clear on just how unavoidably and definitively close disruption by unconscious forces can be. It is even quite specific about the two sites at which you can count on being troubled; where language is performed and in the "home." Remember, "Their hand is at your throats yet ye see them not; and Their habitation is even one with your guarded threshold."

So these monstrosities are forever close, primal and defining, always ready to disrupt the social discourse of the protagonist in much the same way as the unconscious can be said to disrupt and inhabit the psyche of the subject.

The fear of knowledge, of facing the repressed of both private mind and public bodies, is articulated as the crisis point in the protagonists' own narration. So what am I saying? What is the point? What happens when you come right up against your "guarded threshold" and take it right to where "they" live?

If I have said that the unconscious is the discourse of the other . . . it is in order to indicate the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition. . . . In other words this other is the Other that even my life invokes as a guarantor of the truth in which it subsists By which we can also see it is with the appearance of language the dimension of truth emerges.

—Lacan¹³

The words reaching the reader can never even suggest the awfulness of the sight itself.

—Lovecraft

The majority of the stories are narrated in the first person and are usually given some fictional framework to explain their existence—a warning, a statement, a "test of my own sanity" and so on. If any useful parallel with Lacanian psychoanalysis is more relevant than at the critical encounter with the Mythos creatures there should necessarily be some equally critical disruption in language as the subject comes face to "face" with the return of the unthinkable. And indeed, "Poor Johansens handwriting almost gave out when he wrote of this."

At almost every climactic encounter language cannot cope with the strain. Robert Blake's diary descends into disjointed poetics at the point of identification. The alien nature of the names takes them outside normal human speech and pronunciation. In both *Mourntowns of Modness* and *Charles Dexter Ward*, protagonists slip into

mad litany and a psychotic inability to focus on the object in question, one reciting underground stations and the other revealing Lovecraft's opinion of Modernist poetry.

Ironically, but perhaps necessarily from a psychoanalytic point of view, it is language and the symbolic order which seduce Lovecraft's protagonists to begin their disastrous quests. They encounter the first threads of the Other in language; through the huge library of real and unreal books or the archaic archives of their forerunners. Following the paper trails left by ancestors and authors of forbidden books, the investigator is finally driven to confront what the trail of language has continually hinted at, only to find that it is beyond language. The discourse of the Other made evident. At which point, as Angela Carter says, dementia ensues or, faced with unacceptable truth, suicide is chosen (see 12). Once the quest has begun, its end is inevitable. When you start to write, you have already lost.

The truth of writing, the truth behind the hints in the books, the truth of the confessions and the warnings is that the truth cannot be expressed in writing, by language. It cannot be owned, contained or expressed. If you get too close, it will exile you from sane and proper communication forever. You will feel their hand at your throat.

But even here the surviving narrators draw back, or at least their language does. In all the stories that do not result in sudden death, the truth is still never directly stated. Albert Wilmarth runs in terror from the "face and hands of Henry Wentworth Akeley" whose position, sans body, on a chair proves that he has spent all night talking to a disguised alien whose existence, now undeniably proved, he never admits to in plain words.¹⁴ The narrator of *At the Mountains of Madness* continually wishes only to hint at certain inevitable conclusions that must be reached by

the reader and not laid down in words. On a few occasions even those alien races which afford the first horror are allowed to become recognizable as sane and sentient only when they become victims of another fear which cannot be sanely faced. The Old Ones face the shoggoths in *Mountains* (there are even secondary mountains hinted at in the end) and the Great Race face the flying polyps in "Shadow out of Time."

In every story there is a limit that cannot be crossed, a barrier that cannot and should not be breached—but its very existence defines the crisis of language and sanity in which the narrators find themselves; "I am forced into speech . . ."

There is a further paper trail to follow, to lead us again simultaneously toward and away from whatever fearful truth may be out there. American surrealists wrote on Lovecraft as early as 1943. Lacan read and contributed to French surrealist magazines in the forties.¹⁵ Did he encounter traces of Lovecraft? Had he read Levy's biography? Is that another story? Dare I continue?

Notes and Bibliography

¹From analyst Melanie Klein, Lacan's description from "The Mirror Stage" in "Ecrits: A Selection," (Tavistock 1977).

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Taru Mol, "Sexual/Textual Politics" (Methuen 1985), p. 100.

⁴"The Mirror Stage," p. 5.

⁵Michel de Certeau, "Heterologies: Discourse on the Other" (Manchester University Press 1986), p. 9.

⁶Elizabeth Wright, "Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice" (Methuen 1984), p. 100.

⁷From "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" in "Ecrits," p. 166.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Lacan, "Seminar of 21st January 1975" in "Feminine Sexuality," eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline

Rose (Macmillan 1983), p. 165.

¹⁰"Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," p. 169.

¹¹Ibid, p. 174.

¹²Except, of course, in "Shadow over Insmouth," the magnificent tale which undermines my whole thesis.

¹³"Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," p. 172.

¹⁴This, as has been pointed out to me, is, and has been, extremely debatable. Whose fantasy of "plain words" could be appealed to here? Language is seducing someone here; me, Lovecraft, the narrator's? I can't decide.

¹⁵See David Macey, "Lacan in Contexts" (Verso 1988).

This essay would be impossible without the assistance of Dr. Vicky Lebeau who told me to drop all the stuff about Freud, which I did. The sections where I appear to understand Lacan are down to her and the sections where I talk rubbish are all my own work. Thanks also to Robert Price for being interested.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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EDITORIAL SHARDS (continued from page 2)

you may literally ingest. Sports fans who have no natural link to the teams they choose buy sports cards in order, I am guessing, to own a piece of the team and thus to imagine they have some real reason to be interested in it.

Lovecraft's Cthulhu cultists cherished their space-stone idols to give themselves psychological focal points more tangible than Cthulhu's dream-revelations. And I guess it is entirely natural that when Mythos action figures become available, we, too, should clutch our little plastic eidolons. *la R'lyeh!*

Robert M. Price
Hierophant of the Horde



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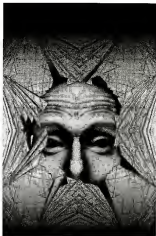
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Litany for the Deliverance of our Holy Mother, Ut'uils-Hi'ehr

By Joseph S. Pulver, Sr.

Come O Holy Mother shuddersome and tremendous,
bringing thine hate

and rage,
and aeons-long miseries,
and agonies-virulent,
and ravenous desires--

come to the feast promised and ceaseless,

O Holy Mother-Eternal, my tears are joy!

O Tumultuous Damnation-Aflame,

who bore Kassogtha, who bore the twins, Nctosa and Nctolhu,
come hence from thy foreign land of grief--

come eat the trees and the lands that bear moving fruits.

O Holy Mother-Eternal, my tears are joy!

O True-Governess of Chaos free of restraint,

come to this ant hill with the Changing
suffused with the stench of Oblivion,

and end all the foolish sophistries rattling away,
like dry sticks cracking underfoot, their last days.

Come make even the grass and water to be scared.

O Holy Mother-Eternal, my tears are joy!

Come O Holy Mother Immortal and Insatiable,

named Beast and Leviathan and Madness and Evil,
who wast exiled by treachery.

Come through the nightblooms and serpentine coils of shadows

set to bar thee from Thy Glories awash in blood.

O Holy Mother-Eternal, my tears are joy!

Holy Mother--

the defenseless-herd, the tribe conjured of clay,
sleeps;

come make all gallows and dungeon

and feasting necropolis to be bothered by spirited nightmares.

O Holy Mother-Eternal, my tears are joy!

Come now, Divine-Lurker Waiting,

who wast set down as a tortured slave drowned in malediction,
thou who wast the first breath, the first angel, in the chilled blackness.

Come to us now, O Most Holy, Ut'uils-Hi'ehr,

be as thick smoke choking,

be pestilence and shroud,

be the grudge who punishes with delicious-strife surging,

be as the sword falling like an avalanche,

be poison and Death's screaming teeth.

O Holy Mother-Eternal, my tears are joy!

Come Sinuous-Goddess vast as the caverns below Voornithadrath

with all Thy dark thunders bright and hurried,

and Thy Plague of Ecstasies spanning the harrowing keening,

for all the ages--waiting under shining treacheries are worn to dust--

Wait not, O Elder-Glory, for the signs of Thy liberty are everywhere!

O Holy Mother-Eternal, my tears are joy!

The "Art" of H. P. Lovecraft

By J. G. W. Russell

No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.
—Dr. Samuel Johnson

I've often wondered what H. P. Lovecraft would've made of the later work of his protege Robert Bloch, who was a regular correspondent during the final three or four years of Lovecraft's life. Whereas Lovecraft's later stories forged his own synthesis of traditional fantasy/horror with more modern science fiction and laid the foundations for a new subgenre of (i.e., the "Cthulhu Mythos" story), Bloch's 1958 book *Psycho* played a significant part in changing the direction of the whole horror genre, taking emphasis away from the supernatural and putting it on the natural, making man the monster instead of merely the monster's victim. Certainly EC Comics had been doing a similar thing for years before that, and Alfred Hitchcock's film possibly had more actual effect than the book itself, but Bloch still deserves some credit.

It would be futile to ask, however, whether or not Lovecraft would have approved of these developments had he lived to see them, because the answer would almost certainly have been a resounding negative. That Lovecraft took a very dim view of the conventional horror fiction of his own day is undeniable, and I find little reason to suppose he would look more favourably upon modern exponents of the genre such as Stephen King, Brian Lumley or Clive Barker. They would be too conventional and, more to the point, too commercial according to Lovecraft's views.

Lovecraft's opinions of the commercial weird fiction and pulp magazines of his day were generally and famously low, even though by his own admission he had been a regular reader of popular magazines such as the *Argosy*, the *Air-Story*

and the *Black Mask* since at least 1905 (or maybe that just gave him enough experience to be able to justify his opinions). As has been noted elsewhere, his 1926 history of weird fiction *Supernatural Horror in Literature* omits all reference to the pulps and their authors, including Clark Ashton Smith only by virtue of omitting the latter's pulp connection. In his later years Lovecraft would bemoan the pulps for having ruined his literary style (echoing the judgement of companies such as Street & Smith and Putnam's who asked to see his stories with a view to publishing a collection of them, then declined on the grounds that Lovecraft's work had too much of the pulp flavour) and also the style of several other promising beginners, including his own friends and correspondents Frank Belknap Long and E. Hoffmann Price.

This might be interpreted by the uncharitable as biting the hand that (at least partly) fed him, since it was pulp magazines like *Weird Tales* who provided his only professional outlet during his life for his own fiction. But we shouldn't really accuse him in this way, I suppose, since his own anti-commercial attitude would probably not have let him say anything else. Although it may be out of fashion in some critical circles, at least since the "death of the author" (Roland Barthes) was first announced, to give consideration to what the intentions of the recently deceased author may have been in regards to his own work, I feel it might be worth looking at this attitude, considering where it stemmed from and how it influenced his aesthetics, how he viewed his own work and its purpose, and also perhaps how we should view it.

The roots of Lovecraft's anti-commercial tendencies may be traced at least in part to his heritage. Since his parents were of good English and New England stock and had a reasonable income, young Howard's various childhood interests (chemistry, astronomy, the Arabian Nights, "New Anvik" et al.) were indulged with some freedom. Even when, following the death of his grandfather in 1904 and the absence of his mother from 1919 until her death in 1921, the money to indulge these interests was not there to the same extent as before, he still had that "gentleman" image to maintain. And, as L. Sprague deCamp says in his biography of Lovecraft, the traditional function of the gentleman is to be rather than to do—especially to do things for money. Heaven forbid that a gentleman should be so crass as to accept money for services rendered, etc., etc. He emphatically disagreed with the dictum of Dr. Johnson cited at the head of this piece. Consequently Lovecraft was left in a fairly hopeless situation in later years when money was tight; having never been forced to seek regular paid employment when he was younger, he had an infinitely harder time finding it when he needed it during his New York period.

His initiation into the world of amateur journalism may have been an equally if not more decisive factor. The story of Lovecraft's rescue from a life of wasteful reclusiveness after being discovered by Edward F. Daas of the United Amateur Press Association should be well enough known by now without my having to repeat it in detail here. Consider what might have happened, however, had Daas been a professional publisher who thought Lovecraft had potential. (The Lovecraft verse letters called "Ad Critics" that Daas would have seen in the *Argosy* are indeed amusing specimens, so his interest is understandable.) Perhaps Lovecraft may have turned down the professional path much earlier than he

did had this been the case. But it wasn't and he didn't, so perhaps such speculation is useless.

At any rate, Lovecraft was already well attuned to the spirit of amateur journalism, having produced hand-written and hectographed journals and treatises since he was about eight or nine. Having officially enrolled with the UAPA, this was what he continued to do, with the crucial difference that he now also gave works of his to others for them to publish. When he began to write fiction again in 1917 following his nine-year absence from it, he donated them in similar fashion. He was not remunerated for any of these since they were amateur publications after all, but the amateur field did provide him with his first paid revision clients, and his revisory work remained his main source of income. His first professional fiction commissions ("Herbert West-Reanimator" in 1921 and "The Lurking Fear" in 1922) also came from within amateur circles, when George J. Houtain decided to attempt a professional magazine called *Home Brew*. Not until 1923, according to Will Murray, did Lovecraft write a story off his own bat but with a view to professional publication in mind. So the amateur field provided him with a decisive and long-lasting influence, especially regarding his attitudes towards the professional pulps. Whether that influence was for good or evil is probably something best left to the judgment of the individual.

Enter *Weird Tales* at last, with Lovecraft finally securing a regular professional outlet for his work, though his feelings for the magazine were somewhat mixed. He seems to have gotten along splendidly with the magazine's publisher J. C. Henneberger and first editor Edwin Baird, who basically printed whatever Lovecraft would give him. Unfortunately for Lovecraft, the magazine began to struggle in 1924 and Baird was replaced by Farnsworth Wright, with whom Lovecraft had distinctly cooler relations.

Wright was famously fond of rejecting stories on their first submission with a request for revisions, then asking for a second look and then buying them. If he did not accept a story on the first go, however, Lovecraft did not often give Wright his second chance.

Relations grew more strained following Wright's rejection of *All the Mountains of Madness* in 1931. Lovecraft became increasingly reluctant to submit new works to *Weird Tales* (although works ghost-written for others such as Hazel Heald and William Lumley were bought by Wright), yet there were few other options available at the time in the professional weird fiction field (*Amazing Stories* had paid Lovecraft so absurdly little for "The Colour out of Space" in 1927 that he never considered them again, and he was horrified by the editorial hatchet job performed on *All the Mountains of Madness* by *Assounding Stories* in 1936). So between 1933 and 1935 we see Lovecraft submitting a few items again to non-paying magazines, three stories written in the early 1920s that he had not previously managed to land elsewhere.

Of course, if Lovecraft were a professionally-minded author he would have written and submitted many more things than he did; and for all his grumblings that Wright would not accept any of his new longer stories, the latter's purchase of "The Thing on the Doorstep" in 1936 proved that he would buy Lovecraft's stories if only he would submit them. But Lovecraft was not professionally-minded, with the amateur attitude having gained the ascendancy long before over any commercial tendencies he may have had. Certainly, as S. T. Joshi notes, "he never became a 'pulp writer' in the sense of mechanically grinding out reams of hackwork for money," and Lovecraft always tried to promote himself as one who wrote only when inspiration (as well as revision duties and health) permitted. The Will Murray article cited earlier

attempts to present Lovecraft as having been somewhat more calculating than that, but Lovecraft's own genteel and basically "amateur" self-image will probably still endure nonetheless.

Lovecraft's aesthetic standards basically conformed to classical, canonical and conventional divisions between "high" and "low" art, and also to the usual notions of "taste" (with his own "gentlemanly" breeding and heritage playing an undeniably strong part in the development of these standards). A 1935 letter certainly demonstrates that latter proposition, defining art as "anything which brings the sense [enjoyment] of universal truth and harmony to any representative number of generally high-grade and properly educated people." The genuineness of a work of art is therefore something that can be tested and measured by a suitably qualified observer, with the experience and appreciation of art thereby being limited to a select few. There's a word for this sort of attitude, and it is snobbery. Not a pretty word but no less true for its unattractiveness, at least in my estimation. Unfortunately traces of this sort of thinking still linger; vide S. T. Joshi's characterization of the *Argosy's* readers as "so pathetically ill-educated that they could not even begin to make the fundamental critical distinction between a story that they happened to like and a story that had genuine literary substance."

Traditionally, weird fiction (and its modern names of fantasy, science fiction and horror) has never been held in vast critical esteem according to accepted literary standards, and Lovecraft's valorisation of it formed his great deviation from the "literary" orthodoxy of his day, though he still seems to have regarded it as somewhat inferior to realist non-fantastic fiction in a way; vide his comments praising August Derleth for being able to straddle both sides of the divide, producing pulp hackwork to order and serious "artistic" real-

ist works like *Place of Hawks* or *Evening in Spring* with apparently equal ease.

Still, he had high critical expectations of weird fiction; though the genre may have been treated as beneath contempt by many other critics, Lovecraft still applied the standard principles of criticism to it, drawing lines between the good and the bad. By these standards, of course, the biggest majority of what *Weird Tales* and the other pulps printed fell into the latter category. If anything Lovecraft considered to be superior rose above the general morass, these specimens had to be exceptions. That Clark Ashton Smith's stories were constantly rejected by *Weird Tales* was suitable proof of their excellence. His condemnation of the pulps extended as well to their target audience; no doubt he would not have disagreed with the quote from Joshi cited above if his various printed statements are anything to go by.

In all of these critical judgments we can see Lovecraft's amateur and anti-commercial attitude in operation. Writing in 1924 (a year after his professional *entree* with *Weird Tales*) he said bluntly, "He who strives to produce saleable fiction is lost as an artist"; twelve years later, and equally bluntly, he says, "What is valued & insisted upon by commercial editors is precisely what has no place in authentic literary expression . . . The one effect of commerce on the writer is to make him stop trying to write good stuff & begin trying to tailor trash to order in conformity with some cheap & anti-artistic formula." If an author's natural mode of expression should coincide with commercial requirements, as he believed to be the case with Robert E. Howard, then that was fortunate. But as a rule, according to Lovecraft, commercial influences were bad news and overtly commercial fiction was virtually a sin. To come back to my introductory example, he would certainly have considered Bloch's success with *Psycho* and the

successes of Messrs. King, Lumley, Barker and whichever other big name modern horror writer you may wish to nominate as sellouts to commercial interests.

What, then, did the authentically artistic weird tale consist of for Lovecraft, other than an absence of overt concessions to populism? This question is answered easily enough, since Lovecraft left us with sufficient clues. Above all other considerations, the depiction of a certain mood rather than of action was paramount. Almost as important was his demand for realism, which perhaps sounds a peculiar thing to demand of a story rooted in the unreal, but Lovecraft believed the unreal should be presented as realistically as actual things. A partial list of other important factors in the Lovecraft aesthetic would include an absence or at least minimization of dialogue and overt humor and comedy, a detached and objective style of telling the story, avoidance of stock horror elements such as ghosts, werewolves, vampires, etc., and a shunning of self-consciousness and mannerisms. And let's not forget the cosmic perspective either.

This is evidently not a complete list, but even such a partial survey of what Lovecraft looked for in the works of other writers should perhaps give us some idea of what he wanted his own work to be. How successful he was in achieving his aims is, again, perhaps best left to the individual's judgment, though I personally think he did a pretty good job most of the time. Nonetheless I think it goes without saying that Lovecraft would have preferred to think of himself as following in the footsteps of the masters of the weird genre (Poe, Dunsany, Bierce, Machen, James, etc.), rather than the grubbler and lower-grade tracks of the commercial weird writers. Although by the end of his life he was roundly denouncing almost everything he'd written and expressed a sense of failure in himself as an artist ("I simply lack whatever it is that enables a real

artist to convey his mood"), we can be fairly sure that his original and continuing intention as a writer was to be an artist rather than a mere entertainer.

Now, over six decades after his death, this is how Lovecraft is being appreciated, as a literary artist. He is held up as a Great and Important Writer (capitals used advisedly), his stories dissected for traces of autobiography and influences from and parallels to other Great Writers, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, James J. Joyce, W. B. Yeats, Edward Arlington Robinson or Guy de Maupassant (to name a few). Books and biographies abound, from scholarly academic dissertations to simpler fan writings. If Lovecraft were unimportant surely August Derleth and Donald Wandrei would never have bothered forming Arkham House in 1939 to ensure the hardback book publication of his stories, nor would they have kept him continually in print for sixty years, nor would S. T. Joshi have been commissioned in the 1980s to produce the definitive corrected texts of the stories, nor would Joshi and Peter Cannon have produced two (so far) annotated paperback editions of the stories in the 1990s. All of this would have been an unfeasible and absurd expenditure of effort on a writer if he were not important. I myself would surely never have gone to the effort, as I have done in the past, of spending 2 1/2 months on writing a 33,000-word essay on all of Lovecraft's stories. And Penguin is finally publishing a selection of his stories in their 20th Century Classics line, which must mean Lovecraft has indeed officially arrived as a Great and Important Writer.

Still, though Lovecraft may indeed have been leagues ahead of most of his *Weird Tales* compatriots as a writer, and may have set out with loftier aspirations than most of them, he was still essentially in the same commercial boat as they were. He may not have been a "professional" or "commercial" writ-

er as such, but it was still in the commercial pulp field rather than any of the serious literary magazines that most of his work made its first appearance; even those stories which debuted in amateur magazines would usually see later print in the pulps. Lovecraft may indeed have found a place among the serious literary writers of the 20th century, but he has as important a place within the purely popular sphere, and this is something we should perhaps not forget this fact while we're busy trying to posthumously elevate him beyond it. If we want to look for the "art" in H. P. Lovecraft—and yes, I do believe it is there—then this is probably where we should go looking for it.

As it is, we currently live in a more relativistic, cultural studies-influenced world where we seem to have grown somewhat suspicious of the old divisions between high and low art. Or rather, though something of the old antithesis of "art vs. entertainment" remains, we've come to a point where we can treat the latter in the same way as if it were the former, and where previously "low" forms of art and popular culture in all its manifestations are suddenly fit for serious academic appraisal. We've seen this sort of thing happen before in the world of cinema, when the critics of the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* unleashed their *politique de l'auteur* on the world in the 1950s. Though John Ford or Alfred Hitchcock made films within the Hollywood industrial system, the *politique* made it possible for them to be considered as artists rather than condemned as hacks as they would otherwise have been. In similar fashion has Lovecraft been elevated in more recent years, and again we can probably thank (or blame) the French for it.

Personally I wonder just how much the academic dissection of Lovecraft that we now see so often actually helps. By which I mean, what does it actually do to, our understanding, appreciation and

enjoyment of the works? Is the influence it has upon us for better or for worse? After all, surely the ideal task of all criticism is to aid one's understanding of a work of art so that one appreciates it more (with the worst case scenario here being that perhaps one's enjoyment of the work is lessened). I find much of the critical writing interesting, to be sure, but I'm not always sure just how much my enjoyment of a given story is enhanced by it. For example, I don't know if it really helps to know that the plot of "The Dunwich Horror" was basically knocked off from Arthur Machen's "Great God Pan." I enjoyed the story before I knew that, and I don't think it enhances my enjoyment. Then again, I think I *did* appreciate the story a little more for considering some of the autobiographical references in it. Not an easy thing to predict, obviously.

I have this terrible fear that everything I've been saying will be treated as somewhat self-evident, old hat, overly obvious or otherwise unnecessary by more seasoned Lovecraft fans and scholars. Still, I think the things I've said (or said again) are worth remembering, especially that the literary sphere in which Lovecraft operated was a popular one and that we should perhaps not lose sight of this fact while we're trying to rescue him from his popularity and make a Great Writer of him. And since Lovecraft himself professed to hate few things more than the "man of letters," perhaps we should be more circumspect about trying to make him one.

Of course, none of what I've said should be interpreted as some sort of radical call to abandon the academic study of Lovecraft, or that his works are somehow not fit for serious consideration. Far from it. I think Lovecraft has left the world with a rather splendid fictional legacy with a rich level of potential for interpretation and exegesis; how else would the whole field of Lovecraft studies have per-

sisted for as long as it has were that not the case? And Messrs. King, Lunley and Barker may be commercial writers as Lovecraft was, but none of them has had the influence and effect on my overall philosophical outlook as Lovecraft has. That he was a Great Writer within his genre is hardly worth denying any more, so perhaps it's more worthwhile considering him from that perspective rather than trying to pull him out of it and dropping him into more auspicious company where his position is somewhat more tenuous.

Anyway, who says Lovecraft has to be a Great Writer? However great Joseph Conrad may be, *Heart of Darkness* threatened to choke me. It may be great literature and I may be able to connect with it intellectually, but I don't enjoy it so I choose not to read it. And if I didn't enjoy Lovecraft's stories then it wouldn't matter how great he was because I would never read him. Perhaps Dave Carson put the case for Lovecraft as popular artist most succinctly and splendidly at a fantasy/horror convention in 1983; as a number of speakers described the deep and meaningful reasons for their own enjoyment of Lovecraft, Carson interrupted: "F--- all that. I love H. P. Lovecraft because I just like drawing monsters."

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Notes from a Snug Room

By T. G. Cockcroft

Leon Stone

I corresponded with Leon Stone for several years; which is how I came to be a contributor to *Koolinda*, and to be mentioned in it as a donor to his Australian Library of Amateur Journalism—this was one of the greatest collections of amateur papers in the world—and it went up in flames, every bit of it, in 1959 or 1960. This was very sad. I visited Leon twice in 1958. I never learned as much about him as I would have liked to learn; he was a vegetarian (as were his parents, I think), and made a living as a "freelance journalist"—which I'd have expected to be a precarious way to live, but he seemed to have all that he wanted in life, until the fire destroyed everything he had. Then he went to live with the Mellens, but left them after some years and the last I heard of him he was in what was apparently a home for the aged at Neutral Bay, which I think is classified as a Sydney suburb. Why do you call him "Tasmanian"? I never heard of him living in any Australian states other than Victoria and New South Wales, and he never

mentioned Tasmania to me.

His father was a talented printer, responsible for those beautiful issues of *Koolinda*—but I think he'd been active in amateur journalism many years before Leon was born (Leon was a bit past fifty when I saw him, I think); and had been a professional printer in his working life. Leon's mother and father died in fairly quick succession. Leon was not a printer, and I think never published anything after his father died; he planned an issue of *Koolinda* that would be a tribute to his parents—but I don't think anything came of this idea. I think he would have had this printed by Walter Stone, the famous Australian literary man (a very fine fellow—I saw more of him than I saw of Leon), who had a printing business and I think bought from Leon the press on which Hal Stone had printed *Koolinda* and other amateur journals, including *Coo-Ee*. I think Stone Sr. printed and published the first Australian edition of Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, among other things.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Cthulhu

By Mark Francis

They drifted crippled for a week or more
then making landfall, put themselves ashore
among colossal blocks of green-slimed stone
that rose up steeply to a fearful door.

Now from the fixture in the white-tiled hall
a few cold rays escape and, dropping, fall
within the narrow grate, to limn a shape
that bleats and beckons from my padded wall.

Disturbed and sleep-deprived by stubborn dreams
of sunken rooms and other watery themes
she one day walked into the waves and drowned
where only fishes came to hear the screams.

In cracking wax against the vellum page
a cryptic sigil from that distant age
proclaims the author of the mystic tome.
"Alhazred," it is said to read, "the Mage."

Put into stone at some strange power's command
(how else explain the sculptor's uncouth hand
and fevered eye?) the thing appears to be
a pulpy dragon coiled upon a stand.

The gleam of cold defiance in his face
is telling proof our efforts to erase
the young man's mad conceit have failed—or, worse—
he covets now the so-called cult's embrace.

The startling features of the manuscript
include weird drafts of finned and fishy-lipped
bipedal forms whose every act involves
the puzzling ruins of a seabed crypt.

We trained our lens against the cloudless night,
observing comets, planets, spectral light,
Our charts bear out the twisted nebulae.
The stars were wrong . . . or were they, somehow, right?

Well-born, and schooled to match, I once could pass
a cultured member of the upper class
throughout this coast; but now, despair each time
I view my scaly image in the glass.

It rose up darkly from the swampy mire,
a rough-hewn, sickly gleaming limestone spire.
The naked devotees, to seal the rite,
howled chants and danced around a corpse-strewn fire.

He swears there is a froth between the waves,
conceives a fetor as from yawning graves,
then—frenzied by an unheard gibbering—
holds up a razor to my throat and raves.

Drawn down, and on, by hoarse hypnotic chants
of inexpressible significance
you calmly wander through the grottoed fanc
and lair that are your cursed inheritance.

The prophets, seers and mediums assume
this world soon ends in flames, or frozen gloom.
I hail the far apocalypse—and know
the Earth is merely Hades' anteroom.



CULTIST CARPOOL

Lustcraft

A Column by Wilum Hopfrog Pugmire, Esq.

Just how perverse was Lovecraft? I ask this because I have been oddly disturbed—nay, distressed—by an essay by that red old thing, Stanley Sargent, in which he states his revolutionary theory that "The Dunwich Horror" is one of Lovecraft's most autobiographical prose pieces. One would think, perverse old queen that I am, that I would welcome such a theory, that I would applaud the idea that Wizard Whateley, as sexual proxy for Yog-Sothoth, had carnal relations with his daughter, the offspring of which were Wilbur and his noxious twin. To Stanley it is obvious that Wilbur is HPL's representation of himself, Lavinia represents his mother, and Wizard Whateley his grandsire. (Wilbur's twin, Stanley assures me—although he wasn't bold enough to proclaim this absolutely in his article—represents Lovecraft's buried homosexual desire.) I refuse to believe that Lovecraft was a closet homosexual, but that's not the point in Stanley's article that so disturbs me. I simply cannot believe that Grandpa would, even subconsciously, represent his beloved mother as an ignorant white trash hillbilly who gets raped by her father. The very idea has me foaming at the mouth in protest.

To give credit to his wild idea, Stanley has pointed out (and may be the first to do so) that Wilbur's twin, when revealed by the alchemic waving and chanting of poor old Armitage, had the "Whateley look":

" . . . but they was a haff-shaped man's face on top of it, an' it looked like Wizard Whateley's, only it was yards an' yards acrost . . ."

Well, that is certainly an interesting point; yet I still refused to believe in the perverse idea of a sexual energy between Lovecraft

and his mother. Thus I was quite astonished when my dear friend Alyssen Bills gave me a copy of *Lovecraft Remembered*, the Arkham volume edited by Peter Cannon (Alyssen had to get rid of the book because she found the brightly-lit cover illustration, depicting HPL as Jehovah gazing in serenity upon his friends and acolytes, offensively disturbing). I nearly fainted when I read, in Wilfred Townley Scott's opening essay in which he discusses Susie's mental health (page 16), "The psychiatrist's record takes note of an Oedipus complex, a 'psycho-sexual contact' with the son . . .!!!"

It is, of course, dangerous and probably foolish to determine what Lovecraft's characters are meant to represent. One of Stanley's theories that absolutely doesn't work is that Armitage is meant by HPL to represent the narrow-minded social system that would repress Wilbur's dark nature. This is refuted in Joshi's biography, page 450, where he quotes a 1928 letter from HPL to Derleth: "[I] found myself psychologically identifying with one of the characters (an aged scholar who finally combats the menace) toward the end." Still Stanley's distressing suppositions may hold more truth than I want to credit.

I have long been of the opinion that Lovecraft's best work contains much that is astonishing in its perversity; and in my own "Lovecraftian" writings, I have tried to honestly examine and express my own sense of personal depravity. (And, judging from Victor Hotep's charming review of *Tales of Sesquo Valley in Crypt of Cithu-lhu* #98, I've succeeded.) Thus I continually encourage those of you who pen Lovecraftian and Mythos fiction to dig deep into darkness of your secret souls, to bring to

the pallid light of day those aspects of your private corruption, the revelation of which moves you to shameful trembling. Remember Quentin Crist's superb advice: if you have a secret of which you are deeply ashamed, don't hide it; reveal it on television. Then the world will love you. I first discovered the truth of this philosophy when I began to publish *Punk Lust* in 1981. I revealed to the punk community those aspects of my personality that I thought would horrify and disgust them—and as a result I became a punk rock hero. Those of my stories in which I convey my personal sickness, my sad and pathetic life, have been hailed as my finest work. I'm not saying that this is what Lovecraft intended to express in his fiction. But it cannot be denied that his fictive work is pregnant with dark, twisted perversity, sexual and psychological. Therein lies much of its power as literature.

THE SORCERER'S SACRIFICE

The sullen flame that writhes beneath the flask
reflects the soul that bubbles forth
in sin.
The stubborn pestle grinding at its task
is brother to the brain against the skin.
True poisons, potions, philters, all require
some matching of the magic to the bone.
At last, to consecrate a tool so dire,
I bid a Darkness blacker than my own . . .
into this instrument of hate and woe,
these blind devices of my blood,
my will,
come, now: long exiled Powers! On me bestow
the fleeting perfect knowledge to fulfill
—neck bent, knees bowed—the one and common fate.
Take this expiring body as Your gate.

—Mark Francis



FISH HEADS

H. P. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*. Edited by S. T. Joshi. Hippocampus Press, 2000, paperback, 172 pp. \$15.00. ISBN 0-9673215-0-6.

[Reviewed by Robert M. Price]

HPL's classic critical survey of the weird fiction field up into his own day is not that hard to find, and most readers of *Crypt of Cthulhu* will already have a copy. But so what? This edition far supersedes all others. For not only does editor Joshi introduce the essay with his characteristic and engaging erudition; he also provides all the collateral information any reader might wish about authors and works Lovecraft discusses, even touches upon.

With a work like *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, one might choose either of two foci, and no one would complain. One might decide to treat the essay as a source of critical and biographical insight on Lovecraft himself, both as a reader and a writer (something Joshi does here and at a greater length elsewhere). Or one might view the essay from the other end of the scope: instead of taking Lovecraft as the object of scrutiny, one might join him and look at this literature with him so as to appreciate it better. The main emphasis of Joshi's new edition is on the latter.

Indeed, if in reading the essay before, you have found yourself only tantalized when you got to the end of it and wished there was more, this time you will find that indeed there is! For Joshi has not only annotated the essay itself, updating Lovecraft's scholarship, elaborating references he took for granted, etc.; he has also added a section where, for each author dis-

cussed in the essay, there is provided a list of his or her works, a guide to available editions of the stories Lovecraft discusses, and a list of published criticism. What a treat!

The new edition even boasts a cover illustration of a medieval scribe at work, drawn by Lovecraft's pal Vrest Orton, reproduced from the first issue (1927) of W. Paul Cook's *The Recluse*.

For those who would like to see still another Joshian attempt at updating *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, check out his earlier volume *The Weird Tale*, which in effect follows the "spectral fiction" movement up to the present time through Lovecraftian spectacles.

HERETICAL GOSPEL

Lazarus, resurrected,
locked in his shuttered room,
still stinks of the grave,
and knows to his bones
that nothing can render him clean.

For Lazarus, resurrected,
dreams of that soundless void
from which he was hauled,
like a fish on a hook,
into the thundering sunlight.

Now Lazarus, resurrected,
spends the whole of his time,
in rapturous conversation,
with silent and unseen companions,
speaking the speech of the dead.

--Darrell Schweitzer

FROM DEAD SALTES

His bungalow above Pawtuxet shore
Concealed deep knowledge ageless & profane,
A cellar shambles—nay, all that & more—
Where fearful wisdom trickled from such brains
As ghouls delight in. Riven from their sleep
By necromancers' craft & outright threat,
The hallowed dead no grave could safely keep
Surrendered all in horror & regret.

Blind error wrought its worst therein, yet still
Brought forth one former victim to defend
A foredoomed land from madness without end.
Thus ill sometimes must counter greater ill . . .
Unaided, no men mortal might displace
Undying malice masked by youth's mild face.

—Ann K. Schwader

(from "Charles Dexter Unwarded")

OF HUMANE DUST

Time sends some ending to all sorceries,
& Nature is not mocked, however bent
By ancient art or hideous intent.
All dust of ages craves some cleansing breeze
To sweep it from this waking world toward rest
Untroubled & eternal: each man's right
Of passage on this plane is short, & night
Falls equally upon the worst & best.

So Curwen learned, by curse of Dragon's Tail
(Descending node of necromantic fame),
His conqueror, though tremulous & pale,
Transcended darkness by a single Name
Wrenched from that void where death & life mean less
Than mocking & chaotic nothingness.

—Ann K. Schwader

(from "Charles Dexter Unwarded")

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Cover Artist: D. L. Hutchinson

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