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THE  
CLASSIC  
HORROR  
STORIES

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H. P. LOVECRAFT



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*Edited by*

ROGER LUCKHURST

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## INTRODUCTION

*Here be monsters—and spoilers. Readers may wish to cross the threshold unaided and treat this introduction as an afterword.*

THE fiction of H. P. Lovecraft, it is safe to say, divides opinion. He has been called ‘sick . . . hysterical and neurotic’, the writing ‘ghastly’, and even a sympathetic biographer regards him as an ‘eccentric recluse’, writing ‘stilted, artificial and affected’ work. Lovecraft’s fiction was demolished by the eminent literary critic Edmund Wilson with the damning judgement that ‘the only real horror of most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art’.<sup>1</sup> Yet at the same time, Lovecraft was adored by the great experimental novelist Jorge Luis Borges, has been compared to Franz Kafka in significance, and was the subject of the first book by the leading contemporary French novelist Michel Houellebecq. He helped define the genre of ‘weird fiction’ and give a new direction to modern horror, fusing science fiction and the Gothic within a rigorous and bleakly materialist world view. The novels of Stephen King are unthinkable without Lovecraft, as are the films of the *Alien* series or the fantasy cinema of Guillermo del Toro. Lovecraft invented a whole ‘mythos’ of terrifying gods and aliens to which thousands of stories have been added. Several occult religions have been established in ambiguous worship of Lovecraft’s menacing god Cthulhu. His influence stretches from Japanese manga to contemporary philosophy, from heavy metal music to ritual magic and the contemporary writers of hybrid fictions known as the New Weird.

All of this is not bad for a man of fragile health who only circulated his stories to close friends in handwritten form or published them in tiny networks of amateur journals. Later, he eked out a living by publishing in pulp magazines in the 1920s and 1930s. He was dismissive of his own efforts and was often disdainful of pulp horror and

<sup>1</sup> Colin Wilson, *The Strength to Dream: Literature and the Imagination* (1962; London: Abacus, 1976), 25. Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree* (London: Weidenfeld, 1973), 176. Lin Carter, *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the ‘Cthulhu Mythos’* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), p. xiii. Edmund Wilson, ‘Tales of the Marvellous and Ridiculous’, *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (London: Allen, 1951), 288.

science fiction. He would leave manuscripts around for years, unable to bear the thought of typing them up, an effort he abhorred. There were no collections of his stories in book form during his lifetime. Utterly marginal in life, barely surviving on a dwindling inheritance until he died in 1937, Lovecraft has only become a major writer posthumously.

### *Lovecraft's Life (and Afterlife)*

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born in 1890 in the family home in Angell Street, Providence, Rhode Island. Except for short holidays and a disastrous couple of years in New York, Lovecraft stayed close to home and buried himself in antiquarian studies of New England. He lived in the oldest settlements of the first Puritan arrivals in America, and Lovecraft fashioned himself as an old Colonial, a man out of time, writing letters in stilted eighteenth-century English, imitating the poetics of those Enlightenment wits Addison and Steele, signing off his letters with 'God Save the King!' in defiance of this newfangled American Republic. Lovecraft was born into America at the moment that it became a world power, yet he lived and wrote with his back turned steadfastly against the American century.

Whilst Lovecraft adored Colonial era houses, pottering about New England on pilgrimages to notable survivals, his obsession with the past was never retreat. The inheritance of New England was ambiguous. The Puritans wanted to throw off priestcraft and establish the kingdom of God. To clear the ground for that celestial city, they slaughtered Native Americans and built the nation on the backs of African slaves. The sublime wilderness pressed in on their feeble footholds. And the settlers only brought their fallen ways with them. In Salem, a place Lovecraft visited and used as the basis for his fictional town Arkham, the notorious witch-hunts turned the community against itself in a fever of denunciation in 1692. Nineteen people were hanged as witches on Gallows Hill before the grip of paranoia eased. The great American Gothic writer Nathaniel Hawthorne was haunted by the fact that an ancestor had served as one of the hanging judges; the threat of such a guilty inheritance was the subject of his Gothic romance, *The House of Seven Gables*. Ancestral horrors lurked in the family trees of New England. This was the direct theme of Lovecraft's 'The Shadow over Innsmouth', because for him these inheritances were intensely personal.

Lovecraft was the last descendant of two notable New England families. In 1893, his father collapsed with paresis, and spent the remaining years of his life in an asylum. Paresis was the degenerative muscular weakness that was associated with the late stages of syphilis, the then incurable sexually transmitted disease in which spirochaetes devour the nervous system over long years of decline. The disease was regarded as a moral failing and hushed up. It was also transmissible to children, and H. P. Lovecraft must have lived under the shadow of the disease. In 1896, his grandmother died, prompting the young Lovecraft to suffer horrifying nightmares mixed up with his already precocious reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in an edition illustrated with images of hell by Gustav Doré.

Childhood trauma was compounded by the death of his grandfather in 1904. Whipple Phillips was the last tie to hereditary family wealth, and reduced circumstances forced the family to leave the ancestral home and move into a smaller property. It left Lovecraft feeling exiled for the rest of his life and this event drove his antiquarian and genealogical fascinations. Lovecraft was a sickly child, nervous illnesses disrupting his schooling to an extent that he could not graduate to attend Brown University in Providence. A breakdown at 18 left him a recluse in his mother's home for several years. In letters Lovecraft declared himself a neurotic: '*Nervous exhaustion* always intervenes between me and success,' he said: 'I am only about half-alive . . . My nervous system is a shattered wreck.'<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to escape, Lovecraft tried to join the army in 1917, even while suspecting that basic training would kill him before he got to the trenches in France. His mother intervened with military authorities and Lovecraft was declared permanently unfit for service. Family catastrophe was crowned by his mother's mental collapse in 1919 from nervous debility. She died in a sanatorium two years later.

After his mother's death, Lovecraft's health improved, yet he must have identified himself as a Decadent. One of Lovecraft's favourite Poe stories was 'The Fall of the House of Usher', featuring Roderick Usher, the last, peculiarly sensitive member of his ancient family. Although Lovecraft disliked the work of French Decadent Joris-Karl Huysmans, Lovecraft's life recalls the anti-hero of his strange novel

<sup>2</sup> Lovecraft, Letters (16 Nov. 1916 and 27 May 1918), in *Selected Letters*, i (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House, 1965), 30 and 67. Further references to the 5 vols. of letters (1965-76) marked as *SL*.

*Against Nature*, Duc des Esseintes. Des Esseintes's mother is nervous, his father dies from an 'obscure illness', and he is weak in body with shattered nerves. He is the last of his line, marking the final decline of his ancient house, yet has precocious intelligence, is reclusive, hypochondriac, lives only at night, and is obsessed by the stories of Poe. Both Usher and des Esseintes dedicate themselves to the overstimulated imagination. The Decadent embraces the private world of the dilettante, despising the public and professional world of bourgeois taste. To the Decadent, the market in art and culture is vulgar, yet any gesture of refusal is thoroughly defined by the market. This was also Lovecraft's dilemma.

Lovecraft was an autodidact who immersed himself in his grandfather's mouldering library. His precocity resulted in passions for mythology, chemistry, and astronomy. At 16, he published his first journalism on astronomy, and wrote for various New England newspapers. He then abandoned science for years of writing verse in imitation of English eighteenth-century men of letters. In 1914, he encountered the United Amateur Press Association (UAPA), a network of amateur writers who circulated their work by mail. The UAPA made Lovecraft a prodigious letter-writer to a network of friends and young writers he often never met. These included writers Clark Ashton Smith and Robert E. Howard. In this circuit, he worked as an editorial adviser and ghostwriter, sometimes for a small fee. He wrote and distributed his own magazine, *The Conservative*, a vehicle for his anti-democratic views, but found his métier when he began writing short pieces in the Gothic mode, starting with 'Dagon' in 1917.

'Dagon' is the last confession of a traveller dying from the horror of what he has encountered in an incalculably ancient, far-flung terrain 'putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish' and 'black slime'. It is the vision of a 'Cyclopean monolith' that breaks the narrator, a statue in honour of a monstrous god worshipped by hybrid ancestors, 'damnable human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes, and other features less pleasant to recall'. The story is laced with references to Poe, Gustav Doré, and Gothic novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, yet seems most indebted to the prose poems of Lord Dunsany, the Irish writer whom Lovecraft travelled to see read in Boston in 1919.

'Dagon' anticipates many of Lovecraft's key themes: a narrator driven mad by the horror of a revelation of the truth of the origins of

humanity, communicating extreme experience in dense and cluttered prose always on the verge of collapsing into comic overstatement. For all the awkwardness, 'Dagon' conveys a glimpse of a wholly other cosmogony of malignant gods, ancient others indifferent to humanity. Like Dunsany's *The Gods of Pegana* (1905), Lovecraft would go on to elaborate whole orders of these hideous ancestral gods, weaving his stories together in a dense matrix of cross-references. Throughout this present selection of stories, the reader will catch glimpses of the Old Ones, the Elder Gods, the Deep Ones, monsters buried in our deep ancestry or arriving from extraterrestrial worlds unimagined aeons ago. 'Dagon' was published in an amateur journal, but was the first tale of Lovecraft's to appear in the commercial magazine *Weird Tales* in 1923. It was to begin a stormy association with that famous pulp journal.

In 1924, Lovecraft made a decision that astounded his friends and family, given his lack of interest in what one letter called 'amatory phenomena'. He married Sonia Greene and moved from Providence to New York to live with her. He had met Sonia, a Jewish immigrant from the Ukraine, through UAPA gatherings. She was in the haberdashery business, and seemed willing to support Lovecraft's writing. They lived modestly, but within months the couple's New York plan went awry. Sonia's business failed. They began selling their belongings and moving to cheaper accommodation. Lovecraft undertook to find salaried work. Letters advertising his gentlemanly virtues and writing skills went unanswered. The couple ended up on the edges of Red Hook, the Brooklyn area that housed one of New York's busiest docks, a poor and sometimes desperate area of transients. After this unlucky experiment, the couple parted amicably in 1926. Sonia went to work out West; Lovecraft was offered a home back in Providence with his aunts. He returned to Rhode Island with immense relief.

In New York, Lovecraft had written 'He', with its vision of New York as 'in fact quite dead, its sprawling body imperfectly embalmed and infested with queer animate things'. He wrote another nightmare vision of Brooklyn, 'The Horror at Red Hook', and researched his essay on the Gothic literature, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature'. The return to New England prompted an explosion of writing, a period in which he began to compose his key texts. The jolt of New York had unlocked his imagination. The central work was 'The Call of Cthulhu', written in 1926, a compelling mosaic of partial

accounts of cult worship in a structure he had borrowed from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde* (1886) but mainly from Arthur Machen's 'The Great God Pan' (1894). Machen was a Welsh mystic and another lost Decadent, eking out a living in the margins from odd Gothic horrors about ancient terrors in modern London. Machen's writing was one of the final pieces of influence that allowed Lovecraft's work to mature.

Lovecraft never resolved his feelings about writing to order or for money, and hated grinding out serial Gothic horrors. In the course of the 1920s and 1930s, Lovecraft would publish in various commercial pulps, including *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction*. These throwaway magazines made of low-grade wood pulp paper with lurid covers in brash coal-tar dye colours became the places where the genre of science fiction was established. The buffeting Lovecraft received from editors and market pressures caused him misery. After 'At the Mountains of Madness' was rejected by *Weird Tales* in 1931, he lost energy for this kind of writing, moving back to amateur circulation.

It is easy to caricature Lovecraft as a recluse, yet he travelled widely in the late 1920s and 1930s, throwing off the neurasthenia that had defined him. He spent summers in Florida and took trips to Quebec. His antiquarianism flowed into detailed evocations of the Colonial world. He polished his panoply of nasty gods, enjoying the joke of inventing an imaginary occult library with friends like Clark Ashton Smith and Robert Howard. Even so, eccentric nocturnal habits, long-term poverty, and genteel self-neglect hastened his death from stomach cancer in 1937, untreated until five days before he died in hospital. He was 47, an unknown and unsuccessful pulp writer.

It was Lovecraft's friends that rescued him from oblivion. August Derleth was a teenage correspondent with Lovecraft in the 1930s, who took it upon himself to become Lovecraft's literary executor, a task he pursued for the rest of his life. When mainstream publishers showed little interest in a collection of Lovecraft stories, Derleth established a press with fellow fan Donald Wandrei, which they called Arkham House. In December 1939, *The Outsider and Others* appeared with a small print run. *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*, a second collection including Lovecraft's unpublished novels, *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, appeared in 1943. A third volume, *Marginalia*, seemed to be scraping

the barrel in 1944. It was the fannish devotion of this emerging ‘cult’ that caught the notice of literary critic Edmund Wilson in 1945, and prompted his dismissal of Lovecraft’s ‘bad art’.

More controversially, Derleth began sifting Lovecraft’s papers for ideas and started publishing Lovecraft stories that he had expanded and completed himself. Lovecraft had worked in collaboration and as a ghostwriter for many years; he co-authored many stories with other amateurs. Derleth, though, unleashed an extraordinary process of extension and elaboration of Lovecraft’s whole cosmogony. This has become known (in a term never used by Lovecraft himself) as the Cthulhu Mythos—thousands upon thousands of stories that share the same bestiary of monsters and tentacled gods. This shared mythos reaffirms that the Gothic genre is a tissue of borrowings and quotations.

Strange things started happening to Lovecraft’s reputation in the 1960s. Colin Wilson began his 1962 study *The Strength to Dream* with an assessment of Lovecraft as a man of ‘dubious genius’. There was something admirable in the purity of Lovecraft’s commitment to his vision, even if Wilson considered Lovecraft’s life ‘a spectacle of self-destruction’. In the late 1960s, the French academic Maurice Lévy wrote a thesis on Lovecraft as a serious *fantaisiste*, continuing the French love of all things tinged with Poe. In turn, the radical philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari used Lovecraft as a touchstone for notions of unstable being and becoming-other in their revolutionary manifesto, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).

The mass market paperbacks of the stories released in the late 1960s finally brought Lovecraft to a large readership. The hallucinatory prose spoke to elements of the American counter-culture: there were concept albums and rock bands steeped in Lovecraftian lore and a host of B-movies were adapted from his fiction. Magic cults worshipped Cthulhu and ufologists borrowed the Lovecraft’s particular fusion of Gothic and science fiction.<sup>3</sup> This has oozed into

<sup>3</sup> See Don G. Smith, *H. P. Lovecraft in Popular Culture: The Works and Their Adaptations in Film, Television, Comics, Music and Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), and A. Migliore and J. Stryik, *The Lurker in the Lobby: The Guide to Lovecraftian Cinema* (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2003). For the spill of Lovecraft into wider occult beliefs, see Victoria Nelson, *Gothika: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), and Jason Cavolito, *The Cult of Alien Gods: H. P. Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture* (New York: Prometheus, 2005).

popular culture everywhere, particularly after the Swiss artist H. R. Giger's designs for the film *Alien*. In 2005, Lovecraft was finally recognized with a Library of America edition of twenty-two stories, a form of canonization that raised the hackles of some literary commentators.

### *Genre Matters: The Weird*

What is it that snares the readers of Lovecraft? Can we even be sure what genre we are reading? In 'The Dunwich Horror', a wild sport of a child grows up wrong after an incantation to a demon, keeping an even nastier secret in the woodshed that ultimately erupts into a beleaguered community. In 'The Colour out of Space' anything with life near a lonely backwoods farm is poisoned by something carried to earth on a meteorite, a thing so alien it defies description. In Red Hook and in Innsmouth, the doors of the community hide foul secrets of shameful communions between men and monsters.

Many of these tales have the trappings of Gothic literature, but Lovecraft refused the Christian underpinnings of that genre. Crucifixes do no good against these creatures, who are not demons in any religious sense. The protagonists never sin against moral codes, instead suffering the catastrophe of too much knowledge. Gone are the trappings of tyrannical priests, virgins menaced in convents, or men tempted to Faustian pacts by the Devil. Even New England witch-houses should not be feared for the reasons the Puritans suspected.

What prompts this American horror is history, guilt at the state-founding violence buried in the white community. The transgressions are spatial, a street too far in Brooklyn, a mountain range too high in Antarctica. The historical costs of this expansion haunt the federation of American states: the modern republic has always been haunted by its excluded and exterminated others. Perhaps this is what allows modern horror to emerge out of the bowels of the traditional Gothic: the religious dread of the supernatural is snapped off in Lovecraft's materialist tales. There is no super-natural, only the super-normal, things as yet to be inscribed within natural law. Lovecraft sought what he called '*supplements* rather than *contradictions* of the visible and measurable universe'.<sup>4</sup> Horror erupts from the

<sup>4</sup> Lovecraft, Letter (27 Feb. 1931), *SL* iii. 295–6.

edges of the known frontier or else slithers from the recesses of the body, its borders breached from within and without by nasty things. Puritan paranoia persists, but Lovecraft's settings are modern and the terrors secular.

Are they science fiction stories, then? Lovecraft is a post-Darwinian writer, exploiting the extension of evolutionary time in Darwin's theory of natural selection. The scientists in 'At the Mountains of Madness' or the dreaming narrator of 'The Shadow out of Time' count off the millions of years in geological strata and aeons of biological time when humans had no existence. Freud once suggested that Darwin's *Origin of Species* had delivered a terrible blow to man's narcissistic belief in an anthropocentric universe, and Lovecraft precisely uses the expanded scale of biological and astronomical time to dethrone humanity from its illusion of biological mastery. This is what pulp writer Fritz Lieber recognized in calling Lovecraft the 'Copernicus' of horror, creating a change of paradigm, when he 'shifted the focus of supernatural dread from man and his little world and his gods, to the stars and the black and unplumbed depths of space'.<sup>5</sup> Lovecraft's protagonists encounter beings sunk in primordial pasts or that arrive from extraterrestrial worlds, where aeons of evolving differently suggest wholly other biological pasts and futures. They are only gods to the sluggish minds of primitive humans.

H. G. Wells had achieved a sense of the sublime extension of evolutionary time in the closing pages of *The Time Machine*, and opened *The War of the Worlds* with a remarkable reversal of the anthropological perspective, imagining humans the object of the merciless and superior Martian gaze. Lovecraft's contemporary Olaf Stapledon also wrote visionary science fictions that extended beyond the evolutionary end of man. Lovecraft similarly aspired to *cosmicism*, evoking moments of freedom from 'the galling limitations of time and space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis'.<sup>6</sup> This is sometimes called the 'sense of wonder' intrinsic to the sublimity of science fiction. Yet pulp science fiction was

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Lieber, 'A Literary Copernicus', in S. T. Joshi (ed.), *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism* (Athens, O.: Ohio University Press, 1980), 50.

<sup>6</sup> Lovecraft, 'Notes on Weird Literature', in *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House, 1995), 113.

expansive, confident, and optimistic, breathlessly invested in the technological progress of America, whilst Lovecraft was a pessimist, believing that he lived in decadent end-times. He was more interested in creating the intense, emotional effect of the kind Poe associated with horror or death. Fear, as Lovecraft said in the opening sentence of ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, was ‘our oldest and strongest emotion’ (Appendix, p. 444). It is not the emotion generally associated with science fiction.

In fact, there was already a term in use in the 1920s for this slippery writing: the weird. Collections of strange or unsettling stories—sometimes supernatural, sometimes not—began to be regularly titled ‘weird’ by the 1880s. It was a term applied to the fantastical visions in Rider Haggard’s imperial adventures, for instance, and to Kipling’s gossip tales that used the language of the supernatural to convey something of the oddness of encounters at the very limits of empire. Both of these writers of the weird encounter were global phenomena by 1890, so that Lovecraft’s spiritual home, *Weird Tales*, was in an emerging tradition. Yet the category did not get fixed down into identifiable rules and tropes, as science fiction or detective fiction did in the pulps of the 1920s, perhaps because it seems exactly concerned with what defies fixity or boundary. The weird concerns liminal things, in-between states, transgressions always on the verge of turning into something else. It is hard to define because it focuses on the horrors of the hard to define. Taxonomies of the genre have therefore only appeared later, such as Jeff and Ann Vandermeer’s huge *Weird Compendium* (2011).

Lovecraft helped shape this field by establishing a canon of weird literature in his essay ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’. For him, the descent came through the English Gothic revival that peaked with Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis in the 1790s and inevitably gave Edgar Allan Poe the honour of giving modern horror ‘its final and perfected state’ in the short tale in the 1830s and 1840s. Lovecraft identified four modern masters of the weird: Arthur Machen and Lord Dunsany we have already encountered; to these he added Algernon Blackwood, the English author who lived mainly in exile and wrote metaphysical horrors of men menaced by invisible forces obtruding through lonely landscapes in classics such as ‘The Willows’, and M. R. James, who wrote tales of diffident dons haunted by events that confound their cramped empiricism.

Lovecraft moved to define the weird as having ambitions beyond the iconography of the Gothic:

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Appendix, p. 446)

This definition built on the Old English meaning of *myrd* as a supernatural force or agency that predetermines events—a distinctly northern sense of malign fates waiting to cross your destiny, like the ‘weird sisters’ in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. It only really began to be associated with the uncanny and supernatural in Romantic and Victorian literature. Coleridge’s poem ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ is weird; so is Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’. Edward Bulwer-Lytton subtitled his occult novel *Zanoni* ‘a strange tale’. In ‘Notes on Writing Weird Fiction’, Lovecraft further emphasized that the form was focused on specific striking moments or situations, ‘visualising more clearly and detailedly and stably the vague, elusive, fragmentary impressions of wonder, beauty and adventurous expectancy’. Poe, in his essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition’, gave primacy to *effect*. In turn, Lovecraft declared that

Atmosphere, not action, is the great desideratum of weird fiction. Indeed, all that a wonder story can ever be is *a vivid depiction of a certain type of human mood* . . . Prime emphasis should be given to *subtle suggestion*—imperceptible hints and touches of selective associative detail which express shadings of moods and build up a vague illusion of the strange reality of the unreal. Avoid bald catalogues of incredible happenings which can have no substance or meaning apart from a sustaining cloud of colour and symbolism.<sup>7</sup>

One of the best accounts of the weird is by China Miéville, a writer of fictions sometimes called the New Weird. He suggests that the weird effect is one of surrender to an outside that ‘allows swillage of that awe and horror from “beyond” back into the everyday—into angles, bushes, the touch of strange limbs, noises, etc. The weird is a

<sup>7</sup> Lovecraft, ‘Notes on Writing Weird Fiction’, 113 and 116.

radicalised sublime backwash.’<sup>8</sup> Miéville sees this surrender as potentially positive, reading against the grain of Lovecraft’s depictions of panic and disgust.

Disgust lies at the core of Lovecraft’s work. Stomachs turn at what is revealed beneath the clothes of the Dunwich Horror or in the final revelations of what inbreeding has done to the community of Innsmouth. Men are broken by what they see and the stench that they smell in the mountains of the Antarctic in ‘At the Mountains of Madness’ or the seas of the Pacific in ‘The Call of Cthulhu’. The horror and loathing at shapeless, slime-coated, rank-smelling entities is a repeated moment of culmination in his stories. The revelations can barely hold on to language, as the narrators faint away or gag. Disgust is a response to things that overwhelm our senses, stick too close, ooze across borders, or refuse to keep a stable shape. Disgust is contaminating; we scrabble to escape the touch of the abject, to purify ourselves from its tentacled, slimy touch. Lovecraft’s weird is about horror turning to revulsion at this intrusion.

At the heart of the weird, then, is a dynamic of the sublime and the disgusting or grotesque. Grotesque things revolt because they violate boundaries, commit category errors, mix up illegitimate elements. In Lovecraft, weirdness comes from the rapid lurch between the sublime and the grotesque, in sudden inversions of emotion. These opposites are rammed together in his fiction, where transcendence ends in vertigo and nausea.

Lovecraft’s evocation horror and disgust are built in unbroken rhythms of incantatory prose, with little interest in character or society. They abandon the change or conflict that drives most conventional fiction. Lovecraft claimed to emulate Poe’s lack of concern with character: ‘If Poe never drew a human character who lives in the memory, it is because human beings are too contemptible and trivial to deserve such remembrance. Poe saw beyond the vulgar anthropocentric sphere, and realised that men are only puppets; *that events and circumstances are the only vital things*.’<sup>9</sup> Lovecraft’s retrospective structure of narration anticipates the end in the opening sentences, leaving the text to build towards a revelation of horror that is already anticipated. Stories that are married to pulp plotting, such as the

<sup>8</sup> China Miéville, ‘Weird Fiction’, in M. Bould et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2009), 511.

<sup>9</sup> Lovecraft, Letter (4 June 1921), *SL* i. 137.

Antarctic expedition in 'At the Mountains of Madness' or the fractured texts of 'The Call of Cthulhu', generate forward dynamism, but the tendency of the prose is entropic, towards stasis. Beyond his early sketches, Lovecraft's short stories are rarely that short, working by accumulations of details and by rhythms of repetition that slow the pace. It is a risky strategy, since shock or disgust are instinctive reactions of the moment, whilst Lovecraft stretches out and sustains a fever pitch of revulsion.

This brings us to the charged question of Lovecraft's style. The culminating horror, the revelation of the weird, usually pushes Lovecraft into a fever of adjectival clatter. 'The Call of Cthulhu' heads towards this notorious moment of Lovecraftian horror:

That tenebrousness was indeed a *positive quality*; for it obscured such parts of the inner walls as ought to have been revealed, and actually burst forth like smoke from its aeon-long imprisonment, visibly darkening the sun as it slunk away into the shrunken and gibbous sky on flapping membranous wings . . . It lumbered slobberingly into sight and gropingly squeezed Its gelatinous green immensity through the black doorway. (p. 49)

The next paragraph screams: 'The Thing cannot be described—there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order. A mountain walked or stumbled. God!' (p. 49). It is safe to say that this breaks every rule of orthodox creative writing, which has been dominated for years by the model of Raymond Carver's minimalism, which demands the erasure of all adjectival intensifiers and clausal repetitions. The moon is always 'gibbous' in Lovecraft, and things are often 'eldritch' and usually 'slobber'. Adjectives move in packs, flanked by italics and exclamation marks that tell rather than show. His horror is premised on a contradiction: the indescribable is always exhaustively described. Edmund Wilson specified that the source of Lovecraft's bad art was his recourse to these ridiculous adjectives: 'Surely one of the primary rules for writing an effective tale of horror is never to use any of these words—especially if you are going, at the end, to produce an invisible whistling octopus.'<sup>10</sup> This is funny but patronizing, because for Lovecraft this was a conscious aesthetic choice. In 1923, Lovecraft wrote a short story called 'The Unnamable',

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Wilson, 'Tales of the Marvellous and Ridiculous', in *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (London: Allen, 1951), 288.

in which a writer is criticized by a friend: 'Besides, he added, my constant talk about "unnameable" and "unmentionable" things was a very puerile device, quite in keeping with my lowly standard as an author.'<sup>11</sup> The tale shatters that objection by forcing them through an experience in a graveyard that can only be grasped by this awkward clatter of adjectives.

The power of the weird crawls out of these sentences *because* of the awkward style. These repetitions build an incantatory rhythm, tying baroque literary form to philosophical content. Conceptually, breaking open the world requires the breaking open of language and the conventions of realism. In a story such as 'The Colour out of Space', the brokenness of the language is a logical consequence of trying to describe an absolute otherness, a colour for which no human language exists, thus prompting another convulsion of adjectives to catch the impossible: 'No sane wholesome colours were anywhere to be seen except in the green grass and leafage; but everywhere those hectic and prismatic variants of some diseased, underlying primary tone' (p. 62). Can colours ever be 'sane', 'wholesome', 'hectic', or 'diseased'? This rhetorical device is known as *catathesis*, the deliberate abuse of language, such as mixed metaphors. The contamination in the story follows the line of a linguistic collapse: as one character is infused with this otherness, 'In her raving there was not a single specific noun, but only verbs and pronouns' (p. 63). Similarly, the call of Cthulhu itself is so alien that only severe abuse of language can approximate a transliteration. Lovecraft's horror fictions employ a language that continually stumbles against the trauma of the unrepresentable Thing, the shards of the sublime falling back into the debris of his busted sentences.

Disgust is everywhere, in his grotesque, tentacular gods, in the biological degenerations of 'The Colour out of Space' or the flopping, hopping fish-toad-men of 'The Shadow over Innsmouth'. The unspeakable creature that forms the physical half of 'The Dunwich Horror' oozes with sexual disgust: 'Below the waist . . . it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began' (p. 98). But this produces another aesthetic crisis. The opposite of the sublime is disgust, according to Kant, because 'disgusting objects present themselves to the imagination with an inescapable

<sup>11</sup> Lovecraft, 'The Unnamable', in *The Dreams of the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (London: Penguin, 2005), 82.

immediacy that prevents the conversion of the disgusting into something discernibly artistic and aesthetically valuable'.<sup>12</sup> What disgusts is too instinctive to be sublimated; it is not possible to imitate it in art, only to *feel* revulsion. The Gothic tradition has always dallied with exploiting powerful emotions of horror and disgust to interrogate the claims of reason. Its rejection of the tasteful and beautiful has left it on the margins of taste.

It is odd to discover that Lovecraft agreed on the abject status of the pulp worlds in which he published. 'Literature and pulp writing can't mix', Lovecraft declared, and lambasted himself for the corruption of his vision by pulp formulas in the early 1930s.<sup>13</sup> But Lovecraft equally despised the Modernist art emerging around him, reserving special contempt for T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. He disdained both high and low culture. It meant that he could steer between the traps of high art and low pulp, negating these torn halves of modern culture through an amateurism that resisted the literary marketplace. It was in this niche habitat, as a Poverty Row Decadent, that Lovecraft's strange growths pushed out their poisoned petals.

### *Lovecraftian Philosophy*

At its best, Lovecraft's moments of oscillation between the sublime and grotesque approach metaphysical intensity. 'The Call of Cthulhu' opens with the statement: 'The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity' (p. 24). The narrator of 'At the Mountains of Madness' experiences a similar collapse of worldview as his 'accustomed conception of external nature and nature's laws' is destroyed (p. 207). For many readers, one of the key pleasures of Lovecraft's work is the way the fiction becomes a vehicle for the dramatization of a rigorous philosophy.

Lovecraft was well versed in scientific materialism. He read the biologist Ernst Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe* with admiration.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, cited in Carol Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46.

<sup>13</sup> Lovecraft, 'Suggestions for a Reading Guide', in *The Dark Brotherhood and Other Pieces by H. P. Lovecraft and Divers Hands* (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House, 1966), 42 and Letter (7 Sept. 1934), *SL* v. 31.

The book argued that Darwinism had made it clear that there was only one order of reality and thus stripped humanity of any metaphysical illusions of soul or transcendental order. Lovecraft read Schopenhauer's pessimistic account of blind striving Will and Nietzsche's splenetic relativization of Christian morals. The strand of pessimism was strong in Lovecraft's thinking, and was voiced in the late 1920s by Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, an influential account of the cyclical decline of Western culture, in accord with iron laws of determinism. Drafted in the Great War and published in Germany in the crisis conditions of the 1920s, Spengler's philosophy of history inverted many values: civilization marked the death throes of culture, not its apotheosis; imperialism was the last decadence, 'a doom, something daemonic'; the great metropolitan city was the sign of imminent collapse of a race. All of this spoke directly to Lovecraft and is everywhere apparent in his fiction.

His philosophical pessimism was tinged by cynicism, arguing for maintaining certain illusions to pacify what Lovecraft called 'the herd'. Lovecraft praised Joseph Wood Krutch's book, *The Modern Temper*, for its fearless expression of the shattering effect of modern science. Krutch suggested that mythology, religion, and metaphysics had 'all collapsed under the face of successive attacks' since the nineteenth century, leaving the West haunted 'by ghosts from a dead world and not yet at home in its own'. To avoid chaos, Krutch suggested a need to maintain traditions however hollowed out of meaning. This was a stance Lovecraft often adopted: 'Tradition means nothing cosmically, but it means everything locally and pragmatically because we have nothing else to shield us from the devastating sense of "lostness" in endless space and time.'<sup>14</sup>

The clearest position Lovecraft came to articulate, though, was cosmic indifferentism. In an important letter to the editor of *Weird Tales*, resubmitting 'The Call of Cthulhu' for consideration, Lovecraft said:

Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form—and the local human passions and conditions and standards—are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes.

<sup>14</sup> Quotations from Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper: A Study and A Confession* (London: Cape, 1930), 12 and 26. Lovecraft, Letter (10 June 1929), *SL* ii. 357.

To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind have any existence at all.

This was a strictly in-human stance, a different emphasis from the cynical or pessimistic strands of Lovecraft's thinking. 'Contrary to what you may assume,' he said in a later letter, 'I am *not a pessimist* but an *indifferentist*—that is, I don't make the mistake of thinking that the resultant of natural forces surrounding and governing organic life will have any connexion with the wishes or tastes of any part of that organic life-process. Pessimists are just as illogical as optimists . . . Both schools retain in a vestigial way the primitive concept . . . of a cosmos which gives a damn one way or the other.'<sup>15</sup> This philosophy appears fitfully in Lovecraft's actual fiction, but supplies some of his most chilling moments of climax. It is a stance that is allergic to every moral or humanistic defence of the purpose of literature explored by his contemporaries.

Modern philosophers have expanded on the radical possibilities of Lovecraft's stance. His fiction has been read as an attempt to think outside the subject and give priority to the weirdness of the object world, making Lovecraft a key figure for thinkers like Graham Harman and Eugene Thacker. 'The weird is the discovery of an unhuman limit to thought, that is nevertheless foundational for thought,' Thacker suggests, defining Lovecraftian horror as an attempt to think about '*the world-without-us*'.<sup>16</sup> Whilst exploring 'real externality' in these abstract, philosophical ways, Lovecraft's 'weird realism' is also a particular reflection on his times.

### *Pulp Fiction for a Morbid Age*

By Armistice Day in 1918, it was estimated that ten million military personnel has been killed in the Great War. Civilian deaths were nearly as high, and the catastrophe was compounded by the outbreak of 'Spanish flu' which killed many millions more between 1918 and 1920. There was a widespread view among intellectuals that the

<sup>15</sup> Lovecraft, Letters, *SL* ii. 150 and iii. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Citations from Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 23, and *In the Dust of This Planet (Horror of Philosophy)*, vol. i) (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011), 9.

Great War marked the end of European culture: the ‘suicide of civilization’ was a common phrase. The Treaty of Versailles, signed in June 1919, which forced punitive reparations on Germany, sowed the seeds for collapse and the rise of extreme politics across Europe. Amidst civil war in Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, a meeting of Communist parties announced the principles of the Third International as the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, by armed force if necessary. In America, paranoia about immigrants bringing Bolshevism into the country meant that ‘nonconformist aliens’ were targeted by legislation and persecution in the Red Scare of 1919. One English journalist called America ‘hag-ridden by the spectre of Bolshevism. It was like a sleeper in a nightmare, enveloped by a thousand phantoms of destruction.’ As capitalism tottered, the authoritarian Fascist solution to crisis found power first in Italy and then in Germany. From his prison cell in Italy, the Marxist Antonio Gramsci composed the famous epigram: ‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.’

We can count Lovecraft’s fiction amongst these symptoms. In some respects, it was typical of its age, but driven towards pathological intensity by Lovecraft’s perception of himself as the last scion of New England civilization. Lovecraft was an Anglo-Saxon Nativist. The sources for Lovecraft’s politics are easy to trace because they are so dispiritingly derivative. American Nativism was a movement that demanded tighter immigration laws to exclude those who did not come from northern European stock, and was panicked about not just Asian immigration (the so-called yellow peril), but about Mediterranean stock—all those lowly Italian peasants passing through the Ellis Island immigration halls in New York. They were also suspicious of the ‘Alpine’ races, since they had worrying Slavic and Asiatic taints in their blood. This spurious racial taxonomy had been popularized by Madison Grant in *The Passing of the Great Race* in 1916. The great race under threat was the ‘Nordic’ type, ‘the white man par excellence’, best represented by the British, German, and Scandinavian immigrants in the first wave of settlers, now menaced as America headed towards ‘a racial abyss’. As Grant put it in an introduction to another racist text, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, if other races were not ‘Nordicised and vitalised’, then civilization would end in a chaos of an ‘unstable and

bastardised population'.<sup>17</sup> Grant, an important figure in New York, active in the Zoological Society and a founder of the zoo in Central Park, was an ardent believer in eugenics. This movement advocated the betterment of the race through the control of the 'breeding' of lesser races and the arrest of the dilution of pure racial stocks by preventing miscegenation.

These terms saturate Lovecraft's letters and creep everywhere into his fictions. He called the Nordics 'THE MASTERS', appealed to racial science as showing 'the infinite superiority of the Teutonic Aryans', and lapsed into formulations about 'racial suicide' when contemplating the war between England and Germany. He was an advocate of Americanism, which meant protecting 'the great Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere' in its purity. It could possibly assimilate the Celtic, but no 'really alien blood'. He despised Bolshevism, 'the noxious example of the almost sub-human Russian rabble', and was suspicious of pushing the democratic experiment in America too far, particularly if equal rights were given to the black population of America. He dismissed 'effeminate ideas of liberty' because 'it would retard the developments of a handsome Nordic breed'. Lovecraft voiced cautious praise for Fascism in both Italy and Germany, largely because authoritarianism was needed to keep the herd in check at a time of crisis capitalism.<sup>18</sup>

These positions were intensified by Lovecraft's traumatic experience of New York, where his racism conformed to the psychic mechanisms of demonizing immigrants at times of economic pressure. This is Lovecraft's passage about his experience of the slums of the Lower East Side in 1922:

The organic things—Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid—inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth's corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities. They—or the degenerate

<sup>17</sup> Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History*, 4th edn. (New York: Scribners, 1923), 167 and 263, and Grant, introd. to Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1922), p. xxix.

<sup>18</sup> Citations from Lovecraft, *SL* i. 278 and 17; 'Americanism' in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 265; 'Bolshevism', in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 269; Letter, *SL* i. 207.

gelatinous fermentations of which they were composed—seem'd to ooze, seep and trickle thro' the gaping cracks in the horrible houses . . . and I thought of some avenue of Cyclopean and unwholesome vats, crammed to the vomiting point with gangrenous vileness, and about to burst and inundate the world in one leprous cataclysm of semi-fluid rottenness.<sup>19</sup>

Although composed in exorbitant language, this kind of discourse about the New York slums was common. The appalling conditions of the slums around the Five Points in Lower Manhattan were exposed by journalists and reformists, perhaps most famously by Jacob Riis in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). Riis used new flash photography techniques to allow the horrors of the tenements to bloom onto film. Riis's photos contributed to New York's tradition of infernal nights. Lovecraft himself indulged in long night-walks through the slums of Manhattan.

It can be completely disarming to realize that the crescendos of Lovecraft's fiction share exactly the same rhythm and language of revulsion at miscegenate things as his disordered rants about New York. Lovecraft's dialectic of the sublime and disgusting had thoroughly historical roots. The explicit disgust at the mixed race degenerates of Brooklyn in 'The Horror at Red Hook' is pretty much the same as when Dyer encounters the slavish Shoggoths in 'At the Mountains of Madness'. Rural New England was hardly a refuge for Lovecraft. Industrial development and urbanization was sucking life from villages, leaving them sunk in economic decline and—for Lovecraft—open racial degeneration. The vision of the crumbling port of Innsmouth, cut off from the world and sunk in unspeakable inbreeding, is an evocation of economic decline. In 'The Shadow over Innsmouth', Lovecraft did not just demonize racial others, but suspected that the racial taints were coursing in the veins of respectable New Englanders. In the last tale collected here, 'The Shadow out of Time', the greatest horror is to discover that the contaminated, overmastered creature is none other than the narrator of the tale himself.

It might be tempting to think that this racism is just part and parcel of pulp fiction, a sign of its limited sympathies. Yet when Henry James returned to New York in 1904 after over twenty years

<sup>19</sup> Lovecraft, Letter (21 Mar. 1924), *SL* i. 333–4.

in Europe, he was appalled at what had happened to the city and used similar terms. 'There was no escape from the ubiquitous alien,' he wrote in *The American Scene*, calling New York 'monstrous'. It left him with a disorienting 'sense of dispossession' of his homeland. The side streets were 'darkened gorges of masonry' that 'put on, at their mouths, the semblance of black rat-holes, holes of gigantic rats, inhabited by whirlwinds'. He travelled into New England, where he encountered a worker on the road who was unable to answer James in English, French, or Italian. After a while, James established that the man was Armenian. James had no interest or understanding of the Armenian diaspora; he thought only that America was becoming 'a prodigious amalgam, such a hotch-potch of racial ingredients'.<sup>20</sup>

Lovecraft, though, tied the Gothic and the weird directly to the question of race. This is not superficial, but integral to his work. In 'The Supernatural Horror in Literature', the Gothic is the product of northern tribes, the Goths and the Teutons: 'Wherever the mystic Northern blood was strongest, the atmosphere of the popular tales became most intense.' His list of approved authors includes M. P. Shiel, who also wrote hallucinatory race-hate prose about the 'yellow danger' and aristocrats of august northern houses menaced by supernatural forces. Lovecraft's pulp collaborator and correspondent Robert E. Howard wrote fiction saturated in fantasies of white racial supremacy. In a letter to Frank Belknap Long, discussing the 'ethereal mystick power' of Poe, Machen, and Dunsany, Lovecraft calls their Gothic power 'a purely *Teutonic* quality' in which 'you ought to find plain evidences of *Nordick* superiority; and derive therefrom a proper appreciation of your natural as distinguisht from your adopted race-stock'.<sup>21</sup> Weird literature deals with encounters that are insistently racialized, produced in an era when colonial ideology of the 'white man's burden' under the European powers curdled into explicit violence.

Fiction, though, is never a simple extrusion from historical circumstances. Art—even pulp fiction—transforms its conditions. To some, Lovecraft falters because he is unable to complete a properly aesthetic transmutation of suffering of the kind expected from

<sup>20</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York: Scribners, 1948), 87, 83, 86, 109, and 121.

<sup>21</sup> Lovecraft, Letter (8 Nov. 1923), *SL* i. 260.

great art. Yet Weird fiction is insistently about transformation, always in a process of becoming something other than itself. This is why so many readers can take so many different things from Lovecraft's fiction and why he speaks to an age where technology, globalization, and accelerated modernity put the question of the human under ever more pressure. Whatever one concludes, Lovecraft's fictions are extraordinary documents of an extraordinary time.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT

THE selections of stories for this anthology primarily focus on Lovecraft's work after his return from his traumatic years in New York in 1926. Most Lovecraftians agree that the period between 1926 and 1931 is when he produced his most successful works. The rejection of 'At the Mountains of Madness' by *Weird Tales* stopped him writing with any energy, and he was reluctant to offer the stories he wrote after 1931 to pulp magazine editors. 'The Horror at Red Hook', composed in 1925, is included to point the way: it is Lovecraft's engagement with the actual city of New York. After this, the horrors that erupt are located in far-flung terrains or the reimagined backwaters of Lovecraft's New England.

The texts have been checked against the first publication of the stories, nearly all in pulp magazines, with obvious mistakes silently corrected. The texts of these stories are mostly stable and were reprinted in the Arkham House editions as published in *The Outsider and Others* in 1939 and again in the revised Arkham editions of the 1960s, both overseen by August Derleth. There are, however, variant versions of 'At the Mountains of Madness' and 'The Shadow Out of Time' in print. These stories were both published in the science fiction magazine *Astounding Stories* and were extensively reparagraphed by the editor, with some passages deleted and some of the phrasing simplified. I have chosen to reprint the original pulp versions of the tales with regard to paragraphing, in order to retain some of the pulp energy that *Astounding Stories* wanted to inject into Lovecraft's tales. Readers may note a different prose rhythm in these two tales, but this breathless form was how they were first encountered by their audience in the Golden Age of science fiction. I have followed August Derleth in restoring deleted passages, and variants arising from S. T. Joshi's work on the manuscripts are recorded in the Explanatory Notes.

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## A CHRONOLOGY OF H. P. LOVECRAFT

- 1890 (20 Aug.) Howard Phillips born in Providence, Rhode Island, the last in line of two respected New England families.
- 1893 Father, Winfield Lovecraft, committed to asylum with 'general paresis', linked to syphilis.
- 1896 Death of HPL's grandmother; he suffers intense nightmares. A sensitive child, rarely able to attend school. Educates himself in grandfather's library; reading includes *Arabian Nights*, Greek and Roman legends.
- 1899 Begins to publish his own journal, the *Scientific Gazette*.
- 1903 Begins to publish *Rhode Island Gazette of Astronomy*. Spends time at Brown University observatory.
- 1904 Death of his grandfather, Whipple Phillips. Family in financial crisis and move out of the ancestral home. HPL feels displaced for the rest of his life.
- 1906 First published essay, denouncing astrology, published in *Providence Sunday Journal*. Writes astronomy articles for local papers *Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner* and, from 1908, *The Tribune* in Providence.
- 1908–13 Period of being a virtual recluse.
- 1910 Following private researches, writes his textbook, *Inorganic Chemistry*.
- 1912 Abandons science for poetry. Over five years, he writes verse imitative of eighteenth-century British models of Addison, Pope, and Steele.
- 1913–14 Debates fiction in the letters pages of the pulp magazine *The Argosy*. As a result, HPL comes into contact with the United Amateur Press Association (UAPA). He becomes a lifelong advocate of amateur journalism. Letters to other amateur writers begin.
- 1914–18 Astronomy column for Providence *Evening News*.
- 1915 Begins to publish his amateur journal, *The Conservative*, which runs for thirteen issues. His uncle, Dr F. C. Clark, dies, a big influence on HPL's development.
- 1917 Attempts to enlist in the army. Initially accepted, his mother intervenes and he is declared 'totally and permanently unfit'. At the encouragement of editor W. Paul Cook, HPL writes Gothic tales,

- 'Dagon' and 'The Tomb'. Begins to revise and edit others' fiction for small fees but often for free.
- 1919 Reads Lord Dunsany's fantasy fiction for the first time, and also sees him read in Boston. Mother committed to a sanatorium.
- 1921 (May) Mother dies after two years of confinement for 'nervous illness'. Meets Sonia Haft Greene, a divorced Jewish Ukrainian immigrant. Writes 'The Nameless City'. First comes across the work of Californian visionary painter and pulp horror writer, Clark Ashton Smith.
- 1922 Struggles to complete the series 'Herbert West—Reanimator' for the *Home Brew* journal. Writes 'Nyarlathotep', based on nightmare. (Mar.) Travels to New York, the 'Cyclopean city'. Appalled by Chinatown and slums of Lower East Side. Meets Frank Belknap Long, who becomes a devoted acolyte. Begins antiquarian travels, initially in New England. Travels to Salem, scene of the 1692 witch trials, and Marblehead. Also travels to Cleveland, first trip beyond New England.
- 1923 Begins his association with the new pulp magazine, *Weird Tales*, which publishes 'Dagon'. Writes 'The Festival' and 'The Rats in the Walls'. Reads the work of Gothic writer Arthur Machen for the first time and Eliot's *The Waste Land*.
- 1924 In a sudden move, HPL moves to Brooklyn and marries Sonia Greene. Sonia's business runs into trouble, meaning HPL has to look for work. The couple move to less expensive rooms, in the slum district of Red Hook in Brooklyn's port district. For *Weird Tales*, ghostwrites the fictional tale 'Imprisoned with the Pharaohs' for the escapologist Harry Houdini. HPL is offered editorship of *Weird Tales*, but he refuses when it becomes apparent he would have to move to Chicago.
- 1926 Sonia moves to Cincinnati. HPL returns to Providence (they divorce amicably in 1929). In a burst of energy, HPL completes his essay 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' and writes several key fictions: 'The Call of Cthulhu', 'The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath', *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.
- 1927 (Mar.) Writes 'The Colour out of Space'. Publishes 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' in *The Recluse*. Antiquarian trip to Deerfield, Massachusetts, and Vermont.
- 1928 Another two-month stay to help Sonia in New York leads to nervous collapse. (July) In Virginia, visits the 'Endless Caverns'. Writes 'The Dunwich Horror'.

- 1930 Completes his sonnet cycle, 'Fungi from Yuggoth' and 'The Whisperer in Darkness'. (Apr.) Visits South Carolina. (Sept.) Travels to Quebec. Simon and Schuster ask Lovecraft if he is interested in publishing a novel; he offers only short stories.
- 1931 Completes antiquarian essay on Quebec. *Weird Tales* rejects HPL's 'At the Mountains of Madness', which depresses him and his motivation collapses. Poverty intensifies. In Providence, his birthplace on Angell Street is pulled down. Writes 'Shadow over Innsmouth'.
- 1932 Writes 'The Dreams in the Witch-House'. Visit to New Orleans. Second visit to Quebec.
- 1933 Writes collaborative stories with Hazel Heald, including 'The Horror in the Museum'. Third trip to Quebec.
- 1934 First visit to Florida, to visit Robert Barlow. Begins to write 'The Shadow out of Time'.
- 1935 Spends two months with Barlow in Florida. At the end of the year, *Astounding Stories* buys 'At the Mountains of Madness' and 'The Shadow out of Time' for \$595, his best sale.
- 1936 'The Shadow over Innsmouth' is published in a limited edition of 400 copies by his friend William Crawford, the only book that HPL publishes in his lifetime. Friend Robert Howard commits suicide.
- 1937 (10 Mar.) HPL admitted to Brown Memorial Hospital. He dies five days later of stomach cancer, which he had left untreated.
- 1939 After rejections of proposals for a collection of Lovecraft stories by mainstream publishers Scribner's and Simon and Schuster, HPL's devotees August Derleth and Donald Wandrei establish Arkham House and publish *The Outsider and Others*. This collection is followed by *Beyond the Wall of Sleep* (1943) and *Marginalia* (1944).

# THE TALES

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# THE HORROR AT RED HOOK



*There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move to my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight. It is possible that man may sometimes return on the track of evolution, and it is my belief that an awful lore is not yet dead.*

ARTHUR MACHEN\*

## I

NOT many weeks ago, on a street corner in the village of Pascoag, Rhode Island, a tall, heavily built, and wholesome looking pedestrian, furnished much speculation by a singular lapse of behaviour. He had, it appears, been descending the hill by the road from Chepachet;\* and encountering the compact section, had turned to his left into the main thoroughfare where several modest business blocks convey a touch of the urban. At this point, without visible provocation, he committed his astonishing lapse; staring queerly for a second at the tallest of the buildings before him, and then, with a series of terrified, hysterical shrieks, breaking into a frantic run which ended in a stumble and fall at the next crossing. Picked up and dusted off by ready hands, he was found to be conscious, organically unhurt, and evidently cured of his sudden nervous attack. He muttered some shamefaced explanations involving a strain he had undergone, and with downcast glance turned back up the Chepachet road, trudging out of sight without once looking behind him. It was a strange incident to befall so large, robust, normal-featured, and capable-looking a man, and the strangeness was not lessened by the remarks of a bystander who had recognised him as the boarder of a well-known dairyman on the outskirts of Chepachet.

He was, it developed, a New York police detective named Thomas F. Malone, now on a long leave of absence under medical treatment after some disproportionately arduous work on a gruesome local case which accident had made dramatic. There had been a collapse of several old brick buildings during a raid in which he had shared,

and something about the wholesale loss of life, both of prisoners and of his companions, had peculiarly appalled him. As a result, he had acquired an acute and anomalous horror of any buildings even remotely suggesting the ones which had fallen in, so that in the end mental specialists forbade him the sight of such things for an indefinite period. A police surgeon with relatives in Chepachet had put forward that quaint hamlet of wooden Colonial houses as an ideal spot for the psychological convalescence; and thither the sufferer had gone, promising never to venture among the brick-lined streets of larger villages till duly advised by the Woonsocket\* specialist with whom he was put in touch. This walk to Pascoag for magazines had been a mistake, and the patient had paid in fright, bruises, and humiliation for his disobedience.

So much the gossips of Chepachet and Pascoag knew; and so much also, the most learned specialists believed. But Malone had at first told the specialists much more, ceasing only when he saw that utter incredulity was his portion. Thereafter he held his peace, protesting not at all when it was generally agreed that the collapse of certain squalid brick houses in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn,\* and the consequent death of many brave officers, had unseated his nervous equilibrium. He had worked too hard, all said, in trying to clean up those nests of disorder and violence; certain features were shocking enough, in all conscience, and the unexpected tragedy was the last straw. This was a simple explanation which everyone could understand, and because Malone was not a simple person he perceived that he had better let it suffice. To hint to unimaginative people of a horror beyond all human conception—a horror of houses and blocks and cities leprous and cancerous with evil dragged from elder worlds—would be merely to invite a padded cell instead of a restful rustication, and Malone was a man of sense despite his mysticism. He had the Celt's far vision of weird and hidden things,\* but the logician's quick eye for the outwardly unconvincing; an amalgam which had led him far afield in the forty-two years of his life, and set him in strange places for a Dublin University man born in a Georgian villa near Phoenix Park.

And now, as he reviewed the things he had seen and felt and apprehended, Malone was content to keep unshared the secret of what could reduce a dauntless fighter to a quivering neurotic; what could make old brick slums and seas of dark, subtle faces a thing of nightmare and

eldritch portent. It would not be the first time his sensations had been forced to bide uninterpreted—for was not his very act of plunging into the polyglot abyss of New York's underworld a freak beyond sensible explanation? What could he tell the prosaic of the antique witcheries and grotesque marvels discernible to sensitive eyes amidst the poison cauldron where all the varied dregs of unwholesome ages mix their venom and perpetuate their obscene terrors? He had seen the hellish green flame of secret wonder in this blatant, evasive welter of outward greed and inward blasphemy, and had smiled gently when all the New-Yorkers he knew scoffed at his experiment in police work. They had been very witty and cynical, deriding his fantastic pursuit of unknowable mysteries and assuring him that in these days New York held nothing but cheapness and vulgarity. One of them had wagered him a heavy sum that he could not—despite many poignant things to his credit in the *Dublin Review*\*—even write a truly interesting story of New York low life; and now, looking back, he perceived that cosmic irony had justified the prophet's words while secretly confuting their flippant meaning. The horror, as glimpsed at last, could not make a story—for like the book cited by Poe's German authority, '*es lasst sich nicht lessen*—it does not permit itself to be read'.\*

## II

To Malone the sense of latent mystery in existence was always present. In youth he had felt the hidden beauty and ecstasy of things, and had been a poet; but poverty and sorrow and exile had turned his gaze in darker directions, and he had thrilled at the imputations of evil in the world around. Daily life had for him come to be a phantasmagoria of macabre shadow-studies; now glittering and leering with concealed rottenness as in Beardsley's best manner, now hinting terrors behind the commonest shapes and objects as in the subtler and less obvious work of Gustave Doré.\* He would often regard it as merciful that most persons of high intelligence jeer at the inmost mysteries; for, he argued, if superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the very integrity of the universe. All this reflection was no doubt morbid, but keen logic and a deep sense of humour ably offset it. Malone was satisfied

to let his notions remain as half-spied and forbidden visions to be lightly played with; and hysteria came only when duty flung him into a hell of revelation too sudden and insidious to escape.

He had for some time been detailed to the Butler Street station in Brooklyn when the Red Hook matter came to his notice. Red Hook is a maze of hybrid squalor near the ancient waterfront opposite Governor's Island, with dirty highways climbing the hill from the wharves to that higher ground where the decayed lengths of Clinton and Court Streets\* lead off toward the Borough Hall. Its houses are mostly of brick, dating from the first quarter to the middle of the nineteenth century, and some of the obscurer alleys and byways have that alluring antique flavour which conventional reading leads us to call 'Dickensian'. The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth, and sends out strange cries to answer the lapping of oily waves at its grimy piers and the monstrous organ litanies of the harbour whistles. Here long ago a brighter picture dwelt, with clear-eyed mariners on the lower streets and homes of taste and substance where the larger houses line the hill. One can trace the relics of this former happiness in the trim shapes of the buildings, the occasional graceful churches, and the evidences of original art and background in bits of detail here and there—a worn flight of steps, a battered doorway, a wormy pair of decorative columns of pilasters, or a fragment of once green space with bent and rusted iron railing. The houses are generally in solid blocks, and now and then a many-windowed cupola arises to tell of days when the households of captains and ship-owners watched the sea.

From this tangle of material and spiritual putrescence the blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky. Hordes of prowlers reel shouting and singing along the lanes and thoroughfares, occasional furtive hands suddenly extinguish lights and pull down curtains, and swarthy, sin-pitted faces disappear from windows when visitors pick their way through. Policemen despair of order or reform, and seek rather to erect barriers protecting the outside world from the contagion. The clang of the patrol is answered by a kind of spectral silence, and such prisoners as are taken are never communicative. Visible offences are as varied as the local dialects, and run the gamut from the smuggling of rum and prohibited aliens through diverse stages of

lawlessness and obscure vice to murder and mutilation in their most abhorrent guises. That these visible affairs are not more frequent is not to the neighbourhood's credit, unless the power of concealment be an art demanding credit. More people enter Red Hook than leave it—or at least, than leave it by the landward-side—and those who are not loquacious are the likeliest to leave.

Malone found in this state of things a faint stench of secrets more terrible than any of the sins denounced by citizens and bemoaned by priests and philanthropists. He was conscious, as one who united imagination with scientific knowledge, that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances; and he had often viewed with an anthropologist's shudder the chanting, cursing processions of blear-eyed and pockmarked young men which wound their way along in the dark small hours of morning. One saw groups of these youths incessantly; sometimes in leering vigils on street corners, sometimes in doorways playing eerily on cheap instruments of music, sometimes in stupefied dozes or indecent dialogues around cafeteria tables near Borough Hall, and sometimes in whispering converse around dingy taxicabs drawn up at the high stoops of crumbling and closely shuttered old houses. They chilled and fascinated him more than he dared confess to his associates on the force, for he seemed to see in them some monstrous thread of secret continuity; some fiendish, cryptical and ancient pattern utterly beyond and below the sordid mass of facts and habits and haunts listed with such conscientious technical care by the police. They must be, he felt inwardly, the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the sharers of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than mankind. Their coherence and definiteness suggested it, and it showed in the singular suspicion of order which lurked beneath their squalid disorder. He had not read in vain such treatises as Miss Murray's *Witch Cult in Western Europe*;<sup>\*</sup> and knew that up to recent years there had certainly survived among peasants and furtive folk a frightful and clandestine system of assemblies and orgies descended from dark religions antedating the Aryan world, and appearing in popular legends as Black Masses and Witches' Sabbaths. That these hellish vestiges of old Turanian-Asiatic magic and fertility-cults<sup>\*</sup> were even now wholly dead he could not for a moment suppose, and he frequently wondered how

much older and how much blacker than the very worst of the muttered tales some of them might really be.

### III

It was the case of Robert Suydam\* which took Malone to the heart of things in Red Hook. Suydam was a lettered recluse of ancient Dutch family, possessed originally of barely independent means, and inhabiting the spacious but ill-preserved mansion which his grandfather had built in Flatbush when that village was little more than a pleasant group of Colonial cottages surrounding the steepled and ivy-clad Reformed Church with its iron-railed yard of Netherlandish gravestones.\* In his lonely house, set back from Martense Street amidst a yard of venerable trees, Suydam had read and brooded for some six decades except for a period a generation before, when he had sailed for the old world and remained there out of sight for eight years. He could afford no servants, and would admit but few visitors to his absolute solitude; eschewing close friendships and receiving his rare acquaintances in one of the three ground-floor rooms which he kept in order—a vast, high-ceiled library, whose walls were solidly packed with tattered books of ponderous, archaic, and vaguely repellent aspect. The growth of the town and its final absorption in the Brooklyn district had meant nothing to Suydam, and he had come to mean less and less to the town. Elderly people still pointed him out on the streets, but to most of the recent population he was merely a queer, corpulent old fellow whose unkempt white hair, stubbly beard, shiny black clothes and gold-headed cane earned him an amused glance and nothing more. Malone did not know him by sight till duty called him to the case, but had heard of him indirectly as a really profound authority on medieval superstition, and had once idly meant to look up an out-of-print pamphlet of his on the Kabbalah and the Faustus legend,\* which a friend had quoted from memory.

Suydam became a ‘case’ when his distant and only relatives sought court pronouncements on his sanity. Their action seemed sudden to the outside world, but was really undertaken only after prolonged observation and sorrowful debate. It was based on certain odd changes in his speech and habits; wild references to impending wonders, and unaccountable hauntings of disreputable Brooklyn neighbourhoods.

He had been growing shabbier and shabbier with the years, and now prowled about like a veritable mendicant; seen occasionally by humiliated friends in subway stations, or loitering on the benches around Borough Hall in conversation with groups of swarthy, evil-looking strangers. When he spoke it was to babble of unlimited powers almost within his grasp, and to repeat with knowing leers such mystical words or names as 'Sephiroth', 'Ashmodai' and 'Samaël'.\* The court action revealed that he was using up his income and wasting his principal in the purchase of curious tomes imported from London and Paris, and in the maintenance of a squalid basement flat in the Red Hook district where he spent nearly every night, receiving odd delegations of mixed rowdies and foreigners, and apparently conducting some kind of ceremonial service behind the green blinds of secretive windows. Detectives assigned to follow him reported strange cries and chants and prancing of feet filtering out from these nocturnal rites, and shuddered at their peculiar ecstasy and abandon despite the commonness of weird orgies in that sodden section. When, however, the matter came to a hearing, Suydam managed to preserve his liberty. Before the judge his manner grew urbane and reasonable, and he freely admitted the queerness of demeanour and extravagant cast of language into which he had fallen through excessive devotion to study and research. He was, he said, engaged in the investigation of certain details of European tradition which required the closest contact with foreign groups and their songs and folk dances. The notion that any low secret society was preying upon him, as hinted by his relatives, was obviously absurd; and showed how sadly limited was their understanding of him and his work. Triumphant with his calm explanations, he was suffered to depart unhindered; and the paid detectives of the Suydams, Corlears, and Van Brunts were withdrawn in resigned disgust.

It was here that an alliance of Federal inspectors and police, Malone with them, entered the case. The law had watched the Suydam action with interest, and had in many instances been called upon to aid the private detectives. In this work it developed that Suydam's new associates were among the blackest and most vicious criminals of Red Hook's devious lanes, and that at least a third of them were known and repeated offenders in the matter of thievery, disorder, and the importation of illegal immigrants. Indeed, it would not have been too much to say that the old scholar's particular circle

coincided almost perfectly with the worst of the organised cliques which smuggled ashore certain nameless and unclassified Asian dregs wisely turned back by Ellis Island.\* In the teeming rookeries of Parker Place—since renamed—where Suydam had his basement flat, there had grown up a very unusual colony of unclassified slant-eyed folk who used the Arabic alphabet but were eloquently repudiated by the great mass of Syrians in and around Atlantic Avenue. They could all have been deported for lack of credentials, but legalism is slow-moving, and one does not disturb Red Hook unless publicity forces one to.

These creatures attended a tumble-down stone church, used Wednesdays as a dance-hall, which reared its Gothic buttresses near the vilest part of the waterfront. It was nominally Catholic; but priests throughout Brooklyn denied the place all standing and authenticity, and policemen agreed with them when they listened to the noises it emitted at night. Malone used to fancy he heard terrible cracked bass notes from a hidden organ far underground when the church stood empty and unlighted, whilst all observers dreaded the shrieking and drumming which accompanied the visible services. Suydam, when questioned, said he thought the ritual was some remnant of Nestorian Christianity tintured with the Shamanism of Thibet.\* Most of the people, he conjectured, were of Mongoloid stock, originating somewhere in or near Kurdistan—and Malone could not help recalling that Kurdistan is the land of the Yezidis, last survivors of the Persian devil-worshippers.\* However this may have been, the stir of the Suydam investigation made it certain that these unauthorised newcomers were flooding Red Hook in increasing numbers; entering through some marine conspiracy unreached by revenue officers and harbour police, overrunning Parker Place and rapidly spreading up the hill, and welcomed with curious fraternalism by the other assorted denizens of the region. Their squat figures and characteristic squinting physiognomies, grotesquely combined with flashy American clothing, appeared more and more numerous among the loafer and nomad gangsters of the Borough Hall section; till at length it was deemed necessary to compute their numbers, ascertain their sources and occupations, and find if possible a way to round them up and deliver them to the proper immigration authorities. To this task Malone was signed by agreement of Federal and city forces, and as he commenced his canvass of Red Hook he felt poised upon the brink of

nameless terrors, with the shabby, unkempt figure of Robert Suydam as arch-fiend and adversary.

## IV

Police methods are varied and ingenious. Malone, through unostentatious rambles, carefully casual conversations, well-timed offers of hip-pocket liquor, and judicious dialogues with frightened prisoners, learned many isolated facts about the movement whose aspect had become so menacing. The newcomers were indeed Kurds, but of a dialect obscure and puzzling to exact philology. Such of them as worked lived mostly as dockhands and unlicensed pedlars, though frequently serving in Greek restaurants and tending corner news stands. Most of them, however, had no visible means of support; and were obviously connected with underworld pursuits, of which smuggling and 'boot-legging' were the least indescribable. They had come in steamships, apparently tramp freighters, and had been unloaded by stealth on moonless nights in rowboats which stole under a certain wharf and followed a hidden canal to a secret subterranean pool beneath a house. This wharf, canal and house Malone could not locate, for the memories of his informants were exceedingly confused, while their speech was to a great extent beyond even the ablest interpreters; nor could he gain any real data on the reasons for their systematic importation. They were reticent about the exact spot from which they had come, and were never sufficiently off guard to reveal the agencies which had sought them out and directed their course. Indeed, they developed something like acute fright when asked the reasons for their presence. Gangsters of other breeds were equally taciturn, and the most that could be gathered was that some god or great priesthood had promised them unheard-of powers and supernatural glories and rulerships in a strange land.

The attendance of both newcomers and old gangsters at Suydam's closely guarded nocturnal meetings was very regular, and the police soon learned that the erstwhile recluse had leased additional flats to accommodate such guests as knew his password; at last occupying three entire houses and permanently harbouring many of his queer companions. He spent but little time now at his Flatbush home, apparently going and coming only to obtain and return books; and his face and manner had attained an appalling pitch of wildness.

Malone twice interviewed him, but was each time brusquely repulsed. He knew nothing, he said, of any mysterious plots or movements; and had no idea how the Kurds could have entered or what they wanted. His business was to study undisturbed the folklore of all the immigrants of the district; a business with which policemen had no legitimate concern. Malone mentioned his admiration for Suydam's old brochure on the Kabbalah and other myths, but the old man's softening was only momentary. He sensed an intrusion, and rebuffed his visitor in no uncertain way; till Malone withdrew disgusted, and turned to other channels of information.

What Malone would have unearthed could he have worked continuously on the case, we shall never know. As it was, a stupid conflict between city and Federal authority suspended the investigations for several months, during which the detective was busy with other assignments. But at no time did he lose interest, or fail to stand amazed at what began to happen to Robert Suydam. Just at the time when a wave of kidnappings and disappearances spread its excitement over New York, the unkempt scholar embarked upon a metamorphosis as startling as it was absurd. One day he was seen near Borough Hall with clean-shaven face, well-trimmed hair, and tastefully immaculate attire, and on every day thereafter some obscure improvement was noticed in him. He maintained his new fastidiousness without interruption, added to it an unwonted sparkle of eye and crispness of speech, and began little by little to shed the corpulence which had so long deformed him. Now frequently taken for less than his age, he acquired an elasticity of step and buoyancy of demeanour to match the new tradition, and showed a curious darkening of the hair which somehow did not suggest dye. As the months passed, he commenced to dress less and less conservatively, and finally astonished his new friends by renovating and redecorating his Flatbush mansion, which he threw open in a series of receptions, summoning all the acquaintances he could remember, and extending a special welcome to the fully forgiven relatives who had so lately sought his restraint. Some attended through curiosity, others through duty; but all were suddenly charmed by the dawning grace and urbanity of the former hermit. He had, he asserted, accomplished most of his allotted work; and having just inherited some property from a half-forgotten European friend, was about to spend his remaining years in a brighter second youth which ease, care, and diet had made possible

to him. Less and less was he seen at Red Hook, and more and more did he move in the society to which he was born. Policemen noted a tendency of the gangsters to congregate at the old stone church and dance-hall instead of at the basement flat in Parker Place, though the latter and its recent annexes still overflowed with noxious life.

Then two incidents occurred—wide enough apart, but both of intense interest in the case as Malone envisaged it. One was a quiet announcement in the *Eagle* of Robert Suydam's engagement to Miss Cornelia Gerritsen of Bayside, a young woman of excellent position, and distantly related to the elderly bridegroom-elect; whilst the other was a raid on the dance-hall church by city police, after a report that the face of a kidnapped child had been seen for a second at one of the basement windows. Malone had participated in this raid, and studied the place with much care when inside. Nothing was found—in fact, the building was entirely deserted when visited—but the sensitive Celt was vaguely disturbed by many things about the interior. There were crudely painted panels he did not like—panels which depicted sacred faces with peculiarly worldly and sardonic expressions, and which occasionally took liberties that even a layman's sense of decorum could scarcely countenance. Then, too, he did not relish the Greek inscription on the wall above the pulpit, an ancient incantation which he had once stumbled upon in Dublin college days, and which read, literally translated,

*O friend and companion of night, thou who rejoicest in the baying of dogs and spilt blood, who wanderest in the midst of shades among the tombs, who longest for blood and bringest terror to mortals, Gorgo, Mormo, thousand-faced moon, look favourably on our sacrifices!\**

When he read this he shuddered, and thought vaguely of the cracked bass organ notes he fancied he had heard beneath the church on certain nights. He shuddered again at the rust around the rim of a metal basin which stood on the altar, and paused nervously when his nostrils seemed to detect a curious and ghastly stench from somewhere in the neighbourhood. That organ memory haunted him, and he explored the basement with particular assiduity before he left. The place was very hateful to him; yet after all, were the blasphemous panels and inscriptions more than mere crudities perpetrated by the ignorant?

By the time of Suydam's wedding the kidnapping epidemic had become a popular newspaper scandal. Most of the victims were young

children of the lowest classes, but the increasing number of disappearances had worked up a sentiment of the strongest fury. Journals clamoured for action from the police, and once more the Butler Street station sent its men over Red Hook for clues, discoveries, and criminals. Malone was glad to be on the trail again, and took pride in a raid on one of Suydam's Parker Place houses. There, indeed, no stolen child was found, despite the tales of screams and the red sash picked up in the areaway; but the paintings and rough inscriptions on the peeling walls of most of the rooms, and the primitive chemical laboratory in the attic, all helped to convince the detective that he was on the track of something tremendous. The paintings were appalling—hideous monsters of every shape and size, and parodies on human outlines which cannot be described. The writing was in red, and varied from Arabic to Greek, Roman, and Hebrew letters. Malone could not read much of it, but what he did decipher was portentous and cabalistic enough. One frequently repeated motto was in a sort of Hebraised Hellenistic Greek, and suggested the most terrible daemon evocations of the Alexandrian decadence:

HEL . HELOYM . SOTHER . EMMANVEL . SABAOOTH .  
 AGLA . TETRAGRAMMATON . AGYROS . OTHEOS .  
 ISCHYROS . ATHANATOS . IEHOVA . VA . ADONAI .  
 SADAY . HOMOVSION . MESSIAS . ESCHEREHEYE.\*

Circles and pentagrams loomed on every hand, and told indubitably of the strange beliefs and aspirations of those who dwelt so squalidly here. In the cellar, however, the strangest thing was found—a pile of genuine gold ingots covered carelessly with a piece of burlap, and bearing upon their shining surfaces the same weird hieroglyphics which also adorned the walls. During the raid the police encountered only a passive resistance from the squinting Orientals that swarmed from every door. Finding nothing relevant, they had to leave all as it was; but the precinct captain wrote Suydam a note advising him to look closely to the character of his tenants and protégés in view of the growing public clamour.

V

Then came the June wedding and the great sensation. Flatbush was gay for the hour about high noon, and pennanted motors thronged

the streets near the old Dutch church where an awning stretched from door to highway. No local event ever surpassed the Suydam-Gerritsen nuptials in tone and scale, and the party which escorted the bride and groom to the Cunard Pier\* was, if not exactly the smartest, at least a solid page from the Social Register. At five o'clock adieux were waved, and the ponderous liner edged away from the long pier, slowly turned its nose seaward, discarded its tug, and headed for the widening water spaces that led to old world wonders. By night the outer harbour was cleared, and late passengers watched the stars twinkling above an unpolluted ocean.

Whether the tramp steamer or the scream was first to gain attention, no one can say. Probably they were simultaneous, but it is of no use to calculate. The scream came from the Suydam stateroom, and the sailor who broke down the door could perhaps have told frightful things if he had not forthwith gone completely mad—as it is, he shrieked more loudly than the first victims, and thereafter ran simpering about the vessel till caught and put in irons. The ship's doctor who entered the stateroom and turned on the lights a moment later did not go mad, but told nobody what he saw till afterward, when he corresponded with Malone in Chepachet. It was murder—strangulation—but one need not say that the claw-mark on Mrs Suydam's throat could not have come from her husband's or any other human hand, or that upon the white wall there, flickered for an instant in hateful red a legend which, later copied from memory, seems to have been nothing less than the fearsome Chaldee letters of the word 'LILITH'.\* One need not mention these things because they vanished so quickly—as for Suydam, one could at least bar others from the room until one knew what to think oneself. The doctor has distinctly assured Malone that he did not see IT. The open porthole, just before he turned on the lights, was clouded for a second with a certain phosphorescence, and for a moment there seemed to echo in the night outside the suggestion of a faint and hellish tittering; but no real outline met the eye. As proof, the doctor points to his continued sanity.

Then the tramp steamer claimed all attention. A boat put off, and a horde of swart, insolent ruffians in officers' dress swarmed aboard the temporarily halted Cunarder. They wanted Suydam or his body—they had known of his trip, and for certain reasons were sure he would die. The captain's deck was almost a pandemonium; for at

the instant, between the doctor's report from the stateroom and the demands of the men from the tramp, not even the wisest and gravest seaman could think what to do. Suddenly the leader of the visiting mariners, an Arab with a hatefully negroid mouth, pulled forth a dirty, crumpled paper and handed it to the captain. It was signed by Robert Suydam, and bore the following odd message:

In case of sudden or unexplained accident or death on my part, please deliver me or my body unquestioningly into the hands of the bearer and his associates. Everything, for me, and perhaps for you, depends on absolute compliance. Explanations can come later—do not fail me now.

ROBERT SUYDAM

Captain and doctor looked at each other, and the latter whispered something to the former. Finally they nodded rather helplessly and led the way to the Suydam stateroom. The doctor directed the captain's glance away as he unlocked the door and admitted the strange seamen, nor did he breathe easily till they filed out with their burden after an unaccountably long period of preparation. It was wrapped in bedding from the berths, and the doctor was glad that the outlines were not very revealing. Somehow the men got the thing over the side and away to their tramp steamer without uncovering it. The Cunarder started again, and the doctor and a ship's undertaker sought out the Suydam stateroom to perform what last services they could. Once more the physician was forced to reticence and even to mendacity, for a hellish thing had happened. When the undertaker asked him why he had drained off all of Mrs Suydam's blood, he neglected to affirm that he had not done so; nor did he point to the vacant bottle-spaces on the rack, or to the odour in the sink which showed the hasty disposition of the bottles' original contents. The pockets of those men—if men they were—had bulged damnably when they left the ship. Two hours later, and the world knew by radio all that it ought to know of the horrible affair.

## VI

That same June evening, without having heard a word from the sea, Malone was desperately busy among the alleys of Red Hook. A sudden stir seemed to permeate the place, and as if apprised by 'grapevine telegraph' of something singular, the denizens clustered expectantly