



H. P. LOVECRAFT

A Biographical Sketch

by F. LEE BALDWIN

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born August 20th, 1890, in Providence, Rhode Island, about a mile east of 66 College Street, where he now lives. Began to read at four; Grimm's Fairy Tales and Arabian Nights being among the first volumes he seized upon. Later, he came across books about Greek and Roman mythology and was still more fascinated by them. He first tried writing at six and his earliest story was written at seven—about a cave of robbers—called "The Noble Eavesdropper." At eight he began to take an interest in science—first chemistry—then geography, astronomy, and other subjects, but his first love for mythology and mystery never diminished. Was about nine when he got his first volume of Poe and adopted him as a model. Virtually all his tales are weird, for nothing has ever fascinated him half so much as the mystery of time and space and the unknown. Remote and inaccessible places like the Antarctic ("At the Mountains of Madness") and other worlds enthralled his imagination.

Astronomy in particular attracted him and when thirteen began to edit and publish a very small hectographed paper called *The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy*. He continued this little publication for a few years and at the age of sixteen (while still in school)



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[Linoleum Cut by Duane W. Rimel]

broke into print for the first time with a monthly article on astronomical phenomena in a new local daily, and followed this with other astronomical articles in the local press.

At eighteen he became dissatisfied with all of his fiction and destroyed most of the tales he had written. His time was used exclusively for verse, essays, and criticism, and did not write another tale for nine years. In 1914 he joined the nation-wide United Amateur Press Association, and his first tale to appear anywhere was 'The Alchemist'

in *The United Amateur* in 1916. This story was written in 1908. The next was "The Beast in the Cave," written in 1905 and appearing in W. Paul Cook's *Vagrant* sometime in 1917. In this same year, 1917, he wrote "The Tomb" and "Dagon;" in 1918 "Polaris," and in 1919 "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," "The White Ship," "The Doom that Came to Sarnath," and "The Statement of Randolph Carter."

His first tale to be professionally printed was "Herbert West—Reanimator" in 1922. This appeared in the now defunct *Home Brew* in six parts, each a separate episode. Later in 1922, *Home Brew* published "The Lurking Fear" as a four-part serial with illustrations by Clark Ashton Smith, whom he met thru amateur journalism. In 1923 *Weird Tales* was founded, and "Dagon" was published in October.

"The Horror at Red Hook" was written while Mr. Lovecraft lived in New York, where he got much of the local color for the tale. "He" was based on the old Greenwich Village section of New York. Like "The Horror at Red Hook," it expresses the author's detestation of the metropolis. "The Shunned House" was written in Brooklyn. It is about a house in Benefit Street, Providence, not far from his present home. In reality, the place has no sinister connection. The tale was printed by the *Recluse Press* (W. Paul Cook) of Athol, Mass., as a brochure, but the loose sheets were never put together. R. H. Barlow of De Land, Florida, now has them in his possession and plans to present the story sometime in the future. It was twice rejected by *Weird*.

Frank Belknap Long, Jr., has written a preface for it. The tale "Cool Air," which WT also rejected, was published in 1927 in the short-lived Philadelphia magazine called *Tales of Magic and Mystery*. Of all his tales Mr. Lovecraft likes best "The Colour Out of Space," and next best "The Music of Erich Zann." Edward J. O'Brien gave "The Colour Out of Space" a three-star rating in "Best Short Stories of 1928." "The Music of Erich Zann" was reprinted in the *London Evening Standard* and also in an anthology, then again in WT. "The Rats in the Walls" was first submitted to *Argosy* in 1923 but was rejected as being too horrible. However, it twice appeared in WT, and in 1931 was included in the British anthology "Not at Night." "The Dunwich Horror" was given a three-star rating by Edward J. O'Brien; the only tale besides "The Colour Out of Space" to be so honored. "The Strange High House in the Mist" was given first class rating in the "O. Henry Memorial Year Book." "In the Vault," "Pickman's Model," and "The Silver Key" were given minor year book mention.

His favorite authors—aside from the Græco-Roman classics and the English poets and essayists of the 18th century—are Poe, Dunsany, Machen, Blackwood, M. R. James, and Walter de la Mare. Of the pulp writers he prefers A. Merritt, E. Hoffman Price, C. L. Moore, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and Frank Belknap Long, Jr. Apart from fantasy, he likes realism in fiction—Balzac, de Maupassant, Zola and Proust, etc; believes the French are better adapted than

we to the reflection of life as a whole; dislikes nearly all Victorian literature and believes that such very recent material as escapes freakishness has more promise than most of the stuff immediately preceding it; regards ultra-modernism mainly as a blind alley; likes conservatism in style and thinks recent prose tends to be slipshod and inartistic. In music—disavowing all genuine classical taste—he unashamedly prefers Victor Herbert, and also likes the old colored “cake walk” songs. In painting he prefers landscapes as subjects. In architecture he favors Georgian and classic types, but feels strongly the charm of the Gothic. He is greatly interested in archæology and anthropology. His principal hobbies are early American architecture and general antiquarianism. His library, only the weird section of which is catalogued, contains over 2000 volumes. This includes a *complete set of Weird Tales*.

He usually does his best work at night and prefers two meals a day on a flexible schedule. He dotes on cheese, chocolate and ice cream, but abhors all sea food; doesn't care for tobacco and has never tasted intoxicating liquor; has great fondness for cats of all kinds, and likes conversation. Letter-writing holds the place of the latter to quite an extent with him, and he has 51 or 52 regular correspondents, with about 25 more as long-term occasionals. Some are of 20 years' standing.

In many of Mr. Lovecraft's tales the cities of “Arkham” and “Kingsport” are much in evidence. These are somewhat modified reflections of Salem and Marblehead, Massachusetts. He has even made a map of the

“imaginary” city of Arkham, marking all the streets, buildings, rivers, bridges and cemeteries so that there will be no chance of a slip-up in locations and landmarks. To us, the readers of his tales, the names “Dunwich,” “Kingsport,” and “Arkham” are synonymous with the sequestered and sometimes decadent towns of old Mass.

Ideas for stories come from almost anywhere—dreams, pictures, another story, a happening on the street—anything. The idea for Frank Belknap Long, Jr.'s tale, “The Horror from the Hills,” came while he and Lovecraft were looking at a reproduction of an elephant-god statuette in the Louvre lately added to Long's collection. Lovecraft exclaimed: “What do you suppose would cause a Chinaman to fall screaming to the floor in front of that statue's original in the Louvre?” That sentence caused the spark and Long wrote the tale.

The length of time taken by Lovecraft to write a story depends largely on the difficulty of the theme. “The Whisperer in Darkness” took about a fortnight, “The Dreams in the Witch-House” took a little less than a week. A story of average length takes about three days.

The idea for “Cassius” was given to Henry S. Whitehead by Lovecraft, and H. S. W. wanted him to collaborate on it. But, of course, he didn't, as his way of developing the tale differed widely from Whitehead's...The idea for the yarn came from seeing an actual case of the undeveloped-twin anomaly in a freak show in New York ...As Lovecraft puts it, “The man in

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BOOK REVIEW

“Horrors” “Terrors”
Collections of Uneasy Tales

published by Philip Allan & Co., Ltd., London, England, at 2s 6d each

These two weird books are among the latest volumes that comprise *The Creeps Series*, a collection of uneasy tales. Each book contains about a dozen tales of horror and fear, exceptionally well written. There are real shivery stories about the fatal experiment of Doctor Fawcett, who tam-

pered with forbidden subjects; the lunatic with a taste for cannibalism; the tragedy of a night of horror spent in a waxwork exhibition; the fulfillment of an age-old curse, etc. Fantasy fans would do well to add this series to their libraries. —J. S.

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question had a little anthropoid excrescence growing out of his abdomen that looked hellishly gruesome when uncovered. Clothed, he looked like any ordinary ‘pot bellied’ individual. He looked so essentially refined and high-grade that I wondered at his willingness to be exploited as a freak, and speculated as to what he would do if a stroke of luck removed him from the need of such an ignominious occupation. The first thing he would do, I argued, would be to have the excrescence cut off—and then and there the idea for the story came. This was in 1924 or 1925. The odd and amazing thing is this: Years afterward—after I had given the idea to Whitehead and was awaiting the appearance of ‘Cas-

sius’—I chanced to mention the matter to my old friend Arthur Leeds of New York, who has had extensive dealing with freaks and other amusement enterprises. Fancy my surprise when he told me that he knows the man well, and that the latter is a person of much education and intelligence. More—that he is interested in everything *weird*, and (believe it or not—it’s the actual truth!) that he is especially fond of *my* work in WT!! Leeds was going to introduce me to him; but something prevented, so the meeting never came off. It certainly would have seemed odd to meet one of my plot-germs in the flesh...the flesh of *two* bodies, or a body and a half, at that!”



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