

LOVECRAFT: 25 YEARS AFTER

by Redd Boggs

Leland Sapiro, a methodical mathematical type, warned me recently that to find anything in my old pocket notebooks -- of which I have a stack tall enough to daunt Tensing Norkey -- I would have to go to the trouble of indexing them. That's quite absurd. I have just been browsing through my old pocket notebooks, and have found all sorts of fascinating jottings totally without the aid of an index. For instance, here is a note that says, "Philippine 20 centavos 1944." How about that, eh, Walter Breen? And here is one that says, "421-1186," another that says "Agfa Memo," and still another that says, "Mar-Lee, Olive & Pico." Shock! Shock! Shock! Will fandom ever be the same after learning these secret data from my private notebooks?

It's true, of course, that occasionally I find a note scrawled here that has been temporarily overlooked, a circumstance that chagrins me so thoroughly that I spend two days folded up in a pull-down bed.

Take this one: "H. P. Lovecraft: 25 Years After." I scribbled that into a notebook I wore in my waistcoat pocket during part of 1960-1, and since 1962 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of HPL's death, I suppose the note was intended to trigger an article that should have appeared many many months ago.

Nevertheless, I see no very good reason why this article cannot be written and published in 1963. All my fans from Abilene to Surbiton are happy to read my keen critical analyses any old time, and the great library of the University of Hawaii stands ready to add Boggs on Lovecraft to its rare book room just as soon as I deign to write my authoritative treatise. I mean, there's really no good reason why I shouldn't write "Lovecraft: 25 Years After" 26

THE LOVECRAFTSMAN

NO. ONE

years after, except that I am 2017 miles from my library and can't recall any Lovecraft to mind except -- pretty vaguely -- his great story "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Who could forget the opening sentence of "The Yellow Wallpaper"? "The yellow wallpaper had long devastated the country."

Possibly, then, it would be best to refrain from any extended literary discussion of Lovecraft in this article and turn, instead, to personal reminiscence. Sort of a "HPL As I Knew Him." The whole trouble is, I didn't know him. At least not very well. I never corresponded with him, and unless he was that drunken pro in the hotel elevator at the Convention in 1949 I never met him. (It seems unlikely, by the way, that he was the drunken pro, though I have never been able to completely identify that person. The drunk told me, anyway, that her name was Ginger. She may have been lying, but I'm sure she was a real pro. Besides, Lovecraft had been dead since 1937.)

Nevertheless, from the very first time I ever heard of Harold Phillips Lovecraft, he took powerful hold of my imagination, and even after 25 years -- all right, 26 years -- I can conjure him up in my mind's eye almost as vividly as Dian Girard in a red dress. Possibly I don't conjure him up quite so often, but what the hell, can't I write an article about HPL rather than Dian anyway? So I am stupid.

Tall, thin, cadaverous -- Lovecraft, not Dian Girard -- goatee beard, porkpie hat, thong sandals, and of course the true bohemian touch: the toga virilis he affected almost as habitually as Gail Knuth wears blue slacks.

Of course the citizens of Milford, Pennsylvania -- his famous address "Ozcot" is now headquarters of the Planned Parenthood clinic -- still whisper that HPL was a nudist at home and in his hunting lodge, "Stormfield," at Sauk City, but this may be a rumor started by D. Bruce Berry.

~~With brown hair having a reddish tint, slender, weighing 97 pounds....~~ Sorry. I was interrupted and forgot who I was writing this article about. That reference to Gail Knuth in the preceding paragraph misled me. But I was really talking about H. P. Lovecraft, wasn't I?

As is well known, HPL weighed not 97 pounds but 237, although in other respects he looked like the other half of Robert Randall. The other half of Robert Randall gone to seed. That is, he weighed 237 pounds till the final days when he toured Baltimore with a political gang voting for Richard Nixon under such pseudonyms as Clark Ashton Derleth, Cambyses Bloch, and J. Belknap Sigafos.

As we all remember, he was discovered in a delirious condition at a Meridene Drive saloon, a bottle of Pepsi-Cola in one hand and a copy of his collection Beyond the Great Oblivion in the other, from which he was reciting the "Tension, Apprehension, and Dissention" passage from his masterpiece, "Born of Man and Woman."

Upon being asked, "Aren't you Ernie McGonish of Strawberry Point Iowa?" Lovecraft is said to have replied, "Hell no. McGonish has a beard." Oh yes, I neglected to mention that in those last days HPL had lost his beard (in a crap game), as well as 121 pounds and his toga, and had begun to look a little like Bjo Trimble or possibly Elmer Perdue. Not that those

people look at all alike, you understand: I'm just a little vague who HPL did resemble. Possibly I mean Walter Breen. Sans beard, of course. Lovecraft's remark now appears on page 673 of Something About Cats, with a long introductory essay by Edmund Wilson.

The odd thing about the whole incident, of course, is that it really was Ernie McGonish of Strawberry Point, Iowa. It develops that two minutes before, Lovecraft himself had left the place in order to make a phone call to his old girl friend, Chris Haycock. He was last seen stepping into a phone booth and nobody ever saw him leave it. You know how long it takes to get a connection with General Telephone sometimes.

Lovecraft's fate may take us another 25 years (or 26 years) to unravel, but meanwhile we have his great masterpieces to read, so we shouldn't feel too downhearted, should we? No, we should get right at it, in hopes of being able to struggle through "At the Mountains of Madness" by 1987, so that an essay called "Lovecraft: 50 Years After" may be written without undue delay.

My theory is that he is still in that phone booth, talking with Chris Haycock. Has anybody seen Chris Haycock lately? Well, then.

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