

THE
DUNWICH
HORROR

HOWARD PHILLIPS
LOVECRAFT
illustrated by
SANTIAGO CARUSO

H. P. LOVECRAFT
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AGUIJÓN DE LA NOCHE

EXCERPTS

of Lovecraft's travel impressions



“Another time we visited Westminster, where I spent the summer of 1899 with my mother, & which I remembered in all its details though I had not seen it in all the intervening thirty years. Finally I decided to conclude my two months of varied wandering, & had Cook bring me down to Providence in his car—traversing the territory described in my *Dunwich Horror*.”

from a letter to Elizabeth Toldridge (May 1929)

“On the towns of the lower coast the blight of mutation and modernity has descended. Weird metamorphoses and excrescences, architectural and topographical, mark a menacing tyranny of mechanism and vicerealty of engineering which are fast hurrying the present scene out of all linkage with its historic antecedents and setting it adrift anchorless and all but traditionless in alien oceans. Swart foreign forms, heirs to moods and impulses antipodal to those which moulded our heritage, surge in endless streams along smoke-clouded and lamp-dazzled streets; moving to strange measures and inculcating strange customs. All through the nearer countryside the stigmata of change are spreading. Reservoirs, billboards, and concrete roads, power lines, garages, and flamboyant inns, squalid immigrant nests and grimy mill villages; these things and things like them have brought ugliness, tawdriness, and commonplaceness to the urban penumbra. Only in the remoter backwoods can one find the pristine and ancestral beauty which was southern New-England's”

from Vermont -A First Impression (1927)

“Regarding the settings for tales—I try to be as realistic as possible. The crumbling old towns with winding alleys & houses 100 to 250 or more years old are realities on the New England coast. Providence has in number of houses dating back to 1750 & thereabouts—the one I live in was built 130 years ago. Boston’s oldest house dates from 1676; Hliverhill has one built in 1640, & so on. My fabulous “Kingsport” is a sort of idealised version of Marblehead, Mass.—while my “Arkham” is more or less derived from Salem—though Salem has no college. “Innsmouth” is a considerably twisted version of Newburyport, Mass. I hope you can see some of these old towns some time—they are my principal hobby.”

from a letter to Emil Petaja (December 1934)

“I am perfectly confident that I could never adequately convey to any other human being the precise reasons why I continue to refrain from suicide—the reasons, that is, why I still find existence enough of a compensation to atone for its dominantly burthensome quality. These reasons are strongly linked with architecture, scenery, and lighting and atmospheric effects, and take the form of vague impressions of adventurous expectancy coupled with elusive memory—impressions that certain vistas, particularly those associated with sunsets, are avenues of approach to spheres or conditions of wholly undefined delights and freedoms which I have known in the past and have a slender possibility of knowing again in the future.”

from a letter to August Derleth (December 1930)

EDITOR’S NOTE

The previous selection of fragments tries to evidence the devotion—and aversion—that Lovecraft had for some cities, towns and provincial villages. During his multiple travels over the region of Massachusetts (1920-1936) in search of ancient chapitels, architectural testimonies of the colonial times, he poured a lot of his impressions in letters, essays and travelogs.

From these, an attentive reader will note how fascinating is the relation between the real landscapes and buildings with his imagined land along the Miskatonic River: *Kingsport*, a transposition of Marblehead; Wilbraham, where he visited Edith Minter in June 1928, incorporated into the topography of *Dunwich*; *Innsmouth*, based on his impressions of Newburyport, which he had visited in 1923 and 1931; and Salem, always associated with Cotton Mather and the witch-hunt, was the model for its most notorious city: *Arkham*.

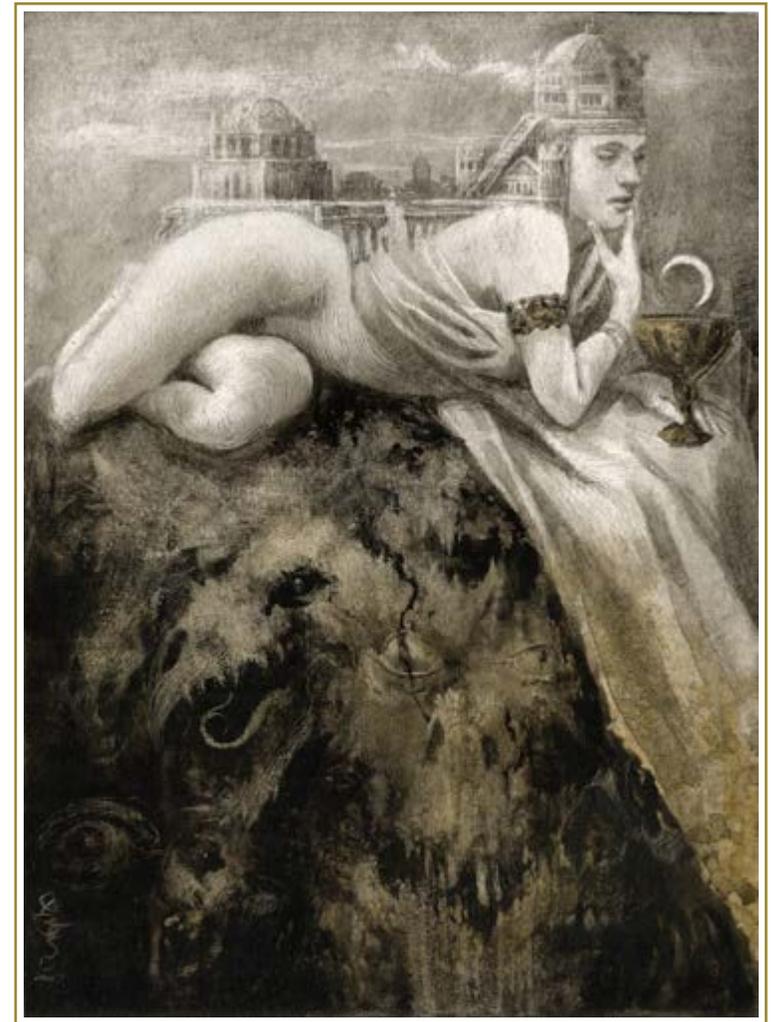
A gloomy horizon connects them all.

However, it is Providence, where he wrote and dreamt it all, what remains forever as an *interregnum* between reality and fiction.

This volume altogether with “*Arkham Horizons*” compose the whole picture of the so called *Lovecraft Country*.

«Gorgons and Hydras and Chimaeras, dire stories of Celaeno and the Harpies, may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition, *but they were there before*. They are transcripts, *types*—the archetypes are in us, and eternal. How else should the recital of that which we know in a waking sense to be false come to affect us all? Is it that we naturally conceive terror from such objects, considered in their capacity of being able to inflict upon us bodily injury? O, least of all! *These terrors are of older standing. They date beyond body*—or without the body, they would have been the same... That the kind of fear here treated is purely spiritual, that it is strong in proportion as it is objectless on earth, that it predominates in the period of our sinless infancy... are difficulties the solution of which might afford some probable insight into our ante mundane condition, and a peep at least into the shadowland of pre-existence.»

Charles Lamb, *Witches and Other Night-Fears*





THE DUNWICH HORROR

I

WHEN A TRAVELLER IN NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS takes the wrong fork at the junction of the Aylesbury pike just beyond Dean's Corners he comes upon a lonely and curious country. The ground gets higher, and the brier-bordered stone walls press closer and closer against the ruts of the dusty, curving road. The trees of the frequent forest belts seem too large, and the wild weeds, brambles, and grasses attain a luxuriance not often found in settled regions. At the same time the planted fields appear singularly few and barren; while the sparsely scattered houses wear a surprisingly uniform aspect of age, squalor, and dilapidation. Without knowing why, one hesitates to ask directions from the gnarled, solitary figures spied now and then on crumbling doorsteps or on the sloping, rock-strown meadows. Those figures are so silent and furtive that one feels somehow confronted by forbidden things, with which it would be better to have nothing to do. When a rise in the road brings the mountains in view above the deep woods, the feeling of strange uneasiness is increased.

The summits are too rounded and symmetrical to give a sense of comfort and naturalness, and sometimes the sky silhouettes with especial clearness the queer circles of tall stone pillars with which most of them are crowned.

Gorges and ravines of problematical depth intersect the way, and the crude wooden bridges always seem of dubious safety. When the road dips again there are stretches of marshland that one instinctively dislikes, and indeed almost fears at evening when unseen whippoor-wills chatter and the fireflies come out in abnormal profusion to dance to the raucous, creepily insistent rhythms of stridently piping bull-frogs. The thin, shining line of the Miskatonic's upper reaches has an oddly serpent-like suggestion as it winds close to the feet of the domed hills among which it rises.

As the hills draw nearer, one heeds their wooded sides more than their stone crowned tops. Those sides loom up so darkly and precipitously that one wishes they would keep their distance, but there is no road by which to escape them. Across a covered bridge one sees a small village huddled between the stream and the vertical slope of Round Mountain, and wonders at the cluster of rotting gambrel roofs bespeaking an earlier architectural period than that of the neighboring region. It is not reassuring to see, on a closer glance, that most of the houses are deserted and falling to ruin, and that the broken-steepled church now harbors the one slovenly mercantile establishment of the hamlet. One dreads to trust the tenebrous tunnel of the bridge, yet there is no way to avoid it. Once across, it is hard to prevent the impression of a faint, malign odor about the village street, as of the massed mould and decay of centuries. It is always a relief to get clear of the place, and to follow the narrow road around the base of the hills and across the level country beyond till it rejoins the Aylesbury pike. Afterwards one sometimes learns that one has been through Dunwich.

Outsiders visit Dunwich as seldom as possible, and since a certain season of horror all the signboards pointing towards it have been taken down. The scenery, judged by an ordinary aesthetic canon, is more than commonly beautiful; yet there is no influx of artists or summer tourists.

Two centuries ago, when talk of witch-blood, Satan-worship, and strange forest presences was not laughed at, it was the custom to give reasons for avoiding the locality. In our sensible age—since the Dunwich horror of 1928 was hushed up by those who had the town's and the world's welfare at heart—people shun it without knowing exactly why. Perhaps one reason—though it cannot apply to uninformed strangers—is that the natives are now repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New England backwaters. They have come to form a race by themselves, with the well defined mental and physical stigmata of degeneracy and inbreeding. The average of their intelligence is woefully low, whilst their annals reek of overt viciousness and of half-hidden murders, incests, and deeds of almost unnameable violence and perversity. The old gentry, representing the two or three armigerous families which came from Salem in 1692, have kept somewhat above the general level of decay; though many branches are sunk into the sordid populace so deeply that only their names remain as a key to the origin they disgrace. Some of the Whateleys and Bishops still send their eldest sons to Harvard and Miskatonic, though those sons seldom return to the mouldering gambrel roofs under which they and their ancestors were born.

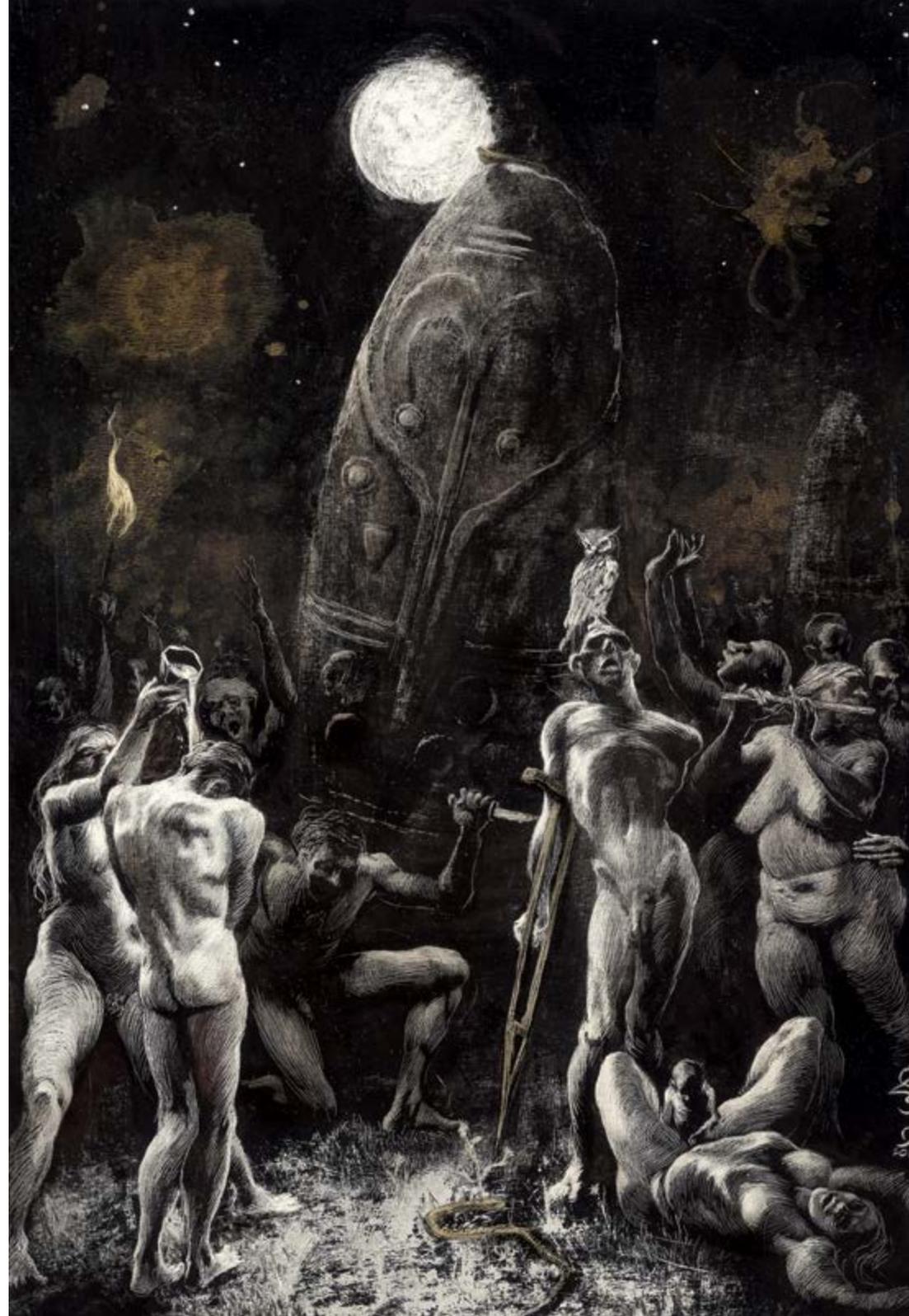
No one, even those who have the facts concerning the recent horror, can say just what is the matter with Dunwich; though old legends speak of unhallowed rites and conclaves of the Indians, amidst which they called forbidden shapes of shadow out of the great rounded hills, and made wild

orgiastic prayers that were answered by loud crackings and rumblings from the ground below. In 1747 the Reverend Abijah Hoadley, newly come to the Congregational Church at Dunwich Village, preached a memorable sermon on the close presence of Satan and his imps; in which he said:

“It must be allow’d, that these Blasphemies of an infernall Train of Daemons are Matters of too common Knowledge to be deny’d; the cursed Voices of Azazel and Buzrael, of Beelzebub and Belial, being heard now from under Ground by above a Score of credible Witnesses now living. I myself did not more than a Fortnight ago catch a very plain Discourse of evill Powers in the Hill behind my House; wherein there were a Rattling and Rolling, Groaning, Screeching, and Hissing, such as no Things of this Earth could raise up, and which must needs have come from those Caves that only black Magick can discover, and only the Divell unlock.”

Mr. Hoadley disappeared soon after delivering this sermon, but the text, printed in Springfield, is still extant. Noises in the hills continued to be reported from year to year, and still form a puzzle to geologists and physiographers.

Other traditions tell of foul odors near the hill-crowning circles of stone pillars, and of rushing airy presences to be heard faintly at certain hours from stated points at the bottom of the great ravines; while still others try to explain the Devil’s Hop Yard—a bleak, blasted hillside where no tree, shrub, or grass blade will grow. Then, too, the natives are mortally afraid of the numerous whippoorwills which grow vocal on warm nights. It is vowed that the birds are psychopomps lying in wait for the souls of the dying, and that they time their eerie cries in unison with the sufferer’s struggling breath. If they can catch the fleeing soul when it leaves the body, they instantly flutter away chittering in daemonic laughter; but if they fail, they subside gradually into a disappointed silence.



These tales, of course, are obsolete and ridiculous; because they come down from very old times. Dunwich is indeed ridiculously old—older by far than any of the communities within thirty miles of it. South of the village one may still spy the cellar walls and chimney of the ancient Bishop house, which was built before 1700; whilst the ruins of the mill at the falls, built in 1806, form the most modern piece of architecture to be seen. Industry did not flourish here, and the nineteenth-century factory movement proved short-lived. Oldest of all are the great rings of rough-hewn stone columns on the hilltops, but these are more generally attributed to the Indians than to the settlers. Deposits of skulls and bones, found within these circles and around the sizeable table like rock on Sentinel Hill, sustain the popular belief that such spots were once the burial-places of the Pocumtucks; even though many ethnologists, disregarding the absurd improbability of such a theory, persist in believing the remains Caucasian.

II

It was in the township of Dunwich, in a large and partly inhabited farmhouse set against a hillside four miles from the village and a mile and a half from any other dwelling, that Wilbur Whateley was born at 5 a.m. on Sunday, the second of February, 1913. This date was recalled because it was Candlemas, which people in Dunwich curiously observe under another name; and because the noises in the hills had sounded, and all the dogs of the countryside had barked persistently, throughout the night before. Less worthy of notice was the fact that the mother was one of the decadent Whateleys, a somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of thirty-five, living with an aged and half-insane father about whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth.

Lavinia Whateley had no known husband, but according to the custom of the region made no attempt to disavow the child; concerning the other side of whose ancestry the country folk might—and did—speculate as widely as they chose. On the contrary, she seemed strangely proud of the dark, goatish-looking infant who formed such a contrast to her own sickly and pink-eyed albinism, and was heard to mutter many curious prophecies about its unusual powers and tremendous future.