Lovecraft, H. P. (Howard Philips) (1890-1937)

H. P. Lovecraft was an American pulp author in the 1920s and 1930s. His work, primarily published in the magazine *Weird Tales*, helped create the genre of weird fiction, which combined science fiction, fantasy, and horror. His stories and novels construct an elaborate fictional cosmology, opening up new possibilities for pulp writers. He maintained an active correspondence with fans and other pulp writers. By the time of his death in 1937, Lovecraft had accumulated a substantial archive of manuscripts that were published posthumously.

**Early Life**

Lovecraft was born in Providence, Rhode Island, where he lived for much of his life and set many of his stories. His formal schooling was sporadic, and he never received a high school diploma. Much of his education resulted from his independent reading in his family’s library. Edgar Allan Poe and Lord Dunsany were particular favorites. In 1913, Lovecraft wrote a letter to the pulp magazine *The Argosy* critiquing the work of a regular contributor. The ensuing exchange in *The Argosy*’s letter pages brought Lovecraft to the attention of the United Amateur Press Association, which invited him to join their organization. Amateur journalism served as Lovecraft’s apprenticeship for the following decade.

Lovecraft published fiction in amateur publications like *The United Amateur*, *The Tryout*, and *Home Brew.* His first professional story, “Dagon,” appeared in the October 1923 issue of *Weird Tales*, edited by Edwin Baird. A year later Farnsworth Wright became the editor of *Weird Tales* and he made Lovecraft a core author for the magazine. In addition to publishing fiction and poetry in *Weird Tales*, Lovecraft worked as a ghostwriter for many other *Weird Tales* writers, including Harry Houdini.

**The New York Years**

In 1924 Lovecraft married Sonia Haft Green and moved to Brooklyn. The couple’s marriage was marked by economic hardship. Lovecraft’s disgust for New York City is apparent in his writing from this period, such as “The Horror at Red Hook.” His correspondence and fiction from this period is rife with virulent racism. Lovecraft’s revulsion for the city and its inhabitants is related to his larger distaste for modernity, which he saw reflected in the works of high modernists like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein. Although he recognized a critical response to modernity in the works of these authors, he held them in little esteem. By 1926 Lovecraft and his wife separated and he returned to Providence; they divorced in 1929.

**The Major Period**

1926 also marks the beginning of Lovecraft’s most significant years as a writer. In these years he produced stories, novels, and travel writing focused on New England, while remaining an active correspondent. In stories like “The Color Out of Space,” published in *Amazing Stories* in 1927; “The Call of Cthulu,” published in *Weird Tales* in 1928; and “The Shadow Out of Time,” published in *Astounding Stories* in 1936, Lovecraft developed a complex fictional mythology based around The Old Ones, a group of monstrous aliens with powers that border on the divine.

Lovecraft’s characters often learn about The Old Ones by reading fictional occult texts, including his most famous creation *The Necronomicon*. Lovecraft shared his mythology with other *Weird Tales* writers with whom he corresponded regularly, meaning that a pulp reader might encounter references to his creations in the work of Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert Bloch and vice versa. Although Lovecraft’s novel *In the Mountains of Madness* was serialized in *Astounding Stories* in 1936, he died without seeing a book-length publication of his work.

**Afterlife and Influence**

After Lovecraft’s death, two of his former correspondents, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, founded Arkham House Publishers to provide an outlet for Lovecraft’s work. Derleth also took it upon himself to complete many of Lovecraft’s unfinished works. Lovecraft’s posthumous productivity attracted the notice of Edmund Wilson, who scathingly dismissed both the author and his fans. In the ensuing years writers ranging from Stephen King to Joyce Carol Oates have cited Lovecraft as an influence.

**Biographical and Autobiographical Texts**

Lovecraft, H. P., *Lord of a Visible World: An Autobiography in Letters*, eds. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000)

Joshi, S. T., *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H. P. Lovecraft in His Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2001)

**Recommended Editions of Lovecraft’s Work**

*Tales*, ed. Peter Straub (New York: Library of America, 2005). (The most reliable collection of Lovecraft’s fiction)

*Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1995). (Collects Lovecraft’s amateur writing and literary essays)

**Letters**

*Selected Letters*, eds. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, five volumes (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1968)