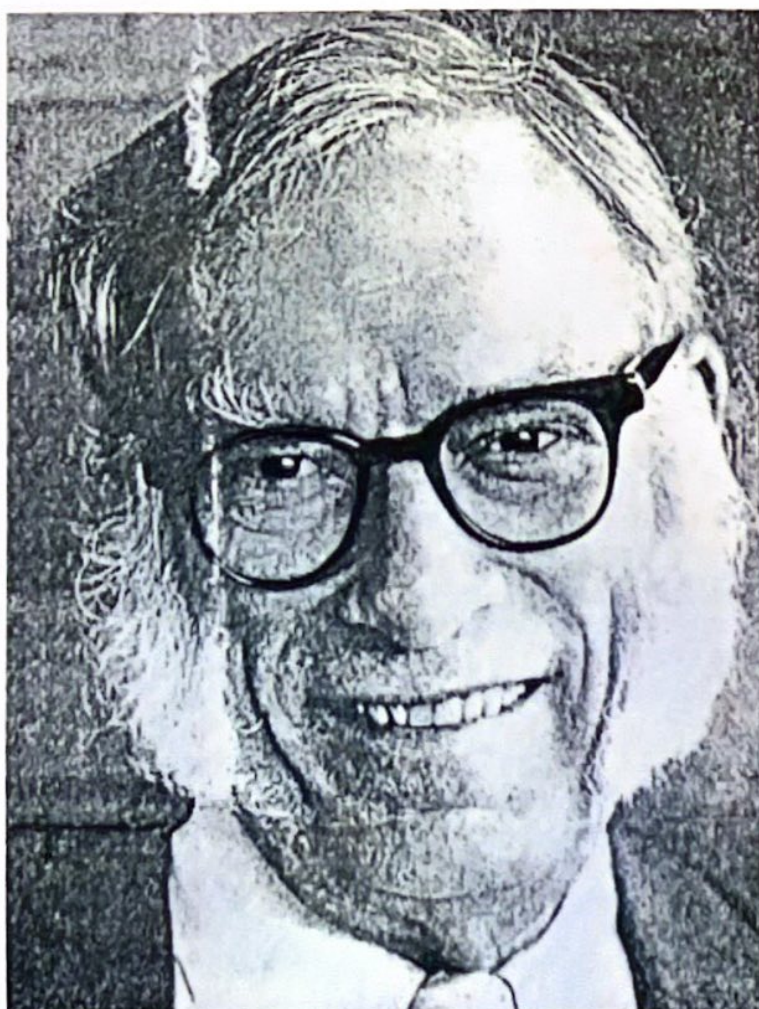


# FANTASY COMMENTATOR



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# FANTASY COMMENTATOR

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This is the forty-fourth number of *Fantasy Commentator*, a journal devoted to articles, reviews and verse in the areas of science-fiction and fantasy, published semi-annually. Subscription rates: \$5 per copy, six issues for \$25, postpaid in the United States; foreign postage 50¢ per copy extra. All opinions expressed herein are the individual contributors' own, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or the staff. Material is accepted subject to editorial revision if necessary. Unless correspondents request otherwise, communications of general interest may be excerpted for inclusion in the column of letters, "Open House."

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# "THE CALL OF CTHULHU":

## An Analysis

*John McInnis*

### I

#### AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE ON SOME PRECEPTORS

In my earlier article, "Father Images in Lovecraft's 'Hypnos,'" I posed and supported the hypothesis that some of this writer's stories were, at least in part, coded narratives of unconsciously remembered childhood experiences. Here I examine another of his tales, which also seems describable in this way. "The Call of Cthulhu" contains as well disguised memories of the adult Lovecraft. They are most clearly apparent in the name and personality of the investigator and authority figure in the story, Professor George Gammell Angell of Brown University.

This fictional character seems modelled after a well-known Providence academic of the last century, William Gammell (1812-1889), who also taught at Brown University. Professor Gammell won deep respect and even veneration from students, colleagues and acquaintances alike. So beloved was he that a memoir honoring him, edited by James O. Murray, a friend and colleague at Princeton University, was published the year after his death.<sup>1†</sup> It seems very likely that Lovecraft, who was familiar with and interested in Providence history, would have known him by repute, and may well also have read this memoir.

William Gammell, born and bred for academic life, was a perfect inspiration for Lovecraft's fictional scholar. He was associated with Brown as a student (1827-1831), tutor and lecturer of Latin literature (1833-1835), assistant professor and professor of Belles Lettres (1835-1851),<sup>2</sup> and professor of history (1851-1864).<sup>3</sup> He joined the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1844, and assumed its presidency in 1882.<sup>4</sup> In addition he held other prestigious positions, including trustee of the Brown University Corporation,<sup>5</sup> trustee of the Butler Hospital for the Insane,<sup>6</sup> trustee of the Rhode Island Hospital,<sup>7</sup> president of the Providence Athenaeum<sup>8</sup> and president of the Rhode Island Bible Society.<sup>9</sup>

Professor Gammell's intellectual and moral leadership was recognized by his students, in many of whose careers he took a personal interest. Several of these proteges, who became lifelong intellectual and social intimates, wrote letters to Professor Murray, some of which were included in the Gammell memorial volume. Two of these valedictories were from favorite pupils who became especially close friends: the Reverend George P. Fisher, D.D. (Brown class of 1847), Professor of Church History at Yale University; and James B. Angell, L.L.D. (Brown class of 1849), president of Michigan University.<sup>10</sup> Page twenty of the memorial volume, which is given over to communications from former students, begins with the concluding lines of Professor Fisher's letter and ends with an excerpt from Dr. Angell's.

The mental and spiritual kinship of these men, impressed upon Lovecraft's mind, could have led him to blend their names into the name of his imaginary Brown University Professor of Semitic Languages. The "George" of Professor Fisher's given name and Dr. James Angell's surname complete both the Gammell name and personality. (It is also conceivable that the choice was a fully conscious one, just as Lovecraft purposely utilized as a locale in part III of this story the actual

\**Fantasy Commentator VII*, 41 (1990).

†Notes for this article begin on page 280.

Paterson, New Jersey museum of which his mineralogist friend, James F. Morton, was the curator.)

James Angell likewise influenced Lovecraft directly through *The Reminiscences of James Burrill Angell*, published in 1911. (We can say this with certainty because a copy of that book is known to have been in Lovecraft's library.) The first two pages reveal Angell's Rhode Island ancestry and a close connection with Rhode Island's founder, Roger Williams: "I am a lineal descendant, of the seventh generation, from Thomas Angell, who, an Englishman by birth, came, in 1631, to Massachusetts with Roger Williams, and, in 1636, accompanied Williams when the latter settled on the spot to which he gave the name of Providence."<sup>11</sup> Thomas Angell took a parcel of land at Providence where Angell Street (on which Lovecraft once resided) is located,<sup>12</sup> probably giving that thoroughfare its name.

Lovecraft's maternal ancestors were also intimately identified with Rhode Island, both in reality (for the Phillips line came to Massachusetts at about the time Williams did) and in the mind of the writer:

The Phillips line here begins with the Reverend (George) Phillips, son of Christopher Phillips, Gent., of Rainham, St. Martins in Norfolk, who came on the *Arabella* in 1630 and settled in Watertown, Massachusetts.<sup>13</sup>

My ancestry was immediately rural on the maternal side—with the spacious valleys and ancient ways of western Rhode Island behind it, and with the country echoed and re-echoed in the tales of my grandfather [Whipple V. Phillips] and mother [Susan Phillips Lovecraft]—and on the paternal side, behind two generations of New York state urbanizing, there was the tradition of the Old English countryside.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Roger Williams' foremost friend while at Plymouth was Edward Winslow, who became governor there in 1633, and who was a lineal ancestor of Lovecraft's uncle, Dr. Franklin Clark.<sup>15</sup>

Further identification with the freethinking Roger Williams may have come from Lovecraft's early (and unfortunate) placement in a children's Baptist Sunday School class. His skepticism of the Puritanical doctrines he encountered there caused him to declare to his family that he was a Roman pagan. In 1915 he stated that his beliefs wavered between pantheism and rationalism. "I am a sort of agnostic, neither affirming nor denying anything," he once wrote.<sup>16</sup>

Although Lovecraft did not subscribe to any religious doctrine, he felt that the American Protestant tradition had much to recommend it, and that at its best its spirit represented that freedom of thought for which Roger Williams stood: "... Williams called himself simply a 'seeker,' and would be bound by no creed."<sup>17</sup> His founding of Rhode Island was thus to Lovecraft a kind of spiritual epic, much as was Aeneas' founding of Rome (but with the added impetus of actuality). Lovecraft identified strongly with this early preceptor, who may even have become something of a liberating father-figure because of Lovecraft's early loss of his own father and his early engulfment by the Yankee Puritanism of his mother and the rest of the Phillips family.<sup>18</sup>

Surrounded by his family's drab old Puritan behaviors and values, Lovecraft turned toward an ethical rationalism reminiscent of the philosophers of his beloved ancient Rome—Democritus and Lucretius.<sup>19</sup> He used rational materialism to emancipate himself from the "environmental tyranny" he saw around him, and his interest in Roger Williams and the founding and development of Rhode Island culture helped serve this purpose:

What I really am, is a growth of the soil. My instincts were formed by the functioning of a certain line of germ-plasma through a certain set of geographical and social environing conditions. . . . The emancipation of my consciousness has left my emotions all the freer to follow the ancient patterns without supervision. Without question, my deepest, instinct-

lvo personality belongs to early America in unbroken continuity.<sup>20</sup>

Lovecraft not only traced the Phillips ancestry back to the early seventeenth century, but showed its genealogical connections—and hence his own—with prominent families of Providence.<sup>21</sup> This identification with early Rhode Island and its founder gave him a kind of "hereditary memory" of the state's history: "The old families and the old ideas still dominate, and there are little ways and customs on every hand which attest an unbroken evolution from colonial times, and an absolutely vital identity with the Gothic town of Roger Williams and the Georgian town of Stephen Hopkins."<sup>22</sup> It was thus easy for Lovecraft to think of his preceptors—e. g., Williams, Hopkins, Angell and Gammell—as actual members of his family, because this embraced the entire colony of Rhode Island: "In truth, the old R. I. stock is perhaps more thoroughly intermarried than that of any other region outside the decadent Tennessee hills. R. I. was more a *family* than a *colony*."<sup>23</sup>

Something of the day-to-day history of this "family" was written by William Goddard, the founder and editor of *The Providence Gazette*, "whose kinsfolk were found throughout Rhode Island colony."<sup>24</sup> This same William Goddard married Abigail Angell, thus grafting her family to his own. The two had a child, William Giles Goddard, who preceded William Gammell as Professor of Belles Lettres at Brown University.<sup>25</sup>

Professor Gammell may well have been an inspiration to Lovecraft's writing style as well as to his study of Rhode Island history. Jared Sparks, then McLesse Professor of Ancient and Modern History at Harvard, asked Gammell to contribute two memoirs to *The Library of American Biography*, which he was then editing. Gammell "entered at once with zest into the undertaking, and his memoir of Roger Williams appeared in 1845. . . ." <sup>26</sup> Both historically and rhetorically, this biography would have been a wonderful example for Lovecraft, who had two separate but linked literary goals, "a liking for well-modeled expression in the traditional manner for its own sake, and a wish to get on paper some of the images and impressions constantly running through my mind."<sup>27</sup>

The conscious, Puritan-influenced "mother-family" part of Lovecraft's mind is the trained, consciously intellectual side that takes the form of Professor George Gammell Angell in "The Call of Cthulhu." The task of the Professor Angell-intellect is to find and understand the interplay of raw emotions—most notably the English father half, the germ-plasmic form of Cthulhu that waits in the depths.

## II

### THE SEARCH FOR THE OTHER HALF

Being highly imaginative, and sensitive to the archaic influences of this old town with its narrow hill streets and glamorous Colonial doorways, I conceived the childish froak of transporting myself altogether into the past. . . .

—H. P. Lovecraft<sup>28</sup>

A child's watching a man become a monster is a traumatic experience which nightmares are made of—but how much more horrible if that man-into-monster metamorphosis be made by the child's own beloved father? Such was the fate of Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937), the American writer of horror stories, whose father, Winfield Scott Lovecraft, died of general paresis at the age of 44 when his son was but a seven-year-old child. Otherwise known as dementia paralytica, or general paralysis of the insane, this terrible disease results in a chronic degeneration of the nervous system; in time, the condition completely destroys the personality of the patient. Both mental and physical symptoms appear as the disease (here untreated) moves inevitably towards the extinction of consciousness and finally to the death of the patient. Winfield Lovecraft was committed to Butler Hospital in Providence by family physician George D. Wilcox and Annie W. Hunt on April 25, 1893, and he died there on July 19, 1898.<sup>29</sup>

Some symptoms associated with general paresis appear clearly in descriptions of the monster Cthulhu in "The Call of Cthulhu," written in 1926. Cthulhu seems (as statue and in real life at the story's end) to be the delineation of Lovecraft's father during the time when the latter was confined to the house at 454 Angell Street and later in Butler Hospital—a nightmare past that was screened from the consciousness of the author.

When Lovecraft wrote in a letter to Reinhardt Kleiner on November 16, 1916 that his father "was seized with a complete paralysis resulting from a brain overtaxed with study and business cares,"<sup>30</sup> he was unknowingly describing early symptoms of his father's actual illness. "The introduction of paresis frequently presents symptoms of nervous exhaustion which can be traced to some stress or worry," writes Dr. Emil Kraepelin in his monograph *General Paresis*.<sup>31</sup> Lovecraft had no conscious awareness of other symptoms incorporated in the story, because his letter to Maurice W. Moe of January 1, 1915 states that after his father's admission to Butler Hospital he "was never afterward conscious, and my image of him is but vague."<sup>32</sup> These symptoms must come, as Lovecraft wrote concerning the character Wilcox, from "a subconscious residuum . . . that . . . had influenced his art profoundly."<sup>33</sup>

When the family had Winfield Lovecraft committed to Butler Hospital they reported that he had uninterruptedly "been engaged in business for several years and for the last two years . . . worked very hard."<sup>34</sup> Yet the Butler medical record suggests strange behavior during his pre-commitment period. For about a year he had "shown obscure symptoms of mental disease—doing and saying strange things."<sup>35</sup>

Dr. George Darling Wilcox, who signed the certificate of commitment (and whose last name, significantly, is given by Lovecraft to the young artist in the story) had practiced medicine in Providence since his 1849 graduation from the New York University School of Medicine. He had studied in Europe (Leipzig, Vienna and London) to sharpen his skills, so that, as the July 24, 1897 *Providence Journal* remarks, his "reputation was more than local." (In "The Call of Cthulhu" Dr. Wilcox becomes Dr. Tobey, and his office is moved from Washington Street to Thayer Street. But even as he changes the name, Lovecraft cannot resist being his truthful self, for "Dr. Tobey" echoes Providence practitioner Samuel Boyd Tobey, trustee of Butler Hospital from 1850 to his death in 1867.<sup>36</sup>) Dr. Wilcox had no doubt attended Winfield Lovecraft prior to his commitment, but his discretion is shown by the hospital's failure to record any explicit precommitment history.

His relationship to the Phillips family was probably benignly authoritarian. The typical physician of that generation "saw his patients often and knew their lives well."<sup>37</sup> "The usual procedure of a doctor when he reached the patient's house was to greet the grandmother and aunts effusively and pat all the kids on the head before approaching the bedside."<sup>38</sup> In fact, the famous New York neurologist S. Weir Mitchell compared the physician treating nervous patients to a priest hearing confession.<sup>39</sup> Clothed with authority as they were, these Victorian Age physicians emphasized fear rather than hope, teaching members of the family to avoid the fate of any deviantly-behaving patient in order to avoid ostracism by the Puritanical society of that day:

On the grounds that eccentricity approached insanity, physicians were warned against any course that departed from "average" or "normal" behavior, and recommended that children be taught to "avoid eccentricity and not to defy the requirements of custom without some very excellent reason."<sup>40</sup>

Medical practitioners of that day had very little to do with hospitals, mental or otherwise, which were then "places of dreaded impurity and exiled human wreckage."<sup>41</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, hospitals had degenerated into little more than "custodial warehouses"<sup>42</sup> that tended the sick rather than worked for their care. Thus "...the idea of confining the sick or helpless members of one's family to an institution was far from being a popular one, particu-

larly among the more 'respectable' elements of society."<sup>43</sup> Whipple Phillips was certainly of the "respectable" social stratum, being high in Masonic circles and a well-known Republican in the state's economic and political circles, and he avoided commitment of his son-in-law as long as he could by using Dr. Wilcox to maintain a belated familial homeostasis.

Sequestration at Angell Street would inevitably have given young Howard a close look at what went on, experiences that appear in coded form in his later fiction. Like "The Nameless City," "Hypnos," "From Beyond" and "The Colour out of Space," "The Call of Cthulhu" records submerged memories of Lovecraft's father-son relationship.

The central character in this familial drama is Cthulhu himself, together with all the Anglo-Saxondom in the child's mind for which his father and other ascendants stood. Lovecraft could "just recall," he wrote, his father's "extremely precise and cultivated British voice, and his immaculate black morning-coat and vest, ascot tie, and striped black trousers," and in his youth "resented being called anything but an Englishman."<sup>44</sup> So strongly did Lovecraft identify himself with his paternal Englishness that he felt abandoned when his father was stricken; "...after that I was brought up in the utter and engulfing midst of a typical old Rhode Island family . . . who have not any link beyond the sea of a later date than 1658...."<sup>45</sup>

For familial reinforcement, Lovecraft had to look back to earlier British antecedents. These he found in the genealogical records of his paternal great aunt Sarah Allgood, which he copied in 1905.<sup>46</sup> They took him back to the heraldry of his forbears in 1500, when "a Thomas Lovecraft (note the spelling) bore as arms a chevron *or* on a field *vert*."<sup>47</sup> He was even able to trace his lineage back into pre-conquest times for an oblique family connection in the period of Edward the Confessor.<sup>48</sup> This, he felt, encompassed "the bulk of the germ-plasm that made up [his] paternal half."<sup>49</sup> All that became blended into an even larger group of images of English countryside settings. "My memory," he wrote, is "full of ancestral images of Old England's hedged fields and willowed brooks, village steeples and Abbey chimes."<sup>50</sup>

Such are the visions that sustained Lovecraft's Anglo-Saxon mindset as he grew up, and which remained with him all his life. In 1931 he wrote:

Nor can I say that any major change has ever taken place in my emotions. As I was then, so am I today. All my deep emotional loyalties are with the race and the empire rather than with the American branch—and if anything, this Old Englandism is about to become intensified as America becomes more and more mechanised, standardised and vulgarised—farther and farther removed from the original Anglo-Saxon stream which I represent. I could very well use Rupert Brooke's famous lines . . . . "If I should die, think only this of me; that there's some corner of a foreign field that is for ever ENGLAND."<sup>51</sup>

Lovecraft's English self felt encircled and endangered by Yankee influences, and he redoubled his efforts to identify with the very milieu that had deserted him through illness and death. "In America," he wrote, "the Lovecraft line made some effort to keep from being Yankeeized—and here for the first time we see an influence which may have directly affected me. Here, almost without a doubt, stems my lifelong Toryism."<sup>52</sup> But because he represses most of the memories of his father, the strength and individuality of his Toryism become to him a tantalizing mystery:

According to all accepted rules, I ought to be as Yankeeified as any person living—for I was out of touch with any line other than Yankee, and a purely English line domiciled in New York state since 1827 is hardly bizarre or different enough to give a small child any great feeling of half-alienage. That is, by ordinary reckoning. And yet it did . . . . and how!"<sup>53</sup>

This familial mystery might be explained by the fact that the child Lovecraft was caught enthralled but repelled by his handsome parent's strange behavior. A child's

natural reaction to a stone-still father is to try to arouse him, to bring him back into the realm of family experience and precision to which he is accustomed. But the child's attempts fail, and the father is estranged. As an adult, H. P. Lovecraft may have noted an entry in *Black's Law Dictionary* (1891) which echoed the situation: "Uncuth. In Saxon law, unknown, a stranger. A person entertained in the house of another was, on the first night of entertainment, so called."<sup>54</sup> In his studies of Anglo-Saxon history he found a name—a noun, even—for his estranged father in the *Laws of Edward the Confessor*. Another statute of this code is:

Twa night guest. In Saxon law, a guest on the second night. By the laws of Edward the Confessor it was provided that a man who lodged at an inn, or at the house of another, should be considered, on the first night of his being there, a stranger (uncuth); on the second night, a guest; on the third night a member of the family. This had reference to the responsibility of the host or entertainer for offences committed by the guest.<sup>55</sup>

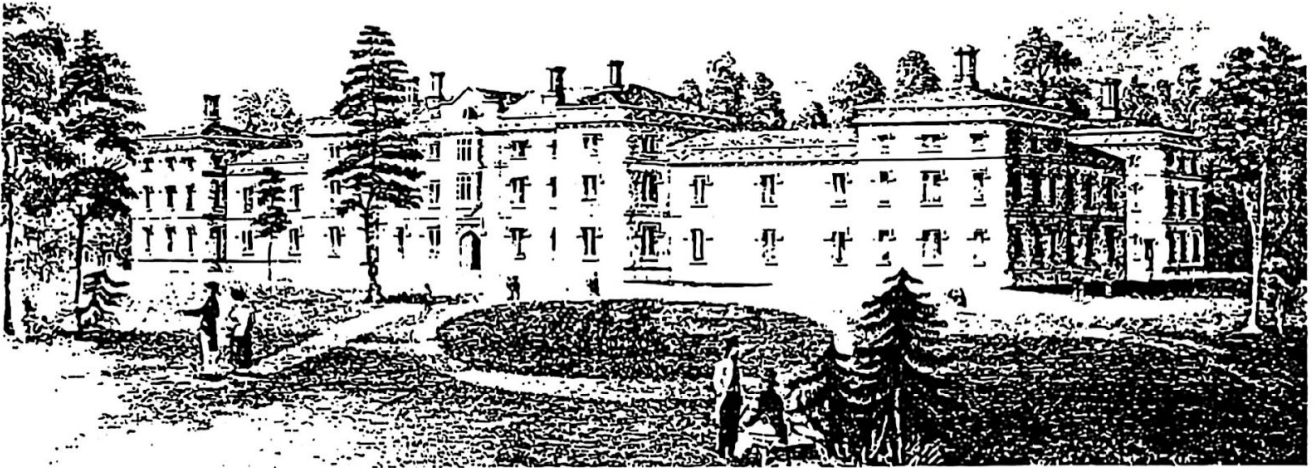
Winfield Lovecraft's increasingly aberrant behavior removed him from his former intimate position with his son, and the latter's repeated exclamation, "Papa, you look just like a young man!"<sup>56</sup> did not alter this process. The episode did, however, give Lovecraft's scholarly reading a basis that would grow into the monster-god Cthulhu, whose physical form was initially derived from the seated, immaculately dressed father whom the son tried to awaken. The name itself, which may be decoded by transposing its first "u," is a brilliant ciphering of the words "cuth," l(ovecraft), h(oward's) and u(niverse). A father beloved by his son would have been godlike to this son, but this "god" had two aspects in the child's mind: an image of immaculate English precision deformed into the "uncouth" actions of a stranger. The adult artist would later write that "the letters CTHULHU were merely what Prof. Angell hastily devised to represent (roughly and imperfectly, of course) the dream-name orally mouthed to him by the young artist Wilcox."<sup>57</sup> This comment of course gives no hint of the word's subconscious origin.

The stone statues of Cthulhu are images of Winfield Lovecraft's depressed state, a profound melancholia; as Kraepelin remarks, "Often in the course of paresis we observe long-continuing stuporous states.... The patients speak neither voluntarily or in reply to questions."<sup>58</sup> An observant two-year-old would have seen his sometimes bedridden father's rigid body as statue-like. There are several statues of Cthulhu in the story, probably representing several visual contacts with the father, whose paresis seems to have developed into "circular insanity," a dramatic series of mood changes which we know today as manic-depressive psychosis or bipolar mood disorder. These can take the patient from the depths of deepest depression to a high point of manic excitement and back again, perhaps many times. "When, in any given case, the melancholic phase recurs again, it is prone to wear the same features as in the first attack.... [the deepest melancholia] may appear again and again as the cycle returns, with the same phase and character again and again."<sup>59</sup> Each statue or statuette would thus represent a reappearance of the same depressive features, separated by the elapsed time of each passing cycle.

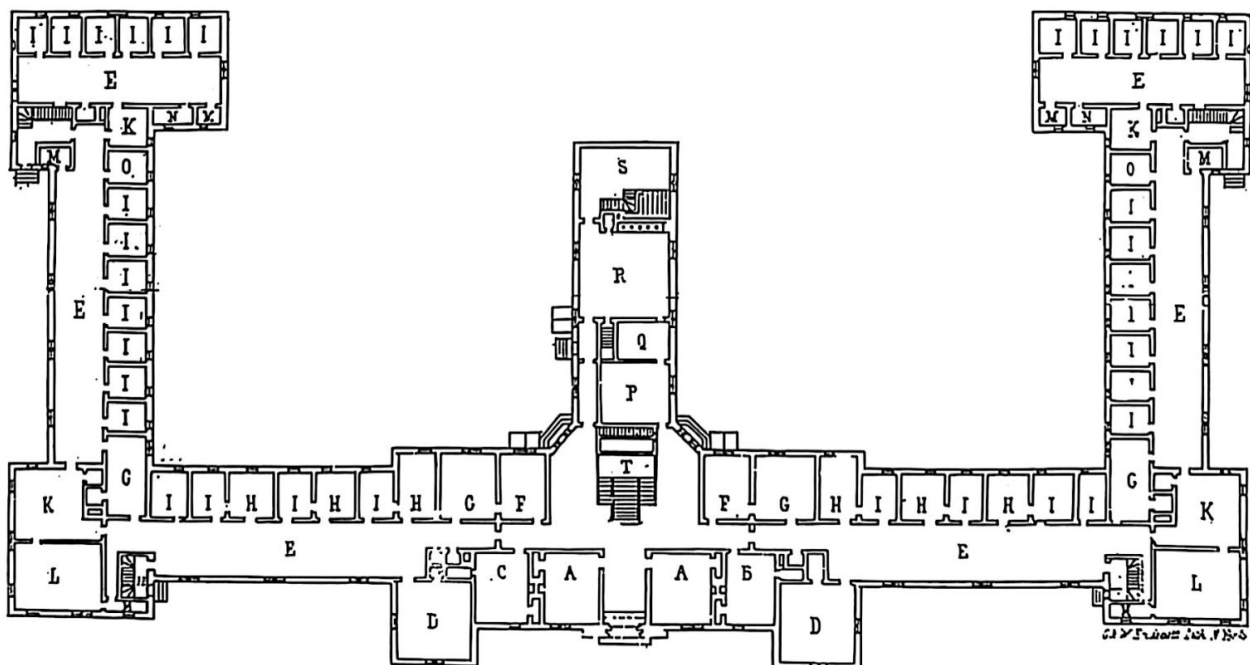
The frenzied actions of the father's manic stages appear as the fervid movements of Abdul Alhazred, the mad Arab:

With the rapidly increasing excitement, the patient becomes completely confused and practically devoid of his faculties; he produces only a few inarticulate sounds or stereotypes, meaningless syllables, mostly in arrhythmical manner. He dances about the floor, drums and stamps with arms and legs, twists and bends himself, claps, plucks, scratches, cuts his face, blows and grunts, will not keep his clothing on, tears, rubs, sneers and spits, eats his excreta, howls, cries, strikes blindly about him.<sup>60</sup>

The motor excitement of such patients makes them tear the sheets and blankets of



*Butler Hospital for the Insane, Providence, 1848*<sup>81</sup>



PLAN OF BUTLER HOSPITAL<sup>82</sup>

the sickroom bed into strips with which they wrap themselves. Wrapping their heads in this way would give them a somewhat Arabic appearance. On observing this, the child Lovecraft would identify with his father's outlandish maniacal persona. "At the age of 5," he wrote, "I was a dream-Arab who read Andrew Lang's *Arabian Nights*. It was then that I invented for myself the name Abdul Alhazred...."<sup>61</sup>

There is further deterioration in the parietic as nutritional disorders (caused by the diseased nervous system) bring on inflammatory skin afflictions. Lesions develop, and atrophy of dermal sweat glands cause the patient's skin to take on a dull, earthy appearance. Bedsores form, accompanied by "blebs, boils, herpetic, ecthymatous, or other eruptions . . . about the extremities or trunk [and] furuncles and carbuncles may appear . . . because of the depressed patient's unchanging position. . . ."<sup>62</sup> Relief of pressure at critical points is gained by sitting the patient up on the side of his bed; there he would likely remain absolutely impassive in his new posture:

The individual affected with melancholia with stupor presents a very striking appearance. He sits motionless, his hands clasped before him, his head bent forward, his eyes closed or staring vacantly, or fixed upon the floor. His half-open mouth allows the viscid saliva to drop from his lips. If spoken to, he does no answer or even give any sign that he has heard. . . .<sup>63</sup>

This petrified posture appears in Lovecraft's descriptions of the carved statues of the seated Cthulhu, the most complete of which follows:

It represented a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline but with an octopuslike head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind. This thing . . . was of a somewhat bloated corpulence, and squatted evilly on a rectangular block or pedestal. . . . the cephalopod head was bent forward so that the ends of the facial feelers brushed the backs of huge forepaws which clasped the croucher's elevated knees.<sup>64</sup>

Other peretic effects help explain the stone artifact's ichthyoid features. Loss of tone in the facial muscles flattens the naso-labial folds, and the expressionless look of the patient blends with the grayness characteristic of a premature senescence to give a smooth, fishy cast to the statue's "octopuslike" visage.<sup>65</sup> A precocious young Lovecraft could have likened his father's loss of self-awareness (revealed in the fishy blankness of his stare) to a devolutionary descent to the cephalopods—cuttlefish, octopus or squid—all molluscs with heads resembling that of Cthulhu.

Lovecraft's description of Cthulhu's head as "bent forward" is another sign of his father's disease: "Often a striking symptom, even in the early stages, is the stooping position of the head, which does not rest upon its base, but is constantly supported by the stiffly-contracted neck muscles."<sup>66</sup> The appearance of the monster's "scaly, rubbery-looking body" may arise from the patient's copious bedsores, which have already been mentioned. Its prodigious claws on hind and fore feet reflect abnormal growth of the nails:

Hypertrophy of the nails or onychia is not infrequent. The nails become thick, rough, uneven, brittle, and lusterless. They are often elevated from the nail-bed. The color changes and usually becomes a dirty yellow-brown. When the nail is bent over, the fingertip [or toe] like a claw, the condition is described as onychogryposis.<sup>67</sup>

Hypertrophic growth of hair would accompany the rapid nail growth, and this could appear on the lethyoid face as feelers. Cthulhu's "bloated corpulence" is accounted for by other trophic problems:

On the part of the *bladder*, there are frequent disturbances which are independent of parietic attacks: They consist of sphincter paralysis as well as retention. . . .

The *abdomen*, is frequently subject to typanitic distention, apparently resulting from atony of the intestinal musculature. The sluggishness of the bowel may lead to excessive impaction. On the other hand, in advanced cases, there is complete inability to retain the feces, perhaps due partly to paralysis of the sphincters, but chiefly because the patient is not aware of the approaching evacuation nor the distention of the bladder even to the umbilicus.<sup>68</sup>

Even with all these strange symptoms, however, the child Lovecraft still seeks to ascribe rationality and intelligence to Cthulhu by the clue of the "voice that was not a voice" in the Wilcox dream sequence, of articulations so low on the evolutionary scale of intelligence as to be only "gibberish."

[There is a] difficulty in composing words from their syllables. . . . The final syllable is often repeated. . . . The speech may be reduced to a mixture of senseless, frequently-repeated combinations of syllables.<sup>69</sup>

The voice [of the patient] is monotonous, sometimes trem-

lous; it loses its capability of expression and often its normal resonance (paresis of the vocal cords). . . .<sup>70</sup>

. . .there sometimes occur . . . some of the disturbances of will which are spoken of as catatonic. Not only is catalepsy, at least transitory, frequent enough, but also echolalia, echopraxia, and verbigeration, the continuous, almost rhythmical repetition of the same sentence, word, or syllable.<sup>71</sup>

Such parietic vocal habits describe the nature of Cthulhu's "sense - impacts," but the fictive coding of the creature's monotonous vocalizations as "Cthulhu sleeps" is ascribable to Winfield Lovecraft's somnolence:

Often in the course of paresis we observe long-continuing stuporous states. . . . The patients speak neither voluntarily nor in reply to questions, lie motionless, taking no part in their environment, eat no food, wet and soil their beds.<sup>72</sup>

In many patients, an actual somnolence develops, so that they are only occasionally fully fully awake when eating or when conversed with, after which they immediately resume their sleep.<sup>73</sup>

While the Cthulhu statues originate from the Angell Street home, the Le-grasse and Johansen Cthulhu episodes seem fictive renditions of actual encounters the child had with his father during visits to Butler Hospital. Winfield Townley Scott understands well some of the feelings evoked in Lovecraft by the hospital and its surroundings:

The grounds of Butler Hospital are an extensive tract of field and woodland overlooking the Seekonk River, the most attractive and unspoiled part of that countryside which haunted Lovecraft from his early childhood . . . an undramatic land, understated; by its very nature, it became in Lovecraft's imagination a landscape where so little happened that anything might happen.<sup>74</sup>

Deeply felt past experiences lie beneath this tranquil, if haunting, surface, as Lovecraft himself later wrote:

What I said a real artist must have is simply an emotional pull of great depth & sincerity toward something—anything—that is truly related to experience & primary emotion. . . .<sup>75</sup>

And as for the milieu described by Scott, "It is mine by natural placement and personal contact—soaked into my subconscious mind and rooted there by a thousand tentacles," he wrote<sup>76</sup>—"tentacles" here being the roots of family trees still very much alive in his imagination. No wonder Lovecraft felt that he was more sensitive to *places* than to *people*.<sup>77</sup>

I think an author strongly reflects his surroundings, and that he does best in founding his elements of incident and colour on a life and background to which he has a real and deep-seated relation. This may or may not be his native and childhood environment, but I think it is better so. . . .<sup>78</sup>

Lovecraft was constantly exploring, and ever missing, the residue of his stored memories:

My most vivid experiences are efforts to recapture fleeting & tantalizing mnemonic fragments expressed in unknown or half-known architectural or landscape vistas, especially in connection with a sunset. Some instantaneous fragment of a picture will well up suddenly through some chain of subconscious association—the immediate excitant being usually half-irrelevant on the surface—and fill me with a sense of wistful memory & bafflement; with the impression that the scene in question represents something I have seen & visited before under circumstances of superhuman liberation & adventurous expectancy, yet which I have almost completely forgotten, & which is so bewilderingly uncorrelated & unorientated as to be forever inaccessible in the future.<sup>79</sup>

Many such "mnemonic fragments" lay beneath the surface of his memory, strongly attracting him along "chain[s] of subconscious association" into an unremembered but not totally forgotten past:

The source of these images, as tested by repeated analysis & associative training, is always a composite of places I have visited, pictures I have seen & things I have read—extending back in my experience to my very first memories at the age of 1½, & having about ¾ of its extent in that period of life antedating my 18th year, when I left the birthplace to which I was so utterly attached. The more recent an experience is—be it objective, pictorial, or verbal—the more sharply vivid it has to be in order to gain a place in this subconscious reservoir of vision-material. . . .<sup>79</sup>

At the center of this reservoir lie two visits Lovecraft made to Butler Hospital in his fourth year, later than his earliest memories, but so traumatic as to be buried at the bottom of his subconscious—far beneath the quiet, rustic scene described by Scott as having "haunted Lovecraft "from his early childhood." Apparently he had been taken to the hospital to visit his father soon after his third birthday (August 20, 1893), for Winfield Lovecraft's medical record reads in part: "Aug. 29: A few days ago patient was dressed and permitted to go about ward and into yard; for a time he was quiet, but soon he became even more noisy than before, and as he was fast exhausting his strength he was placed in bed again."<sup>80</sup> If the boy had been visiting his father at this time he would have witnessed, even if at a distance, the *melée* of the orderlies restraining, subduing and removing the excited man to prevent his destructive involvement with other patients in the exercise yard. Lovecraft later transposed this traumatic event to his Cthulhu story as its New Orleans episode, giving his adult persona the fictitious name of John R. Legrasse, or John the Fat—thinking perhaps of himself during 1925 when (much to his dismay) he weighed about 200 pounds.

As shocking as this event must have been to the child, his perception of it could have been ameliorated by its distance from his person. No such emotional leeway existed at the climax of the second visit, which hospital records suggest occurred on May 29, 1894: "May 29: Mental condition remains the same: is allowed the liberty of the hall and airing court. Very noisy at times. Physically—thin, and anaemic."<sup>80</sup>

In 1894 the Phillips family had two carriages and the stabled horses to draw them, and young Howard's grandfather could have on that day driven the boy the mile or so to Butler Hospital to visit his father. Howard probably felt the gentle swaying of the vehicle, for author Lovecraft changed the carriage-ride to a sea voyage in the Pacific where the *Emma* is sunk by the armed steamer *Alert*. The Phillips vehicle may have run afoul of the "swarthy cult-fiends" of the *Alert*, possibly a group of inmates being transported from one hospital building to another—for in January 1892 there was completed on the grounds a stable designed to house "the horses and carriages so much demanded by the patients for carriage exercise."<sup>83</sup> The second mate Johansen's later-whitened may be an indication of Lovecraft's early age at the time, for he remembered that his own hair, much to his dismay, changed color by the age of five.

The six-man crew lands and climbs the "monstrous acropolis" by stepping upon "titan blocks which could have been no mortal staircase." The presence of this crew hints that the child and his grandfather were accompanied by orderlies as they approached or ascended the flight of steps leading to the building's Lower North men's ward on the second floor, where Winfield Lovecraft had been placed earlier.<sup>84</sup> Attempts to open the "acre-great panel" suggest that the child must have seen the ward's immense hall door, of a size to allow passage of the hospital gurneys. The "now-familiar squid-dragon bas-relief"<sup>85</sup> sign of Cthulhu on the door foreshadows what is to come. An unendurable stench from beyond the door emanates from the ward's oak floor, which had absorbed years of patient incontinence. Other symptoms suggest themselves as the apprehensive crew sees Cthulhu appear in the doorway:

. . . At length the quick-eared Hawkins thought he heard a nasty, slopping sound down there. Everyone listened, and everyone

was listening still when It lumbered slobberingly into sight and gropingly squeezed its gelatinous green immensity through the black doorway into the tainted outside air of the poison city of madness.<sup>86</sup>

The lapse of time after the ward door begins to open allows the sounds that foreshadow Cthulhu's appearance to precede him—the shambling steps of the tabo-paretic patient, whose ataxic gait has the "nasty slopping sound" which Hawkins hears: "The movements are clumsy, slow, and awkward. . . . The gait is unsteady with a wide base and is shuffling, often spastic."<sup>70</sup>

Salivating by the monster, so common in late paresis, occurs because muscle paralysis makes swallowing almost impossible:

Furthermore, since the reflex action of the epiglottis is often entirely lost, there is great danger to the patient from the aspiration of saliva, the mouth cavity containing as it does many decomposition products. . . .<sup>87</sup>

Particles of food and drink also make easy escape, and are spilled on the beard or clothing. The saliva, escaping through loose paretic lips, and the patient breathing with half-open mouth, the buccal [inner cheek] surface goes dry; and this excites a fresh and increased secretion of saliva.<sup>88</sup>

The "gelatinous greenness of the monster's immensity"<sup>89</sup> suggests observation by the child Lovecraft of still other symptoms. Weakness and loss of tone in body musculature combine with the loosely hanging adipose tissue to produce the look of the "peculiar fatness of the paretic."<sup>73</sup> The green color of the image, as well perhaps as that of the story's second statue, could derive from the several eccymoses on the patient (as bruises caused by subcutaneous bleeding) that occur with even slight bumps to the body as he totters about.<sup>68</sup>

The scene's climax recalls the frightened flight of the small child back from those gargantuan hospital stairway steps at the sight of his insane, excited father, minus the unhelpful orderlies and most of his personal vitality (seen in the quick obliteration of the sailors by Cthulhu as he attacks and chases members of the crew). The death of Parker through misjudgment of the environment suggests that Howard fell at least once in his precipitous flight.

During the course of the disease, disorder or impairment of the gait often undergoes many fluctuations. Even until late in the disease the paresis is often more apparent than real, and when roused or excited the patient may throw off his inertia and move about with great ease and celerity.<sup>90</sup>

It is tempting, finally, to relate Cthulhu's entry into the ocean (where he is run down by the *Alert* at Johansen's hand) with Butler Hospital's fronting circular coachway, whose shape reminds us that horse-drawn vehicles could not move directly backward, as can the automobiles of today. Whether or not Winfield Lovecraft got through the outer door and into this coachway, only to be repulsed or run down by the departing Mr. Phillips as he drove away with his grandson, we can understand why Howard Lovecraft would never enter any Butler Hospital buildings again, even to see his mother there in her final illness of 1921.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, through writing "The Call of Cthulhu" the adult artist, with the help of his preceptors, was able to seek out and face, symbolically and artistically, the feelings of pain and anguish engendered by his father's terrible illness of many years before.

### III POSTSCRIPT

"The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents."<sup>91</sup> Thus Lovecraft begins "The Call of Cthulhu" with a blunt statement of its central conflict—the artist's wish to know everything about his personal past is countered by a yearning for "the peace and safety of a new dark age" of his own. The look back in time, "like all dread

glimpses of truth, flashed out from a occasional piecing together of separated things—in this case an old newspaper item and the notes of a dead professor."<sup>92</sup> Lovecraft may have first encountered his mentor through old issues of the *Providence Journal*, because the name of one of its early editors finds its way into "The Call of Cthulhu":

For many years . . . he [William Gammell] furnished articles to the "Providence Journal," whose accomplished editor, the Hon. Henry B. Anthony, was his friend. In this he followed in the footsteps of Professor Goddard [William Giles Goddard, who preceeded Gammell as Professor of Belles Lettres at Brown from 1834 to 1842]. His contributions took various shapes: sometimes reflections on current events, then discussions of matters pertaining to Rhode Island history or the cause of education. . . .<sup>93</sup>

The story makes Gammell's "reflections on current events" into "an old newspaper item" (which itself may derive from Lovecraft's second visit to Butler Hospital), while Murray's memoir suggests itself in the phrase "notes of a dead professor." The editor of the *Journal* appears in the name of the artist, Henry Anthony Wilcox.

Professor Goddard's own letter to Murray eloquently indicates the close relationship of William Gammell to Butler Hospital—and thus, ultimately, to Lovecraft himself:

On the 27th of January, 1875, Mr. Gammell was elected a trustee of the Butler Hospital for the Insane.

His interest in this great charity had been fostered by an intimate acquaintance with its beneficent purposes, and by personal observation of its measureless blessings to those who were afflicted with the various forms of mental disease. His acute mind clearly discerned the importance to the safety of society of this place of seclusion and of restraint for those whose delusions were dangerous both to themselves and to their fellow men. Before Mr. Gammell's election to this responsible office, he had rendered important aid to the hospital by literary work, undertaken at the request of Mr. Ives, its first secretary. [This was Richard H. Ives, William Gammell's father-in-law.] He was, therefore, by familiarity with the work of the hospital, as well as by his mental endowments and by his sympathy with all forms of human suffering, exceptionally equipped for the high trust of its guardianship.

. . . He never neglected any duty devolving upon him, and often made his weekly visitations when almost disabled by illness. Of the annual reports, by which the work of the hospital is made known and its pressing wants are explained, no less than six proceeded from his graceful and earnest pen. Most of the occasional appeals of the trustees to the public and to the benefactors of the hospital during his long term of office emanated from him. His manners to the patients were singularly attractive and cheering, and he overlooked nothing that would diminish their sense of confinement or add to their slender store of happiness. His services will be long and gratefully remembered by his associates, and in the lucid intervals which sometimes come even to the clouded intellect of the insane his name is mentioned with respect.<sup>94</sup>

The Gammell influence on Lovecraft persisted in yet another way. William Greene Roelker, a director of the Rhode Island Historical Society, writes in *A Century of Butler Hospital*:<sup>83</sup>

At this point [some time during 1882] Mrs. Gammell offered to give \$50,000 in memory of her father, Mr. Robert H. Ives, "the income from which shall be devoted to aiding in the support of such patients as are not able to pay the entire cost of their board and treatment." Mrs. Gammell had known the hospital from her youth and was well aware of the need for such a fund.

Shrinkage in the family's funds probably made necessary the Gammell Fund's payment of part of Sarah Susan Lovecraft's board and treatment from her commitment there

in 1919 until her death in 1921, Lovecraft; who visited his mother on the hospital grounds (but because of painful buried memories never entered the buildings themselves) would thus have felt gratitude towards the name of Gammell and have been reminded of the family's liberality of spirit to Butler Hospital and to himself through its help for both his parents. It is fully consonant with his code of gentlemanly behavior; then; that he would honor his preceptor with a kind of literary immortality by making him George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages at Brown University; in "The Call of Cthulhu."

## NOTES

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- (3) *Ibid.*, p. 30. (7) *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 42. (8) *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- (5) *Ibid.*, p. 51. (9) *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- (10) *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 20.
- (11) James B. Angell, *The Reminiscences of James Burdell Angell* (1911; rpt. Freeport; N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 1.
- (12) Gertrude Selwyn Kimball, *Providence in Colonial Times* (1912; rpt. N.Y.: De Capo Press, 1972), p. 15.
- (13) August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, eds., *H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters III 1929-1931* (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House Publishers; 1971), p. 316.
- (14) *Ibid.*, p. 365. (15) *Ibid.*, p. 351.
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- (17) *Selected Letters III*, p. 333.
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- (19) *Ibid.*, p. 322.
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- (22) *Ibid.*, p. 102. (25) *Ibid.*, p. 318.
- (23) *Ibid.*, p. 237. (26) Murray, pp. 24-25.
- (24) Kimball, pp. 313-314.
- (27) *Selected Letters II*, p. 107. (28) *Ibid.*
- (29) "Medical Record of Winifred Scott Lovecraft," annotated by M. Eileen McNamara, M.D. in *Lovecraft Studies* no. 24 (Spring 1991), p. 15.
- (30) *Selected Letters I*, p. 33.
- (31) Emil Kjaerholm, *General Paralysis* (1913; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp.; 1970), pp. 3-4.
- (32) *Selected Letters I*, p. 6.
- (33) Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror and Others*; selected by August Derleth, with texts edited by S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House Publishers; 1963), p. 143.
- (34) *Lovecraft Studies* no. 24; p. 15.
- (35) *Ibid.* For more on the mystery of the Lovecraft family's whereabouts during the fall and winter of 1892-1893; see my article, "Father Images in Lovecraft's 'Hypnos,'" *Fantasy Commentator VII*, 41 (1990).
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- (43) *Ibid.*, p. 11.
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- (64) *The Danish Horror*, p. 134.
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- (74) Winfield Townley Scott, "His Own Most Fantastic Creation," in *Marginalia*, edited by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House, 1944), p. 320.
- (75) *Selected Letters III*, p. 324.
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- (77) *Selected Letters II*, p. 102.
- (78) *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- (79) *Selected Letters III*, p. 197.
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- (82) I. Ray, M. D., "The Butler Hospital for the Insane," *American Journal of Insanity* V, unpaginated frontispiece (July 1848).
- (83) *A Century of Butler Hospital*, p. 21.
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- (85) *The Danish Horror*, p. 151.
- (86) *Ibid.*, p. 152. (87) Kraepelin, p. 37.
- (88) Mickle, p. 84.
- (89) *The Danish Horror*, p. 152.
- (90) Mickle, p. 86.
- (91) *The Danish Horror*, p. 125.
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- (93) Murray, p. 69.

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### THE HANGMAN'S SONG

I am a jolly hangman  
 For gargoyles cheer my gallows.  
 The dogdays rear the devil's child  
 Whose mask is met in shallows.

My birth's a bloody tale  
 And keeps me to my hood;  
 My father, one of five who rent  
 My mother in the wood.

I sup with thieves and parsons;  
 Drape rascals from a rafter.  
 I've prospered so for many years  
 On modest fees and laughter.

I am a jolly hangman  
 And nourished by the law.  
 And if a statue won't provide?  
 Call it an alewife's saw.

I've scuffle-board and rigging  
 Sufficient to each need,  
 Come garrulous, with rookish crown,  
 With appetite my creed.

I'll rear a rugged gibbet  
 In sleet or Lammas-weather.  
 Drink dregs, who can, to the last doxy;  
 Tomorrow, hang together.

I am a jolly hangman,  
 Full lusty by my trade,  
 And exercise a biting wit  
 To sway a scullery-maid.

I come to tie the knot,  
 To honor the maidenhead.  
 The foot, so coy at country fairs,  
 Relents and climbs to bed.

Good children, close your eyes,  
 Nor dare to lift the cover.  
 The midnight-stranger wears a hood  
 And is your mother's lover.

I am a jolly hangman,  
 Swing babes, now to, now fro.  
 I inch their fathers heavenward,  
 Clap for the dancing show.

Come dawn, and thrush and jay  
 Trill falsely of reprieves.  
 What profit is that trifling song  
 Where I roll up my sleeves?

Who calls me stout and rank?  
 My hood, is it not pretty?  
 I've broken bread and passed the ale  
 And lodged in every city.

I am a jolly hangman.  
 Hemlock is mother's milk.  
 For tyrants and for democrats,  
 Hang rag or hang fine silk.

One goblet would be kindness;  
 Most brotherly, if whiskey.  
 My surety for Christian debts  
 Is piece-work, seldom risky.

My credit is this rope  
 And hood and hangman's tackle.  
 With wormstale crust, with bitter beer,  
 Salute the hanged man's cackle.

For I'm a jolly hangman—  
 A lusty hangman, I—  
 And will, with proper hands, correct  
 Each countenance you try.

—Jeffrey Woodard

•   •   •

### SLIM CHANCE

The Earth's a speck of trivial mud,  
 Thumping with a thud  
 Some other planet presently,  
 Splattered in Time's spacious, stellar sea.

The oceans and the rocks will splash—  
 Stars together smash—  
 But will our species splatter, too?  
 Will, instead, Mankind escape—prevail—new?

—Steve Eng