Howard Phillips Lovecraft as
Her Memoirs of the Providence
Writer of Horror Stories
Now First Published

By SONIA H. DAVIS
(the former Mrs. H. P. Lovecraft)

H OWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT and I met in 1821 and
we were married at New
York in March 1924. What follows
here may to all intents and
purposes be called the true story of his
private life. It differs somewhat
from what is given by most of his
biographers.

For instance, I have recently
read the late W. Paul Cook's "In
Memoriam: Howard Phillips Love-
craft." As far as it goes it is a very
interesting and worthy eulogy of a
truly great person. But it contains
—as do other accounts—several
misconceptions about Howard's
life, and especially of events in the
years 1921-1930 of which no one
but myself knows.

Of various early incidents in his
life, not generally reported to
others, Howard himself told me.
Of other incidents I speak from my
own experience while still his wife;
some of these are of a very
personal nature.

First Meeting
I first met Howard Lovecraft at a
Boston convention of the Amateur
Journalists. I admired his personality
but, frankly, at first not his person.

As he was always trying to find
recruits for Amateur Journalism,
he offered to send me samples of
work—his own and others—which
appeared in the different amateur
journals: non-paying little papers
and magazines, privately printed
and circulated. From these we
kept up a steady correspondence,
and I felt highly flattered when
he told me in some of his letters
why I indicated a freshness
not born of immaturity but rather
of "re-freshening" because of the
originality and courage of my
convictions when I disagreed with
him.

I disagreed often, not just to be
disagreeable; if it possible I wanted
to remove some of Howard's intensely
fixed ideas.

During many months of corres-
pondence H. P. mentioned the
names of several writer-friends,
many of whom he knew through
letters only. One of these whom he
particularly lauded was Samuel
Loveyman of Cleveland, Ohio.
"Samuel," Howard called him—
he was always romanizing names
of his friends. Howard had a great
regard for Loveyman and used him
his desire to leave Providence and
settle in New York. Each of us
mediated the possibilities of a life
in a city together. Some of our friends sus-
pected. I admitted to friends that I
cared very much for Howard and
that if he would have me I would
fear him as his wife. But nothing
definite was decided.

I came to America when I was
nine years old, a White Russian
of the old Czarist regime. In 1899,
when I was 16, I married a fellow-
countryman who had adopted the
name of a Boston friend, Greene.
My husband died in 1916. By him
I have one daughter who was for
several years Paris correspondent
for various American newspapers.

After my divorce from Howard
Lovecraft, I married Nathaniel A
that we were married by a Christian
minister and that the marriage
take place in St. Paul's Church—
where Washington and Lord
Howe and many other great men
had worshiped." In this, as later,
in so many other things. I let him
have his way, in nearly everything
he was the "victor" and I the "van-
quished." I would gain him
nothing if I thought it would eradi-
cate his complexes.

Houdini Manuscript

The night before our marriage
Howard absent-mindedly left in
the Providence station the Houdini
manuscript—that is, an article
which he had ghost-written for the
famed magician. It was not, as
someone has said, "a public sten-
ogapher" who copied the hand-
writing about Lovecraft, himself a natural and engaging personality. And third, a general increase of reader interest in the weird, especially for those selections of his work, reprints of stories in many anthologies, residual publication of Lovecraft’s work, and an increase in the number of his "Letters" yet to come from Arkham House; these have filled our reputational collectors. Collectors have paid between $50 and $100 for a copy of "The Outsider"—that highest of his works, as Angiolo菲 H. P. L. would delight to know, in England.

For general Lovecraft biography, any account will refer to Derleth’s Little book, "H. P. L.: A Memoir," published by Ben Abramson, and to my article, "His Own Most Fantastic Creation," published in the Lovecraft anecdotal volume called "Marginia" (Arkham House). At the John Maynard Keynes’ London University, is a constantly extended H. P. L. collection.

Now, as to Sonia Davis’ personification, it is precisely that. She is her version. Perhaps—I do not know—it is not always an universally true piece, Certainly it corrects much that has been written about Lovecraft. It is consistent and adequately enriches what we already know of his personality. It gives us a unique insight into family and financial affairs. Above all it tells the story of his marriage, which is something that has been known beyond the astonishing fact that so different a person did.

Long ago I said in print that if sometime Mrs. Lovecraft could be discovered and persuaded to tell her story it would be immensely valuable. Now at last this has happened. And we have you, the editor, not only the addition to Lovecraft biography but a story which is in reality an unexpectedly moving. W. T. S.,

His very plain face he attributed, to his addiction. At 15 or 16 he fell and broke his nose when another boy was running his bicycle. He said it was quite an accident. The nose was a little crooked, but he said it was not bad. He went to the doctor, who said it was nothing serious.

When Howard and I women walked in the park one evening, he said he was feeling very well. He had just come from a visit with his mother in town. He was wearing a new hat, which he said was very comfortable. He was also wearing a new coat, which he said was very warm.

When Howard and I were seated in the park, I asked him about his love for the outdoors. He said he loved it very much, and that he thought it was a great way to relax and unwind. He also said he enjoyed the smells and sounds of nature, and the way it made him feel.

Howard and I were married in September, and we spent our honeymoon in Arizona. It was very beautiful, and we had a great time. We visited the Grand Canyon, the Petrified Forest, and other places. Howard especially enjoyed the hiking, and we both loved the sunny weather.

Howard was a very kind and thoughtful man. He always made sure that I was taken care of, and I was very grateful for that. He was also very good at keeping me company, and we both enjoyed spending time together.

We were very happy together, and we spent the rest of our lives enjoying each other's company. Howard passed away in May 2020, but I still think of him every day. He was a wonderful husband, and I was very lucky to have had him in my life.

Howard H. P. M.
His very plain face he attributed, he said, to two reasons. At 15 or so he fell and broke his nose when he and another boy were racing their bicycles. The doctor said that night he would look up at the stars through his telescope. Actually, he was three-quarters full. Though less pronounced in the womenfolk, the entire Phillips family had the kind of face which I shall never speak of again.

Ward was fond of making caricatures of himself, but they never appeared when he became old.

Well-to-do to return to Howard with the Persian cat—I felt that it could be made to look as confident of his genius as a writer and to forget his "awful looks," as he put it, he would be kinder and more happy. So whenever an opportunity presented itself I would not avoid giving him compliments.

When Howard, still in New York, went out with "the boys" for several evenings, I never missed him. I suggested that instead of going home to Providence, we would go to Parkside Avenue.

Each of us wrote an urgent invitation to the aunt with whom he lived, Mrs. Linwood, and Mrs. Gamwell came for a few weeks.

Return to Providence

After their return to Providence I was not ashamed to write him how very much I missed him. His appreciation of this led both to more serious ground.

Howard was not in a position to marry. His Grandfather Phillips' estate there was only abundant. Howard needed to last the rest of the lives of his two aunts and himself. He had been less proud to write for himself. He would say "I write to please myself only; and if a few of my friends say my "effusions" I will feel repaid."

He spent much of his time revising the atrocious work for which he was paid a pitance. He would wear himself out over some of the stupid trash he was asked to revise. Some of the authors who later became well known and prosperous.

Meanwhile his letters indicated Howard down, and the manuscript reached the publisher in time.

The only money Howard ever spent on me which I had earned I received for that article. I wished to thank only half the amount be used for a wedding. He was the first to say that he could not afford to spend Christmas and New Year. I turned my Parkside Avenue apartment over to them. They gave me sleeping space in hers. And evenings the two men would meet me and we would go together and see a play, or sometimes we would make a conclave of "amateur" friends—James F. Morton Jr. (who had introduced me to Lovecraft), Frank Bellocq, Long, Reinhardt, Kleiner and others.

He seemed to have a language that he understood, but which he never learned to use. It curled up his lip and pursed it half in earnest, half joking. I said: "What a whole lot of perfectly good affection out—when a woman might highly appreciate it?"

He said, "How can any woman love a face like mine?"

A mother can," I replied, "and some who are not mothers would not have to try very hard."

We all laughed and Howard went on flowering the cat.

Howard was clear and reasonable when he read it. He became thin and high-pitched in conversation, somewhat foppish, and in his companies, though not strong, was very sweet. He would sing none of the modern songs—only the more serious ones and the ones everyone else had sung.

Howard's mother had hoped her child would be a girl, and as a baby she looked like a very beautiful girl. Photographs show him with a mass of flaxen curls which he wore until he was about a year old. At last he, his mother took him to the barber's where she cried bitterly as he was being cut. (Thus he got his name Howard; once showed them to me.)

Once when we were looking at an early photograph of him, he exclaimed, "And look at me now!"

Long ago I said in print that if the one-time Mrs. Lovecraft could be discovered and persuaded to tell all, the world would be a more illuminating place. Now at last this has happened. And we have here, I think, not only another addition to Lovecraft biography but a story which is in itself unexpectedly moving. W. T. S.
His Wife Remembers Him

Woman Who Knew Him Best Tells of Their Strange Marriage and Difficult Years

Further, to lift him out of his abnormal depths of loneliness and psychic complexes by a true wedded love. I am afraid my opinions and experience of self-assurance misled us both. (His love of the weird and mysterious, I believe, was born of sheer loneliness.) I had hoped, in other words, that my embrace would make of him not only a great genius but also a lover and husband. While the genius developed and broke through the chrysalis, the lover and husband receded into the background until they were apportioned that finally vanished. It has been my entire life that our separation was mainly caused by his lack of money. That is not true. The real reason my own story makes evident. Marvelous person though he was, it was probably the only fact that Howard was willing to give a reason, offered one that might most easily believed.

When Howard felt he could no longer tolerate Brooklyn, it was I suggested he return to Providence. He'd say, “If I could live in Providence, the blessed city where I was born and reared, I am sure, there, I could be happy.” I agreed. I said, “I'd love nothing better than to live in Providence if I could do my work there.”

Providence Again

Well, he returned, and I followed him much later. Again, it must be known, that his aunts “dispatched a truck which brought Howard back to Providence at last.” I made a special trip from out of town to help pack his things, to see to it all was well packed and left, and to send him railroad fare and all-out of my own funds.

Eventually we held a conference with the aunts. I suggested we take this house in Providence, hire a maid, pay the expenses, and we all live together; our family to use the other for a business venture of my own. The aunts gently but firmly informed me that neither they nor Howard could afford to have Howard’s wife work for a living in Providence. That was the limit where all of us stood.

To be not too far from Providence where I could spend some weekends, I took a new and less well paying job in New York. (The time was now 1927.) But there was a Chicago job too. I refused to go, and now I could have Howard meet me in New York every few weeks on my buying trips. I hated Chicago through after six months—at Christmas—so decided to try Providence for a short vacation while waiting for something to happen. I didn’t know Howard was perfectly willing and even satisfied to live this way, but not I. I began urging divorce.

Howard said he knew of a very happy couple whose marriage was sustained by him; the wife living with her parents, and the husband because of his illness living elsewhere.

I replied that neither of us was really sick and I did not wish to be a “long-distance” wife. I told him it was all impossible, that I ought to divorce me and find and marry a young woman of his own background and culture, live in Providence and try to live a happy, normal life.

“No, my dear,” he would say, “if you leave me I shall never marry again. You do not realize how much I appreciate you.”

“But your way of demonstrating.” I would reply, “is so unheard-of!”

Divorce

The divorce came in 1929. On a friendly but imperative basis we occasionally corresponded.

In 1932 I went to Europe. I was almost tempted to invite him along, but he would not accept. However, I wrote him from England, Germany and France, sent him books and pictures of every conceivable thing I thought might interest him. And I sent him a travelogue which he revised for me.

Final Meeting

After my return to the United States I was quite ill. On recuperating, I went to Harvard, Conn. I was so enchanted by the 18th century beauty of it that I wrote Howard at once to join me there, which he did. We explored the town and also Weathersfield.

I believe I still loved Howard very much, more than I cared to admit even to myself. Although in my travels I had met many eligible men and sons and offer proposals of marriage for eight years I met one who did not seem inadequate in intellect compared to Howard. When we parted the night I said, “Howard, won’t you kiss me goodnight?” He said, “No, it is better not to.”

The next day we explored Harvard, and when we parted that night I no longer asked for a kiss.
Huxley's Post-Atomic World


The year is 2108. A.D. If you insist, but only in a consistency of time measurement. Now it is Satan who is the god of the half-savage tribes around the ruins of what was once Los Angeles, the city of the angels. It is long after the Third World War. The world is almost an atomic-bomb destruction of civilization.

One of the gilded priests of the new cult, sees the path of history clearly: "Well, what are the facts? The first is the fact of experience and observation—namely, that nobody wants to suffer, wants to be degraded, wants to be maimed or killed. The second is a fact of history—that fact, that, at a certain epoch, the overwhelming majority of human beings accepted beliefs and adopted courses that could not possibly result in anything but universal suffering, general degradation and wholesale destruction. The only possible explanation is that they were inured or possessed of an alien consciousness, a consciousness that willed their unhappiness and willed it more strongly than they were able to will their own happiness and survival."

Huxley has projected from our beginning of an atomic age yet another "Brave New World." He has done this with a weirdness of imagination, a "Brave New World." He has done this with a weirdness of imagination, an "Ape and Essence." A Gothic novel of the future. Well-man-writer, he has shown scientific possibilities to be the supreme source of the horror tale. Or, it is as though "The Waste Land" were given a new direction and translated into actual drama; as though the bitter Jeffers of "The Double Axe" had written a novel to express his disgust with mankind and his conviction of its

In Brooklyn Alone

I soon found it necessary to accept an exceedingly well-paid job out of town. I wanted Howard to live in my home with me there, but I noticed that he would hate to live in a middle-class city, he would prefer to remain in New York where he could have all the advantages of the city. I discussed this with my aunts and they thought it was wiser for me to store and sell my furniture and find a studio room large enough for Howard to have the old and several elaborate things he had brought from Providence. It was then the Clinton Street, Brooklyn, address was decided upon.

I could be in New York only a few days at a time, every three or four weeks. I gave him money each time I came to town and sent him weekly checks.

Racial Prejudices

He admired the quaintness of that part of Brooklyn, and at first he seemed to love his Clinton Street setup. But the prejudice in the subway, streets and parks he hated, and he suffered through that hate. He referred chiefly to Semitic people: "beady-eyed, rat-faced Asiatics," he called them. In general, all foreigners were "mongrels."

Long before we were married, Howard wrote me in a letter praising Samuel Loveman that the only "discrepancy" he could find in Loveman was that he was a Jew. I replied in amazement at such discrimination and reminded him— as I did constantly—that I, too, some of Hebrew people. It was his prejudice against minorities, especially Jews, which prompted me to that simultaneous invitation of Howard and Loveman to New York of which I have spoken.

Later H. P. assured me he was quite "cured." But unfortunately, not here I must speak of something I never intended to have publicly known, whenever we found ourselves in the racially

Visit and Letters

I spent several weeks there. But I soon needed money, so I returned to New York, rented an apartment, retrieved some storage which was left of my furniture and set up housekeeping by myself. I opened a small millinery shop in the neighborhood.

Our marital life for the next few months was spent on roasts of paper in the riverink sink. That spring I left Howard to visit me and I was ready to accept, as a visitor only. To me, even his nearness was anything but endearing. The visit lasted throughout the summer and I saw him only during the early morning hours when he would return from jousting with Morton, Loveman, Long, Klein, or some of them. Then he visited W. Oron Ritz at Yorkers and returned to Providence in the early fall. Then we lived in letters again.

When we parted for the night he said, "Howard, won't you kiss me goodnight?" He said "No, it's too late." No night.

The next day we explored Hartford, and we parted that no longer to see a kiss. I had learned my lesson well. I never saw Howard again.

H. P.'s Death

Off and on they corresponded, after I moved to California. Here he found and married Dr. Davis. He was here, too, I met Mr. Wheeler Dryden, who told me of Howard Lovecraft's death.

I do not believe it was an exaggeration to say that Howard had the mind, taste, and fineness of a much greater artist and genius than with that which he was accredited. He, who I am quite sure a legendary, mysterious figure. The irony is that he died before the rewards and celebrity of his labors occurred. I like to believe that time mellowed him, that he found other men of all sorts so normal, kindly folk. And even Aizen of us left this widow, I mourn in sorrow and reverence his untimely passing.

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THE CITY BOY, by Herman Wouk. 306 pages. Simon & Schuster. $2.50.

The quality of "The City Boy" merits my reminding you that Mr. Wouk's first novel, "Apache Dawn," was the most critically Book-of-the-Month selection since "Crude of the Deep." What the publishers are trying to jam down your throat this time is a wordy attempt at jockeying by boyhood, summer camps and pre-adolescent love. That even above this, a preposterous plot in which the 11-year old boy's burglary saves his father's artificial ice business. Mr. Wouk's artificial writing business is saved by nothing, especially not by his nudging us to attention for errors that off-hand book "comic kids" characters, or by a pretentious and undistinguished diction—example: "Jacob Bookbinder was not, in the popular phrase, a man to be trifled with."
Huxley’s Post-Atomic World


The year is 2100—A. D. If you insist, but only in a consistency of time measurement. Now it is Satan who is the god of the half-savage tribes who have been during his rule, as it was once Los Angeles, the city of the angels. It is long after the Third World War and the almost complete atomic-bomb destruction of civilization.

The city is Huxley’s project of a movie serial, but it is not so as on Ozu’s work there is an intricate brilliance of intellect—here it is an imaginative imagination. It repays reading; if you can stand it, or if you have already left for New Zealand.

W. T. S.


Our disinclination in World War II to treat the Negro soldier as anything but a “limited service,” military and the police insufficiency of this year by Generals Eisenhower and Bradley show how much our government has refused to learn since the war took on San Juan Hill, or since the noblest Shaw was “buried with his niggers.” Mr. W. G. Smith, a Negro newspaperman, ex-sergeant, and University student, has written a thesis novel about the days when Negro service was too much shunted out of the ETO—but because they had conquerers’ privileges, because guards officers must sometimes clean them, and cause some people didn’t want their Negro labor supply to become accustomed to every soldier’s pay and service.

Any enlisted man has learned something of what it means to occupy a Negro’s place in society, and most of the injustices visited on Mr. Smith’s hero are merely military, not necessarily matters of color. But the hero of “The Waste Land” escapes being “buried with his niggers” and becomes an intellectual German woman and treatment even from ex-Nazi which makes his return to the United States a

personal tragedy. The warden of the man who has forced him on by America’s one opinion about the German be, for anyone who had joyed in America’s way, a sense of this tragedy a straddler, and Smith has pickled his experiences well to make a record representative or a convincing.


The quality of “The City Boy” is a remarkable reminder; Mr. Wouk’s first novel, “Dawn,” was the most critical Book-of-the-Month selecti.

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