

THE CTHULHU PRAYER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

H.P. Lovecraft's Birthday Draws New Friends For Swan Point Visit

AUGUST 17, 2003 — The local "Friends of Lovecraft," also known as the Cthulhu Prayer Society, gathered on Sunday, August 17 at The Poet's Press headquarters at 66 Hope Street in Providence, with food and drink for a pot luck lunch and a trip to Swan Point cemetery to read poems and tributes at the grave of New England's most renowned writer of supernatural fiction. We welcomed a number of newcomers, underscoring that our organization is a welcome haven for those who love the dark, the strange and the wonderful and want to learn more about its local art and lore.

The August gathering marked the prelude to our 2003-2004 season of events, and culminated an extremely busy year. Past events this season included the second annual H.P. Lovecraft Xenophobe Picnic in Lincoln Woods in July. The quest for "Quisnicket" fulfilled a long-time desire on the part of many of us who have read H.P. Lovecraft's letters, in which he rhapsodized over the woods and one spot in particular that he felt was better than any landscape painting.

At the sparsely-attended May meeting at Pleasant Valley Parkway, an elect few of the Friends group participated in a chilling group reading of Algernon Blackwood's tale, "The Willows," read under a stand of weeping willow trees planted in 1909!

Programs earlier in the year included Brett Rutherford's lectures on Poe and Mrs Whitman at the Providence Athenaeum (April 15) and on "Illustrated Editions of Edgar Allan Poe" at the John Carter Brown Library for the Bartlett Society; and Carl Johnson's April 6th memorial tribute to Lovecraft at Swan Point Cemetery.

Please note that we are returning to the downtown Union Station Brewery for many of our events. The "pot luck" lunch idea did not draw any more attendees, our conclusion being that most of you would rather deal with parking than cooking.

Anyone with an interest in H.P. Lovecraft, the spectral side of New England, or just the strange and the wonderful, is welcome to join us for future excursions. To be added to our e-mail list, send a message to brett@thepoetspress.org or write to us at the address below to receive an issue of the newsletter by mail.



Benefit Street Gothic: Opium, Ether and Mr. Poe

by BRETT RUTHERFORD

(Conclusion of 2 parts, excerpted from the new edition of *Last Flowers: The Romance and Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe and Sarah Helen Whitman.*)

The Year 1848 — Meetings and Calamities

Although not all the events listed below may seem relevant, they all bear upon Poe's and Helen's state of mind during the year 1848:

On January 1, 1848, *The Home Journal* reprinted Poe's poem "Ulalume," anonymously.

On February 3rd, Poe baffled a New York City lecture audience with his long, long talk on "The Universe," his first public presentation of his prose-poem *Eureka*. During the rest of his days, Poe would recite from his epic description of the creation and destruction of universes on the slightest pretext. He was convinced that he had "guessed" the deepest secrets of science, and he would expound to anyone who would listen (including drunks in taverns.)

In January 1848, Mrs. Lynch invited Sarah Helen to contribute poetic greetings to a Valentine's Day party she was planning for the New York *litterati*. Helen and her sister Susan both sent poems. Helen's was addressed to Poe.

Only after the February 14 party was over did Sarah Helen learn that Poe had not been invited, and was now in fact *persona non grata* among much of the literary set (certain people would not attend if they knew Poe was invited, etc. etc.). Anne Lynch then submitted 42 poems that had been read at her party for publication in the *Home Journal*. Helen's poem was not among them.

It took two more communications to a reluctant Anne Lynch to get her to pass along the Poe valentine for publication. The *Home Journal* published it separately. Although the poem as originally written is a clear "come hither," common friends assured Poe that Helen was dour and eccentric. None of these friends mentioned to Poe, perhaps intentionally, that Helen was a widow.

Sarah Helen revised her valentine poem substantially in later years, making its imagery encompass more of Poe's writing. Since it is the poem that launched the love affair, I have included both versions in this edition. The original valentine is titled "To. E.A. Poe," and the revised poem is titled "The Raven."

Poe's most recent biographer, Kenneth Silverman, in his book *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*, is the first to acknowledge that Helen was a formidable match for Poe intellectually. Unlike the dilettante ladies Poe knew in New York, Silverman observes, "Sarah Helen Whitman was a woman with sophisticated philosophical and literary interests — after her friend Margaret Fuller, perhaps the leading female literary critic in America." He lists the depth of her literary studies, her love of Goethe, Shelley, Shakespeare and the Transcendentalists. He adds, intriguingly, "She also studied mesmerism and magnetic science, of which Providence was a center. Convinced that an Other World existed, she went beyond both Emerson and Mesmer in the pursuit of occult knowledge."

At the time I assembled the first edition of my book, no Poe biographers had made such generous assertions about Sarah Helen's worth.



Privately printed for members by The Poet's Press, 66 Hope Street #2, Providence RI 02906. Tel. 401-861-3272. Subscriptions free to contributors and members of the H.P. Lovecraft Friends Society; others \$10 for 12 issues. Website: www.thepoetspress.org. E-mail: brett@thepoetspress.org. Contents Copyright 2003 by The Poet's Press.



The three-mile walk to Swan Point cemetery would have taken Poe and Helen down many country lanes in the midst of the falling ash, maple and oak leaves. Pictured here: woods along the Seekonk River.

Only after interrogating one or more other literary women by letter did Poe learn that “Mrs.” Whitman was a widow. Fanny Osgood wrote to Helen, warning her with some humor that the New York raven would certainly descend on the Providence dove.

Two Women in Lowell

Poe, who was beginning to thrash about for female companionship to center his life, was already commencing a long distance relationship with the first of two women in Lowell, Massachusetts.

The first was Jane Locke, who lured Poe to the mill city for a paid lecture and reading. In correspondence, Jane Locke sounded like a potential soul-mate, but her fevered letters were worded so cautiously that Poe could not ascertain her age, or even whether she was single, married, or a widow.

While still trying to figure out Jane Locke’s status, Poe responded to Sarah Helen’s “come hither” poem by tearing a page from one of his printed books — his early poem “To Helen” which was inspired by Helen Stanard, a married lady Poe was obsessed with in his youth. He sent the poem anonymously on March 2.

Then, in May, with the Muse on his side, Poe penned the longer prose-poem “To Helen,” which recollected the vision of Sarah Helen seen in her rose garden that summer night three years earlier. He mailed it anonymously to Helen on June 1. She matched its handwriting to the address of the envelope containing the earlier poem. A friend confirmed for her that it was indeed Poe’s handwriting.

As summer commenced, Poe was getting desperate to sort the ladies out. He was preparing his lecture for the mysterious Jane Locke in Lowell. At least he could investigate Sarah Helen long-distance. He wrote poet Anna Blackwell, who had recently been in Providence for “magnetic therapy,” asking “Can you not tell me something about her — anything — every thing you know — and let no one know that I have asked you to do so?”

In Lowell, Massachusetts, Poe gave his scheduled performance on July 10 — his new talk, “The Poets and Poetry of America.” He included special praise for the poetry of Mrs. Whitman. He tried not to appear quite so shocked as he was, when he discovered that his professed “soul mate,” Jane Locke, was a 43-year-old married woman with five children. Mrs. Locke, after showing off the visiting poet to the other mill owners’ wives, would later give birth to an ecstatic long poem deifying Poe — the only fruit of her intended union with the famous writer.

During the Lowell visit, though, lightning struck. As he was dragged around to the Lockes’ relatives, Poe met the “other” woman: 28-year-old Nancy “Annie” Richmond. Poe fled the threat-

ened embraces of Mrs. Locke, and stayed over at the Richmonds’ home. That night, he fell hopelessly in love (Platonic, brotherly love, of course) with “Annie,” who instantly became his sister, twin, goddess — almost enough to push the lamented Virginia out of the cosmos. One could almost hear Virginia’s ghost, coughing tubercularly, outside the Richmonds’ parlor.

“Annie” was conveniently married to an indulgent paper mill owner who didn’t seem to mind his wife entertaining and corresponding with a harmless, broken-down poet. Annie’s three-year-old daughter, far from daunting to Poe, seemed an angel next to the pawing horde of little Lockes.

Since the Richmonds were related to the Lockes, one can only imagine the repercussions of this poetic abduction, especially after Poe began inundating Annie with letters.

Back in New York, Poe’s book *Eureka* was issued by Putnam’s. Poe had tried to convince the skeptical publisher that this landmark book would be so popular that presses would run day and night to keep it in stock. It was then, and may now still be, the least-read book by any major American writer.

In late July, Poe was off to Richmond to try to raise funds for his long-dreamt-of magazine, *The Stylus*. There, he distinguished himself with a two-week drinking binge, incoherent visits to editors, a thwarted duel, and a reacquaintance with a lady named Elmira Royster. She is outside the ken of our story here, except that Poe *almost* proposed to her. It seemed a fatality of Poe’s that the further South he went, the closer to doom he came.

While he was in Virginia, two stanzas of poetry by Sarah Helen Whitman arrived. The lines were encouraging — she had *read* — she had *understood*. He may have sensed that the sterner, more sober lifestyle of New England was what he really needed. Perhaps Sarah Helen would be his salvation — if not, the divine Annie was near. Poe hurried back northward.

Poe Arrives in Providence

On Thursday, September 21, 1848 — an equinoctial, portentous date — Edgar Poe arrived in Providence, after devising a letter of introduction so that he could present himself to Mrs. Whitman in person.

On Friday, September 22, Poe and Helen toured a cemetery — purportedly Swan Point Cemetery. Some have questioned whether Poe and Helen ventured all the way to the then-rural Swan Point, more than three miles’ walk through dirt lanes and woods. Originally I was inclined to doubt this, too. The Episcopal Churchyard of St. John’s, just yards from Sarah Helen’s door, was one candidate, but prying eyes were everywhere there. The North Burial Ground, Providence’s traditional

cemetery, was closer, and would have given her a chance to show Poe her relatives’ graves, as well as the stones of some of Providence’s founding fathers. But Swan Point, which had opened just two years earlier, was American’s second “garden cemetery,” and everyone was curious to see the new idea in landscaped, park-like cemeteries, even if the spot was not yet full of the neglected graves and crumbling old mausoleums that Helen’s recollections seem to suggest.

It is my opinion that they may have gone to the North Burial Ground, and that Helen romanticized the story by saying, years later, that they had gone to Swan Point. We do know, though, that Poe was avid about long walks, and Helen would have been grateful for the chance to talk about poetry and friendship away from the eyes and ears of mother and sister. If so, she must have come home late, exhausted, speechless, her shawls and scarves full of burrs, to the alarm of Mrs. Power.

If she smiled a quiet smile and refused to say much, it was understandable. In a secluded spot in the cemetery, Poe had put his arm around her waist and proposed marriage.

Poe stayed on until Sunday, September 24th. Presumably, in those days, he met some of Helen’s other friends, including the poetic Mr. Pabodie. Poe and Pabodie had much in common — both were poets with a leaning toward the hyper-romantic, funereal and supernatural; both detested the Boston literati; and both had dreams of founding a national literary journal. Pabodie had much to gain if Poe and Helen, his friends, remained in Providence and launched *The Stylus*.

As Poe learned just how close Sarah Helen still was to the New England literary circle, he grew alarmed: her friends were emphatically not his. He also learned that Helen was known to the whole circle of New York literary women, and could expect to receive letters from the likes of Mrs. Ellet, his social nemesis in New York. He began earnestly to warn Helen that his very real detractors would do anything they could to thwart his — and their — mutual happiness. Even more so would the envious mediocrities oppose the union of two poetic *geniuses*.

Because of transportation difficulties, Poe remained in Providence yet another day. On Monday morning, September 25 he went alone to Swan Point Cemetery. His train for New York was not until 6:00 in the evening. If this is actually what he did with his day, the long walk, similar to those he enjoyed during his better New York period, would have given him ample time to reflect on his potential new life. What he made of Mrs. Power and the moody Susan Anna, and how he thought the Poe-Whitman household would take shape, were doubtless foremost in his mind. Could Helen be persuaded to leave Providence and move with him to New York, where they would found *The Stylus* and begin their joint triumph over the kingdom of letters? Or would he move to Rhode Island and clean the Augean stables of the Transcendentalists?

Back in New York City, on September 30, Poe received Helen’s letter declining his proposal. Family duties, age differences, her health and other unstated issues were insurmountable, she said. And indeed, she had begun to hear unsettling things about him...

October arrived, and on its first day Poe worked up a proper fury writing his first love letter to Helen. On October 18th, he wrote another one. They are his longest, most impassioned letters, and they have been reprinted numerous times in Poe biographies.

In late October (the dates here are not certain), Poe was back in Providence again, asking Helen to reconsider her refusal. This is likely the time they spent showing one another their poetry and best work, especially in the shadowed nooks of the Athenaeum, away from Mother’s rebuking glances. Now Poe worked his magic, trying to convince her she was not too old, nor too frail, to be the companion who would save his soul. And he appealed to her as an artist, challenging her to the level of *ambition* required to join the immortals.

Since it seemed in Edgar Poe’s character to do the worst thing always, he appeared at Helen’s

2003 LOVECRAFT FRIENDS EVENTS

Except where noted with **, all meetings commence at Noon at The Union Station Brewery, 36 Exchange Terrace, Providence RI 02903. For directions or questions about programs, call Brett Rutherford at 401-861-3272.

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 17th — 12:00 Noon. H.P. LOVECRAFT BIRTHDAY

Local fans and visitors from all over the planet will converge on Providence once again to celebrate The Old Gent's Birthday. We'll start with pot luck lunch at The Poet's Press, and then head off to Swan Point to do some readings and other surprise events. And who knows whom we'll meet!

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10th — 8:00 pm BROWN UNIVERSITY PRESENTS S.T. JOSHI AT THE JOHN HAY LIBRARY: LOVECRAFT'S LETTERS: A LITERARY TREASURE TROVE

John Hay Library, Lownes Room
20 Prospect Street, Providence

Renowned H.P. Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi will draw upon manuscripts from the H.P. Lovecraft Collection at the John Hay Library. His talk will focus on what we learn about Lovecraft from his letters, especially his philosophical thought, as well as the genesis and purpose of his supernatural fiction. Reception will follow.

Preceding his scheduled 8:00 p.m. lecture, S.T. Joshi and Donovan K. Loucks (webmaster of the H.P. Lovecraft Archive) will lead a walking tour of Providence's East Side, stopping at locations significant to H.P. Lovecraft's life and writing. The tour will depart promptly from the front of the John Hay Library at 5p.m. and return at about 6:30 p.m. This tour will wind up and down the steep hills of the East Side, so please wear comfortable walking shoes!

Please call (401) 863-1518 or e-mail FOL@brown.edu for more information.

Starting with a fish fry or calamari plate at Union Station Brewery, this day will be devoted to creepy things from beneath the waves. We'll revisit Lovecraft's most terrifying tale, "The Shadow over Innsmouth"

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14th — 12:00 Noon FROM THE DEEPS

Starting with a fish fry or calamari plate at Union Station Brewery, this day will be devoted to creepy things from beneath the waves.

We'll revisit Lovecraft's most terrifying tale, "The Shadow over Innsmouth"

and explore the history of Dagon, Neptune/Poseidon and other watery gods, including the Great Cthulhu Himself.

Also in store, some video clips from *Moby Dick*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and other films involving oceanic monsters.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12th — 12:00 Noon. THE RAY BRADBURY TRIBUTE

Bring your favorite Ray Bradbury stories to share passages you love. Or, sit back and enjoy others do so, followed by video excerpts from *The Illustrated Man*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, *The Martian Chronicles* and *It Came From Outer Space*.

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30th — 8:00 pm till cock crow. HALLOWEEN IN HAUNTED FOX POINT

The chains clank and the pumpkins glow in Providence's oldest neighborhood. Our friends from near and far are invited for a Halloween feast/fest including horror flick tidbits, inspired music, and things that go bump.

house more than once in an obvious state of inebriation. Perhaps Mr. Pabodie also introduced Poe to the pubs in Providence's notorious North End, where sailors brawled and where the police frequently raided "common brothels" and "brothels of the lowest sort."

His counter-arguments made, Poe then secured Helen's promise that she would write to him with her reply.

Another Interval with the Richmonds

Things in Lowell did not turn out as planned. Poe found his first pretext to leave Mrs. Locke's home and become a guest of the Richmonds once again. The sympathetic Annie Richmond showered Poe with sympathetic and sisterly affection, and Poe doubtless shared with her all his doubts and worries about the proposal to Helen. She may have counseled him to persevere in the marriage, knowing how desperately he needed a center for his life. Poe walked to the post office daily, looking for Helen's letter, and was miserable each day when it did not appear.

The planned Lowell lecture was cancelled because of the distractions leading up to the 1848 Presidential election (possibly the lecture hall became unavailable). Poe thus lost a desperately needed lecture fee.

One consolation was a three-day visit to Westford, Massachusetts, where Annie Richmond's parents hosted Poe and Annie, and Poe was induced to read for an appreciative local audience. On one of these days, Poe took a long, solitary walk in the hilly countryside.

Poe's presence in the Richmond home finally provoked the festering jealousy of Mrs. Locke. Open hostilities broke out between the Lockes and the Richmonds. By this time, the indulgent Mr. Richmond was doubtless alerted that some-

thing was improper about Poe's attentions to his wife.

Around November 2, Helen finally wrote a brief, vague letter, which Poe received in Lowell, neither confirming nor denying the idea of an engagement, and this letter agitated Poe even more. On Friday, November 3, he sent back a note indicating he would be in Providence on Saturday. He now stood to lose the links to both of his New England women, the poetic bride and the Platonic sister-spirit.

Annie continued to encourage him in the marriage to Mrs. Whitman. Poe, in great turmoil, agreed to renew his courtship in Providence, but got Annie to promise that she would come to him if he were near death.

Laudanum and Ultima Thule

On Saturday, November 4th, Poe arrived in Providence. Helen waited at her home, and Poe never arrived. Instead he spent what he called "a long, long, hideous night of despair." It is hard to credit his claim that he spent the night alone in his hotel room. If there was any time he needed a drink, it was now...

Sunday dawned, and Poe decided that he would return to the city of his birth, Boston. He would kill himself, and summon Annie to be at his side for his final moments. Here is how he related it to Annie in a letter written two weeks later:

I arose & endeavored to quiet my mind by a rapid walk in the cold, keen air — but all *would* not do — the demon tormented me still. Finally I procured two ounces of laudanum & without returning to my Hotel, took the cars back to Boston. When I arrived, I wrote you a letter, in which I opened my whole heart to you — to *you* — my Annie, whom I so madly, distractedly love — I told you how my struggles were

more than I could bear — how my soul revolted from saying the words which were to be said [proposing marriage once again to Mrs. Whitman]— and that not even for your dear sake, could I bring myself to say them. I then reminded you of that holy promise, which was the last I exacted from you in parting — the promise that, under all circumstances, you would come to me on my bed of death — I implored you to come *then* — mentioning the place where I should be found in Boston — Having written this letter, I swallowed about half the laudanum & hurried to the Post Office — intending not to take the rest until I saw you — for, I did not doubt for one moment, that my *own* Annie would keep her sacred promise — But I had not calculated on the strength of the laudanum, for, before I reached the Post Office my reason was entirely gone, & the letter was never put in.

Monday, November 6th was a lost day. In Boston, a good Samaritan helped Poe, quite of his mind, find and board the train, not to Lowell, but back to Providence.

On Tuesday morning, November 7, Poe came to the Power house on Benefit Street early in the morning and demanded to see Helen. Helen sent word through a servant that she would see him at noon. Poe insisted to the servant that he had to see Helen at once, because he had an engagement later. Rebuffed, Poe went back to his hotel and scribbled a note that read:

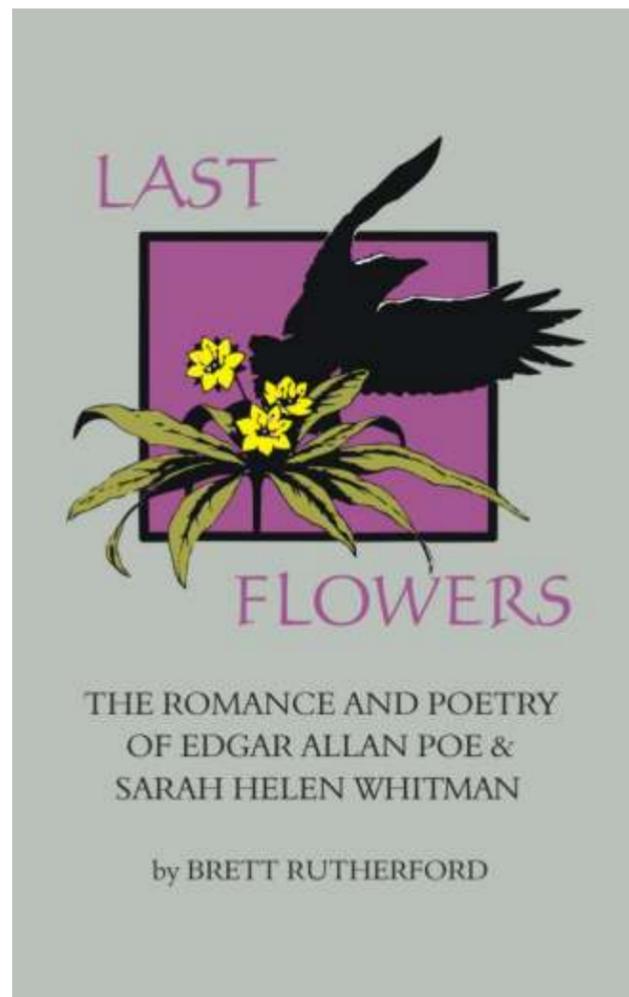
I have *no* engagements, but am *very* ill — so much so that I must go home, if possible — but if you say 'stay', I will try & do so. If you cannot see me — write me *one word* to say that you *do* love me and that, *under all circumstances*, you will be mine. Remember that these coveted words you have never yet

ORDER YOUR COPY OF BRETT RUTHERFORD'S NEW BOOK ON EDGAR ALLAN POE, SARAH HELEN WHITMAN, AND THE LITERARY WORLD OF PROVIDENCE IN THE 1840s.

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PROVIDENCE, RI 02906

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spoken... It was not in my power to be here on Saturday as I proposed...

Helen met Poe later that morning at the Athenaeum. Helen accepted Poe's explanation that he had taken laudanum to "calm himself" and had suffered an overdose. He chided her for delaying her letter to Lowell for so long, and urged her to marry him immediately and return with him to New York.

The next day, Wednesday, November 8, the two poets had recovered their equilibrium. Now it was Helen's turn to balk. She had received several letters from New York cautioning her about Poe and his drinking. Helen herself later wrote:

[H]e had vehemently urged me to an immediate marriage. As an additional reason for delaying a marriage which, under any circumstances, seemed to all my friends full of evil portents, I read to him some passages from a letter which I had recently received from one of his New York associates. He seemed deeply pained and wounded by the result of our interview, and left me abruptly saying that if we met again, it would be as strangers.

Helen assumed that Poe, who had written her a tortured farewell note from his hotel, had taken the evening train to New York. But Poe was going nowhere. He may not even have had the train fare. Instead he spent the evening in the bar-room of his hotel. We can imagine "The Raven" and "Eureka" intoned, others paying for the visiting celebrity's drinks, and the refrain of "Nevermore!" shaking the rafters. We can imagine Poe in his cups, reading the one poem certain to make him think of Virginia ... and what might he have said, in his bitterness, about the dainty widow on the hill? And Mr. Pabodie was always about, making us wonder, too, where Poe obtained his laudanum.

Helen passed a night of "unspeakable anxiety in thinking what might befall him traveling alone in such a state of mental perturbation and excitement."

Sometime during the night, a man named MacFarlane attached himself to the miserable poet, and saw him through the night. In the morning, MacFarlane dragged him to Masury & Hartshorn's daguerreotype parlor, where Poe permitted himself to be immortalized in his misery. This is the famous "Ultima Thule" portrait, showing Poe with his face distorted — the lingering after-effect of the drug overdose, combined with the emotional crises which had accumulated upon him.

It was the morning of Thursday, November 9. Helen wrote: "He came alone to my mother's house in a state of wild and delirious excitement calling upon me to save him from some terrible impending doom. The tones of his voice were appalling and rang through the house. Never have I heard anything so awful, awful even to sublimity." It would not be too far a stretch to guess that Poe had taken another laudanum "calmative," for this behavior does not sound like a mere hangover.

Poe stayed in the house for several hours. When Helen finally had the nerve to enter the parlor, Poe hailed Helen as an angel and clung to her, tearing away a piece of muslin. A doctor was summoned, and brain congestion was the diagnosis. Mr. Pabodie was on hand, and as a devotee of the poppy, he might have known a lot more about Poe's condition than the doctor. Poe was removed to Pabodie's house, where he lodged for a few days.

By November 13, Sarah Helen felt that Poe was himself again. He seemed to have worked an almost mesmeric spell over her. They went together to the daguerreotype parlor and had Poe photographed. At this point, to everyone's astonishment, Helen agreed to a conditional engagement, provided that Poe pledged to absolutely refrain from drinking. If Poe behaved as a model suitor, she hoped to persuade her mother to approve the marriage, perhaps as soon as December. Satisfied, Poe left on the six o'clock train for Stonington, from where he would get the steamer boat to New York.

Within hours, Helen and her mother heard some gossip about Poe's recent conduct — possibly an account of how much and how often he had imbibed while in Providence, and only blocks from the Benefit Street home. These new reports "augmented almost to phrenzy" Mrs. Power's opposition to the union. Helen's response was to scan the heavens and write the first of her poems "To Arcturus."

Engaged, But Full of Foreboding

On November 14th, Poe was reinstalled at the cottage at Fordham. He and Helen exchanged more letters. Poe called Helen "beloved of my heart, of my imagination, of my intellect" but added ominously, "I am calm and tranquil and but for a strange shadow of coming evil which haunts me I should be happy. That I am not supremely happy, even when I feel your dear love at my heart terrifies me. What can this mean?"

By late November, other missives were flying. Mrs. Anne Lynch in New York wrote to William

Pabodie to ask if the rumors of the Edgar Poe-Helen Whitman engagement were true. Fannie Osgood rushed to Providence and called on Sarah Helen. Unlike the others, she defended Poe. As Sarah Helen later recalled, "She threw herself at my feet & covered my hands with tears & kisses; she told me all the enthusiasm that she had felt for him & her unchanged and unchanging interest in him & his best welfare."

Poe, for his part, spent November writing Helen several long letters detailing the vengeful nature of his enemies on the New York literary scene. He convinced Helen of their frenzied desire to do him harm.

Sometime after December 7, Poe had returned to Providence. On December 12th, Poe sat with Helen and read her long poem, "Hours of Life." If he had any doubts about her poetic worth, or the quality of her mind, he now knew he had a formidable mate. He urged her to complete the poem and publish it as soon as possible. On one of these evenings, Poe and Helen sat silently on opposite sides of the Power parlor. Helen stood, as if under a hypnotic power, and walked to the center of the room, where Poe embraced her. They kissed, and then Helen went to sit at Poe's side. All this without a word spoken.

Poe returned by train and steamer to Fordham. His mother-in-law, Mrs. Clemm, had to be prepared for the news, and it is likely that Poe did not have the money in pocket to remain day after day in a hotel, not to mention the daily expenses of the courtship.

Seeing that Helen was determined to marry Poe, the Power clan swung into action. On Friday, December 15, Mrs. Power, consulting with Charles F. Tillinghast, administrator of the Marsh estates, drew up an agreement in which Helen transferred all her money and property to her mother. This would prevent Poe from having any access to the family estate and funds. Sarah Helen dared not oppose her mother, and wrote to Poe and Mrs. Clemm with this unpleasant news.

Poe's reply to Helen was reassuring. On Saturday, December 16 he wrote: "My own dearest Helen — Your letters — to my mother & myself — have just been received & I hasten to reply ... I cannot be in Providence until Wednesday morning and, as I must try and get some sleep after I arrive, it is more than probable that I shall not see you until about 2, P.M. Keep up heart — *for all will go well*. My mother sends her dearest love and says she will return good for evil & treat you *much* better than *your* mother has treated me."

NEW TENT- ACLES & POEMS

By *PIETER VANDERBECK*

PRAYER FOR ALL TENTACLES DAY

Opus 21321

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Petrus Vanderbeccius

Note on the use of this incantation. This is a light prayer, and is intended to be read during daylight hours, particularly the early afternoon, outside in the open light, or in a sun parlor, but in either case avoiding places of shadow, even seemingly insignificant pockets. If read on overcast days or during the sun's absence, it may yield grotesque results in the least, and could be outrightly dangerous, for too many and intricate reasons to list here. Otherwise, it is one of the most popular, versatile, and adaptable rites for casual and celebratory purposes. By no means, however, is it applicable in pragmatic missions involving the use of power. As in all such cases, it should be studied first under a mentor, and not experimented with on a freelance basis.

CLANG THE BELLS OF OUTFRÉ METALS!
TAP THE TAMBOURINES THAT RATTLE!
SCREECH WITH CHORDS

THAT SHAKE THE WINDOWS!
CALL TO BREAK THE CLOUDY LAYERS
THAT THROUGH DREAD
DESERTED SPACES
SEPARATE THE HALLS
OF STRANGENESS
THAT IN DISTANT FROZEN YUGGOTH
HARBOR THOSE
THAT COUNT NO HOURS,
DO NOT SLEEP, AND NEITHER WAKEN.

Hear us, you, with eyes uncounted,
who see all, the yet, and no more,
eldritch in remote dimensions
far beyond the frozen waters
that through Kladdath flow like rivers,
far beyond the giant planets
larger than the stars that twinkle,
far beyond the crossing comets
that from other stars bring tidings,
far beyond the belts of rubble
that in crystals turn and glitter,
far beyond our moon and planet
and the chamber we inhabit,
hear us, as we call to waken
thee who, frozen and immobile,
delegate the plans and doings
with your thoughts from brains unmeasured.
We who stand our lonely vigil
at the very edge of reason
stare into forbidden corners
of a vigintillion doorways
to seek guidance for our doings,
and to learn our lives' directions!

Shield us from the spell of slumber
that around us weaves the normal.
Thread us through our bourgeois errands
that be not confused, entangled.
Let us not be like the others
with their terminal allegiance,
but be free to dance and revel
in the space defying measure!



As the modern trends of fashion
shackle and imprison victims
in their closures of finiteness,
let us read our fancies weirdly
and not fail to find diversion
in the routes that bypass drudgedom.

When to nitrogen our vapors
fill the space above our coffins,
may with colored lights our humors
tinkle through the strange of hours.

TWIGGIDY! THAN BLITGOOP THELDOR!
HOODLY PLEMWEM TRIG BLOT DEDDLE,
SNIDPLID DRIDWID THOR WEN HANNLE!
TER PLID,
GRID PLELLOR,
THERD HUD BLEMWEM!
CRID!
CRID!
CRID!



FULIGO*

**[To the giant slime mold that grows around dead tree trunks in Providence.]*

Fuligo by tree sits sleeping,
like a plant but slowly creeping.
Brown and cream like bread discarded,
through the night it crosses yardage,
Clearing pathways of nutrition,
on it aims for demolition.
Clapboard walls and blocks of cinder
stand at loss to halt or hinder.
Where the house has organisms
it can sense metabolisms,
which, though capable of moving,
must spend periods of snoozing.

Op 21537 / 3 November 2002

LAMENT FOR PROMETHEUS

Opus 21324

20 June 2002

POOR is the universe!
Poor are the gods!
Poorer still is man!
Against the universe's wishes were we made,
our creator an evolutionary obsolescence!
Yet we, and our creator, have a sense of honor,
and the mighty who dominate the firmament
are thieves, imposters,
criminals of nameless vileness!
While we, given our spark against the will
of the muses,
can wonder at the profundity of the universe,
they to whom it is commonplace treat it
as commonplace,
despising it in cynicism as they feud
within their sandbox.
Better it is to be mortal, imagining
the universe as noble,
than to see that it is worse than hell!
Forget the mightiest, that deranged braggart
stewing in his train of brainless cupids!
Prometheus, that holdover from finished times,
had heart and humor that show the gods to shame!
We, doomed, an eventuality hanging over our heads
that someday, when the gods have time,
we will be replaced,
have, under our condemned tutor,
developed a refinement
that shows as crude the powermongering
manipulators!
We would have a future,
if justice existed.
But do not want that
of the gods, their endless misery!
Let us go to obsolescence! We have lived.
Prometheus, we long
for the moment we will join you,
bound to the rock of ultimate exile
for having escaped oblivion.

LAMENTATION FOR ANIMALS EXPERIMENTED ON IN LABORATORIES

Op 21357 / 12 July 2002

IN those dreadful concrete cubicles
lighted by sputtering fluorescent tubes
there lie arrangements of tables,
basins and cages
staffed by those of unhealthy pallor
who, without names of histories, slink around,
at random selecting various things of different sizes
for new torments they have devised.

We, apart allegedly detached,
wear, apply, consume, the products of their screams.
In dishonor with Nature and the Planet,
the eyes of the Universe, and of our Consciences,
we live each day in desperate greed
for power and diversion,
so that we may create worlds that can shut out
the worlds we have made.



Gothic folk gathered at Mt. Auburn Cemetery, heeding the Call of Cthulhu and exploring the literary graves of Cambridge, Mass. Here, a breathless pause at Longfellow's tombstone.

THE OLD GENT'S FRIENDS

Hal Hamilton completed teaching his first course on H.P. Lovecraft at the "AI" film & broadcast school in Brookline, Mass., this May. As part of the course, there was a guest lecture by CPS founder **Brett Rutherford**, and a field trip that brought the students to Providence for a walking tour of Lovecraft haunts, a peek at the shunned railroad tunnel off Gano Street, and tea and gingerbread at Rutherford's place.

The University Orchestra at Edinboro State University (PA) performed an orchestral work by Pennsylvania composer **William Alexander** on May 6. The piece, "Todesblumen," was based on a poem by Brett Rutherford depicting the Grim Reaper as described by his Alsatian great-grandparents – the Angel of Death tapping three times on the glass outside the dying person's window.

Richard Sardinha says he is "painting, painting, painting" and his website demonstrates his commitment to the Lovecraftian. Go to www.battleduck.com to see his latest, including a giant squid that might make your heart stop. Richard's dinosaurs are legendary, and his latest forays into the oceanic include portraits of Dagon,

Cthulhu and various deep ones, as well as the more approachable water sprite Rusalka.

Ben Indick's personal newsletter, *Ibid*, does us a favor in its 123rd issue by reprinting a detailed review of **James Schevill's** 1970 play, *Lovecraft's Follies*. Reading this review can put to rest any idea that Schevill's work reflected the ideas or story lines of H.P. Lovecraft. Schevill's play was published in 1971 by The Swallow Press in Chicago. Ben also featured some interesting artwork and some actual pulp magazine pages from **Abe Merritt's** landmark serialized novel, *The Metal Monster*. This novel was greatly influenced by Lovecraft's style and shares HPL's vision of a universe people by nonhuman entities we might not even recognize as living things, nor they us.

Lovecraft scholar **S.T. Joshi** will be in town September 18th to lecture at the John Hay Library about the letters of H.P. Lovecraft's. Joshi, who has edited the definitive edition of Lovecraft's fiction, and the most exhaustive biography of Lovecraft ever, also co-edited a massive selection of HPL letters which include many passages that earlier editors dared not print.

Pieter Vanderbeck has been haunting the Adirondacks all summer, and came back with more stunning drawings and some suitably Lovecraftian poems (see this issue's special focus on Pieter's wry and multi-tentacled writings.)

Congratulations to **Risa Gilpin** on her new position at Rhode Island Council on the Humanities. During her many years at The Providence Athenaeum, Risa was instrumental in programs and exhibits that featured H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allan Poe, and Sarah Helen Whitman.

While visiting poet Mary E. Hewitt in New York City, Poe expressed a very different opinion about whether the intended marriage was going to happen. He told her, repeating his words twice for emphasis, "That marriage will never take place."

On Wednesday, December 20, Poe arrived early in the morning and checked into the Earl House at 67 North Main Street. At 7:30, Poe delivered his Franklin Lyceum lecture at Howard's Hall, to an audience of 1800 to 2000 persons. Sarah Helen sat in the front row. His lecture, "The Poetic Principle," showed Poe at his best. He also read "The Raven" and the early version of "The Bells."

That night, flush with success and with his speaker's fee in pocket, Poe fell in with a group of dissolute young men at his hotel (so Pabodie described them, and we suspect he knew them). They persuaded the famous poet to drink with them. And with Poe, that meant drink after drink, and choruses of "Nevermore!"

On Friday, December 22, Poe arose in his hotel. He dressed and went out for breakfast, but *the hotel bar was already open*. So he went in and had a glass of wine. Who would know?

At Helen's home a little later, Poe was required to sign the Power family property transfer agreement as a witness. It must have been a moment of supreme humiliation. Pabodie also signed the agreement as a witness. It was now plain that if he married Helen, she would go with him to Fordham as a penniless woman with a trunk full of clothes and books. If he broke off the engagement at this point, he would be branded forever as a fortune hunter and a man without honor.

The arrangements continued with grim determination. The pace suddenly accelerated: Mr. Pabodie was asked to contact the minister and make official arrangements for a Monday, December 25 wedding. The process of "publishing the banns" meant that the intended marriage was to be announced on Sunday in the church in the week preceding the marriage. In earlier times, the banns were announced three weeks in succession, during which period anyone in the congregation had a chance to raise objections, legal or moral.

Pabodie put the note from Poe to the minister in his pocket but did not deliver it to St. John's church, which was a stone's throw from Helen's



Pierre and Jen explore one of several colonial buildings near the Lovecraft haunts in Lincoln Woods.



His last picnic. Mr. Jones discovers one of Lincoln Woods' sacrificial stones.

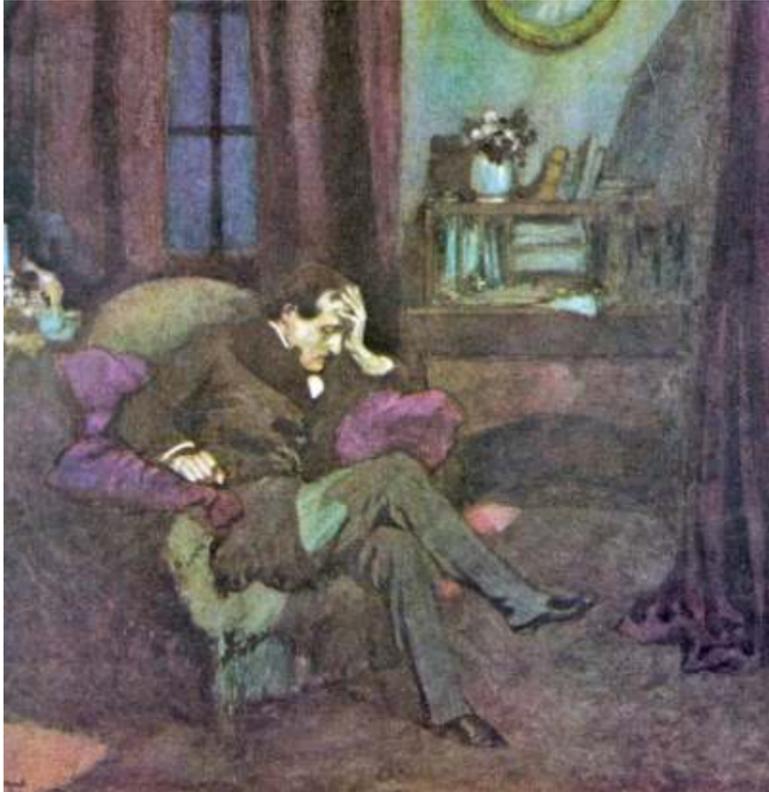


house. Was this at Poe's request? Or was this done in connivance with Mrs. Power? Or were they all, Helen included, going through motions they wished some Providential force would interrupt? Poe seemed to treat the marriage as a certainty. He sent off a note to Mrs. Clemm that read "We shall be married on Monday [Christmas Day], and will be at Fordham on Tuesday, in the first train." Now things were accelerating...

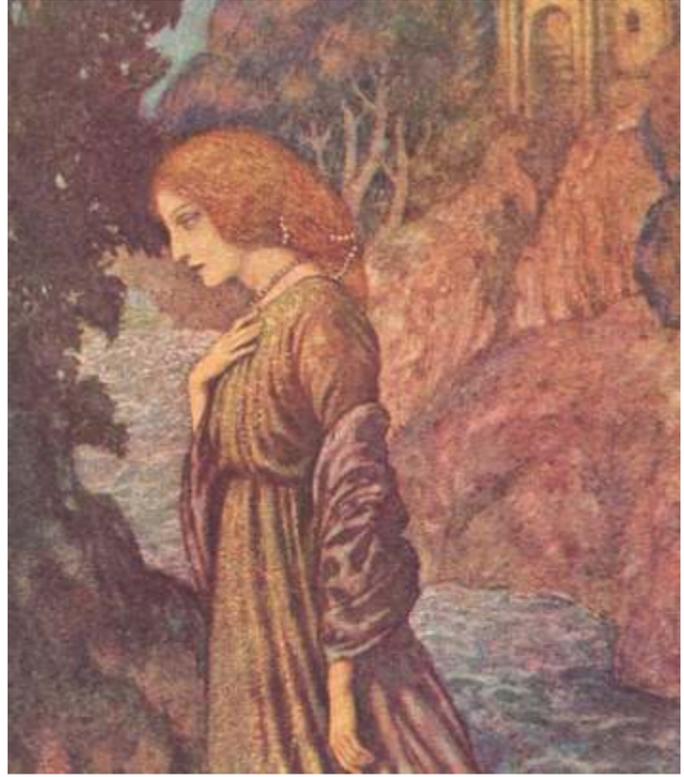
At the Athenaeum, Revelations

Oppressed by the atmosphere of the Power house, Poe and Helen fled to the quietude of The Athenaeum. There, nestled amid the dimly-lit stacks, the two poets sat together. Both of them were beleaguered by events, and human nature being what it is, they may have been even more resolved to make the whole thing work. Life in New York would be difficult, but Poe was famous, a sworn reformed man, and they both had many friends there.

This was the moment, as in every Greek drama, when a messenger arrives with disastrous news. A messenger boy ran into the Athenaeum, breathless,



Watercolor painting of Edgar Allan Poe by illustrator Edmund Dulac. At right, detail of Dulac's conception of "Annabel Lee." Poe may have written the famous ballad in memory of his doomed Providence romance.



asking for Mrs. Whitman. He handed her a letter. It was urgent, he said, that she read it at once. She opened the envelope and read in silence. I will let Helen tell the rest of what transpired a little later back at the Power house:

Recollect — we were to be married in a few days. Poe had at last prevailed upon me to consent to an immediate union. He had written to Dr. Crocker to publish the "banns of marriage" between us. He had written to Mrs. Clemm to announce our arrival in New York early in the following week, when it came to my knowledge & the knowledge of my friends, that he had already broken the solemn pledge so lately given by taking wine or something stronger than wine at the bar of his hotel. No token of this infringement of his promise was visible in his appearance or his manner, but I was at last convinced that it would be in vain longer to hope against hope. I knew that he had irrevocably lost the power of self-recovery.

Gathering together some papers which he had entrusted to my keeping, I placed them in his hands without a word of explanation or reproach, and, utterly worn out & exhausted by the mental conflicts & anxieties of the last few days, I drenched my handkerchief in ether & threw myself on a sofa, hoping to lose myself in utter unconsciousness. Sinking on his knees beside me, he entreated me to speak to him—one word, *but one word*. At last I responded almost inaudibly, "What can I say?" "Say that you love me, Helen." "*I love you.*"

Those three words were the last I ever spoke to him. He remonstrated & explained & expostulated. But I had sunk from a violent ague fit into a cold and death-like stupor. He brought shawls and covered me with them, & then lifting me in his arms, bore me to a lounge near the fire, where he remained on his knees beside me, chafing my hands & invoking me, by all tenderest names & epithets, to speak to him again, *one word*. A merciful apathy was now stealing over my senses, & though I vaguely heard all, or much, that was said, I spoke no word, nor gave any sign of life. My mother & sister & another friend were in the room. I heard my mother remonstrating with him & urging his departure.

Then Mr. Pabodie entered the room and joined my mother in entreaties that he would leave me. Her last words I did not hear, but I heard him haughtily and angrily reply, "Mr. Pabodie, you hear how I am insulted." These were his last words, & the door closed behind him forever. His letters I did not dare to answer. Exaggerated and humiliating stories were in circulation. He entreated me to deny them, to say that I at least had not authorized them. I never answered the letter.

Within days, everyone knew, from Providence to New York, how Poe had courted and lost the poetic Mrs. Whitman. Each telling of the scene in the parlor became more melodramatic, until it finally seemed that the militia had been called to remove the deranged poet from the premises. Meanwhile, to the mortification of all parties,

newspapers all over the Northeast noted the impending nuptials, one of them even looking forward to a clan of little Poes.

What was *really* in the letter that made Helen break off the engagement? Helen discreetly said it was about Poe's glass of wine in his hotel that morning, but it was probably a litany of all of Poe's recent transgressions, gathered by a loose conspiracy of vagrants, snitches, Temperance bar-watchers, and maybe even an off-duty police officer or two. An artist could have dashed off sketches from the Poe daguerreotype, facilitating a near-total "Poe watch" in the neighborhood. Any words that Poe uttered in his drinking escapades might also have been repeated. (Almost all of Poe's biographers have marveled at the flow of gossip in Providence, so I'm making the leap to guess that Helen was given an unvarnished precis of Poe's activities.)

Thus it is hard to avoid feeling that Poe was being watched, probably from the time he was photographed on November 9. Poe also had the distinct feeling that he was being followed and watched all the way back to New York.

Some Poe biographers assume that the fatal missive contained details about Poe's squabbles with the lady poets in New York, but he had already told her about that. Others have suggested she received a letter about Annie Richmond — but we know that Helen did not know about the simultaneous letters to Annie until almost thirty years later. The letter was almost certainly all the local gossip someone had gathered on Mrs. Powers' behalf, if not at her behest.

Helen remained silent about the whole affair. Later, she published a poem to tell Poe indirectly of her undying affection for him. Poe, for his part, may have written "Annabel Lee" to memorialize their romance. But before they could ever meet again, Poe was found in a stupor on a Baltimore street during the crazed days of a local election. He died, drifting between lucidity and delirium, on October 7, 1849.

Helen did not learn the truth about "Annie" and Poe's suicide attempt until just months before her own death, almost three decades later. She had continued to defend Poe's reputation against his many detractors, and had a long career as Providence's "Athena," hosting and encouraging generations of young writers and artists.

[The complete text of *Last Flowers* contains more information about Sarah Helen's later life and a history of her poetry publications. When the first, limited edition was printed in 1987, Sarah Helen Whitman's poetry had not been reprinted in book form since 1916. This is the first book to present the poetry of Poe and Mrs. Whitman together.]



Lovecraft's favorite rocky perch in Lincoln Woods, as we found it this July. HPL would take two streetcars in order to spend his day atop this rock, writing letters and working on his horrific tales.