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REVERSE THE CHARGES  
by Jess Nevins

(Found among the blog posts and computer files of Guilliot Abellard, of New Orleans)

<http://www.guilliotabelard.com/blog/?p=4>

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the ability of the white man's mind to maintain the contradictions of racism. They live on placid islands of ignorance in the midst of seas of infinite blackness, and they never intend to voyage far. Their sciences, each straining in their own direction, have hitherto harmed their perspectives only a little; but some day soon the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of their frightful position therein, that they shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the glorious truth into the peace and safety of ignorance.

Theosophists of the nineteenth century guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents. Physicists of the twentieth century confirmed it. Astrophysicists and cosmologists of the twenty first century have begun to detail it. But folklore from a millennia before maintained it all along, the centuries-old teachings of the Songhai and the Inuit and China under the Tang stating clearly what white science only hints at, even now. White seekers after forbidden knowledge have their blood frozen at mere hints of this truth. But wise and learned men and women of color have long embraced these truths and been the better for it.

This blog will be my account of how I became sane, thanks to the ancient teachings and the wisdom community. I hope that it will help lead others to the community, and to find peace and hope in the teachings and the holy scripture. Certainly, as long as I live, I shall always knowingly supply the links in so cheerful and finally hopeful a chain.

*"The Statue in Clay"*

<http://www.guilliotabelard.com/blog/?p=694>

"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots."

- Marcus Garvey

My introduction to the old ways—what we call “the teachings” or “the wisdom”—took place in the fall of 1980. One October Saturday my father began pulling weeds from our backyard, and required that I help him. Unfortunately, many of the weeds were poison ivy, and I, as I quickly discovered, was severely allergic. I was immediately confined to bed, a bloated brown mess, skin cracked and covered with sores, frantically scratching at the many furiously itching places on my arms and legs and face and neck. My mother, anxious to find me something to read, to take my mind off my body, went to the nearest used book store and bought a range of books, all the science fiction that I loved.

I set aside the Silverberg and Donaldson and Pohl for later consumption; I was in the mood for something shorter. I picked up the sole short story collection my mother had seen fit to buy, black covered, illustrated with a bizarre monster, the likes of which I hadn't seen before, even in my dreams. The author of the collection, H.P. Lovecraft, was a name I'd run across before, I couldn't recall exactly when or where, as someone worth reading.

So I did, and was immediately swept away. Some of the language was difficult—but of course I had my dictionary nearby—and some of his phrasing hard to understand—but I muddled through—but the stories. Ah, the stories! Doomed Antarctic expeditions! Aliens who were colors, somehow, infecting Massachusetts landscape! (I was on Cape Cod at this time, and immediately thought of someday visiting the blasted heath west of Arkham—wherever in Massachusetts that was). Farm folk descended from alien god-monsters! I was enthralled, and none more so than by “The Call of Cthulhu,” which struck me as thoroughly fascinating, in structure and in concept. A three-part story about an artist haunted by an insanity-inducing vision, alien-worshippers in Louisiana, and the encounter of a sailor with the alien itself—what was there not to love about “Call”?

I was fourteen, and I think I can be forgiven for not seeing Lovecraft's obsessions with race and purity at that time, during that first reading of “Call.” I was reading the story so quickly, I may simply have skimmed over the lines about “mongrel Louisianans” and “horde of human abnormality” on my way to the story's climax. Or perhaps, conversely, I read them and simply thought of them as one more moment of racist badness in a world of it, and nothing more than that; I was one of a small handful of people of color in my school and by no means unfamiliar with racial hostility, and possibly just thought of Lovecraft as one of Them, the racist whites who were making my life even more difficult. (I was too brown for whites, too chubby and pimply for girls of any race, and too much of a nerd for the other blacks and Latinos. An outsider at every turn, is how I thought of it, though now I see the good training it provided me for adult life).

Over the next few months I haunted the used bookstores and libraries of Yarmouth, Yarmouthport, Dennis, and Barnstable, looking for more books by and collections of Lovecraft, and then for anthologies which contained stories not included in the Ballantine collections I managed to purchase with my allowance. (I do not say my schoolwork suffered for my new obsession; with the exception of English, my favorite, my schoolwork had never been stellar,

much to the despair of my parents, both of whom expected me to excel as they had. My grades remained mediocre throughout high school.) Soon enough I had read everything in print and available by him, and was scribbling bad Lovecraftian fiction on my own, though I had the dim wit not to show anyone my writing. Those months were not exactly enjoyable months—nothing in my adolescence was in enjoyable—but I was diverted and occupied in ways that I had not been before. None of my previous enthusiasms—Star Wars, Star Trek, science fiction more generally—had kept me so entertained, even enthralled as playing in the world of Lovecraft did. I was able, with the help of Lovecraft and my stories, to spend long hours every day not thinking about school and the boys and girls in it. Those hours were a precious escape I hadn't had before, and I valued them.

But escapes and vacations are not permanent. They always end, one way or another. The end to my escape was Christmas vacation and an unprecedented trip to Houma, Louisiana, to visit my grandmother.

For reasons not made clear to me at that time—again, I was only fourteen, and withdrawn, and perhaps my parents felt I was not ready for uncomfortable truths—my father's relationship with his mother was strained. Before that Christmas we had not seen her in ten years, since I was four and my sister three, and though we received cash-filled cards from her at Christmas and on our birthdays, she remained a distant presence in our lives. I remain unsure why my father felt that the Christmas of 1980 was the right holiday in which to re-introduce my grandmother to us—perhaps guilt drove him? My father had used the G.I. Bill to escape the oppressive poverty of his childhood in Houma—Louisiana, in the 1930s and 1940s, being a poor country cousin to the rest of the country; even compared to the rest of the south, Louisiana was an impoverished, backwards place and a kind of sad joke—and had never returned to Louisiana, choosing instead to move to Massachusetts after serving in the Korean War. He also abandoned the Creole patois of his youth, and converted to straight white man's English—something he always insisted his children speak. (My first exposure to any form of French was freshman year in high school, and even then my father was negative about it, insisting that Spanish would be more useful to us).

Did my father feel regret that he hadn't seen his mother in a decade? From what I later learned, I doubt that. I think the reverse was true, and that my mother persuaded my father to make the Christmas trip over his best judgment, that my father had intended never to let his children be exposed to his mother and what she believed, beliefs that (though he would never admit such to me) must have made his childhood, in its way, as unpleasant as my own had been. (As an adult my father was a staunch agnostic. I believe he was that way as a child, which is not something his religious mother would have tolerated).

My grandmother was welcoming, though more so of the children than my father or mother. (More difficult family cross-currents: the suspicion my grandmother had for my mother, who my grandmother suspected of being a large part of why my father had not returned home in so long. I intuited this at fourteen and had it explained to me at greater length when I was an adult.) A widow of many years, my grandmother was not lonely, exactly—she had her extended relatives in the area and the local community, as well as her church—but as she told us, “blood trumps all.”

Family meals during that trip were stiff and formal, and my parents did what they could to keep my mother from preaching. Our trip was short by design; my parents kept themselves busy, visiting New Orleans and showing my sister, my brother, and myself the local sites, driving us out to the bayou, visiting the French Quarter, and generally doing what they could to

avoid being in my grandmother's house for as much time as possible. But whenever possible my grandmother took my sister and I aside (my brother being too young at this time) and told us stories about the family, and about my father's line—her line. My sister was unreceptive, being more interested in *Dallas* and *Knotts Landing* and the like—she always had a nose for popular culture—but my grandmother's words found fertile ground in my imagination, which was fired by the stories my grandmother told me, stories of escaped slaves and the Underground Railroad, of Marie Laveau (supposedly a lover of a several times removed cousin of my grandmother's family), of clever escapades and adventures by wily young men in the swamps south of Houma.

My father did what he could to limit my time with grandmother, I suspect because he feared that she was filling my head with the old ways that he had rejected. She wasn't, not then; she was teaching me about the lineage I was inheriting, and trying her best to fill me with pride in myself and my line. The only moment when she discussed the wisdom was on the last day of the visit, an hour or two before we left for the airport. She made sure my father and mother were busy packing, and quietly gestured me into her kitchen. She led me into the pantry attached to the kitchen, and showed me a clay statue, hidden behind some cans of beans.

It was a statue of Cthulhu. I recognized it instantly, not from any of the covers of the Lovecraft collections I owned (for, indeed, cover artists of Lovecraft collections in the 1970s were for some reason shy of portraying Cthulhu himself, preferring their own sometimes outlandish interpretations of Mythos creatures and landscapes), but from the description in "Call of Cthulhu," a description I had memorized. (Some boys my age memorized baseball statistics, some the names of cars. I memorized H.P. Lovecraft. Who is to say mine was the more eccentric devotion?)

My look of shock surprised her, and she hastened to tell me about the statue's background. It was Dogon, which was the name of the African people from which we were descended. And it represented a "Nommo," which is what my grandmother said was one of the names of the god she worshiped. She said the Nommo predated Jesus, and like him was crucified but then rose again, and would rise again a final time, and would rule over the earth and the heavens. She further said that were a number of people in the area—relatives and friends of hers—that believed that, and that they were a part of "the Church" and the "wisdom community."

The combination of the sight of the statue in real life and my grandmother's words—I was only ever a reluctant and disinterested churchgoer, but her words still struck me as in some way irreligious and possibly even blasphemous—unnerved me, and I made some hasty excuse and fled.

This did not, though, prevent me from thinking about what she said, during the long flight back to Boston, and wondering what truth there was in what she said, and what it had to do with Lovecraft and Cthulhu, and finally resolving to write her once I returned home and to ask her questions about the statue and the Nommo.

Which I did, beginning a correspondence of several years' length. My father disapproved of my writing to her, so I did so in secret, and hid the letters I received from her.

Grandmother taught me much—about her childhood, about my family's history, about the teachings and the wisdom community, about the gaps in my own knowledge about our people. Her married name, the Creole surname she took from her husband, was "Terrien," but her real name, the one that had been handed down by previous generations and survived the onslaught of slavery, the one her line had borne when they'd been taken from the Mali empire two centuries before, was Ouologuem (yes, I am distantly related to the writer of that name), and the Ouologuems—of the Dogon people—were traditionally aristocrats, privy to traditions and

knowledge that the ordinary Dogon were not.

One of those traditions was of the Nommos. The French anthropologists Griaule and Dieterlen, and then the American writer Temple, came in for no small amount of criticism and controversy when they published their accounts of the Nommos, but what they said in their two books matches what my grandmother told me. The truth of the Nommos may not be in accord with the truth that white academics accept and propagate, but as has often been seen, what white academics believe about Africans, and what they write about them, and what Africans actually are, are very different things.

For the Dogons, the Nommos were spirits or gods, amphibious, hermaphroditic, fish-like creatures, called variously “Masters of the Water,” “Watchers,” and “Teachers.” Dogon religious teachings say that the Nommos were once one being, the Nommo, the first living creature created by Amma, the sky god. Nommo soon transformed into four pairs of twins. One set of twins rebelled, leading Amma to sacrifice a second set of twins to stop them. The second set of twins’ bodies were dismembered and scattered across the Earth and the universe.

So goes the knowledge of the ordinary Dogons. What aristocrats like the Ouologuems knew was something more complicated: that the Nommos were in reality inhabitants of a world circling the star Sirius. Centuries ago they descended from the sky in a ship, accompanied by fire and thunder. After arriving, the Nommos created a reservoir of water and subsequently dove into the water. (The Nommos require a watery environment in which to live). The Nommos then, in some form or fashion, divided its body among humans to feed them, just as the universe had done—the universe “had drunk of his body.” The Nommos were crucified and resurrected, and will in the future assume their amphibious form and rule the world from the waters.

Aliens who descended to Earth from the stars, who lived in the waters, who had been mortally punished but came back anyhow, who would in the end return from a watery grave to rule the world? How like Cthulhu this was, in all ways! I was stunned, and couldn’t help but wonder if my beloved Lovecraft had stolen Cthulhu from the Nommos and the Dogon. It made me question Lovecraft in other ways. If he had stolen Cthulhu from the Dogon, what else might he have taken? My grandmother knew of Lovecraft—everyone in the wisdom community did, of course, and like them my grandmother’s opinion of the man was a dire one. She knew of the similarities between Cthulhu and the Nommos, but she couldn’t answer my very specific and detailed questions about those similarities, and when I began querying her about the “facts” she became short-tempered. Like many octogenarian true believers, she was happy to preach her religion but less willing to entertain probing questions about it. So I learned no more from her. But the issue of the truth behind the relationship of Cthulhu and the Nommos stuck with me, and when I reached college I decided I would pursue it as a student.

Unfortunately, a small liberal arts college in rural Maine, in the mid-1980s, was not the place for students interested in investigating popular culture and the truth behind it. There were no classes on popular literature—no classes of any kind on literature written after 1960—and no faculty members willing to lead me on an independent study of Lovecraft’s work, either from a literary standpoint or an anthropological one. Indeed, faculty members were more bemused than anything by my interest in science fiction, and tried to direct me to African-American literature, Ellison and Baldwin and Malcolm X and the like. Eventually I allowed myself to be pushed in that direction, although even at the time I saw the impropriety of white professors urging a black student to specialize in black literature. Racism can be extremely subtle in its applications and its effects.

Being a college student did give me one advantage, however: a student i.d., which I

found to be quite useful on vacations home. I used the student i.d. to gain access to the libraries of other colleges and universities in New England, where I could carry out my research into Lovecraft and Cthulhu and the Dogon. Some of the best libraries, like Harvard's, were closed stacks and only served that particular college's or university's students. Others, like Miskatonic's, were open, both open stacks and open to other colleges' students, and allowed me to wander through the stacks at will, and even to use their Rare Books collections. To my parents, I said I was doing preparatory research for my senior thesis, which they approved of; they were happy to see me applying myself to schoolwork, something that had never been the case in high school.

So it was that I got to examine the original Cthulhu statue, the one taken during Inspector Legrasse's raid, and the original Cthulhu bas-relief, the one carved by Henry Wilcox—although of course I was forced to wear white cotton gloves while handling them—and got to turn the pages of the *Al Azif* and the *Necronomicon* (again, while wearing gloves)—and to ransack collections and decades-old bound periodicals, *The Journal of West African Research* and so on, for information about the Dogon and the Nommos. I learned so much during those days, much that didn't make sense to me at the time but which, as I became more and more acquainted with the teachings, eventually did make sense and did answer certain mysteries.

I mostly view those days through a rose-colored lens. Being left to myself in large college and university libraries, to trip through centuries of learning at will? Paradise, for one such as me, and the thought of them still brings a rush of warm goodwill. But that warm good feeling disappears if I really think about those days, for there, as everywhere else, racism raised its ugly white head. This was a time of heightened antagonism toward African-Americans, both nationally and locally. George Bush's Willie Horton ad and the Charles Stuart murder case did not appear in vacuums, they were the fruit of long-germinating seeds. The ivory halls of academia were surprisingly (or perhaps not) fertile soil for this hatred. My college, with its 80% white population, left me feeling an outsider despite the obvious good intentions of the white students and faculty members, but staff and faculty and students at Miskatonic, among other places, made me feel unwelcome, even with me wielding my student i.d. like a shield. Miskatonic may have a reputation for being welcoming of international students, including Africans. This reputation may even be merited. But this spirit of bonhomie and brotherhood does not extend to African-Americans. Hostility from other students, the obvious reluctance to answer questions from staff members and faculty, and naked suspicion from librarians, who watched me closely the entire time I was handling the statue and the bas-relief and looking at the *Al Azif* and the *Necronomicon*—those are my memories of Miskatonic University and its library. The school's motto is "Ex Ignorantia Ad Sapientiam; Ex Luce Ad Tenebras"—“Out Of Ignorance Into Wisdom; Out Of Light Into Darkness”—but in my experience those of Miskatonic prefer to wallow in white racist ignorance rather than proceed toward blackness and wisdom.

One thing did come out of those weeks spent in libraries: my senior year independent study. My senior thesis, on the African roots of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, was mediocre (though good enough, in the eyes of the white faculty at my college, to earn me Honors). But my independent study, carried out against the wishes of my thesis advisor (he felt I should focus solely on my thesis), was a comparison of the images on Wilcox's Cthulhu bas-relief with traditional Dogon statuary. I was, I feel, successful in showing that Wilcox was not, as Lovecraft wrote, a “precocious youth of known genius,” but a cunning (if notably insecure and neurotic) social climber who took the basics of his bas-relief from Dogon statuary (especially those of the “seated Nommo” variety) and simply embroidered the rest of the bas-relief with fanciful

hieroglyphics and outré symbols and images of his own design. Indeed, as I implied in my paper, there is evidence that Wilcox was heavily influenced by some of Lovecraft's early writing, "The Nameless City" and "Dagon" and the like. The traditional narrative is that Lovecraft incorporated Wilcox and his bas-relief into "The Call of Cthulhu," but that is exactly backwards: Lovecraft was not inspired by Wilcox—Wilcox was inspired by Lovecraft. Wilcox simply concluded (with no small justification) that the art world he was so desperate to gain entry to would be unfamiliar with Lovecraft's work, and see Wilcox's bas-relief as something entirely original to him rather than as something derived from Dogon statuary and Lovecraft stories.

(Of course, Wilcox's theft of Dogon imagery is but one act in a long, sordid history of the white theft of African art. Indeed, even in 1925, the year that Wilcox carved his bas-relief, the Congolese activist Paul Panda Farnana M'fumu was in Belgium attacking the white theft of African art and calling for white European museums to repatriate the stolen art to local African museums. What Wilcox did was not new—but neither are cries to return stolen African art. Like most activism, African and African American arts activism has a long, proud history.)

My paper was quite well-received by the faculty at my college, and was actually published in *Studies in African Art*, gaining me a (very) small amount of notoriety on campus as well as the praise of my father. I look upon the paper with satisfaction—I did my part in changing the discourse on Wilcox—and as an avenue of a life not taken. I could have pursued a graduate degree in art history, focusing on Dogon art and eventually becoming a lecturer on African art, whether in the United States or abroad. I would have been successful at it. But the wisdom and the teachings were luring me in another direction. The call of Cthulhu was strong.

## 2.

### *"The Legrasse File"*

<http://www.guilliotabelard.com/blog/?p=698>

"People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them."

- James Baldwin

What followed—well, I suppose you would call it a typical Lovecraftian narrative, in its way. I took a day job in Boston, of no interest to me but one which would pay the bills and allow me weekends off and enough vacation time to take research trips, and I made use of those weekends and vacation days to investigate obscure, arcane, and hidden information, about Lovecraft's stories. Did Lovecraft write, in "Pickman's Model," about a real artist working out of Boston's North End? Then I would track down every reference to Pickman in the scholarly literature and find the actual building Pickman lived in. (That Pickman is one of many forgotten artists of the Jazz Age, and that his building was apparently torn down in the 1920s, did not deter me, nor did the scowls that the Italians of the North End directed at my brown skin). Did Lovecraft base Dunwich, in "The Dunwich Horror," on Wilbraham, Monson, and Hampden? Then I would drive out Route 20 to investigate the area myself. Did Lovecraft write about a valley, soon to be flooded for a reservoir, in "The Colour out of Space"? Then I would visit the Quabbin Reservoir and the towns around it, and scour their libraries for copies of newspapers from the towns that the Quabbin Reservoir drowned—Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott—to see if any Lovecraftian events or simply unexplainable occurrences had occurred in these towns before the creation of the reservoir.

Meanwhile I grew to be a familiar face at the Boston Public Library's Rare Books

Department, and at the library at Miskatonic University. An unwelcome face, at times, because of my pertinacity (many of the librarians were of the school of thought that books are best preserved by not being used, while I was constantly demanding to see the most obscure, oldest, and most fragile of the library's collection) and the color of my skin, but a familiar one nonetheless. The more I learned, the more I discovered that I had to learn—not only of the Dogon and the Nommos, but of the material Lovecraft drew upon for this stories. I exhausted my grandmother's knowledge, and I spent one memorable week in New Orleans, at the main branch of the public library, and in Houma, at the library there, reading everything the local newspapers had to offer about the past. I learned so much, during those months and years spent in libraries, not the least of which was about how minor the Dogon and Nommos were in the overall history of the wisdom community, which contrary to what my grandmother had taught me was so much more than just the descendants of the Dogon. The wisdom community, as I was surprised to discover, consisted of peoples from many different indigenous groups, all of which had their own sets of legends to accompany the teachings from the holy book. My grandmother's adherence to the story about the Nommos was matched by many others' adherence to the legends and myths of their own cultures. The wisdom community in America is primarily black, but America, as I was learning, was not the world.

Perhaps the foremost thing I learned was just how much Lovecraft, in "Call of Cthulhu," warped history. Of course, the surprising thing is how much he knew to begin with, how close his stories were to reality. Say what you will about Lovecraft—that he was a racist, a sexist, an anti-Semite, a man with peculiar phobias—but the man could research. Without any contacts inside the wisdom community, and relying only upon a scattered array of correspondents and upon newspaper and magazine articles and the selected testimony of those outsiders who became involved in community affairs, or at least exposed to them, Lovecraft managed to piece together a remarkably accurate half of the real situation. The other half of what he wrote was racist misinformation—but that is to be expected. Instead, give him his due for what he accomplished. Hate the player, maybe, but respect the game.

Roughly a third of "Call" is taken up by the account by one John Raymond Legrasse, Inspector of the New Orleans Police Department, of a raid on "voodoo" "cultists" in the swamps south of New Orleans. As might be expected, Legrasse's account (perhaps verbatim, perhaps filtered through Lovecraft's sensibility and rhetoric) is full of racist vocabulary—"mongrel celebrants" and "men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type" and so on—and racist concepts—Negroes and mulattoes dancing around an idol after having sacrificed men and women and children by burning them alive. It is about what one would expect of a white New Orleans policeman of that era, and not, to be honest, all that far from the early accounts of voodoo, Seabrook's *The Magic Island* and the film *White Zombie* and the like.

Readers of "Call of Cthulhu" have traditionally taken Legrasse's account as accurate. Those readers, after all, cannot be expected to know much of Louisiana in 1907, and are ever more distant from Lovecraft's own time; the details of life decades ago are difficult to recapture now, even with the vast amount of research resources available to us. So the readers of "Call" take it as a given that what Legrasse said was fact, and that, at most, what Lovecraft did was embroider that truth, perhaps adding more purple descriptive words and phrases.

But let me speak of another truth, one that wouldn't make it into the mainstream accounts of Legrasse's raid, the articles in the *Picayune* or the *Times-Democrat* and the like, but would survive in word-of-mouth accounts of actual civilian witnesses to the raid, and eventually show up as short historical pieces in African-American newspapers like the *Louisiana Defender* and



the *Atlanta Daily World*. Let's speak of what the raid really was, and the context in which it took place. Let's speak of the black man's truth.

New Orleans, in 1907, was the entrepôt of the Mississippi River, the gateway to the south and to the Caribbean. The city saw an enormous amount of material come through its docks; keep in mind, this was 1907, before trucking replaced railroads and ships as the primary means of bringing goods to the city. Shipping was vital to the city's economic well-being, and the docks and dockworkers were key to making sure that the goods on the ships made their way off the ships and into the arms of waiting vendors.

Naturally, the docks were the site of substantial friction between ship owners and dockworkers—the eternal conflict between labor and management played out there as it does everywhere else. Interestingly, though—especially for the time period—there was relatively little friction between the races on the docks. Black men and white men worked together, side by side, without the major brawls or attacks that occurred on other docks—just witness the brutal assaults on African-Americans who tried to find work on the Houston docks following the 1906 hurricane. This strange cross-racial unity was not, however, the result of some early progressive tendencies among the whites of New Orleans, but sprang from a purely pragmatic perspective: that by working together white and black dockworkers could prevent ship owners from playing both sides against each other, and that a unified front would bring them the greatest victories against their employers.

So in 1907, when the dockworkers' unions (one for the blacks, one for the whites) had to negotiate a new contract with shipping companies, and the companies demanded an unreasonable increase in the daily rate of work performed by the dockworkers, the dockworkers, both white and black, went on strike. Despite the usual attempts by management to break the strike, by importing strikebreakers and appealing to the supposed best interests of the strikers, and despite management attempting to revive the White League, a paramilitary racist terrorist group akin to the Ku Klux Klan, the strikers held firm, and the strike ended with a compromise agreement that slightly increased the dockworkers' expected daily rate but in other ways favored the strikers.

This strike--the General Levee Strike--was the high point for racial solidarity among Louisiana dockworkers for many years, and the high point for labor activism. Naturally, management, specifically the ship owners, were very concerned about what this portended. Nor was the city happy with the strikers (having lost substantial money during the strike), and the police and opinion-makers (rightly) suspected a socialist influence in all that labor activity.

The General Levee Strike ended on October 24, 1907. Inspector Legrasse's raid took place eight days later, on the evening of November 1.

Now, you can believe Legrasse's account and Lovecraft's rendition of it, with their half-human Negroes and mixed blood mulattoes dancing around a fire and an icon, having burned victims to death. Thanks to Legrasse and Lovecraft, that is the truth that generations of whites have accepted and believed. But there is a separate truth, handed down through generations of local blacks and Creoles, a truth my grandmother and her friends shared with me, and our truth and the white man's are radically at odds. Our truth is that Friday evenings were the traditional day of the week for union officials to meet—and November 1 was a Friday. Our truth is that, though the black and the white unions worked together during the General Levee Strike, there was no desire on the part of the whites for true social equality, that the alliance was one of pragmatism, even after the Strike, and that the black dockworkers' union still had to meet separately. Our truth is that there at the location of the raid there was a fire (November evenings

are chill in the swamps) and drinking (union officials were not opposed to alcohol at meetings, as long as the work of the union was done before the serious drinking began), but no dancing (with no woman, who would the officials—all men—be dancing with?), no chanting (the union officials were mostly Catholics, and no wisdom community members would ever attempt to hold a wisdom ceremony in the presence of outsiders), and certainly no sacrifices (Friday night is the night of our ceremonies, but this meeting was a union meeting, not a wisdom ceremony). Our truth is that Legrasse knew (thanks to an informer) about the meeting, and was determined to break it up, as he had been ordered to by his superiors and their ship owner allies.

Our truth, in other words, is that the Legrasse raid was simply another union-busting action carried out by police at the direction of their corporate masters, and that the additional bug of the union members being black was actually a feature, to the police and to the ship owners, who were desirous of breaking up the alliance between the black and white unions. The post-facto story which Legrasse peddled, to the *Picayune* and the *Times-Democrat* and later to the American Archaeological Society, was a fanciful cover story to justify the brutality with which Legrasse and the other policemen handled the union officials.

Ask yourself honestly, white readers. Which is more likely: racist union busting—in New Orleans, in 1907, a week after the General Levee Strike? Or a police raid which coincidentally interrupts a sacrificial celebration to an unknown god? The latter is the province of the pulps—where, of course, “The Call of Cthulhu” finally appeared. The former would be part of a long, discomfiting tradition in the United States. Why would twenty heavily-armed police be required for a raid on a religious rite? They wouldn’t be. But a large number of police raiding a union gathering—that’s simply an American tradition.

There remains, of course, the statue which Legrasse showed off to the Archaeological Society, and which Lovecraft must eventually have seen, so detailed are his descriptions of it in “Call.” The Abellard family tradition—again, the black man’s truth, which whites have proven over generations particularly resistant to accept—see, for example, the descendants of Sally Hemings and their long-running account of Thomas Jefferson’s relationship with her—although given the power he held over her, perhaps the best phrase for it is “Thomas Jefferson’s repeated rapes of Sally Hemings.” But I stray, forgive me. The Abellard family tradition—and that of a few other black families in New Orleans—is that following the Legrasse raid and the arrests of the men present at the union meeting, there were more raids, this time of the houses of the union officials and their families. My grandmother, who was only eight at the time, still remembered the raid of her house vividly when I asked her about it. And she remembers how upset her parents were when Legrasse—oh, yes, he personally led the raids—took away the statue of the Nommo that they had been given in what was then known as the French Sudan, when they had traveled there in search of family relations.

Why did Legrasse present at the Archaeological Society in St. Louis in 1908, and ask those questions about the statue? The narrator of “Call” mentions having spoken with Legrasse, and says that Legrasse’s testimony and others of his raiding party confirmed what the narrator’s uncle wrote. I doubt, very much, that Legrasse mentioned what he had between 1908 and the time the narrator—who, let’s be honest, is not “Francis Wayland Thurston” but H.P. Lovecraft himself—spoke with him. Legrasse would not willingly have spoken of his extra-legal hounding of union activists or wisdom community members, and the violence with which his raids were carried out, especially during and after the “Red Scare” of 1916-1920. Legrasse would not willingly have admitted, especially to a Yankee outsider, how “justice” was practiced in New Orleans in those years—the torture-like “questioning” and “interrogation” of suspects, the arrests

and imprisonments based on little or no evidence, the midnight burials of “suicidal” prisoners at Angola Penitentiary, the virtual slavery that those prisoners were forced to undergo. Legrasse would not willingly have spoken of how the wisdom community became his bugaboo, his white whale, his obsession, and the increasing persecutions through which he put black New Orleanseans, all to root out the “cult.” To members of the community Legrasse became a kind of Javert, albeit one who never saw the contradictions and hypocrisies in his own beliefs. (Those curious can read the true story of Legrasse’s actions in my article, “The Infamous Legrasse: His Life And Times,” *Wisdom Community Quarterly* 49.3 (2003) 87-101.)

Perhaps I should be ashamed to admit that I enjoy the thought of Legrasse’s tawdry ending. Perhaps I should be a bigger man than Legrasse was. But I am not. Sometimes what the *Al Azif* teaches as an aspirational goal is too much for ordinary humans to achieve.

### 3.

“*The Teachings From Over The Sea*”

<http://www.guilliotabelard.com/blog/?p=703>

Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places. For them are the catacombs of Ptolemais, and the carven mausolea of the nightmare countries. They climb to the moonlit towers of ruined Rhine castles, and falter down black cobwebbed steps beneath the scattered stones of forgotten cities in Asia. The haunted wood and the desolate mountain are their shrines, and they linger around the sinister monoliths on uninhabited islands.

So wrote Lovecraft in “The Picture in the House.” But of course he didn’t mean “searchers after horror” so much as “searchers after forbidden knowledge,” which like the rest of that quote is for modern readers a problematic statement. “Forbidden” to whom, after all, and by who? These “strange, far places,” “nightmare countries,” “forgotten cities,” are they uninhabited? Are they strange and nightmarish and forgotten to their native citizens? Are we sure the islands of the “sinister monoliths” are uninhabited? Or is it that they are just the home to people of color, and not whites, the only people that Lovecraft counted as truly human and civilized?

The typical Lovecraftian subject is a white man who spends months or years of his life traveling to these locales in search of arcane, obscure, esoteric knowledge, with the result that he—always a he—is driven slightly mad, or more than slightly. Well, I, too, went in pursuit of forbidden knowledge, and what I found changed me—but for the better.

I spent my twenties haunting the libraries of the United States, looking for the truths behind Lovecraft and looking for more information about the wisdom and the teachings community. I learned as much about them as any outsider could. I became, after a fashion, an expert on Lovecraft, although I did not try to publish my findings, feeling that fans of Lovecraft and participants in Lovecraft studies would not be welcoming to my conclusions or to someone with my skin color. (After all, racism in what is now called the geek community is as pervasive and noxious as it is among regular people). I had self-taught Arabic, to a respectable degree of proficiency. And I became passably well-acquainted with most of the available material on the wisdom and the teachings, bolstering my knowledge when possible with correspondence with my grandmother, and after her passing with her friends.

Meanwhile I worked hard at my day job—all so that I could use my weekends and vacation time in pursuit of my real interests. I received promotions, and occasionally worked late

into the night, always keeping in mind my ultimate goals. I had few friends, and was a distant presence even in my family's life—mostly estranged from my father, who I could not forgive for keeping me, keeping us, from the wisdom of his people, and who let his disappointment in me show, and an awkward correspondent to my sister and brother, whose preoccupations—in popular culture and sports and the mundane details of their mundane lives—bored me. But I had my researches, and that was enough to drive me.

When I turned thirty I judged that I'd saved enough to be able to afford the worldwide trip I had always known was my destiny, so I quit the job, cashed in my stock options, and began traveling. But as I discovered in the planning stage of my world trip, in his stories Lovecraft only hints at the locations his protagonists visit, he never names them or describes them with any degree of accuracy or recognizability. I was forced to admit that I could not solely or even primarily rely upon Lovecraft's stories for my destinations. Instead, I would have to choose those locations which were most likely to have the sorts of libraries and archives and resources on the wisdom and the teachings, and hope that I would be able to find what I sought. Fortunately, the year was 1996, and the World Wide Web was beginning to reach full usefulness, so I was able to do a significant amount of research online.

So it was off to Mali, first of all, and Timbuktu and its libraries. Many of the manuscripts in those libraries date to the 13<sup>th</sup> century; some, I found, predated those by centuries, and were written by contemporaries of Abdullah Alha zred in the pre-Songhai Gao empire. I visited the library at the University of Haiti, founded in 1820 but the home to material predating the Haitian revolution and, in one precious archive, records of the Taino, the first inhabitants of Haiti, those who were on the island before the Spanish came. I climbed the moonlit towers of ruined Rhine castles that Lovecraft mentioned—some of the private holdings of German collectors are surprisingly comprehensive—but spent much more time in the Universitätsarchiv of the Berlinisches Polytechnikum. I bothered the librarians at the University of Bologna until they gave in and agreed to help me. There were cobwebbed steps in Qom, in Iran, but none in the Fatima Masumeh Shrine. There are ancient carvings on the islands of the Chiloé Archipelago, off the coast of Chile, but also over 150,000 Chilotés. To Asia, then, and the ruins of Nalanda and the Samye monastery in Tibet, and the Shwedagon Pagoda in Burma, and the White Horse Temple in China.

In every location I found at least something to learn from, some document or engraving or statue which had information I lacked and needed. In some locations, I found much that was useful and informative—nothing about Lovecraft or the parts of Massachusetts he wrote about, but much about the global wisdom community, whose history could be traced back at least to the Egyptian Third Dynasty, 4600 years ago—a time and a place which I learned was the wisdom community's original home.

I admit, I had thought that my world trip would give me a depth of knowledge about the wisdom community's practices that I would at last be able to present myself during one of the church services and take part in them, and perhaps eventually lead them—the services, and the private rituals that have always been a part of our community's practices. If Lovecraft's protagonists would return from their travels with enough knowledge to perform sorcerous rituals, I would similarly come back as an expert in the wisdom community's ways.

So I did, after a fashion, although the centuries-long knowledge of the wisdom community is fractal—the farther in you get, the more learned you get, the farther you have to go and the more you have to learn.

What I took most to heart was the lesson of the community itself: how centuries of

diaspora, oppression, prejudice, and the suppression of our ways, our lifestyles, our very communities and lives had not defeated us. Always, we survived and found ways to thrive, no matter what the governments and local officials and even hostile countrymen did to us. Like the Romany and the Jews, we survived pogroms, being driven from country to country, being forced to live in pales of our own, the seemingly eternal hatred of everyone. The Jews have it as “Esau hates Jacob”—that Christians will *always* hate Jews. If Esau hates Jacob, so too does William hate Ousmane (and Nadheer, and Yū, and Nahuel, and so on)—the outside world will always hate members of the wisdom community. But Jacob’s descendants survived and thrived, despite the buffets of the gentile world, and found a home first in the United States and then in Israel itself. So could the wisdom community. I knew we were practicing semi-openly in parts of the United States. Why couldn’t we dream about finding our own country? We had no “Next year in Jerusalem”—but we should. “Next year in R’lyeh,” perhaps.

But of course there could be no community without community members, and there too I found a heartening message. The wisdom and teachings community was remarkably successful in passing our ways down across the continents and the long centuries, despite the attempts at suppression we suffered. Always overseen by the mothers and grandmothers—the backbone of our community—the ways were taught. Families were formed and maintained, houses and churches were built and repaired, help was given to those who needed it, marriages were arranged. We not only survived, we maintained our traditional ways, and kept the communities strong, even when we had no country or even village to call our own.

I had to confront one unpleasant reality, though, which was that I was not a part of the community. I wanted to be, and knew enough to be one, but all my life, first unwillingly and then by design, I had been an outsider. To be a part of the wisdom community, I couldn’t remain one. To be a part of a community is to sacrifice some of your individualism in exchange for the rules of the community—and being an individual was all I had. And to be a part of the wisdom community, whose values predate those of America itself, one must think first of the community, rather than oneself, something I as a twentieth century American male found to be a most jarring shift. (African-Americans speak of going back to Africa, but when they do they all too often take America with them).

So when I returned to the United States I packed up my apartment in Boston and moved to Houma, the town with the largest wisdom and teachings community in the eastern half of the United States. My grandmother was gone, but some of her friends still lived, and I had maintained contact with them. They took me in as a long-lost grandson, accompanied me to church services, introduced me to prominent members of the community, arranged excursions with men my age and arranged introductions with suitable women my age.

I, the lifelong outsider, was forced to set aside my solitude and socialize, something I found quite uncomfortable at first. But in time I learned to enjoy aspects of it. And I met Evangeline, who became my wife and eventually mother to my daughters. I became a part of the wisdom community in Houma. Eventually, I became what I remain today: a suburban husband and father (soon to be grandfather), a deacon in my church, someone known at work as solid and dependable, someone known in my neighborhood as a regular, unremarkable guy. I am estranged from my parents (who never forgave me for becoming a part of the wisdom community which my father had long rejected) and my siblings (who view me as a dangerous religious fanatic). But I have a family of my own, and loving in-laws, and a community of fellow believers who give me the support I would otherwise have looked to my family for.

I am, in other words, the exact opposite of Lovecraft’s protagonists. What makes them

outsiders made me an insider. Forbidden knowledge—the dark epiphanies Lovecraft hints at and sometimes describes—drove them mad; that same knowledge and epiphanies made me sane. Is it because Lovecraft’s protagonists are white and I’m black? It’s certainly possible. Wherever they went, they were outsiders. Wherever I went, I was—not one of the local communities, for I was after all an American traveler—but someone recognizable, someone with dark skin. I was far more accepted in Haiti and Timbuktu, despite being an American, than Randolph Carter could ever have been. The racism I faced in Arkham, and Boston, was a distant memory. Oh, the trip wasn’t free of prejudice. The white colonial mindset is distressingly common even in Asian countries, and I faced suspicion and occasional hostility from Tibetans, Burmese, and Chinese. (The prejudice Africans and those of African descent face in large parts of Asia are well-known, and I was by no means exempt from it). But in black and Semitic countries, I was made welcome, and even in the most remote sections of Asia, when I found wisdom communities, I was made as welcome as any native.

But of course the tradition of William hating Ousmane, and our (well-founded) suspicion of whites, are all the product of culture and history, and have nothing to do with the scripture of the holy book—or anything innate to white people. It took me a very long time to learn this, but racism is the system we are all trapped within, a system which deforms both victims and victimizers. (The similarity to patriarchy has not gone unremarked upon among the younger and more progressive women of the wisdom community—sexism is all too common in the wisdom community, despite our tradition of female elders being seen and revered as wise woman.). Some of the victimizers can—have—recognized this system, this structure, and work against it. Some of the victimizers—some of the whites—are racially progressive, and undeserving of our distrust. My personal Malcolm-X-in-Mecca epiphany about white men came during my visit to the Cascade community of believers--Cascade, Montana, being the largest western wisdom community, the “Houma of the west.” I saw white students of the wisdom studying and worshiping and working and eating and sleeping side-by-side with people of color, acting for all the world as if they truly did not see race. It’s too late for my generation of white men, but who knows how truly tolerant the next generation of white men and women might become?

When I began this blog I wrote that whites will “either go mad from the revelation or flee from the glorious truth into the peace and safety of ignorance.” Perhaps that was unfair—too harsh. If the white brothers and sisters of Cascade are any indication, there is a third way open to them that they will take.

I wish Lovecraft could have been one of them, rather than a purveyor of racist lies about the wisdom community. Even among non-community members, Lovecraft is the focus of ire these days. And he certainly deserves his share, for when he wasn’t writing non-fiction, or fictionalized accounts of reality (like “Call of Cthulhu” and “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”), he was writing fiction (“The Colour Out of Space” and “The Dunwich Horror” being perhaps his best), and too often that fiction is based on or propelled by racial animus, a fear of miscegenation, a contempt for and loathing of immigrants, people of color, Jews, and women. It’s no surprise that in 2016 many readers view him dubiously, and extend that doubt and suspicion to his fiction, and see it as an extension of his personal racial biases, and devalue the fiction because of those biases.

(Don’t worry, I’m not about to go Houlebecq on you. I will say, as a side note, that partisans in the Lovecraft wars needn’t go to the extremes of S.T. Joshi, on the end of unthinking denial of the racism, or to the foolishness of a Daniel José Older, who sees no merit in Lovecraft’s writing, it seems, because of the racism. Those like Nick Mamatas and Kenneth

Hite, who stride the middle route of admitting the racism while also esteeming his work, are much wiser than the extremists of either side).

But Lovecraft, extreme in some ways though he was, was very much a man of his time. It's easy—and lazy—to punish one man for the sins of his era. It's not so easy to hold up the era itself to critical scrutiny, and even more difficult when the era being exposed to scrutiny is one's own.

Consider the present. I write this early in 2016. In many ways, we've made great progress—socially, religiously, economically, culturally. But in many other ways we're still subject to the same old, reflexive prejudices.

Take religions. Compare how predominantly white religions are described to those religions primarily practiced by people of color. Notice how often the word “cult” is used in describing those religions. Voodoo, Santeria, the Ghost Dance—rarely are they described as religions, though such they are. More often they are described as cults.

So, too, with the ways of the wisdom community, usually called “the Cthulhu cult.” In the 1920s, in primarily white gatherings, as in Providence, our ways became subsumed by and practiced by the “Church of Starry Wisdom,” but the rest of us have always known it by simpler names. Before the Dogon were brought over as slaves, we knew the wisdom rituals simply as *dinà*, or “the religion.” (This was before Islam appropriated that term from us, as they took so much else from the original Dogon culture). The Inuit of Greenland—the “degenerate Esquimaux” that Inspector Legrasse sneered at—have it as *illu*, or “the house.” The Mapuche of Chile know it as *huepil*, “the rainbow.” The Miao of China called it *hnia*, or “the kiss.”

Now, we in America call it “the teachings” or “the wisdom,” and describe the followers of it as “students” and as “the wisdom community.” Not so frightening when you put it that way, is it? Recently, in the Internet age, we've even allowed the rare white journalist into our ranks, to interview us and see our ceremonies. The ones who write for online venues, like *Salon* or *Slate* or *The Nation*, tend to get it right, although those writers come in for criticism as “revisionist” when they do—such are the deep wells of reactionary prejudice that the Internet age has revealed. These journalists use carefully-composed neutral phrases like “belief system” and “way of life” and even “religion.” That feature writer from *The Atlantic* tried to do right by us, too, though I think his labeling us “the believers” was an attempt to start a catchphrase rather than accurately define us.

But even with the best of intentions these are attempts by outsiders—white outsiders—to shape our narrative for their own purposes and to sell it to a white audience. Who, it must be asked, gets to tell our story—ourselves, or white outsiders? We—the students of the teachings—have suffered from white definitions for centuries. Isn't it about time we were given the opportunity to define ourselves?

Never mind the names they call us. Consider the narratives about us, the many “Cthulhu Mythos” stories written in the past seventy years, the comic books, the role-playing games, the movies. To read and see these things, one would believe that the students of the teachings are held captive to centuries-old religious texts, that our beliefs have not changed in centuries and remain the same now as they were when Abdullah Alha zred wrote the holy book. This, too, is a kind of racism: white people's religions change (Christianity, Judaism), but colored people's religions stay the same (Islam), unaffected by changes in knowledge and culture over time.

The truth is—and this is an objective truth, not just one black man's truth—that the teachings have changed in the past century. New teachings, new beliefs, new translations of the holy book. Why are you surprised? Christianity had its Reformation. Judaism had its splits into

Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Even Islam is not unchanging; there was the historical split between Sunni and Shia and the more current (if still unlabeled) developments of the more conservative groups of the Middle East and the more liberal Muslim groups of the Southeast Asia. The differences between the Wahhabi of Saudi Arabia and the Muslims of Indonesia are great. Why shouldn't the teachings and the followers of the teachings also change? Why shouldn't there have been generations of scholars among the followers who investigate the oldest available primary text, the *Al Azif*, and its first two translations, the Greek and Latin *Necronomicons*, and the available supporting, secondary texts, and the scholia and commentary that accompany those texts—and why shouldn't these scholars (working, needless to say, under the most difficult of conditions) have reached conclusions that would surprise and possibly even shock Lovecraft and his followers and scholars? Why shouldn't students of the teachings use modern technology and resources to investigate the roots of the teachings, to tease out what is true and real and what was accreted to the teachings or added to them later on—just as Christian scholars have done for generations with the Bible? Why shouldn't the *Al Azif* undergo translation into modern English, and be reprinted as a cheap paperback so all worshipers in the wisdom community can have access to it?

So, yes, there have been changes to the teachings. Huge changes. Take the name “Cthulhu.” Abdullah Alha zred, the credited author of the *Al Azif*, wrote the name in Arabic as “ولوثك,” which was translated (250 years later) into Greek as “κθολο” in the Greek *Necronomicon*, which was then (270 years later) translated into Latin as “Cthulhu,” and so it has remained ever since, to outsiders. There are even many within the wisdom community who remain faithful to the old teachings and continue to use “Cthulhu” as the name for the god.

But as modern scholars have pointed out, written Arabic omits vowels, as many Semitic languages do, including only consonants on the assumption that the reader/speaker already knows how the word is pronounced. In written Arabic, the word “Cthulhu” is actually “k-th-l.” Centuries of outsiders have assumed that the pronunciation of “ولوثك” is “Cthulhu,” based on the Latin translation by one “Olaus Wormius” (the Latinized version of “Ole Worm,” which is another pseudonym if I've ever seen one). But is it? How would we know, in 2016? Lovecraft had his opinion of how the word was pronounced, but he was relying on second- and third-hand resources and the occasional white correspondent. Lovecraft was as ignorant of the truth as any white outsider. The author of the Greek *Necronomicon*, Theodorus Philetas of Constantinople, interpolated the o/u sounds in “k-th-l,” to come up with “κθολο,” and then “Olaus Wormius” altered “κθολο” to come up with “Cthulhu.” That's two levels of scholarly assumption and alteration that have become received wisdom, when the question should be asked, why not an “a” or an “e” or an “i” or an “o” sound in there? Indeed, given Arabic word construction, we should take the final name as contraction of two words: the first, the “k-th,” and the second, the “l”.

Given the subject in question, and the writer, modern wisdom community scholars have deemed it likely that the “l” is actually short for اللّٰه, or “al-ilah,” or “the god.” (Again, the vowels are omitted when written). The “k-th” combination is a subject of substantial debate, with numerous Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew words being proposed. The generally accepted one, at least among the more forward-thinking members of the teachings community, is that “k-th” is a borrowed and transliterated word from Hebrew: “aqath,” or “crying, shouting, calling.” (Keep in mind that such cross-language borrowing was common in centuries past; there was a reason that many scholars, for a long time, theorized that اللّٰه, “Allah,” was originally borrowed from Aramaic or Hebrew, both of which have cognates of “Allah”).



So in the original Arabic of Abdullah Alha zred, “k-th-l” would have been pronounced “aqath-al-ilah,” meaning “the Calling God.” Quite a bit different from “Cthulhu,” isn’t it? Which, after all, is a meaningless, nonsensical-sounding name.

(Further afield, some of these scholars have also drawn comparisons between the Christian and gnostic “Logos,” or divine word—and Christ, the Logos incarnate—and the word or words that the Calling God speaks. But that is a contentious subject and one deserving of its own blog post).

As you might imagine, this conclusion is controversial within the teachings community, with traditionalists rejecting it and those of us of a more modern mind set accepting it.

Are you surprised that there are two different, conflicting groups within the teachings community? You shouldn’t be. As mentioned, Christianity and Judaism and Islam have their separate sects, why shouldn’t we? Inside the community the two groups are known variously as, on the one hand, “traditionalists” or “literalists” or “conservatives,” and on the other hand “modernists” or “progressives.” Those are the informal names for the groups; in more formal occasions, during services and such, they self-label as “The Church of Cthulhu” and “The Reforming Church of the Calling God”.

The split between these two groups—one might (unkindly but not inaccurately) call it a “schism”—began after the Second World War, when some highly-placed members of the wisdom community, in exchange for their cooperation with the Allied authorities during the war, were granted a certain amount of legal freedom to worship (as long as they were not obvious about it and practiced it in remoter locales). The community had not known this kind of freedom of worship since at least the 1920s, when the Innsmouth raids led to a nation-wide crackdown on the community. The community took glad advantage of this new freedom, re-establishing churches that had been shut down twenty years before. But more than that, a number of the young men in the community, returning service members, took advantage of the G.I. Bill to get a college education. For many, this education led them to take classes in religion, which in turn exposed them to currents and trends in Biblical criticism, which in turn inspired some of these men to apply the methods of both Higher and Lower Biblical criticism to the holy scripture and to the *Necronomicon*.

Many in the teachings community—largely older members—took badly to having their deepest beliefs and their holy texts questioned and examined in this way. But many others, younger men and women, embraced the new knowledge-seekers. The two groups disagreed, first politely, then vehemently, and finally, in 1948, the two officially split and formed the separate churches. I wasn’t there, obviously, but I’m led to understand the split was caused not just by doctrinal disagreements, but also by the publication of *The Arkham Sampler*, from the publisher Arkham House, whose books did so much damage to the public perception of the wisdom community. *The Arkham Sampler* contained the infamous article, by H.P. Lovecraft and August Derleth, about the history of the *Al Azif* and the *Necronomicon*—an article which brought more attention to the holy book and the *Necronomicon* than anything ever had, and unfortunately raised the profile of the wisdom community higher than it had been since the Innsmouth Raids.

So began our Reformation, a process that continues today. (I’ve greatly simplified the preceding and used language that the traditionalists of the Church of Cthulhu would undoubtedly find disagreeable; I can only imagine what the threads on the pro-Church message boards and on the mailing list traditionalteachings-l are going to be like when they read this). As occurred with the Christian Reformation, the wisdom community’s Reformation has meant that both the new Church—thanks to its innovations—and the old Church—thanks to its renewed emphasis on

traditional ways—have seen an increase in membership, something that continues today. The Reforming Church is growing as never before, thanks to the Internet, which allows us to reach out to the unconverted, and the Church of Cthulhu is prospering thanks to the dark web, which allows old community families to get in touch with the community of Church members without being tracked by the government or law enforcement. For many of us in both Churches, these are exciting times to live in, and we actually dare hope for a time when we will gain official recognition as a living religion.

4.

*“At the Mountains of Wisdom”*

<http://www.guilliotabelard.com/blog/?p=716>

“The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

- Malcolm X

So what, then, is my point in this narrative, these blog posts? A personal accounting, of course, my autobiography as a student of the teachings and a member of the Reforming Church, and an attempt at describing the modern history of the wisdom community. But my point is also to draw attention to “The Call of Cthulhu” and the racism behind it, and behind Lovecraft’s version of the truth.

I’m by no means the only person of color to do this. Tommy Tester of Harlem in 1924, Douglas Laidlaw of Providence in 1929, Paul Harding in Passamaquoddy, Maine, in 1938, George Berry and Atticus Turner of Chicago in 1954—there’s a tradition of people of color who pointed the racism out and who suffered from it. But, with respect to those gentlemen, none of them wrote about the wisdom community from the inside, as one of the believers in the holy book and the Calling God. And none had the benefit of the twenty-first century sensibility and vocabulary, in which we can talk about things like “cultural appropriation” and “theft of intellectual and cultural property” without having our listeners be ignorant of that which we speak.

Consider “Call,” and its three sections. Section one is about “the horror in clay,” which as I’ve shown is an example of theft of intellectual and cultural property from the Dogon. The actual statue itself, and the other statues of the Calling God, are, frankly, not nearly as frightening as Lovecraft makes them out to be. The supposed wave of psychic unrest which swept across the globe in the spring of 1925 which Lovecraft writes of, supposedly drawn upon from the material provided by a cutting bureau, is hard to prove. A suicide, a crazed letter to the editor, “serious native unrest” in India and Africa and the Philippines—these are not remarkable events in and of themselves. Only Lovecraft’s sewing them together and labeling them the result of the Calling God made them so.

The second section of “Call” is Legrasse’s story, and I’ve explained what Legrasse and his mouthpiece Lovecraft made of the truth—the black man’s truth, the objective realities unpalatable to white readers.

The third section of “Call” is the most fantastic of the three, the story of a Norwegian sailor and his encounter with, first, a crew of pirates and second, a recently-risen island from which the Calling God rose to terrify and kill the sailor’s crewmates. This section, “The Madness from the Sea,” is the most *fantastic* of the three, and I mean that quite literally: it is “conceived

or appearing as if conceived by an unrestrained imagination; odd and remarkable; bizarre; grotesque.”

Consider the Norwegian’s story. The first part takes place at S. Latitude 49° 51, W. Longitude 128° 34. There he encounters the *Alert*, a ship crewed by “a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes.” (Kanakan being a racial slur for those of Polynesian or Melanesian descent—a typically Lovecraftian touch, to include something that shows off his research, and then to make it a racist item). Then, some distance away, the Norwegian lands on the island of R’lyeh, which coincidentally has risen in time for the Norwegian and his crewmen to visit. From this island the Norwegian takes “a horrible stone idol of unknown origin.”

How much of this story is true? How much of it can be true? The Norwegian’s story is, after all, devoid of witnesses besides himself. The encounter with the *Alert* and its crew takes place a long way from anything, in the middle of the uninhabited wastes of the south Pacific Ocean. There are no survivors among the “Kanakas and half-castes” left to testify about the encounter, nor crew members from the *Emma* who can confirm (or deny) the Norwegian’s account. The trip to R’lyeh puts paid to the rest of the crew of the *Emma*, and the Norwegian is found alone, half-delirious, bearing the stone idol but nothing else.

No witnesses for the Norwegian’s story, and no evidence to back it up, for R’lyeh sinks beneath the waves as abruptly as it appeared, and as conveniently for the Norwegian’s story. No evidence, but the stone idol.

Does anyone believe this story? *Can* anyone? Isn’t it more likely the fabrication of a sailor who wished to bring attention to himself, and so fabricated a fantastical story to do so? Or who perhaps stole a native statue and wished to cover up that theft? Lovecraft relates that the correspondents who vouch for the Norwegian’s character and the character of the crew of the *Emma*, and condemn the “Kanakas and half-castes” who crewed the *Alert*, were Australian—but Australia is a country with its own history of anti-indigenous genocide and slavery. Why wouldn’t white Australians side with white crew of the *Emma* against the colored crew of the *Alert*? Why should racism in this scenario be a surprise? Indeed, why do I even need to bring it up—shouldn’t everyone recognize it? Isn’t it obvious that this is yet another of Lovecraft’s appropriation of wisdom community history for his own purposes?

This, too, brings into doubt—as it should—what the Norwegian said about the Calling God, what the God might have done when R’lyeh rose, and what the God intended to do, and what the God intends to do when it rises for good. Earlier in “Call of Cthulhu” Lovecraft quotes Castro, “an immensely aged mestizo,” to the effect that

the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.

That is certainly one interpretation of one passage from the holy book. (The sura “*Al-Nahda*,” “The Awakening,” 45-49). It is the chosen interpretation the traditionalists of the Church of Cthulhu cling to. But it is not the only one by any means.

We can posit the teachings of the wisdom as the original religion, based on eons-old creatures, but are they? Are there any written legends or documents—in any form—which

predate Alha zred and the *Al Azif*? Nobody has ever produced any reliable evidence for the existence of the so-called “R’lyeh text,” or “The Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan,” or the “Book of Eibon.” I think, if we’re honest with ourselves, that we have to admit the very real possibility that, however old the “Old Ones” are, the legends about them actually post-date the appearance of Islam. The teachings can even be studied and evaluated as a *reaction* to Islam—the anti-Islam, if you will. Poor deluded Alha zred, crazed after his encounter in the desert with the avatar of the Calling God, putting all his delusion and fear of what Muhammad and the Muslims had done to Alha zred’s native Yemen into the pages of the *Al Azif*.

In fact, there has been substantial writing done, both formally (in the pages of the *Wisdom Community Quarterly*) (why shouldn’t we have our own scholarly journal? Other religions do) and informally (in first letters and then the many online venues and mailing lists as well as conference presentations), about how to interpret the Calling God, its nature, and its intentions. The wisdom community underwent its schism and Reformation relatively late, but we have more than made up for it in the volume of scholarly writing and essays and disputation we have produced. And perhaps the major subject for many community writers is the Calling God.

This is somewhat sad to admit, but the wisdom community has its expatriates—its atheists and agnostics, its Richard Dawkinses and Sam Harrisers. We mourn the loss of these brothers and sisters from the community—of necessity, they move away from their natural homes and live among the gentiles. But they, even they, write about the Calling God. The traditionalists in the community reject these writings, but those of us on the progressive end, in the Reforming Church and its various liberal sects, accept them as part of the discourse of our religion.

The agnostics and atheists have three basic theories about the Calling God. They do not deny the God’s existence—they underwent the coming of age ritual, just as nearly every community member did (thanks to my father I am one of the few community members who did not), and they saw the avatar of the Calling God. But the atheists and agnostics refuse to call what they saw a god.

Their first theory is that the Calling God is nothing more than an alien nanotech being or nanotech assembler, a form of the “gray goo” that Eric Drexler described in *Engines of Creation*. In this theory the Calling God is an alien Von Neumann machine, which transforms all it touches into shapes pre-programed into it by its alien creators. This theory explains the alien appearance of the “Cthulhu statue” (as an attempt to duplicate the appearance of the nanotech assembler’s creators) and the bizarre appearance of R’lyeh (an attempt by the assembler to replicate the alien environment of its creators’ homeworld here on Earth). The nanotech assembler, in this theory, created R’lyeh once the island emerged from the sea, but was halted by the presence of cold salt water, and was rendered inert once the island submerged beneath the sea. But eventually the nanotech assembler will spread onto the continents, and when it has sufficient energy sources it will remake all the land of the Earth into the landscape of its alien creators.

The second theory is that the Calling God is a kind of alien meme, a living idea spread by exposure to some pre-existing visual or aural material. Under this theory, there would have been an original, alien source for the meme; this theory posits a material cause of or source for the meme, unlike the more conceptual origin theorized by Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*. (Intriguingly, the field of memetics currently, thanks to neuroimaging, supports the idea that memes have a material presence). The theory supposes that at some point in the distant past the original source for the meme landed on Earth, whether carried on a meteorite or through some other vehicle, and fragmented, landing in numerous locations—locations which men and women found over the ages and which provided the vectors for the memes to spread. Interestingly, in the

Lovecraft stories, the meme of the Calling God, as contained in the *Al Azif* and the *Necronomicon*, is lethal to white men and women but not to men and women of color. Perhaps the evolutionary development, 40,000 years ago, which split off Caucasians from their darker ancestors also included a loss of genetic resistance to or tolerance of the meme?

The third theory is that the Calling God is simply an unknowably-formed multiply-dimensioned alien being, with a lifespan possibly measured in eons. This theory relies partially on the same material that Lovecraft used in writing his non-fiction and fiction, but draws different conclusions: that the Calling God is not divine, but instead is, finally, mortal. Powerful, as humans measure things, and very long-lived, and made up of an alien type of matter which defies our limited understanding of biology and chemistry and physics, and capable of surviving in a death-like coma state for millennia—but mortal. A creature of ten dimensions rather than six—a creature who somehow visually displays those ten dimensions (a sight that ordinary human minds are not prepared to see)—but a mortal creature, one capable of dying. (This theory sees some support from the account that the poet Arthur Rimbaud wrote following his encounter with an avatar of the Calling God in the Rub al-Hālī in 1883. Rimbaud’s prose-poem about the encounter, “خ آ ل ش ط,” or “t’shay `akhar”, lay undiscovered in the archives of the Morand and Fabre company in Aden until I visited them in ‘97. My translation of the poem is entitled “Je Est Autre Chose.”) Those who put forth this theory use the panspermia theories of Hoyle and Wickramasinghe as the vehicle by which the Calling God and others of its ilk originally arrived on Earth.

I, of course, am no agnostic or atheist, but rather a true believer of the Reforming Church, and so my theory of the Calling God is going to be that of the Church. Or, at least, part of the church, as I’ll explain.

What the Church believes is that the Calling God is both alien and divine. But what that means is complicated. Castro spoke of the ascension of the Calling God as an event to be dreaded, involving the conquest of the Earth and the creation of a new race of humans, amoral and murdering. But why should this be so? The Calling God is after all *alien*. Its personality and motivations would be likewise, and what happens after its ascension unknowable. By definition, the Calling God is an alien being. Why should we assume that it will indulge in the conquest of Earth, that it will uplift humanity into amoral, reveling murderers—that it will act according to the very human conceptions of domination and hierarchy, rulership and uplift. Who is to say what an alien god would do? Need it be positive or negative at all? Isn’t it more likely that its actions, personality, and motivations will be alien and inconceivable to us, but not ultimately lethal to us?

That is one strain of thought within the Reforming Church. There are other strains, such as the one I believe in, the group somewhat derisively dubbed, by the traditionalists, the “sunshine believers.” We believe in the Calling God—and in hope.

There are, after all, purely theoretical reasons for hope, arguments put forth by philosophers like Erich Fromm and Josef Pieper who have no connection to the wisdom community. And they are certainly reasonable and persuasive. But inside the wisdom community people like me choose hope for other reasons.

I say “choose” hope because ultimately there is no knowing anything for certain about the Calling God except that it exists. So much of the original *Al Azif* is about ambiguity and doubt—the doubt of unconverted Arabs on the run from the conquering, converting Muslims. Abdullah Alha zred, after all, was a Yemeni of Sanaá whose active years were in the early decades of the eighth century, at a time when the Muslim influence in Yemen was great but

when there were still tribes resisting these non-Yemeni conquerors and converters. One can't read the *Al Azif* without seeing how much of it was written by Alha zred as a reaction to the rise of Islam and the destruction of the traditional Yemeni ways and religion. The *Al Azif* prominently shows both doubt, about why the foreign religion Islam was being allowed to triumph, and a doubling down on certainty, Alha zred's certainty about the Calling God and its ways. (This ambiguity and doubt is clear in the Arabic of the *Al Azif* but far less so in the Greek of the *Necronomicon*, to the point where the wisdom community scholars applying the methods of Higher Criticism to both texts have come to doubt the fluency in Arabic of Theodorus Philetas, the translator of the *Al Azif*).

The ambiguity—the *unknowability*—of the Calling God remains despite Alha zred's statements and descriptions. When it comes down to it, we cannot know what the Calling God wants (if it does have wants) or needs or desires, if it has any. The *Al Azif* says little about the Calling God's personality—Castro's explanations of the “ancient legends” is a product of the post-*Necronomicon* era, and quite possibly derive from misunderstood and garbled third-hand accounts taken from one of the many modern mistranslations of the *Necronomicon* of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. What we are left with, when the extraneous material in the *Al Azif* is stripped away—the more obvious ravings of poor crazed Alha zred, the scholia incorporated into the *Necronomicon* verbatim, the sections obviously written by Alha zred's scribes or servants or colleagues rather than by Alha zred himself—what we are left with is a Mystery, numinous and unknowable, which surrounds whatever event or events took place in the Rub al-Hālī, before Alha zred went to Damascus to write the *Al Azif*. A mystery—a Mystery—like the Resurrection of Christ, a matter of fact—did it happen or not?—necessarily taken as a matter of faith.

We in the wisdom community believe—have faith—because we choose to believe what we cannot know, just as Christians and Jews and Muslims do. But unlike what Lovecraft wrote—what he never lived to see—there are those who, like me, embraced the Mystery out of hope, not despair, and believed, because we choose to believe, in a redemptive Mystery, a Calling God who may actually usher in a brand new age. Not the one that poor deluded Alha zred described, but one in which the new man and the new woman shout and revel in joy out of goodness and happiness. After all, the Dogon believed in a myth of crucifixion and resurrection and the gift of a new reality. So too did the Christians. Was not the Calling God crucified, in his fashion, when it arrived on Earth and was imprisoned and “slain”? Whites accept the Christian God's new world will be paradise; why not the Calling God's new world?

Of course, we of the sunshine believers have more than just faith to base our beliefs on. The line “all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom,” so beloved of Castro and so emphasized by Lovecraft, is a light rephrasing of an oft-repeated line from the *Al Azif*. But the original Arabic word in the *Al Azif* was “h-b,” taken by Theodorus Philetas to mean هب, “hib,” or flame. Couldn't “h-b” in fact be حب, “hubb,” or “love”? Isn't it preferable to believe that the real song of the Calling God—the actual call of Cthulhu—is one of love? Isn't it more hopeful to think that the uplift of the Calling God will bring us, when we become as the Great Old Ones—which can be translated as “elevated” or “sublime” or “dignified” or even “heroic” Old Ones—freedom from the tyranny of pain and death, of hate and want and misery? Ultimately, isn't it better to believe that the Calling God's new world will be joyous and free—a new paradise on Earth?

That's what I believe, and why I attend services every Friday night, and regularly practice the higher ceremonies, and what I teach my daughters, and what I live for—the hope, the belief in a different, better world, one coming sooner rather than later. In that new world, the

gods and jailers we made to help us feel small and alone and ashamed will be no more. We have let ourselves be oppressed and judged, we have let ourselves be sentenced. One day, thanks to the Calling God, our sentence will be up.