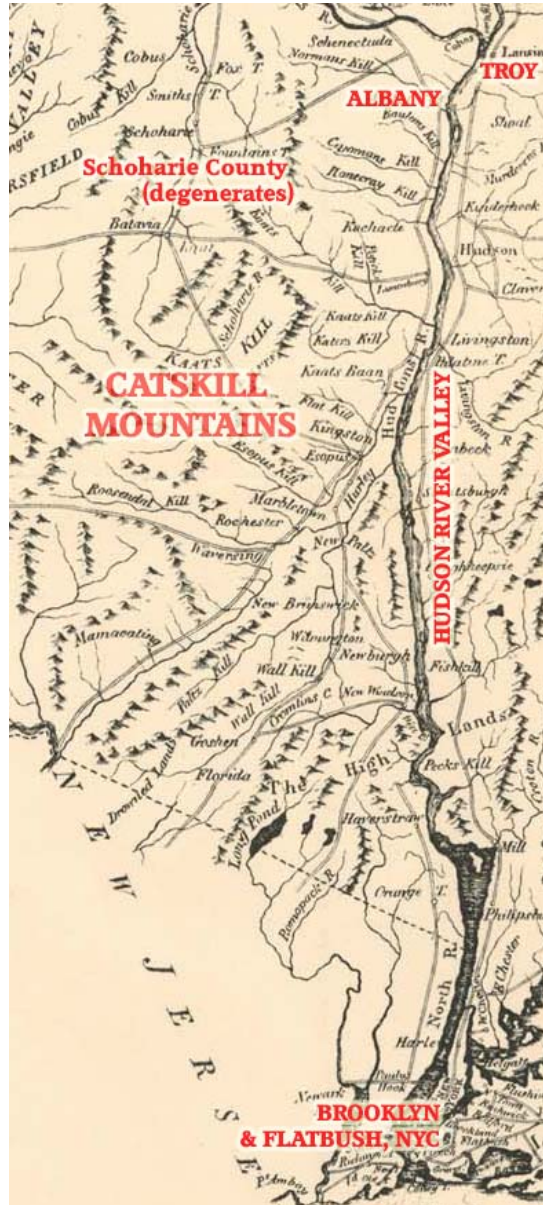


The annotated “The Lurking Fear”

Annotated by David Haden, with 8,000 words of scholarly footnotes.
Prepared for Mr. H.P. Lovecraft’s 123nd birthday, 20th August 2013.





Frederic Edwin Church, "Storm in the Mountains" (1847). Church was the student of the painter Thomas Cole, based in Catskill town. Church was one of the Hudson River School and often painted in the Catskills — the setting of "The Lurking Fear".

THE LURKING FEAR¹

by H.P. Lovecraft

I. The Shadow On The Chimney

There was thunder in the air on the night I went to the deserted mansion atop Tempest Mountain² to find the lurking fear. I was not alone, for foolhardiness was not then mixed with that love of the grotesque and the terrible which has made my career a series of quests for strange horrors in

¹ Lovecraft wrote “The Lurking Fear” in November 1922. The tale was designed as a four-part serial for George Houtain’s *Home Brew* magazine, and was published as such from January through to April 1923. I have made several minor corrections to this online version of the story, with the aid of S.T. Joshi’s textually-correct Penguin Classic version. These changes include: changing American spellings to British; changing ‘mined’ to the correct ‘ruined’; and I also fixed a few obvious OCR errors.

² Tempest Mountain, although obviously named by Lovecraft for its storms, appears similar in name to Tremper Mountain at the very centre of the Catskills. According to the local Park Service website, Devonian bluestone quarries on the western slopes of Tremper once provided most of the gravestone slabs in eastern America. Tremper Mountain was the site of Tremper House (opened 1879), one of the Catskills’ earliest railroad resorts, said to be one of the finest hotels in the Catskills — it burned down in 1908 and was never rebuilt.

Below the mountain there is a hamlet, originally named Ladew Corners (see Mary L. Herrmann, *Shandaken*, Arcadia Publishing, p.94) but now named simply Tremper. The hamlet’s original name seems somewhat similar in name to the “Lefferts Corners” hamlet which Lovecraft places below his Tempest Mountain. See my later footnote for the likely source of the Lefferts name.

I can see only a very broad link with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, in that Caliban is a deformed earthy ape-like monster who is under the command of the airy spirit Ariel, the latter being able to command lightning and storms.

literature and in life.³ With me were two faithful and muscular men for whom I had sent when the time came; men long associated with me in my ghastly explorations because of their peculiar fitness.

We had started quietly from the village because of the reporters who still lingered about after the eldritch⁴ panic of a month before—the nightmare creeping death. Later, I thought, they might aid me; but I did not want them then. Would to God I had let them share the search, that I might not have had to bear the secret alone so long; to bear it alone for fear the world would call me mad or go mad itself at the daemon implications of the thing. Now that I am telling it anyway, lest the brooding make me a maniac, I wish I had never concealed it. For I, and I only, know what manner of fear lurked on that spectral and desolate mountain.

In a small motor-car we covered the miles of primeval forest and hill until the wooded ascent checked it. The country bore an aspect more than usually sinister as we viewed it by night and without the accustomed crowds of investigators, so that we were often tempted to use the acetylene headlight⁵ despite the attention it might attract. It was not a wholesome landscape after dark, and I believe I would have

³ By hinting at a “career” of adventures for the narrator, Lovecraft appears to be setting the scene for a future series of stories in *Home Brew*, featuring the same character, while leaving the narrator’s actual name and appearance usefully undecided. But *Home Brew* folded in 1923, and no further serials were required.

⁴ Eldritch is from the Old English, where it meant unearthly, of another and supernatural realm. Until Lovecraft picked it up the word appears to have survived in popular form in early Scottish ballads, and then in the famous Scots poems of Robert Burns.

⁵ Lovecraft had an acetylene headlamp (aka carbine lamp) on his bicycle when a young boy. Early models of the famous and ubiquitous Ford Model T automobile used acetylene headlamps, so this is an early indication to the reader that the story is set in the ‘present day’ — but also a subtle hint that the car is an outmoded model of a type common in a deeply rural setting.

noticed its morbidity even had I been ignorant of the terror that stalked there. Of wild creatures there were none—they are wise when death leers close.⁶ The ancient lightning-scarred trees seemed unnaturally large and twisted, and the other vegetation unnaturally thick and feverish,⁷ while curious mounds and hummocks in the weedy, fulgurite-pitted⁸ earth reminded me of snakes and dead men’s skulls swelled to gigantic proportions.⁹

⁶ This conveniently and immediately places animals such as bears outside the orbit of suspicion, in terms of the clawings and maulings in the story.

⁷ Giant ancient hemlock trees, which were “up to 150 feet tall and 5 feet in diameter” according to the website of the local Park Service, were abundant in the Catskills until about the 1880s. Their bark was used extensively in the many local leather tanneries. Establishing the subtle weirdness of a place in this manner — having a narrator note the unnaturally large-but-normal vegetation while arriving on a short car journey — is a technique Lovecraft used again at the start of “The Dunwich Horror” (1928).

⁸ Fulgurite is a glassy tube-like mineral formed in the earth by lightning strikes. Some of the largest instances have been known to create tubes running as far as 17ft into the earth (*Guinness Book of Records*). The idea that mighty strikes of lightning could open strange crystalline tunnels into the earth has an obvious attraction for an author of weird fiction.

⁹ This seems a clear nod to the legend of the Catskill gnomes. Charles M. Skinner’s well-known *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* (1896) had a small section on the ‘Catskill Gnomes’ in Vol.1, which features swelled skulls...

“Behind the New Grand Hotel [at Highmount], in the Catskills, is an amphitheatre of mountain that is held to be the place of which the Mohicans spoke of when they told of people there who worked in metals, and had bushy beards and eyes like pigs. ... They brewed a liquor that had the effect of shortening the bodies and **swelling the heads of all who drank it** ... when the moon was full, it was their custom to assemble on the edge of a precipice above the hollow and dance and caper until the night was nigh worn away ...”. (p.21, my emphasis).

Lovecraft had a copy of Skinner’s book in his library and he used folklore from it for his other stories: but until now no Lovecraftian appears to have noticed the probable link between the Catskill Gnomes section in Skinner and “The Lurking Fear”. That the “gnomes ... worked in metals” implies mining tunnels. The other key Catskills folk tale, published by Irving as “Rip van Winkle”

Fear had lurked on Tempest Mountain for more than a century.¹⁰ This I learned at once from newspaper accounts of the catastrophe which first brought the region to the world's notice. The place is a remote, lonely elevation in that part of the Catskills¹¹ where Dutch

(1819), also features the gnomes: it tells us they were very short and looked like old men, were to be found at night in the same “amphitheatre” in the mountains, and that they create “rumbling peals of thunder” with their games.

The “gnomes” were later given a passing name-check by Poe in “The Domain of Arnheim” (c.1840s), which was based on Poe’s time spent on the region’s Hudson River. The gnomes were also depicted as tiny old men in the well-reviewed 58-minute silent film *Rip Van Winkle* (1921): this was set in the Catskills and the film’s eighteenth century quasi time-travel theme may have appealed to Lovecraft. The gnomes and the Catskills had been magnificently — if conventionally — illustrated by the famous illustrator N.C. Wyeth in a handsome 1921 book edition of *Rip Van Winkle*, a book presumably published to coincide with the 1921 movie.

The titan “amphitheatre of mountain”, deemed by the Mohicans to be the home of the “gnomes”, does exist and it can be located on Google Maps. Through these high central Catskills mountains the Shandaken Tunnel Corporation bored an immense 18-mile \$12m tunnel throughout the whole of 1921, from Schoharie Reservoir to the Esopus Creek, in order to supply double the amount of water then reaching New York City. Lovecraft undoubtedly read in the news about the vital Shandaken Tunnel project during 1921 — could he have mused on the fictional possibilities of having the tunnel engineers encounter the sinister gnome-like miners of folklore?

¹⁰ The story later gives more precise details, which point to “the fear” starting around the 1820s. Lovecraft thus places the emergence of “the fear” at about the same time as the ‘taming’ of the Catskills, at least in terms of the settling in the 1820s of the many land and boundary claims there. With land rights and boundaries assured, construction of the first mountain resort houses was undertaken in the 1820s. The resorts quickly attracted many painters seeking sublime wild grandeur for their paintings and engravings (see Kenneth Myers, *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820-1895*, Hudson Valley Museum, 1987). They also attracted writers interested in the archaic folklore and stories that had been preserved in the mountain fastnesses (see Washington Irving’s famous “Rip Van Winkle”, 1819, as the first of such).

¹¹ A vast and wild mountainous area first discovered in 1609 (see map) and located immediately west of the Mid-Hudson River Valley. In Lovecraft’s youth it was easily accessible by a train trip of about 100 miles from Providence. The name is said to have come from the wildcats which screamed and yowled in the

civilisation once feebly and transiently penetrated,¹² leaving behind as it receded only a few ruined mansions¹³ and a degenerate squatter

dark valleys and creeks, although there has subsequently been much debate as to the origin of name — perhaps urged on by a modern desire to move to a bland tourist-friendly name such as the “Blue Mountains”. In the early and mid 20th century the mountains became known for mountain resorts and hotels, where elderly New Yorkers sought refuge from the worst of the city’s summer heat.

Adjacent to the main central Catskill Mountains runs the middle-part of the Hudson River Valley. Lovecraft had an elderly revision client, Jonathan E. Hoag, who lived in Troy at the northern end of the Hudson River Valley — though Troy is not actually very near to the Catskill Mountains. Lovecraft wrote an outline history of the river valley in note form, “Notes on Hudson Valley History” (1929), but as far as I can tell he seems never to have visited the adjacent mountains themselves.

¹² The Dutch were the first settlers in the Mid-Hudson Valley, just east of the Catskills, from c.1624. They were dispossessed by the British in 1708, but in the Great Hardenbergh Patent (1708) were granted some 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 unsurveyed acres of the abutting Catskill Mountains in recompense. The Dutch names given to cemeteries appear to show that many Dutch did make the move to the mountains, even though they found there many squatters and Indians. The Dutch holders of the Patent spent many decades riding the Catskill trails and trying to get squatters to leave, resorting in time to armed force to extract goods in place of rent. But for 40 years the mountains went without even a basic Patent survey, which encouraged the squatters to stay. Firm boundaries were only really established by about the 1820s, and then only on paper.

By about 1910 the squatter and other claims had been settled one way or another, and at that time the informed observation was made that... “squattling was a thing of the past”. Legal force started to arrive in the backwoods in 1917, in the form of regular horseback patrols by the new State police. Many mountain farms were struggling by the time Lovecraft was writing “The Lurking Fear”, and by 1930 many of the smaller farms were “abandoned” and were reverting to forest (quotes from David Stradling, *Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills*, University of Washington Press, 2007, p.120).

¹³ For details of the strong propensity of the superstitious Dutch to weave ghost, witch, and gnome stories about the deserted mountain mansions of the mountains, see Judith Richardson’s chapter “The Ghosting of the Hudson Valley Dutch”, in J.D. Goodfriend (ed.), *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2009*, Brill, 2008. See also Judith Richardson’s book, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley*, Harvard University Press, 2005. Of general Catskills folklore interest are: A.E.P. Searing, *The Land Of Rip Van Winkle: a tour through the romantic parts of the Catskills, its legends and traditions*,

population¹⁴ inhabiting pitiful hamlets on isolated slopes. Normal beings seldom visited the locality till the state police were formed,¹⁵

1884; and James McMurry, *The Catskill witch and other tales of the Hudson Valley*, Syracuse University Press, 1974.

¹⁴ An official report of the New York State probation committee, in regard to crime in remote rural counties, in the *Catskill Mountain News* on 6th May 1910...

“The social conditions, the non-enforcement of law and the absence of preventive agencies, in many rural localities are asserted to call seriously for the use of the probation system. The report says, “Much of the shiftlessness, lawlessness, truancy, vice and crime in rural places, goes uncorrected. Before anything effective is done to check the wayward tendencies in children and the rowdyism in young men, the evils often become so grave as to be beyond remedy. Some of the worst criminals and the most degenerate families in the State have grown up in small communities.””

Lovecraft had read and noted at least one press report about degeneracy in the Catskills. In a letter to Alfred Galpin he recalls that his seminal story...

“Beyond the Wall of Sleep”—[1919, was] written spontaneously after reading an account of some Catskill Mountain degenerates in a N.Y. TRIBUNE article on the New York State Constabulary.” (given in *Letters to Alfred Galpin*, p.83. This was *The New York Tribune*, 27th April 1919)

This clan noted by the *Tribune* were personified in “Beyond the Wall of Sleep”...

“Joe Slater [...] typical denizen of the Catskill Mountain region; one of those strange, repellent scions of a primitive Colonial peasant stock whose isolation for nearly three centuries in the hilly fastnesses of a little-traveled countryside has caused them to sink to a kind of barbaric degeneracy, rather than advance with their more fortunately placed brethren of the thickly settled districts.”

The Slater/Slahter family clan were much later the subject of an article in the *New York Times* 18th July 1991: “Despised, Small Band Remains In Its Valley”...

“Slaughter communities — the word is spelled with both an “a” or an “o” in old texts — were often ones where mixed racial couples lived. [...] In 1893 Catherine S. Lawrence, who served as an Army nurse during the Civil War, noted in her autobiography...

“They were a mixture of colored, white and aborigines; were given to drinking firewater, and to bad habits, and were ignorant and illiterate,” she wrote in her book *Life Sketch*, “They were a neglected, despised class of people.”

and even now only infrequent troopers patrol it. The fear, however, is an old tradition throughout the neighboring villages; since it is a prime topic in the simple discourse of the poor mongrels who sometimes leave their valleys to trade handwoven baskets for such primitive necessities as they cannot shoot, raise, or make.

The lurking fear dwelt in the shunned and deserted Martense¹⁶ mansion, which crowned the high but gradual eminence whose

According to a University of Wisconsin ethnographic study of such families, reported in the *Times Union*, (18th February 1990), there may also be old-world Gypsy blood in this mix, where there are...

“likely descendants of the 18th-century Palatine German settlers and “gypsies” who, according to legend, came from “Araby.” [...] Local folklore has it that sometime in the last century, there was an annual meeting of gypsies in the Summit Lake area, said Buckley [of the University of Wisconsin].”

The general settlement area of the degenerate families and clans appears to lie in the land immediately west of Albany (Schoharie County, “Summit, Richmondville, Charlotteville and Arabia”). Looking at the maps, this area seems to be just north of the Catskill Mountains proper.

¹⁵ The New York State Police were formed and organised in 1917.

¹⁶ Martense Lane served as the British General James Grant’s attack route in The Battle of Brooklyn 1776, the first major battle of the American Revolutionary War. So the name may have been known to Lovecraft due to his intimate knowledge of Revolutionary War history. Lovecraft probably also knew that the Lane was where the first shots of the war were fired, on: “the old Martense Lane that now borders the cemetery” (*The Battle of Brooklyn, August 27-29, 1776: A Walking Guide to Sites and Monuments*, p.10). It is now known as Border Avenue, bordering Greenwood Cemetery on the southern side.

The lane was named after the Martense family, among whom at the very first there was a Jan Martense and also a Gerrit Martense (both named in a short list in *Contributions for the Genealogies of the First Settlers of the Ancient County of Albany [NY], from 1630 to 1800*, p.8). These are of course names that feature prominently in “The Lurking Fear”. Jan Martense was reputedly... “the first of the name of whom we have record in America” (*Lambert Janse Van Alstyne and Some of His Descendants*, p.6). Jan is said to have first landed in America c.1646 and then came over for good in 1650. He is in the court records as being prosecuted for selling brandy to the Indians, and for selling liquor on a Sunday (both prosecutions in *Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary*,

Albany: Dutch records 1630-1664). He later moved south from Albany and was able to purchase large chunks of land in the Flatbush area of New York City — perhaps suggesting shades of the fictional dealings with New York Indians depicted in Lovecraft’s “He”. Readers will remember that the He character served the local Indians “monstrous bad rum” and thus got their land in Greenwich from them.

But Lovecraft does not mention the Martense family in his “Notes on Hudson Valley History” (1929), so he may only have been aware in passing of their later presence in Flatbush, Brooklyn: the Martense family appears to have settled down as unremarkable farmers in Flatbush from the 17th century until the 1880s (for a genealogical history of the Martense family in Flatbush, see: *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn*, p.407). Part of the Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn was once the original Martense farm, a fact which Lovecraft could have learned from either a tour of the cemetery or a book on the history of Brooklyn.

The Jan Martense house in New York City has also been suggested as a source for the name. S.T. Joshi states, in *An H.P. Lovecraft Encyclopedia*, that Lovecraft did not visit the then-private Jan Martense house during his 1922 trips to New York City. However he may have seen the house from a distance, across the remote and eerie Flatlands area, on a walk there with Everett McNeil in September 1922...

“the vast, low-lying flat lands and salt marshes of Southern Brooklyn; where old Dutch cottages reared their curved gables, and old Dutch winds stirred the sedges along sluggish inlets brooding gray and shadowy and out of reach of the long red rays of hazy setting suns.” (Lovecraft recalling his 1922 visit, given in a letter in *Lord of a visible world: an autobiography in letters*, p.151)

Lovecraft would have been interested in a sight of the Martense house, as it was very old and was occupied by the British during the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776. In the 1960s the house was moved from the Flatlands and rebuilt inside the Brooklyn Museum, and is now exhibited as the oldest house in New York City.

As with the Catskill Gnomes (see my earlier footnote), Charles M. Skinner’s well-known *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* (1896) could have provided Lovecraft with stimulating folklore material on Martense Lane...

“Before Brooklyn had spread itself beyond Greenwood Cemetery a stone could be seen in Martense’s Lane, south of that burial-ground, that bore a hoof mark. A negro named Joost, in the service of the Van Der Something-or-others, was plodding home on Saturday night, his fiddle under his arm. [Drunk, he plays his fiddle to make the stars dance, but plays on into Sunday morning and so succeeds only in raising up the Devil, with whom he engages in a fiddling contest —

liability to frequent thunderstorms gave it the name of Tempest Mountain. For over a hundred years the antique, grove-circled stone house had been the subject of stories incredibly wild and monstrously hideous; stories of a silent colossal creeping death which stalked abroad in summer. With whimpering insistence the squatters told tales of a daemon which seized lone wayfarers after dark, either carrying them off or leaving them in a frightful state of gnawed dismemberment; while sometimes they whispered of blood trails toward the distant mansion. Some said the thunder called the lurking fear out of its habitation,¹⁷ while others said the thunder was its voice.

only narrowly winning just as dawn breaks. The hoof mark was thus the Devil's impatient stamp made when he lost the contest. This perhaps recalls "the print of a split hoof" that concludes "The Unnamable" (1923)?].

Lovecraft used the Martense name again, this time as a place name, in his "The Horror at Red Hook" (1925)...

"Suydam was a lettered recluse of ancient Dutch family, possessed originally of barely independent means, and inhabiting the spacious but ill-preserved mansion which his grandfather had built in Flatbush when that village was little more than a pleasant group of colonial cottages surrounding the steepled and ivy-clad Reformed Church with its iron-railed yard of Netherlandish gravestones. In his lonely house, set back from Martense Street amidst a yard of venerable trees, ..."

One other likely place where Lovecraft could have had the Dutch names in "The Lurking Fear" was the Dutch Reform Cemetery in Flatbush. Lovecraft is known to have visited there on 16th September 1922 (famously using it as the setting for "The Hound") and to have examined the place in some detail. There are many Lefferts buried there, and one of the headstones there records:

"SUYDAM, b. 13 Oct 1747, d. 7 Mar 1833, aged 85; widow of Gerrit MARTENSE" (Inscriptions on Tombstones Copied Fri., 29 Aug 1913)

Could this be the... "From one of the crumbling gravestones—dated 1747—I chipped a small piece..." in Lovecraft's "The Hound", a story based on this cemetery visit?

¹⁷ Lovecraft would later powerfully revisit this idea in his late story "The Haunter of the Dark" (written November 1935).

No one outside the backwoods had believed these varying and conflicting stories, with their incoherent, extravagant descriptions of the half-glimpsed fiend; yet not a farmer or villager doubted that the Martense mansion was ghoulishly haunted. Local history forbade such a doubt, although no ghostly evidence was ever found by such investigators as had visited the building after some especially vivid tale of the squatters. Grandmothers told strange myths of the Martense spectre; myths concerning the Martense family itself, its queer hereditary dissimilarity of eyes,¹⁸ its long, unnatural annals,¹⁹ and the murder which had cursed it.

The terror which brought me to the scene was a sudden and portentous confirmation of the mountaineers' wildest legends. One summer night, after a thunderstorm of unprecedented violence, the countryside was aroused by a squatter stampede which no mere delusion could create. The pitiful throngs of natives shrieked and whined of the unnamable horror which had descended upon them,

¹⁸ The medical name for this condition is heterochromia. Later in the story specifics of the condition are given — the Martense family is revealed to have been characterised by one blue and one brown iris. A blue iris was especially feared in antiquity in the Mediterranean region, as the 'evil eye'. This is evidenced by surviving amulets against the evil eye, relics from what is now modern Greece and Turkey, depicting blue eyes — these being meant to simply 'reflect back' the evil power of the blue eye.

Visually the Martenses recall the monsters in Edgar Rice Burroughs's "A Man Without a Soul" (1913) adventure, since they also have mis-matched eyes. The Martenses also broadly resemble H.G. Wells's morlocks, but Lovecraft did not read *The Time Machine* until well after "The Lurking Fear" was written.

Lovecraft's racist conception of the Teuton implied a manly blond giant with blue eyes. To have one blue and one brown eye thus seems a visual expression of some miscegenation lurking far back in the Martense ancestry. Possibly there is also some implied symbolism about being able to see both the real and the spectral world.

¹⁹ Implies the family had a long history, with "unnatural" elements in it (perhaps such as incest), rather than that they were unnaturally long-lived.

and they were not doubted. They had not seen it, but had heard such cries from one of their hamlets that they knew a creeping death had come.

In the morning citizens and state troopers followed the shuddering mountaineers to the place where they said the death had come. Death was indeed there. The ground under one of the squatter's villages had caved in after a lightning stroke, destroying several of the malodorous shanties; but upon this property damage was superimposed an organic devastation which paled it to insignificance. Of a possible seventy-five natives who had inhabited this spot, not one living specimen was visible. The disordered earth was covered with blood and human debris bespeaking too vividly the ravages of daemon teeth and talons; yet no visible trail led away from the carnage. That some hideous animal must be the cause, everyone quickly agreed; nor did any tongue now revive the charge that such cryptic deaths formed merely the sordid murders common in decadent communities.²⁰ That charge was revived only when about twenty-five of the estimated population were found missing from the dead; and even then it was hard to explain the murder of fifty by half that number. But the fact remained that on a summer night a bolt had come out of the heavens and left a dead village whose corpses were horribly mangled, chewed, and clawed.

The excited countryside immediately connected the horror with the haunted Martense mansion, though the localities were over three miles apart. The troopers were more skeptical; including the mansion only casually in their investigations, and dropping it altogether when they found it thoroughly deserted. Country and village people,

²⁰ For a complete history of murder in the Catskills, see: Caroline Crane, *Murder & Mayhem in the Catskills*, The History Press, 2008. Prohibition of liquor, from 1920, opened up many opportunities for both local and New York City bootleggers in the Catskills and this appears to have caused a flood of murders.

however, canvassed the place with infinite care; overturning everything in the house, sounding ponds and brooks, beating down bushes, and ransacking the nearby forests. All was in vain; the death that had come had left no trace save destruction itself.

By the second day of the search the affair was fully treated by the newspapers, whose reporters overran Tempest Mountain. They described it in much detail, and with many interviews to elucidate the horror's history as told by local grandams.²¹ I followed the accounts languidly at first, for I am a connoisseur in horrors; but after a week I detected an atmosphere which stirred me oddly, so that on August 5th, 1921²², I registered among the reporters who crowded the hotel at Lefferts Corners,²³ nearest village to Tempest Mountain and

²¹ Archaic word for grandmothers.

²² July 1921 was the... "hottest month ever experienced in New York State since records began" (*Climatological data*, U.S. Weather Service, 1956) which could have made for prime thunderstorm conditions in the mountains.

²³ The hamlet below Tremper Mountain in the centre of the Catskills was named Ladew Corners, somewhat similar to Lovecraft's "Lefferts Corners". Its cemetery name of the Van Kleek Cemetery suggests it was a Dutch settlement. Lefferts was the name of one of the first and key Dutch settler families of New Amsterdam from the 1660s. Like the real Martense family, the real Lefferts family later owned a great deal of land in Flatbush, Brooklyn, in New York City. The Lefferts continued to be one of the leading families in Brooklyn into the 1880s.

A 'Lefferts Homestead' was one of the sites of the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776, and this house was later moved to serve as a quaint historic house open to the public in Prospect Park. It is thus very probable that Lovecraft saw the house on his 1922 visits to New York City, since his letters state he toured Prospect Park twice (once with Samuel Loveman, then again with Sonia as a local guide). An interior tour of this house was then available, hosted by a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Lovecraft is known to have visited the Flatbush Reformed Church (Dutch Reform) cemetery on 16th September 1922, setting "The Hound" there. In the cemetery there are many Lefferts headstones, such as...

acknowledged headquarters of the searchers. Three weeks more, and the dispersal of the reporters left me free to begin a terrible exploration based on the minute inquiries and surveying with which I had meanwhile busied myself.

So on this summer night, while distant thunder rumbled, I left a silent motor-car and tramped with two armed companions up the last mound-covered reaches of Tempest Mountain, casting the beams of an electric torch on the spectral grey walls that began to appear through giant oaks ahead. In this morbid night solitude and feeble shifting illumination, the vast boxlike pile displayed obscure hints of terror which day could not uncover; yet I did not hesitate, since I had come with fierce resolution to test an idea. I believed that the thunder called the death-daemon out of some fearsome secret place; and be that daemon solid entity or vaporous pestilence, I meant to see it.

I had thoroughly searched the ruin before, hence knew my plan well; choosing as the seat of my vigil the old room of Jan Martense, whose murder looms so great in the rural legends. I felt subtly that the apartment of this ancient victim was best for my purposes. The chamber, measuring about twenty feet square, contained like the other rooms some rubbish which had once been furniture. It lay on the second story, on the southeast corner of the house, and had an immense east window and narrow south window, both devoid of panes or shutters. Opposite the large window was an enormous Dutch fireplace with scriptural²⁴ tiles representing the prodigal son,²⁵ and opposite the narrow window was a spacious bed built into the wall.

“LEFFERTS, Gerrit; “Heir leyt he lichaem von Gerrit LEFFERTS overleden den 14 May 1773.” (from Inscriptions on Tombstones Copied Fri., 29 Aug 1913).

²⁴ Blue Delft scriptural tiles were an example of early Dutch ceramics production, showing Bible scenes in the refined Chinese blue-and-white style.

As the tree-muffled thunder grew louder, I arranged my plan's details. First I fastened side by side to the ledge of the large window three rope ladders which I had brought with me. I knew they reached a suitable spot on the grass outside, for I had tested them. Then the three of us dragged from another room a wide four-poster bedstead, crowding it laterally against the window. Having strewn it with fir boughs, all now rested on it with drawn automatics, two relaxing while the third watched. From whatever direction the daemon might come, our potential escape was provided. If it came from within the house, we had the window ladders; if from outside the door and the stairs. We did not think, judging from precedent, that it would pursue us far even at worst.

I watched from midnight to one o'clock, when in spite of the sinister house, the unprotected window, and the approaching thunder and lightning, I felt singularly drowsy. I was between my two companions, George Bennett²⁶ being toward the window and William Tobey²⁷ toward the fireplace. Bennett was asleep, having apparently

They appear to have been relatively common, and not only in Dutch houses. An original fireplace with Blue Delft scriptural tiles can still be seen in the old Pickering House in Salem, Massachusetts.

²⁵ Here Lovecraft alludes to the well-known Bible parable (Luke 15), in order to foreshadow its later inversion in the interior story of Jan Martense. Like the Prodigal Son, Jan was away from the Martense mansion for many years. Slightly earlier in Luke (10:18) there is the line... "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven".

²⁶ The name is so common that it seems impossible to pin down. One wonders if — like the "Arthur Munroe" who is introduced later — Bennett and Tobey may have perhaps been names from the gang of boys which Lovecraft was part of in his boyhood?

²⁷ The Tobey name appears again in "The Call of Cthulhu", as Dr. Tobey. A Dr. S.B. Tobey of Providence was the Chancellor of Brown University in the 1860s. His home was 110 Benevolent Street, Providence, later known as the "S.B. Tobey House" (houses on Benevolent Street feature in several Lovecraft stories). There is also a Tobey Street in Providence, presumably named for Dr.

felt the same anomalous drowsiness which affected me, so I designated Tobey for the next watch although even he was nodding. It is curious how intently I had been watching the fireplace.

The increasing thunder must have affected my dreams, for in the brief time I slept there came to me apocalyptic visions.²⁸ Once I partly awaked, probably because the sleeper toward the window had restlessly flung an arm across my chest. I was not sufficiently awake to see whether Tobey was attending to his duties as sentinel, but felt a distinct anxiety on that score. Never before had the presence of evil so poignantly oppressed me. Later I must have dropped asleep again, for it was out of a phantasmal chaos that my mind leaped when the night grew hideous with shrieks beyond anything in my former experience or imagination.

In that shrieking the inmost soul of human fear and agony clawed hopelessly and insanely at the ebony gates of oblivion. I awoke to red madness and the mockery of diabolism,²⁹ as farther and farther down inconceivable vistas that phobic and crystalline anguish retreated and reverberated. There was no light, but I knew from the empty space at my right that Tobey was gone, God alone knew whither. Across my chest still lay the heavy arm of the sleeper at my left.

Then came the devastating stroke of lightning which shook the whole mountain, lit the darkest crypts of the hoary grove, and splintered the patriarch of the twisted trees. In the daemon flash of a

Tobey, which in the 1920s housed an orphanage for immigrant children and formed one of the boundaries of the Federal Hill district of Italian immigrants.

²⁸ This seems to anticipate the psychic mechanism used later in “The Call of Cthulhu”, when the sensitive dreamers feel the “call” of Cthulhu via their dreams.

²⁹ Diabolism: superstitiously evil conduct which seeks to worship the Devil.

monstrous fireball³⁰ the sleeper started up suddenly while the glare from beyond the window threw his shadow vividly upon the chimney above the fireplace from which my eyes had never strayed. That I am still alive and sane, is a marvel I cannot fathom. I cannot fathom it, for the shadow on that chimney was not that of George Bennett or of any other human creature, but a blasphemous abnormality from hell's nethermost craters; a nameless, shapeless abomination which no mind could fully grasp and no pen even partly describe. In another second I was alone in the accursed mansion, shivering and gibbering. George Bennett and William Tobey had left no trace, not even of a struggle. They were never heard of again.

II. A Passer In The Storm

For days after that hideous experience in the forest-swathed mansion I lay nervously exhausted in my hotel room at Lefferts Corners. I do not remember exactly how I managed to reach the motor-car, start it, and slip unobserved back to the village; for I retain no distinct impression save of wild-armed titan trees, daemonic mutterings of thunder, and Charonian³¹ shadows athwart the low mounds that dotted and streaked the region.³²

³⁰ Seems to imply ball lightning, a mysterious and fleeting type of blue coloured lightning that appears as free-floating glowing balls during storms.

³¹ In Ancient Greek mythology, Charon was the ferryman who took the dead to the underworld. He took souls bought to him by Hermes, and ferried them across the rivers Styx or Acheron to Hades. Lovecraft thus seems to imply that the landscape shadows were like the crowds of shadows on the banks of one of those rivers, waiting for Charon to ferry them across.

³² Lovecraft seems to evoke here the painterly vision of this wild landscape which had been fostered and made popular by the Hudson Valley School. There is a PhD thesis on this: "Sublime: The Catskills and the Social Construction of Landscape Experience in the United States, 1776-1876" by Kenneth John Myers, in addition to various popular and scholarly art history

As I shivered and brooded on the casting of that brain-blasting shadow, I knew that I had at last pried out one of earth's supreme horrors — one of those nameless blights of outer voids whose faint daemon scratchings we sometimes hear on the farthest rim of space, yet from which our own finite vision has given us a merciful immunity. The shadow I had seen, I hardly dared to analyse or identify. Something had lain between me and the window that night, but I shuddered whenever I could not cast off the instinct to classify it. If it had only snarled, or bayed, or laughed titteringly — even that would have relieved the abysmal hideousness. But it was so silent. It had rested a heavy arm or foreleg on my chest...³³

Obviously it was organic, or had once been organic... Jan Martense, whose room I had invaded, was buried in the grave-yard near the mansion... I must find Bennett and Tobey, if they lived... why had it picked them, and left me for the last?... Drowsiness is so stifling, and dreams are so horrible...

In a short time I realised that I must tell my story to someone or break down completely. I had already decided not to abandon the quest for the lurking fear, for in my rash ignorance it seemed to me that uncertainty was worse than enlightenment, however terrible the latter might prove to be. Accordingly I resolved in my mind the best course to pursue; whom to select for my confidences, and how to track down the thing which had obliterated two men and cast a nightmare shadow.

books on the Hudson Valley School of artists. It should however be noted that Lovecraft's sublime differs in important ways from the classic sublime — on this point see: Alex Houstoun, "Lovecraft and the Sublime: A Reinterpretation", *Lovecraft Annual* 2011.

³³ This seems similar to Lovecraft's *Commonplace Book* entry 106: "A thing that sat on a sleeper's chest. Gone in morning, but something left behind."

My chief acquaintances at Lefferts Corners had been the affable reporters, of whom several had still remained to collect final echoes of the tragedy. It was from these that I determined to choose a colleague, and the more I reflected the more my preference inclined toward one Arthur Munroe,³⁴ a dark, lean man of about thirty-five, whose education, taste, intelligence, and temperament all seemed to mark him as one not bound to conventional ideas and experiences.

On an afternoon in early September, Arthur Munroe listened to my story. I saw from the beginning that he was both interested and sympathetic, and when I had finished he analysed and discussed the thing with the greatest shrewdness and judgement. His advice, moreover, was eminently practical; for he recommended a postponement of operations at the Martense mansion until we might become fortified with more detailed historical and geographical data. On his initiative we combed the countryside for information regarding the terrible Martense family, and discovered a man who possessed a marvelously illuminating ancestral diary. We also talked at length with such of the mountain mongrels³⁵ as had not fled from the terror

³⁴ S.T. Joshi suggests in *An H.P. Lovecraft Encyclopaedia* that this character could have been named after Lovecraft's friends in his boyhood and adolescence, Chester and Harold Munroe. Lovecraft wrote the poem "To Mr. Munroe, on His Instructive and Entertaining Account of Switzerland" in January 1914 (which I have not seen, but which may have an account of wild mountains?). In September 1921 Lovecraft had briefly visited Harold Munroe who, having newly acquired a Ford car, was able to offer a car tour around their old boyhood haunts.

It is tempting to think that the name Arthur M. was meant as a nod to "Arthur M[achen]", an author whose famous 'little people in the hills' theme might seem an inspiration for "The Lurking Fear". Yet this is unlikely, as Lovecraft first discovered Machen's work in the summer of 1923 (S.T. Joshi, *I Am Providence*, p.454), after "The Lurking Fear" was written.

³⁵ The Hudson Valley Dutch at Albany had long been setting their nearby "mountaineers" an example, by freely interbreeding with a host of newcomers...

and confusion to remoter slopes, and slope again scanned for dens and caves, but all without result. And yet, as I have said, vague new fears hovered menacingly over us; as if giant bat-winged gryphons³⁶ squatted invisibly on the mountain-tops and leered with Abaddon-eyes³⁷ that had looked on transcosmic³⁸ gulfs.

As the afternoon advanced, it became increasingly difficult to see; and we heard the rumble of a thunderstorm gathering over Tempest Mountain. This sound in such a locality naturally stirred us, though less than it would have done at night. As it was, we hoped desperately

“By the 1750s all these newcomers had intermarried with the children of New Netherland” (*The Other New York: The American Revolution beyond New York City, 1763-1787*, State University of New York Press, 2012, p.156)

³⁶ Mythical creature of antiquity, a winged lion with a bird’s head. Its original symbolic meaning seems to be unknown today, but it was probably deemed a guardian spirit since it furnishes sanctuaries and tombs.

³⁷ Abaddon is the Hebrew for “place of destruction”, the name of the “realm of the dead” in the Hebrew Bible. It only appears once in the English translation of the Bible, thus...

“And they [the weird man-faced locusts from the bottomless pit] had a king over them, who is the Angel of the Abyss, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon” (Revelation 9:11, King James Version)

Possibly Lovecraft seeks here to draw a comparison between his devolved mound-makers and the Bible’s denizens of the bottomless pit. Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Book 10) presents a similar section, in which the Devil leads a plot to...

“lead ye forth Triumphant out of this infernal Pit Abominable [and to this end he transforms its denizens] to serpents all, as accessories To his bold riot. Dreadful was the din Of hissing through the hall, thick-swarming now With complicated monsters [...] They all Him followed, issuing forth to the open field [of the Human earth, whereupon they see some real serpents] “Horror on them fell, And horrid sympathy; for what they saw They felt themselves now changing [into normal lowly serpents, as] the dire form Caught by contagion, like in punishment As in their crime.”

³⁸ Transcosmic: dimensions outside the material universe. The word seems to originate in English translations of Hindu sacred texts published around 1900.

that the storm would last until well after dark; and with that hope turned from our aimless hillside searching toward the nearest inhabited hamlet to gather a body of squatters as helpers in the investigation. Timid as they were, a few of the younger men were sufficiently inspired by our protective leadership to promise such help.

We had hardly more than turned, however, when there descended such a blinding sheet of torrential rain that shelter became imperative. The extreme, almost nocturnal darkness of the sky caused us to stumble badly, but guided by the frequent flashes of lightning and by our minute knowledge of the hamlet we soon reached the least porous cabin of the lot; an heterogeneous combination of logs and boards whose still existing door and single tiny window both faced Maple Hill.³⁹ Barring the door after us against the fury of the wind and rain, we put in place the crude window shutter which our frequent searches had taught us where to find. It was dismal sitting there on rickety boxes in the pitchy darkness,⁴⁰ but we smoked pipes and occasionally flashed our pocket lamps about. Now and then we could see the lightning through cracks in the wall; the afternoon was so incredibly dark that each flash was extremely vivid.

The stormy vigil reminded me shudderingly of my ghastly night on Tempest Mountain. My mind turned to that odd question which had kept recurring ever since the nightmare thing had happened; and again I wondered why the daemon, approaching the three watchers either from the window or the interior, had begun with the men on

³⁹ Maple Hill is a very common American place-name, so no firm real-life location can be suggested as a possible inspiration. 1903 U.S. topographical maps of the central Catskills Mountains show no likely candidate.

⁴⁰ If the character of Arthur Munroe was indeed named for Lovecraft's boyhood friend, then the setting of this section may perhaps recall something of the small wooden clubhouse they had once built together?

each side and left the middle man till the last, when the titan fireball had scared it away. Why had it not taken its victims in natural order, with myself second, from whichever direction it had approached? With what manner of far-reaching tentacles did it prey? Or did it know that I was the leader, and saved me for a fate worse than that of my companions?

In the midst of these reflections, as if dramatically arranged to intensify them, there fell nearby a terrific bolt of lightning followed by the sound of sliding earth. At the same time the wolfish wind rose to daemonic crescendos of ululation. We were sure that the one tree on Maple Hill had been struck again,⁴¹ and Munroe rose from his box and went to the tiny window to ascertain the damage. When he took down the shutter the wind, and rain howled deafeningly in, so that I could not hear what he said; but I waited while he leaned out and tried to fathom Nature's pandaemonium.

Gradually a calming of the wind and dispersal of the unusual darkness told of the storm's passing. I had hoped it would last into the night to help our quest, but a furtive sunbeam from a knothole behind me removed the likelihood of such a thing. Suggesting to Munroe that we had better get some light even if more showers came, I unbarred and opened the crude door. The ground outside was a singular mass of mud and pools, with fresh heaps of earth from the slight landslide; but I saw nothing to justify the interest which kept my companion silently leaning out the window. Crossing to where he leaned, I touched his shoulder; but he did not move. Then, as I playfully shook him and turned him around, I felt the strangling

⁴¹ A tree on a hill being fatefully struck by lightning, with an associated death, was also the subject of Lovecraft's earlier story "The Tree" (written 1920).

tendrils of a cancerous horror whose roots reached into illimitable pasts and fathomless abysses of the night that broods beyond time.

For Arthur Munroe was dead. And on what remained of his chewed and gouged head there was no longer a face.

III. What The Red Glare Meant

On the tempest-racked night of November 8, 1921,⁴² with a lantern which cast charnel⁴³ shadows, I stood digging alone and idiotically in the grave of Jan Martense. I had begun to dig in the afternoon, because a thunderstorm was brewing, and now that it was dark and the storm had burst above the maniacally thick foliage I was glad.

I believe that my mind was partly unhinged by events since August 5th; the daemon shadow in the mansion, the general strain and disappointment, and the thing that occurred at the hamlet in an October storm. After that thing I had dug a grave for one whose death I could not understand. I knew that others could not understand either, so let them think Arthur Munroe had wandered away. They searched, but found nothing. The squatters might have understood, but I dared not frighten them more. I myself seemed strangely callous. That shock at the mansion had done something to my brain,⁴⁴ and I could think only of the quest for a horror now grown

⁴² Possibly a co-incidence, but it is interesting that the first ever official 'severe storm warning' was issued in America on 8th November 1870.

⁴³ A charnel house is a traditional building, usually of stone, intended for the storage of human bones after death.

⁴⁴ If we are to assume that 'the fear' pre-existed the Martense family, then this is one of several hints that it is somehow starting to affect the narrator — in the same manner as it had done with Gerrit Martense.

to cataclysmic stature in my imagination; a quest which the fate of Arthur Munroe made me vow to keep silent and solitary.

The scene of my excavations would alone have been enough to unnerve any ordinary man. Baleful primal trees of unholy size, age, and grotesqueness leered above me like the pillars of some hellish Druidic⁴⁵ temple; muffling the thunder, hushing the clawing wind, and admitting but little rain. Beyond the scarred trunks in the background, illumined by faint flashes of filtered lightning, rose the damp ivied stones of the deserted mansion, while somewhat nearer was the abandoned Dutch garden⁴⁶ whose walks and beds were polluted by a white, fungous, foetid, over-nourished vegetation that never saw full daylight. And nearest of all was the graveyard, where deformed trees tossed insane branches as their roots displaced unhallowed slabs and sucked venom from what lay below. Now and then, beneath the brown pall of leaves that rotted and festered in the antediluvian forest darkness, I could trace the sinister outlines of some of those low mounds⁴⁷ which characterized the lightning-pierced region.

⁴⁵ Lovecraft here references the ancient Druid priest cult of the British Isles. The British druids were said by the Ancient Romans to worship in sacred groves of tall trees.

⁴⁶ A rectangular formal garden laid out with angular geometric sunken paths, creating a densely packed atmosphere. Often planted with Dutch tulips and other vivid and erect flowers, and with a rectangular sunken pool in the centre.

⁴⁷ It may be coincidence, but Herman Melville's *Pierre* (1852) makes some interestingly pertinent observations of the Dutch of the Catskills and the Hudson River Valley, comparing their aristocracy to worms crawling in the earth, and their post-Revolutionary survival to that of "Indian mounds" in the landscape. He says that, on...

“their own river, Hudson ... These far-descended Dutch meadows lie steeped in a Hindooish haze ... Such estates seem to defy Time's tooth, and by conditions which take hold of the indestructible earth ...

Unimaginable audacity of a worm that but crawls through the soil he so

History had led me to this archaic grave. History, indeed, was all I had after everything else ended in mocking Satanism.⁴⁸ I now believed that the lurking fear was no material being, but a wolf-fanged ghost that rode the midnight lightning. And I believed, because of the masses of local tradition I had unearthed in search with Arthur Munroe, that the ghost was that of Jan Martense, who died in 1762. This is why I was digging idiotically in his grave.

The Martense mansion was built in 1670 by Gerrit Martense,⁴⁹ a wealthy New-Amsterdam⁵⁰ merchant who disliked the changing order

imperially claims! ... Ranges of mountains ... are their walls; and regular armies, with staffs of officers, crossing rivers with artillery, and marching through primeval woods, and threading vast rocky defiles, have been sent out to distraint [seize property for debts] upon three thousand farmer-tenants of one landlord, at a blow. ... But whatever one may think of the existence of such mighty lordships in the heart of a republic, and however we may wonder at their thus surviving, like Indian mounds, the Revolutionary flood; yet survive and exist they do...”

⁴⁸ Lovecraft appears to have believed that family degeneration — and consequent feeble-mindedness — was one of the prerequisites for the development of forms of superstitious Devil-worship in a region.

⁴⁹ The name occurs on a short list of the first Dutch settlers of the Martense name in New York (*Contributions for the Genealogies of the First Settlers of the Ancient County of Albany [NY], from 1630 to 1800*, p.8). Lovecraft could also have had the exact name from the Dutch Reform Cemetery in Flatbush, which he is known to have visited (16th September 1922, setting “The Hound” there based in a chip from a “1747” gravestone). One of the headstones there records:

“SUYDAM, b. 13 Oct 1747, d. 7 Mar 1833, aged 85; widow of Gerrit MARTENSE” (from *Inscriptions on Tombstones Copied Fri., 29 Aug 1913*).

⁵⁰ New Amsterdam (1609-1664) was a Dutch colony at the mouth of the Hudson, which was later to become New York City. The colony also stretched north along the Hudson River Valley into New York State, from c.1624. As fur traders, many of the Hudson River Valley Dutch would have had trade connections to mountain men operating in the neighbouring Schoarie and Catskill Mountains.

under British rule,⁵¹ and had constructed this magnificent domicile on a remote woodland summit whose untrodden solitude and unusual scenery pleased him. The only substantial disappointment encountered in this site was that which concerned the prevalence of violent thunderstorms in summer. When selecting the hill and building his mansion, Mynheer⁵² Martense had laid these frequent natural outbursts to some peculiarity of the year; but in time he perceived that the locality was especially liable to such phenomena. At length, having found these storms injurious to his head,⁵³ he fitted up a cellar⁵⁴ into which he could retreat from their wildest pandaeonium.

⁵¹ New Amsterdam had been surrendered to the British in September 1664 in the Second Anglo-Dutch War, and its trade and people made subject to British rule. It was renamed New York.

⁵² “Mynheer” is simply the Dutch equivalent of the English Mr. or Mister.

⁵³ There had been speculation about the influence of the different seasons on individual creativity, and even on national character (see the chapter “Climate and Civilization” in: Jan Golinski, *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment*, University of Chicago Press, 2007). But Lovecraft’s “The Lurking Fear” goes beyond the then-existing eugenics / environmental influence research — in that he portrays violent weather in an isolated landscape as the key trigger starting the degeneration of a lone family.

⁵⁴ This is one of a number of close similarities to Lovecraft’s tale “The Hound”, written just two months before “The Lurking Fear”...

“It was a secret room, far, far, underground” a space which is then immediately linked to... “huge winged daemons...”

Other similarities found in “The Hound” include: the deaths by manglings and clawing by some “unspeakable beast” that seems a “huge winged daemon” (rather than an actual hairy hound); a neglected garden; the degenerate nature of those killed by the beast at a “squalid thieves’ den”; “the wide-nebulous shadow sweeping from mound to mound” on the desolate moor; the maniacal digging at a grave; and of course the Dutch connection.

There are a few further similarities to be gleaned in his “The Picture in The House” (1920): the rural backwoods setting; an apparently abandoned house; cannibalism; the fateful lightning bolt.

Of Gerrit Martense's descendants less is known than of himself; since they were all reared in hatred of the English civilisation, and trained to shun such of the colonists as accepted it. Their life was exceedingly secluded, and people declared that their isolation had made them heavy of speech and comprehension. In appearance all were marked by a peculiar inherited dissimilarity of eyes; one generally being blue and the other brown. Their social contacts grew fewer and fewer, till at last they took to intermarrying with the numerous menial class about the estate. Many of the crowded⁵⁵ family degenerated, moved across the valley, and merged with the mongrel population which was later to produce the pitiful squatters. The rest had stuck sullenly to their ancestral mansion, becoming more and more clannish and taciturn, yet developing a nervous responsiveness to the frequent thunderstorms.

Most of this information reached the outside world through young Jan Martense, who from some kind of restlessness joined the colonial army when news of the Albany Convention⁵⁶ reached Tempest Mountain. He was the first of Gerrit's descendants to see much of the world; and when he returned in 1760 after six years of campaigning,⁵⁷ he was hated as an outsider by his father, uncles, and brothers, in spite of his dissimilar Martense eyes. No longer could he share the

⁵⁵ "Crowded" may be a polite euphemism for incestuously interbred?

⁵⁶ The Albany Congress of 1754 met to plan for better relations with the Mohawk and Iroquois tribes, and also for common defensive measures against the French during the Seven Years' War. The Catskill Mountains region served as a natural bulwark against the French during this war.

⁵⁷ The original newspaper article which alerted Lovecraft to the potential of the Catskills as a setting had referred to the State troopers taking young mountain men away as wartime conscripts. It is interesting to note that old Zadok in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" has, like Jan Martense, been away to the wars and he then returns to take on a semi-outsider status.

peculiarities and prejudices of the Martenses, while the very mountain thunderstorms failed to intoxicate him as they had before. Instead, his surroundings depressed him; and he frequently wrote to a friend in Albany⁵⁸ of plans to leave the paternal roof.

In the spring of 1763⁵⁹ Jonathan Gifford,⁶⁰ the Albany friend of Jan Martense, became worried by his correspondent's silence; especially in view of the conditions and quarrels at the Martense mansion. Determined to visit Jan in person, he went into the mountains on horseback. His diary states that he reached Tempest Mountain on September 20, finding the mansion in great decrepitude. The sullen, odd-eyed Martenses, whose unclean animal aspect shocked him, told him in broken gutterals that Jan was dead. He had, they insisted, been struck by lightning the autumn before; and now lay buried behind the neglected sunken gardens. They showed the visitor the grave, barren and devoid of markers. Something in the Martenses' manner gave Gifford a feeling of repulsion and suspicion, and a week later he returned with spade and mattock to explore the sepulchral spot. He found what he expected — a skull crushed cruelly as if by savage blows — so returning to Albany he openly charged the Martenses with the murder of their kinsman.

⁵⁸ Albany was a key site of early settlement of the real Martense family. See: *Contributions for the Genealogies of the First Settlers of the Ancient County of Albany [NY], from 1630 to 1800*, p.8.

⁵⁹ The Catskills provided a natural barrier against the French, and it was not until 1763 that a peace treaty with the French was signed. Therefore before Summer 1763 a stranger venturing alone into the Catskills might well have been mistaken for a French spy seeking an invasion route.

⁶⁰ I can identify no particular Gifford as a possible source, though there were a number of Giffords in Albany at that time. Later there was a Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823–1880), a key member of the Hudson Valley School of painters (depicted the Catskills wilderness), and a native of the Hudson River Valley.

Legal evidence was lacking, but the story spread rapidly round the countryside; and from that time the Martenses were ostracised by the world. No one would deal with them, and their distant manor was shunned as an accursed place. Somehow they managed to live on independently by the product of their estate, for occasional lights glimpsed from far-away hills attested their continued presence. These lights were seen as late as 1810, but toward the last they became very infrequent.⁶¹

Meanwhile there grew up about the mansion and the mountain a body of diabolic legendry. The place was avoided with doubled assiduousness, and invested with every whispered myth tradition could supply. It remained unvisited till 1816, when the continued absence of

⁶¹ The process of the lightning-and-thunder -provoked degeneration of the family thus took exactly 140 years (1670-1810). The Bible states that 140 years is the requisite time for four generations...

“lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons’ sons, even four generations. (Job:42:16, King James Version).

(It’s perhaps also of relevance that this is preceded, in Job 37, by a famous encounter with God — who takes the form of a great thunderstorm).

“Four generations” was then a common trope in eugenic research, arising from Benedict Augustin Morel’s seminal sequence (1857 in French) suggesting family degeneration over four generations. In 1910s America “three generations is enough” was a common eugenics point made about degenerate families, positing the outright danger of the “fourth generation”. The sequence ran: nervous temperament and moral laxness in the first generation; then their children, who have severe neurotic behaviour leading to addictions; leading in the third generation to insanity and suicide; then in the last a sterile generation with outright cretinism and often malformed bodies and heads.

One wonders if it was his acceptance of such a generational framework which led Lovecraft to fear that his own family tree had severe ‘taints’, and that he was himself part of this third generation of degeneration? That both his parents appear to have died mad *and* that he himself had a deformed jaw *and* many neuroses *and* lack of sex-drive, might all have seemed to be a horrible conformation of this four-generation theory.

lights was noticed by the squatters. At that time a party made investigations, finding the house deserted and partly in ruins.

There were no skeletons about, so that departure rather than death was inferred. The clan seemed to have left several years before, and improvised penthouses showed how numerous it had grown prior to its migration. Its cultural level had fallen very low, as proved by decaying furniture and scattered silverware which must have been long abandoned when its owners left. But though the dreaded Martenses were gone, the fear of the haunted house continued; and grew very acute when new and strange stories arose among the mountain decadents. There it stood; deserted, feared, and linked with the vengeful ghost of Jan Martense. There it still stood on the night I dug in Jan Martense's grave.

I have described my protracted digging as idiotic, and such it indeed was in object and method. The coffin of Jan Martense had soon been unearthed — it now held only dust and nitre⁶² — but in my fury to exhume his ghost I delved irrationally and clumsily down beneath where he had lain. God knows what I expected to find — I only felt that I was digging in the grave of a man whose ghost stalked by night.

It is impossible to say what monstrous depth I had attained when my spade, and soon my feet, broke through the ground beneath. The event, under the circumstances, was tremendous; for in the existence of a subterranean space here, my mad theories had terrible confirmation. My slight fall had extinguished the lantern, but I produced an electric pocket lamp and viewed the small horizontal tunnel which led away

⁶² Probably meaning salt-petre. Although there is also a Hebrew *nitre* or *natrum* found in the Bible, which is actually neither nitre nor salt-petre: on this point see Thaddeus Mason Harris, *The natural history of the Bible*, 1820, p.306.

indefinitely in both directions. It was amply large enough for a man to wriggle through; and though no sane person would have tried at that time, I forgot danger, reason, and cleanliness in my single-minded fever to unearth the lurking fear. Choosing the direction toward the house, I scrambled recklessly into the narrow burrow; squirming ahead blindly and rapidly, and flashing but seldom the lamp I kept before me.

What language can describe the spectacle of a man lost in infinitely abysmal earth; pawing, twisting, wheezing; scrambling madly through sunken — convolutions of immemorial blackness without an idea of time, safety, direction, or definite object? There is something hideous in it, but that is what I did. I did it for so long that life faded to a far memory, and I became one with the moles and grubs of nighted depths. Indeed, it was only by accident that after interminable writhings I jarred my forgotten electric lamp alight, so that it shone eerily along the burrow of caked loam that stretched and curved ahead.

I had been scrambling in this way for some time, so that my battery had burned very low, when the passage suddenly inclined sharply upward, altering my mode of progress. And as I raised my glance it was without preparation that I saw glistening in the distance two daemoniac reflections of my expiring lamp; two reflections glowing with a baneful⁶³ and unmistakable effulgence, and provoking maddeningly nebulous memories. I stopped automatically, though lacking the brain to retreat. The eyes approached, yet of the thing that bore them I could distinguish only a claw. But what a claw!⁶⁴ Then far overhead I heard a faint crashing which I recognised. It was the

⁶³ Baneful: very harmful, set to cause much harm.

⁶⁴ A similar partial revealing takes place in Lovecraft's "The Shunned House" (a titan elbow), "Under the Pyramids" (a monstrous paw); and in other works.

wild thunder of the mountain, raised to hysteric fury — I must have been crawling upward for some time, so that the surface was now quite near. And as the muffled thunder clattered, those eyes still stared with vacuous viciousness.

Thank God I did not then know what it was, else I should have died. But I was saved by the very thunder that had summoned it, for after a hideous wait there burst from the unseen outside sky one of those frequent mountainward bolts whose aftermath I had noticed here and there as gashes of disturbed earth and fulgurites of various sizes. With Cyclopean⁶⁵ rage it tore through the soil above that damnable pit, blinding and deafening me, yet not wholly reducing me to a coma. In the chaos of sliding, shifting earth I clawed and floundered helplessly till the rain on my head steadied me and I saw that I had come to the surface⁶⁶ in a familiar spot; a steep unforested

⁶⁵ Refers to the raging fury of the classical Cyclops named Polyphemus, a famous one-eyed giant who is blinded in *The Odyssey*.

⁶⁶ This evokes the 1921 popular book illustration by N.C. Wyeth, for Irving's Catskills story *Rip Van Winkle*, showing Rip Van Winkle emerging from his twenty-year drunken sleep on the mound, as if from under the ground..



place on the southwest slope of the mountain. Recurrent sheet lightnings illumed the tumbled ground and the remains of the curious low hummock which had stretched down from the wooded higher slope, but there was nothing in the chaos to show my place of egress from the lethal catacomb. My brain was as great a chaos as the earth, and as a distant red glare burst on the landscape from the south I hardly realised the horror I had been through.

But when two days later the squatters told me what the red glare meant, I felt more horror than that which the mould-burrow and the claw and eyes had given; more horror because of the overwhelming implications. In a hamlet twenty miles away an orgy of fear had followed the bolt which brought me above ground, and a nameless thing had dropped from an overhanging tree into a weak-roofed cabin. It had done a deed, but the squatters had fired the cabin in frenzy before it could escape. It had been doing that deed at the very moment the earth caved in on the thing with the claw and eyes.

IV. The Horror In The Eyes

There can be nothing normal in the mind of one who, knowing what I knew of the horrors of Tempest Mountain, would seek alone for the fear that lurked there. That at least two of the fear's embodiments were destroyed, formed but a slight guarantee of mental and physical safety in this Acheron⁶⁷ of multiform diabolism; yet I continued my quest with even greater zeal as events and revelations became more monstrous. When, two days after my

⁶⁷ Acheron was the river of pain in the underworld of the Ancient Greeks. One of the rivers crossed by Charon the ferryman, ferrying his cargo of souls to Hades. Dante has it that this river was... "where assemble those who die in mortal sin".

frightful crawl through that crypt of the eyes and claw, I learned that a thing had malignly hovered twenty miles away at the same instant the eyes were glaring at me, I experienced virtual convulsions of fright. But that fright was so mixed with wonder and alluring grotesqueness, that it was almost a pleasant sensation. Sometimes, in the throes of a nightmare when unseen powers whirl one over the roofs of strange dead cities toward the grinning chasm of Nis,⁶⁸ it is a relief and even a delight to shriek wildly and throw oneself voluntarily along with the hideous vortex of dream-doom into whatever bottomless gulf may yawn.⁶⁹ And so it was with the walking nightmare of Tempest

⁶⁸ Nis was used by Poe in his eerie poem “The Valley Nis” (1831), in which an “unrest”-filled river-valley landscape is depicted...

It is called the valley Nis.
And a Syriac[*] tale there is
Thereabout which Time hath said
Shall not be interpreted.
Something about Satan’s dart —
Something about angel wings —

Possibly Lovecraft, who knew Poe’s biography intimately, assumed the inspiration for this poem to have been Poe’s time spent in the Hudson River Valley immediately adjacent to the Catskills? Poe’s setting for “Nis” (and its later revision) can very easily be understood in that way. It also has an interesting focus on dead human eyes that gaze from a grave on “a terror-stricken sky”, in a lonely valley where the people have “gone unto the wars” — all of which seem relevant to elements in “The Lurking Fear”.

* Incidentally, one wonders if the “not be interpreted” “Syriac” passage quoted above is the source of Lovecraft’s idea of the “inexplicable couplet” in *The Necronomicon*? Syriac was a widespread 4th-8th Cent. literary language of the Near East, meaning that the period is congruent with the dates for Alhazred.

⁶⁹ This passage seems to echo Lovecraft’s childhood ‘night gaunts’ nightmares, as well as being a sideways comment on the enjoyable frisson to be had from good weird fiction. It also echoes something of the passage to be found near the end of his story “The Outsider” (written 1921)...

Mountain; the discovery that two monsters had haunted the spot gave me ultimately a mad craving to plunge into the very earth of the accursed region, and with bare hands dig out the death that leered from every inch of the poisonous soil.

As soon as possible I visited the grave of Jan Martense and dug vainly where I had dug before. Some extensive cave-in had obliterated all trace of the underground passage, while the rain had washed so much earth back into the excavation that I could not tell how deeply I had dug that other day. I likewise made a difficult trip to the distant hamlet where the death-creature had been burnt, and was little repaid for my trouble. In the ashes of the fateful cabin I found several bones, but apparently none of the monster's. The squatters said the thing had had only one victim; but in this I judged them inaccurate, since besides the complete skull of a human being, there was another bony fragment which seemed certainly to have belonged to a human skull at some time. Though the rapid drop of the monster had been seen, no one could say just what the creature was like; those who had glimpsed it called it simply a devil. Examining the great tree where it had lurked, I could discern no distinctive marks. I tried to find some trail into the black forest, but on this occasion could not stand the sight of those morbidly large boles,⁷⁰ or of those vast serpent-like roots that twisted so malevolently before they sank into the earth.

My next step was to reexamine with microscopic care the deserted hamlet where death had come most abundantly, and where Arthur

“Now I ride with the mocking and friendly ghouls on the night-wind, and play by day amongst the catacombs of Nephren-Ka in the sealed and unknown valley of Hadoth by the Nile.”

⁷⁰ Not to be confused by gamers with bholes, a name which once sparked a lengthy dholes / bholes debate within Lovecraft RPG gaming fandom. Lovecraft means the boles (trunks) of trees.

Munroe had seen something he never lived to describe. Though my vain previous searches had been exceedingly minute, I now had new data to test; for my horrible grave-crawl convinced me that at least one of the phases of the monstrosity had been an underground creature. This time, on the 14th of November, my quest concerned itself mostly with the slopes of Cone Mountain⁷¹ and Maple Hill where they overlook the unfortunate hamlet, and I gave particular attention to the loose earth of the landslide region on the latter eminence.

The afternoon of my search brought nothing to light, and dusk came as I stood on Maple Hill looking down at the hamlet and across the valley to Tempest Mountain. There had been a gorgeous sunset, and now the moon came up, nearly full⁷² and shedding a silver flood over the plain, the distant mountainside, and the curious low mounds that rose here and there. It was a peaceful Arcadian⁷³ scene, but knowing what it hid I hated it. I hated the mocking moon, the hypocritical plain, the festering mountain, and those sinister mounds. Everything seemed to me tainted with a loathsome contagion, and inspired by a noxious alliance with distorted hidden powers.

Presently, as I gazed abstractedly at the moonlit panorama, my eye became attracted by something singular in the nature and arrangement of a certain topographical element. Without having any exact knowledge of geology, I had from the first been interested in the odd mounds and hummocks of the region. I had noticed that they were

⁷¹ I have inspected the early U.S. topographical maps but no such location can be found in the Catskills or nearby.

⁷² Lovecraft, being an astronomer and a collector of almanacs, was correct on this point. The 14th/15th Nov 1921 was indeed the night of a full moon in nearby Albany, according to online moon phase back-calculators.

⁷³ Arcadian means an idyllic view of a pastoral landscape. The Hudson River School had painted many such sunsets and idyllic landscapes in the river area.

pretty widely distributed around Tempest Mountain, though less numerous on the plain than near the hilltop itself, where prehistoric glaciation had doubtless found feebler opposition to its striking and fantastic caprices.⁷⁴ Now, in the light of that low moon which cast long weird shadows,⁷⁵ it struck me forcibly that the various points and lines of the mound system had a peculiar relation to the summit of Tempest Mountain. That summit was undeniably a centre from which the lines or rows of points radiated⁷⁶ indefinitely and irregularly,

⁷⁴ Lovecraft refers to the immense glaciers of the Ice Ages, whose slow grinding erosion of the land beneath them often left a legacy of strange landscapes and oddly positioned giant boulders.

⁷⁵ The idea of... “the light of that low moon which cast long weird shadows” seems indicative that Lovecraft had some basic knowledge about British archaeological methods. Before modern archaeological tools, detecting ancient earthworks — such as small ploughed-out tumuli (ancient mounds) — through fieldwork was something best done in a low-angled light casting long shadows.

⁷⁶ Either Lovecraft independently lit upon this wrong-headed but seminal ‘earth mysteries’ concept, or else he must have had this idea of ‘ley lines’ from a review of Alfred Watkins’s book *Early British Trackways, Moats, Mounds, Camps and Sites*. This book had appeared in early 1922, some nine months before “The Lurking Fear”. It attempted to show that ancient British trackways, evidenced millennia later only by their associated ancient barrow mounds and standing stones, hill-forts and the like, were often constructed onto dead-straight lines. Watkins further suggested that these straight lines radiated from certain key points in the British landscape.

If so, then it seems likely that a review of Watkins in the scientific journal *Nature* (5th August 1922, 110, pp.176-177) would have been Lovecraft’s source for the idea. There *Early British Trackways* was briefly reviewed without skepticism. The *Nature* review charitably overlooked the bumbling place-name blunders which had caused howls from British reviewers at *The Spectator* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. This oversight at *Nature* was perhaps due to editorial recall of one Sir Norman Lockyer (founder and first editor of *Nature* until 1920) and his groundbreaking idea in *Stonehenge and Other British Stone Monuments Astronomically Considered* (1906, 1909) about the astronomical alignment of early British sacred sites. Findings which implied that a sacred nature might indeed be inferred for straight lines and lines-of-sight in early British cultures, and over a very long period. Lockyer’s work was the start of the broadly-sound (although loon-haunted) research on archeoastronomy. This earliest archeoastronomy

as if the unwholesome Martense mansion had thrown visible tentacles of terror. The idea of such tentacles gave me an unexplained thrill, and I stopped to analyse my reason for believing these mounds glacial phenomena.

The more I analysed the less I believed, and against my newly opened mind there began to beat grotesque and horrible analogies based on superficial aspects and upon my experience beneath the earth. Before I knew it I was uttering frenzied and disjointed words to myself; “My God!... Molehills... the damned place must be honeycombed... how many... that night at the mansion... they took Bennett and Tobey first... on each side of us...” Then I was digging frantically into the mound which had stretched nearest me; digging desperately, shiveringly, but almost jubilantly; digging and at last shrieking aloud with some unplaced emotion as I came upon a tunnel

was something which Lovecraft may also have become aware of in passing, since he was an astronomer who was also interested in ancient British topography and archaeology. Possibly the Theosophist journals may also have picked up before late 1922 on Lockyer and Watkins, providing another route by which Lovecraft could have learned of the new idea.

To anyone familiar with the close-packed and topsy-turvy nature of the hilly topography of Watkins’s own English Midlands and Welsh Marches, the ‘ley lines’ idea might have seemed as loopy as the traditionally rambling English road. Yet Watkins found a hearing in some quarters because the Ancient Romans had actually done it, incontrovertibly paving much of Britain with their dead-straight roads. Some of which were indeed founded on or alongside earlier ancient British trackways. Yet most reputable archaeologists were skeptical, and the idea simmered and drifted to the fringes where it became entangled with occultism and UFOs. In the late 1960s and early 1970s ‘leys’ were assiduously researched by mushroom-munching hippies during the British counterculture’s rural retreat from the heroin-blighted cities, but the notion was brought to a juddering halt by the abundant computer power of the late 1970s and early 80s. Long-distance leys were shown to be the result of statistical chance, plus dodgy place-name derivation and the indiscriminate lumping together of disparately-aged points — rather than the result of druids with pointy sticks standing on hilltops.

or burrow just like the one through which I had crawled on the other daemonic night.

After that I recall running, spade in hand; a hideous run across moon-litten,⁷⁷ mound-marked meadows and through diseased, precipitous abysses of haunted hillside forest; leaping screaming, panting, bounding toward the terrible Martense mansion. I recall digging unreasonably in all parts of the brier-choked cellar; digging to find the core and centre of that malignant universe of mounds. And then I recall how I laughed when I stumbled on the passageway; the hole at the base of the old chimney, where the thick weeds grew and cast queer shadows in the light of the lone candle I had happened to have with me. What still remained down in that hell-hive, lurking and waiting for the thunder to arouse it, I did not know. Two had been killed; perhaps that had finished it. But still there remained that burning determination to reach the innermost secret of the fear, which I had once more come to deem definite, material, and organic.

My indecisive speculation whether to explore the passage alone and immediately with my pocket-light or to try to assemble a band of squatters for the quest, was interrupted after a time by a sudden rush of wind from the outside which blew out the candle and left me in stark blackness. The moon no longer shone through the chinks and apertures above me, and with a sense of fateful alarm I heard the sinister and significant rumble of approaching thunder. A confusion of associated ideas possessed my brain, leading me to grope back toward the farthest corner of the cellar. My eyes, however, never

⁷⁷ A neo-archaism, since according to the *OED* it dates only from the later 19th century. I have, however, found an example in poetry by Henry Beck Hirst in *The Ladies' Companion and Literary Expositor* published October 1843. P. Fijn van Draat (1912) is said to have credited the coinage to Poe, but I have been unable to find the details of this claim.

turned away from the horrible opening at the base of the chimney; and I began to get glimpses of the crumbling bricks and unhealthy weeds as faint glows of lightning penetrated the weeds outside and illumined the chinks in the upper wall. Every second I was consumed with a mixture of fear and curiosity. What would the storm call forth — or was there anything left for it to call? Guided by a lightning flash I settled myself down behind a dense clump of vegetation, through which I could see the opening without being seen.⁷⁸

If heaven is merciful, it will some day efface from my consciousness the sight that I saw, and let me live my last years in peace. I cannot sleep at night now, and have to take opiates⁷⁹ when it thunders. The thing came abruptly and unannounced; a daemon, ratlike scurrying from pits remote and unimaginable, a hellish panting and stifled grunting, and then from that opening beneath the chimney a burst of multitudinous and leprous life — a loathsome night-spawned flood of organic corruption more devastatingly hideous than the blackest conjurations of mortal madness and morbidity. Seething, stewing, surging, bubbling like serpents' slime it rolled up and out of that yawning hole, spreading like a septic contagion and streaming from the cellar at every point of egress — streaming out to scatter through the accursed midnight forests and strew fear, madness, and death.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Lovecraft's later story "The Shadow over Innsmouth" provides a similar position from which the narrator can witness the final horror.

⁷⁹ Opium-based sedative drugs were once commonly prescribed by American doctors to ease stress and nerves in patients. Non-medical opiates were criminalised in America by the early 1910s, and over-the-counter patent medicines were forced by law to state their opiate ingredients on the label.

⁸⁰ Lovecraft would later develop this vision of a many-eyed and amorphously shape-shifting 'emergence from a subterranean opening', in the famous onrush of the shoggoth at the end of *At The Mountains of Madness*.

God knows how many there were — there must have been thousands. To see the stream of them in that faint intermittent lightning was shocking. When they had thinned out enough to be glimpsed as separate organisms, I saw that they were dwarfed, deformed hairy devils or apes — monstrous and diabolic caricatures of the monkey tribe.⁸¹ They were so hideously silent;⁸² there was hardly a

⁸¹ The history of the study of generational family degeneration, with its associated eugenic theories of national population devolution/improvement, is too complex to summarise here. Suffice it to say that by 1922 family degeneration was a central underpinning element in ‘humane’ programmes of eugenics, programmes that were endorsed as much on the political left as on the right. Incest, cousin-marriage, and miscegenation were then deemed the commonest causes of degeneration, with hastening factors being isolated and lawless environments, syphilis and alcoholism. Lovecraft had broadly absorbed eugenic and racist worldviews, while showing a clear preference for the approaches taken by the British exponents. Oxford University’s *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (2010) is a good starting place for those seeking a rational and scholarly overview of the history of the subject. For studies of the theme in literature see: *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880-1940*; and *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel: 1880-1940*; and *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration*. There are also a small number of scholarly and academic essays which explore themes of degeneration and devolution in Lovecraft’s fiction.

Note that in 1922 Lovecraft had not yet read Margaret Murray’s powerful and influential *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921). This book, on the alleged survival into modern times of an ancient pre-Aryan cult, was to strongly shift Lovecraft’s imaginative focus away from the interiority of family/clan heredity and degeneration. In 1923 Murray’s *Witch Cult* served as an anchor on which Lovecraft swung his fears toward the Asiatic ‘Mongloid’ peoples (the human race was then understood as three broad types: Mongoloid, Negroid, and Caucasian) and their archaic cults and superstitions.

Also note that he had not yet read Arthur Machen, whose ‘little people’ might otherwise be possible inspiration for the devolved Martense clan. Lovecraft first discovered Machen’s work in the summer of 1923 (S.T. Joshi, *I Am Providence*, p.454), a good six months after “The Lurking Fear” was written.

⁸² Utter silence is one of the characteristics of the Catskill gnomes. In Irving’s description of them... “they maintained the gravest faces, the most mysterious silence” except for the ability of their games to make the sound of thunder. The gnomes also stare at Rip with... “such strange, uncouth, lack-lustre

squeal when one of the last stragglers turned with the skill of long practice to make a meal in accustomed fashion on a weaker companion. Others snapped up what it left and ate with slavering relish. Then, in spite of my daze of fright and disgust, my morbid curiosity triumphed; and as the last of the monstrosities oozed up alone from that nether world of unknown nightmare, I drew my automatic pistol and shot it under cover of the thunder.

Shrieking, slithering, torrential shadows of red viscous madness chasing one another through endless, ensanguined corridors of purple fulgurous sky... formless phantasms and kaleidoscopic mutations of a ghoulish, remembered scene; forests of monstrous over-nourished oaks with serpent roots twisting and sucking unnamable juices from an earth verminous with millions of cannibal devils; mound-like tentacles groping from underground nuclei of polypous perversion... insane lightning over malignant ivied walls and daemon arcades choked with fungous vegetation... Heaven be thanked for the instinct which led me unconscious to places where men dwell; to the peaceful village that slept under the calm stars of clearing skies.

I had recovered enough in a week to send to Albany for a gang of men to blow up the Martense mansion⁸³ and the entire top of Tempest Mountain with dynamite, stop up all the discoverable mound-burrows, and destroy certain over-nourished trees whose very existence seemed an insult to sanity. I could sleep a little after they had done this, but true rest will never come as long as I remember that nameless secret of

countenances, that his heart turned with him..." (Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle").

⁸³ This anticipates the explosive destruction visited on the town and its reef at the end of Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", a similar story in which a whole town is in the process of slowly devolving and moving underwater over a period of generations.

the lurking fear. The thing will haunt me, for who can say the extermination is complete, and that analogous phenomena do not exist all over the world? Who can, with my knowledge, think of the earth's unknown caverns⁸⁴ without a nightmare dread of future possibilities? I cannot see a well or a subway entrance without shuddering...⁸⁵ why cannot the doctors give me something to make me sleep, or truly calm my brain when it thunders?

What I saw in the glow of flashlight after I shot the unspeakable straggling object was so simple that almost a minute elapsed before I understood and went delirious. The object was nauseous; a filthy whitish gorilla thing with sharp yellow fangs and matted fur. It was the ultimate product of mammalian degeneration; the frightful outcome of isolated spawning, multiplication, and cannibal nutrition above and below the ground; the embodiment of all the snarling and chaos and grinning fear that lurk behind life. It had looked at me as it died, and its eyes had the same odd quality that marked those other eyes which had stared at me underground and excited cloudy recollections.⁸⁶ One eye was blue, the other brown. They were the

⁸⁴ Despite his long-standing fascination with caves, at the time of writing "The Lurking Fear" Lovecraft had yet to set foot in a proper cave. He describes his first descent into a cave in "A Descent to Avernus" (Summer 1928), a short but vivid account that is to be found most easily in *Collected Essays Volume 4: Travel*.

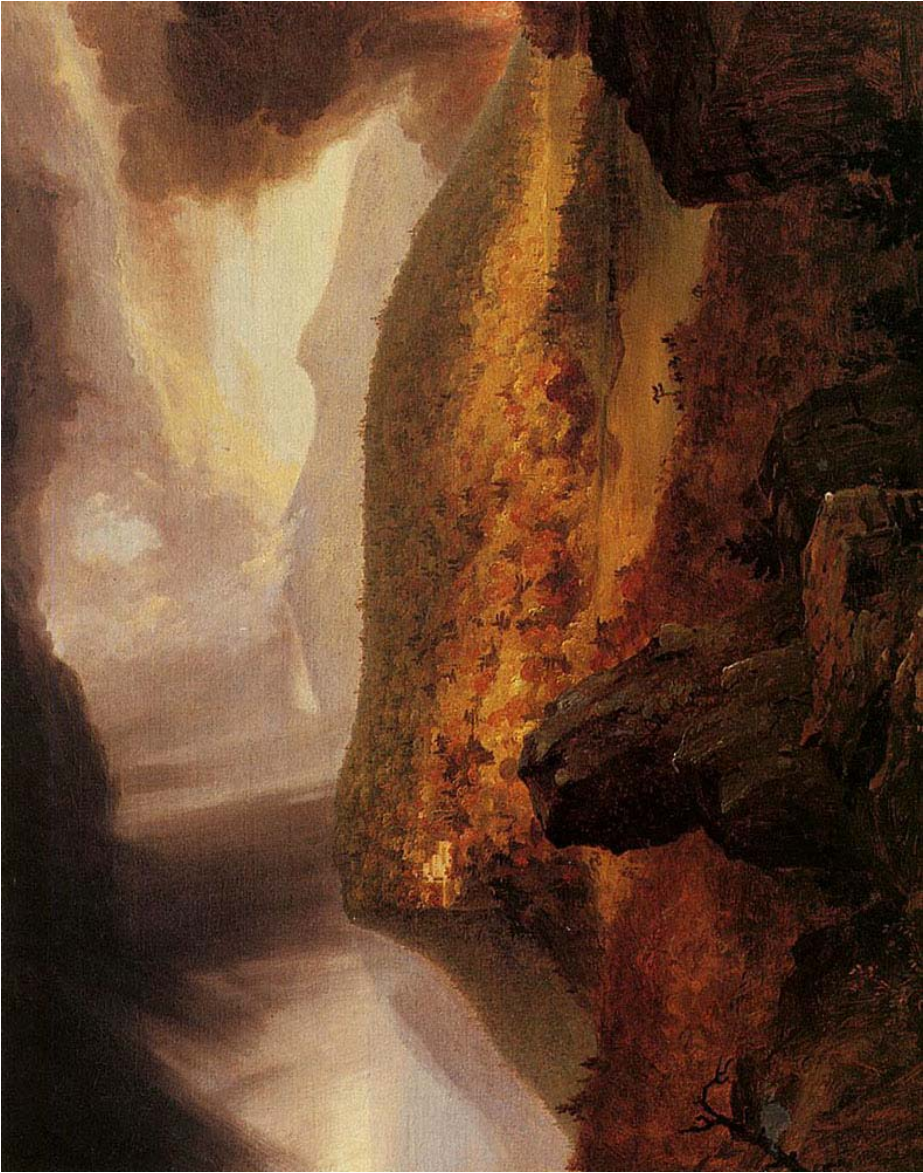
⁸⁵ Lovecraft here anticipates the underground creatures and the "Subway Accident" painting, in his later story "Pickman's Model" (1926). Future Mythos writers might usefully note that the Hudson River flows down from the Catskills to empty into the sea at Red Hook — suggesting a riverine connection between Tempest Mountain's daemon tunnels and the watery "subterranean channels and tunnels in the neighbourhood" which are exploited by the Dutch-descended Robert Suydam and his minions in Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook" (1925).

⁸⁶ This recalls the "maddeningly nebulous memories" the narrator half-feels on first looking into the evil eyes under the earth. This appears to be Lovecraft's final hint to the reader that the narrator's own primal and bestial ancestral memories were starting to be stirred by 'the fear' during his ordeals. Is the

dissimilar Martense eyes of the old legends, and I knew in one inundating cataclysm of voiceless horror what had become of that vanished family; the terrible and thunder-crazed⁸⁷ house of Martense.

intelligent and attentive reader meant to draw the subtle inference that ‘the fear’ repeatedly spared the narrator’s life because it had infected him to become another Gerrit Martense, thus allowing him to flee in order to found a new family that would likewise slowly degenerate into mound-makers over four generations?

⁸⁷ Lovecraft will later link thunder and deep-time heredity at the end of “The Dunwich Horror”... “[from what] obscure, long-latent heredity, were those half-articulate thunder-croakings drawn?”



Thomas Cole, "Catskill Mountain House" (1844-48). With storm above.

August 2013. Designed for printing as a 6" by 9" booklet.

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