



The Case of Charles Dexter Ward

H.P. Lovecraft

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Incantations of black magic unearthed unspeakable horrors in Providence, Rhode Island. Evil spirits are being resurrected from beyond the grave, a supernatural force so twisted that it kills without offering the mercy of death!

Cover illustration: Michael Whelan

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward Details

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From Reader Review The Case of Charles Dexter Ward for online ebook

Nickolas the Kid says

<http://metalinvader.net/el/napalm-eye...>

Μια παλιά? κριτική στο METAL INVADER!!!

Marilou K. says

Ε ναι ρε παιδ; μου!! Τ;ρα μ?λιστα, κατ?λαβα γιατ? ο Λ?βκραφτ κατ?χει τ?τοια θ?ση στον τρ?μο!!! Παρ?λο που ε?ναι προφαν?ς απ'τη μ?ση σχεδ?ν τι ?χει γινει και σε ορισμ?να σημε?α θα ?θελα πιο πολλ?ς λεπτομ?ρειες και τρ?μο (ο συγγραφ?ας ε?ναι αρκετ? φιειδωλ?ς, σα να θ?λει απλ?ς να καταγρ?ψει κ?ποια γεγον?τα), το μοναδικ? του μυθιστ?ρημα με "κ?ρδισε" και με αγχωσε!!

υ.γ. Η ?κδοση απ'τον Α?ολο ε?ναι χ?λια (λανθασμ?νες ημερομην?ες, λε?πουν εισαγωγικ? ?ταν σταματ?ει κ?ποιος να μιλ?ει, αν?κληση λ?ξεων/φρ?σεων με διαφορετικ? αυτ? τη φορ? μετ?φραση.....)! Με ?βγαζε απ' το κλ?μα! Επιλ?ξτε κ?ποια ?λη!

Х. Ф. ЛАВКРАФТ

Δικαίως χαρακτηρίστηκε ρχοντας της κοσμικός φρέκτης και του εξωλογικό τρόπου. Ιδιαίτερη ήταν περιγραφή της της χνής με να σπένιας ποιητήτας ργος, μαυλιστική και ερεθιστική. Και φοιτούσε υποχθόνιο δόσος και μαγεία γεμάτη μυστικό θαματά.

Η περ?πτωση του Τσ?ρλας Ντ?ξτερ Γου?ρντ ε?ναι μια ιστορ?α στην οπο?α εφι?λτης και πραγματικ?τητα ενσωματ?νονται και ρευστοποιο?νται,ανακατε?ονται με την αινιγματικ?τητα,το ?γνωστο της ?παρξης,το τερατ?δες σκοτ?δι,το «?λλο» σ?μπαν,το σατανικ? ψ?θυρο του ατ?ρμονου διαστ?ματος,τις κοσμικ?ς ν?χτες και τις σιωπ?ς, το χιμαιρικ?, το ?μορφο ?ν της φαντασ?ωσης και την αληθοφ?νεια του τρ?μου και δημιουργο?ν

τοπ?α, μ?ρη, μορφ?ζ, ?ντα,

υπερκ?σμια δι?σταση, αιν?γματα και ασ?ληπτες πιθαν?τητες, που αγγ?ζουν τον αναγν?στη με
?νεση, ακρ?βεια και απ?λυτα υπαινικτικ? κλ?μα, μεταφ?ροντας τον
στην Νεκρομαντε?α και στον ?λλο Χ?ρο.

Π?ρα απο ?ρια, π?σω απο τον κ?σμο, π?σω απο το χρ?vo.

Αφετηρ?α της ιστορ?ας μας ?νας παρ?ξενος στ?χος απο τη Β?βλο:

-Αν κ?ποιος πεθ?νει θα ξαναγυρ?σει ?ραγε;

λες τις μ?ρες του ταγμ?vou μou χρ?vou θα περιμ?vω,

μ?χρι να 'ρθει η αλλαγ?-

αλλ? και ?ρωμα απο ανατολ?τικα παραμ?θια,ιστορ?ες φρ?κης και γοτθικ? μυστ?ριο.

Μ?σα σε αυτ? την ιστορ?α συναντ?με τον καταραμ?νο συγγραφ?α Μπορ?λους-που υποκινε? ?λο το γαλαξ?α τρ?μου του βιβλ?ου- ο οπο?ος ?χει ανακαλ?ψει αλχημιστικ? μυστικ? και επαναφ?ρει στη ζω? τους νεκρο?ς, χωρ?ς να καταφ?γει σε οποιαδ?ποτε εγκληματικ? Νεκρομαντε?α.

Αντ? ε?ναι και η επιδ?ωξη του ?ρωα μας, του Τσαρλς Ντ?ξτερ Γου?ρντ. Ο οπο?ος υποκινο?μενος απο τον προπ?πο του-που θ?λει να κατακτ?σει την αι?νια ζω? και να νικ?σει το χρ?νο αλλ?ζοντας διαδοχικ? ξενιστ?ς-

μπα?νει στη διαδικασ?α νεκραν?στασης του προγ?νου του.

Σ?μφωνα με τον Μπορ?λους θα τον αναστ?σει χρησιμοποι?ντας τα ουσι?δη ?λατα του ανθρ?που και τη σκ?νη του μ?ρους ?που ο νεκρ?ς ε?χε αποτεφρωθε?.

?πως καλ? καταλ?βατε απο εκε? και μετ? ξεκιν?ει το ταξ?δι στο ?λεος του σκ?τους.

Μυστικ? θα?ματα συντελο?νται μ?σα σε ατμ?σφαιρα σαγηνευτικ? και τρομαχτικ?. Γν?σια γοτθικ?. Κ?που π?σω,στο β?θος, στο υπ?γειο,στο σκοτ?δι ενεδρε?ει ο α?ρατος αλλ? πραγματικ?ς τρ?μος.

Διαβολικ? δ?ναμη,ακαταν?ητα σ?μβολα,ψαλμωδ?ες ανατριχιαστικ?ς και ψ?θυροι στο σκοτ?δι,τυμβωρυχ?ες, φ?ρετρα,υποχθ?νια πλ?σματα εκατοντ?δων χρ?νων που θρηνο?ν και ουρλι?ζουν,προετοιμ?ζουν τα οδυνηρ? και απα?σια αποτελ?σματα.

Το νεκρονομικ? και οι μαγικ?ς φ?ρμουλες κ?ποιας απ?στευτης δ?ναμης και αρχα?ας γν?σης ε?ναι προτιμ?τερο να μην ανακαλυφθο?ν ποτ? απο τον ?νθρωπο.

Καλ? αν?γνωση.

Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς!!

? Irena ? says

4.5

Lovecraft must be the only author whose works I've read and don't mind certain things most readers seem to hate. Yes, it can be slow. Yes, he can be overly descriptive. Yes, there is an omniscient narrator. Yes, there is lots of retelling. And in most cases, some of those annoy me too.

However, all of it pales in front of his extraordinary imagination and the atmosphere you find in his stories. It doesn't matter if it is a short story or a longer one. He is one of a kind and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is one of those stories that shows just how great Lovecraft was.

'What horrors and mysteries, what contradictions and contraventions of Nature, had come back after a century and a half to harass Old Providence with her clustered spires and domes?'

It starts with the escape of Charles Dexter Ward from a private hospital near Providence, Rhode Island. He 'was placed under restraint most reluctantly by the grieving father who had watched his aberration grow

from a mere eccentricity to a dark mania involving both a possibility of murderous tendencies and a profound and peculiar change in the apparent contents of his mind'. Charles seemed to switch his personality to the one from eighteenth century. Even his physical appearance was changed. The last person to talk to him before his escape is his family physician, Dr. Marinus Bicknell Willett. The only thing left in the room is a strange blue powder.

'This is no common case—it is a madness out of time and a horror from beyond the spheres which no police or lawyers or courts or alienists could ever fathom or grapple with.'

From there, the story goes back to where and when it all started. From Ward's unhealthy interest in his ancestor Joseph Curwen who came from Salem during the witch-hunt trials to all the changes everyone noticed. It goes even further in the past, because there is a story within a story here. Who was Joseph Curwen? What did he do? What happened to him? Why would someone try to erase every trace of him? From Ward's research, private letters and rare diaries he managed to find, he found out that his ancestor '*was marvelled at, feared, and finally shunned like a plague*'.

You already know where Charles Dexter Ward would end up, but his path from a solitary young antiquarian to the changed man the doctor left in that hospital room is a remarkable story. Considering that Dr. Willett is the one who brought him into this world, the ending is extraordinary and the doctor one of my favourite characters I've read.

Stenjohnson says

“Do not call up that which you cannot put down.”
— H. P. Lovecraft, "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward"

I first read H.P. Lovecraft's 1927 short novel "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" when I was 11 years old, in the tacky Del Rey edition pictured. At the time, I was surprised by the difference between the densely erudite content and the pulp cover art. A horror writer with high-literary roots, Lovecraft remains a unique and original artist; at his best, he combines the ethereal sensibilities of "decadent" fantasists like Lord Dunsany and Arthur Machen with the bleak gothic tales of Poe and Ambrose Bierce. My scholarship is a bit of cheat, since those are all known influences, but Lovecraft is also different from his peers in his obsession with abstract, implacable dread. He delights in a trademarked sensation of religious-epiphany-in-reverse; the fabric of reality, when explored too deeply, always yields inscrutable horror. Poe and Bierce are actually more reliant on the pulp mechanics of surprise endings and clockwork irony. Lovecraft is fonder of dark, cosmic irresolution.

"The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" features a typical Lovecraftian hero, a young man in 1920s Providence, RI whose "antiquarian" obsessions lead to occult discoveries. By "antiquarian," Lovecraft means (without a trace of irony) that Ward is preoccupied with the postage stamp-sized world of pre-Revolutionary Providence, with interests as disturbingly esoteric as Colonial wood-working techniques.

Ward begins to research an ancestor, Joseph Curwen, whose identity was mysteriously effaced from town records and learns that he was a notorious practitioner of black magic. He begins his own series of experiments into the unknown, resulting in what appears to madness. Or is it? Or has his identity been taken by a figure from the past? Another Lovecraftian archetype, psychiatrist (or "alienist") Dr. Willett investigates; his discoveries take him to inexplicable occult findings, a startling conclusion, and an epic

battle of wills.

It would be unfair to call Lovecraft's style eccentric. It is urbane, precise, and boldly oblivious to contemporary literary trends. Defiantly anachronistic, with British spellings and mannerisms ("shew" anyone?) and an obsession with minute detail and rhetorical elegance, his prose can be detached to a fault: all the dialog in "Dexter Ward" could fit on the head of a pin, and most subjective expression occurs in letters and journal entries, some written in a brilliant, intentionally-enigmatic pastiche of 17th century prose. Lovecraft even makes a rare, satirical swipe at TS Eliot, and one can see the unlikely parallels between the two writers: buttoned-up early 20th century antiquarians chafing against modernity, shaking their fists at an opaque universe.

Virtually unknown during his lifetime, Lovecraft has since gained literary respect and looms large in popular culture. But he is often misunderstood or willfully misread; think of the innumerable films that are based on his work in name alone (and "Charles Dexter Ward" was filmed by Roger Corman as the much-altered "The Haunted Palace"). Readers willing to accept his unusual technique will be rewarded by the prodigious, wildly unconventional imagination of an American genius. There is nothing like him.

mark monday says

Dear Mr. Lovecraft,

I, Joseph Curwen, necromancer supreme, have rather a bone to pick (forgive my little joke). I have noticed many problems with your narrative *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. First of all: that title. Surely you realize that *I* am the protagonist of the tale - not the fey amateur Charles Dexter Ward? I do not think it is too much to ask that the title of your document correctly identify its leading personage. Second: I have noticed a strong bias against scholars of the so-called "dark" arts in your work - a bias that clearly and unfairly slants your narrative in favor of such laughable nonentities as that impressionable youth, his hysterical parents, his meddling doctor, etc, as well as towards questionable groups such as the unimaginative bourgeoisie and the overly imaginative lower classes, and various small-minded institutions including the Church and the Mental Ward. Your insufferable bias against such studies - indeed, to all those who would bravely dig up graves, retrieve bodies, revive those bodies, and proceed to imprison, interrogate, and torture those revived bodies until certain ancient bits of knowledge are at last shared - is not just regrettable and close-minded, but genuinely insulting on a personal and professional level. For shame, sir, for shame! Your prejudices do you no credit. Third: I find your general attitude towards a humble wizard such as myself, as well as towards my peers, we who only wish to remain immortal, even if it means possessing and discarding otherwise useless youths (like Charles Dexter Ward for example), so that we may come to learn ancient knowledge and thus reshape the world and all of mankind, for the better good no doubt, well... I just have to say that your entire attitude towards my lifestyle choice is appallingly narrow-minded and shockingly judgmental. Very unbecoming behavior for a writer of 'horror' fiction!

I will admit that there are many good things within your story. You have been accused of indulging in intensely theatrical purple prose; personally, I find your style of writing to be highly atmospheric, thrilling, and surprisingly enjoyable overall. The narrative itself is involving and even rather intricate. You have also been accused of tellnotshow-itis. I did see some of that in your lengthy flashback to my own story (the tragic tale of an unjustly accused and persecuted investigator of the supernatural - a former pillar of the community! oh how the small-minded love to tear down their betters!)... but that was merely a story within a

story, told secondhand, and so I forgave it. Conversely, the last third of the novella - where the insufferable Dr. Willett finds my secret underground cavern and its attendant labs, cells, sacrificial altar, and deep well-cages for the unruly undead - that is written in an exciting and tense *you are there* style that I much appreciated. I was quite pleased with your descriptive powers and I cheered frequently at every gasp of horror uttered by the unimaginative and mulish Dr. Willett. And last but certainly not least, regarding the public accusations that detail your racism: as a necromancer who does not discriminate based on race when choosing my various living, dead and undead victims, I was specifically on the look-out for any race-based judgments. I am happy to note that I saw no example of that sort of foolishness. Well, save for the black cat unfortunately named "Nig". That made me quite uncomfortable.

But back to my grievances! Most repugnant of all: the ending. You seek to reduce me, sir, to conquer me as I have conquered death! I laugh in the face of that. Ha! Ha! Ha! From tiny particles of dust I shall rise again. And when I do, know that even your currently deceased state shall offer you no refuge.

Kristen says

Lovecraft is a special writer, capable of twisting the mind of the reader in ways that all of the visual horror we are forever shown in this day and age can never accomplish.

What WAS the thing at the bottom of the pit? What was it that the good Doctor saw? So many open questions to let our minds fill in the blanks with the things that horrify us above all else.

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward is Lovecraft's longest work (at least that I've encountered) and there is so much in the meager 120 or so pages that it's amazing. We follow the Doctor as he relates the tale of his patient Charles Dexter Ward and his supposed decent into madness. In doing so we learn of an ancient relative who may have gone beyond dabbling in the black arts. Though the case revolves around Mr. Ward... the true story is that of his ancient relative.

Lovecraft has a grasp of the language that is beyond beautiful. He is eloquent, descriptive, engaging and thought provoking without ever coming across as pompous or arrogant. His description is effective without being obnoxious (Unlike J Fenimore Cooper), his dialog is realistic and meaningful (not like Jane Austin) and his plot is engaging, grabbing the reader from beginning to end (unlike "The House of the Seven Gables"). Highly recommended for those who like either the writing style of the time, or simple horror fans.

Sr3yas says

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward is the only lengthy work of Lovecraft classified as a novel rather than a novella. Lovecraft wrote this story in 1927, and as per legend, When HPL finished writing this novel he was so disappointed with the final draft that he decided to shelve it instead of publishing it, and only after Lovecraft's demise did this work find the light in 1941. (*It's not a legend, but a true fact. I just wanted to use "As per legend" in a sentence*)

So what is it all about?

“I have brought to light a monstrous abnormality, but I did it for the sake of knowledge. Now for the sake of all life and Nature you must help me thrust it back into the dark again.”

The Case tells the story of Charles and his obsession with his sinister 18th-century ancestor, Joseph Curwen, whose idea of hobbies were murdering people and conjuring ungodly creatures from distant abysses no man should ever venture upon. Kids, If any of you invent time travel, do not try an expedition to the 18th century. It was not a fun time.

Anyways, Mr. Curwan, AKA Dark Wizard of Providence is long gone and his legacy was almost forgotten, thanks to the work of scared, yet sensible officials of the city.

Almost forgotten.

Enter Charles Dexter Ward.

If you've read enough Lovecraftian tales, you will see the footprints of this story in many of his acclaimed tales. I think when HPL shelved this story, he borrowed the interesting parts from the pages of the novel and dropped them in his short stories like *"The Thing on the Doorstep"* and many more. Also, the plot and revelations of the novel are easily guessable after decades of reuse of these elements in horror medium, so don't expect any surprises here.

Yet with Case Of Charles Dexter Ward, we get something special... Something wholesome. This is one of the rare HPL standalone tales which boasts complete backstories, fleshed out characters and a definite ending. Even though I knew exactly what's going to happen, I enjoyed the writing, especially the parts where Charles tracked down the gruesome history of his enigmatic ancestor and the sinister last act.

Overall, this is a must-read for Lovecraft's fan club. After all, this is his only novel!

Char says

“What the thing was, he would never tell. It was like some of the carvings on the hellish altar, but it was alive. Nature had never made it in this form, for it was too palpably unfinished. The deficiencies were of the most surprising sort, and the abnormalities of proportion could not be described.”

That was just a sample of the type of writing found within this short novel by H.P. Lovecraft. Reading this reminded me how much I love this type of writing.

I hereby vow to read more of Lovecraft's work this year. Yeah, I made a vow, baby. A vow!

Terence says

I'm rereading this based upon Stephen's review so if I do not appreciate it more, it will be entirely his fault :-)

In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* HPL ventures a novel-length story about his Elder Gods and one man's tragic fate when he delves into mysteries better left unexamined. Charles Dexter Ward is the scion of a well established Providence family who begins investigating esoteric matters and discovers that an ancestor, Joseph Curwen, was killed by a terrified town when they discovered his unhallowed necromantic studies.

The reader doesn't actually spend a lot of time with Charles Ward. Instead HPL tells the story through the boy's doctor's attempt to find out what happened to him. HPL's strength as a storyteller does not reside in memorable characters but in the ability to evoke an atmosphere of mounting horror and despair, and he does that very well here. You can feel the terror Dr. Willett experiences when he's trapped in the lightless vaults beneath that ill-omened Pawtuxet farmhouse where Curwen raised up monstrous entities from Outside:

But Marinus Bicknell Willett was sorry that he looked again; for surgeon and veteran of the dissecting-room though he was, he has not been the same since. It is hard to explain just how a single sight of a tangible object with measurable dimensions could so shake and change a man; and we may only say that there is about certain outlines and entities a power of symbolism and suggestion which acts frightfully on a sensitive thinker's perspective and whispers terrible hints of obscure cosmic relationships and unnameable realities behind the protective illusions of common vision. In that second look Willett saw such an outline or entity, for during the next few instants he was undoubtedly as stark mad as any inmate of Dr. Waite's private hospital. He dropped the electric torch from a hand drained of muscular power or nervous co-ordination, nor heeded the sound of crunching teeth which told of its fate at the bottom of the pit. He screamed and screamed and screamed in a voice whose falsetto panic no acquaintance of his would ever have recognised, and though he could not rise to his feet he crawled and rolled desperately away over the damp pavement where dozens of Tartarean wells poured forth their exhausted whining and yelping to answer his own insane cries. He tore his hands on the rough, loose stone, and many times bruised his head against the frequent pillars, but still he kept on. Then at last he slowly came to himself in the utter blackness and stench, and stopped his ears against the droning wail into which the burst of yelping had subsided. He was drenched with perspiration and without means of producing a light; stricken and unnerved in the abysmal blackness and horror, and crushed with a memory he never could efface. Beneath him dozens of those things still lived, and from one of the shafts the cover was removed. He knew that what he had seen could never climb up the slippery walls, yet shuddered at the thought that some obscure foothold might exist. (pp. 102-03)

And this is a description of the relatively empty vaults found in 1928; nothing at all like these same vaults from 170 years earlier when the men who descended into those hellish catacombs emerged unable to speak about what they had seen and heard – the only account of the venture coming from the journals of a man who remained above ground.

I've got the entire Ballantine collection of HPL's stories sitting on my bookshelf but poor *Charles Dexter* has languished there while I favored its brothers such as *The Lurking Fear* or *The Doom That Came to Sarnath*. It took Stephen's review mentioned above to prompt a reread and I'm glad that I did.

So, Stephen, you may not have steered me to a tropical paradise, but I did manage to avoid any literary ice bergs.

Miriam says

The blurb says: *A nameless terror surges through centuries to engulf the soul of Charles Dexter Ward, a brilliant New England antiquarian.* Rather amusing in retrospect, as the character doesn't seem to realize the danger until near the end; if the book were written from Ward's perspective, presumably he would be having a satisfying few years of progressing in his fascinating historical research. His family, too, is only mildly concerned, wishing he would write more often and maybe get a girlfriend. Only the omniscient narrator is really worried.

The Horror is mostly rather understated, but the monstrosities are classic Lovecraft:

It is hard to explain just how the single sight of a tangible object with measurable dimensions could so shake and change a man; and we may only say that there is about certain outlines and entities a power of symbolism and suggestion which acts frightfully on a sensitive thinker's perspective and whispers terrible hints of obscure cosmic relationships and unnameable realities behind the protective illusions of common vision.

It's kind of sweet on some level that Lovecraft thinks it is fine for grown men to scream hysterically and maybe faint when they see scary stuff. Not the 18th century guys, though; they were made of sterner stuff back then and only have PTSD when the action is over.

I enjoyed this book. It is not very scary, so don't be put off by the NAMELESS TERROR expressed by various characters. The prose is somewhat less purple than is oft Lovecraft's wont -- my impression is that he is a lot more lurid when writing about the Dreamlands and other Unknown exotic locations than when using real world settings (this is set in an area he knew himself, and that is clear from the descriptions of streets and houses and neighborhoods; it may be extra enjoyable if you are from this bit of New England yourself).

My edition, which is the Creation Oneiros one, had enough typos to be mildly distracting, but on the plus side did not have the claustrophobically squashed print I've encountered in several Lovecraft reprints.

Leonard Gaya says

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward (1927) is probably a culmination in Lovecraft's career. After some short stories such as *The Rats in the Walls*, *The Shunned House* or *The Call of Cthulhu*, it is the first work of fiction that has the dimension of a full novel and goes over the themes he had previously developed. The investigation into a dark mystery —usually taking place around the town of Providence, Lovecraft's place of residence. The discovery of a repulsive cult, most evocative of Alchemy, Qabalah or Voodoo —or rather a depraved or primitive version of these esoteric practices. A hoard of letters or notes, written in a cryptic, foul language —including a copy of the *Necronomicon* by the Mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. Finally the unearthing

of a ghastly secret, hidden in a stifling underground, that presents a threat of cosmic proportions.

More specifically, Lovecraft probably wrote *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* with Poe's story, *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, in mind. In both cases, there is a fascination for the occult, for dead, dying or "undead" characters; for some dark form or science or witchcraft. Lovecraft also develops the theme of the *doppelgänger*, typical of the fantasy/science-fiction genre, from Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to Gaiman's *Coraline*.

All in all, however, Lovecraft's story is perhaps overly complex for a short novel, with many irrelevant background descriptions and epistolary texts about colonial Rhode Island; or maybe too stretched out for a short story, which makes it a bit winding and difficult to follow.

The True Detective TV series (starring the excellent Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson) is, the way I see it, indirectly inspired by Lovecraft's novella.

[Name Redacted] says

This was the first work by Lovecraft I ever read, but I have not re-read it in nearly 2 decades. I had odd tastes, even as a child. I remembered very little, aside from the broad plot-points, so you can imagine my consternation when, upon re-reading it this week, I discovered that I am merely one step away from following in the footsteps of young Charles; so many of the descriptions of him sounded like the man I have become and, as it happens, 3 years ago I began to dedicate myself to exactly the sort of studies young Charles pursued (albeit in a professional capacity). I was able to distinguish which of the names and words used in this book's incantations were actual ancient "magical" words and which were Lovecraftian inventions, and I can even contextualize those former employed by Lovecraft's characters herein. Apparently I missed my true calling. Maybe it's not too late?

"It was this place and the mysterious forces of its long, continuous history which had brought him into being, and which had drawn him back toward marvels and secrets whose boundaries no prophet might fix. Here lay the arcana, wondrous or dreadful as the case might be, for which all his years of travel and application had been preparing him."

Apatt says

"There is about certain outlines and entities a power of symbolism and suggestion which acts frightfully on a sensitive thinker's perspective and whispers terrible hints of obscure cosmic relationships and unnameable realities behind the protective illusions of common vision."

That little passage explains why Lovecraft's characters often go mad at the mere sight of blasphemous eldritch monstrosities from beyond; something I often wondered about. It is also a fine example of his penchant for convoluted sentence structures.

When I read *At the Mountains of Madness* I felt that Lovecraft is preferable in smaller doses, that is when his stories are not novel (or even novella) length. It seems that when he gives himself elbow room with the longer format he overindulges his tendency to ramble, overwrite and include unnecessary details. *The Case*

of *Charles Dexter Ward* reinforces this impression for me.

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward is basically about an undead necromancer called Joseph Curwen who is foolishly resurrected by his descendant the eponymous Charles Dexter Ward through evocations, and other black magic shenanigans. Curwen of course wrecks all kinds of havoc because you don't come back to life via black magic to do charity work.

One thing I noticed about reading Lovecraft is that the creepy atmosphere is more effective if you read the stories in a quiet room, unfortunately, I read this book in a living room while family members are watching TV and it rendered the creep factor completely ineffective. I also find the depiction of Curwen's early life fairly mundane and less than riveting. The usual Lovecraftian tropes are all accounted for, the awful smells, the creepy noises, the creaking, the screaming and what not. The "unmentionable" *Necronomicon* by Mad Paula Abdul Alhazred is of course mentioned. Poor Cthulhu does not get a look in though his cousin Yog-Sothoth is often referred to.

Lovecraft's idiosyncratic prose style can be both entertaining and frustrating. As I mentioned before he is more readable in short story format. At novel length he tends to repeat himself with the description of funny smells, funny noises etc. The faux-archaic English passages are also hard to decipher. Lovecraft seems to aspire to be a literary prose stylist, unfortunately, his literary ambition exceeds his talent.

A scene from this story by kerens-or

The climax of the story is unexpected though, it makes the whole thing almost worthwhile. I also particularly like this passage:

"It was a godless sound; one of those low-keyed, insidious outrages of Nature which are not meant to be. To call it a dull wail, a doom-dragged whine, or a hopeless howl of chorused anguish and stricken flesh without mind would be to miss its quintessential loathsomeness and soul-sickening overtones."

He could have been reviewing a Justine Bieber album here.

Not my favorite Lovecraft book then, the very best of Lovecraft is to be found in *The Best of H.P. Lovecraft: Bloodcurdling Tales of Horror and the Macabre*. Exactly what it says on the tin. That anthology is the perfect Halloween read, I cannot say the same about *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.

Lyn says

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward by H.P. Lovecraft is definitely one of his best works and this is a high compliment, as I have liked almost all that I have read from him.

This work, first published in 1927, combines most of the themes common to his works: occult, arcanery, unspeakable nighttime horrors, deep dark pits with unknown creatures, etc. even some hints of the Cthulu cult.

The other element of this book that is noteworthy is the scope of influence that Lovecraft created.

Innumerable horror genre books and movies have borrowed liberally from Lovecraft's themes and even works like Harry Potter show semblances of Lovecraftian influence.

If you like the horror genre, this is a must read, and if you have never read a Lovecraft work, this is a good one to start.

A very good read.

Kimberly says

Classic.

Stephen says

Let me be clear at the outset of this review that when it comes to the work of **H.P. Lovecraft**, I am definitely one who drinks deep the kool-aid **Cthulhu-aid**. For me his stories are something to be savored and relished; succulent, meaty feasts of atmosphere, hyper-lush imagery and dark melodrama dipped in dread. If you've read other works by HPL and have not been impressed or fallen under his spell, this story is not likely to change your mind. However, if you are already a wanton Lovecraft gourmand and have not yet sampled this tasty dish, you are in for a treat.

PLOT SUMMARY:

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward is the longest work of fiction produced by Lovecraft and is his only novel coming in at about 180 pages. Much of the novel is told in epistolary format as a series of diary entries, newspaper clippings, and quotes from journals and reports. In brief, the novel recounts the story of a brilliant young man, Charles Dexter Ward, who in the early 1900's undergoes a bizarre and unexplained "mental collapse" soon after becoming obsessed with one of his ancestors named Joseph Curwen. Curwen was a wealthy shipping merchant was was rumored to be a powerful and evil alchemist and sorcerer who, though almost 100 years old did not look more than 40 when he "died."

After young Charles Ward suffers his breakdown and mysteriously vanishes, his physician, Dr. Marinus Willett, begins investigating the weird goings on. We learn of the nefarious past of Ward's ancestor and the rumors of diabolical acts that surrounded him during his life. As the mystery slowly unfolds, Willett eventually discovers...[insert mind-blowing and totally satisfying resolution].

THOUGHTS :

I don't really want to go into any more detail because the slow unveiling of the mystery and the subtle clues and hints peppering the narrative that eventually all come together at the climax are quite impressive and part of the charm of the tale.

However, I can't help teasing you by offering that the central mystery touches on a plethora of cleverly integrated horror staples including vampirism, zombies, necromancy, black magic, alchemy, the *Necronomicon* and the **Cthulhu mythos**, including the first mention of **Yog-Sothoth**, the Lurker at the Threshold aka Opener of the Way...aka "He who is a Scary-multi-eyed-multi-mouthed-Ginormous-JELLO mold"...

This story is really a seminal tale of the Cthulhu Mythos and one of the aspects I found most appealing is that Lovecraft creates a seriously spooky tension-filled atmosphere in this story without directly expounding on the cosmology of the "elder gods." All the reader is told is of some vast conspiracy involving some "vast" and "nameless" malevolence from beyond the stars. It is a perfect example of the "less is more" technique for instilling maximum dread into the narrative.

In sum, I thought this was outstanding. I'm not giving this quite 5 stars only because HPL's prose is not as dripping with imagery as some of his more famous stories and the length of the novel left a little too much time for Lovecraft to discuss the architecture of Providence at the turn of the century which got a bit stale after a while. However, those minor nits aside, this is a definite **must read** for fans of HPL.

4.5 stars. HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION.

Windy Pineda says

Voy a ser categórica con esta novela. Es fenomenal.

Este es el primer libro que leo de Lovecraft (además del Necromicón, que es más que nada una serie de invocaciones y hechizos y no prosa propiamente tal) y lo he encontrado sencillamente magistral.

Esta es la historia de Charles Dexter Ward, quien da título a la obra. A inicios del siglo XX, este joven comienza a sentir una profunda e inquieta fascinación por un antiguo antepasado suyo, Joseph Curwen, internándose por ello en un mundo oscuro, escalofriante y paranormal.

Con una escritura agradable y un ritmo cómodo, Lovecraft sabe cómo mantener el suspense durante todo el relato. Como decía, tiene la extensión precisa, sin agregar un sinnúmero de páginas sin sentido que alarguen la historia innecesariamente. Además, maneja los detalles de tal manera de que el lector está siempre dudando y sospechando qué más puede haber detrás de los rastros que el narrador nos va dejando. Los personajes y la atmósfera también están muy bien descritos; las personas actúan con naturalidad y no llevan a cabo acciones que quedan muchas veces fuera de lugar para calzar con la trama, como ocurre en otras novelas.

Me ha encantado esa sensación de no destapar el 100% del misterio, o en otras palabras, de no explicar completamente el trasfondo espeluznante en el que desarrolla la historia. Me quedé rumiando un montón de pistas y pasajes luego de terminar el libro. Bajo ninguna circunstancia significa que hayan quedado cabos sueltos en la novela, sino muy por el contrario, queda el lector con la sensación de que hay detrás un escenario muy profundo y bien pensado, del que no se puede dar cabal explicación a raíz de la historia del protagonista.

No sé si lo he dicho con suficiente énfasis, pero esta obra es magnífica. Seguro me adentraré más el universo

de Lovecraft.

Werner says

Though Lovecraft is a favorite writer of mine, until now this book (one of only two novel-length pieces he ever wrote) has been one I hadn't gotten around to reviewing. It was recently nominated as a common read in my Supernatural Fiction Readers group; and though it wasn't the one chosen, that reminded me of it, and I resolved to correct the lapse. It's one of my favorite Lovecraft works, and certainly one I highly recommend to other readers who like this type of fiction.

The Goodreads description for this edition (which isn't the one I read) doesn't really give you any accurate clue as to what the book is about, and the reference to "magic" is erroneous; like Poe, Lovecraft tended to eschew magical causes for his horrific plots, preferring naturalistic explanations. (Nonetheless, this novella reads a lot like supernatural fiction, both in mood, tone and style and in the fact that his "science" operates in ways that in practice might be easily mistaken for magic.) The premise here is that in colonial New England, a would-be sorcerer has learned both how to extend his life far beyond its natural limit, and how to reanimate even the long-dead (which some old-time alchemists actually believed was possible by the proper treatment of their "essential saltes"). His villainous activities are destined to have sinister results, both in his own time and that of the author. (Though it was published posthumously in 1941, it was actually written shortly after World War I.) To avoid spoilers, I won't elaborate further.

Some Lovecraftians characterize this as one of his "non-Cthulhu" works. To be sure, it was written well before "The Call of Cthulhu" (1927), and the agent of evil here is a human being, not a Great Old One. But there are indications that some of the motifs of the Mythos were already germinating in the author's mind. It's indicated that the baddie got his information from occult traffic with unhallowed elder beings from beyond the earth ("Those Outside"), and one scene in particular depicts a hidden-away place with phenomena that could come from out of any of the later Mythos stories. (Indeed, Lovecraft himself almost certainly never divided his works into those two neat categories in his own mind. Nor did he even coin the "Cthulhu Mythos" term, which was the invention of August Derleth after HPL died.) But although exposure to this place sends our principal good guy into a temporary paralyzed state of catatonic terror, this book does lack some of the heavy-handed moralizing about the supposedly reason-annihilating terror of exposure to Lovecraft's view of nihilistic "reality" that appears in some of his stories (though one earlier passage hints at it.) In terms of his plotting here, a case could be made that this is perhaps one of Lovecraft's more "optimistic" works (if we can apply that adjective to anything from his pen :-)).

Lovecraft is a master of purple prose, one of the authors I most admire when considered strictly as a stylist, and he's at the top of his form here. The storytelling is first-rate, and the evocation of atmosphere is masterful. Much of the story is built around the title character's antiquarian research, a motif I particularly like, and HPL handles it very adeptly. He set the tale in his native Providence, and he brings that setting to life as only he could --he makes it real to me though I've never been there! (One reviewer complained about the wealth of historical detail as distracting and slowing the story, but for me it was actually one of the strong points of the book.) For Lovecraft fans, this is a must-read; and I'd heartily recommend it to anyone wanting to sample his work.

It's worthwhile here to briefly mention the 1963 movie *The Haunted Palace* (www.imdb.com/title/tt0057128/) directed by Roger Corman and starring Vincent Price (which I watched before I read the book). Although it takes its title from a Poe poem, this is actually a loose adaptation

suggested by this book, though the film writers moved the setting to Lovecraft's fictional Arkham and changed a number of other aspects, including the ending (which seems designed to set up a sequel, though I don't think one was ever made). The movie is worth watching on its own merits, but no one should imagine that viewing it will give them a real understanding of the book's actual plot.

Ken McKinley says

This is my fourth HP Lovecraft story and, so far, it's my favorite. That says a lot. Because, I'm really enjoying discovering his writing and connecting his influences to my favorite horror authors of today. For some odd reason, Lovecraft wasn't happy with his novel. He wrote it in 1927 and he didn't try to get it published. It wasn't until after his death that August Derleth and Donald Wandrei published it in the May and July issues of *Weird Tales* in 1941 did the story see the light of day. I find this curious. Like his *Herbert West: Reanimator*, which he also wasn't fond of, I find these stories to be some of his best work and highly influential in the world of horror fiction and film.

(view spoiler)

Charles Dexter Ward is a young man from Rhode Island that is reported to have disappeared from a mental asylum after being a patient there due to downward spiral into insanity. His main doctor and family friend, Dr. Willett, retells the story of his investigation into how Charles slipped into madness.

Ward was always a history buff and this led him into looking into his ancestry. In particular, one Joseph Curwen. Curwen's legacy seems to have been erased from the surface with very few details about him coming to light. After digging deep into learning more about his ancestor, Charles discovers that the reason Joseph's past has been hidden is due to the town's dealing with a man that not only was an 18th century shipping baron who was also rumored to be a wizard and an alchemist. Upon further investigation, Ward unearths that Curwen had to flee Salem, MA during the time of the infamous witch trials due to his peculiar habits and experiments that he was conducting caused uneasiness amongst his neighbors. Curwen moved to Providence and started a new life and it wasn't long before his new neighbors noticed strange habits. Joseph kept odd hours, had strange deliveries to his home, was seen visiting graveyards in the middle of the night, odd sounds and lights coming from his home at all hours, and that Curwen never seemed to age. The townspeople eventually had enough of these strange happenings and a group descended upon his home one night and discovered unspeakable horrors. Curwens home was destroyed and the owner perceived to have been killed. Painstaking efforts were made by the townspeople to cover up any trace of his existence. Charles to great lengths to discover the hidden grave of his ancestor and unravel the mystery of who Joseph Curwen was. After finding Joseph's hidden journals and ashes, Ward begins to delve into his relative's work and begins to hole himself up after turning his family's attic into a laboratory. Strange sounds and odors begin to emanate from the attic. Charles begins acting strange and keeping odd hours. He then announces that his studies require him to visit various locations overseas and is gone for a few years while only keeping little contact with his family. After he returns, Ward eventually purchases the house that was owned by Curwen and continues his experiments. It appears to his family and neighbors that he is slipping into madness. A strange Dr. Allen shows up and is helping Ward. Soon, Dr. Willet commits Charles. After investigating his home, it is learned that Charles is dead and that Dr Allen is indeed the resurrected Joseph Curwen in disguise.

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward is a real page turner and I highly recommend it to anyone that enjoys Lovecraft or wants to see where Stephen King and many of today's horror icons got their influence from.

5 out of 5 stars

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