

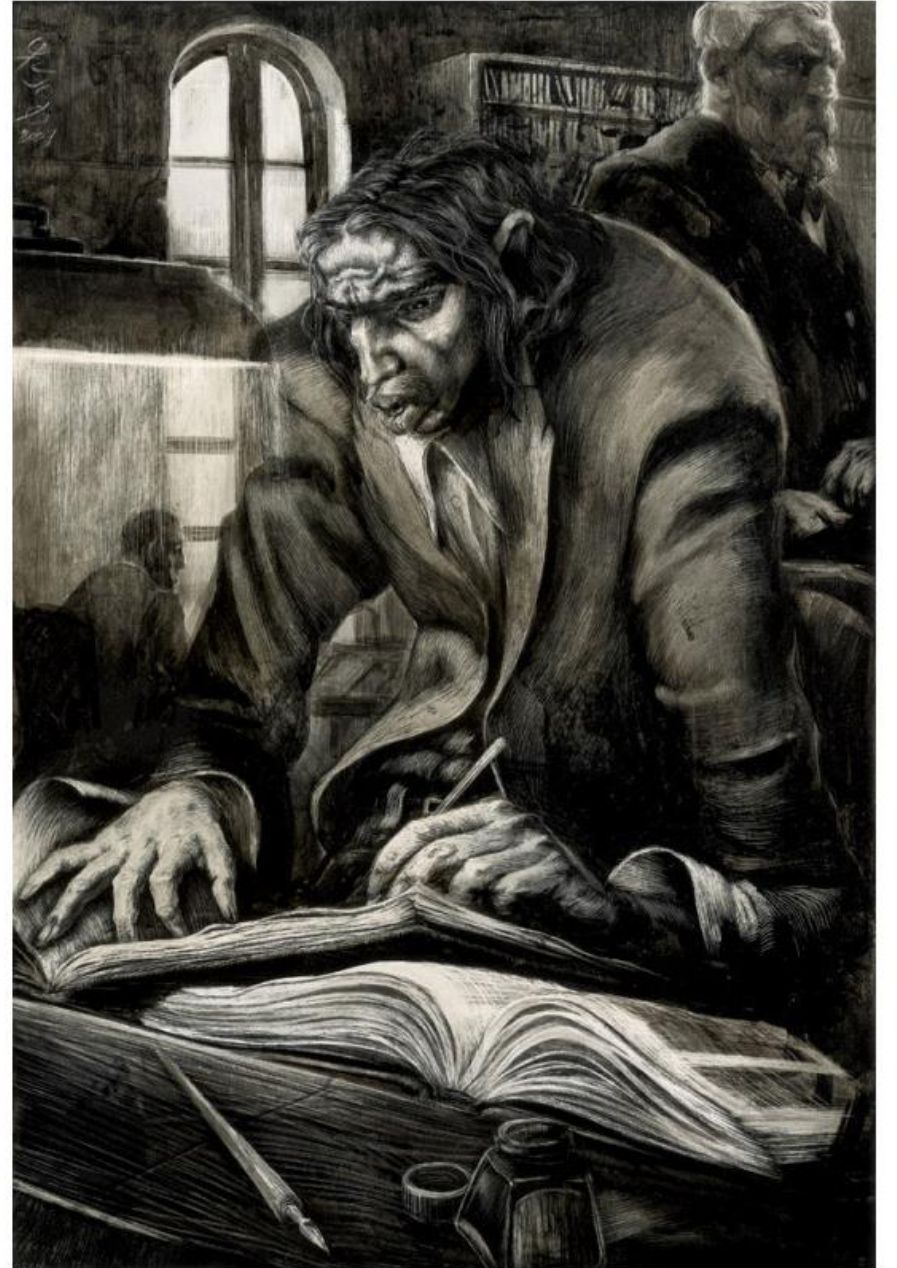


HORROR FICTION 3

H. P. Lovecraft and The Dunwich Horror

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LOVECRAFT

“The one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader **a profound sense of dread**, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe’s utmost rim.”



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COSMIC HORROR FICTION

- Lovecraft established cosmic horror fiction 1928
- created the fictional universe of the Cthulhu mythos
- Lovecraft's mythology influences today's popular culture
- Lovecraft's settings, characters and uncaring universe are common to many media
- Featured in games ex. The Call of Cthulhu, TV ex. Southpark, heavy metal music and film
- More about this next week





COSMIC HORROR CONT.

- Used horror in the cosmic context of space and time
- show the universe to be a cold uncaring place, beyond human understanding.
- Reveals humanity's insignificance in the universe
- Fictional characters' (and ours as readers) perception of space, time, and history are called into question
- Overthrows human science, religion, history

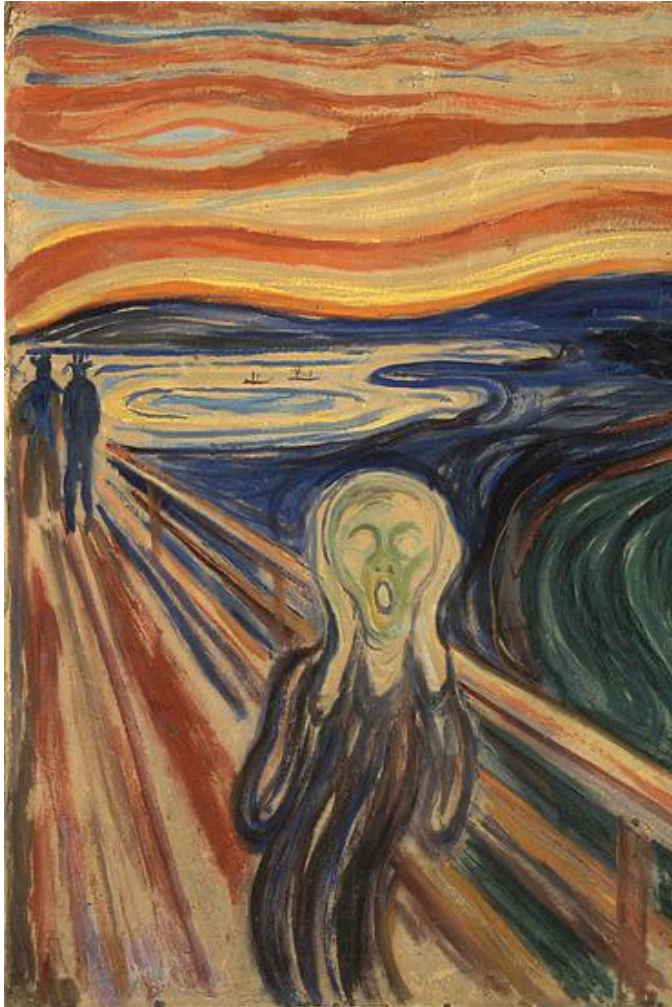
THE GROTESQUE

- Potentially civilization-threatening invasions of grotesque monsters from other dimensions
- Lovecraft's monsters contradict principles of human science of biology "outreaching in grotesqueness the most chaotic dreams of man"

Grotesque: odd or unnatural in shape, appearance, or character; fantastically ugly or absurd; bizarre, fantastic in the shaping and combination of forms



COSMOLOGY OF MEANINGLESSNESS



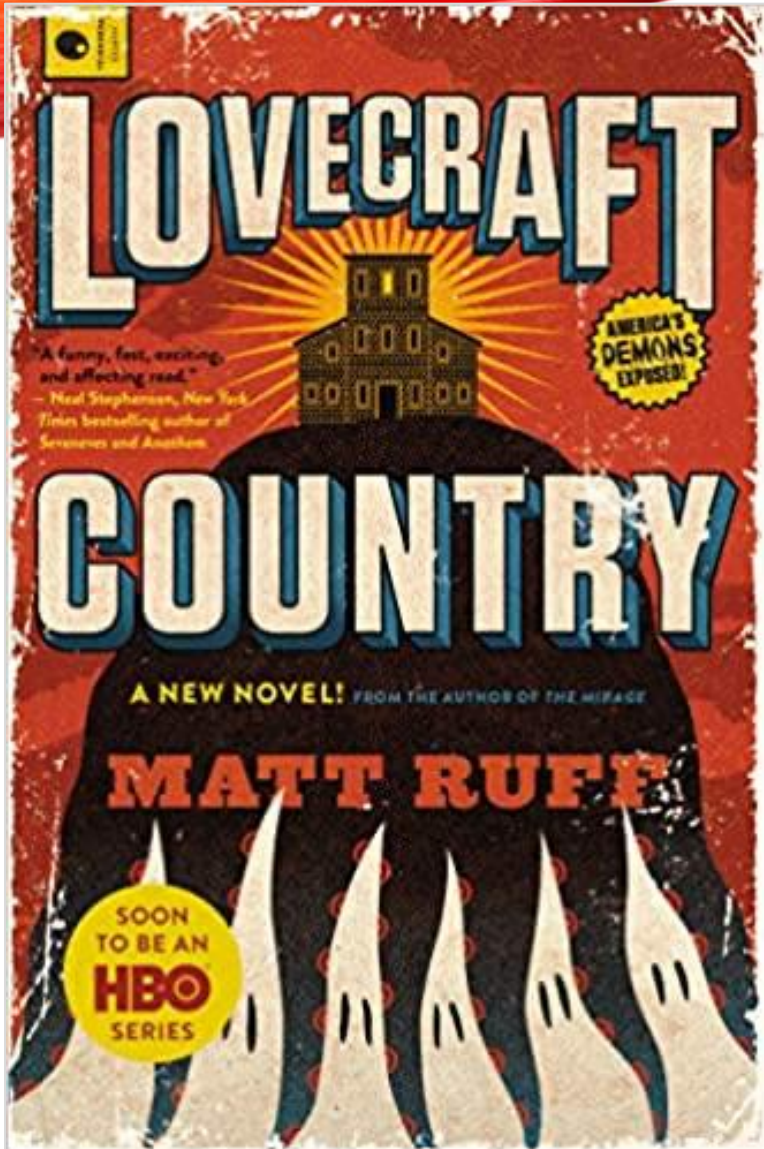
- No mythic heroic figures in Lovecraft's work
- Secrets discovered through the course of the story
- Characters are faced madness, fear and existential dread
- **Existential dread** is the awareness of the possibility that life lacks meaning, causing an extreme form of anxiety, and a feeling of despair or hopelessness. May be a result of a crisis of safety or security.

• <https://www.dictionary.com/>



CONTROVERSIAL LEGACY

- Lovecraft demonstrated his racist and xenophobic views in his private writings
- Regarded Anglo-Saxons as superior
- Expressed classist and sexist attitudes
- Denigrated groups such as Jews, African-Americans, and immigrant groups
- Speculative fiction community find his work controversial due to his attitudes
- Current filmmakers and novelists working in cosmic horror subvert Lovecraft's attitudes with African American main characters and more progressive attitudes in their works.



EXAMPLE OF ANTI RACIST NOVEL AND SERIES USING LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR

“ Soon to be a New HBO® Series from J.J. Abrams (Executive Producer of *Westworld*), Misha Green (Creator of *Underground*) and Jordan Peele (Director of *Get Out*)

The critically acclaimed cult novelist makes visceral the terrors of life in Jim Crow America and its lingering effects in this brilliant and wondrous work of the imagination that melds historical fiction, pulp noir, and Lovecraftian horror and fantasy.

Chicago, 1954. When his father Montrose goes missing, 22-year-old Army veteran Atticus Turner embarks on a road trip to New England to find him, accompanied by his Uncle George—publisher of *The Safe Negro Travel Guide*—and his childhood friend Letitia. On their journey to the manor of Mr. Braithwhite—heir to the estate that owned one of Atticus’s ancestors—they encounter both mundane terrors of white America and malevolent spirits that seem straight out of the weird tales George devours.

A chimerical blend of magic, power, hope, and freedom that stretches across time, touching diverse members of two black families, *Lovecraft Country* is a devastating kaleidoscopic portrait of racism—the terrifying specter that continues to haunt us today.”

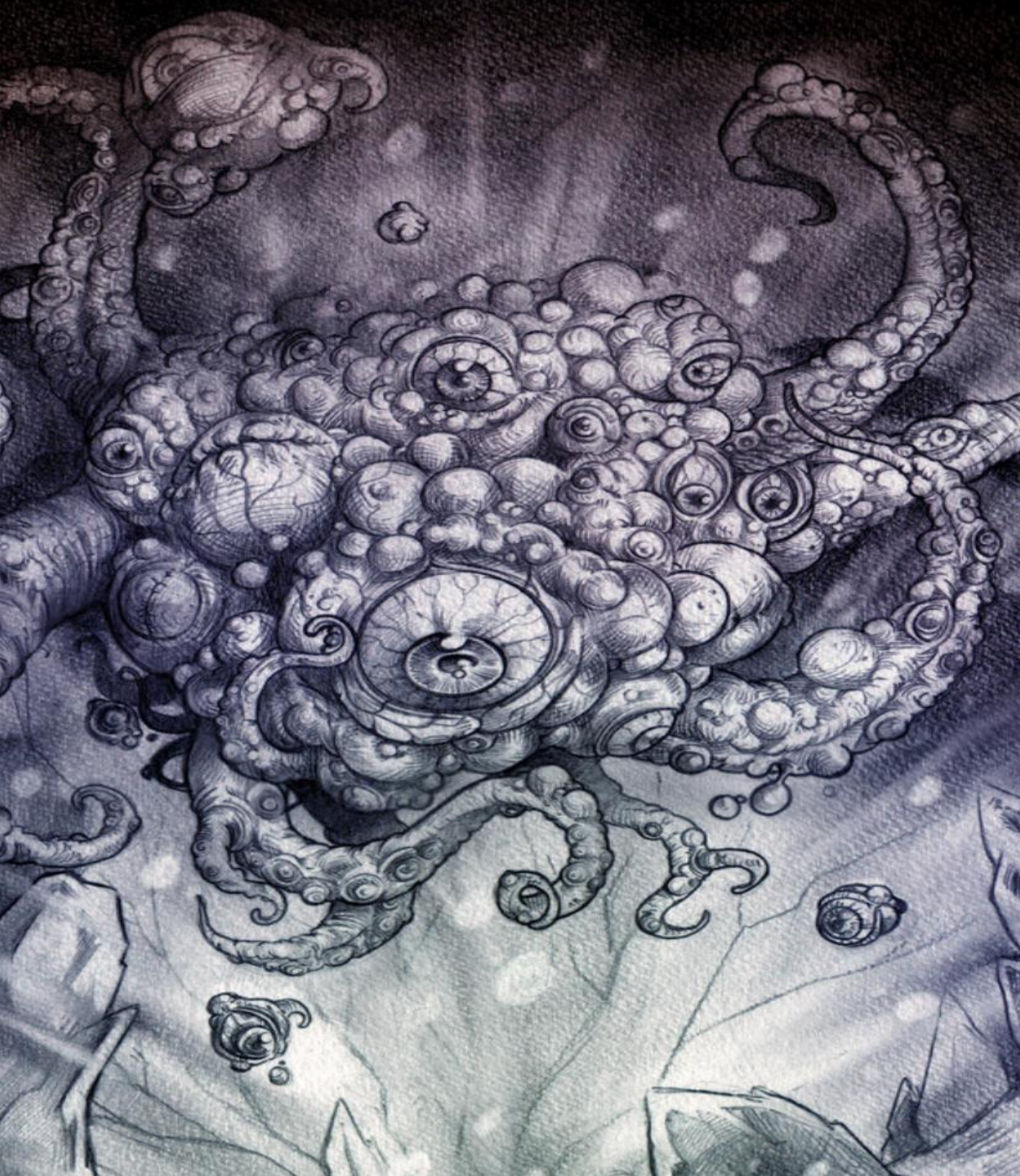
<https://www.amazon.com/Lovecraft-Country-Novel-Matt-Ruff/dp/0062292072>

More on this next week in Lovecraft in contemporary horror....

THE DUNWICH HORROR

- H. P. Lovecraft





THE DUNWICH HORROR, 1928, A CTHULHU MYTHOS STORY

Plot

- "The Dunwich Horror," written in 1928, begins as a tale of witchcraft and satanism
- Uses a cosmic version of the mating with the devil **motif** (ex. The Omen and Rosemary's Baby)
- Results in the birth of a monster
- Yog-Sothoth (an outer god and cosmic entity) has "begotten hellish hybrids among the females of various organic species throughout the universes of space-time" Out of the Shadows, Anderson
- Cosmic significance of the union between Lavinia Whateley and the Great Old One

PLOT CONT.

- Set in the rural farmlands of western Massachusetts,
- Wilbur Whateley takes on the characteristics of an antichrist
- His twin brother, the Dunwich Horror, is revealed
- This monster could open the cosmic gates to alien invaders from beyond space and time
- Potential danger - the destruction of all earth life and the planet's removal to the unknown cosmos



CHARACTERS



Old Whateley, also known as Wizard Whately

- calls forth gods from the cosmos using spells from his incomplete copy of the Necronomicon
- Sacrifices his daughter to a cosmic union with the god Yog-Sothoth sex with Outer Gods.
- assures villagers that Lavinia had as good a “church wedding” as anyone could hope for.

Lavinia Whateley Only female character in story

- described as an unattractive albino woman
- uneducated except for some knowledge of magic she learns from her father
- Her appearance is described as "slatternly."
- Would this character be written this way for today's audience?



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FEARFUL MONSTERS

“A monster can be defined as any nonexistent (according to reigning scientific belief) being which is both threatening and impure (impurity can be created via category jamming, contagion, and/or disgust).”

An abnormal creature in an ordinary world, threatening physically, morally psychologically or socially

Noel Carroll

<https://caitlinduffy.hcommons.org/2018/07/09/the-philosophy-of-horror-or-paradoxes-of-the-heart-1990/>

THE TWINS

Is Wilbur Whateley a monster?

- Rapid growth
- Non human, animal like physical aspects

The Unnamed Twin (The Dunwich Horror)

- natural state is invisible to the humans, (a special powder allows it to be seen for just seconds
- not solid, jelly-like.
- Similar in shape to a squid, centipede or spider.
- Barn-like in size

While Wilbur has monstrous characteristics, he is described with knowable earthly detail.

His twin, the Dunwich Horror, is more frightening still, due to his grotesque strangeness.



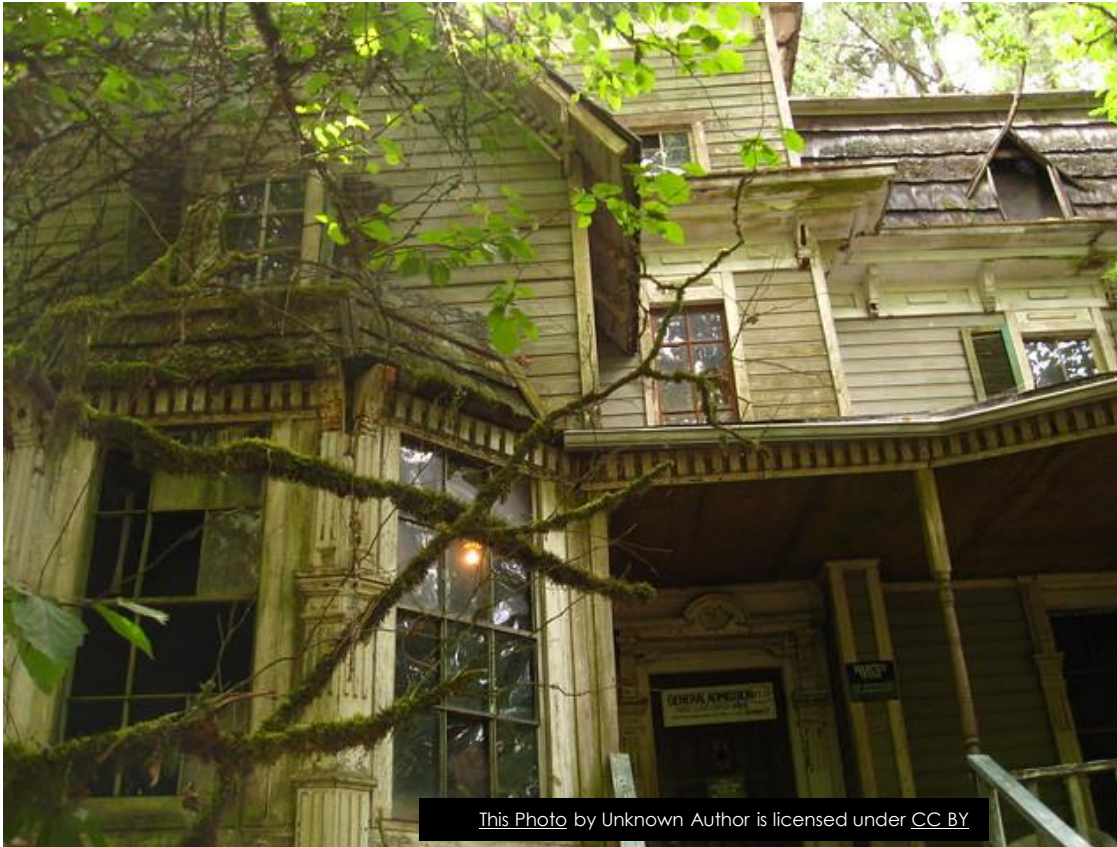
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DR. ARMITAGE

- Librarian and academic, 73 years old
- recognizes the danger that Wilbur brings and his “outerness”
- well-read in weird fiction, as well as esoteric tomes.
- Keeps other *Necronomicons* away from Wilbur, as well as the Miskatonic one.
- Appears in other Cthulhu stories



STRUCTURE



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- Carefully constructed with elements that give subtle clues and anticipate developments.
- Old Whateley says at the general store that Lavinia's child will call for its father on Sentinel Hill. This foreshadows the climactic scene in which the monster on the hilltop cries out to its father.
- Constant rebuilding and expansion of the farmhouse are clues to the existence and growth of the horror within.

STYLE

- reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe conscious use of archaisms (old fashioned formal language) and a tendency to use many adjectives.

Ex. Dr. Armitage “seemed to sense the close presence of some terrible part of the intruding horror, and to glimpse a hellish advance in the black dominion of the ancient and once passive nightmare.”



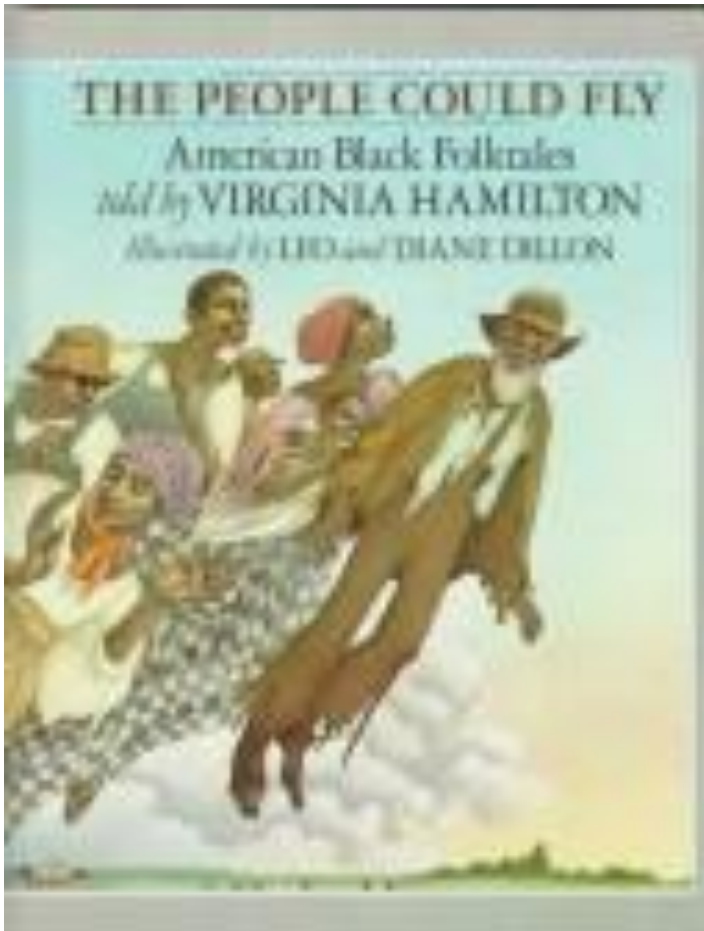
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LANGUAGE USE

- Smell is important, there are similar odors from upstairs room, Wilbur, the top of Sentinel Hill, and the monster towards the final part of the story, all which provide clues to the identity of Wilbur.
- Sound is also used, particularly from birds -the whippoorwills always cry in concert before a death.
- Has reporter-like tone of an observer



FOLKTALE



- form of oral literature
 - **teach lessons** about right and wrong,
 - involves a fight between good and evil
 - Demonstrate triumph over natural or supernatural evils
 - Reflect values of past societies
-
- The Folktale and Social Values in Traditional Africa Enongene Sone 2018

FOLKTALES CONT. THE HERO JOURNEY, SOME ELEMENTS

- Villain causes harm or injury
- Hero leaves home on quest
- Hero is faces danger
- Magical object must be retrieved to help in quest
- Task is resolved
- True hero is recognized

<http://courses.missouristate.edu/MarkTrevorSmith/eng200Spring03/ProppStructure.htm>

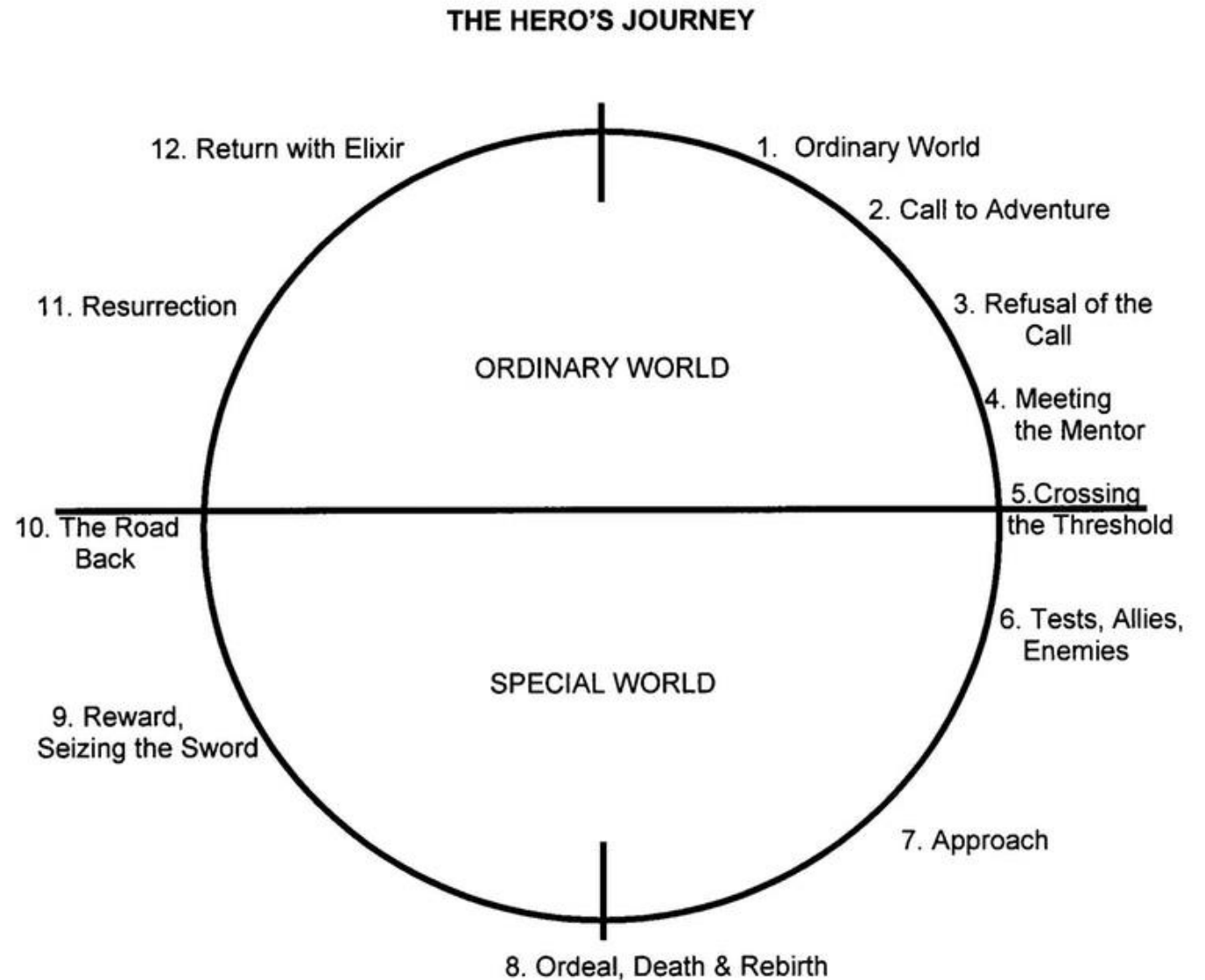


The Hero's Journey

pattern of narrative identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell that appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual, and psychological development.

describes the typical adventure of the archetype known as The Hero,

The person who goes out and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization.



THE DUNWICH HORROR AS FOLKTALE PARODY

Parody: a narrative work or writing style that mocks or mimics another genre or work. Typically, parodies exaggerate and emphasize elements from the original work in order to ridicule, comment on, or criticize their message.

(Purdue Owl Literary Terms)

- There are no real human heroes- typical of Lovecraft's fiction.
- Wilbur and his monstrous twin, united, can be seen as the "hero" or protagonist of the story
- The Whateley twins meet the criteria of the mythic hero
 - Created as the result of a miraculous birth,
 - Experience rapid growth
 - Embark upon a quest for knowledge or a magical agent.



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FOLKTALE PARODY (REVERSAL)

- Lovecraft maintains the structure of the traditional folktale, inverted
- the escapist fantasy of the mythic hero is reversed.
- The characters engaging in action are anti heroic
- the trinity of Armitage, Rice and Morgan are not heroes but act as obstacles for the Whateley twins,
- "The Dunwich Horror" like Lovecraft's other stories reveals that humans as vulnerable beings living in a hostile universe.
- Thus, the tale offers an ironic form of escape for the reader



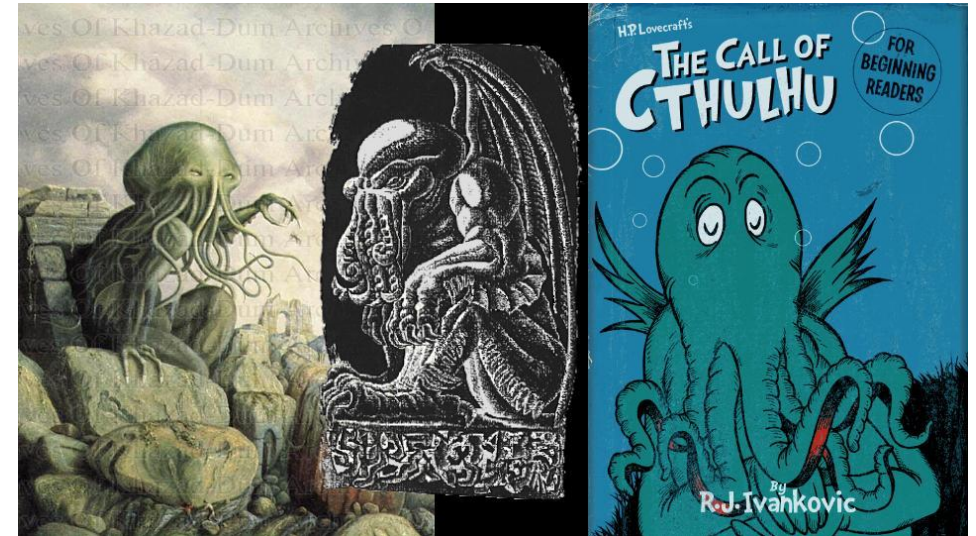


KEY TERMS

- Parody
- Folktale
- Existential Dread
- Motif
- Convention
- Monster
- Protagonist

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE READING AND CLASS DISCUSSION

- What are titles of fiction, TV, film, games that you currently enjoy that show possible Lovecraft influence?
- Some people do not experience fear when reading or watching horror. In this case, how does horror engage the audience attention?



NEXT WEEK

- Upcoming: influence of Lovecraft on Horror fiction and film

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