JOURNEYS INTO DARKNESS

CRITICAL ESSAYS ON GOTHIC HORROR

JAMES GOHO

Journeys into Darkness

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Critical Essays on Gothic Horror

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For Pam

“Who ever lov’d, that lov’d not at first sight?”
Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, 176

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Introduction

Literature tells the stories of a people, but Gothic literature tells the hidden stories of a people. Hidden because they tell darkly of dark things.[1] They look underneath beds, go into attics, wander through graveyards, and go deep down into cellars and caves. There is darkness in Gothic tales, the darkness of a forest, or a city, or in our houses, and in our heads. We are all afraid of the dark. The Gothic tells what terrifies people.

This book explores Gothic horror through the lenses of recognized masters in that literary genre. Charles Brockden Brown is the earliest American Gothic writer. His novels carved out a unique American Gothic and his themes and images are still found in recent horror fiction and film. There is something startlingly new in Brown; he unearths lasting American Gothic archetypes: the dark forest, a city ravaged by disease, the indigenous peoples as Gothic monsters, and the violence found in ordinary home settings. Edgar Allan Poe is the foremost Gothic short story artist. His stories repeatedly broke new ground and initiated new narrative readings. In this book, Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," the greatest of all haunted house stories, is hypothesized to be the precursor of one of H. P. Lovecraft's signature stories, "The Outsider." It seems that horror does breed its own offspring. Lovecraft is the twentieth century's Gothic master. He is the inspiration for so many horror writers. This book studies Lovecraft's "The Hound" in depth from the perspective of Søren Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*. As well, Lovecraft's use of the image of the aboriginal is traced across his fiction to reveal the centrality of it in his body of work. A third chapter on Lovecraft focuses on his keystone story, "The Unnamable." It is a fictionalized treatise on the art of horror narrative. But more so, it contains clues to guide us deep into the caverns of Lovecraft's ruminations on the problem of evil. In the Arthur Machen chapter, suffering and evil is the guiding principle in my review of four of his greatest stories, written in the 1890s. The stories reveal the darkness shrouding the *fin de siècle* of the nineteenth century in England.

The forest is a dark place, but one also of solace for Algernon Blackwood. Here his Canadian stories are surveyed to understand their influence on his fiction writing and how the wood can be seen as both dangerous and full of awe. Many of Ambrose Bierce's stories take place in a forest. His American Civil

War stories often show armies and individuals in woods, separated by an open field. Bierce is a keystone author within the Gothic horror tradition and a master of the short story form. He is the foremost writer about war and its effects on individuals. But he writes of the agony of individuals in crisis and chaos both in war and in peace.

The original Gothic arose as a sort of scream against the ruling order. It was a critique of a decadent society, reigned over by despotic royals, and lorded over by a hypocritical clergy. The prisons and hideous tortures of the Inquisition were real; the ravine between the rich and poor was unbridgeable. The traditional European Gothic can be thought of as an expression of rebellion against perverse power. It illuminated a decadent social edifice for what it really was: violent in enforcing a rigid social order, and oppressive against the poor, women, and outsiders. And more, there is a deep dread in the Gothic, a terror in the soul, as Poe would say, of an ultimate void. No name can be given to real dread. Great Gothic gives readers an experience of an unexplainable dread.

The American Gothic is different from the European in its topography, with the wilderness and frontier as Gothic spaces, and the indigenous peoples of America transformed into Gothic monsters. Slavery as well is part of the darkness at the heart of the American Gothic. Another recurring image is the witch, rising up from the 1692 Salem horror. The penultimate chapter traces the witch archetype from Salem through recent American films. The book concludes with a survey of Fritz Leiber's urban Gothic. He reanimated the Gothic by taking horror into ordinary settings, especially the modern city, which seems to spawn its own terror. A city not only will break your heart; a city will cut your throat. His works are also a sociological critique of aspects of modern life in a mechanized and marketing-focused society. But underneath it all, Leiber writes about the fragility of humans in a cosmos of indifference at best and perhaps of fierce hostility. Not only does Leiber speak to urban social anxieties and despairs, he triggers our fundamental dread.

There are several themes woven throughout the essays. One is the urban Gothic, starting with Brown, seen in Machen and Lovecraft, and realized in Leiber; another is the wilderness as a dangerous Gothic space in Brown, Lovecraft, and Algernon Blackwood. A third theme is understanding Gothic literature, in part, as a manifestation of economic, social, and political anxieties and conflicts, which is found in Brown, Bierce, and Leiber most explicitly. A fourth notion is Gothic horror as giving a voice to those who suffer, those who experience evil. This stands out in Brown's *Wieland* and *Arthur Mervyn*, and

Bierce’s short fiction takes place in a realm of suffering. The suffering and sacrifice of women is told in Machen’s four stories and also in the chapter on witchcraft. A common theme in the chapters is that Gothic horror narrative is about dread, about a primal fear and an ontological unease in the world. It expresses an ineluctable encounter with the invisible. Every Gothic writer goes into that darkness, especially Poe. But the Gothic is not escapism. It liberates what is hidden.

NOTE

1. See Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot and Lawrence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 6.

Chapter 2

Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

A Predecessor to Lovecraft's "The Outsider"?

"The Outsider" (written 1921; published 1926) is a keystone story in H. P. Lovecraft's body of horror fiction. It has been widely reprinted, it was one of his early professional stories, and it headlined the Arkham House first collection. The story has also been extensively and variously interpreted: Carl Buchanan, Donald R. Burleson, S. T. Joshi, Dirk W. Mosig, Robert H. Waugh, and others have all studied and commented on the story. All spy the hand of Poe in the tale. [1] Several of Poe's stories are identified as precursors, for example, "William Wilson," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," and "Berenice." This chapter suggests that it may be a sequel to "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Peter Cannon implied this when he wrote that Lovecraft's underground castle "rivals Poe's *House of Usher* as a symbolically potent image."[2] Robert H. Waugh proposes "an antecedent to the *Outsider* in the figure of Madeline Usher"[3] and identifies parallels between the stories. However, Perry and Sederholm do not mention "The Outsider" in their wide-ranging review of the influence of Poe's tale on many of Lovecraft's stories. Overall, they argue that Lovecraft's work in horror fiction was, in part, to "explore new dimensions from 'Usher's' hints about cosmic horror."[4]

In a fashion, "The Outsider" imagines the aftermath of Poe's story, or at least one possible afterworld. Although sometimes distorted, similar images and themes haunt the stories. Some of the key common images are the House of Usher and the underground castle in "The Outsider"; the library of Roderick Usher and the "rows of antique books"[5] in the underground castle; the reflecting tarn in Poe's tale and the mirror in "The Outsider"; the wasteland surrounding the House of Usher and the wasteland the outsider travels; an escape from a tomb; and a climactic scene of coming face to face with one's terrifying destiny. The thrall of time and space over humans are thematic links. There is a life-to-death sequence in Poe's tale, while there is a sort of death-to-life ascent in Lovecraft's. In a way, there is a resurrection in both. A key question may be: "Is the outsider the imaginary spawn of Roderick and Madeline—the last of the

Ushers—and an abomination at that?" Leslie Fiedler saw incest as a major theme in "The Fall of the House of Usher," along with the theme of a death wish.[6] Barton Levi St. Armand argues that the end of Poe's tale was not destruction "but a new genesis."[7] More importantly, is "The Outsider" a signpost toward a new Gothic horror?

Lovecraft was not an imitator: "The Outsider" is an early story and it bears the signs of homage,[8] but there is a shift in the locus of horror in the story. Richard Wilbur argues that Poe broke wholly new ground[9] in a sequence of stories published between 1835 and 1839, including "The Fall of the House of Usher."[10] Lovecraft also opened new ground in the Gothic. Perry and Sederholm suggest that Lovecraft went beyond Poe, and by melding "the mundane to cosmic realism as an additional source for the weird and uncanny, Lovecraft helps plot the course of twentieth-century Gothic horror fiction."[11]

Poe's influence is of a piece with the omnipresence of the past. The story itself seems from the past—a dusty set of pages found in an old tomb. But is it a jumble? S. T. Joshi notes several inconsistencies in the story.[12] William Fulwiler claims that the story is virtually a transcript of a dream and is best understood as a dream.[13] This echoes Richard Wilbur's surmise that "we must understand 'The Fall of the House of Usher' as a dream of the narrator's."[14] Louise Norlie suggests that a dreamer experiences a cascade of images and morphing events that, while dreaming, make sense; but awake, everything seems irrational and absurd.[15] It is a trance state, and this trance is also evident in "The Fall of the House of Usher." Wilbur contends, among other things, that Poe's tale be viewed as illustrating the experience as one slips from the wakeful world to that of dreams, when consciousness reels before plunging into dreams —a phantasmagoria state.[16] In "Between Wakefulness and Sleep," Poe wrote about this unique transition when the "confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams" that is at "the very brink of sleep." It is thronged with "shadows of shadows."[17] "The Fall of the House of Usher" is, then, a passage from the living world of light to a world of night where the past and death reign. "The Outsider" also is a tale of the interstices between being awake and being asleep, between light and dark. "Light" is used eight times, and "dark" or "darkness" is used six times. They are point and counterpoint words in the text of the story. "The Outsider" is a tale of the nightmarish passage from sleep to being awake, or from death to life, where neither dream nor reality offers solace. In a manner, Roderick is going to sleep (the sleep of death, admittedly)

while the outsider is just awakening.

Both “The Outsider” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” drown in the tides of past time, as manifested, in part, by their primary abodes. In Poe’s tale, the Ushers had lived in the hoary house through the “long lapse of centuries.”[18] The architectural twin in “The Outsider” is the underground castle resting upon the “piled up corpses of dead generations” (46–47). Time itself is embodied in the decomposing castle “infinitely old and infinitely horrible” (46). The unnamed narrator “cannot measure the time” (47) he has lived in the castle of darkness where the only light comes from candles. The Usher House is “of excessive antiquity” where the “discoloration of the ages had been great” (400) and it suffers a fracture scoring from its roof to “the sullen waters of the tarn” (400).

The Ushers are shuttered within the confined space of their house. Darkness and an “irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all” (401) in the House of Usher. Upon arriving, the unnamed (as in “The Outsider”) narrator, who is a boyhood friend of Roderick Usher, proceeds through “many dark and intricate passages” (400) to Roderick’s study, which is hung with “dark draperies” and the “eye . . . struggled in vain to reach . . . the remoter angles of the vaulted and fretted ceiling” (401). The outsider lives in a shadowy castle and is restricted to roaming “dark passages” and “dismal chambers with brown hangings” (46). In the underground castle (not known to be buried by the outsider early in the story), there are “high ceilings where the eye could find only cobwebs and shadows” (46). Yet even with these heights, both the house and castle are confined spaces, constricted spaces, limiting the movement of the main characters. Even the forest seems to prevent escape from the castle, as the outsider learns when “farther from the castle the shade grew denser and the air more filled with brooding fear” in the forest so that he dreaded losing his way “in a labyrinth of nighted silence” (47).[19] Both the house and castle are enclosed spaces, haunted with a sense of capture, of a prison. In “House of Usher,” both Ushers are sick and dying, seemingly drugged by the age of the house into a somnambulistic trance of pre-death. Roderick “for many years . . . had never ventured forth” (403). He is chained to the house, as is his sister, Madeline, who is a shadowy figure in the story. D. H. Lawrence calls them “inmates”[20] of the Usher House. The outsider has been enclosed, but he is different; he longs for light and freedom from the infernal gloom of the underground castle and from isolation and loneliness.

Both the house and the castle seem to be alive—especially the stones.

Roderick tells his friend the house is sentient—evident in the "gray stones of the home of his forefathers" (408), which had a particular order and were overspread with fungi and a "certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls" (408). Seemingly, the house breathed. The castle is more of a dead place, but its "worn and aged stone"[21] (47) seems like flesh. When the outsider ruminates, "I think that whoever nursed me must have been shockingly aged, since my first conception of a living person was that of somebody mockingly like myself, yet distorted, shrivelled, and decaying like the castle" (47), he is really personifying the castle as alive, almost like a parent.

The books of Usher are named: Christopher Rollason points out that they range from classical times up to Poe's time in European literature and encompass a diversity of genres, come from seven different countries, and are in four different European languages.[22] Moreover, Thomas Ollive Mabbott confirms that the volumes in the library of Roderick Usher were not imaginary but for the most part real. Mabbott also convincingly shows that the particular books were seemingly chosen by Poe to give "greater insight into . . . [Roderick's] character."[23] The books are the reification of his intellect and are unusual and of a dark cast, as Mabbott explained. For example, *Belphegor* is a novella about a fallen archangel and demoniac possession. Swedenborg's work is of visions and mystical experiences. The *Subterranean Voyage* tells of a land inside the earth where the people are trees who walk and talk. The works on chiromancy are about predicting the future. The novella by Tieck tells of Gloriana, the Faerie Queene, who reigns in a paradise inside a mountain, where the souls of great poets live. Campanella's work recounts a visit to the inhabitants of a Utopia in the Sun. The *Directorium Inquisitorium* contains instructions to priests examining heretics and includes a list of forbidden books. And a tome on the vigils for the dead according to the church at Mainz is also part of the odd collection of reading.[24]

In "The Outsider" the books are not named. The outsider has read at least some of "the mouldy books" (47) but generally muses on the pictures. In the underground castle, the books of Usher decompose on rotting shelves, perhaps becoming unreadable, now moldering, mirroring the corruption of Usher's intellect. Perhaps these odd books have affected the mind of the outsider—he is confused about what is reality. The books are unnamed, replicating the inchoate nature of the outsider's intellect.

The outsider escapes from his tomb. He undertakes a perilous journey, scaling up the tower of the castle to touch the sky, as if on a vision quest. He

dares go beyond his enclosed space. His struggle is a devilish version of birth, as he claws up the tower. This is an escape from the womb in contrast to Poe's tale, which presents a return to the womb, illustrated by Madeline's premature burial. And, in both tales, there is a live burial, with the outsider alive in the castle as a tomb and Madeline entombed by her brother. But she also breaks out of her tomb. She is resurrected, and her struggles in escaping from the tomb parallel the terrifying ascent of the outsider. His climb ends as he heads a trap-door open and falls unto a level space shrouded in darkness. In dread, he feels his way to a "portal of stone" (49) and forces it open. A flood of silver moonlight showers him. He is elated but also confounded. He has attained level ground, not a lofty height. Venturing out, he finds "marble slabs and columns . . . overshadowed by an ancient stone church, whose ruined spire gleamed spectrally in the moonlight" (49). This is the beginning of the wasteland[25] he crosses. Driven by a deep memory, he sorties across a land of "ruins" (50).

This is prefigured by the wasteland surrounding the House of Usher, the badlands that infect the mood of the unnamed narrator as he rides toward the dire and fissured house and looks upon "a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees" (397). At the house he seems to sink into "its image in the pool" (399) and is overcome with "a fancy . . . that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere . . . which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn" (399–400). The desolation of the land and the house is paralleled by the "acute bodily illness" (398) of Roderick and by the "long-continued illness" (403) of his sister. The narrator was summoned by Roderick to bring "some alleviation of his malady" (398). Perhaps he is a knight to rescue Roderick and the land—as if the narrator, who is an outsider to the Ushers, is the mythic hero of Grail Quest tales as told by Jessie L. Weston.[26] His deed is to restore Roderick as the Fisher King or Maimed King, and healing him will return the land to fecundity. Instead, perhaps the narrator becomes enmeshed in the delirium world of Roderick; he gives in "by slow degrees [to] the wild influences of [Roderick's] own fantastic yet impressive superstitions" (411). He becomes a bit player in Roderick's hallucinogenic world of his sister's death and resurrection, according to Rollason.[27] St. Armand identifies Roderick's role as the Fisher King and the house as the Hidden Castle.[28] Forrest C. Helvie argues that Roderick Usher embodies many aspects of the Maimed King.[29] The landscapes in both thematically present the Gothic wastelands and ruins. But there are differences in the stories; the land and house

are emphasized in Poe's tale, but in Lovecraft's it is the relics of previous structures, a wasteland of human ruins.

After his journey, the outsider arrives at a "venerable ivied castle" (50), another distorted mirror image of the House of Usher in this tale. Lovecraft deploys this ivied castle, alive and full of merriment, in contrast to the House of Usher, which is a "mansion of gloom" with "bleak walls" and "vacant eye-like windows" (397). The ivied castle has "open windows—gorgeously ablaze with light" (50), and the interior resounds with revelry. The outsider recalls vanished towers and wonders at the added wings, again calling on deep memory, as if, like Lovecraft wrote, "The past is *real*. It is *all there is*."[30] The past is buried in our memories and structures our world, the shape of our architecture and our landscapes, and it spawns the ideas that form our perceptions. The past is the ground of our living but also our death. However, perhaps the outsider is disoriented—he has escaped in a landscape he dreamed of and is now realizing in a dizzying fashion. In a sense, the outsider emerges from the unconsciousness realm into consciousness, but the disturbing element is the absence of solid epistemological ground to understand himself and the strange, but familiar, world he now inhabits.

Peering through the ivied castle's windows, the outsider observes a crowd of people in high spirits and joy. He yearns to join their company. His hope of escape from loneliness and the dark is at hand. Entering through a window, he witnesses a colossal commotion among the revelers. They scream and hide their faces and stumble over one another in a mad rush to flee the castle. At first he thinks some danger is lurking in the room. Cautiously he surveys his environs. Alarmed, he senses some movement and cries out as he sees an "inconceivable, indescribable, and unmentionable monstrosity" (51). In the presence of the monster one cannot reason, portray, or speak. In confusion and terror, the outsider reels forward and seemingly touches the "paw of the monster" (51). But the paw is his;[31] it is himself in the mirror.[32] He is "unclean, uncanny, unwelcome, abnormal and detestable" (51); he is abject. At the climactic moment, he discovers he is the monster. He is an outcast. Julia Kristeva posits that "abjection" is the way we react to the loss of any distinction between self and other. This arises from an encounter with an abject object, something disgustingly other. It is as if the world loses sense or meaning for us—it becomes unspeakable. The collision with the abject in the story is the outsider touching the looking glass. According to Kristeva, when we confront the abject we both fear and identify with it; we are attracted to and repelled by the abject;

nausea is a biological recognition of it. Its looming presence provokes fear. For the outsider it is himself. Moreover, in Kristeva's psychological terms, abjection is something we must experience in forming a sense of self. This notion is illustrated by the outsider's trials toward self-discovery through self-revulsion. [33]

This reflection, or rather the revelation, of a hidden self that has been darkly repressed is crushingly unsettling to the identity of the outsider. In a sense, the outsider's time in the underground castle was a time of stifled identity or buried self-awareness. It is similar to Roderick's attempt to repress his shadow-self—Madeline—a burial that does not last. The confrontation of the outsider with himself, leading to self-revulsion through self-revelation, is paralleled by the final embrace of Madeline with Roderick, who had knowingly entombed her alive in the catacombs of their ancient abode, after her seeming demise to the narrator. In the climactic scene, Roderick is in the narrator's chamber within the house, which is assaulted by an external tempest. The narrator feels the creeping near of an internal doom accompanied by a sequence of increasingly disturbing sounds. These sounds appear to echo the events in the "Mad Trist" by Sir Launcelot Canning (the one imaginary book in the tale), the adventures of the knight Ethelred, which the narrator is reading to Roderick. The sounds start with "cracking and ripping," followed by "low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound" (414), and then "a distinct, hollow, metallic and clangorous, yet apparently muffled reverberation" (415).[34] Then the aged antique panels of the chamber door open languorously, revealing Madeline "lofty and enshrouded" (416), resurrected, as the outsider was from the underground castle. She trembles and reels to and fro in her "final death-agonies" (416). Her white robes are soaked in blood and she bears the marks of the grave. She is abject; like the outsider, she is a figure of horror and pathos. Then she lurches forward and with a "moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother" (415–16), with whom she shares "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature"[35] (410), and "bore him to the floor a corpse" (416). She falls upon her brother as if she is being absorbed into his person in their embrace of death, as if the shadow has returned home. As the narrator flees, the house collapses into the tarn, engulfed by its mirror image.

Similar to the concept of the "abject" is Kelly Hurley's notion of the "abhuman," which she borrows from William Hope Hodgson. The abhuman is typified by a "morphic variability" and is "in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other."[36] The abhuman is a being that retains part of its human

identity but is or is becoming an unspeakable other thing. Such a thing is loathsome as it threatens or indeed overcomes human identity. The abhuman is on the threshold between human and beast. Hurley contends that the modern Gothic shows and ignites cultural anxieties and conflicts through the figure of the abhuman. When the outsider sees his reflection, at first he identifies it, as Waugh noted, "as someone else or, more subtly as a travesty, a creature dressed as a human but not one."[37] Lovecraft's story vividly illustrates the process of becoming not-itself, becoming other, becoming alien. In Poe's tale Madeline also becomes not-herself, arising from the grave in a monstrous form, no longer truly human.

Leslie Fiedler argues that American literature is a "chamber of horrors," where readers face "inter-reflecting mirrors, which present us with a thousand versions of our own face."[38] The chambers include "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Outsider." Before entering the House of Usher at the beginning of the story, the narrator stares into the stagnant tarn and sees the reflected image of the house; it is a mirror.[39] In "The Outsider," the unnamed protagonist looks into a mirror and becomes a stranger to himself, or finally knows himself. Or has he stepped through the mirror into a wonderland of terror? Or is he taken over by the thing in the mirror? In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the mirror reveals the crack in the castle, foretelling its demise. In "The Outsider," the mirror reveals the monster, arisen from death, and the loss of hope. The mirror parallels the tarn and, of course, the mirror image of the monster is like seeing one's rotting self in all its desolation. But it is the mirror of the old Gothic that Lovecraft's story breaks.

Chris Baldick argues that "The Fall of the House of Usher" is an exemplar Gothic short story. Poe shifted the Gothic from cruelty to decadence, according to Baldick, who further maintains that for the Gothic effect a story needs to express a "fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space."[40] Both of these are central to Poe's story, with its plot of a sickening descent into intellectual and emotional disintegration predestined by the ancestral Ushers as atavistic denizens of the house. The traditional Gothic uses the chains of time and the constriction of space as both alluring and repulsive. These themes are explored explicitly in Lovecraft's "The Tomb" (1917), in which Jervas Dudley yearns for the dead, for confinement, and for a return to the past. And he ends up being committed in an asylum, realizing his dream with a Lovecraftian twist. "The Tomb" is another story of the dead hand of the past—the Gothic strangulation of the present. In this story Dudley is

confined (in either imagination or reality—the story leaves some ambiguity) by his volition in a crypt for a time and then involuntarily confined by his parents. Dudley seems to "know the way" into the depths of the "vault."[41] The vault is a counterpart to the underground castle. Later, he seems aware of a sub-cellar of a burned mansion (a parallel of the above-ground castle) that "had been unseen and forgotten for many generations,"[42] as if guided by past memories or as if possessed. Tombs, of course, abound in "The Outsider"—indeed, at the end of the story the Great Pyramid is the final tomb.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is one of the landmark tales in the American Gothic. Lovecraft praised Poe's story in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* and conjectured that the house and two Ushers, brother and sister, "an abnormally linked trinity of entities,"[43] shared one soul—one source of being—and perished at the same moment, really a story of a sickness of the soul. The house in Lovecraft's view seems alive. "The Fall of the House of Usher" riffs on the themes of the decline and extinction of a family line, of the dissolution of identity, and of obsessive mental states. The house is the family—is the personality of Roderick Usher—is the world of the living dying. At the end of the story, the Ushers all die, the house cracks apart and falls into its mirror image in the tarn—it is the end of life—the house is like a human body in its decay. But the house is also a killer: it seems as if it has pervaded the mind of Roderick, who walls up his sister in a tomb, and she resurrects in vengeance. In "The Outsider," the castle gives a sort of life-in-death to its offspring.

Poe's tale is an archetypal story, with its elegance of language, its striking characterizations, its symmetry of images, its slow yet building pace to the climax, and its clarity in plot. Lovecraft's "The Outsider" is rough-hewn; yet there is a staying power in the story with its disturbingly familiar strangeness as Lovecraft unchains a spirit into a world of loneliness and dread. Lovecraft denigrated the story later in his life, but Burleson says it is "central to an understanding of Lovecraft's thematic continuity," focused on the "soul shattering consequences of self-knowledge."[44] For Waugh the moment when the outsider touches the polished glass "presents a paradigm of Lovecraft's most authentic fiction"[45] and the words that stream forth represent Lovecraft's lexicon of horror.

Although the story is stylistically reminiscent of Poe and, as argued here, it reflects "The Fall of the House of Usher," it is not merely an imitation; it is a keystone at the start of Lovecraft's reshaping of the Gothic away from the

confines of old houses, away from decadence out into cosmic dread. The story is distorted and there are inconsistencies, as if Lovecraft were experimenting during the writing of the tale—illustrating indeterminacy.

Both stories have been interpreted in manifold ways. As Perry and Sederholm catalogue, “The Fall of the House of Usher” is the subject of hundreds of critical articles and chapters exploring the story’s endless ambiguities.[46] “The Outsider” also yields to alternate readings. That is part of its allure, its ambiguity imaging the indeterminacy of our experience of the world. Readers can see what they want in the story. It may be a weird coming-of-age story—a deformed perspective on an introverted, lonely teenager’s agony and failure in shaping an identity in an unfriendly world, as the outsider’s personality goes from one obsessive state to another. Or is it a tale of alternate times or of doubles, as Waugh suggests,[47] among other interpretations, with the outsider playing multiple parts? Perhaps “The Outsider” is a tale of the “uncanny” as described by Freud, “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known and to us, once familiar.”[48] The uncanny is in the interstices between the living and the dead and the figure of the double. And the double eventually becomes a “vision of terror,”[49] as the outsider experiences. Or is it a story of self-discovery leading to self-revulsion—a moral drama of fear and trembling in the face of death? In this story it is the monster we feel sympathy toward, not the fleeing revelers. But that is because readers participate in the outsider’s agonizing struggle for self-discovery. And perhaps the story appeals because readers experience a distressing epiphany as the outsider journeys away from home, fearfully venturing out and finding only rejection, disgust, sadness, and despair.

“The Outsider” reveals the disturbing nature of Gothic fiction. The inconsistencies and contradictions in the tale reflect the unreliability of storytelling and story-reading, which in turn reflect the contradictions and the underside of society and the chaos and horror of the cosmos within which we live. The story is akin to a disquieting initiation rite into the new Lovecraftian horror Gothic, which is pronounced by its epistemological instability, its raw images and power of disgust, its cosmic dread, its pervasive despair, its solitary fear, and its existential loneliness.

In summary, “The Outsider” reflects images and actions from “The Fall of the House of Usher” and works with similar themes of the impact of the tentacles of the past and the cells of space on personality. “The Outsider” takes place after the collapse of the Usher House. The house is re-imagined in the

form of the underground castle and later as the castle of light and joy and then despair. The books of Roderick mold and rot in “The Outsider.” In both stories, there is a wasteland. Mirrors appear in each. Madeline and the outsider are both resurrected. Both have a climactic confrontation scene of revelation and dread. And both predict, in a fashion, current literary theories on the Gothic.

The underground castle is the fallen House of Usher. But more so, it is the Gothic castle appearing in many traditional Gothic fictions that is scuppered. Lovecraft seems to be using up or mocking the old Gothic castles of dungeons and clanking chains and decadent protagonists to illustrate that what emerges is dead literature for his time. In “Cool Air” (1926) Lovecraft’s narrator considers it “is a mistake to fancy that horror is associated inextricably with darkness, silence, and solitude. I found it in the glare of mid-afternoon, in the clangour of a metropolis, and in the teeming midst of a shabby and commonplace rooming-house with a prosaic landlady and two stalwart men by my side.”[50] “The Outsider” bears the burden of the past in explicit form in the beginning paragraphs as it takes place in a closed foreboding space; but it emerges into the moonlight, and Lovecraft takes the Gothic off into limitless space—the indifferent void—more terrifying than any bounded space. The decadence of Poe is revealed to conceal the unknowable, the unspeakable true horror experienced in vast open space adrift in endless, meaningless time, that is just around an ordinary corner.

The monster of “The Outsider” ends up riding the night wind with ghouls; he leads a company of monsters as they extend the frontiers of horror literature. Freedom is illusory, and any continuing life is a sort of death-trance in a zombie world.[51] The marks left by the dead rune the end of all. At the culmination the hero embraces his alien nature, his otherness, even though all is hopeless—an existential freedom in nightmare.[52] He welcomes “the bitterness of alienage” (52) as foreshadowed in the first paragraph when his thoughts try to “reach beyond to *the other*” (46). Lovecraft’s story illustrates “the mystery of the recognition of otherness.”[53]

Lovecraft admired Poe and acknowledged the importance and influence of his work in horrific supernatural literature. In part, Poe saw art as a way to break free from ordinary consciousness into a domain of beauty and wonder; for Lovecraft, in his fiction, breaking free only means more fear and dread. There is no sublime in Lovecraft. “The Outsider” is an embryonic state of Lovecraft’s later great stories, as it creates unease in its indeterminacy, which reveals an emerging artistic response to a world of chaos and dread. It bears lineage to “The

Fall of the House of Usher," but it births a new line of horror fiction.

NOTES

1. There are other influences, for example: S. T. Joshi in *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1996), 253, notes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In the novel, the monster is unnamed. It is rejected and causes panic by its appearance, which Dr. Frankenstein describes, "Oh, no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A Mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch," Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Joanna M. Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 61.
2. Peter Cannon, *H. P. Lovecraft* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 47.
3. Robert H. Waugh, *The Monster in the Mirror: Looking for H. P. Lovecraft* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2006), 145.
4. Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm, *Poe, "The House of Usher," and the American Gothic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 69–70.
5. H. P. Lovecraft, "The Outsider," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1984), 46. Hereafter cited in the text.
6. Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), 398–99.
7. Barton Levi St. Armand, "The 'Mysteries' of Edgar Poe: The Quest for a Monomyth in Gothic Literature," in *The Tales of Poe*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 50.
8. Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath continue the homage to Poe as the fountainhead of the new Gothic: introduction to *The New Gothic*, ed. Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath (New York: Random House, 1991), xi–xiv.
9. Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," in *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism since 1829*, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 277. This is similar to Ezra Pound's praise of Walt Whitman in "A Pact" that he "broke the new wood" of open verse. Ezra Pound, "A Pact," in *New Selected Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: New Directions, 2010), 39.
10. The other stories were "Berenice," "Morella," "Ligeia," and "William Wilson."
11. Perry and Sederholm, *Poe*, 81.
12. Joshi, *Lovecraft: A Life*, 252.
13. William Fulwiler, "Reflections on 'The Outsider,'" *Lovecraft Studies* no. 2

(Spring 1980): 1–4.
14. Wilbur, “The House of Poe,” 265.
15. Louise Norlie, “Existential Sadness in H. P. Lovecraft’s ‘The Outsider,’” *Bewildering Stories* no. 208 (August 2006). http://www.bewilderingstories.com/issue208/outsider_article.html (accessed November 2011).
16. Richard Wilbur, introduction to *Poe: The Complete Poems*, ed. Richard Wilbur (New York: Dell, 1959), 26.
17. Edgar Allan Poe, “Between Wakefulness and Sleep,” in *The Unknown Poe*, ed. Raymond Foye (San Francisco: City Light Publishing, 1980), 42.
18. Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” in *Tales and Sketches*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 399. Hereafter cited in the text.
19. This is a striking phrase, shifting mazes from space to sound, painted black. It rings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s “Absolute silence leads to sadness. It is the image of death.” Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), 70.
20. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Martin Secker, 1933), 79.
21. “Stone(s)” is the most frequently used non-common word in the story, appearing twelve times, followed by “castle.”
22. Christopher Rollason, “The Character of Phantasm: Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ and Jorge Luis Borges’ ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,’” *Atlantis*: *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies* 31, no. 1 (June 2009): 14–15.
23. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, “The Books in the House of Usher,” *Books at Iowa* 19 (November 1973): 1.
24. Mabbott, “The Books in the House of Usher,” 1–5.
25. Lovecraft developed the theme of the wasteland more elaborately in “The Colour Out of Space,” in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 56. The “blasted heath” is a zone of death where the thriving Gardner farm once stood.
26. See Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997).
27. Rollason, “The Character of Phantasm,” 13.
28. Barton Levi St. Armand, “The ‘Mysteries’ of Edgar Poe,” 25–54.
29. Forrest C. Helvie, “‘The Fall of the House of Usher’: Poe’s Perverted Perspective on the Maimed King,” *452 F.: Electronic Journal of Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature* 1 (2009).

http://www.452f.com/pdf/numero01/01_452f-mon-helvie.pdf (accessed November 2011), 42–51.

30. H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, vol. 3, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1971), 31.

31. Even though the underground castle had no mirrors and was seeped in darkness, the outsider lit candles and looked at books, yet did not notice his own hand? Perhaps this and other incongruences reflect the clash of the ideal and materiality.

32. Jorge Luis Borges in "The Other" has a more sanguine confrontation with himself on a bench on the banks of the River Charles in Cambridge. St. Armand enumerates the synchronicities of Borges and Lovecraft: "Synchronistic Worlds: Lovecraft and Borges," in *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honor of H. P. Lovecraft*, ed. David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), 298–323.

33. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

34. Roderick sums it up: "To-night—Ethelred—ha! ha!—the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the shield!—say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault!" (416). Roderick recounts how he has been aware of Madeline's struggles yet was paralyzed with agony, as if he knew she would come to him to join her in the grave, or as if he knew the penalty for his crime.

35. A hint of incest.

36. Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3–4.

37. Waugh, *The Monster in the Mirror*, 50.

38. Fiedler, *Love and Death*, xxi.

39. In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), Borges writes about mirrors as abominations: "There is something monstrous about mirrors" (68). Early in the tale a mirror "troubled the far end of a hallway" and "hovered, shadowing" (68) the fictive Borges and Bioy Casares. Later he writes of the Uqbar "stone mirrors" and then of an engineer who still lingers in the "illusory depths of the mirrors" (70) of a hotel. These are images of the cruelty of mirrors, their true and false reflections of reality, their distorted revelations, and their haunting duplications.

40. Chris Baldick, introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Stories*, ed. Chris

Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xix.

41. H. P. Lovecraft, “The Tomb,” in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1986), 8. As in “The Outsider,” “stone” is a very frequent word, used ten times in “The Tomb,” but more frequent are “tomb,” “vault,” “door,” and “time.”

42. Lovecraft, “The Tomb,” 10.

43. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, rev. ed., ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2012), 59.

44. Donald R. Burleson, “On Lovecraft’s Themes: Touching the Glass,” in Schultz and Joshi, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 135.

45. Waugh, *The Monster in the Mirror*, 17.

46. Perry and Sederholm, *Poe*, 1.

47. Waugh, “Landscapes, Selves and Others in Lovecraft,” in Schultz and Joshi, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 233.

48. Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, ed. Ernest Jones, trans. Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 370–71.

49. Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” 389.

50. Lovecraft, “Cool Air,” in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 199.

51. Jovanka Vuckovic, *Zombies: An Illustrated History of the Undead* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2011), 8, suggests that the zombie has emerged as the modern monster in popular culture from “films, to video games to musicals, comic books and even global ‘zombie walks.’”

52. In one of his faces of the outsider, Yōzan Dirk W. Mosig, *Mosig at Last: A Psychologist Looks at H. P. Lovecraft* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1997), 16, sees him as going insane and that accounts for the chaotic nature of the ending. Carl Buchanan, “‘The Outsider’ as Homage to Poe,” *Lovecraft Studies* no. 31 (Fall 1991): 12–14, sees it as the outsider accepting his existential lot.

53. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 78.

Chapter 4

Suffering and Evil in the Short Fiction of Arthur Machen

"There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us,"[1] writes Arthur Machen (1863–1947) in "The Red Hand." A "sacrament," according to Iris Murdoch, "provides an external visible place for an internal invisible act of the spirit."[2] Murdoch was writing about the nature of the good, but for Machen a sacrament is a visible ritual that reifies the supernatural—good or evil.

This chapter will explore the rituals of suffering and evil in Machen's short weird fiction as exemplified in four stories: "The Great God Pan" (written 1890; published 1890–94); "The Inmost Light" (written 1892; published 1894); "The Shining Pyramid" (written and published 1895); and "The White People" (written 1899; published 1904).[3] The rituals center on the sacrifice of women. The sacrifices are founded within a web of mystery, where the sacrifice, in most cases, is intended to rip away the veil of reality or open the wonders of the universe. The sacrificial act is engineered by men, men with power, and in part within a nexus of scientific exploration.

These are stories of the mystery of being in a universe of horror. One of the protagonists, Vaughan, in "The Shining Pyramid," says mystery is a "veil of horror."[4] The events of "The Inmost Light" take place in London, which often "veiled in faint blue mist" its "deformities."[5] As central to the Gothic tradition, the stories are nested within Victorian societal, scientific, and sexual nightmares, with violence at their heart. The stories' lead female characters all die violently, and they are the sacrificial beings to rend the veil of the world, to reveal the mysteries.

PERSPECTIVES ON ARTHUR MACHEN

Machen was a prolific writer with many publications, but he is best noted for his work in the Gothic or horror genre. H. P. Lovecraft appraises Arthur Machen as one of the great writers of weird fiction.[6] Although differing substantially in their overall assessment of Machen's body of work, S. T. Joshi, Wesley D. Sweetser, and Mark Valentine agree that his short horror fiction is noteworthy and influential, especially the short fiction written in the 1890s. Sweetser contends that Machen opposes modernity in many of its forms, such as big business, industrialization, communism, atheism, democracy, materialism, and science. Machen's work is a constant interrogation of the modern and an exploration of the moral effects of the collision between the modern and the past, according to Sweetser.[7] Joshi argues that the whole of Machen's work is based on only one notion, "the awesome and utterly unfathomable mystery of the universe."[8] This sense of wonder and awe at the world is central to Machen's short fiction, and as Joshi shows, that wonder is an awful wonder at times. Joshi also argues that Machen's work is best exemplified in the decade when the stories studied in this chapter were written. Valentine also sees Machen as a visionary who pens a sense of wonder tinged by strangeness.[9]

Vincent Starrett was an early advocate, virtually a publicist for Machen, and he viewed Machen as a writer of the frontier between reality and mystery. Starrett writes, "Machen is a novelist of the soul. He writes of a strange borderland, lying somewhere between Dreams and Death."[10] Starrett saw Machen as striving to unveil and provide a view of the mysteries, which are not marvelous but awful. Dorothy Scarborough seemed to be scandalized, as she says that Machen wrote the "most revolting instances of suggestive diabolism"[11] and "[one] feels one should rinse his mind out after reading . . . [Machen's] stories."[12]

MYSTERY

In “A Fragment of Life” Machen writes: “Man is made a mystery for mysteries and vision.”[13] As a first approximation, Machen explores three levels of mysteries. The first is akin to solving a puzzle or unraveling a riddle—very much like a detective story. Another level harkens back to the Mysteries—the ancient mystery religions with their hidden initiations and secrets forbidden to tell. These religious cults were entered through special initiations—mysteries. Walter Burkert notes that “to initiate” is *myein*, in Greek, “the initiate” is called *mystes*, and the whole process is the *mysteria*.[14] Part of the mystery celebrations was a jolt from normal customs, often as a descent into the primitive. The Mysteries always involved some initiation into an arcane and precious knowledge or experience. There was a ritual or rite of passage—a journey beyond the everyday, beyond the veil of normal sense. In some initiations there were tests or trials. Marvin W. Meyer notes that the Mysteries were sacred and much is still not known about their ceremonies, as classical writers themselves were silent on some matters. Mystery, Meyer says, is *mysterion* in Greek and comes from the Greek verb *myein*, whose root meaning is “to close.”[15] The Mysteries were a secret set of ceremonies not to be disclosed. Such a visionary experience must have had a profound effect on adherents. This is the force of belief.

Burkert defines the Mysteries as “initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal and secret character that are aimed at a change of mind through experience of the sacred.”[16] The initiations were often trying and perhaps painful and meant to disrupt the beliefs and personalities of initiates, to cause a change in consciousness. As Meyer points out, in the Eleusinian Mysteries the initiates went through rituals of life and death, and they emerged into a new light, as if reborn. The initiation rituals were to upset initiates’ knowledge and give them a new set of beliefs. From a religious perspective, the Mysteries led to an encounter with the divine. In the stories studied in this chapter, Machen links the awe from the ancient mystery religions to Celtic worldviews. He treats the ancient Greek and Roman times, not as idealized images of reason and realism, but as locales for an underworld of magic and witchcraft, alive with the unquiet dead who bring fear and dread.

The third level of “mystery” is the hidden essence of creation that it is not possible to comprehend through reason or science or perhaps any means. In a

way, the Mysteries are the process of achieving insight into the hidden essence. It is the revealing of the *arcana mundi*, the secrets of the universe. Machen is adept at evoking a sense of awe at the world, sometimes wondrous, but more often, in the stories, dreadful. There is something beyond our perceived world, but it is not a spiritual realm of goodness and beauty. Our world of sense is profane, and it seems from the stories that the world beyond is not sacred but evil. In the stories there are rituals for attaining esoteric knowledge. Marco Pasi calls it being able "to have access to aspects of reality that normally cannot be the object of perception or experience. These aspects belong to other levels of reality, and esotericism claims to provide access to these levels."[17] Alfred North Whitehead wrote of two kinds of experience. One is our sensory world, which is precise and open for all and is primarily the arena for the work of science. But the other, more fundamental, primitive level of experience is "vague, haunting, unmanageable . . . heavy with the contact of things gone by."[18] Machen evokes this primitive level of experience.

Mysteries, as phenomena, are outside of rational explanation and are dangerous. Machen's landscapes, either in the dark wood or in the dark streets of London, arouse a sense of dread. He explores the porcelain nature of our commonplace worldview and also the fragility of all epistemological or narrative meaning. The jumble of narrators and narrative techniques in his stories reflects the confusion that abounds in the world. Our perception is like glass and easily shattered by the intrusion of the malevolence released by scientific curiosity or indolence, or ancient beliefs, smoldering just below the surface of the everyday. Machen deploys the pagan god Pan and the Little People as reifications of cosmic panic, as Lovecraft uses the phrase. Pan is the totem, so to speak, of an aspect of the esoteric, or of the world normally hidden from us, but not a bucolic world. Machen demythologizes Pan's image as a pleasant and playful being and renders him back as the power of the dark wood. As Sweetser suggests, the Little People are symbolic of timeless evil,[19] but they also arise from the Victorian fear of the lower classes, say miners or laborers or servants, who were asserting more societal power and threatening the ancient order of classes in Britain.

Horror narrative at its core leads to the loss of hope—leads to the denial of the stability that the forces of society and culture strive relentlessly to build, maintain, and reinforce. The mysteries, the past, the evil sacraments snuff out the soul, as happens in "The Inmost Light" under Dyson's boot heel. In these stories of darkness there is no ultimate salvation. The core of the ultimate mystery is malignant; there is suffering and evil everywhere. Machen is exploring the

tragedy of being. There is torment in the stories, as the world is for Mephistopheles, who, responding to a question from Faustus on why he was not in hell, shudders: “Why this is hel, nor am I out of it: Thinkst thou that I who saw the face of God, and tasted the eternal ioyes of heauen, am not tormented with ten thousand hels, in being depriv’d of everlasting blisse?”[20]

Machen’s fictional world is a sort of hell, a world where innocents suffer not because of the indifferent hostility of the universe but because of the deliberate acts of men. The sacrifices of women are the sacraments of evil carried out by men, often men of science in the stories.

SACRIFICE

Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss define a type of sacrifice as "communication between sacred and profane worlds, through the mediation of a victim, that is, of a thing that in the course of the ceremony is destroyed."[21] The profane is our world and the other beyond is generally thought of as the good. The question is: What is the other world really? Is it good or evil or beyond good and evil? Machen explores these questions. And sacrifice is intended to link us in our everyday world with the world of the supernatural. The offering—the sacrifice—brings a return to those who sacrifice, say a view of the sublime, or grace from a god, or societal control. But what it gives to the victim is only violent death. Communication with the supernatural in this context is the aim of sacrifice. In the stories the sacrifice is at the borders of experience,[22] and the rite is the suffering and death of women. The Gothic exemplified in these stories is what Clive Bloom calls the expression of a passion of fear and torment into a distorted eroticism transformed into a sadistic ritual.[23]

The sacrifice of women is the "dark, primordial manifestation of evil still lurking in men."[24] These acts spawn such abominations as "flaming eyes in a formless thing staring from a window,"[25] as Sweetser describes Dr. Black's wife in "The Inmost Light" after a successful experiment to capture her soul. Another abomination is the "child that embodies all the unspeakable evil in the world,"[26] as Scarborough describes the ultimate effect of Dr. Raymond's experiment on Mary's brain in "The Great God Pan." The sacrifice turns out to be dreadful, terrible, seemingly a homage to an elemental power, to evil itself. Mephistopheles answers Faustus's question about whether the demons of hell have many ways to torture: "As great as haue the humane soules of men."[27] In this set of stories Machen creates "embodied deviance,"[28] as Judith Halberstam calls the work of the Gothic. Machen explored taboo areas of Victorian culture, although it seems that he yearned to be a protector of that culture and his stories were cautionary tales. There are excesses in his work, but this is a hallmark of the Gothic—not a failure but rather necessary for his expressions of what was the underside of life.

The core of this chapter is on the ritual of sacrifice to reveal the mysteries. In some of the stories Machen injects elements of a detective narrative to set a tableau against which the real mysteries will stand out. He also uses textual

devices of a return or reversion to the past, or perhaps an interaction of the past with the present, to illustrate the connection to the ancient mysteries. This is likely also a warning about the loss of true religion and a warning against the danger of devolution, of a slipping back to primitive pagan time, because “an awful lore is not yet dead.”[29] A warning that the old mysteries had real meaning and real danger.

THE FOUR STORIES OF SACRIFICE

In “The Great God Pan,” the sacrificed one is a young woman, Mary, the ward of Dr. Raymond. It is perpetrated in order to see “the real world” that is “beyond a veil,” and the sacrifice is to allow Dr. Raymond “to see it lifted” (170). Vivisection is the method. Dr. Raymond performs a lobotomy of sorts: he penetrates her brain with a “glittering instrument” (178); afterwards, he “kissed her mouth” and then she “crossed her arms upon her breast as a little child about to say her prayers” (177–78). The young woman is defenseless and treated as an object by Raymond. Indeed, the scientist says: “I rescued Mary from the gutter, and from almost certain starvation, when she was a child; I think her life is mine, to use as I see fit” (173). There is a witness, Clarke,[30] to the experiment, as Dr. Raymond calls the sacrifice.

The experiment is founded on the notion that what we see every day with our senses is only the shadow of a deeper reality. But Dr. Raymond believes that a simple surgical procedure on the brain will unlock the mysteries of the esoteric. After the surgical knife cuts into her brain, Mary dozes for a few minutes and then starts awake:

> Her eyes shone with an awful light, looking far away, and a great wonder fell upon her face, and her hands stretched out as if to touch what was invisible; but in an instant the wonder faded, and gave place to the most awful terror. The muscles of her face were hideously convulsed, she shook from head to foot; the soul seemed struggling and shuddering within the house of flesh. (178–79)

She falls with a shriek and becomes vegetative. Dr. Raymond observes that it was to be expected, as she had seen the Great God Pan, although earlier he had said there was no danger in the incision. On the surface this is the failure of parental, or moral, or societal responsibility to provide proper care and protection to the innocent. Moreover, it portrays a scientist as able to do anything with human subjects with no concern for their care. There is also an undercurrent of a more sinister kind in the relation between Mary and Dr. Raymond.

Mary is deformed by the brain surgery, but there is more to come. She dies nine months later after spawning a child,[31] who goes under various names, but

mostly Helen Vaughan. The remainder of the story is, in a sense, a Victorian shocker about the sexual exploits of Helen Vaughan, the she-devil, the embodied deviance. Helen is a sort of antichrist, born from Mary and Pan, who is akin to Lucifer. The experiment unleashes vengeance and terror in the green hills of England and the shining streets of London; it calls up an ontology of evil in the mating of Pan and Mary. The textual element of the scientific experiment is central to the story's trajectory.[32] The only supernatural effects produced by science are horror. Machen calls this "transcendental medicine" in "The Great God Pan" and "occult science" in "The Inmost Light." Here the Gothic is used to reveal what some thought might be the underside of science, which was becoming the arbiter of truth in place of religion, perhaps exemplified in Victorian times by Darwin and evolution.

Pan in this story is the fetish for evil and suffering and the danger and dread of the wilderness of the ancient woods, a primal fear landscape. Machen links his Pan with the ancient Celtic forms in the great forests of Wales, still dark and haunted. His is the Pan of dread. There are at least two images of Pan, one the bucolic satyr or goat-god, who is playful and amorous but not threatening. W. R. Irwin itemizes the differences between the two images.[33] There is also a dead Pan, as an ancient rumor had it, although Irwin shows this was a mistranslation and writes that, in fact, Pan was the only ancient god to survive classical times. However, Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed a view of the vanished god in "The Dead Pan." She imagines an ancient lament:

> And that dismal cry rose slowly
> And sank slowly through the air,
> Full of spirit's melancholy
> And eternity's despair;
> And they heard the words it said,—
> "Pan is dead! Great Pan is dead!
> Pan, Pan is dead!"[34]

John Boardman suggests that the poem is an expression of the death of the pagan world, with Pan as the image for the end of the old gods and Pan as the passing of the wild darkness, now overcome by light.[35] Perhaps this is symbolized by a city standing brightly where the woods were. Machen transforms the city of comfort into a nest of evil, a den of iniquity, filling it with the bodies of men who have committed suicide. London is a "city of nightmares"

(222) and is as threatening “as the darkest recesses of Africa.”[36]

Pan is a witch god: Robert Graves in *The Greek Myths* identifies Pan as the devil of the Arcadian witch cult and links him with the witch cults of northwestern Europe.[37] In *The White Goddess*,[38] Graves also identifies Pan with the goat-Dionysus, who on the Day of Atonement had a scapegoat, under the name of Azazel, sacrificed to him. E. R. Dodds notes that the god Pan causes panic and evokes a variety of religious experiences or mental disturbances from possession and personality change.[39] Burkert in *Greek Religions* has only brief comments on Pan but suggests that Pan symbolized uncivilized procreation. Georg Luck writes that the Celts worshipped a horned god that the Romans associated with Pan. These two horned gods combined and formed a powerful deity for the pagans. Out of necessity they tried to keep their worship secret and hidden, as the early Christians were barbaric in the war to wipe out the old pagan gods, Greco-Roman or Celtic. Luck argues that Pan was transformed into the devil and that female pagans were characterized as witches, as they often used herbs and natural remedies for sickness.[40] Machen returned Pan to his ancient image of terror and frenzy[41] and overturned the cosmeticized image of Pan as a playful satyr[42] and harmless woodland goat-god—he is not Peter Pan.

The sacrifice of a woman is an attempt by men to open the doors of perception; but it is also the killing off of the old ways, especially the traditions and practices of strong women. “The White People” contains several tales, one of which is about Lady Avelin or Cassap. She was one of the white people, perhaps the league of witches so feared by the church in the Middle Ages as theological and social protesters and a threat to its powers and authority. Hence, in the story the white people are, in a sense, underground and hidden. Lady Avelin ends up burnt at the stake, illustrating the force of the church and state against women and the old folk beliefs.

The progeny of Pan and Mary, Helen Vaughan, is painted as an independent woman, a sybarite, personifying the fear of Victorian men. She has multiple aliases, travels the world, disappears for a time, and has wealth and independence. In Victorian times, the “New Woman,” as Kelly Hurley suggests, must be in league with the devil or with Pan.[43] In the story Helen precipitates the suicide of several men, as if her sexual power were draining away their will to live. This is a twisting of passion into demonic pagan death rites. Joshi says the story “degenerates into a frenzied expression of horror over illicit sex.”[44] She is the image of the all-powerful, threatening woman. The image of a woman

as succubus is clearly expressed in the “Novel of the Iron Maid.” Machen describes a large green bronze statue of a naked woman, with a smile on her lips and “about the thing an evil and a deadly look.”[45] The “Iron Maid” was a mechanical torture device with the arms tightening around the neck of a victim. In the story, the statue starts up and reaches out for Mathias, who had acquired the piece, and the bronze head bends toward him and “the green lips”[46] bite onto the man’s lips, as if to suck out his soul.

Helen Vaughan has numerous crimes on her hands, stretching back to when she was a young girl. These crimes are mostly treated obliquely in the story, as they are unspeakable and hence unwriteable. And perhaps they should not be read, just as Austin discards, without reading, the manuscript detailing the “entertainments” of Mrs. Beaumont (that is, Helen Vaughan). A husband, Mr. Herbert, is said to have died of fright. Another of her victims, Crashaw, hangs himself. Earlier, Villiers passed Crashaw and saw “a devil’s face.” It was as if Villiers had looked into “the eyes of a lost soul.” In Crashaw’s eyes was “furious lust and hate that was like fire” (225). This is similar to Mrs. Black in “The Inmost Light”—the bargain with the devil means giving up your soul, but men make the bargain for the women.

At the end, Helen Vaughan’s “suicide” with a “hempen cord” (234) when threatened seems improbable, although this is hard to say in a story with so many improbabilities. As the rumor of the death of the Great God Pan was merely a mis-hearing, here Helen’s suicide is perhaps disinformation. It is yet another sacrifice of a woman, a strong woman. Here the killing is portrayed as a self-sacrifice, but it seems really to be a mock suicide with Helen, like Thetis or Pan,[47] changing forms and shapes as she escapes or dies or perhaps returns to her primordial[48] or aboriginal embodiment, from which she will be called forth yet again. Helen Vaughan is a shape-shifter, her body wavers “from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then reunited.” It “descends to the beasts whence it ascended” and dissolves into “a substance like jelly” before becoming “a horrible and unspeakable shape, neither man nor beast” (237). In the “Novel of the White Powder,”[49] Francis Leicester goes through a similar metamorphosis when he is found as “a dark and putrid mass, seething with corruption and hideous rottenness, neither liquid nor solid, but melting and changing before our eyes, and bubbling with unctuous oily bubbles like boiling pitch. And out of the midst of it shone two burning points like eyes, and . . . a writhing and stirring as of limbs.”[50] This last image is echoed in “The Shining Pyramid” at the bowl in

the deep of night as Vaughan observes the Little People. He “peered into the quaking mass and saw faintly that there were things like faces and human limbs, [in] that tossing and hissing host.” And “in the uncertain light [he saw] the abominable limbs, vague and yet too plainly seen, writhe and intertwine” (37–38), yet another warped erotic image.

These descriptions also represent a regression to chaotic disorder and social decay. Or perhaps this is an expression of the awfulness or fear of the human body, perhaps especially the female body. The New Woman of the late Victorian time was a threat to the male-dominated culture. The common image was of mother, wife, and sister, as Kelly Hurley notes, characterized or idealized by childlike innocence.[51] The *fin de siècle* was a time of the morphing of gender roles, and perhaps many men rebelled against such a shift. At that time, Bram Stoker portrayed the vampire women in *Dracula* as sexual aggressors, perhaps she-devils or monster women. This is Helen Vaughan.

Machen deploys science as the tool that sacrifices and results in the intrusion of extra-normal events. It is the experimental work of a scientist that leads to the intrusion, as if he is a modern counterpart to ancient pagan priests. Knowledge is now lodged in the sciences. It brings the imperative to believe, an autonomous authority, the power to compel. But science with all its enlightenment drags in more horror. The more we know the more we have to fear, as H. P. Lovecraft argued.

“The Great God Pan” is “an old story, an old mystery” (232) told in episodic fragments from different perspectives, as if the truth is too horrible to see directly. And it is told with different narrators, as if to give credibility through collaboration to an incredible tale. There are supporting documents referenced, like the note by Dr. Matheson. The diffusion in the telling is reflective of the imperative of the Gothic to be disruptive and subversive, especially disruptive of the “dominant rational, empirical and progressive ethos of modern Western culture.”[52]

“The Inmost Light” is a story of roaming the mysterious environs of London and the sacrifice of a woman. The experimenter here is named Dr. Black.[53] In “The White People” a standin for the devil is called the black man. At first Dr. Black and his bride live bucolic lives in a suburban abode. But Dr. Black tires of the routine of medical practice and duties as a husband and returns to his occult science studies and experiments. The experimenter wants to confirm his power over the forces of the universe. He coerces his wife into becoming an experimental subject to confirm his theories. He takes away her

soul, capturing it in a jewel. But his wife is transformed into evil, or she becomes the embodiment of the ancient pagan world, starkly staring from a window in that obscure suburb of London. He eventually kills her, but is not prosecuted, as two doctors at the autopsy could find no evidence of foul play. Her death had been caused by an obscure disease that had malformed her brain. Dyson hunts down one of the doctors, who confesses that he believes that Dr. Black killed his wife. And he thinks it was justified because Mrs. Black's brain was, in fact, "the brain of a devil" (269).

The story starts with Dyson telling Salisbury of his encounter with the monster created by Dr. Black. Dyson had traveled to the quiet suburb and happened by chance to rest in a meadow near a row of houses including the Blacks.' Dyson relates:

> As I glanced up I had looked straight towards the last house in the row before me, and in an upper window of that house I had seen for some short fraction of a second a face. It was the face of a woman, and yet it was not human . . . as I saw that face at the window, with the blue sky above me and the warm air playing in gusts about me, I knew I had looked into another world . . . and seen hell open before me. (254)

Dyson relates his physical shock at the sighting of Mrs. Black: around her face there "was a mist of flowing yellow hair, as if it were an aureole of glory round the visage of a satyr" (255), very much like a fire and linking this story to Pan.

Thus begins the journey into a "world of mystery" (255) across London, resulting in marvelous coincidences or improbable revelations or more obscurities. This story is replete with improbable and deliberately overdone coincidences, not least of which is the purloining of the jewel from Dr. Black and the scrap of paper that Salisbury has thrown at his feet while he takes shelter from the rain in an archway, hidden from view. There is duplicity everywhere and unlikely discoveries always, culminating in Dr. Black's all-telling notebook discovered after his death. After the visit with one of the autopsy physicians, Dyson actually chances upon Dr. Black, who appears drained of life, on one of his London walks and befriends him for a spell, visiting his hovel, where there is "an odour of corruption" (272). Dyson leaves London for a time and on returning finds that Dr. Black is dead.

Machen is mocking mystery stories. Upon arriving at home, Salisbury

spreads that thrown scrap of paper out on his table “as if it had been some rare jewel” (263), in a howling portent. Or perhaps Machen is arguing that all things are connected and that coincidences or improbabilities are merely the manifestations of the vast mystery we live in but do not really know.[54]

The story continues with Salisbury telling Dyson about the scrap of paper and its strange phrases. On yet another one of his haunts through London, Dyson finds the shop hinted at on the paper and uses a phrase to extract a case, which contains the jewel and the pocketbook of Dr. Black. In the story, the most treasured object is the “opal with its flaming inmost light” (286): the work of the husband[55] in his lab while the human subject of his study is made mad and then killed. The wondrous colors of the jewel do not enchant Dyson, and at the close of the story he crushes it underfoot, yet another sacrifice of the wife. And at the end a small fire blazes forth briefly—a faint reflection of the burning pyramid of fire in “The Shining Pyramid.”

“The Shining Pyramid” is perhaps the thinnest of the four stories. It seems to be a sketch of the contrast between the ease of a British gentleman and the terror of the sacrifice of a young woman to pagan, sybaritic forces. Vaughan and Dyson, especially Dyson, savor the intellectual challenge of the mystery of the ancient flints. Perhaps Machen is mocking common mystery tales again, with their focus on clues, facts,[56] and figuring out a solution through reason. In this story, the protagonists do not use sacrifice to attain arcane knowledge, but they use suffering and evil to display their puzzle-solving abilities.

The story is set in the Welsh countryside. Vaughan has invited Dyson to his home to help solve the matter of some flints being left in varying patterns near an ancient pathway beside his garden wall. The flints are very ancient and rare. After the flints, oblong eyes begin to appear on the pathway garden wall. Vaughan is mildly concerned it might be messages of potential thieves after his old sliver plate. The disappearance of a young woman, Annie Trevor, is a background element, which foreshadows the horror to come. The heroes ignore or discount the event, focusing their efforts on the hidden meanings of the flints and oblong eyes.

On the surface, the sacrifice and the horrid violation are of a young woman, Annie Trevor, by the Little People. Her sacrifice begins with her disappearance, or rather kidnapping by the Little People, continues through an ugly orgy of horror, and ends in flame, leaving only her brooch, as her body and soul are consumed. However, the real sacrifice is the young woman by English gentlemen to the forces of darkness and “embodied deviance” (the Little People)

for their viewing pleasure. The perpetrators of the sacrifice seem to be the Little People, but at that natural bowl at night Dyson and Vaughan are observers, like objective scientists gathering data on their field study, detached from their subject.

After Dyson figures out the clues, like an amateur sleuth getting the what, when, and where, they enjoy "six days of absolute inaction" (34), forgetting about Annie Trevor. At the end of this sojourn in comfort, they finally go out at night to the site of a "circular depression, which might well have been a Roman amphitheater, [with] ugly crags of limestone . . . [like] a broken wall" (33). They hide on the rim among the limestone rocks "grim and hideous . . . [like] an idol of the South Seas" (33). They sprawl on the ground and wait in the dark. At last they hear a low sound and then see a moving to and fro in the bowl. A mass of restless forms begins to appear, and these forms seem to speak to one another with a "hissing like snakes" (36). The two men watch as the hideous forms swell around a central object. They hear "more venomous" hissing and see "abominable limbs" (38) grope and grind—another twisted erotic image. Then they hear a faint moan but do not move. Suddenly, the things draw back and they glimpse "human arms," and then a large flame (the shining pyramid) erupts, and they hear screams in utter anguish and horror. Not once during this scene is Annie's name used; she has become a non-being, objectified, a sacrificial object. One of the real horrors in this story is the spinelessness of the heroes—they are voyeurs. Dyson is satisfied at the end of his unraveling of the mystery and reasons away his failure to intercede in the sacrifice of Annie.

The Little People are the imaginative re-creation of fairies in a form of terror. This is similar to Machen's work with Pan; he goes back to the original panic, the original forms. These are not the fairies of children's stories; here as elsewhere Machen uses atavisms to reverse time and invert morality. Graves in *The White Goddess* suggests that fairies can be thought of as displaced early tribes forced into the wilds and woods, where they continue to haunt the imagination.[57] Leslie Fiedler suggests that gnomes or kobolds are "the surviving image in the mind of homo sapiens of the stunted proto-men that they destroyed, the first dispossessed people, whose memory survives to haunt our fairy tales and nightmares."[58] In the story itself, the Little People are identified with "prehistoric Turanian inhabitants" (45). The stories imagine the return of these beings, bearing savagery upon the innocent. They are part of the awful aliveness of the landscape for Machen.

In the story, two Englishmen ruminate on an archaeological mystery in the

wilds but do nothing to help a young woman in danger. What is of value to those two men? It is old silver plate, especially a silver bowl. But mostly the solving of a puzzle, like doing a crossword puzzle while smoking a pipe. To Dyson and Salisbury the small flints left in varying patterns are of value and worth pondering, as are the increasing number of oblong eyes on a wall, but not the disappearance of a young woman of a lower class. In a sense, Machen is mocking the search for false knowledge or a false search for knowledge, the unraveling of a superficial mystery. It is as if the protagonists focus on the lowest level of mystery, as in a detective story, and are unaware of or ignore the deeper mystery. They are voyeurs at the end, watching Annie Trevor's awful death from a hiding place. They are witnesses or perhaps accomplices to a sacrifice and seem to be so self-focused as to be blinded to the world.

The most carefully sketched character is the lurking wilderness, with its feral nature and deep dread. Vaughan's house is "in the west with the ancient woods hanging all about it, and the wild, domed hills and the ragged land" (13). The landscape seems more alive than the male leads, especially "the ancient woods, and the stream drawn in and out between them; all grey and dim with morning mist beneath a grey sky in a hushed and haunted air" (23–24). There is a "desolate loneliness and strangeness of the land" (33) similar to the landscape in "The White People." Underneath everything, the story hints there are currents of great forces at work, which Machen personifies as a grand conspiracy against humans.

In "The White People" the elaboration of this theme of sacrifice is completed. Here we hear the voice of the sacrificed one herself, through her journal or diary. Here we get to see an imaginary manuscript, which in the other of these stories is only hinted at or mentioned and not elaborated. She appears to be an only child, living in the countryside and ignored by her father. A nurse initiates her into the mysteries embedded in the wild landscapes surrounding her home and into ancient rituals that appear magical and terrifying. It seems to be nearly an alternative religion, and the "nurse must have been a prophet."[59] The diary recounts the child's experiences with the nurse and on her own after the nurse has been let go. These latter adventures become increasingly strange and wonderful, all within a deepening feeling of existential loss and elegiac despair. The child finds a most secret place within the "secret wood which must not be described" (161) and performs a series of rituals, and something is revealed to her. The diary ends with her writing of the nymphs both dark and bright and how she called them and a dark nymph appeared and "turned the pool of water into a

pool of fire" (163). The "diary" is framed with a prologue and epilogue where Cotgrave listens to Ambrose ruminate on good and evil.

This is a tale from innocence and of innocence violated, as there is a hint of sexual abuse. In the frame tale, when Ambrose is about to lend his green book to Cotgrave, "He fondled the fading binding" (123), as if he were fondling the young girl, whom he knew. The girl's father is detached and in a sense not there at all, while a nurse plays the role of parent for a time for the young girl. We read of her experiences in fragments, and much is hidden of the wonders and strangeness that she experiences. She uses wonderful words, such as the Chian language, Aklo letters, the Mao games, or the Dols, Jeelo, and voolas, along with the Xu language and voorish things and shib-show. These all dance in the voice of the child narrator,[60] giving a sense of the surreal to her experiences. But the central mystery is with the white people.

Keepers of the old pagan faith appear in the story. There is Lady Avelin, who may be a leader of an underground secret society of witches. She is being forced into marriage but rebels and uses occult means to kill her suitors one by one, nearly a retelling of the suicides caused by Helen Vaughan. And in this story she is also found out and is sacrificed by fire. Each of the four stories has a scene or two with fire as an emblem of death. Perhaps Machen intended this to be a cleansing of evil through fire or a specter of hell. Machen injects distorted erotic images of women into the telling. Lady Avelin cavorts with great serpents in the woods; they "twisted round her, round her body, and her arms and her neck, till she was covered with writhing serpents" (150). The serpents always blessed her with a glame stone (a magical totem) for her pleasures. But Lady Avelin is also emblematic of women who rebel against the rules ordering women into certain roles. Hence she is sacrificed for social control, although perhaps Machen had her sacrificed for being in league with the devil. That lesson for the young girl may result in what is apparently her "self-sacrifice" in a sacred grove near a Roman statue, where "she poisoned herself[61]—in time." But "in time" against what? Or was it a suicide? Is Ambrose to be trusted, or did he drive her to death through abuse that was not caught by her non-observant father, who is distant, aloof, away from the events, and ignorant of what is happening to his own daughter? Mark Valentine suggests it was the fear of becoming like Helen Vaughan or Helen's mother, Mary—that is, becoming the she-devil or spawning one.[62]

The girl's travels through the wild landscapes are like dreamscapes. Jack Sullivan characterized the story as having a "trance-like lyricism and

spontaneity" where "beauty and horror ring out at precisely the same moment."[63] H. P. Lovecraft extolled the merits of the story, calling the narrative "a triumph of skilful selectiveness and restraint [that] accumulates enormous power as it flows on in a stream of innocent childish prattle."[64] Lovecraft admired the craft and praised the overall sense of a horrid sentience behind the words of the young girl.

The landscape she travels is foreboding and alive with danger. As she clambers among the megaliths, she describes them:

> . . . dreadful rocks. There were hundreds and hundreds of them. Some were like horrid-grinning men; I could see their faces as if they would jump at me out of the stone, and catch hold of me, and drag me with them back into the rock, so that I should always be there. And there were other rocks that were like animals, creeping, horrible animals, putting out their tongues, and others were like words that I could not say, and others like dead people lying on the grass. (128–29)

This is all under a sky, "heavy and grey and sad, like a wicked voorish dome in Deep Dendo" (128). Ordinary things come alive. Matter seems to be malleable.

The girl's language is akin to stream-of-consciousness writing, as pointed out by Joshi.[65] It is a wondrous stream, but also there is something beyond or below the surface. There is an overall sadness and feeling of loss and vulnerability in the story. It tells of abandonment and the torture of separation and loss; and there seems to be something non-childhood about her experiences, as if she has been robbed of her innocence. There is a deep despair and a feeling of absence in the marvelous flow of words.

After the nurse is let go, the girl roams the wild countryside on her own with no friends or companions or chaperons. She is alone in a landscape of bewitchment. And the landscape is not in one form but in many forms, a shape-shifting world, a world with a broken epistemology. The little girl thinks of it this way: "all alone on the hill I wondered what was true" (156).

The frame tales of this artifact may be characterized as a "Luciferian philosophy,"[66] to use Murdoch's turn of phrase. It articulates a voyeuristic sordidness, expressed through the fingering of the green book, as if it were flesh. The book is one of Ambrose's "choicer items" and is treated as a specimen, or rather a trophy. He lingers over the book and parts "with difficulty, it seemed,

from his treasure" (124), as he hands it to Cotgrave. This story is a treasure from the horror zone. The frame tale speaks of mysteriousness including both good and evil. In a sense they are both indefinable and can only be hinted at or spoken of in allusions, like the ancient mysteries.

Murdoch jokes that only angels could define the good,[67] so perhaps only devils define evil, and this seems to be the point of the frame tale.[68] It is as if there is a deep, old urge to worship, to strive toward the sacred, as Murdoch argues; but in Machen's tales this urge does not reach the good or the sacred but delivers suffering and evil.

LANDSCAPES OF WONDER AND TERROR

As Machen writes, “if there is a landscape of sadness, there is certainly also a landscape of a horror of darkness and evil.”[69] Barton Levi St. Armand argues that this is the natural corollary to a theory assuming that nature possesses a spirit as well as a self, that it is, in some measure, conscious and alive.[70] Valentine sees Machen’s landscapes as replete with “active, brooding evil” yet also a “sacred splendor.”[71] There are atavistic haunts in these four stories. Over the wonder or terror of existence there is a mask or cloak or veil. The great weeping beauty of nature hides a terror, as in “The Damned” of Algernon Blackwood, where the hero flees in panic from the woods as he hears the despairing clamor at the gates of hell. There is a deep fear of the forest as it takes us back to the primitive, to the campfires and howling of the wild. But Machen also transforms the streets of London into a forest of dark night.

In each story’s landscapes, there are objects, relics, or statues from the past which personify evil or are fetishes reifying a fear. Megaliths appear in these stories like sentinels from the pagan world, along with relics from Rome. The use of ancient images, ruins, or statues is common in Machen and signals the return of the past, the revolt of the dead, an awful history.

In “The Shining Pyramid” there are contrasting objects. First there are the flints left by the Little People, but there is also the silver, symbolic of old England and the stability of the world. There are the limestone megaliths in the hills and a limestone pillar by Vaughan’s garden wall that was “a place of meeting before the Celts set foot in Britain” (46).

The landscape in “The White People” is overwhelming, “a strange, desolate land” (165). The green book itself—a journal of the evil years, so to speak—is the prime relic. There are megaliths in abundance. And there is the stone image, “of Roman workmanship . . . white and luminous” (166), where Ambrose found the young girl’s body. He demolishes it to kill the pagan world or hide his own sin.

In “The Inmost Light” the landscape is the foreboding, dank atmosphere of London and its maze of streets. The dying Dr. Black resides in an area where the houses seem to have been “sordid and hideous enough when new” but aged in “foulness with every year and seemed to lean and totter to their fall” (271). In this urban landscape of darkness, the key object is the jewel, the host of Mrs. Black’s soul. Its crushing snuffs out any hope for transcendence.

There is “the stone head of grotesque appearance” that was “of the Roman period” (186) in “The Great God Pan.” The view of this head causes such a shock to the boy Trevor, in whom Helen had precipitated a vision of “the strange naked man,” that it leads to a “weakness of intellect” (184), as if Helen had stolen away his knowledge. In the closing pages of “The Great God Pan,” Clarke writes to Dr. Raymond about the life of Helen Vaughan and recounts his recent stay at Caermaen with its “mouldering Roman walls” (239). Near the grounds of an old temple to the god of the deeps was the house where Helen had lived when younger. Off the old Roman road Helen had seduced her first victim, Rachel, who was introduced to the powers of night in the “maze of the forest” (239).

A SCIENCE OF EVIL

The sequence of stories is close to a critique of Victorian scientific research with human subjects. There are observers and non-interventionists of natural events in "The Shining Pyramid." Observational reason here views the suffering of the innocent but does nothing. Is it simply fear or the failure of morality, or the mocking of scientific objectivity? There is experimentation on human subjects, without consent,[72] in "The Great God Pan" and "The Inmost Light." Finally we witness complete detachment and theorizing in "The White People," akin to a single-subject case study design. A child is heard, but her voice is framed by the voyeuristic, perhaps abusive, voice of a man. In the end it is all about the sacrifice of women to appease the desires of men for knowledge and control. And the sacrifice calls up cosmic terror. In a way the stories, solidly in the Gothic tradition, give voice to an underclass against a distorted and immoral ruling order, which uses whatever means it can to maintain its control. In the stories, men engineer the intrusion of horror by sacrificing women. It is as if women are scapegoats to appease the great unknown and allow the gathering of data and knowledge by men. The troubling center of these stories is precisely the act of violent sacrifice of women.

These stories may be seen as critiques of the cult of science as the highest form of human activity. Christine Ferguson writes of decadence as the logical conclusion of one of the most fundamental of all Victorian values, scientific positivism.[73] Roger B. Salomon argues that Machen, along with Lovecraft and Bierce, attacked the accepted worldview of nineteenth-and twentieth-century scientific positivism and empiricism, which rejected any horror or disorder or atavistic haunts from the past as having any place in a narrative structure. Salomon sees Machen as disrupting the accepted sense of truth as given to us by empiricism; he also hints that this disruption applies to conventional morality and ethics.[74] The dominance of positivistic science and logical positivism was distasteful for Machen. Ferguson argues that if science is too worshipped for its mathematical logic and the fruits of its experimental methodology, then the moral practice of its experiments is secondary and ethical considerations are unnecessary.[75] Machen exposes this. The *reductio ad absurdum* is that in science all is allowed and that the resulting knowledge sanctifies all means for its achievement.

The Victorian anti-vivisectionist and feminist Frances Power Cobbe warned

of the consequences of science penetrating into “regions where it has no proper place,”[76] such as emotions and ethics. Cobbe argues that the over-veneration of science could lead to a disruption of common human morality. Cobbe’s *Wife Torture in England* unveils the Victorian-age beatings of women. Susan Hamilton writes how Cobbe let light into the horrid details of the violent acts against Victorian women’s bodies. For her the Victorian age was a culture of violence against women.[77] The central core of Machen’s four stories is violence against women; it is as if the search for knowledge and the power structure sanctify suffering and evil.

A NEGATIVE VISION

Machen's quartet of stories deconstructs established Victorian notions such as empiricism, rationality, social control, and sexuality. Although part of this is like a Romantic reaction to reasoning and the praise of vision to experience being, Machen's sundering of the veil reveals horror. The invisible world is not like the Romantic ideal, as Emerson wrote of:

> If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them. The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God. [78]

In these stories the god, so to speak, brings panic, not wonder; it is a revealing of a negative vision. The dropping of a veil is revolting and hideous, the mysteries infected with blasphemy and despair. There are only fear and trembling, and the face of god revealed is of a corpse or worse. The sight does not elicit feelings of the sublime but rather of dread and panic. Of course, this is the Gothic. There is no sublime, only an unnameable dread.

The sacrifices are the terror. In each of the four stories there is a sacrifice of a woman at the hands of men. Although the sacrifices take on different forms and the actions of the men, as agents or abettors of the sacrifices, are somewhat different, the essential theme is the killing of women. These sacrifices are set in a pornography of suffering and evil. The rituals are performed in alien landscapes misted in misery, haunted by atavistic relics, and distorted with repellent erotic images.

In "The White People," Ambrose says that real evil is akin to trying to take heaven by storm. Perhaps that is what the men in these stories are doing by sacrificing women—women who end up like Mrs. Black, "a cinder, black and crumbling to the touch" (286); or Annie Trevor, "a heap of grey ashes" (40); or the young woman's beloved statue in "The White People," "dust and fragments" (166); or Helen Vaughan, "a horrible and unspeakable form" before her "death" (237).

NOTES

1. Arthur Machen, “The Red Hand,” in *The White People and Other Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Oakland, CA: Chaosium, 2003), 11.
2. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), 67.
3. See S. T. Joshi, *The Weird Tale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 39–41, for a comprehensive list of dates for the works of Machen.
4. Machen, “The Shining Pyramid,” in *The Shining Pyramid* (New York: Knopf, 1925), 17. Hereafter cited in the text.
5. Machen, “The Inmost Light,” in *The House of Souls* (New York: Knopf, 1922), 247. Hereafter cited in the text.
6. H. P. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, rev. ed., ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2012), 81.
7. Wesley D. Sweetser, *Arthur Machen* (New York: Twayne, 1964), 116–28.
8. Joshi, *The Weird Tale*, 13.
9. Mark Valentine, *Arthur Machen* (Bridgen, Wales: Seren, 1995), 23–24.
10. Vincent Starrett, *Arthur Machen: A Novelist of Ecstasy and Sin* (Chicago: Walter M. Hill, 1918), 11.
11. Dorothy Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1917), 139.
12. Scarborough, *The Supernatural*, 237.
13. Machen, “A Fragment of Life,” in *The House of Souls*, 86.
14. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 276.
15. Marvin W. Meyer, introduction to *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 4.
16. Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 11.
17. Marco Pasi, “Arthur Machen’s Panic Fears: Western Esotericism and the Irruption of Negative Epistemology,” *Aries* 7 (2007): 64.
18. Alfred North Whitehead, quoted in William Beer, *Women and Sacrifice: Male Narcissism and the Psychology of Religion* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 9.
19. Sweetser, *Arthur Machen*, 18.

20. Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragicall Historie of Doctor Faustus*, in *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), 155.
21. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 97–98.
22. The sacrifice is to bridge the "unthinkable gulf that yawns between two worlds; the world of matter and the world of spirit" (Machen, "The Great God Pan," in *The House of Souls* [New York: Knopf, 1922], 172; hereafter cited in the text); and "the fathomless abyss that separates the world of consciousness from the sphere of matter" (Machen, "The Inmost Light," 268).
23. Clive Bloom, *Gothic Histories: The Taste for Terror, 1764 to the Present* (London: Continuum, 2010), 78. For Machen it may be that these stories lament the dying of Christian religious ritual and a reversion to pagan rites.
24. Sweetser, *Arthur Machen*, 81.
25. Sweetser, *Arthur Machen*, 82.
26. Scarborough, *The Supernatural*, 139.
27. Marlowe, *The Tragicall Historie of Doctor Faustus*, 160.
28. Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 5.
29. Machen, "The Red Hand," 11.
30. Clarke is one of several witnesses to the events of the whole story.
31. One wonders if Dr. Raymond is the father.
32. In a letter to John Lane in 1894, Machen rejects a suggestion to cut out the first chapter of "The Great God Pan" because it contains "the motive." Machen, *Selected Letters*, eds. Roger Dobson, Godfrey Brangham, and R. A. Gilbert (Wellingbourough, UK: Aquarian Press, 1988), 218. He argues that the credibility of the story rests on a scientific basis, as the supernatural itself is not credible.
33. W. R. Irwin, "The Survival of Pan," *PMLA* 76 (June 1961): 159–67.
34. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Complete Poetical Works of Mrs. Browning* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 190.
35. John Boardman, *The Great God Pan* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 7.
36. Machen, "Novel of the Iron Maid," in *The Three Imposters and Other Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Oakland, CA: Chaosium, 2001), 188.
37. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: I* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1968), 102–3.
38. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), 218.

39. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).
40. Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 7.
41. Machen's portrayal of the awful power of Pan influenced subsequent writers such as Edgar Jepson in *The Garden at 19*. Valerius Flaccus caught this aspect of Pan in *Argonautica*. "Pan had driven the doubting city distraught, Pan fulfilling the cruel commands of the Mygdonian Mother, Pan lord of the woodlands and of war, whom from the daylight hours caverns shelter; about midnight in lonely places are seen that hairy flank and the soughing leafage on his fierce brow. Louder than all trumpets sounds his voice alone, and at that sound fall helm and sword, the charioteer from his rocking car and bolts from gates of walls by night; nor might the helmet of Mars and the tresses of the Furies, nor the dismal Gorgon from on high spread such terror, nor with phantoms so dire sweep an army in headlong rout." Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautia*, trans. J. H. Mozley (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1934), 131.
42. This image of Pan is detailed by John Boardman, *The Great God Pan*. It is still a potent salutary symbol as evidenced by the April 12, 2010, cover of the *New Yorker* of "Spring Is Sprung" by Edward Sorel. The cover depicts Central Park overrun by satyrs and lascivious naked women, who seem to be the sexual aggressors. Most interesting is the pictorial of a balding, bearded satyr with eyeglasses pushing a baby carriage: the Great God Pan fully domesticated.
43. Kelly Hurley, "British Gothic Fiction: 1885–1930," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 199–201.
44. S. T. Joshi, introduction to *The Three Impostors and Other Stories*, 21.
45. Machen, "The Novel of the Iron Maid," 190.
46. Machen, "The Novel of the Iron Maid," 191.
47. Pan changed shape when the gods battled the Titans, as did most of the gods out of terror. C. Julius Hyginus (c. 64 BCE–17 CE) writes that Pan took on the shape of fish for his lower half and a goat for his upper half. Hyginus, *Astronomica*, part 2, trans. Mary Grant, http://www.theoi.com/Text/HyginusAstronomica2.html (accessed May 2012).
48. Sweetser, *Arthur Machen*, 111–12, suggests that Machen has her become a "hideous protoplasm," because it represents the "primordial slime" back to which we could all slide. It is symbolic perhaps of original sin for Machen and

an expression of the fear of the return to the primitive.

49. In both this story and “The Great God Pan,” an attending physician provides the descriptions of the transformation as an analytic and objective viewer.

50. Arthur Machen, “Novel of the White Powder,” in *The Three Impostors and Other Stories*, 207.

51. Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 121–122.

52. Roger B. Salomon, *Mazes of the Serpent* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 117.

53. This is an old textual ploy to make it appear as if one is hiding the real name and have readers suspend disbelief. The devil was historically portrayed as black. Cotton Mather, *On Witchcraft* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), 102, wrote that witches call the devil the “Black Man.”

54. It is expressed this way in “The Children of the Pool”: “Any man who cares to glance over his experience of the world and of things in general is aware that the most wildly improbable events are constantly happening.” Machen, “The Children of the Pool,” *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural* (New York: Pinnacle, 1983), 315.

55. Tellingly, over the course of the tale, Dr. Black shrivels, as if the jewel that he hoards in his hovel drains his life force.

56. In “The Red Hand,” Phillips, searching for a commonplace solution to a murder with a primitive flint knife, says to Dyson, “I warn you I have done with mystery. We are to deal with facts now.” Machen, “The Red Hand,” 5. But this is not how it all works out.

57. Graves, *The White Goddess*, 171.

58. Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), 369.

59. Arthur Machen, “The White People,” in *The House of Souls* (New York: Knopf, 1922), 161. Hereafter cited in the text.

60. The book is “full of secrets” and she has written “a great many other books of secrets . . . hidden in a safe place” (Machen, “The White People,” 125); but not everything is written down, as if she is aware that someone may take her books, as in fact happens.

61. Shortly before the journal breaks off abruptly, the young girl, after her moment of rapture, writes: “I wished that the years were gone by, and that I had not so long a time to wait before I was happy for ever and ever.” Machen, “The White People,” 161.

62. Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 62.
63. Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978), 114.
64. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror*, 84.
65. S. T. Joshi, *The Weird Tale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 22.
66. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 47.
67. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 96.
68. Ambrose says that sin "is an effort to gain the ecstasy and the knowledge that pertain alone to angels. And in making this effort man becomes a demon." Machen, "The White People," 117. This is traced through the stories.
69. Machen, "The Children of the Pool," 320.
70. Barton Levi St. Armand, "The 'Mysteries' of Edgar Poe: The Quest for a Monomyth in Gothic Literature," in *The Tales of Poe*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 25–54.
71. Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, 24.
72. In a sense, these are cautionary tales about the lack of ethics in the conduct of research on human subjects; this attitude reached its epitome in Nazi Germany. After the war, the Nuremburg Code finally elaborated a set of principles to guide such research, one of which was that researchers should be willing to subject themselves to any research. The principles, standards, and controls over research with human participants have evolved since then.
73. Christine Ferguson, "Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment," *PMLA* 117 (May 2002): 465.
74. Salomon, *Mazes of the Serpent*, 115.
75. Ferguson, "Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment," 468.
76. Frances Power Cobbe, quoted in Ferguson, "Decadence as Scientific Fulfillment," 486.
77. Susan Hamilton, "'A Whole Series of Frightful Cases': Domestic Violence, the Periodical Press and Victorian Feminist Writing," *TOPIA* 13 (2005): 89–101.
78. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Works* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1883), 558.

Chapter 6

The Sickness unto Death in H. P. Lovecraft's "The Hound"

Mainstream literary critics have often condemned H. P. Lovecraft's stories for dreadful writing. Edmund Wilson called Lovecraft a writer of "bad taste and bad art."[1] When Lovecraft was included in the Library of America, Laura Miller[2] and Stephen Schwartz expressed outrage that Wilson was not in the Library at that time. Schwartz's indignation at Lovecraft's inclusion is reflected in the title of his review, "Infinitely Abysmal." He writes, "[Lovecraft's] stories always evince overwriting of a kind that disappeared with the pulp genre in which it flourished."[3] Schwartz calls Lovecraft's descriptions "absurd confabulations." Comparison with Borges, he says, "is ridiculous."[4] This is extreme literary elitism. Michael Dirda, on the other hand, contends that the Library of America volume helped Lovecraft reach "from beyond the grave to claim his rightful place as a grand master of visionary fiction."[5]

"The Hound" (1922), in particular, has been criticized as absurd and overwritten, suffering from the overuse of adjectives. Darrell Schweitzer suggests that the story gibbers from start to finish.[6] Even sympathetic criticism has characterized the story as a self-parody.[7] Steven J. Mariconda notes that Lovecraft himself referred to the story as a "dead dog," perhaps confirming the critical perspective.[8] The remark, however, may be ironic, similar to Mary Shelley calling *Frankenstein* (1818) her "hideous progeny."[9] Besides, Lovecraft depreciated much of his literary work.[10] Artists themselves are not always the best critics of their work; even so confident a writer as James Joyce expressed occasional self-doubts.[11]

Nonetheless, "The Hound" is a sound pillar supporting Lovecraft's literary status. The story is at the core of his art and shows him experimenting with form, style, plotting, and characterization. He marshals the common tools of horror stories, such as foreshadowing, building suspense through mood, and returning characters to a disturbing place, as if he is using them up and squeezing what he

can out of old techniques. What is more, he is also having fun—a bleak fun surely. This chapter explores the story through several intersecting lenses. As with much of Lovecraft, the story appeals in a fundamentally visceral manner, the way all true weird tales appeal as they evoke a primal sense of unwanted touching or being touched by an indefinite menacing something from a strange otherness. We find so much in "The Hound" about the experience of horror, about the language of horror stories creating mood and atmosphere (the language haunts readers more than the plot), and even about the American tradition of adventure stories. Lovecraft was beginning to cut the new wood of horror in this story. That is why some of the language seems crooked and the images splintered, but it is a gateway into his more mature body of work, where the themes are elaborated on a bigger stage. Still, the story unearths a sense of true dread.

The language itself is the fundamental gateway to understanding the story. It is the exemplar of the baroque language of horror—perhaps the only language to use in exploring the sickness unto death or in confronting authenticity in the experience of dread. That is the core bravery of the story: it is not fear but dread that Lovecraft confronts. And the message is that in the end even language cannot protect us. Eventually words fail in the story as they cannot describe phenomena, instead referring to "less explicable things," things of which "I must not speak,"[12] and that which is "utterly impossible to describe" (176). The odd sentence, "Bizarre manifestations were now too frequent to count" (176), is another example of the corroding and breakdown of language. By the last paragraph, language becomes confused, inarticulate, and chaotic, ending in a silent gunshot offstage.

A third way of exploring the story is through Søren Kierkegaard's concepts of dread and despair. The heroes suffer through the "sickness unto death." They experience the moral chaos of dread, the end of good and evil, where dread is ultimately a confrontation with a person's nothingness in the world. And the heroes fall prey to the sickness. But Lovecraft worked through this in his own life by revolting against dread. In a sense, Lovecraft is a metaphysical rebel as described by Albert Camus in *The Rebel* (1951). He rebels against the situation of life, against the world we inhabit. Michel Houellebecq argues that Lovecraft's art was a rebellion against realism, against the facts of existence.[13] Lovecraft "conquers his own existence"[14] by writing. Anne Lamott believes that "becoming a writer is about becoming conscious."[15] Lovecraft was heroic in an existential sense by knowing the anguish of life, yet persisting in the face of

hopelessness through writing. In “The Myth of Sisyphus” (1955), Camus argues that the core philosophical question is whether to commit suicide or not in the face of the absurdity of life.[16] Maurice Lévy suggests that Lovecraft fought with suicide and survived at least in part through his dreams, which he later transformed into art.[17] In “The Hound,” along with other stories, Lovecraft explores the idea of suicide as a response to knowledge of the world. The unnamed hero succumbs to the sickness unto death and takes his own life; Lovecraft soldiered onward.

In addition, it is helpful to read the story and the experience of dread through the perspective of the double. There are multiple layers of this theme in the characters, the action, and the act of reading itself. Throughout the story the reader is a double, as he or she is directly addressed by the narrator. We become co-conspirators in the crime of avoiding the truth of our existence in our very reading of the story if we become lost in the thickets of words. We are not just passive observers of the story’s events but real agents in its creation as we respond or do not to the messages about dread. Lovecraft is an artist of substantial literary presence, and this chapter explores his talent in the writing of “The Hound.”

The story starts with the unnamed narrator, hard gun in hand, fondly anticipating suicide after the killing of St. John, his companion. And death may be an ethical end for his sickness, reified as “the black, shapeless nemesis” (171). This is dread. This expression is similar to the “black seas of infinity” and that “dark terror which will never leave” in “The Call of Cthulhu”[18] (1926). In the poem “The Going,” Thomas Hardy conveyed the same overwhelming dread: “in darkening darkness *The yawning blankness* Of that perspective sickens me.”[19] Lovecraft is part of this tradition in literature: he wrote weird tales and poetry to express his anguish; Hardy wrote mainstream novels, stories, and poems. Lovecraft in pulp magazines and in his letters explored the same frontiers of thought. Massimo Berruti notes Lovecraft’s use of obscurity as an image for “outsideness,” which Berruti describes as “the pervasiveness of the horror and the ineluctability of its menace.”[20] This is one way of apprehending the concept of dread. In “The Hound,” this image of darkness is the real menace, for example, as the premonition of death, when “a large, opaque body darkened . . . [their] library window” (175). It is with the “blackest of apprehensions” (175) that they realize the language of the chattering outside their library door is Dutch. The narrator arrives at the scene of St. John’s screams to “see a vague

black cloudy thing silhouetted against the rising moon" (176). Later he witnesses "a black shape obscure one of the reflections of the lamps in the water" (177). In the last paragraph, the unnamed narrator speaks of the "night-black ruins of . . . Belial" (178). It is this overwhelming image of darkness—a symbol of dread—that engulfs his existence.

This presence of something that is almost not there but also everywhere arises from the tomb—the ghoul (underneath the ground, perhaps from hell); from the surface of the earth itself—the gigantic hound; and down from the sky—"the stealthy whirring and flapping of those accursed web-wings circles closer and closer" (178). There is no escape; it is everywhere. It is a suffocating, smothering atmosphere; one is numbed by the thick beating of the reptilian wings, overcome by the "stenches of the uncovered grave" (172), deafened by the unrelenting baying, and blinded by the "black, shapeless Nemesis" (171).

Lovecraft attacks all our senses, although there is a special ringing reek to this story—roused by the repeating gong of the baying monster. The story attacks our ears unrelentingly. Moreover, there is that intense unease at the dead human body; no one, willingly, is going to touch the thing "covered with caked blood and shreds of alien flesh and hair" (178). And yet, perhaps the heroes would do so. In the story, Lovecraft alludes to their cannibalism of the dead when, on first opening the grave, the heroes "feasted" (174) and in the description of the corpse of St. John laid out like a chewed cut of beef. There is the core of traditional horror in the story, but it is the consuming cosmic nothingness that gives it the biting edge.

In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927), Lovecraft writes that he wanted to evoke in readers "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."[21] Those moments of "awed listening" are ones that we all avoid, turning away from the buzzing night forest by turning up the TV, drinking, or praying. In "The Hound," Lovecraft articulates this avoidance from the dark night of the soul, an avoidance that will ultimately fail.

It is the language of the story that sticks with people, language that is over the top. Indeed, some find the language annoying and childish, but it is also exhilarating and enchanting. And contrary to the claims of mainstream criticism, Steven J. Mariconda, in "H. P. Lovecraft: Consummate Prose Stylist," and Berruti have demonstrated that Lovecraft altered his style to suit the subject matter of his stories. S. T. Joshi argues Lovecraft "was almost always the master,

rather than the slave, of his style."[22] The self-affected style of "The Hound" purposely draws attention to the un-naturalism of the story and the spoiled-brat heroes. The rhetorical excess reflects the excess of the protagonists. The language expressly shows itself through word flourishes and hyperbole. But there is more to the language than baroque extravagance. Lovecraft's language serves a clear purpose as the "purple prose" itself expresses the substance of the story. "The Hound" is packed with adjectives, replete with qualifiers as if there are not enough words to describe the experiences of the characters, abounding with repetitions like incantations against evil. Perhaps by writing enough, the dread will pass by. But it is not to be. You can feel Lovecraft combating with the form and substance of horror in "The Hound," in the full, exuberant flowering of words. In the story, the words and phrases are artifices, fortifications against the tenebrous hours of darkness.

Among other things, "The Hound" is a study in using rhetoric to cope with horror. The language is its glory. The language is appropriate to the hysterical situation and to the annoying main characters, who may strike readers as immature, naughty boys. All through his writing career Lovecraft struggled with symbols and shadow to express his dark insights. The repetitions are necessary, the allusions to the canon of weird tales are central, and the alliteration and formulaic phrasings invoke the muses of horror.[23] This story is a nightmare. It followed on a visit that Lovecraft and his friend Rheinhardt Kleiner made to a graveyard. Lovecraft stole away a small chunk of a gravestone that he promised to put under his pillow—a charm to rouse the muses or demons of sleep.

However, the artifices of rhetoric fail to keep the dread at bay. Lovecraft uses many such devices in the story. From the first paragraph, onomatopoeia ("whirring," "flapping," and "baying" [171]) and anaphora (repetition of the same word or phrase in successive clauses: "It is not a dream—it is not, I fear" [171]) are used to signal the deployment of rhetorical devices. Overall, the story is a prime example of synathroesmus (piling up of adjectives), although the paragraph describing the first visit to the grave of the ghoul is the highlight sequence, and pleonasm (a word or phrase that, if omitted, would not change the meaning). Other examples include hyperbaton (reversal of normal word order: "Statues and paintings there were" [172]); neologism ("*Necronomicon*" [174]); alliteration ("dripping death aside a Bacchanale of bats from the night-black ruins of buried temples of Belial" [178]); tautology ("unknown and unnamable drawings" [172]); oxymoron ("articulate chatter" [176]); and allusion ("I heard a knock at my chamber door" [175], alluding to "The Raven"). Yet rhetoric cannot

keep the dread away.

An overwhelming sense of existential despair, disgust, and dread permeates the adventures of the heroes.[24] It is a case study of the sickness unto death spelled out by Kierkegaard. In *Either/Or* (1843) Kierkegaard describes two ways for humans to live, the aesthetic or the ethical. The aesthetic existence leads to hedonism, consisting of a search for gratification and a nurturing of mood. The aesthetic person must always seek novelty in an effort to stave off world-weariness and an all-pervading melancholy; but in the end he has only boredom and despair.[25] The heroes in "The Hound" live the aesthetic life and try to escape ennui by indulging in the grotesque and morbid, hoping to enliven their existence through a continuous spiral deeper into degradation and corruption as they hunt for satiation of their feeling of nothingness. They live in a sort of death-coma, as Kierkegaard might say. Although the heroes recognize dimly the emptiness of their aesthetic life, they cling desperately to it. Kierkegaard's argument is that this emptiness arises from the fact that we have within us something else, which will not be satisfied by a sensory life. This is the eternal. For Kierkegaard, we are a synthesis of body and spirit, of temporal and eternal, of necessity and freedom. The aesthetic life, however, emphasizes the corporeal, the temporal, and the finite. This leads to a desperate search for endless gratification. The aesthetic way of life leads to dread or angst. In contrast, the ethical life is based on adhering to moral codes and living in a spirit of fellow-feeling. It is possible to achieve the ethical life by following cultural moral precepts. There is also a third way of living, the true way, the religious way of life, when we make a leap of faith beyond despair by acknowledging our sin and embracing belief in God. But if we have felt dread, yet obstinately persist in an existence in the sensory sphere, we will end in despair.

Despair is the sickness unto death. The narrator seems to be moving toward the ethical life as he retells the adventure. He speaks of the moral failure of their exploits and calls to God.[26] However, the heroes confront dread, persist in their worldly adventures, and end in despair, in the death desire as described by Kierkegaard in *The Sickness unto Death* (1849). A way of thinking about this matter is to consider that people tend to deal with this anxiety by obsessively focusing on physical apparitions and fantasies rather than the dread itself. Dread is not like fear; it lacks any determinate object and is something we all feel. "There lives not one single man . . . in whose inmost parts there does not exist a disquietude, a perturbation, a discord, an anxious dread of an unknown something, or of a something he does not even dare to make acquaintance

with."[27] No wonder—as it is so overwhelmingly awful, like a cold darkness spilling eternally into your bedroom, or night falling through your tall dark windows like coffins. We objectify dread[28] to escape the valley of existential loss as long as we can. Mistakenly, we displace the anxiety to an external object and hope that dread can be managed by getting rid of the object—but when this fails the fear reverts to the original dread. This is the horror of human existence that Lovecraft experienced and tried to dissolve in his writings.

The heroes objectify dread into a thing that seems like a gigantic hound, or at least the narrator does. However, it is more than a black dog barking in their heads. In the story, the quest for escape from ennui leads the heroes to grave-robbing. In this expedition, they find more than they bargain for, as out of their frenzied digging arises the monster, the objectification of dread, the false hope to transform it into fear. In a sense, they unearth the other and see their personal hell. The "sickness unto death" infects the entire story and erupts in many words and phrases: "soul-upheaving stenches of the uncovered grave" (172), "dissonances of exquisite morbidity and cacodaemnoniacal ghastliness" (172), "features . . . savouring at once of death, bestiality and malevolence" (174), "vexed and gnawed at the dead" (174), "wind moaned sad and wan" (175), "gibber out insane pleas" (178), "queer combination of rustling, tittering, and articulate chatter" (176), and "madness rides the star-wind" (178). These strange phrases are attempts by the narrator to describe his illness and his dread.

In "The Uncanny" (1919), Freud describes an encounter with dread, where the known causes terror precisely because it is known, but somehow now twisted into the unfamiliar and disruptive of the normal. The uncanny is "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known and to us, once familiar."[29] The uncanny arises from the unclear boundaries between the living and the dead and the figure of the double. Both of these resonate throughout "The Hound." The narrator and St. John are old hands at the boundaries of life and death and know decay and corruption; indeed, that is their rapture. Even the icon of dread in the story, the amulet, "was not wholly unfamiliar" (174) to the pair. Alien to most but not to these two, who have read the *Necronomicon*. However, this does not protect them from a fiend of the grave. But more important is the notion of the double, for the narrator and St. John are doubles. St. John is the purported leader, but this is hard to believe as the narrator does not seem like the tag-along type. The double is one mode of the uncanny. It can be considered part of the longing for immortality. Freud thinks the notion of the double does not disappear with the "passing of the primary narcissism"[30] of

childhood. The double, at that early stage, protects against the loss of the ego. Later, the double functions as the conscience. Otto Rank describes the various incarnations of the double and sees the double developing into an "opposing self" appearing "in the form of evil,"[31] that is, as the bringer of death. So the double becomes a "vision of terror," according to Freud, just as, after the collapse of a religion, "the gods took on daemonic shapes."[32]

In "The Hound," Lovecraft expresses the horror through the double; for who is St. John and who is the unnamed narrator but two of the same, partners in crime? A reader gains a vague notion of the narrator, but St. John is only a shadowy figure, befitting a double. And when the double dies, the original is sure to follow.

However, the real double is the "one buried for five centuries, who had himself been a ghoul in his time" (174). Lovecraft deploys the dislocating effect of the known transforming into a monstrous unknown, yet still familiar, presence in the story. Dirk W. Mosig explicates this disturbing effect of many of Lovecraft's stories. There are other layers of doubles in this weird tale. The protagonists are both predators and prey. The ghoul in the grave was a fellow despoiler of graves, who also "had stolen a potent thing from a mighty sepulchre" (173). The scene at the grave is repeated, explicitly representing the intrusion of the past into the present. Opening the grave opens the past and unleashes the horror; it is as if the monstrous events will occur eternally, for there is no salvation. The characters in the story are struck by dread, but the real cosmic dread is that we, as readers, are drawn into the same recurring horror story.

Reason collapses under the weight of dread. This is Lovecraft's philosophical perspective. There is a difference between the narrator of "The Hound" and Lovecraft: the narrator gives up, but Lovecraft, in the grip of despair, persisted. Lovecraft saw the universe as awful, like Pascal, who, when thinking of the starlit night sky, wrote: "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me."[33] This is the universe Lovecraft experienced and tried to articulate in his writings. Indeed, in "The Call of Cthulhu," Thurston speaks in a tone similar to Pascal of the horrible possibility that knowledge "will open up . . . terrifying vistas of reality."[34] In "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio," W. H. Auden also describes this alien landscape, where "We are afraid *Of pain but more afraid of silence; for no nightmare* Of hostile objects could be as terrible as this Void."[35] For Kierkegaard there is an escape with a leap of faith.

This leap is awakened by our longing for and recognition of the essential need for religion. We can obliterate our dread and the manifestations of this dread in apparitions through God. Fear of nothingness and despair at our limitations can be overcome. But Lovecraft would not traffic with a God. Nietzsche had already broadcasted that "God is dead."[36] Moreover, the horrors of World War I had spotlighted the emptiness of the idea of a personal God. Nietzsche, of course, did not think there was a God to die, but he argued that the idea was bankrupt in a scientific world. In a sense, the concept of God had no meaningful explanatory role in the world. Talking about God was talking nonsense. It was time for humans to grow up and throw away the thoughts of children. Lovecraft does have some fun with the notion of appealing to God in the story. The second paragraph starts: "May heaven forgive the folly and morbidity which led us both to so monstrous a fate!" (171). Of the particularly noxious tomb-loot, the narrator exclaims, "thank God I had the courage to destroy it long before I thought of destroying myself!" (173). In the last scene at the ghoul's grave, when the narrator says, "I know not why I went thither unless to pray, or gibber out insane pleas" (178), Lovecraft compares praying to gibbering.

Maurice Lévy argues that Lovecraft gave up on religion knowing the bleak cosmos and tried in his writing to forge a meaningful life in spite of the fact of nothingness. Houellebecq writes that Lovecraft lived an "exemplary life," that his "only animus was literature and dreams."[37] He was a "man without hope," according to Lévy,[38] the true existential man, who felt always the absurdity of life. Lovecraft was authentic and expressed an understanding of himself in a hostile world. For Lovecraft, the unknown comes from within one's own head and the hostile universe we inhabit and try to ignore. The true weird tale needed more than a murder or clacking bones or ghostly forms—more than mere fear. Fear is, in a sense, composed of tangible things—like slasher movies, drooling zombies, or the fear of death. Dread, on the other hand, is more formidable because it has no objective source. There is not a sane method to overcome the sense, the feeling of nothingness.

In "The Hound" the unnamed narrator is trying to flee from everything, including the reader, and uses language to shape-shift and distort his story. Always he turns away from the real truth of dread, using words to keep the night at bay and to confuse us, the readers. But that is part of the agony he goes through, and perhaps it is so awful that none of us could stomach it—not the actual sense of cosmic loneliness. Lovecraft chronicles this objectification of dread and the hopelessness of doing so in "The Hound." But the objectification

of dread in a fear object is a temporary measure. The emotions in the story move from ennui, to excitement, to fear, to horror, then to full-blown dread. And at the conclusion of the story, language breaks down entirely when the narrator faces the unexplainable despair elucidated by Kierkegaard. Finally, the narrator is engulfed and can no longer use the magic of words to keep it away. The fear object becomes more intense throughout the story, from the faint but mounting sounds of the beast; to marks left by the dead monster outside a door, underneath a window; to a savaged, mutilated, dead friend; to the dread object itself, characterized as some "dead, fleshless monstrosity" (178). In "The Hound," there are no mild-mannered black dogs of suburban depression but a real howling madness. No Zoloft will work here.

But Lovecraft does have fun with the story. It is a takeoff on the grand English tradition of tomb-looting and museum-building. This colossal social edifice of stealing the relics of the dead is turned on its head, or perhaps illuminated for what it really is. As Lovecraft always reminds us, cemeteries are not dead; malignant, decayed, abominable yes, but not dead; the heroes eventually learn this the hard way. In the story, their museum is a re-creation of the tomb, of death. They lug trophies from the dead back to their chamber of horrors in England. They savor their sordid Elgin Marbles "far, far underground" (172) like a tomb itself. And the narrator "cannot reveal the details of . . . [the] shocking expeditions, or catalogue even partly the worst of the trophies adorning the nameless museum" (172). This is a sick archaeology, a twisted science to know death. And as the heroes seem to have no means of supporting themselves, perhaps they are in the market of selling pilfered grave goods, literally living off the dead. The heroes suffer the sickness unto death, but do not evoke much sympathy from readers because they seem too wearisome, just bad little boys.

The heroes—are they brothers, twins, lovers? Doubles? The double seems the most likely. "The Hound" is a story of two men on an adventure, a common theme in American literature. Leslie Fiedler, in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), suggests that much of American literature is focused on male bonding through adventure, often in undefiled nature, and that it is essentially a boys' literature.[39] Lovecraft's "The Hound" is a sick adventure of two men who sometimes seem like juveniles in a defiled world, and finally in this tale we find out where all that really ends. This is not a boy's tale of the wilderness but an adult's descent into sickness, madness, murder, and suicide. From the hairy earth, the heroes have dug up their own death. Lovecraft has dared to express the truth about this stream of American writing.

In this story the narrator dares not say his own name—but howls at the outrages of life, of the earth, of the universe.[40] At the end, the narrator recognizes his own sickness, his own sin, his own monstrousness; he has become another monster, "the unnamed," the double of the "unnamable" (178). Even language cannot ward off the ennui, the darkness, the awfulness of existence, and so there is really only one last act. He succumbs to sickness and death and is overwhelmed by the darkness of Belial.[41] The unnamed transforms into the unnamable, realizing the nightmare of the sickness. For ultimate dread really is unnamable. But perhaps he is redeemed, a little, by plugging himself; he refuses to go back to regular culture and conventional morality, for he has seen the truth, and he will not pray.

So what is "The Hound"? What is the hound itself? Only a silly garish undead, a feeble image of infantilism? No. It is the reification of dread. We hear the real anguish, the howls of dread from the hero; perhaps more than we really want to hear or understand. Yes, as a story it has faults, there may be more than we want in adjectives but also less than we want in the elaboration of the chilling cosmic terror that Lovecraft explores in his later work. The baroque language is perhaps too florid and it fails finally at the end—as it must. The heroes or doubles are silly schoolboys, playing with forces too big for them to handle. The narrator succumbs to the sickness unto death. The action is full of repetition. The literary allusions may be too obvious and overdone, particularly the ongoing references to the baying hound. Yet there is a power in the story that creates unease; we sense an undertow tugging at us, dragging us down into the night ocean of dread. Lovecraft captures us with his magic language and in doing so has portrayed an episode in the experience of dread. Kierkegaard wrote: "If there were no eternal consciousness in a man, if at the foundation of all there lay only a wild seething power . . . if a bottomless void never satiated lay hidden beneath all, what would life be but despair."[42] Lovecraft knew this to be the truth of existence, and there was no salvation through Christian rapture. In "The Hound," we have been blessed with a brief glimpse into the sickness and death that envelops us all. The "unnamable" is the sickness unto death, and Lovecraft has broken down the walls of infinity for a moment, allowing us an instant of awed listening.

NOTES

1. Edmund Wilson, "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous," in *Classics*

and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Co. 1950), 287.

2. Laura Miller, "Master of Disgust," *Salon.com*, http://www.salon.com/books/feature/2005/02/12/lovecraft (accessed May 12, 2005).

3. Stephen Schwartz, "Infinitely Abysmal—Review of *Tales, H. P. Lovecraft*, Library of America," *New Criterion* (May 2005): 75.

4. Jorge Luis Borges's admiration for Lovecraft is attested by "There Are More Things," a story in the mode of and dedicated "To the memory of H. P. Lovecraft." In *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), 471.

5. Michael Dirda, "The Horror, the Horror! H. P. Lovecraft Enters the American Canon," *Weekly Standard* 10, no. 23 (March 7, 2005), http://www.theweeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/005/285tmh (accessed August 2005).

6. Darrell Schweitzer, "Lovecraft and Lord Dunsany," in *Discovering H. P. Lovecraft*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer (Holicong, PA: Wildside Press, 2001), 86.

7. S. T. Joshi, in *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1996), 285, and elsewhere, has argued for the perspective of self-parody, or at least parody of blood and guts horror. It is true, I think, that Lovecraft is having fun in the story, but I am not convinced that Lovecraft would mock his own style this early in his "professional" writing career. There is parody, I think, for example, to the habit of literary allusion. But more important is the undertow of despair that finally takes the story into the depths of real horror, into dread.

8. Steven J. Mariconda, "'The Hound'—A Dead Dog?" in *On the Emergence of "Cthulhu" and Other Observations* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1995), 45. Mariconda calls the story a literary joke and parody.

9. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Folio Society, 2004), xxv.

10. Mariconda in "'The Hound'—A Dead Dog?" traces Lovecraft's increasing dissatisfaction with the story. Peter Cannon, *H. P. Lovecraft* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 33, also notes Lovecraft's dismissal of this story, but thinks the story has some merit due to "its vivacity alone."

11. Joyce writes "is there one who understands me?" toward the end of *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1939), 627. And in a letter to Viscount Carlow, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), 395, Joyce wrote of *Finnegans Wake*, "I think I can see some lofty thinkers and noble livers turning away from it with a look of pained

displeasure."

12. Lovecraft, "The Hound," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1986), 173. Hereafter cited in the text.

13. Michel Houellebecq, *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*, trans. Dorna Khazeni (San Francisco: Believers Books, 2005).

14. Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage, 1956), 103.

15. Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Anchor, 1995), 225.

16. Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1955), 3.

17. Maurice Lévy, *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*, trans. S. T. Joshi (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1988), 32.

18. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1984), 125 and 149.

19. Thomas Hardy, *A Selection of His Finest Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 80.

20. Massimo Berruti, "H. P. Lovecraft and the Anatomy of the Nothingness: The Cthulhu Mythos," *Semiotica* no. 150 (2004): 372. The concept of "outsideness" is not exactly the same as the concept of "dread" elucidated by Kierkegaard, although there are intersections. Outsideness is similar to alienation, where we feel separated from the world and it evades our limited understanding and does not respond to our needs. Perhaps it is the unutterable and indescribable. Berruti writes that the experience is that "of the limit, of the threshold: on the edge, along the razor blade, one hovers between life and death, between sanity and madness" (382). It brings one to the edge of suicide. The story "Facts concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" begins: "Life is a hideous thing" (*Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 73). There the outsideness is embedded in a sordid evolutionary history where the link to apes is much closer than one would think. We are not made in the image of God but are adrift in an alien universe.

21. H. P. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, rev. ed., ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2012), 28.

22. S. T. Joshi, introduction to *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, by H. P. Lovecraft (New York: Penguin, 1999), xix.

23. The phrase "baying of some gigantic hound" and its component words are used in a traditionally oral manner where key phrases and words are used as mnemonics. "Hound" is used eight times, "baying" fourteen times, and the

phrase “some gigantic hound” five times. Some of the words in the story, such as “baying,” “flapping,” and “gigantic hound,” function as a soundtrack does in horror movies to pump up the tension.

24. This feeling of existential loneliness infuses other stories, particularly “The Outsider” and *At the Mountains of Madness*. In both of these tales the sense of separation from others and from the universe is intense. The heroes inhabit a space of solitude and unbearable loss—they are exiles, as perhaps we all are.

25. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall, trans. David F. Swenson, Lillian Marvin Swenson, and Walter Lowrie (New York: Modern Library, 1946), 19–108.

26. S. T. Joshi, in *H. P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West* (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont House, 1990), 96, details the change in the narrator’s ethical posture.

27. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death*, ed. and trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), 155.

28. Kierkegaard’s concept of dread is confusing, complex, and manifold. A key element is that dread or angst is a feeling that has no definite object; it is different from the fear that comes from an objective threat (for example, a mugger, a grizzly bear in the wilds). In a sense, dread is a sign that we have the eternal or the desire for the eternal within us, but something is missing. Kierkegaard suggests the solution to dread is finding a connection to the power that established us as humans, namely with God. By truly linking with the source of everything in the universe, we can be fully realized. Dread is a sin when we do not connect with God, which we do through faith. Of course, there is no rational basis for this, and Kierkegaard glories in it.

29. Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, ed. Ernest Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 369–70.

30. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 387.

31. Otto Rank, “The Double as Immortal Self,” in *Beyond Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1958), 82.

32. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 389.

33. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, in *The Provincial Letters, Pensées, and Scientific Treatises*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, trans. W. F. Trotter (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Great Books, 1952), 211.

34. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu,” 125.

35. W. H. Auden, “For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio,” in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1991), 352.

36. Freidrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common, rev.

and ed. H. James Birx (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1993), 35.
37. Houellebecq, *H. P. Lovecraft*, 89.
38. Lévy, *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*, 31.
39. Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), xxiv.
40. As the power and impotence of language are themes in this story, it seems appropriate that the narrator's name is not revealed. It is as if there is a disembodied voice crying out against the terror of life, not sure if there will be listeners.
41. Joshi pointed this out in his notes to "The Hound" in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*. Belial is described in II Corinthians, 6:15, as akin to darkness: "what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" In the Dead Sea Scrolls Belial leads the hordes of darkness against the army of light, "his rule is in Darkness": Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Folio Society, 2000), 136. In *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, the meaning of the word is elucidated, and one of the references is as "the spirit of darkness": JewishEncyclopedia.com, "Belial," http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2805-belial (accessed July 22, 2013). In a sense Belial is darkness. This speaks again to the real dread in the story—not the "hound" but the overwhelming universe expressed as darkness.
42. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 30.

Chapter 7

What Is “The Unnamable”?

H. P. Lovecraft and the Problem of Evil “The Unnamable” (1923) is not customarily considered one of H. P. Lovecraft’s classic stories. Peter Cannon calls it “stagey and static.”[1] S. T. Joshi says it is “a very slight tale,”[2] although he thinks it can be read as a treatise on the aesthetics of supernatural horror fiction. Two recent studies suggest the story has more merit.

Massimo Berruti sees Lovecraft connecting thoughts on the limits of language with ideas on writing supernatural fiction in the story. Lovecraft’s use of such words as “unnamable,” “unmentionable,” “unnamed,” and “nameless” reflect his concern with the perimeters within which language works, and thus the limits of rationality. The conflict between rationality and the supernatural can be resolved “by the way of the ‘unnamable,’”[3] which is, in a sense, the writing of supernatural fiction. This imaginative activity unbinds language and defies the limits of rationality. Lovecraft achieves this by deploying key words to signal where our language fails and our epistemology ends. In the story, reason is not so much argued away (which seems contradictory in any case) but dramatized away.

James Kneale sees the story as exemplifying Lovecraft’s fiction as it explores the “paradox of representing entities, things and places that are beyond representation.”[4] “The Unnamable” specifically attempts to resolve the problem of naming and knowing what is outside of normal experience. But as language is the tool we are trapped in, it illuminates the indeterminacy in using it to represent things or spaces of an undetermined nature. For Kneale, the textual geography of the story performs a key role in illustrating this indeterminacy and the problems of expressing the “unnamable.” The graveyard is a threshold between the known and unknown, and it is the pivotal ground in the plot. Kneale argues that Lovecraft represents thresholds (that is, change) as threats, and that is why monsters arise from them; and, moreover, they represent the essentially reactionary aspect of Lovecraft’s fiction as a struggle against change.

Of course, cemeteries in Lovecraft are at the edge of reality, serving as gateways to horror, opening up tunnels from the past; they are places to surface the unknown, as Maurice Lévy has argued,[5] or as landscapes to reveal evil. But it is not a threshold; it is “a cavernous rift”[6] in the settled experience of things

that this story is getting at. Here the setting is a clue to readers that Lovecraft is engaged in an archaeology of horror fiction. He is mining below the surface of appearances to reveal an artistic response to a metaphysics of chaos. We are "upon the riven tomb by the deserted house" (202) to see what is always before us but ignored, to face the problem of evil.

John P. Langan calls Lovecraft's use of such words as "unnamable" and "nameless" part of his "approximate language" that is essential to his fictional works. Langan focuses on "nameless," which refers to the failure of language to account for something; the nameless is "a blank spot."[7] Our failure to comprehend the truly alien is mirrored by the language in the stories failing to describe the other. According to Langan, Lovecraft writes a "fiction about the attempt to construct knowledge, often crucial knowledge, through language, an attempt that is hindered, often fatally, by lack of adequate linguistic and therefore representational resources."[8] Lovecraft's work is about the failure to attain meaning and, in a sense, the failure of any epistemology. Donald R. Burleson also focuses on "nameless" in his deconstruction of "The Nameless City" (1921). The word "nameless"[9] is also found across Lovecraft's work. For Burleson, "nameless" is a contradictory word, both naming and denying that it names.[10] My intent is to focus on "the unnamable."

In a way both Berruti and Kneale, along with Langan, see the story as confronting epistemological questions, and the use of terminology like "the unnamable" speaks to the limits of human knowledge. This also articulates an anxiety about the impotence of language generally and more particularly the impotence of fiction writing to tell us anything meaningful.[11]

In a letter to Clark Ashton Smith in November 1931, Lovecraft stated he was experimenting with an idea for a new story, that is, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (1931), by "writing it out in different manners, one after the other, in an effort to determine the mood and tempo best suited to the theme."[12] In the same spirit, this chapter is a series of field experiments toward understanding what the unnamable means. That is, I will explore "The Unnamable" from several angles, in a broad sense similar to mixed methods in qualitative research, in order to comprehend the meanings. As a beginning hypothesis, I think the story and the language deployed in the telling of the story, as well as in others, are really all about metaphysical issues in the end. Indeed, a reading of "The Unnamable" is an introduction to the overall fiction of the unnamable in the Lovecraft canon.

Metaphysics is the philosophical enterprise to make sense of the world. It is a search for the fundamental principles of the world. At its core, metaphysics attempts to answer the question: What is? In addition, a core activity is to clarify the ideas or language that we use in our efforts to understand the world and our place in it. In this chapter, it is particularly the challenge to make sense of a world where there is evil. The fictions of Lovecraft seem to be saying that the only metaphysics that makes sense is one founded on dread and the horror of existence. Is the unnamable then shorthand for a metaphysics of dread and nothingness, a philosophy of death and negation—the only way to make sense of our blood-stained time? We live in an absurd universe that is not congruent with Hegel's dictum, "when we look at the world rationally, the world looks rationally back."[13] There is really only irrational silence. The lack of intelligibility of the world is not a failure of epistemology but a failure of any first principles. Everything is fabrication; we have our being in a matrix of falsehoods. The visceral power of Lovecraft's works arises from the way he uses language to illuminate that there are no truths, nothing is as it seems; everything rests on the quicksand of metaphysical incomprehension, highlighting the fear we all experience when such an unintelligible world is revealed. That is because the core of this unintelligibility is, to use an old turn of phrase, the evil in creation.

There are several contrasting and intersecting themes at work in the story: the revivification of the past and its chaos overwhelming the present, the limits of science and the illusion of certainty, the instability of language at its core, and the anarchy with no meaningful metaphysics.

UN-DEFINITION

To begin, what does it mean to say something is unnamable? Surely not that something is simply unnamed, without a name yet, say like K2. Nor that the name is waiting to be discovered, or the name is hidden, or secret or forbidden to be told. In *The Golden Bough* (1890), Sir James George Frazer illustrates the powerful taboos surrounding names and concomitant need to conceal them. "Taboos are applied not only to acts and objects but also to words, and to none more than to names"[14] in many societies. This ban is especially held for the names of sacred kings and priests. Sometimes individuals have two names, one of which is kept secret, as the knowledge of a name may give power to another,

who may bring harm. That is so because in “primitive thought, the name of a person is not merely an appellation but denotes what he is to the world outside of himself.”[15]

In a more imaginative and poetic manner, Robert Graves also explores the power of names and the ancient tradition of secret or unknown names and the danger of revealing names in *The White Goddess* (1948). Graves traces the history of the holy unspeakable name of God. In the Jewish tradition, the name of God is sacred and not to be articulated; the Tetragrammaton is the name for the Hebrew symbols that only represent God’s name.[16] The hidden or unspeakable name of God is directly related to the essentially unknowable nature of God in religious and philosophical contexts. For example, Benedict de Spinoza argues that the ultimate nature of God is unknowable, although for Spinoza the terms God, Nature, and Substance are equivalent. Spinoza was criticized for atheism, even though he was born into a Jewish family that fled to Amsterdam from the Inquisition. He argues that God, or Nature or Substance, is that without which nothing could be, and hence is necessary, and the scope of existence is unknowable.[17]

However, the mystical nature of hidden names or secret names is not what is going on in the story. In the fiction of Lovecraft many narrators are unnamed, suggesting hidden identities for readers, or perhaps the unreliability of the narrators as witnesses to the events of the stories, or the need for a cover because of their knowledge. It is also true that the past casts a shadow over the story. And, to be sure, the past is an element in an aesthetics of dread. Horror art calls up what is buried away, reveals what is hidden, unearths, as the New York police detective Thomas F. Malone finds in “The Horror at Red Hook” (1925), “secrets more terrible than any of the sins.”[18] But the story is not centered on name hiding or name fear, or on the mysteries of religion. This is not to say that these human traditions have nothing to tell us as they speak to the fact that naming (let us say to our and the world’s identity) is caught up within the web of language.

Lovecraft uses the word “unnamable” in several stories. In some it is paired with “unnamed,” which may seem redundant, but the two words do differ in meaning and perhaps together emphasize the impossibility of rational explanation in the presence of the unknown, of the other, of evil, as will be explored in this chapter. I searched a selection of the stories of Lovecraft and found the word used in several. As a first approximation toward understanding this terminology, in the following stories the word is used to indicate the absence

of descriptive power: “The Colour Out of Space” (1927): “breath from regions unnamed and unnameable”;[19] “The Lurking Fear” (1922): “throngs of natives shrieked and whined of the unnamable horror”[20] and “forests of monstrous over-nourished oaks with serpent roots twisting and sucking unnamable juices” (199); “The Rats in the Walls” (1923): “peopled by unnamable fancies”;[21] “The Dunwich Horror” (1928): “deeds of almost unnamable violence and perversity”; [22] “The Crawling Chaos” (1921; with Winifred V. Jackson): “a curse unnamed and unnamable lowering over all”;[23] “Through the Gates of the Silver Key” (1933; with E. Hoffmann Price): “*HE WHO will guide the rash one beyond all the worlds into the Abyss of unnamable devourers*”;[24] *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931): “the responsibility for unnamable and perhaps immeasurable evils”;[25] “The Shadow over Innsmouth” (1931): “unnamable abysses of blackness and alienage”;[26] and one of two instances from *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927): “A stench unnamable now rose up from below,”[27] and one of two from “The Hound” (1922): “held certain unknown and unnamable drawings.”[28]

Another reference in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is more complex, I believe, and adds to a deeper appreciation of the nuances Lovecraft is trying to articulate with such words. The sentence reads:

> 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 unnamable realities behind the protective illusions of common vision. (207)

Although used as an adjective, the complete thought contextualizes the phrase within a perspective of metaphysical incomprehension. A second use in “The Hound”—“I shall seek with my revolver the oblivion which is my only refuge from the unnamed and unnameable”[29]—is as a noun. In “The Hound,” the unnamable seems to be really shorthand for the experience of true dread, the sickness unto death as elucidated by Søren Kierkegaard. It is also interesting to note that the term was used in stories as early as 1922 and as late as 1933, in well-regarded tales and those less well-regarded, and in sole authorships and collaborations. It was embedded in Lovecraft’s lexicon.

“The Unnamable” opens with two friends, Randolph Carter[30] and Joel Manton, “speculating about the unnamable” (201). They are in a graveyard, literally reposing on the past, with the vast hosts of the dead stacked underneath them, at the frontier of life and death, textually digging up the primitive as a form of confronting the unknown or confronting fear or revivifying evil. Interestingly, the miasma arising from the ancient burying ground seems to have a gradual intoxicating effect on the characters and on the language as the story progresses.

The protagonists are part of a tradition of two males on an adventure in American literature, a common theme in mainstream literature and in Lovecraft, who distorts and reframes the theme.[31] But here, this adventure is not in unspoiled nature but in the land of the dead, while arguing about spooks in the dark night. The plot of the story is, in one sense, an urban legend meant to scare Manton into agreeing with Carter’s argument; and it works. When describing the bones and skull he found in the aged house, Carter felt “a real shiver run through Manton, who had moved very near” (206).

Theirs is a debate in isolation and desolation. It is almost as if they inhabit two solitudes early in the story as they debate. And the landscape is one of death. This is because horror fiction is outside of conventionality, in the personal space of its protagonists and its landscapes of experience. Carter and Manton argue as night creeps over them. In the story, Carter tries to convince Manton that the unnamable is genuine:

> Since spirit, in order to cause all the manifestations attributed to it, cannot be limited by any of the laws of matter, why is it extravagant to imagine psychically living dead things in shapes—or absences of shapes—which must for human spectators be utterly and appallingly “unnamable”? “Common sense” in reflecting on these subjects, I assured my friend with some warmth, is merely a stupid absence of imagination and mental flexibility. (202)

They continue their debate in “utter blackness” seemingly under the surveillance “of a tottering, deserted seventeenth-century house” (202). The story is stylized, in part, as notes on an academic debate. Lovecraft deploys a traditional scholarly point-counterpoint argument style at first, but this is transformed into a duel between the “objectification” of the commonsense view and the mythology of horror fiction, manifested through an increasingly baroque

language. Early in the story, Carter says:

> Sensitive students shudder at the Puritan age in Massachusetts. So little is known of what went on beneath the surface—so little, yet such a ghastly festering as it bubbles up putrescently in occasional ghoulish glimpses. . . . And inside that rusted iron straitjacket lurked gibbering hideousness, perversion, and diabolism. Here, truly, was the apotheosis of the unnamable. (203)

Later, Carter exclaims:

> If the psychic emanations of human creatures be grotesque distortions, what coherent representation could express or portray so gibbous and infamous a nebulosity as the specter of a malign, chaotic perversion, itself a morbid blasphemy against nature? Moulded by the dead brain of a hybrid nightmare, would not such a vaporous terror constitute in all loathsome truth the exquisitely, the shriekingly unnamable? (205)

Always, Manton argues as an idealized rationalist, actually as a religious logical positivist. Carter deploys several strategies, including references to Cotton Mather's writing, to a diary of an ancestor, and to his own fiction writing, nearly like citations in a scholarly article; and he also uses his own direct experience with the "bones up under the eaves" (205) of the house. This strategy blurs the distinctions between journalistic or realistic writing and fiction writing. It acts to disrupt or breach the boundary dividing "reporting" from "speculating" on the universe within which we live and have our being.

In the story itself, the word "unnamable" is used nine times. Carter uses it four times, three as a noun, while Manton, when they are arguing, uses it as an adjective, but at the end he uses it as a noun. "The unnamable" is reified, objectified, and Manton has been converted; he is now a believer.

Lovecraft is not alone is using such words or phrases. Edgar Allan Poe says that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1837–38) is "a story of disaster the most unspeakable."[32] It is like violating a terrible taboo, as horror fiction is generally considered to be outside of literary writing in the United States. Poe used the phrase "Tekeli-li!" as a neologism to express unknown horror. Lovecraft followed suit in *At the Mountains of Madness*,[33] a sort of cover of the *Narrative*. In *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), Joseph Conrad uses

similar language as Marlow confronts the horror of darkness at the edge of the unknown, embodied in Kurtz's indulgence in "unspeakable rites"[34] and in Kurtz's "vast grave of unspeakable secrets."[35] In "Mr. Jones" (1928), Edith Wharton writes of the "unspeakable horror"[36] expressed by the eyes of the dead housekeeper, killed by the ghost of Mr. Jones. We are at the boundary of expression and are limited by our language. This has a long history. In *Oedipus Rex* (429 BCE), when blinded Oedipus is led in, his eyes are flowing with blood; Sophocles has the chorus speak but also say that they cannot speak:

> What madness came upon you, what daemon *Leaped on your life with heavier* Punishment than a mortal man can bear? *No: I cannot even* Look at you, poor ruined one. *And I would speak, question, ponder,* If I were able. No. / You make me shudder.[37]

The language of the unnamable is not simply misrepresentation; it is the confrontation with the irrational. And irrational impulses arise in us as we experience the world. Poe in the "Imp of the Perverse" (1845) writes about standing at the edge of an abyss; as we stare down we grow sick but do not run away, and by "slow degrees our sickness and dizziness and horror become merged in a cloud of unnamable feeling."[38] That feeling takes shape as "the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height."[39] This is the urge to death at the critical moment in the experience of the absurdity of the human condition. A similar image is to be found in Lovecraft, Søren Kierkegaard, and Albert Camus.

At least part of the point seems to be that whatever the unnamable is, it is not possible to describe it or place it in a category familiar to human experience. The unnamable cannot be denoted or you cannot link a signifier to such an un-signified. Knowing, in part, is denoting, naming things.[40] In a sense it is grasping the world through categories of language. Ludwig Wittgenstein promulgates: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."[41] But the unnamable is outside of experience. It is unknown; at least, it is not known in the traditional ways of knowing. Noël Carroll argues that the real issue of horror is to "disclose, and manifest that which is . . . unknown and unknowable."[42]

In a way, whatever the thing, experience, or event is, it is not part of our understanding of the world. It is inexpressible, indefinable, infandous.[43] "Infandous" is an archaic term defined as "unspeakable," and according to Roger

B. Salomon, horror literature's essential aim is to "remind us of the unspeakable."[44]

But using synonyms is not really helpful in moving our understanding forward about "the unnamable" as used by Lovecraft. In the story, one of the keys is that the unnamable is used as a noun, not an adjective; it is, in a sense, not a descriptive but the thing, or un-thing, its un-self. Not to name a person, animal, place, thing, or abstract idea, but to unname. Moreover, using the definitive article usually means a noun is a special sort of noun, which normally refers to a shared knowledge or something unique. In the story Lovecraft is illustrating writing fiction, so perhaps the unnamable is a way of stating that the monster in the Gothic and horror tradition is always a textual fabrication, as it must be, but also that all our ways of knowing the world are fabrications because the world is hideous at its core. And this core is mostly kept at a distance by a "slender gulf that is mercifully fixed between . . . [us] and the Outer World."[45]

FOREST AS SYMBOL

The story[46] is a fictional exposition on the writing of horror fiction. It is a fictionalized "In Defense of Dagon" (1921), where Lovecraft argues that weird fiction is imaginative literature, akin to realism in psychology and emotion but different in confronting the unknown and different in evoking fear. In "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" (1933), Lovecraft says his stories "emphasise the element of horror because fear is our deepest and strongest emotion. . . . It is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or 'outsideness' without laying stress on the emotion of fear."[47] In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927), Lovecraft articulates in finer detail this fear when he writes that in an effective weird tale "a certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present," and there should be an expression of "a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space."[48] The story says that artists (here a writer) speak about the unspeakable, arising from an apprehension of the world different from the commonsense view, similar to what Poe writes in "Alone": "I have not seen / as others saw" but am enthralled by "the mystery which binds me still" away from the world of ordinary sight to see things as "of a demon in my view."[49] The story is then a sort of exercise (perhaps a primer) in writing horror

fiction, and the act of writing is art critiquing the accepted norms of understanding, representing, or apprehending the world. Horror writing, at its best, opens a fissure in our customary and comfortable living, to expose fear, to illuminate dread, and to give voice to the repressed, the hidden, and the locked away.

It is a space where few venture directly in their art. Roberto Calasso says that Kafka delimited his work to a "zone of the nameable"[50] because the world was turning back into a primeval forest, full of power, dangers, and apparitions. A world of "absolute atrocity,"[51] as Fielder writes—a world where mass death is nearly commonplace.[52] Kafka, particularly in *The Castle* (1926), describes the human experience within walls, within a perimeter of confusion, away from the dark forest—perhaps the forest where the raven "in the shadow of the silent night, doth shake contagion from her sable wings."[53] It is "the dismal wood"[54] of contagion, as expressed in *Beowulf*. Lovecraft goes far into this "antediluvian forest darkness" ("The Lurking Fear," 190), forest of fear, "nighted woods."[55] This journey into the "primal wood"[56] is not just literal, as "Forests may fall, but not the dusk they shield."[57] It is the force of this nightfall that Lovecraft illustrates.

In "The Great God Pan" (1890), Arthur Machen expresses it this way: "Such forces cannot be named, cannot be spoken, cannot be imagined except under a veil and a symbol, a symbol to the most of us appearing a quaint, poetic fancy, to some a foolish tale."[58] The heart of this is the fear of the vast nothingness all around us, yet which we want to unveil; when we do, it tears apart our perceptions and may drive us mad, as happens to many of Lovecraft's heroes.

The fiction of the unnamable is a trip into this dusk, a dusk of dread—for authentic apprehension of a cosmos of indifference at best, but also a cosmos with malevolence toward humankind, a cosmos of terror, dread, and hideousness. The arguments in the story start with a remark by Carter on "the giant willow in the centre of the cemetery, whose trunk had nearly engulfed an ancient, illegible slab" (200) and whose roots fed on the dead. Manton mocks this remark and the debate is on.

Horror literature, at its apex, is at the nexus of the metaphysical paradox regarding humans' quest for meaning in a "world of atrocity" and only finding displacement and the feebleness of any and all principles of comprehension constructed by us about the world. And the forest is both a metaphor of the

experience of otherness and descriptive of an actual experience of an individual in a real woods, away from the battlements of home. Both uses suggest uncharted territory, a place where it only makes sense to say, “Here there be dragons.”

In his best fiction, Lovecraft evokes that feeling of being in the woods alone, as related by Steve Duffy,[59] away from civilization, where panic grips one, where there are only dark spaces, where the evil breathes. It is where you may be “caught by the goblin touch of the willows.”[60] And this space is located geographically and psychologically, as when the Nurse in Robinson Jeffers’s adaptation of Medea dreads “where . . . evil stalks in the forest of her dark mind.”[61] Later in the play evil is sighted “through the dark wood . . . at the end of the tangled forest.”[62]

Carter and Manton argue in the dark, on a tomb, watched over by a tree and in the shade of a crumbling vestige of civilization, the deserted seventeenth-century house—a house that appears early in the story and returns later as a portent of the appearance of the unnamable. The house models in a way the emptiness of the arguments of science and religion and the monsters in our heads. There are things in our minds that we do not know. In Lovecraft, houses are almost always dangerous. Houses are desecrated, unholy, desolate, full of old festering sin and death. It is a place not for comfort or protection but for defilement. Here it is vacant of human life; it is the past that we think is dead, but sinister things persist. Homes are not safe from the woods. A house is a symbol of the past, of the forgotten past, of the loss of memory and impossibility of burying the monstrous, even in our heads. It also represents the intellect of humans, an intellect that in the end is empty, aside from the monstrous deeds of our ancestors. And the beasts infect every floor from basement to attic, representing the depravity in all spheres of the mind. Everything is in chaos, in disorder. Our reason produces monsters as dramatized in the film *Forbidden Planet* (1956).[63]

THE ETERNAL RETURN OF THE PAST

The story illustrates a longing for the past, perhaps a longing for death, perhaps for a dead lover. Yet it also seems to say that such an act only results in guilt and shame as the protagonists must be punished. This story, along with others in the Lovecraft canon, connects us “face to face with the ancient world of terror and

devotion”[64] as expressed by Albert Camus in “On the Future of Tragedy” (1955). Revenants of the past come through the fissure because “beneath the ruination . . . of older powers is really a deathly chaos”[65] —a chaos where it makes no sense to name and where there are no identities. This is a worldview reviled by science—yet a world that we still inhabit. It is a dangerous world as the heroes of the story discover, a world of terror and revulsion and contagion: the closer we get to it the more likely we are to be infected, especially morally.

As Carter remarks of the “unmentionable nourishment which the colossal roots [of the willow] must be sucking in from the charnel earth” (200) in the cemetery, so the roots of horror are nourished by a nostalgia for the haunted past, the archaic and atavistic that continue to trouble us. There is a mood of longing for the past by Carter, perhaps best expressed in “The Silver Key” (1926), where he knows “he must go into the past and merge himself with old things.”[66] The ancient lore is not dead yet: it still hints at the malignant powers surrounding us and shut away in our attics but yet alive and ready to feast on our fears. In Lovecraft, the monsters harken back to the pagan gods of myth who, as Karen Armstrong writes, brought pain, sorrow, and death. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, upon the discovery of Old Ones found in the ice, the scientist Lake notes: “Important discovery . . . found monstrous barrel-shaped fossil of wholly unknown nature. . . . Arrangement reminds one of certain monsters of primal myth, especially fabled Elder Things in *Necronomicon*” (20). These fossils return to life and bring death to those who unearthed them. So the return of the past, the primitive, is code for unexplainable evil.

During the argument, Carter delves into the psychic underworld to drag out of the past facts that science and religion now shun. He is a journalist of the haunting, indeed the possession, of the present by the past. The past is populated by the dead and is an arena of dread. It is where everything is corrupted and vestigial—a locale of unspeakable acts in the darkness of memory. For Lovecraft, “The past is *real*—it is *all there is*.”[67] This is not a salutary past, as it holds a “shocking and primordial tradition” with “ceremonies older than mankind.”[68] Part of the aesthetic expressed in the story is an aesthetic of passivity in the rapture of the past, and it is also an aesthetic of a heroic struggle to express the monstrous fear and darkness that envelops us from the past and elsewhere. Out of the vast camps of loneliness, destruction, and atrocity that define our world, part of the character of Carter tries to express the consuming howl of anguish of past generations along with the awful power of that howl to

capture us and hold us fast. Through the adoration of the past his "soul has become a ruin."[69]

SCIENCE AND ART

Writing a story is not a science; it is "to relate events without analysing causes."[70] There is no formula for art in fiction, although there are formulaic writers and formulaic stories, which are entertainments and divert attention from the imperative to express the unnamable.

Science and progress are not unequivocal; the unnamable "undermines ordered notions of civilized humanity and rational progress."[71] The common sense of order is not completed and assured. In fact, horror is everywhere and horror fiction, at its best, is meant to bare these facts, which are concealed. The language used in this hopeless endeavor must necessarily be twisted and bizarre. Maurice Lévy noted that the "unintelligible is necessary hideous."[72] The unnamable is, in a sense, a "psychic intervention," as described by E. R. Dodds, when consciousness is disturbed and jolted out of normality, as Agamemnon was by "Erinys who walks in darkness."[73] It is a force that impels behavior and actions and comes from outside conventional human experience. In a sense, it is the inevitable intrusion of the irrational in our experience. This is the world within which we live, a world of fear and trembling that we often ignore or shun. This necessitates inverting the norms of the aesthetics of beauty. As with Albert Camus, Lovecraft might say, "Beauty is unbearable, drives us to despair, offering us for a minute the glimpse of an eternity that we should like to stretch out over the whole time."[74] Lovecraft says that "My reason for writing stories is to give myself the satisfaction of visualising . . . impressions of wonder, beauty and adventurous expectancy."[75] And fear sometimes becomes "so mixed with wonder and alluring grotesqueness, that it was almost a pleasant sensation" ("The Lurking Fear" 195). In the end the beautiful is awful. Camus admits that "At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise . . . that denseness and that strangeness of the world is absurd."[76] To write horror fiction is to display that strangeness, which is often hideous.

The story interrogates science and religion (although religion virtually only in passing) on their claims as the true ways of knowledge. Lovecraft compares

and contrasts art and science as ways of understanding the world. Supposedly, science is the exemplar of truth, with its rigorous methodology, instrumentality, and its defined language, while writing (and art generally) is "lowly" (200).[77] The tale speaks to the limits and distortions of scientific knowledge but also about the dangers of artistically venturing into the unknown, of venturing to the frontier of the unknown, that is, of being conscious of the world of dread—of awakening the destructive force that erodes our normalized awareness, and that leads to self-destruction as a normalized response, which is what happens to many of Lovecraft's heroes.

Moreover, in doing this Lovecraft illuminates the horror of modern times and elucidates "a poetics of annihilation and nullity,"[78] as expressed by Salomon. It is an aesthetic of dread that embraces hideousness, for beauty is not rapture but agony, and an aesthetic that, in the end, embraces evil as a necessary fact of human existence in an absurd world.

The story plays off a theme of Edgar Allan Poe, expressed most concisely in the poem "Sonnet—To Science." In this poem, Poe does not so much mock science as describe its usefulness and its limits. It has demolished the old gods, any gods really, and cleansed the mind of the folly of silly "summer dreams" in the arms of loving gods. Science helps us grow up, but it is not the truth as it "alterest all things with . . . peering eyes."[79] It misrepresents. Poe contrasts the magic of his words and his imaginary worlds with the barren, "dull realities" of the world of science. A true artist casts aside any interest in the findings of science and, as Richard Wilbur suggests, constructs "visionary gropings towards imaginary realms."[80] Poe accepts and glories in the fact that the artist has been driven deep into the past or to "some happier star."[81]

Lovecraft did not dismiss science but expressed similar sentiments about the power of aesthetics. Indeed, perhaps his fiction enshrines a counter-myth to the narrow view of logico-empiricism about the world and our experience in it. His use of language exemplifies this—especially in his evocative descriptions of the unknown where the language itself seems to come alive as bizarre and ugly. The story challenges the stance that science is the only truth about the human experience of nature. Imaginative literature is a way of knowing or describing the world, scientific inquiry is another. Aesthetics is as significant and as meaningful as scientific methodology.[82] This story is about the dangerous fissures between the rational and the irrational and the role of art in moving us through into the perilous wilderness beyond. It is not just that scientific

explanation is not the only way of apprehending the world; there is also artistic imagination. But it is that any authentic apprehension of the world necessarily is full of dread.

In “Facts concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” (1921), Lovecraft paints a violent perspective:

> Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer daemoniacal hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold more hideous. Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species—if separate species we be—for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world. If we knew what we are, we should do as Sir Arthur Jermyn did; and Arthur Jermyn soaked himself in oil and set fire to his clothing one night.[83]

Jermyn’s suicide is of a particularly gruesome kind.

Camus says: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.”[84] For Camus, an unintelligible world empty of eternal truths or values is still worth enduring even in the face of an awareness of nothingness. “A world which can be explained, even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger.”[85] It is the clear bracing air of awareness of the indifferent universe within which we live. Yet, for Camus, it does not lead to the negation of life but to an affirmation of living in revolt while not masking our absurd condition, our world without hope. Matthew Hamilton Bowker argues that “the philosophy of the absurd offers both a grounding for moral and political thinking and an appeal for a unique kind of psychological, moral, and political maturity.”[86] This is right, but for Bowker the absurd is a psychological experience that demands a morally mature response, and this is what Camus meant. I think that the absurd for Camus is more than a psychological state; it does demand a moral response, but it is a response to humans’ metaphysical condition in the universe. Camus experienced the absurd in a real, visceral manner, not in the abstract. The moral response is only real in action, not just in words.

THE UNREADABLE

In the story the phrase “illegible slab” (200, 205) is used twice to suggest the flip side of the unnamable. That is, a corollary of texts addressing the unnamable is that they should be forbidden, banned, unread. Or they are unreadable, as of the book Poe says “that does not permit itself to be read,”[87] which Lovecraft quotes in “The Horror at Red Hook.” On a deeper level it may be that true horror cuts off language, obliterates thinking, and ends witnessing. The use of phrases like “unnamable,” “inexpressible,” and “unmentionable” signals that there are experiences beyond our human ability to endure, comprehend, perhaps even imagine.

In attempting to understand the relation between Hebrew literature and the *Shoah*, Gershon Shaked asked, almost despairingly: “What is, therefore, the way writers choose to express the fundamentally indescribable?”[88] Witness writers of the Holocaust like Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi lived the true horror of the twentieth century. They faced the real evil and wrote about it. The first version of Wiesel’s *Night* (1960) was written in Yiddish as *Und di Velt Hot Geshvign* (1955), which translates as *And the World Remained Silent*. *Night* is a book of moral honesty about a time of the complete failure of all values, including the terrible silence that fell across the world about the Nazis and their engineering of the Holocaust.

But perhaps, in times of such personal and community horror, words work to kill memory, as W. G. Sebald argues in *On the Natural History of Destruction* (1999).[89] In the face of horror, there is a conspiracy of silence; we are mute, terrified, like stone. Of course, we want to escape with our wits intact. Some events, experiences, things are too disturbing. What is the authenticity of an experience when words fail because of its terror? How can the truly terrible be expressed, even be stored in our heads, without madness? Does survival depend on forgetting, as Sebald wonders, or is his argument merely a cover-up or an excuse for silence by perpetrators after so many victims have been brutally silenced? However, Daniel R. Schwarz, writing about Holocaust narratives, says: “Were the victims to remain numb and mute, they would remain *material* without soul as well as participate in an amnesia that protected the culprits.”[90] Lovecraft writes of “that chief of torments—inarticulateness.”[91]

The fiction of the unnamable is saying that in art there must be a revealing of the hideous, even when we want to look away. That is why so many of

Lovecraft's stories are filled with references to virtually unreadable texts. The silent cosmos is unreadable, yet we are impelled to read. The use of the unnamable expresses the paradox that there are some things and experiences beyond expression but yet which we must talk about. The best in horror fiction goes where to speak is to be in danger, to be with the alien; where to be articulate is to be a stranger, shunned by society, to be outside the norms of society away from established ways of getting around the world, away from common sense. Manton in the story represents the commonplace with which the world abounds. Carter speaks about the extremes of otherness—an otherness that surrounds us and comes from inside and outside. The point of his argument is, in part, not to be silenced about that world, which is different from the ordinary world of everyday experience.

Conventional arguments speak from a view of the world that "behold[s], without perceiving."[92] And Manton's critical argument is: "even the most morbid perversion of Nature need not be *unnamable* or scientifically indescribable" (205). At this point, Carter does not argue logically; rather, his endgame is to unleash florid language about "monstrous apparitions more frightful than anything organic could be; apparitions of gigantic bestial forms sometimes visible and sometimes only tangible, which floated about on moonless nights and haunted the old house, the crypt behind it, and the grave where a sapling had sprouted beside an illegible slab" (205). And Carter now reveals that the nearby house is the locus of the beast and where he had found the disturbing bones.

Manton's argument is founded on logico-positivism, a school of philosophical thought modeled after scientific inquiry, or so believed by its adherents, who wanted to have a philosophy like a science. For logical positivists, statements are only meaningful if they are verifiable. Statements are verifiable in two ways. There are empirical statements, including scientific theories, that are verified by experiment and evidence; and there are analytic truths, statements that are true or false by definition. But even science is circumscribed by our confrontation with the world through the perception of appearances and our inability to know what is really behind those appearances, except by conjecture. In a sense we are captives of appearances. Logical positivists thought that the scientific method was the only way of knowledge and the only true way of apprehending the world. This was how to make the world intelligible. This is still true of a core of modern analytical philosophy. This viewpoint is expressed by Manton, except that he also believes in the word of

God as expressing the truth about the world.

Wittgenstein writes, “What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence.”[93] So ended the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922). Wittgenstein recognizes here the vast unnamable and urges that we must be silent even though there is a world beyond our current powers of expression. He is arguing for the inadequacy of language and the irrationality of going beyond it.

Marlowe has Faustus express the power of words to reveal too much, when he says, “Be silent, then, for danger is in words.”[94] If we say too much, perhaps the real power of darkness will be unleashed, as happens in “The Unnamable” when Manton’s “odd cry” (206) is answered horribly. This may be the other side of Wittgenstein’s admonition. If we venture too far away from ordinary discourse, we will discover things or have experiences that will destroy us. And once experienced we are forever changed. This break between speaking out and keeping quiet is the fissure we must go through to overcome our fear. It is the crack, from an aesthetic perspective, that must be penetrated to achieve the expression of the unnamable, to reveal that which is buried, ignored, shamefaced.

The story relies upon old tales, “spectral legends” (205), myths to move the action forward, a strategy used by Lovecraft in other stories. Karen Armstrong says that myth “looks into the heart of a great silence.”[95] The so-called Cthulhu Mythos reflects the interconnections of several of Lovecraft’s stories, which seem to arise from a common font of anxiety or reflect an attempt to speak to a deep despair and unconscious chaos. Myth is a way to persist in the inscrutable, silent world.

The aesthetic imperative to overcome silence is also a task in mainstream literature, as the unnamed hero in Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable* (1953) enters the same space: “I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak.” He “is obliged to speak . . . never be silent. Never.”[96] As readers we are not sure in that novel who or what is speaking and what the narrator is speaking about, and whether to believe anything because all that is said can “be invalidated as uttered, sooner or later.”[97] This is the condition of the unnamable. As with the Lovecraft story, there is an attempt to find grounding outside language, to go beyond our normalized experience conditioned by state, religion, family, and culture.

But what is beyond our accepted or customary ways of speaking, writing, or representing experience? It does not seem to make any sense. Language is our

conscious means of understanding the world, even as it reveals and distorts things. Words are normally the carriers of meaning, but in this story words are distorting; in the end, are they empty of significance? But silence is anathema; we must not be like Cotton Mather, who did not tell all: “Perhaps he did not know. Or perhaps he knew but did not dare to tell. Others knew, but did not dare to tell” (204). In *At the Mountains of Madness* the narrator declares, “I am forced into speech because men of science have refused to follow my advice without knowing why” (3). But his partner refuses to witness all: “Danforth is closer mouthed than I: for he saw, or thinks he saw, one thing he will not tell even me” (33).

The conclusion of “The Unnamable” calls up the other, the disfigured one, the dead one, to evoke expression; or rather, the unnamable itself attempts to speak at the end. Manton is found with “two malignant wounds in the chest and less severe cuts or gougings in the back” (207). Carter “was covered with welts and contusions of the most bewildering character” (207). This is the unnamable, itself, attempting to verbalize, leaving a message, but it is illegible, unreadable, illustrating the instability of all texts, of all understanding, of all metaphysics. What we are supposed not to speak about are the most important things, as even Wittgenstein came to believe later in his life.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The traditional problem of evil is how evil can exist in a world created by an all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God; simply, how can God allow evil? Even in this world of contingency, how can evil be reconciled with God? Much has been written on this matter, and many have attempted to reconcile a God with evil through arguments about free will or this being the best of all possible worlds. These are attempts to overcome the problem through reason; others simply rely on faith. The arguments based on reason seem to have been demolished by David Hume, especially in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, published in 1779, three years after his death. But even in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1748, he notes all the hard work we do “to save the honour of the gods; while we must acknowledge the reality of that evil and disorder, with which the world so much abounds.”[98] And the real issue is that reason itself seems not only impotent but “in pain” in the face of evil.[99] Acknowledging the fact of evil, in the precise manner of Hume, results

in realizing that we cannot simply explain it away.

For purposes of clarification, let us say that evil as a noun means something like undeserved harm, or a wicked or morally wrong act or thing or event, or a force that governs and brings about wickedness. For Mary Midgley, the problem of evil is a human problem and "wickedness" means "intentionally doing acts that are wrong."[100] Susan Neiman says the problem of evil is really about the intelligibility of nature. It goes to our ability to understand the cosmos and ourselves. She argues that the fact of evil works to freeze our attempts to make sense of the world, that is, to make sense of our place in the world; yet it is also the key to understanding.

In the grand tradition, philosophy's purpose was to make sense of the world. And Neiman argues that the problem of evil is the driving force of philosophical inquiry. It might be helpful to review Leibniz's distinctions of evil.[101] Natural evil is like a hurricane that causes widespread suffering, destruction, and death. Moral evil is sin against God, according to Leibniz, but from a secular point of view it is a deed or act or failure to act that causes undeserved harm. Then there is metaphysical evil, the imperfection of creation that infects everything. Ari Hirvonen argues that the problem of evil must be disconnected from religion: "from the perspective and standpoint of our own time, we have to start again and again to deconstruct evil, to take responsibility for the problem of evil, and to be sensitive to new forms of the phenomena of evil."[102] The terrors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are the driving force for Hirvonen's argument for a secular rethinking of evil, with humans at the center of evil. He says evil must be brought back into law. It is not a theological matter but a human matter for response even in a world of metaphysical chaos.

There are some events so horrible that all would call them evil, such as the Holocaust. Such a hideous thing can only be called evil. How does such an organized, almost industrialized, evil killing for the sake of complete annihilation make any sense? David B. Levy notes Emil Fackenheim's assertion that it can be nothing but radical evil when children were thrown into the ovens alive to save money on Zyklon-B gas, and their screams could be heard echoing throughout the death camps.[103] How do we make sense of a human world of such irreducible horror, rationally planned, executed, and recorded? Kant writes of a natural propensity to evil, which he calls a radical innate evil in human nature. He says: "This evil is radical, because it corrupts the grounds of all maxims; it is, moreover, as a natural propensity, inextirpable by human powers, since extirpation could occur only through good maxims, and can not take place

when the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims is postulated as corrupt."[104] This means that there is an evil that is a natural predisposition in humans, and Kant believed that this was brought upon humans by themselves, as they are free. The word "radical" signifies that we are "corrupted"[105] fundamentally and there is a "foul taint in our race."[106] Although perhaps not the standard interpretation of Kant's notion, this speaks to the contagion or infection of evil that affects humans and that seemingly is a part of nature. Does this help us understand how supposedly ordinary people become torturers and mass murderers, committing heinous crimes, engaging in hideous cruelty and atrocities? The suffering of the innocent conforms to no logic.[107] Modern times, indeed, perhaps all times, have been evil times.

We are near a disturbing aspect of Lovecraft's work in horror. Fiedler wrote that literary criticism is "an act of total moral engagement."[108] It is obvious that what one tries to say about literature arises from one's own experience in a particular time. And the truth of what one writes is mirrored by one's personal authenticity and commitment to understanding the texts one reads. There is something offensive in many of Lovecraft's stories; not the raw, grating, baroque style, not the sometimes loose plots and the over-the-top monsters. It is the elitism, the overt racism, the social reactionary-ism,[109] and the fascination with fascism (especially the linkage between anti-democratic political systems and racism) that infects some of the fiction and that is clear in his letters and other writings. The elitism is reflected in even minor comments such as Lovecraft writing that his paternal side is of "unmixed English gentry."[110]

In "The Shadow Out of Time" (1934–35), the political system of the four divisions of the Great Race is described as "a sort of fascistic socialism, with major resources rationally distributed, and power delegated to a small governing board elected by the votes of all able to pass certain educational and psychological tests."[111] This is an echo of "Some Repetitions on the Times" (1933), where Lovecraft argues that a fascistic, non-democratic government would be best for the United States for economic recovery during the 1930s.

There is a fetish for the Nordic and the superiority of a certain class of people.[112] Lovecraft expresses support for the actions of Mussolini[113] and even writes favorably about Hitler in a letter dated September 23, 1933, to J. Vernon Shea. In the letter he refers to the "rabble-catering equalitarian columnists of the Jew-York papers."[114] Adolf Hitler became chancellor on January 30, 1933. The Reichstag building was burned on February 27, 1933, and

on February 28 the German government suspended basic rights. In March the Nazi-controlled Reichstag passed the Enabling Act, which, combined with the suspension of freedoms as a result of the Reichstag fire, made Hitler's government into a dictatorship. In April, Hitler's boycott of Jewish shops was proclaimed. Lovecraft's entire letter (and others) is filled with racial slurs, directed at blacks[115] and Jews mostly, and expressions of support for the actions of Hitler and admiration for the German people in supporting him. Joshi[116] argues that Lovecraft's expressions of support modified over time and that his attitude toward fascism was not of the Nazi type. In a letter to Robert E. Howard in 1936, Lovecraft does say that "the most repellent and exasperating of the great powers are Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany,"[117] although he goes on to say that these countries had many points of superiority. It seems clear that Lovecraft's examples of fascism are governments led by an elite, who are in some sense superior to others, and the state is nationalistic with a strong unity of control and development (with economic and social regimentation) and with individuals subordinated to the state. Although the governmental system of the Old Ones in *At the Mountains of Madness* is called socialism, the culture is founded upon an underclass of slaves.

Lovecraft's racism has been self-documented in his fiction and in his letters. Michael Houellebecq argues that Lovecraft's power arises in part from racism, which can be found in such stories as "The Shadow over Innsmouth," "The Horror at Red Hook," "He," and "Herbert West—Reanimator,"[118] not to mention his letters, which Houellebecq quotes with relish, such as the vile letter to Frank Belknap Long, wherein Lovecraft writes about the inhabitants of New York slums:

> The organic things—Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid—inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth's corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities.[119]

Houellebecq goes on to assert that the works of Lovecraft proclaim the "universal presence of evil."[120] Indeed, they insist that "life is itself evil."[121]

Lovecraft throws lit gasoline on the problem of evil. The barrage of

calamities, of senseless sorrow, of atrocity, of continuous violence that engulfs humans and is perpetuated by humans, is in his stories just a fact and simply that. Predominantly, there is no hidden thing that will survive and prosper; no hope of escape; rather, the hidden thing, if there is one, is even more monstrous and destructive. The visceral, raw power of Lovecraft's best work arises from the reader colliding with metaphysical evil—that is, whether the world is truly intelligible, worth living in, surrounded as we are by endless cruelty and atrocity, for that is the core of the problem of evil.

TWO FACES OF MANTON

The action in the graveyard may be understood as an initiation rite of Joel Manton: defilement is necessary to go through the fissure; experiencing the unnamable is to expose oneself to the unholy. Manton, who has been subject to sleep deprivation, incessant interrogation, and shock, finally collapses and "actually cried out with a sort of gulping gasp" (206), as if waterboarded. Afterwards, Manton is changed; he has lost his identity and becomes someone else. His words are like blasphemies, like chants from a savage time. It is the return of the primitive similar to Malone's contemplations in Red Hook:

> that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances; and he had often viewed with an anthropologist's shudder the chanting, cursing processions of blear-eyed and pockmarked young men which wound their way along in the dark small hours of morning . . . he seemed to see in them some monstrous thread of secret continuity; some fiendish, cryptical, and ancient pattern utterly beyond and below the sordid mass of facts and habits and haunts.[122]

This theme is explored in several stories and is explicit in "The Rats in the Walls," where the civilized American regresses to cannibalism. As expressed in "The Horror at Red Hook," Carter has lured Manton to where "the beast is omnipresent and triumphant."[123]

In the beginning of the story Manton is vigorous and active. At the end he is passive in the face of horror. It is like a paralysis induced by Carter. Menaced, Manton submits; he now accepts the propagandistic story line of Carter. The language used by Carter is meant to distort reality, disrupt thinking, and convert.

It works. In a way, Manton gives in to the forces of oppression; the terror world wins, and it is as if fascism marches triumphant.

Of the real nature of the final defilement there must be silence or lies; that is why Manton (who now has the mark of the beast or bears the scars of torture or is an unreadable text) ends the story with a story about a bull. The witness here lies to the world as if it is a story that is ineffable, that should not be told. It is like another story made up for reporting to the masses while the truth is buried. Or is this really just false witnessing? Or is all "bull"? That is, bullshit, horror writing is just nonsense. Lovecraft does have a sense of humor.

The unnamable is the instability of any apprehension of the world, including art rooted in our fears. The unnamable speaks about the "beyondness" of certain experiences of "utter remoteness, separation, desolation, and aeon long death" (*At the Mountains of Madness*, 29). It is a confrontation with the abnormal that disrupts our comfort with the everyday accepted ways of ignoring the vastness of the nothingness within which we live. Speaking of the unnamable is an attempt to contextualize the problem of the human response to the fact of evil. Part of the context is the absurd experience of the indifferent world, but also it is the reality of humankind's steel savagery of bullets, bombs, and torture, where science and technology are used to engineer malevolence.

Hannah Arendt compares evil to a fungus or an infection that has no intentions but may work according to some unknown law of nature.[124] This is the metaphysics of evil of the unnamable. Metaphysics states what we hold to be self-evident and even possible; it is the foundation of our understanding of the world. It is the fundamental principles of our worldview that are not themselves explained. The metaphysics of "the unnamable" is disorder as the norm; the world is a "blasted heath"[125] as described in "The Colour Out of Space."

Within this world of dread and despair, there is no salvation in a Lovecraftian universe. We are separate from and meaningless in the universe. Within such an absurd environment, Kierkegaard believes the only overcoming is by a leap to faith founded on belief that only a God makes sense in an awful universe, because we have within us a vision of the truly beautiful and beneficent. Kierkegaard argues that the absurd is that which is contradictory to reason itself, but resignation and belief will deliver an individual to God. For him, this makes faith courageous in a world of uncertainty, a world that is unknowable. Rationality and logic have gaping holes and fail to account for our experience in the world. The leap to faith is over a chasm of uncertainty, and the flight is propelled by fear and trembling over the bottomless void.

For Camus, the condition of humans is also absurd; we live in solitude and separation. Our unattainable desire for a communion with and in nature results in the sense of the absurd, which is heightened by our glimpses of beauty. Simply, the absurd is the human condition. There is no religious salvation in Camus, but humans rebel and persist without hope within the danger zone. "The danger . . . lies in the subtle instant that precedes the leap. Being able to remain on that dizzying crest—that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge."[126] Camus repudiates Kierkegaard's religious leap. The authentic act of humans is to be aware of the absurd and yet not accept a false god and not commit suicide. Camus links this absurd rebellion to creativity and the creative process. For him, "art is the activity that exalts and denies simultaneously. . . . Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world."[127]

Samuel Beckett ended *The Unnamable* with, "I can't go on, I'll go on."[128] It is persistence in the face of nothingness, and it is akin to writing your name on the walls of time, knowing they will erode and vanish. This seems true of Lovecraft himself, for, as Lévy writes, he was "a man without hope."[129]

Of course, there is no hope in a Lovecraftian universe. In "The Call of Cthulhu" Thurston says, "I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me."[130] This is the bitter taste of beauty overthrown. Lovecraft's characterization of the danger zone, of being poised on the perilous crest of life, is different from Kierkegaard's and Camus's. In a number of stories the characters choose death; none seem to choose religion. Moreover, the fiction implies that there is nothing in common human resistance or rebellion, or fellow-feeling or community solidarity. In the fiction of the unnamable, "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" ("The Lurking Fear," 195).

THE PIT—THE MAELSTROM—THE ULTIMATE ABOMINATION

At the end of "The Unnamable," Manton exclaims: "It was the pit—the maelstrom—the ultimate abomination. Carter, it was the unnamable!" (207). Here, Lovecraft pays homage to his master, Poe; the references to "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1841) and "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841) are clear. But

why these two stories? Both of them take their narrators to the brink of death in an abyss. In these stories the narrators initially react rationally to the chaos within which they find themselves, by measuring the dungeon and timing the maelstrom; this is akin to Manton's initial response to Carter's speculations. Then they realize they are in an irrational world, but the bedlam appears wonderful; for example, the unnamed narrator sees the descending blade "somewhat in fear, but more in wonder."[131] Gerard M. Sweeney argues this is the first step toward salvation, but really deliverance is only possible by entering or embracing the horror event. The sailor in "The Descent into the Maelström" throws himself into the water, embracing the chaos, entering the abyss. And the prisoner of "The Pit and the Pendulum" escapes the blade by embracing "the irrationality and absurdity of the dungeon-world, by inviting the rats to his ropes and his lips."[132] It is by recognizing and acknowledging the irrational that one becomes free. But there is a difference between the stories. The pit is a monstrous torture chamber created by humans. The gigantic whirlpool exemplifies the essential irrationality of our experience in nature. The sailor/narrator realizes the futility of any attempt to define it. Sweeney points this out, noting that the sailor concludes his naming of the surrounding islands with: "These are the true names of the places—but why it has been thought necessary to name them at all, is more than either you or I can understand."[133] This is the absurdity of naming and reflects the powerlessness of our language in the face of the anarchic and baleful power of the world.

The first word of the final phrase "ultimate abomination" may also arise from Poe. In "The Pit and the Pendulum" the narrator says the pit is "typical of hell, and regarded by rumor as the Ultima Thule of all their [Spanish Inquisition] punishments."[134] That is, it is final realization or epitome of delivering pain and terror. The phrase is also found in "Dream-Land":

> By a route obscure and lonely,
> Haunted by ill angels only,
> Where an Eidolon, named NIGHT,
> On a black throne reigns upright,
> I have reached these lands but newly
> From an ultimate dim Thule—
> From a wild clime that lieth, sublime,
> Out of SPACE—out of TIME.[135]

Ultima Thule is thought of as the extreme limit of discovery and sometimes as an ultimate ideal or exemplar; Thule was the northernmost limit of exploration. Clearly this poem influenced Lovecraft, as he uses the final words in two important stories; his admiration for Poe runs deep. So perhaps the final phrase is saying that at the limit of rationality we encounter the abomination.

The word "abomination" is derived from the Latin *abominatus*, past participle of *abominari*, which means to denounce as an ill omen. "Abomination" signifies something that is exceptionally loathsome, hateful, vile, or wicked. It is something that should be avoided; perhaps it is taboo as it spreads pollution or is contagious, and it should not be touched. It is a source of dread. It is evil. In "The Lurking Fear," the narrator, again in a sinister house, upon seeing the shadow of the "death-demon," can only describe it as "a blasphemous abnormality from hell's nethermost craters; a nameless, shapeless abomination which no mind could fully grasp and no pen even partly describe" (184).

The three phrases are fossil traces in the Lovecraftian fiction of the unnamable about three types of evil: natural evil, so called by humans, for natural events or things, such as a maelstrom that causes destruction and death; moral evil or human wickedness against humans, such as the pit of inquisitorial cruelty and death; and the overwhelming evil that seems to infect everything in the world we experience, ultimate metaphysical incomprehension.

Lovecraft uses these images in other stories. The pit is best exemplified in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. Dr. Willett explores the "black pit" (201) beneath the old bungalow of Joseph Curwen. This is a story of the possessive power of the past, the revivification of the dead, the allure of torture, and the glorification of a deathly chaos. Joseph Curwen rediscovered an ancient process to bring the dead back using their decomposed remains. He then tortured and killed them, perhaps repeatedly. The force of evil is forever. In exploring the vile underground chambers, Dr. Willett witnesses the harrowing outcomes of Curwen's experiments. The dungeon is like a Nazi prison. Surveying a vast open space, Dr. Willett spies "a large carved altar" and turns away from the "dark stains which discoloured the upper surface and had spread down the sides in occasional thin lines" (205–6). Casting a flashlight on the distant wall, he sees it is "perforated by occasional black doorways and indented by a myriad of shallow cells with iron gratings and wrist and ankle bonds on chains fastened to the stone of the concave rear masonry" (206). The whole subterranean abyss sounds of wailing, yelps, and screams, and is filled with "a stench unnamable"

(206). Narrow cylindrical cells are sunk deeply down below the slimy stone floor. Within the shafts, Dr. Willett sees something that could only be hinted at: “unnamable realities behind the protective illusions of common vision” (207). This is the environment of evil brought back from the past, built by humans where identity is erased, and suffering and cruelty are everlasting. Unlike Poe’s pit, there is no real escape for the inmates from Lovecraft’s pit.

In “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1932), Walter Gilman is sucked into an abyss of evil. “On the morning of the twenty-ninth Gilman awaked into a maelstrom of horror.”[136] The witch house is another dangerous house located in Arkham. Gilman’s room in the house has odd dimensions and appears to be geometrically awry, with its slanting wall and ceiling. The horror arises from the realization of the import of the muddy marks in his room as evidence that Gilman’s dream—where he joins the ancient witch Keziah Mason and her rat-bodied, human-faced companion Brown Jenkin in the kidnapping of a child—is real. Gilman dreams that he stops Keziah from killing the child but does not save the child from Brown Jenkin. But he does not escape as the sailor narrator does in Poe’s story. Later Gilman is found dead in his room. Keziah returns from the past and shows the horror delivered by the “Sheeted Memories of the Past.”[137] There is no salvation from the maelstrom in Lovecraft.

“The Colour Out of Space” (1927) is a story from the view of yet another unnamed narrator, a surveyor for a new reservoir, who finds the “blasted heath,” a wasteland. It is a zone of death where a prosperous farm once existed, run by the Gardner family. The story is a sinister retelling of the Gawain Grail legend. The sickness of Nahum Gardner is a reshaping of the sickness of the Fisher King, and this has spread to the land. It is an area of complete desolation and nothing lives. The king is now dead and the surveyor is like Gawain, who Jessie L. Weston says came to “restore the waters”[138] and bring the land back to life, although in Lovecraft’s tale it is to flood the area. To end the waste of the land in the original Gawain legend, it is critical to ask the right questions. The surveyor also asks about the wasteland. He is told that a mysterious presence or color from the meteorite seemingly had infected the family, leading to illness, insanity, and horror. The presence spreads across the property, killing all living things. It is like a “maelstrom of horror,” a natural contagion that comes out of space and may or may not be a conscious alien. The presence appears to be unknowable, another manifestation of the unnamable. From the story it does not seem to have any intentionality; it is like a blind infection. It is like Arendt’s image of evil as a fungus. In this story, Lovecraft writes a tale that dramatizes this sense of evil, an

evil that sucks all life away.

The real meaning of abomination is expressed in *At the Mountains of Madness*. This story evokes a vast feeling of existential despair and loneliness. Reading the story is like experiencing a deep loss; this mood is pervasive. The survivors of the Miskatonic expedition are bewildered as they explore the cold desolation, the odd geography, and sense terror everywhere. They are in an alien landscape beyond the edge of the known world. The story tells of the brutal slaughter of expedition members by the Old Ones dug up from the ice,[139] and the strange city built by the Old Ones, which has long been abandoned but is still plagued by monsters. Beyond the mountains, the ultimate evil strikes Danforth dumb when he sees it (that is, becomes fully aware that evil is omnipresent).

Flying into the heart of the Antarctic, upon first sight of the "jagged line of witchlike cones and pinnacles" (28), Dyer says:

> I could not help feeling that they were evil things—mountains of madness whose farther slopes looked out over some accursed ultimate abyss. That seething, half-luminous cloud background held ineffable suggestions of a vague, ethereal beyondness far more than terrestrially spatial, and gave appalling reminders of the utter remoteness, separateness, desolation, and aeon-long death of this untrodden and unfathomed austral world. (29)

Later, beyond the "cube-barnacled peaks" (105), Dyer and Danforth discover a strange stone city of odd volumes and cones and star-shapes, a nightmare city. Interestingly, there is a deliberate blurring of the distinction between made and natural landscapes in the description of the mountains, as, in the end, evil pervades both landscapes. The two explore the alien environment and eventually enter "the black inner world" (77). They find the remnants of the exploration party's camp and the bodies of decapitated Old Ones, mutilated by the shoggoths, who once were "ideal slaves to perform the heavy work of the community" (62). But these protoplasmic beings eventually revolted against their masters.

Deep in the cavern the two explorers hear a monstrous shuffling and whistling, and they turn and run away back to their airplane. Danforth apparently sees something that cripples part of his intellect. And this is compounded on the flight out, where Danforth has "a single fantastic, demoniac glimpse, among the churning zenith clouds, of what lay back of those other violet westward mountains which the Old Ones had shunned and feared" (105). Danforth cannot

speak about it, the final picture of evil. The scene represents dread and despair in the face of a world incomprehensible to humans and anathema for humans. The setting for *At the Mountains of Madness* is the Ultima Thule of metaphysical evil.

INNOMINATE

At the end of "The Unnamable" there are only sentence fragments, like verbal shrapnel. These broken phrases, askew words, are akin to incoherent stammers as language is powerless, a mere figment of human egoism; it is incommensurate with our experience of the world. There is cacophony here as not only language but our place in the world is in chaos. Manton's final words seem like a bestial cry after the embrace from the unnamable. It is an expression of moral chaos. What response is meaningful while confronting the fact of evil in the world? In "The Shadow over Innsmouth," it seems that in the end the only possible act other than death (and perhaps it is really another form of death) is to join evil, enlist in the army of death. That is the only "salvation."

On the other hand, "The Shunned House" (1924) gives us a different perspective on the problem, a sense of the moral commitments we have to our fellow humans. It is unusual in the Lovecraft canon in that the protagonist overcomes the monster and seemingly lives on, while fully aware of the "tenacious existence of certain forces of great power and, so far as the human point of view is concerned, exceptional malignancy."[140] In the story the explanation for the monster hinges on a sort of scientific rationale (as Manton might give):

> Such a thing was surely not a physical or biochemical impossibility in the light of a newer science which includes the theories of relativity and intra-atomic action. One might easily imagine an alien nucleus of substance or energy, formless or otherwise, kept alive by imperceptible or immaterial subtractions from the life-force or bodily tissue and fluids of other and more palpably living things into which it penetrates and with whose fabric it sometimes completely merges itself. (252)

The narrator flees from the terror of the basement, to "where tall buildings seemed to guard me as modern material things guard the world from ancient and unwholesome wonder" (259). A reader suspects that the hero does not really

believe in the guarding power of the tall buildings but soldiers on anyway. The narrator extirpates the alien thing, the intruder, the monster, as a "duty with every man not an enemy of the world's life, health and sanity" (252). One can see Manton in that noble role before he is contaminated by Carter, before he hits the wall of the unnamable, before he is infected by the world of nothingness and alienation, before he fails to witness and try to read the message left on his body. "The Shunned House" is a story of a human trying to live in a world of evil and working to eradicate it, doomed surely, as the story suggests, but still continuing the effort. That is because the important thing is a common social purpose, a common moral purpose even in metaphysical chaos.

More congruent with the fiction of the unnamable is "The Shadow over Innsmouth," a story that chronicles the descent into and the embrace of evil. Evil is characterized as coming from the sea and drawing humans back into the sea, as deformed beings in a deformed world, but where they "shall dwell amidst wonder and glory forever";[141] that is, they are converted to the culture of Innsmouth, where "some cryptic, evil movement was afoot on a large scale."[142] It is like an infection spreading across a populace, but a disease gladly embraced by some, including the protagonist, who discovers his
Innsmouth look and accepts the call of Cthulhu, the call to evil. It is more than an acceptance of the fact of evil; it is an overwhelming loss of ethics, as if a lover forgoes humanity and ethics to carry out the vile orders of the beloved, or the terror orders of a dictator. It is akin to the loss of identity as one joins in the death march of fascism, a return to chaos, an adoration of atrocity.

The fiction of the unnamable expresses this corruption as if it is an infection. It is dangerous, as Sir Thomas Browne writes: "tempt not contagion by proximity, and hazard not thyself in the shadow of corruption."[143]

In the fiction of Lovecraft, there are contradictions, of course. And this is not a weakness but a strength. These works are not trivial entertainments. Lovecraft mined the true vein of horror. The original spring of the Gothic was to question the legitimacy of the sovereignty of state and religion and to reveal the duplicity of societal bonds among classes. It revealed the decadent social edifice for what it really was: built on the bones of the working class, violent in maintaining a rigid social order, and full of horror against the poor, women, and outsiders. The fiction of the unnamable asserts the sovereignty of dread and the metaphysics of incomprehension within a world of fear and the insoluble problem of evil. It reveals the duplicity of language, science, and the human intellectual enterprise generally. There is a loss of all humanity. In doing so the

fiction illuminates the fact of evil in the universe and humankind; it is a place where we lose our identities; we are all captives on a death march. There is a rawness in his stories—a savage, stammering, disturbingly familiar strangeness. Something awful hits you when you read his words—as if you have stepped into a propeller. Franz Kafka, in a letter to Max Brod, says writing is a "descent toward the dark powers . . . [an] unchaining of spirits that are naturally kept bound."[144] More than others, Lovecraft unchains the spirits of dread. At his best you begin to feel those awful, diabolical spirits disgustingly touch you. Sometimes it is as if Lovecraft is retelling something you have tried to forget, forcing you to listen. And ultimate meaning is not the point of the tales; rather, it is the effect. Clear meaning is incompatible with art anyway. For Lovecraft the power or effect is to incite fear, and that is through the dramatization of the metaphysics of evil. Poe saw art as a way to escape from mundane consciousness into a world of beauty and wonder; for Lovecraft the escape leads to more terror.

"The Unnamable" is a foundational story in Lovecraft's canon of work, wrestling with the problem of our place in an unintelligible world. Although the story does not have the sustained brilliance of some stories, it is a sketch of the power of dread and is the start of a journey into the fiction of the unnamable. Even on the surface, it is important, as it uses Arkham as a fictional site for the full story, deploys the serial character Carter, and is Lovecraft's fictional treatise on the poetics of horror writing. But most importantly, it is an early story in the fiction of the unnamable and provides a gateway into the major texts. In short form, it explores the human condition in an irrational world and the metaphysical incomprehension of being in an unreadable world of evil.

NOTES

1. Peter Cannon, *H. P. Lovecraft* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 41–42.
2. S. T. Joshi, *A Subtler Magick: The Writings and Philosophy of H. P. Lovecraft* (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont House, 1996), 99.
3. Massimo Berruti, "The Unnamable in Lovecraft and the Limits of Rationality" (paper presented at research seminar, University of Helsinki, 2005), http://lucite.org/lucite/archive/fiction_-_lovecraft/6380270-the-unnamable-in-lovecraft-and-the-limits-of-rationality.pdf (accessed December 16, 2013), 2.
4. James Kneale, "From Beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the Place of Horror," *Cultural Geographies* 13 (2006): 106.

5. Maurice Lévy, *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*, trans. S. T. Joshi (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1988), 40.
6. H. P. Lovecraft, "The Unnamable," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1986), 202. Hereafter cited in the text.
7. John P. Langan, "Naming the Nameless: Lovecraft's Grammatology," *Lovecraft Studies* no. 41 (Spring 1999): 27.
8. Langan, "Naming the Nameless," 41.
9. Rhys Hughes treats such language in a sardonic manner in "A Languid Elagabalus of the Tombs," in *Stories from a Lost Anthology* (Leyburn, UK: Tartarus Press, 2002), 184–208. This title is derived from Lovecraft's "Herbert West—Reanimator," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 155. The story verges on a parody of "The Unnamable." In the story Mr. Delves says "Definition is the foe of horror!" (197). Delves goes through the synonyms of the word and views namelessness as "the key to the bloody lock on the wormy door which led to the slimy dungeon of total horror" (199). In part, the story is about Delves's search for and eventual discovery of a room of nameless and hidden textbooks of unspeakable horror. Delves solves the problem of namelessness by writing titles and text for what turns out to be unused college ledgers. It is a fun story and is a form of homage to Lovecraft in the Rhys Hughes style.
10. Donald R. Burleson, *Lovecraft: Disturbing the Universe* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 49–57.
11. The unnamable could be interpreted as a confrontation with the "Real": a notion of Lacan used by Eric Savoy in his discussion of the American Gothic. Eric Savoy, "The Rise of American Gothic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 167–88. The "Real" is meant to characterize all those things or experiences that are beyond our current knowledge, beyond our current science, beyond representation that yet haunt us and keep demanding attention.
12. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, ed. August Derleth, Donald Wandrei, and James Turner (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1965–1976), 3.435.
13. Hegel, quoted in Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 313.
14. Sir James George Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, ed. Theodor H. Gaster (New York: Criterion, 1959), 187.
15. Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, 219.
16. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961).

17. See Benedict de Spinoza, *Selections*, ed. John Wild (New York: Scribners, 1930), 94–143.
18. Lovecraft, "The Horror at Red Hook," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 248.
19. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1984), 67.
20. Lovecraft, "The Lurking Fear," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 181. Hereafter cited in the text.
21. Lovecraft, "The Rats in the Walls," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 44.
22. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 157.
23. Lovecraft and Winifred V. Jackson, "The Crawling Chaos," in *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1989), 12.
24. Lovecraft and E. Hoffmann Price, "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," in *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*," ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1985), 431.
25. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, in *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*, 40. Hereafter cited in the text.
26. Lovecraft, "The Shadow over Innsmouth," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 366.
27. Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, in *At the Mountains of Madness*, 206. Hereafter cited in the text.
28. Lovecraft, "The Hound," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 172.
29. Lovecraft, "The Hound," 178.
30. This experience of Randolph Carter is summarized in "The Silver Key," in *At the Mountains of Madness*: "[H]e went back to Arkham, the terrible witch-haunted old town of his forefathers in New England, and had experiences in the dark, amidst the hoary willows and tottering gambrel roofs, which made him seal forever certain pages in the diary of a wild-minded ancestor" (413).
31. Based on the work of Fiedler, Cannon briefly explores this theme in Lovecraft. Peter Cannon, "Lovecraft and Classic American Literature," in *"Sunset Terrace Imagery in Lovecraft" and Other Essays* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1990).
32. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, and Related Tales*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30.
33. Lovecraft takes the use of the neologism to its awful logical conclusion. It is

“that eldritch, mocking cry—‘*Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!*’” of the “demoniac shoggoths —given life, thought, and plastic organ patterns solely by the Old Ones, and having no language save that which the dot groups expressed—had likewise no voice *save the imitated accents of their bygone masters*.” *At the Mountains of Madness*, 101. This is the cry that haunted the narrator and Danforth on their searches for the source of the horror in the Antarctic. When Danforth is witness to the ultimate abomination, his “shrieks were confined to the repetition of a single, mad word of all too obvious source: ‘*Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!*’” (106). Danforth becomes inarticulate.

34. Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness and Two Other Stories* (London: Folio Society, 1998), 123.

35. Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness*, 139.

36. Edith Wharton, “Mr. Jones,” in *The Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton* (New York: Scribners, 1973), 195.

37. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, in *The Oedipus Cycle: An English Version*, trans. Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), 70–71.

38. Edgar Allan Poe, “The Imp of the Perverse,” in *Tales and Sketches*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 2.1222.

39. Poe, “The Imp of the Perverse,” 2.1223.

40. Very young children frequently ask: “What’s the name of it?” about things. It is a way of making the world familiar and known.

41. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuiness (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), 68.

42. Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 127.

43. “Unwholesome recollections of things in the *Necronomicon* and the Black Book welled up, and he found himself swaying to infandous rhythms said to pertain to the blackest ceremonies of the Sabbat and to have an origin outside the time and space we comprehend.” Lovecraft, “The Dreams in the Witch House,” in *At the Mountains of Madness*, 290.

44. Roger B. Salomon, *Mazes of the Serpent: An Anatomy of Horror Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 15.

45. Algernon Blackwood, *John Silence—Physician Extraordinary* (Boston: John W. Luce, 1909), 31.

46. “The Unnamable” is a modernist story in that the how of writing is as

important as the what of writing.
47. Lovecraft, *Collected Essays, Volume 2: Literary Criticism*, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2004), 176.
48. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, rev. ed., ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2012), 28.
49. Edgar Allan Poe, *Poe: The Complete Poems*, ed. Richard Wilbur (New York: Dell, 1959), 73–74.
50. Roberto Calasso, *K* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 3.
51. The early twentieth century was a time of mass charges to death, the terror of mustard gas, endless artillery bombardments, horror in the trenches, ever more armaments, and piles of the dead. This turned out to be only a prelude to the killing fields history of the twentieth century. There are so many that any listing cannot be defended. The Holocaust is beyond thought; in Auschwitz alone, more than one million Jews died in gas chambers, by forced labor, by starvation, and by torture; overall six million were killed by the Nazi regime. Then there are the Armenian massacres, the Gulag, the Ukraine famine, the Khmer Rouge regime of terror in Cambodia, and more recently Rwanda and Darfur. Of course, mass societal murders and the deliberate distortions of history are nothing new. W. M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82 (1992): 369–85; and Richard Wright, *Stolen Continents: The Americas through Indian Eyes since 1492* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992) speak to the effects of the European invasions into North and South America killing tens of millions of the indigenous peoples.
52. Leslie Fielder, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), 115.
53. Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, in *The Plays and Poems of Christopher Marlowe* (London: George Newnes, 1905), 241.
54. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, trans. Seamus Heaney (New York: Norton, 2001), 99.
55. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," *The Dunwich Horror*, 137.
56. Lovecraft, "The Wood," in *The Ancient Track: The Complete Poetical Works of H. P. Lovecraft*, ed. S. T. Joshi (San Francisco: Night Shade, 2001), 60.
57. Lovecraft, *The Ancient Track*, 60.
58. Arthur Machen, "The Great God Pan," in *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural* (New York: Pinnacle, 1983), 44.
59. Steve Duffy, "They've Got Him! In the Trees! M. R. James and Sylvan Dread," in *Warnings to the Curious: A Sheaf of Criticism on M. R. James*, ed. S.

T. Joshi and Rosemary Pardoe (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2007), 177–83.
60. Algernon Blackwood, “The Dammed,” in *Tales of the Mysterious and Macabre* (London: Spring, 1967), 156.
61. Robinson Jeffers, *Medea: Freely Adapted from the “Medea” of Euripides* (London: Samuel French, 1976), 11.
62. Jeffers, *Medea*, 28.
63. *Forbidden Planet*, DVD, directed by Fred M. Wilcox (1956; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2010).
64. Albert Camus, “On the Future of Tragedy,” in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy, ed. Philip Thody (New York: Knopf, 1968), 297.
65. Jerrold E. Hogle, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 5.
66. Lovecraft, “The Silver Key,” in *At the Mountains of Madness*, 414–15.
67. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, 3.31.
68. Lovecraft, “The Horror at Red Hook,” in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 249.
69. Edgar Allan Poe, “MS. Found in a Bottle,” in *Tales and Sketches*, 1.145.
70. Lovecraft, “The Tomb,” in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 4.
71. Fred Botting, “Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines and Black Holes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 279.
72. Maurice Lévy, *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*, trans. S. T. Joshi (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1988), 88.
73. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 6.
74. Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1935–1942*, trans. Philip Thody (New York: Modern Library, 1965), 10.
75. Lovecraft, “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction,” 175.
76. Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage, 1995), 11.
77. Counter to this, consider that in “The Call of Cthulhu” the strange dreams do not inform average people, or scientific men, but “It was from the artists and poets that the pertinent answers came” (131). And more tellingly, later archaeologists cannot “form the least notion” of the “linguistic kinship” (134) of the characters on the base of the strange figure found by Legrasse. Scientists in “The Colour Out of Space” can make no sense of the wasteland. These speak to the failure of rationality in the face of the unknown.
78. Salomon, *Mazes of the Serpent*, 124.

79. Poe, “Sonnet—To Science,” in *Poe: The Complete Poems*, 58.
80. Richard Wilbur, introduction to *Poe: The Complete Poems*, 9.
81. Wilbur, introduction, 9.
82. Bruce Aune, *Knowledge, Mind, and Nature* (New York: Random House, 1967) argues that the way we view and experience the world is dependent on our conceptual scheme, which is informed and expressed through our language. But our language is not cast in stone. Science is engaged in fundamental criticisms of our worldview, that is, our language (which it can be argued determines the manner in which we as language-users characterize the world, indeed experience the world). In a sense science disrupts our interactions with the outside and changes the way we control and manipulate the world. It may be argued that literature is doing something similar. The language employed in *Finnegans Wake*, for example, is radically different from our ordinary discourse, and if we were able to adopt this language one could give fundamentally different descriptions of the world legitimately.
83. Lovecraft, “Facts concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family,” in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 73.
84. Camus, “Myth of Sisyphus,” 3.
85. Camus, “Myth of Sisyphus,” 5.
86. Matthew Hamiliton Bowker, “Albert Camus and the Political Philosophy of the Absurd” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2008), 22.
87. Poe, “The Man of the Crowd,” in *Tales and Sketches*, 1.506.
88. Gershon Shaked, “Afterword,” in *Facing the Holocaust: Selected Israeli Fiction*, ed. Gila Ramras-Rauch and Joseph Michman-Melkman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 275.
89. W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2003).
90. Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 37.
91. Lovecraft, “Hypnos,” in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 166.
92. Thomas Hardy, “To Sincerity,” in *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 262.
93. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 89.
94. Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, in *The Plays and Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, 157.
95. Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (London: Cannongate, 2005), 4.
96. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett* (New

York: Grove Press, 1965), 291.
97. Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 293.
98. David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 104.
99. Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, 168.
100. Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), vii.
101. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E. M. Huggard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).
102. Ari Hirvonen, "The Problem of Evil Revisited," *No Foundations: Journal of Extreme Legal Positivism* no. 4 (October 2007): 48.
103. David B. Levy, review of *The Banality of Evil: Hannah Arendt and "The Final Solution,"* by Bernard J. Bergen (H-Holocaust, H-Net Reviews, August 1999), http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3372 (accessed January 27, 2009).
104. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, in *Readings on Human Nature*, ed. Peter Loptson (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1997), 108.
105. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 104.
106. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 109.
107. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov speaks about the evil of the suffering of innocent children. No god can be worshipped with the knowledge of the facts of children suffering horrible fates and brutal deaths. He knows the evil in the world and rebels and remains unforgiving: "It is not worth one little tear of that tortured little girl who beat herself on the breast and prayed to her 'dear, kind Lord' in the stinking privy with her unexpiated tears. It is not worth it, because her tears remain unexpiated." Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Penguin, 1979), 286. There is no possible explanation or sense in such suffering.
108. Fielder, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, xiv.
109. In 1933, Lovecraft in a letter says: "No settled & homogenous nation ought (a) to admit enough of a decidedly alien race-stock to bring about an actual alteration in the dominant ethnic composition, or (b) tolerate the dilution of the culture-stream with emotional or intellectual elements alien to the original cultural impulse," *Selected Letters*, 4.249. These are the words of a social reactionary. Lovecraft says this logic shows that "Hitler's basic racial theory is

perfectly & irrefutably sound," *Selected Letters*, 4.249. Where Hitler's race theory logic led was the Holocaust.

110. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, 1.296.

111. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Out of Time," *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 399.

112. In a 1926 letter to Frank Belknap Long (*Selected Letters*, 2.68–69), Lovecraft expresses his admiration for the Nordic: "There are two Jew problems in America today—one national and cultural, and to be met by a firm resistance to all those vitiating ideas which parasitic subject-races engender; and another local and biological—the New York Mongoloid problem, to be met God only knows how, but with force rather than intellect."

113. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, 1.208.

114. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, 4.247. Lovecraft is not alone as a writer in his racism. Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form*, rev. ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), details the anti-Semitism of T. S. Eliot. In *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934), Eliot writes that a well-formed society must "make any large numbers of free-thinking Jews undesirable" (20). In "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," Eliot writes: "The rats are underneath the piles / The Jew is underneath the lot" (Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* [London: Faber & Faber, 1974], 43). In "Gerontion" he writes: "My house is a decayed house, / And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner, / Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp" (*Collected Poems*, 39). Like Lovecraft, Eliot has his defenders and apologists.

115. Lovecraft's invectives against African Americans are sharply contrasted by the efforts of Olivia Howard Dunbar, a writer of ghost stories in the early twentieth century, and her husband, the playwright Ridgeley Torrance, in support of rights for blacks (Jessica Amanda Salmonson, introduction to *The Shell of Sense: Collected Ghost Stories of Olivia Howard Dunbar*, ed. Jessica Amanda Salmonson [Uncasville, CT: R. H. Fawcett, 1997], 3–11). Torrance published a collection of plays written specifically for black actors in 1917 and wrote a biography of the black educator John Hope. Dunbar published essays on a range of liberal issues, including the education of African Americans.

116. S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1996).

117. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, 5.247.

118. As an example, consider Lovecraft's descriptions in "Herbert West—

Reanimator" of Buck Robinson: "He was a loathsome, gorilla-like thing, with abnormally long arms that I could not help calling fore legs, and a face that conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eerie moon. The body must have looked even worse in life—but the world holds many ugly things" (*Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 146). And yet, although Herbert West believes that the revivifying fluid failed on Robinson because it was devised with white specimens in mind, at the end of the episode we learn differently.

119. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, 1.333–34, and Michel Houellebecq, *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*, trans. Dorna Khazeni (San Francisco: Believer, 2005), 106.

120. Houellebecq, *Lovecraft: Against the World*, 111.

121. Houellebecq, *Lovecraft: Against the World*, 113.

122. Lovecraft, "The Horror at Red Hook," 248.

123. Lovecraft, "The Horror at Red Hook," 265.

124. Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 251.

125. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 54.

126. Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," 37.

127. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. A. Bower (New York: Vintage, 1956), 253.

128. Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 414.

129. Lévy, *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*, 115.

130. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," 154.

131. Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum," in *Tales and Sketches*, 1.689.

132. Gerald M. Sweeney, "Beauty and Truth: Poe's 'A Descent into the Maelström,'" *Poe Studies* 6, no. 1 (June 1973): 23.

133. Poe, "A Descent into the Maelström," in *Tales and Sketches*, 1.579.

134. Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum," 1.690.

135. Poe, *Poe: The Complete Poems*, 90.

136. Lovecraft, "The Dreams in the Witch House," in *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*, 287.

137. Poe, "Dream-Land," in *Poe: The Complete Poems*, 91.

138. Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997), 19.

139. This is the recurrent theme of digging up the past. The past haunts because,

as Delmore Schwartz writes in “Personae,” “Only the past is immortal.” Delmore Schwartz, *Selected Poems (1938–1958): Summer Knowledge* (New York: New Directions, 1967), 65.

140. Lovecraft, “The Shunned House,” in *At the Mountains of Madness*, 251. Hereafter cited in the text.

141. Lovecraft, “The Shadow over Innsmouth,” in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 367.

142. Lovecraft, “The Shadow over Innsmouth,” 345.

143. Sir Thomas Browne, “Christian Morals,” in *The Voyce of the Worlds: Selected Writings of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Folio Society, 1997), 252. Lovecraft’s reaction to New York is expressed as a form of infection of a population: “the broad, phantasmal lineaments of the morbid soul of disintegration and decay . . . a yellow leering mask with sour, sticky, acid ichors oozing at eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, and abnormally bubbling from monstrous and unbelievable sores at every point,” *Selected Letters*, 1.334.

144. Franz Kafka, quoted in Roberto Calasso, *K*, 111.

Chapter 8

The Aboriginal in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft

More than 400 years ago, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and his band of conquistadores ravaged the Southwest in their quest for gold. The Superstition Mountain just east of Phoenix, Arizona, was one of their targets. The Apache believe the area of Superstition Mountain is the home of the Thunder God; it is a sacred place, treated with reverence and honor, akin to a cathedral and not a place to plunder. Jill Pascoe writes that over hundreds of years countless people have vanished and died in this mysterious area, which continues to be fabled for lost gold.[1] The Spaniards were unable to coerce the Apache to help them scour for gold on Superstition Mountain, where many found only terror and death. The Spaniards viewed the Apache, along with all Amerindians, with distain, as primitives, perhaps with a touch of fear, but with a rapacious loathing.

In 1552, Bartolomé de las Casas documented the savagery of the Spaniards as they subjugated the Americas, where they tortured and murdered millions.[2] The extent of the "genocide" is virtually unimaginable, according to Tzvetan Todorov.[3] Estimating the population of the overall Americas before colonization is challenging, and there are huge variations. Russell Thornton and others show the decline of the American Indian population was a holocaust—precipitous, devastating, and dreadful.[4]

This devastation was founded on the notion of the inferiority of the indigenous people. Celia Brickman notes that the colonizing Europeans saw the American Indian as "the quintessential emblem of the first, primitive stage of human development."[5] Reneé L. Bergland suggests that the American "land is haunted because it is stolen."[6] Bergland argues that the source of the American uncanny lies in the history of "murders, looted graves, illegal land transfer and disruptions of sovereignty"[7] of the Native peoples and the landscape is now one of ghosts.

D. H. Lawrence writes: "The Aztec is gone, and the Incas. The Red Indian, the Sequim, the Patagonian are reduced to negligible numbers. . . . Not that the

Red Indian will ever possess the broad lands of America. At least I presume not. But his ghost will."[8] Of course, American Indians were never completely gone and continue yet to protect and nurture their unique cultures and have not been swallowed up by Lawrence's "great white swamp."[9] But Lawrence does hit on the hauntedness of America and the impact of the American Indian on American literature. To paraphrase a line from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), there is no forest, prairie, valley, mountain, or town in the country not packed with some dead American Indian's grief,[10] and that is why the American landscape is haunted.

THE GHOSTS OF AMERICA

This haunting of the landscape, or geographic terror, is a key theme in the horror fiction of H. P. Lovecraft. That is because for Lovecraft the world in itself is sinister. Dread and horror are the nature of existence, and his textual topography makes this alive. In Lovecraft's ontology the fundamental elements are indifferently malevolent. His haunted landscape was primarily in New England but also in other locales, such as the American Southwest. And the haunting in his stories, in many cases, has a particularly American shape to it. The argument of this chapter is that the haunting in many stories finds its origin in the American Indian. In the fictional woods[11] of Lovecraft the aboriginal is defined as essentially inferior to white Europeans, as demonic or unclean, as savage, as primitive. American Indians are also removed, effaced, overwritten by a legion of monsters, who are portrayed as previous occupiers of the land. These even more aboriginal beings, however, are really the reanimated indigenous peoples, for in the fiction of Lovecraft the millions of dead American Indians are the "soul of the forest,"[12] who keep rising from the graves.

Of course, the fiction of Lovecraft is firmly in the mainstream of American literature on this. Joshua David Bellin argues that the presence and dispossession of American Indians in America have shaped American literature and that this must be understood in the reading of all the literature.[13] Charles L. Crow argues that to know American literature one must understand the Gothic, which he says is "the imaginative expression of the hidden fears and forbidden desires of Americans."[14] The American Gothic is pervasive in the mainstream, and in genre form. It is a counter-argument to American triumphalism and American perpetual progress toward the promised land. Crow argues that the Gothic "patrols the line between . . . the living and dead."[15] It is a literature at the

frontier, which is especially relevant in the United States, with its long fable of striking out into the wild frontier. In distorted and threatening form, the Gothic liberates what is hidden, buried away, taboo, and unspoken within a society. In American Gothic literature the dreadful encounters with "monsters" reify fears and nightmares about the original inhabitants.

American Indians haunt the Gothic fiction of Lovecraft. But his mastery of the horror idiom opens new ground in understanding the foundation of the fear of the aboriginal. In the end, it is the loss of utopia, the realization that we cannot get ourselves back to the pristine garden (a garden we have destroyed), that there is no safe home; we will never really be homeward-bound. Marianna Torgovnick argues that the desire of going home is akin to going primitive.[16] It is a wish to return to origins and the familiar, in a way that perhaps comforts, that helps us overcome our alienation from our culture and our world and perhaps from ourselves. Lovecraft turns this on its head; there is only a hostile strangeness everywhere. Joyce Carol Oates notes a pervasive and profound existential loneliness in Lovecraft's work, an "elegiac poetry of loss."[17] Some things are gone forever.

The ancient alien realms in Lovecraft's fictions are dystopias; there are no sacred places, just nightmare haunts. And over the mountains there is always something even more hideous, as the Old Ones in *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) knew and feared, and as Danforth glimpses as he flies away from the Old Ones' abandoned city, and thus is reduced to gibbering. In a universe of dread, there is no salvation. Enmeshed in these themes is the problematical nature of storytelling itself. For Lovecraft is really a modern in Gothic literature. In many of his stories the narrator is not sure of what he has experienced; often the voice is confused, leaving the reader unsure. The narrative is sometimes constructed from fragments, as if all is artifice. He deploys varying styles and narrative voices. Moreover, as readers, should we trust the narrators of the stories? Lovecraft's fiction raises questions about how narratives are constructed and the reliability of those narrations. With a Gothic twist he explores the randomness of life, the disruption of conventional beliefs. His stories often express the loneliness of being and evoke an awful sense of existential despair. There are no absolute truths, and what truths we may find are likely to be terrifying. Although his stories deploy realism as a way of establishing the suspension of disbelief, the stories disrupt reality and question what is real. His library of imaginary texts establishes an alternate reality with alternative authorities. In addition, Lovecraft also deforms and reshapes American Indian models and beliefs into modern

Gothic narratives in a manner akin to James Joyce's reshaping of Greek myths in *Ulysses*. The past is recast to a modern Gothic form.

THE ABORIGINAL

What, then, is the aboriginal? Used as an adjective, “aboriginal” means being the first or earliest known of its kind present somewhere, having existed from the beginning, something in an earliest or original stage or state. The word is also indicative of or relating to the indigenous peoples of Australia. In Canada, the term is embedded in the Constitution Act of 1982, which says the “Aboriginal peoples of Canada” include “Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada.” The synonyms of “aboriginal” include native, indigenous, autochthonous, original, first, earliest, primordial, and primitive. Torgovnick explores the complex and shifting meanings of “primitive” across a variety of fields—art, psychology, anthropology, and literature. In early usage it referred to the original state of something, that is, the aboriginal. This usage has changed and now, in the usage of a controlling society, it seems to refer to “the other,” who is defined in distinction from accepted behavior or thoughts in that society.[18] The primitive here is the uncivilized, the irrational, the uncultured, the unintelligent, the untamed, and the unrepressed. These words resonate with the sense of primary but also less advanced.

In Lovecraft’s fiction there is often a loathing of the aboriginal or primitive and a pathological aversion to and fear of regression to a primitive state, sometimes expressed through a fear of miscegenation and sometimes in a fear of the regression of isolated populations or in the fear of finding out one’s own origins. This is expressed in many stories. A sampling of these is provided here. In “Beyond the Wall of Sleep” (1919), Joe Slater is described as “one of those strange, repellent scions of a primitive peasant stock whose isolation . . . has caused them to sink to a kind of barbaric degeneracy.”[19] The local population in “The Dunwich Horror” (1928) is “now repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New England backwaters.”[20]

In the remote Catskills, the location of “The Lurking Fear” (1922), there is “a degenerate squatter population inhabiting pitiful hamlets on isolated slopes” (180). These inhabitants of the Catskills, “having descended the evolutionary scale” (186), are “poor mongrels who sometimes leave their valleys to trade handwoven baskets for such primitive necessities as they cannot shoot, raise, or make” (180). Later in this story the unnamed narrator shoots one of the multitude of underground monsters, which are “the ultimate product of

mammalian degeneration; the frightful outcome of isolated spawning, multiplication, and cannibal nutrition . . . the embodiment of all the snarling and chaos and grinning fear that lurk behind life" (199). It is a "dwarfed, deformed" (198), "filthy whitish gorilla thing" (199) that has descended from the Martenses, a once wealthy family.

This degeneracy can happen rapidly, as expressed in "The Horror at Red Hook" (1925), in which Detective Thomas Malone ruminates that "modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances."[21] Moreover, the story's language expresses much anguish and dread, as the primitive is "the root of a contagion destined to sicken and swallow cities, and engulf nations in the foetor of hybrid pestilence."[22]

"Facts concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and his Family" (1920) evidences why Sir Arthur Jermyn soaked himself in oil to hasten his suicide. The story starts, "Life is a hideous thing,"[23] and then asks the question whether humans are a separate species—that is, are we really civilized, are we really distinct from animals (in this story's case, apes), and not from an eon-long evolutionary perspective? Here it is a white ape, spawn of the great apes and a "prehistoric white Congolese civilization" (74), which had fallen into the primal —the awful terror that many stories evoke. Arthur Jermyn "went out on the moor and burned himself" (73) after seeing the gift of the mummy of his great-great-great-grandmother—a white ape princess. Origins are not salutary in Lovecraft but awful.

For Lovecraft, "The past is *real*—it is *all there is.*"[24] But in the end that past is dangerous, as is found in many of his stories. And finding your ancestors is often full of horror. A fondness for the past is, in a sense, akin to trying to get back home. But Lovecraft's fiction tells us it is a fool's mission.

ILLUMINATION AND DISTORTION

In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927), Lovecraft identifies one of the sources of the weird fiction of American writers as "the strange and forbidding nature of the scene into which they were plunged. The vast and gloomy virgin forests in whose perpetual twilight all terrors might well lurk;[25] the hordes of coppery[26] Indians whose strange, saturnine visages and violent customs hinted strongly at traces of infernal origin."[27] He is on the mark with this assessment as a particular feature of the American Gothic. This demonization of American Indians started right away. Cotton Mather writes that witches call the devil the Black Man and that he resembles an Indian and that the Indians "used all their sorceries to molest the first planters."[28] John Smith states, in reference to the American Indian religion, that "their chiefe God they worship is the Devill."[29] Charles Brockden Brown in the preface to *Edgar Huntly* (1799) argues that "The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness"[30] are the appropriate material for American writers. Brown's Gothic is the haunted forest where American Indians are akin to animals and represent natural evil.

Nathaniel Hawthorne in "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) takes the hero deep into a gloomy forest, where he says to himself: "There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree."[31] As Goodman Brown goes deeper into the "haunted forest" he hears "the yell of Indians."[32] According to Teresa A. Goddu, Americans have long been taught from birth to see the Indian as a Gothic monster.[33] In Melville's *The Confidence Man* (1857), there is a chapter, "Containing the Metaphysics of Indian Hating." The preceding chapter recounts the exploits of the Indian-killer Colonel John Moredock, whose family was purportedly massacred by Indians**.** Moredock "seldom stirred without his rifle, and hated Indians like snakes,"[34] equating American Indians with demons in the Garden of Eden. Lovecraft elaborates this theme in "The Curse of Yig." Dirk Peters in Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1837–38) is almost bestial in appearance and the other to Pym. This dark companion is "the son of an Indian squaw[35] woman of the tribe of the Upsarokas."[36] This perspective[37] was a means of justifying the genocide of indigenous peoples and the continued violent expansion of Europeans across the Americas.

Leslie Fiedler writes that in the American tradition "the aristocratic villains of the European tale of terror are replaced by skulking primitives and the natural

rather than the sophisticated is felt as a primal threat."[38] In the European Gothic, it is the power of church and state that is confronted, but in America it is nature and the indigenous people. In a sense, as Fielder argues, the American Gothic is conservative and thematically is about building new power structures over killed ones in the wilderness. This demonization infuses American literature and is the foundation of a unique American literature, which is, as Fielder writes, "almost essentially a Gothic one."[39]

DEPICTIONS OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE FICTION OF LOVECRAFT

Lovecraft's fiction is dense with images and themes of the primitive. There are also explicit mentions of American Indians and in most they are negatively portrayed, often referred to in derogatory language. For example, in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927), Curwen's servants "were a sullen pair of aged Narragansett Indians; the husband dumb and curiously scarred, and the wife of a very repulsive cast of countenance, probably due to a mixture of negro blood."[40] They are presented as in league with the evil Joseph Curwen.

The story "He" (1925) takes place in New York City, where the narrator is shown around the secret places of the city by a stranger dressed in eighteenth-century garb. This stranger tells of an ancestor, the Squire, who learned of magical rituals by observing "sartain half-breed[41] red Indians" as "at full moon" they "stole over the wall" of his property and "performed sartain acts."[42] The Squire "sarved them monstrous bad rum" (272)[43] to kill them off. They were "mongrel salvages" (272). But they have their revenge. The stranger has the power to present vistas of different times. Upon seeing the future vista, the unnamed narrator screams and his shrieks seem to rouse something from the grave. The stranger, the Squire, admonishes the narrator, "The full moon—damn ye—ye . . . ye yelping dog—ye called 'em, and they've come for me! Moccasined feet—dead men—Gad sink ye, ye red devils" (274). In this story Lovecraft uses the images of American Indians as vengeful ghosts returning for payback, a theme that is featured in much of his fiction. They seem to be nowhere in the modern New York City of the story, as if they exist only in nightmares.

In "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), a stone bas-relief of Cthulhu is reportedly worshipped in Greenland by a "singular tribe or cult of degenerate Esquimaux

whose religion [was] a curious form of devil-worship." Moreover, "It was a faith of which other Esquimaux knew little, and which they mentioned only with shudders, saying that it had come down from horribly ancient aeons before ever the world was made."[44] In the new world, there are even more aboriginal beings.

In "The Transition of Juan Romero" (1919), Romero's facial features, although "plainly of the Red Indian type, were yet remarkable for their light colour and refined conformation, being vastly unlike those of the average 'greaser' or Piute of the locality."[45] Interestingly, this light color was due to "the ancient and noble Aztec" (338). But only his face was noble. "Ignorant and dirty, he was at home amongst the other brown-skinned" (338). In the story a great abyss is revealed after a dynamite blast at Norton Mine. The bottom seems lost in the depths: "the void below was infinite" (339). During the night, a great throbbing or drumming and chanting sound from the shaft awakens the unnamed narrator and Romero. They are drawn "irresistibly . . . to the gaping blackness of the mine" (341). As they descend, Romero quickens his pace and leaves the narrator behind, who hears a shift in Romero's language, as if he is returning to his ancestral roots. Romero cries, "Huitzilopotchli" (339), the Aztec god of the sun and war. Romero returns to his ancient home and finds terror. The narrator catches a glimpse of Romero deep down in the chasm, but he dares not tell what he saw. It is a place that cannot be described. In the morning, Romero is dead in his bunk and it is said that neither of them left the bunkhouse at night—nightmares are real.

In "The Dunwich Horror," the megalithic monument on a hilltop is "attributed to the Indians . . . as once the burial-places of the Pocumtucks" (159). The horror in the story seems to have its essential source in the "unhallowed rites and conclaves of the Indians, amidst which they called forbidden shapes of shadow out of the great rounded hills, and made wild orgiastic prayers that were answered by loud crackings and rumblings from the ground below" (157–58). Later in the story the odor at the Whateleys' house is akin to that "near the Indian circles on the hills and could not come from anything sane or of this earth" (164).

"The Whisperer in Darkness" (1930) begins with the sightings of strange creatures floating in the Vermont rivers after a mighty flood. "The Indians had the most fantastic theories of all"[46] about the nature of the strange beings in the so-called Pennacook myth of the winged ones. Their belief that the beings were not native to earth and came to extract a certain ore turns out to be the most

accurate. Standing stones are a geographical element in the landscape of the story, as in others. Such stones are sometimes used as a motif for American Indians and are a signal from the past and often mark a geographical entrance point for “monsters.”

In “The Curse of Yig” (1928), Walker and Audrey Davis move from Arkansas to Oklahoma to start a new life in the former Indian Territory. Audrey has a “slight Indian admixture.”[47] The story centers around Walker’s fears of snakes, rising to a crescendo after he learns Audrey killed a den of newborn rattlesnakes. He tries to atone to the snake god, Yig, modeled on Quetzalcoatl, the Toltec and Aztec god portrayed as a feathered serpent. Walker visits the “Wichitas, and talked long with the old men and shamans about the snake-god and how to nullify his wrath. Charms were always ready in exchange for whiskey” (88). This all fails, and during one night of terror Audrey mistakenly axes Walker to death. She goes mad and dies in an asylum. But first she gives birth to a rhumba of things, only one of which survives and is housed in the asylum. The creature is a “crawling and wriggling” thing “emitting every now and then a weak and vacuous hiss.” It bears “some remote resemblance to a human form laid flat on its belly” but is “subtly squamous in the dim, ghoulish light” (82) of its cell. This is another Gothic incarnation of the primitive, arising from the indigenous peoples.

“The Mound” (1929–30) is centered on a mysterious low tumulus or mound near Binger, Oklahoma. This mound turns out to mark an entranceway to the underground world of Xinaián or K’n-yan, which has seemingly existed for eons. The first narrator is an “American Indian ethnologist”[48] who recounts several tales of expeditions to the mound, most of which result in strange disappearances. He hazards a way into the mound and finds a curious cylinder containing a scroll written by Pánfilo de Zamacona y Nuñez, who was part of Coronado’s band. Zamacona[49] descends to the K’n-yan world[50] and is welcomed, apparently because he is of a “higher-grade” (132) than the indigenous people of the area, referred to as “ignorant tribes of the plains” (137). After centuries, the underground society finds only the European to be welcomed into their cities, although Zamacona is not free to leave. The story refers to American Indians in derogatory terms, and the speech of the character Grey Eagle is a caricature. The sentinels on the mound seem to be biologically distorted images of American Indians, an embodiment of the American Indian terror hallucination haunting the white imagination.

Often Lovecraft’s works have nearly a cinematic quality, including a

soundtrack. For aboriginals, it is the sound of drums. The New Orleans police in "The Call of Cthulhu" track deep into the "terrible cypress woods" (136), getting closer to the "beat of tom-toms" (137), the auditory signal of the primitive in Lovecraft. In "The Curse of Yig" the "tom-toms . . . [of] the Pawnee, Wichita and Caddo country pounded endlessly" (83) to ward off the snake god. In "The Mound" the real danger of American Indian drumming is told: "There are old, old tribes with old, old memories there; and when the tom-toms beat ceaselessly over brooding plains in the autumn the spirits of men are brought dangerously close to primal, whispered things" (97).

These drums are the emblem of the wild primitive[51] and are a source of fear in a number of Lovecraft's works, as Leigh Blackmore illustrates.[52] It is found also in "Herbert West—Reanimator" (1921–22), where Buck Robinson's face "conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eerie moon."[53] Other examples include *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1926–27), where "the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums"[54] accompanies Azathoth, and in the poem "The Elder Pharos," where "the last Elder One lives on alone / Talking to Chaos with the beat of drums."[55]

This deep aversion to drumming is expressed not only by Lovecraft. For example, the historian Douglas Edward Leach, on the first page of chapter 1 of *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, takes this fear back to "1697 [when] the ominous drumbeats of large-scale organized resistance were heard in Connecticut as the enraged Pequots rose up against the English Settlers."[56]

THE RETURN OF ABORIGINAL BEINGS

But Lovecraft is a master; many of his monsters and horrific entities can be seen as a transformation of the primitive, the aboriginal, of American Indians. Fictionally, he displaces American Indians and replaces them with older beings, twisted and deformed in the Gothic tradition. It is as if New England is cleansed fictionally of any remnant of the real original inhabitants. Joel Pace suggests that Lovecraft's invocations of pre–American Indian ruins are an attempt to snuff out the Indian presence in the landscape, to write the Indian away.[57] This is another common thread in America's fabric of dispossession of indigenous peoples. In 1788, Philip Freneau in "The Indian Burying-Ground" made the American Indian "a shade"[58] and tried to write them out of the real "to shadows;"[59] mere "delusions"[60] haunting the land.

In "The Colour Out of Space" (1927), Ammi Pierce says that the woods around the blasted heath were not generally feared before the meteorite fell except for a "small island in the Miskatonic where the devil held court beside a curious lone altar older than the Indians."[61] The unknown thing in the swamp of cypress woods and lagoons in "The Call of Cthulhu," "had been there before d'Iberville, before La Salle, before the Indians" (137). This is of a piece with the looting of American Indian artifacts and grave robbing that started with the first invasions. Bergland points out that in the first year of settlement at Plymouth in 1620, the English plundered a number of grave sites. This progressed as the frontier was pushed across the continent, abetted by the military and museums.

In "The Mound," the tumulus is patrolled by ghostly guardians, and early in the story they are reported as American Indians: a male during the day and a headless female, who carries a "blue ghost-light" (106) at night. The narrator doubts the male is an American Indian, as he "was certainly *not a savage*. He was the product of *a civilization*" (108). These beings turn out to be former denizens of the underground world, one a "discredited freeman," and the second, "T'la-yub who had planned and aided" (157) Zamacona's first attempt at escaping from the underground world and, after they had failed, was punished. Even the ghosts of American Indians are usurped.

But in this dispossession, what Lovecraft's fiction achieves is the return of American Indians in the form of original beings, in Gothic form. American Indians are never really absent in his fiction; but they are often transformed. In "The Thing on the Doorstep" (1933), after Upton rescues Derby from

Chesuncook, Maine, Derby explains his strange behavior as arising in part from his exploration of "certain Indian relics in the north wood—standing stones."[62] This is the locale of "Cyclopean ruins in the heart of the Maine woods beneath which vast staircases led down to abysses of nighted secrets, of complex angles that led through invisible walls to other regions of space."[63] American Indians are the source of the hauntings and transformations that come from the depths, as if they are arising from their looted graves.

In "He," the monster is prefigured by the "gleam of a tomahawk as it cleft the rending wood," and it opens the way for "a colossal, shapeless influx of inky substance starred with shining, malevolent eyes" (275). This is the return of American Indians in a shape twisted by the Gothic vision of Lovecraft.

Meso-American Indian gods are blurred with Lovecraftian monsters into a mixed pantheon of beings in "The Electric Executioner" (1929). In this story, as Marc A. Beherec identifies, Lovecraft displays considerable knowledge of Meso-American myths and geography.[64] The story character, Feldon, who identifies strongly with Meso-Americans, intones the mixing of beings in his many chants. One goes: "In the mountains—in the mountains—Anahuac—Tenochtitlan—the old ones."[65] As Beherec notes, this melds the land, the city, and Lovecraft's Old Ones.[66] Another chant, in part, is: "Mictlanteuctli, Great Lord, a sign! A sign from within thy black cave! Iä! Tonatiuh-Metztli! Cthulhutl! Command, and I serve!"[67] The lord of the underworld and the sun and moon are united with Great Cthulhu.

Beherec also illuminates Lovecraft's use of Aztec mythology in "The Curse of Yig."[68] In the story Yig is said to be an "older and darker prototype" (81) of Quetzalcoatl. This is Kukulcan, the Mayan god, which Lovecraft knew. Yig appears also in "The Mound" as one of the gods in the K'n-yan pantheon. In this story the longevity of the possession of the Americas by indigenous peoples is acknowledged, although it is overwritten by the K'n-yan people, who are portrayed as a sort of pseudo-human alien population of long duration on earth. The mounds in the United States were long believed to be the work of some other agency than the indigenous people, as discussed by George Milner.[69] This story describes the mound as perhaps "a product of Nature" or "a burial-place or ceremonial dais constructed by prehistoric tribes" (98). It is really an entranceway to the underground society and is another example of an indigenous people's formation being usurped as the work of older beings. The story continues the narrative that any major structures or alterations[70] in the

landscape could not have been accomplished by American Indians but must be due really to others. This is part of the appropriation of the North American landscape by Euro-Americans. However, there is a link with the indigenous people; in Zamacona's narrative the K'n-yan people "seemed to be Indians . . . [but] their faces had many subtle differences" (129). And their language has "an infinitely remote linkage with the Aztec" (131).

At the close of "The Dunwich Horror" professors from Miskatonic University kill off the invisible monster. In this story the locals are not capable of destroying the horror, only the white intellectuals are able to do so; the locals are powerless to repossess the land. The Miskatonic mission pulls down all the rings of standing stones on the hills, as if these are the source of the horror, whence the horror really arose, that is, from American Indian haunts. In this story, it is as if the force of the original inhabitants comes back in invisible form. The Dunwich horror, the twin of Wilbur Whateley, is the reification of the fear of the vengeful return of the American Indian. In the Lovecraftian forest, the dispossession of American Indians continues, but their ghosts keep on coming back.

DYSTOPIA Lovecraft's fiction is replete with images of a fallen utopia. No utopia is to be found in the past, the present, or the future. It is a vain quest. In "He" the vision of the past of New York is an "unhealthy shimmer of a vast salt marsh" (272–73). "The Mound" is particularly insightful in its dissection of the vision of utopia. It paints a disturbing picture of the K'n-yan culture that is lost in acedia and overcome with ennui and moral collapse, where hedonism and torture are the only reasons for living. It is hedonism of sadomasochistic dimensions, but where there is a realization that all is pointless. The progress of development of the underground people has led to a society of decadence. They are seemingly immortal, control advanced technologies, and seem to have magical powers to dematerialize and to communicate their thoughts; all things seem within their reach. But the society is repellent to the ancient Spanish adventurer Zamacona. The society is founded on a deformed "half-human slave class" (118)—an especially disturbing slave class continuously engineered through biological deformations and tortured into grotesque forms, something the Nazis dreamed of. Some of the elements of cultural collapse are akin to the Roman orgies of coliseum mutilation and depravity. But much is a spinoff of a post-industrial society, where leisure means torture and disgust. As Leonard Cohen sings about in "The Future," it is murder.

It is a civilization of savagery and cannibalism. Interestingly, there are several levels of this dystopia, a sort of circles of hell, with the known bottom ring of N'kai ruled by sluglike beings surging darkly as if liquefied excretions in gutters. The story hints that there may be even more subterranean rings with even more horrific entities.

In "He," Lovecraft displays a hellish image of the future New York, with drumming as the soundtrack. It is like a dark bestial beating heart:

> I saw the heavens verminous with strange flying things, and beneath them a hellish black city of giant stone terraces with impious pyramids flung savagely to the moon, and devil-lights burning from unnumbered windows. And swarming loathsomely on aerial galleries I saw the yellow, squint-eyed people of that city, robed horribly in orange and red, and dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered kettle-drums, the clatter of obscene crotala, and the maniacal moaning of muted horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the wave of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen. (273–74)

The more we know, the more horrific things are; the deeper underground or farther in space or distant in time we venture or the more homeward we go, the more we find dread.

THE ORIGINAL

Near the end of *At the Mountains of Madness*, Danforth raves "the original, the eternal, the undying."[71] Lovecraft's fiction re-creates American Indians, gothically transformed but powerful and fearsome, reifying fear as they arise from the deep memory. In a real way, his fiction tells the truth about America and its foundation on violence and dispossession and the ongoing fear of the aboriginal. America is founded and spread on violence. This violence, as Richard Slotkin argues, is a continuing impulse in American society and embedded in national historical and fictional narratives.[72] Historically, Americans have not confronted the death and destruction that the country was founded on. It is forbidden, or unspeakable, or written away, or engulfed in a mythology of manifest destiny and always moving and conquering new frontiers where the inhabitants are inferior and have to be removed, in reality, in imagination, and in history. Lovecraft was an outsider himself in many ways, his work published in the pulps and excoriated frequently and viewed as amateur at best until relatively recently. From this outsider post, yet also a defender of the flag, Lovecraft created a new American Gothic clearly founded on its tradition of fear of the vanquished or enslaved. In his fictions they have returned in even more horrific form to terrify society. This theme is throughout the fiction—in early stories, mature fiction, and ghostwritten tales. The eon-old monsters that Lovecraft invents are yet aboriginal themselves. Origins cannot be escaped.

The American Gothic is all about the aboriginal. The European Gothic can be thought of as an expression of rebellion against the obscenities of perverse power. The American Gothic is all about the killing of the powers of the natural, of origins, of the very source of our being. Lovecraft captures that overwhelming sense of loss in the New England landscape, in the great expanse of the United States. He describes a familiar place changing into an alien place of ancient horror that cannot be escaped. And the horror cannot really be escaped because in the end it is not just in the landscape, it is inside us. His stories give voice to the American soul in torment, full of torture and anguish. The genocide of the indigenous population gave Euro-Americans their land, their wealth, their being. In Lovecraft, the dead original peoples of America keep coming back in colossal form to repossess their land. Lawrence writes of Americans as necessarily killers. Lovecraft's fiction rewrites this as self-killers in the end, as all homes are full of ghosts.

NOTES

1. Jill Pascoe, *Arizona's Haunted History* (Gilbert, AZ: Irongate Press, 2008), 112.
2. Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, trans. Herma Briffault (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
3. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1992), 33. Todorov asserts that in Mexico on the eve of Columbus's arrival there were 25 million Amerindians, but in 1600 only 1 million.
4. Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 22–36, provides 1492 population estimates in the Western hemisphere as ranging from 8.4 million to 112.5 million. Thornton himself suggests 72+ million for the Western hemisphere and 7+ million north of the Rio Grande, with 5+ million in the United States and 2+ million in Canada. According to information from the US Census and the US Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the American Indian population of the United States for the decade 1890–1900 was 250,000. David Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 268, says "informed scholars" estimate the overall population of the Americas pre-Columbus as from 75 to 100 million, with some suspecting the figure was even higher. Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The Americas through Indian Eyes since 1492* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 4, says the Native American population was approximately 100 million in 1492.
5. Celia Brickman, *Aboriginal Populations in the Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 17.
6. Reneé Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 9.
7. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, 8.
8. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Martin Seeker, 1993), 39.
9. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 40.
10. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1987).
11. The terror of the forest pervades the works of Lovecraft. In "The Lurking Fear," the unnamed narrator wonders what has "rotted and festered in the antediluvian forest darkness" and will come out of the "accursed midnight forests and strew fear, madness, and death." *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*,

ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1986), 190 (hereafter cited in the text). This is within the continuing flow of American literature. It is as if we are all aliens in nature.

12. H. P. Lovecraft, "The Tomb," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 5.

13. Joshua David Bellin, *The Demon of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

14. Charles L. Crow, *American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 1.

15. Crow, *American Gothic*, 2.

16. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 187–93.

17. Joyce Carol Oates, introduction to *American Gothic Tales* (New York: Plume, 1996), 7.

18. Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, 3–72.

19. Lovecraft, "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 26.

20. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1984), 157.

21. Lovecraft, "The Horror at Red Hook," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 248.

22. Lovecraft, "The Horror at Red Hook," 260.

23. Lovecraft, "Facts concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 73. Hereafter cited in the text.

24. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, ed. August Derleth, Donald Wandrei, and James Turner (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1965–76), 3.31.

25. But Lovecraft, as well as nearly all others, is wrong about the first impressions of the landscape itself at the time of the first colonial incursions. Denevan provides evidence that "by 1492 Indian activity throughout the Americas had modified forest extent and composition, created and expanded grasslands, and rearranged microrelief via countless artificial earthworks. Agricultural fields were common, as were houses and towns and roads and trails." William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82 (1992): 370. Bragdon and Mandell describe the New England landscape first found by Europeans as nearly akin to an English garden, with sweeping meadows and deep woods cleared of much underbrush and with clear sightlines, all to support Native agriculture and hunting: Kathleen J. Bragdon, *Native*

People of Southern New England, 1500–1650 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), and Daniel R. Mandell, *Behind the Frontier: Indians in Eighteenth-Century Eastern Massachusetts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996). However, the European colonists did dramatically alter the New England ecology to suit their agriculture and industry, as shown by William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983).

26. The non-white skin of American Indians has always been a focus of racist words. In *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote writes of Perry Edward Smith that "His mother had been a full-blooded Cherokee; it was from her that he had inherited his coloring—the iodine skin." Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 16. It is as if the flesh of Indians is infected and must be treated to stop contagion.

27. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, rev. ed., ed. S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2012), 60–61.

28. Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (London: John Russell Smith, 1962), 74.

29. John Smith, *The General Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2006 [1629]), 1.72.

30. Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (New Haven, CT: College & University Press, 1973), 29.

31. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," in *American Gothic Tales*, ed. Joyce Carol Oates (New York: Plume, 1996), 53.

32. Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," 59.

33. Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 57. The Declaration of Independence refers to "merciless Indian savages."

34. Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1857]), 187.

35. This is an offensive, obscene, and demeaning racist word.

36. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (New York: Penguin, 1980), 84.

37. There is another perspective of the American Indian as emblematic of the noble savage, a sentimental image but no longer alive or only on display on reservations similar to zoos for exotic animals. This other image is just another way of removing Indians from the real landscape, leaving graves to be looted. The confrontation in the wilderness, at the frontier, between the white settler and

the indigenous people is a continuing story element. The story has variations. In many, the American Indians are eliminated, opening up the land for the use of colonists. In others, a white person goes native, so to speak, and joins the aboriginal either by being captured or by identifying as native. In the film *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron (2009, 20th Century Fox), the disabled marine goes native and saves the people of blue color, as if they are incapable themselves.

38. Leslie Fielder, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (New York: Stein & Day, 1968), 377.

39. Leslie Fielder, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), 129.

40. Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, in *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1985), 119.

41. The progeny of mixed races seems to have been a particular bugaboo in the fiction of Lovecraft. Of course, this is another perennial theme in American literature. The secret theme of the Leatherstocking Tales of James Fenimore Cooper, as Fiedler argues, is miscegenation. Natty Bumppo is for racial purity. In *The Last of the Mohicans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), he says he is "a white man without cross," and has "no taint of Indian blood" (162, 82). In *The Deerslayer* (Teddington, UK: Echo Library, 2006), he has "a white heart and can't in reason, love a red-skinned maiden" (82). Lovecraft drags this theme into the open. In *Tom Sawyer*, evil is personified in Injun Joe, who is half American Indian.

42. Lovecraft, "He," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 271. Hereafter cited in the text.

43. P. D. Mail and S. Johnson argue that the spreading of alcohol to the indigenous people was for colonist advantage and was an early form of chemical warfare. P. D. Mail and S. Johnson, "Boozing, Sniffing, and Toking: An Overview of the Past, Present, and Future of Substance Use by American Indians," *American Indian & Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 5, no. 2 (1993): 1–33.

44. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 135. Hereafter cited in the text.

45. Lovecraft, "The Transition of Juan Romero," in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 338. Hereafter cited in the text.

46. Lovecraft, "The Whisperer in Darkness," in *The Dunwich Horror and*

Others, 212.
47. Lovecraft and Zealia Bishop, “The Curse of Yig,” in *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1989), 84. Hereafter cited in the text.
48. Lovecraft and Zealia Bishop, “The Mound,” in *The Horror in the Museum*, 99. Hereafter cited in the text.
49. Zamacona is told about the underground world by Charging Buffalo, who is nearly parental in his concern and caring for the Spaniard and gives him a talisman for protection. But Zamacona disrespects him by paying him off with “trinkets.” Lovecraft, “The Mound,” 120.
50. This world turns out to be the cities of gold searched for by Coronado, a nice twist by Lovecraft.
51. Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness* (London: Folio Society, 1997), evokes this when he has Marlow think of “the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw him [Kurtz] to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations” (144).
52. Leigh Blackmore, “Some Notes on Lovecraft’s ‘The Transition of Juan Romero,’” *Lovecraft Annual* 3 (2009): 158.
53. Lovecraft, “Herbert West—Reanimator,” in *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, 146.
54. Lovecraft, *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, in *At the Mountain of Madness and Other Novels*, 308.
55. Lovecraft, *The Ancient Track: Complete Poetical Works of H. P. Lovecraft*, ed. S. T. Joshi (San Francisco: Night Shade, 2001), 75.
56. Douglas Edward Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk* (Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 1958), 1.
57. Joel Pace, “Queer Tales? Sexuality, Race and Architecture in ‘The Thing on the Doorstep,’” *Lovecraft Annual* 2 (2008): 117. Jean O’Brien, *Firstings and Lastings: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), writes of the concerted work of New England local narratives from 1820 to 1880 to write away the indigenous population and instill the myth of the extinction of the American Indian. The New Englanders claimed former Indian places as Euro-American. This was in part to solidify the superiority of the white population and to justify the

appropriation of Indian land, as well as to provide a foundation for the continuing Indian wars in the West. Even the graves of Indians were obliterated, either by looting or by such actions as planting trees on the grounds. But the extinction is false in New England and elsewhere. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650–1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), documents the survival of the Mashpee and Gay Head Wampanoag and the Nipmuck in Massachusetts; the Mashantucket, Pequot, and Mohegan in Conneticut; the Narrangansett in Rhode Island; the Abenaki in Vermont and western Maine; and the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot in Maine, and others. Wright, *Stolen Continents*, 121, suggests that in New York the history of Iroquoia is overwritten with an alien history with names like Syracuse, Ithaca, Homer, Rome, and Ovid.

58. Philip Freneau, "The Indian Burying-Ground," in *The Little Book of American Poets: 1787–1900*, ed. Jessie B. Rittenhouse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 3.

59. Freneau, "The Indian Burying-Ground," 4.

60. Freneau, "The Indian Burying-Ground," 4.

61. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 57.

62. Lovecraft, "The Thing on the Doorstep," in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, 291.

63. Lovecraft, "The Thing on the Doorstep," 285.

64. Marc A. Beherec, "The Racist and La Raze: H. P. Lovecraft's Aztec Mythos," in *The Intersection of Fantasy and Native America from H. P. Lovecraft to Leslie Marmon Silko*, ed. Amy H. Sturgis and David D. Oberhelman (Altadena, CA: Mythopoeic Press, 2009), 29.

65. Lovecraft and Adolphe de Castro, "The Electric Executioner," in *The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions*," 68.

66. Beherec, "The Racist and La Raze," 29.

67. Lovecraft and de Castro, "The Electric Executioner," 74.

68. Beherec, "The Racist and La Raze," 33–34.

69. George R. Milner, *The Moundbuilders* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), documents how from 3000 BC to the sixteenth century American Indians quarried tons of earth to form thousands of mounds in the Eastern Woodlands. Some were burial sites, some effigies in the form of snakes and sacred totems, others platforms for dwellings. Much was looted but much also remained in the form of copper-engraved stone palettes, shells, masks, stone figures, and

elaborately designed pottery. Stephen Plog, *Ancient Peoples of the American Southwest* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), itemizes the impact of the Hohokam and Anasazi on the American Southwest landscape with roads, irrigation canals, and towns.

70. William Romain, *Mysteries of the Hopewell* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2000), argues the Hopewell built their massive earthworks using a standard unit of measure and aligned many to cycles of the moon and sun, providing evidence of sophistication in geometry, mathematics, and astronomy.

71. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*, 106.

72. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

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About the Author

James Goho is an independent scholar and researcher with publications on the Gothic, social science studies in academic journals, and short stories in mainstream literary magazines. His interest in Gothic centers on its socio-historic context and its arousing of human dread. He earned a B.A. from the University at Buffalo and an M.A. from the University of Manitoba. He has published a number of essays on Gothic horror writers, including Edgar Allan Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, and Ramsey Campbell. The results of his social science research are found in such academic journals as *Medical Teacher* and *Journal of Distance Education*, and the book *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* (2005), while his short fiction has appeared in *Descant*, *Grain*, and elsewhere. Goho has been a sessional instructor at the University of Manitoba, where he taught research methods, and was the director of research and planning at Red River College.

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