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The Outsider: Comparative Analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's Famous Novel and Ludvig Gur's Short Visual Interpretation

H.P. Lovecraft's *The Outsider* is a classic piece of horror literature that has been praised for its dark atmosphere, intricate language, and exploration of philosophical and existential themes. The story follows an unnamed protagonist on a quest to uncover the truth about his existence, leading to a chilling and unforgettable conclusion. However, the unique challenges of adapting Lovecraft's work to the screen have made it a daunting task for filmmakers, as the original work frequently relies on abstract concepts, such as the limits of human knowledge and the insignificance of humanity in the face of cosmic forces. The horror in Lovecraft's works is often conveyed through a sense of dread and foreboding, requiring careful use of sound design, lighting, and cinematography. This essay presents a comparative analysis between Lovecraft's original text and a short, 10-minute adaptation produced by Ludvig Gur.

The Outsider tells the tale of a man living in a dark castle, cut off from the rest of the world. The story is narrated by the protagonist, who describes his existence, characterized by a lack of memories and human interaction, as he finds comfort in books and music. One day, he decides to escape from the castle and explore the outside world. As he travels through a desolate landscape, he discovers a magnificent cathedral, and upon entering it, he finds himself amid a grand celebration. However, the protagonist is repulsed by the horrified reactions of the people around him, and it is then that he realizes he is not like them, but a corpse-like creature. The story concludes with the

protagonist returning to his castle, where he is forced to confront the truth of his existence and the full extent of his isolation and otherness.

One of the most significant discrepancies between the original story and Gur's visual interpretation involves the existential nature of the outsider. Whereas in H.P. Lovecraft's original work, the narrator discovers to be an undead ghoul, the adaptation portrays him as a living yet grotesquely malformed person. While in the original text, the narrator has no knowledge of who he is, contrary to the visual adaptation his appearance prior to the ending conclusion is irrelevant. Gur intelligently overcomes this issue by portraying the projected self-image of the outsider before the final revelation as a man from a magazine the main character read, his own imaginary reflection. In one of the scenes, the outsider is dancing on the meadow with a duplicate version of himself, indicating that he has never seen another human being and projects his own image onto others as well. Moreover, unlike Lovecraft's protagonist, who is in complete control of his own mind and is capable of formulating complex reflections, the main character in the adaptation seems to have a very peculiar demeanor and limited self-awareness, which could indicate that the director's vision for the story could revolve around a case of severe mental illness. This is further supported by the fact the director decided to set the account in the frame of modern times, in which mental illness is no longer associated with supernatural phenomena. Instead of a dark, obscure castle crypt, the main character lives in a secluded war bunker full of metal pipes. A bunker, a symbol of war and forced isolation, represents the main character's involuntary imprisonment, internal conflict and bleak existence. While the unifying factor of the two works is the main character's yearning for joy and freedom, the adaptation represents his struggle to break free on his own as futile and requiring external force, portrayed as a passerby who randomly opened the bunker from the outside; circumstances similar to a sick person depending on others to survive. Gur further highlights the outsider's helplessness through the use of visual symbolism. Throughout the film, the outsider is seen clutching a butterfly in his hand, which serves as a contrast to the protagonist's grotesque appearance and unattainable desires.

Once liberated, the outsider's first reaction is one of great confusion and fear, which he expresses when looking at the sky – one of the objects of his curiosity from the novel. That fear is consistent with a primary idea of Lovecraft's literature emphasizing the insignificance of humanity in the face of the infinite cosmos, an entity that was linked by many ancient civilizations to the sky itself. Stunned by the sight, the outsider in Gur's adaptation seems to be wandering through the forest without any specific purpose and seemingly lost in the new reality around him, which stands in contrast to Lovecraft's protagonist exploring the countryside with curiosity, following a gravel path or sometimes stepping out of it to a meadow. This change could show the contrast between two ways humans can discover the truth: targeted exploration and mere chance or other external factors. Gur's outsider arrives there due to the latter as he stumbles upon a house occupied by a partying crowd. Both the house and the people in it represent two things the outsider never possessed due to his otherness: an established and secure place of belonging in the universe and a meaningful connection to other people. However, arriving at the house could never mean obtaining them. The truth, as understood by Lovecraft and realized by the outsider after the people he encountered fled in panic on his sight, is that the universe has no regard for individual existence, dreams, or ambitions. The only thing left for the outsider is to accept it.

From a technical standpoint, adapting horror literature for a visual medium poses a significant challenge in terms of creating a mysterious atmosphere that will adequately portray the vivid and complicated setting of the original text, which is especially difficult with Lovecraft's extravagant descriptions and sophisticated word choices. To that end, Ludvig Gur extensively uses a green filter, a frequently utilized method of producing an otherworldly, cryptic aura in film, used to great effect in movies such as *The Matrix*. This decision was especially successful during scenes when the main character is imprisoned in his bunker, either dwelling in silence, chaotically hitting the locked door, or mumbling when reading the Bible he had at his disposal. Additionally, the use of shadows and lighting effectively conveys the sense of dread and foreboding that is prevalent in Lovecraft's work, creating a haunting and unsettling atmosphere that is central to the horror genre.

To fortify the effect of ominousness and show the emotional state of the main character, Gur leveraged slow, eerie background music and disturbing sound effects. Combined, these aesthetic tools create an impression that the outsider is not only physically confined in a dark, unsettling place; he is a prisoner of his own troubled mind. However, one of the most crucial directing decisions was using the main character's facial and motion expressions. In the original story, the reader is constantly informed about the protagonist's thoughts through a wide selection of descriptive words – a method impossible or unfeasible to include in a visual representation of the novel. The actor playing the outsider vividly expresses a variety of emotions, such as confusion, fear, and happiness, which are particularly profound and distorted the moment the outsider escapes from imprisonment for the first time and when he discovers the truth about himself. The actor's movements resemble the ones of an animal, with his posture slanted forward and arms waving chaotically, suggesting that the outsider's humanity is near-forgotten, or perhaps, it never existed. Gur finishes his adaptation by revealing his characterization concept of the outsider's true form, which is an old wrinkled person with an abnormally swollen face, ripped and bloody clothing, and messy, gray hair – a vision surprisingly compatible with some of the folklore representation of witches, who in classic horror literature are also associated with fear, social rejection, and intrinsic evil.

Even though Gur's creative choices diverge from the original work in many aspects, the adaptation successfully captures the main idea of the novel. *The Outsider* is a story of loneliness and isolation, where Lovecraft explores the idea that there are things in the world so alien and mysterious that humans are not willing to accept them, giving in to fear and despise – one of the most primal instincts of mankind. Those spurned and cast out by the rest originally had pure intentions, desiring freedom and happiness, but the brutal rejection and realization of their differences made them accept reality and integrate the externally projected monster into their own consciousness, effectively becoming the horror society already deemed them to be. Gur realizes that idea in the final scene, in which the outsider, having seen his hideous reflection, finally abandons

the previously held self-imagined form and merges with the creature in the mirror to become one, leaving himself growling, furious, and hopeless. The director also captured another well-known theme present in Lovecraft's literature, which is human ignorance of things in the universe that are, in reality, far more terrifying than what is considered possible. In the case of *The Outsider*, that thing is our own nature. Both Gur's and Lovecraft's main characters embark on a quest to elevate their own consciousness by exploring the unknown they saw in their dreams. The yearning to gain insight into his existence and experience the outside world leads to the realization of a terrible truth previously hidden behind a veil of ignorance – a state imposed on him that he never consciously chose. However, regardless of his ultimate revelation, the outsider was never in control of the nature of his existence and of his place in the universe, as he was just an insignificant pawn in the scheme of external powers.

Amid many failed attempts at adapting Lovecraft literature into film, Ludvig Gur achieved a relatively good success. Through interesting cinematographic techniques, he manages to convey the most important themes of the story, such as loneliness and the insignificance of human beings, while also including his own ideas related to mental illness. Even though his work is short and contains numerous artistic choices that change the way the story is told, it is faithful to the spirit of the original text and literary philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft.

References

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