

Introduction

Commonly, elements like ghosts, haunted houses and wicked murders are regarded as a compulsory part of horror literature. However, in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927), the horror writer and part-time critic Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) questions this view. He argues that there must be a distinction between “the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome” (426), and his own type of fiction, the literature of cosmic fear. The literature of cosmic fear, Lovecraft points out, “has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains” (426); instead,

[a] certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint [...] of that most terrible conception of the human brain – 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. (426)

Indeed, the feeling of total fright is all-important in the literature of cosmic fear, according to Lovecraft. In fact, he considers a powerful atmosphere of horror far more significant than the “mere mechanics” or the “dovetailing” (427) of a plot.

What is it then that creates this atmosphere of horror in Lovecraft’s works?

David Punter, an eminent critic of horror and Gothic fiction, argues that Lovecraft is “utterly devoid of psychological interest,” and that his horrors originate wholly from the “unintelligible outside” (*Literature* 38). This is, however, a misconception. Rather, the horror in Lovecraft’s narratives is actually psychologically based, as it has its ground in notions concerning identity and the boundaries of the self. Horror emerges as these notions of identity are unearthed and violated, and the borders of the self are transgressed. In order to create horror in his narratives, Lovecraft uses elements such as setting, characters, narrative mode, and structure in a way that evokes these feelings of identity disordering. This creation of

horror is best understood in psychological terms, more specifically, in terms of Sigmund Freud's and Julia Kristeva's theories of the uncanny and the abject.

Of all of Lovecraft's narratives, these notions of psychologically based horror are perhaps most notable in "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), one of his seminal works. "The Call of Cthulhu" is basically a story built around research concerning Cthulhu, an ancient and alien deity who lies 'dead but dreaming' in the sunken city of R'lyeh. Cthulhu is depicted as a bloated, winged humanoid of awesome size, with scaly, greenish skin and cephalopod head. Through legends, diaries, testimonies, strange artefacts and rumours, the unnamed narrator learns that numerous cults around the world await the return of Cthulhu and the rise of his city. Finally, the narrator's investigation leads him to a diary written by Johansen, the sole survivor of a group of sailors who confronted Cthulhu on the slopes of the newly risen R'lyeh.

In what follows, the horror evoked by the setting and the characters in "The Call of Cthulhu" will be analysed within the spectrum of Freudian uncanniness and Kristevan abjection. Following the same theoretical vein, Lovecraft's mode of narration will be discussed in relation to his control of information in the text, and how this elicits a frightening atmosphere. Furthermore, the importance of Lovecraft's narrative structure in the evoking of horror will be considered. Finally, the analogies to Modernist art in Lovecraft's horrors will be pointed to briefly, followed by an equally brief reflection on the connections between Modernist art and psychoanalysis. However, first, in order to clarify the discussion of horror based on psychology, a short introduction of the relevant terms, as they pertain to this analysis of "The Call of Cthulhu," is needed.

Theories of Horror: Uncanniness and Abjection

It can be argued that Freud's theories about the uncanny have a bearing on almost every discourse related to horror literature. Lovecraft's narratives are certainly no exceptions to this

rule. Although Lovecraft harboured an aversion towards both Freudian theories and psychology at large,¹ he sided with Freud on the notion that the fear of the unknown is hereditary and instinctive, a remnant from mankind's youth, which is present in all humans (cf. Geary 126).

Certainly, the uncanny constitutes a source of horror in Lovecraft's narratives. And, as will be shown, his depictions of the horrifying and monstrous stem from suggestions of something familiar rather than something remote and alien. As Freud points out, the uncanny "is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (340). In fact, the uncanny is "in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated [...] through the process of repression" (363-4). In other words, the basis of the uncanny is something familiar that has become unfamiliar, defamiliarised. However, Freud underscores that 'unfamiliar' does not equal 'uncanny,' pointing out that although something unfamiliar and new can easily be frightening, this is not always the case (cf. Freud 341). "Something," Freud asserts, "has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny" (341). Commenting on the uncanny, Adam Bresnick zeroes in on Freud's 'something' and emphasises that a moment of singular strangeness arrives as the perplexed subject obscurely senses the return of a memory long since repressed [...] that occupies a kind of interior no-man's land, belonging neither to the conscious nor to the unconscious, but to both at once. The subject becomes uneasily aware that he is literally of two minds simultaneously, one conscious and the other unconscious, and [...] the subject palpably perceives the fact of his being inhabited by the constitutively foreign psychic agency of the unconscious. (4)

¹ See, for instance, Joshi 308 and Nelson 4.

Such a condition of consciousness, incorporating both repression and a divide between the conscious and the unconscious, ‘the real’ and the ‘unreal,’ is a requirement for the uncanny (cf. Williams 72). Moreover, as Jacques Lacan points out, the uncanny effect will invariably lead to a “breakdown of the distinction between self and other, inside and out, familiar and unfamiliar” (qtd. in Parkin-Gounelas 128). And, as will be shown, such breakdowns constitute a vital element in horror fiction at large.

In her theories about abjection, derived from Freudian psychoanalysis and, in particular, the uncanny, Kristeva discusses similar borderland tensions. Kristeva claims that what is considered frightening reawakens an anxiety regarding the borders of the self, between ‘I’ and ‘not-I,’ an anxiety which echoes the earliest separation of the self from the mother (cf. Williams 74-5). In the wake of the separation between the self and the mother, between subject and object, there exists a ‘pre-condition’ of the process of individuation, known as the ‘abject’ (cf. Franzén 44). The abject, Kristeva points out, is “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite,” that which “disturbs identity, system, order” (4). Feelings of horror, then, surface when the self is reminded of its first, frail attempts at an ‘I,’ its “early, abject materiality” (Williams 75), which, in turn, disturbs the boundaries of the self. As seen here, in pointing out the core from which feelings of uncanniness and horror stem, Freud and Kristeva both emphasise the confounding and transgression of boundaries, familiar and unfamiliar, ‘I’ and ‘not-I.’

The Chthonian Mother: Horror and Setting

The uncanny in horror literature is often linked to the figure of the mother. Indeed, Ruth Parkin-Gounelas emphasises that the mother’s body is “the most uncanny of all sites,” as well as “the source of all desires” (114). She continues: “[T]he place of origin of all human life, woman’s body (especially the genital organs), arouses universally a sense of extreme

uncanniness because of its ultimate familiarity” (114). Such usage of the figure of the mother and images of female genitals as sources of the terrifying is a common one in Gothic and horror literature; for instance, dark vaults, caverns and underground passages are frequent, and so are houses, chasms and pits.

In “The Call of Cthulhu” the most obvious imagery that evokes the female can be found in the city of R’lyeh, or more specifically, its citadel-house,² wherein Cthulhu dwells. The first descriptions of this place tell of a monstrous, reeking cityscape of oozing, greenish stone, “whose *geometry*” however, is “*all wrong*” (84). Through Lovecraft’s emphasis on the *all wrong* geometry, R’lyeh throws aside all normal conceptions of how buildings and structures should look like. Although R’lyeh can be remotely recognised as something familiar, a set of buildings, the wrongness of the geometry puts the reader in uncertainty regarding the nature of the place. Thus, the familiar becomes unfamiliar, in turn evoking a sense of uncanniness. Such sensations of defamiliarisation are further emphasised in the sailor Johansen’s eyewitness description of R’lyeh, where

instead of describing any definite structure or building, he dwells only on broad impressions of vast angles and stone surfaces – surfaces too great to belong to anything right or proper for this earth, and impious with horrible images and hieroglyphs. [...] He said that the geometry of the dream-place he saw was abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours. (93)

Here too, the initially held, familiar conception of a ‘house’ is ruptured by the defamiliarisation of geometry and structure. In his essay on the uncanny, Freud discusses the notion of ‘home.’ The word ‘uncanny’ is a translation of the German word *unheimlich*, which,

² Given R’lyeh’s immense size, it is unclear whether the sailors encounter the entire city, or just the house of Cthulhu. However, the narrator supposes that “only a single mountain-top, the hideous monolith-crowned citadel whereon great Cthulhu was buried, actually emerged from the waters” (93), thus pointing to the fact that it is just the house itself that has surfaced.

in turn, is the opposite of *heimlich*, the term for ‘homely,’ ‘belonging to the house’ and ‘not strange’ (cf. Freud 339-43). “Our house,” Jack Morgan points out, “defines our safe, familiar space; it is *heimlich*” (183). However, in the description above, Johansen cannot find anything familiar; he cannot focus on anything “definite,” nor can he estimate any proportions, apart from the fact that everything is “too great” and “abnormal,” and has “dimensions apart from ours.” While all schemata of architecture incorporate notions of definite boundaries and clear spatial limits, R’lyeh defies reason with its abnormal dimensions and indefiniteness. Indeed, Anne Williams claims that it is inherent in the conventions of Gothic to “imply disorder in the relations of signifiers and signifieds that are taken for granted in our ordinary conception of ‘reality’” (71). Commenting on the significance of the house in the light of Williams’s notions, Morgan asserts that “the house is the defining symbol of what is right and normal, the violation and defilement of which situates primitive anxieties” (183). A result of such violation and disordering, Cthulhu’s *Heim* at R’lyeh thus becomes a *nicht-Heim*, the ‘unhomely’ antithesis of a ‘home.’

More significantly, however, the house, as a Freudian symbol, represents the mother figure. Steven Bruhm comments on the mother figure in Gothic literature, stressing that the “mother often appears as a figure of horror – dangerous, suffocating, monstrous” (271-2). Such connotations of the mother figure, it has been argued, portray “the unconscious in its terrifying aspects” (Guerin et al. 152). As seen above, in its abnormality, the house of R’lyeh represents a defamiliarisation of the most familiar, a distorted and terrible mother figure. This notion is underscored by Johansen’s failure to deliver an adequate description of the place, save for a reference to a “dream-place.” In the passage quoted above, Johansen unconsciously calls upon images of the mother figure. There is an unmistakable analogy here, where R’lyeh, risen from the depths of the ocean, echoes the surfacing of the repressed mother figure from the depths of the unconscious. As Parkin-Gounelas points out, the

maternal matter, the mother, is “persecuting and threatening,” and “leaves an indelible trace on the psyche” (80). In R’lyeh, the mother figure has re-emerged as a warped image, a “perversion,” a “nightmare corpse-city” (94, 92). Similar repulsive features can be seen in Kristeva’s notion of the “abjected” mother who must be repelled, and who is “filthy, horrifying, nauseating,” and “corpse-like” (qtd. in Bruhm 272). In its distortion of the mother figure, the house of R’lyeh undeniably depicts the kind of abhorrent and uncanny imagery that Kristeva describes.

However, Lovecraft underscores R’lyeh’s uncanniness by emphasising another frightening aspect that aligns it with the Kristevan mother figure – that of the “devourer” (Bruhm 272). In doing so, he draws attention to the unmistakable vaginal metaphors – vaults, cavities, and crevices – that R’lyeh displays. These crevices, an effect of the angles of R’lyeh’s unnatural geometry, signal a distortion of the mother figure’s constituents of desire: the womb and the female genitals. Commenting on genital images, Toril Moi asserts that the female genitals are perceived as a “terrifying chaos” (300). Further, Moi points out that whereas the male genitals are considered “good” and “true,” the female genitals carry negative connotations, such as “fragmented,” “nonexistent,” and “negative” (299-300). The threat these images present is underscored by Johansen’s recollections of R’lyeh: “[T]wisted *menace* and suspense *lurked leeringly* in those crazily *elusive* angles of carven rock where a second glance showed *concavity* after the first showed *convexity*” (94, emphasis added). Moreover, Lovecraft furthers this impression of danger by having one of the sailors “swallowed up by an angle of masonry which *shouldn’t have been there*; an angle which was *acute*, but behaved *as if it were obtuse*” (96, emphasis added).

Granted, there is a tendency to see all concave images as female in psychoanalytical criticism. However, R’lyeh’s genital imagery is as easily recognisable as it is ominous. Johansen’s account of the almost mocking elusiveness of the crevices brings to

mind a predatory guile, with which the place seeks the sailors' demise. This notion is furthered by the wicked peril, the "menace," that seems to lurk in the crevices, as if waiting to attack. The threat of R'lyeh's vaginal imagery is then confirmed as the architecture opens up its 'jaws' to devour. In terms of binaries, the good 'phallic' angles change into evil 'vaginal' ones: acute turns into obtuse, convex turns into concave. Indeed, William Ian Miller purports that, from a male point of view, the vagina is often seen as "a gaping maw [...] frighteningly insatiable" (102). This image of R'lyeh as a devouring mother is certainly similar to Bruhm's observation about the representation of mother figures in horror fiction. These mother figures, Bruhm asserts, seek to "lure the subject back to the womb, back to the imaginary time before the ego individuation [...] back to death" (271-2). The female genitals, desirous and alluring, are thus especially apt to represent such entrapment.

Discussing the uncanny nature of the female genitals, Freud points out that "[t]his *unheimlich* place [...] is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings" (368). However, the memories of this prenatal time are repressed in the unconscious, and stir up uncanny feelings if recalled. The opening to Cthulhu's lair, the most prominent of R'lyeh's vaginal metaphors, demonstrates this:

The aperture was black with a darkness almost material. That tenebrousness was indeed a *positive quality*; for it obscured such parts of the inner walls as ought to have been revealed, and actually burst forth like smoke from its aeon-long imprisonment, visibly darkening the sun as it slunk away into the shrunken and gibbous sky on flapping membranous wings. (95)

Similar to the earlier examples of the devouring crevices, this orifice elicits feelings of threat. Lovecraft underscores this impression in his descriptions of the amniotic fluids that herald Cthulhu's coming. As seen in the passage above, these fluids are not even fluids. Instead, they are described as an entity, an animate, "almost material" *presence* of darkness, rather than an

absence of light. It is certainly a hellish picture, describing an opening to the Pit, the Abyss. Appropriately, it also portrays an opening down to the unconscious, a notion the amniotic fluids emphasise.

In their contradictory state between absence and presence of light and darkness, R'lyeh's amniotic fluids serve as a parallel to the in-between status of bodily products. Commenting on bodily waste, Clive Bloom points out that "[t]he products of defilement, products of our bodies, yet now unassimilable and alien, undermine our identity by their presence as both not-us and us" (164). In using and distorting such fluids, Lovecraft signals a breakdown of the boundaries between subject and object, between 'I' and 'not-I.' As Williams argues, contact with bodily fluids and waste products echoes the time of the abject, before the individuation, and causes feelings of repulsion and horror (cf. Williams 75). In other words, the amniotic fluids depicted here act as a reminder of birth and the prenatal state, experiences whose memories evoke uncanniness. Indeed, these memories do, in Lovecraft's descriptions, "burst forth like smoke" from their "imprisonment" in the pit of the unconscious. And, as will be shown, memories of birth and the time before the individuation play an essential role in the culmination of "The Call of Cthulhu," where Cthulhu himself appears from his crypt.

The figure of the mother, as mentioned earlier, is a widely used symbol of the terrifying in Gothic and horror fiction. However, as Kristeva points out, "[f]ear of the archaic mother proves essentially to be a fear of her generative power" (77). And certainly, such fears are embodied in Cthulhu's birth-like emergence:

The odour rising from the newly opened depths was intolerable, and [...] Hawkins [one of the sailors] thought he heard a nasty, slopping sound down there. Everyone listened, and everyone was listening still when It lumbered

slobberingly into sight and gropingly squeezed Its gelatinous green immensity through the black doorway [...]. (95)

Here, Lovecraft elicits feelings through his distortion of the image of the mother figure's birth-giving. As Parkin-Gounelas emphasises, "birth is perceived as violent expulsion, a tearing away from maternal matter" (80). Moreover, Kristeva asserts, "what goes out of the body [...] points to the infinitude of the body proper and gives rise to abjection" (108). Abjection, then, reminds the self that its fragile boundaries are a result of the violent process of separating the subject and object that is birth (cf. Franzén 45). Thus, when Cthulhu emerges from his 'womb,' this scene suggests memories of this earliest and repressed separation. However, with the natal image of Cthulhu, a hideous monster instead of a 'normal child,' the boundaries of the self collapse, and repulsion, horror, and feelings of uncanniness follow. In effect, Cthulhu calls into mind the self's first distorted attempts at an 'I,' the early abject self before the individuation.

As seen here, there are analogies between how Lovecraft constructs R'lyeh's frightening atmosphere and the sources of horror presented in the psychological theories by Freud and, later, by Kristeva. The horror and uncanniness evoked by 'female' imagery – the mother figure, the female genitals, pregnancy, and birth – all stem from conceptions of familiarity buried deep in the unconscious. Similarly, abjection, Kristeva argues, is experienced as a threat from the outside that simultaneously seems to originate from the inside (cf. Franzén 45). And, as Parkin-Gounelas points out regarding the mother figure, "the defamiliarization of the most deeply familiar (and desired) of all human memories" (115) results in extreme horror. A distorted image of the mother figure, R'lyeh does indeed echo Freud's notion of the unconscious as "dark, ancient, primitive, a repository of lawless desires and 'feminine' chaos" (qtd. in Williams 245). In fact, despite Lovecraft's dislike of

psychoanalytical theories, his narratives nevertheless present many instances where imagery that evokes the female functions as a means of conveying horror.³

Moreover, Lovecraft enhances the horror of the ‘female’ imagery in “The Call of Cthulhu” by emphasising the disgusting in his descriptions, which are full of references to stench and decay. The disgusting is a prominent source of horror in fiction. As Miller points out, “[t]he disgusting can possess us, fill us with creepy, almost eerie feelings of not being quite in control, of being haunted” (27). The disgusting can, in other words, evoke feelings of uncanniness, a notion Lovecraft certainly emphasises in his depiction of R’lyeh. R’lyeh, as Lovecraft repeatedly underscores, exudes an aura of foulness. It is described in words evoking decay and fetid odours, a “corpse-city” (92), a “poison[ous]” structure, whose air is “tainted” (95). Furthermore, the whole place is “dripping with green ooze” (65-6); “green” being not a suggestion of vegetation and nature, but of decay, of gangrene. R’lyeh’s stench, moreover, is so profound that “[t]he very sun of heaven seem[s] distorted when viewed through the polarizing miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion” (94). In its foulness, R’lyeh suggests corruption of all that is normally conceived as ‘right’ or ‘true.’ Even the sun, the “law in nature” (Guerin et al. 150), is perverted, ‘polarised’ by the place’s stench. Indeed, as Miller points out, “odors have the power to contaminate” (68).

Similarly, the representation of the body, upon which R’lyeh is modelled, has not only been distorted, as seen above, but also contaminated by foulness. The body, Kristeva argues, “must be [...] *propé* – both clean and one’s own. It must bear no trace of its debt to nature,” in order not to be “defiled” (qtd. in Parkin-Gounelas 62). Hence, it can be argued that the disgust R’lyeh’s corrupted body elicits threatens this notion of the clean and own self, and, in effect, identity itself. Stench, as is well known, is intimately linked with filth and decay.

Commenting on its corrupting effects, Airaksinen points out that stench is “the sign of

³ Consider, for instance, the dark tunnels in “At the Mountains of Madness,” the labyrinths and underground caves in “The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath” and “The Rats in the Walls,” the deformed mother in “The Dunwich Horror,” and the ominous trapdoor in “The Shadow Out of Time.”

transformation of the body into something else” (196). “What used to be a person, an ‘I,’” he continues, “now becomes unnamable and a non-entity” (196). Thus, what Lovecraft shows in his depiction of R’lyeh’s odours and foulness is how degeneration evokes feelings of horror; both in its suggestion of upheaval of the ‘order’ of the untainted body, as well as in its disintegration of identity from ‘I’ to ‘not-I.’ In fact, degeneration constitutes a significant source of horror in Lovecraft’s portrayal of characters too.

Monstrosities and Men: Horror and Characters

Another important feature in Lovecraft’s conveyance of the horror in his narratives is his depiction of characters. In these descriptions, Lovecraft alludes to the fear inherent in the degeneration of humanity into something else, the confounding of the familiar and the unfamiliar.⁴ As Fred Botting points out:

Human nature is seen to be thoroughly unstable, prone to degeneration, with physical corruption a sign of spiritual or moral decline. Degeneration, moreover, draws out the horrible proximity between primitive or beastly natures and civilised, moral human characteristics. (128)

This “horrible proximity” that degeneration threatens to overlap is strikingly similar to the collapses of familiar distinctions that Ilkka Mäyrä touches upon in his studies of the demonic. Demons, Mäyrä asserts, violate these distinctions of familiarity that create identity (cf. Mäyrä 32-3). Further, the way in which the demonic is “positioned as an enemy of a ‘proper’ identity” and a “trouble to the self” (52) echoes Kristeva’s notion of the abject. “The abject,” Kristeva points out, “confronts us [...] with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal” (12). And, as Mäyrä underscores, “the separation of the human ‘us’ and

⁴ For more examples of this, consider the fish-like inhabitants of Innsmouth in “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” the reptile people in “The Nameless City” and “The Doom that came to Sarnath,” and the humanoid crustaceans in “The Whisperer in Darkness,” to mention but a few.

the animalistic⁵ ‘them’ is presented as dangerously confounded in this distorted figure [the demon]” (33). Demons, Mäyrä continues, inhabit a “‘grey zone’ between two different systems of order; those of the human world and nature” (33). Considering such ‘in-betweenness’ from a perspective similar to Mäyrä’s, Botting asserts:

The conjunction of human shape and animal characteristics evokes horror: it is a being that refuses to remain in a symbolically established place and, shifting between animal and human features, confounds what should be a definite and absolute distinction. [...] The disruption of boundaries and the general ambivalence that threatens the security of human identity is often attributed to a diabolical cause. (129)

Indeed, as Mäyrä points out, “the demon is an inhabitant of borderlands” (51). Given their in-between status and anomalous attributes, the fear-causing characters in Lovecraft’s narratives can certainly be referred to as demons.

In “The Call of Cthulhu,” Cthulhu himself and the members of the Cthulhu cult present illustrating instances of such ‘demonised’ and monstrous characters. The cult members, to start with, are referred to as “[d]egraded and ignorant” individuals “of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type” (78). In fact, the narrator finds the degeneration of these “mongrels” (90) so disturbing that he contemplates their very humanity, referring to them as “creatures” (78) rather than humans. The account of Johansen’s encounter and subsequent fight with the cult members furthers these notions: “Of the swarthy cult-fiends [...] he speaks with significant horror. There was some peculiarly abominable quality about them which made their destruction seem almost a duty” (92). Here, Lovecraft’s own racist beliefs⁶ are glaringly apparent, as all cult members belong to minority groups: Eskimos, African-Americans, Mulattos, Kanakas, and Half-Indians. Admittedly, it can be argued that

⁵ On several occasions, Mäyrä refers to demons whose features of monstrosity are derived from nature, hence the connection to animals.

⁶ See, for instance, Lévy 27-30, Joshi 131-5, 366-70, and Wohleber 6.

Lovecraft's depiction of monsters constitutes an outlet for racist notions and similar prejudices (e.g. Lévy 29). However, there is something more sinister to these illustrations, something that disturbs even Lovecraft's own racial hierarchies. Rather, the degeneration Lovecraft depicts here is so severe that it blurs the borders between human and non-human. Accordingly, the subject ceases to be human and deteriorates into something else, something beastly and demonic. An example of such degeneration into the beastly and the animal is given in Inspector Legrasse's encounter with the Cthulhu cult, deep in the Louisiana swamps:

Only poetry or madness could do justice to the noises heard by Legrasse's men [...]. There are vocal qualities peculiar to men, and vocal qualities peculiar to beasts; and it is terrible to hear the one when the source should yield the other. Animal fury and orgiastic licence here whipped themselves to demoniac heights by howls and squawking ecstasies [...]. [...] On this [island in the swamp] now leaped and twisted a more indescribable horde of human abnormality than any but a Sime or an Angarola⁷ could paint. Void of clothing, this hybrid spawn were braying, bellowing and writhing [...]. (76-7)

As the above passage implies, there is not only physical, but also mental degeneration here. The words used by Lovecraft, "beasts," "human abnormality," and "hybrid spawn" point to the cult members' disturbing liminal position. This notion is emphasised by the cultists' utterances, described as "braying" and "bellowing" "howls," as from wild animals. Clearly, the cultists' inhuman howls present a distortion of what is seen as 'normal' and 'right.' A similar example of such a distortion of utterances presents itself in the account of Cthulhu's voice, as it appears to Wilcox in his dreams. It is described as "a voice that was not a voice; a chaotic sensation which only fancy could transmute into sound, but which he [Wilcox] attempted to render by the almost unpronounceable jumble of letters, '*Cthulhu fhtagn*'" (66).

⁷ Sidney Sime (1867-1941) and Anthony Angarola (1893-1929), two of Lovecraft's favourite artists (cf. Loucks, *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*). Sample works of these artists can be found in Appendix A.

Consider the contradiction and disturbing irrationality of this ‘voice.’ It is seemingly void of structure and order, “a voice that was not a voice,” a “chaotic sensation,” yet its message can somehow still be comprehended. Victoria Nelson comments on distortions of vocal qualities as follows: “In folklore such distortion of voice or language has traditionally been a distinguishing feature of the otherworld and [...] of dead souls” (10). Indeed, these utterances depict something sickening, a violation of nature that ought to be removed, cleansed. The narrator’s account, where the cultists’ howls “*tore* and reverberated through those nighted woods like *pestilential tempests* from the gulfs of hell” (76, emphasis added) certainly underlines such suggestions of violation.

Moreover, in describing the cult members, Lovecraft suggests that beastliness brings about the loss of civilisation and morals. Hence, the “[a]nimal fury and orgiastic licence” that the cultists display do not only evoke fear of degeneration, but also unwholesomeness in the allusion to overt sexual gestures, a behaviour commonly associated with animals and rarely considered civilised conduct. Likewise, the cult members’ incomprehensible dancing, the “writhing” and “twist[ing]” of naked, half-human bodies, is disturbing in its suggestions of sexuality and beastliness. As Botting aptly points out, “[a]nimality and sexuality conjoin to shroud a recognisably human form with the regressive features that are perceived as diabolically inhuman” (129). This depiction of the cult members and their conducts as revolting and degenerative is reminiscent of Noël Carroll’s ideas on the role of the impure in the monstrous. In order to be threatening, the monster must be impure as well (cf. Carroll 28). As Carroll points out, “threat is compounded with revulsion, nausea and disgust” (22). In other words, the monster must evoke feelings of disgust alongside its suggestions of threat. Further, concerning impurity, Carroll claims that “an *object* or *being* is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless”

(32). It is a form of boundary transgression, where the cultists can be considered impure, and thereby horrifying, on account of their animal features and behaviours.

However, a more distinct instance of boundary transgression can be seen in Cthulhu himself. As mentioned above, Cthulhu is an amalgam of different animals, real and mythic, a hybrid of dragon, human and octopus. It is a disturbing entity, as the narrator underscores in his account of imagery representing Cthulhu, here a clay bas-relief:

It seemed to be a sort of monster [...] of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive. If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the *general outline* of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful. (63-4)

In Cthulhu, Lovecraft indeed attempts to portray “something horribly remote and distinct from mankind as we know it” (72), something frightening, alien, and chaotic. Likewise, observing another Cthulhoid image, the narrator points out that it “seem[s] instinct with a fearsome and unnatural malignancy” (72). As with the aforementioned cult members and the image of R’lyeh, the horror Cthulhu elicits has its ground in familiar conceptions that have been defamiliarised. The familiar boundaries of the human form are transgressed by the confounding of species in the dragon and cephalopod features. And, in Botting’s and Carroll’s terms, this is a sign of degeneration and impurity. Such instances of degeneration and impurity are also prominent in the terms “human caricature,” and later, “vaguely anthropoid outline” (72), which describe Cthulhu’s humanoid characteristics.

As seen here, the ambiguous and liminal forms Lovecraft depicts are more or less an expression of the abject. In Kristevan terms, the implications of impurity violate the “clean and proper” body that is “fully symbolic” (102). Any impurity, Kristeva argues, would

make the body “non-separate” and “non-symbolic” (102). This can indeed be seen in the ‘vague’ and ‘caricaturised’ anthropoid features and the animal characteristics in Cthulhu, as well as in the cult members’ implied animal traits; all of which mark the ‘impure.’ Thus, in describing that which only a “diseased fancy,” or “poetry or madness” can depict properly, Lovecraft once again challenges the fragile boundary between ‘I’ and ‘not-I,’ from which the self’s fears stem. This notion of “poetry” and “madness” is, interestingly enough, also a notable aspect of Lovecraft’s mode of narration.

The Fall of Discourse: Horror and Mode of Narration

Lovecraft’s mode of narration constitutes another significant facet of his conveyance of horror. In order to create the feelings of uncanniness in his stories, Lovecraft makes use of two stylistic devices of narration. There is, on one hand, a tendency to leave out information in the narrative, a stylistic vagueness, and on the other hand a tendency towards exaggerated and ‘ponderous’ narration. It is with the omissions of information, the textual gaps in the narratives, that the following discussion will start.

In deliberately omitting information in the narrative, Lovecraft leaves the interpretation and inference to the reader’s imagination. However, these omissions of information also create an uncertainty in the text. And uncertainty, Yvonne Leffler asserts, is “the basic prerequisite for all suspense” (104). Accordingly, this uncertainty evokes an atmosphere of tension and motivates the reader into further interaction with the text (cf. Leffler 104). Indeed, Wolfgang Iser argues that “it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process” (109). Iser points out that this communication

is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and implicit, between

revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. (111)

The communication between reader and text motivates the reader to attribute meaning to the gaps in the text (cf. Iser 110-1). Consequently, the reader is “drawn into events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said” (111). However, in relation to horror literature, Leffler points out that the questions created by the text’s gaps are not meant to be answered, but to evoke feelings of anticipation and uncertainty in the reader (cf. Leffler 107).

Instances of this narrative vagueness can certainly be found in “The Call of Cthulhu,” as the uncanny atmosphere surrounding Johansen’s confrontation with Cthulhu is created by anticipations and omissions of information.⁸ Consider first this detailed description of Cthulhu, available to Johansen through the medium of a stone idol:

It represented a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind. (72)

However, in spite of this detailed description, when Johansen encounters the monster, it is devoid of any resemblance to the stone idol:

The Thing cannot be described – there is no language for such abysses of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order. A mountain walked or stumbled. (95)

Lovecraft does not delve into details; instead, he fragmentises the narrative by omitting information. In doing so, Lovecraft attempts to evoke the feeling that humans cannot be expected to comprehend such horrors, let alone describe them. Although the general

⁸ For more examples of narrative vagueness, see Lovecraft’s depiction of Walter Gilman’s dream visions in “The Dreams in the Witch-House,” the glimpse of the older Whateley brother in “The Dunwich Horror,” or, perhaps most strikingly, the delirious description of the monster in “The Unnamable.”

impression of the monster is given, like in the case of Johansen's stone idol, the actual confrontation with the source of horror defies comprehension. However, as will be shown in the following section, the reader's attempts at such comprehension become a means for Lovecraft of conveying horror.

Commenting on Lovecraft's modes of description, Timo Airaksinen asserts that what Lovecraft strives to depict can only be realised with images – by so-called non-cognitive suggestions – since they cannot be grasped by means of ideas or reference (cf. Airaksinen 169). Clarifying the importance of images, Airaksinen stresses that “ideas do not entail images,” but “images entail ideas” (171). Lovecraft intends to create an atmosphere, Airaksinen continues, and the images he utilises in order to do so carry with them ideas of monstrosities, danger and death; however, these ideas “do not form a systematic whole, because they flow from the images which are efficient only insofar as they are [...] indeterminate and incomplete” (171). In this way, the images evoke both horror and uncertainty. Similarly, Iser points out that “the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination,” arguing that it is “the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning” (111). In other words, through gaps in his narratives, Lovecraft leaves the creation of meaning, and horror, to the reader's imagination. This is certainly no special technique, but a common one in Gothic and Romantic fiction.

However, Lovecraft takes this method a step further in his use of the gaps in the narrative, as he challenges the limits of imagination by alluding to that which can never be comprehended or understood. This, in turn, is central to the evoking of uncanniness in his mode of narration. Indeed, the uncanny, as Punter points out, is that “which is not known, which can never be known, because its very identity” is “rendered incapable of interpretation or explanation” (“Shape and Shadow” 194). Ernst Jentsch, who discusses the uncanny, shares similar views. According to Freud, Jentsch contends that “intellectual uncertainty” is “the

essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness” (341). In Lovecraft’s narratives there is always a gap of uncertainty, a chasm that defies understanding. As a result, what cannot be described is expressed through the use of negative modifiers like ‘no’ and ‘un-’ (cf. Airaksinen 173). And, as seen in the example above, Lovecraft’s descriptions are full of negative modifiers like these. Everything witnessed is ‘unspeakable,’ ‘chaotic,’ ‘beyond description and comprehension,’ ‘past all languages,’ ‘contradictory,’ ‘confusing,’ and ‘lunatic.’ In his discussion on the uncanny, Freud emphasises the negative modifier ‘un-’ as “the token of repression” (368). Certainly, repression and the return of the repressed, to recall Bresnick, constitute a condition for the uncanny experience. More importantly, however, the negativity of such modifiers, Airaksinen asserts, “dissects language and cuts out a fragment of reality,” which is “an impossibility in positive terms” (173). It is, as Airaksinen points out, “as if the narrator tried to do the impossible and give a positive form to something that is beyond language” (173). Words, as mentioned before, are simply not always enough to describe Lovecraft’s horrors. The outcome of attempting to capture the horrors in words is more than often a failure of meaning and comprehension, resulting in confusion and fear, as seen in the passages above. Thus, it is through such attempts of description that feelings of uncanniness surface in this aspect of Lovecraft’s narrative mode.

Contrary to the aforementioned method of omitting passages in the narrative, Lovecraft’s other stylistic device for conveying horror derives from a highly elaborate and abundant narrative manner. In fact, his style on these occasions is so profuse some might even call it ‘overheated’ and ‘feverish’ (cf. Johansson 62). The most prominent aspect of Lovecraft’s style, however, is his extreme use of adjectives. According to Airaksinen, such usage of adjectives constitutes a source of horror in Lovecraft’s narratives. Airaksinen explains, “when Lovecraft piles up adjectives, the reader does not know what he is doing, and this creates the expectation of the worst. It incites an expectation of the unknown” (94). An

illustrating example of such a ‘piling of adjectives’ is the description of Inspector Legrasse’s journey through the Louisiana woods:

At the end of the passable road they alighted, and for miles splashed on in silence through the terrible cypress woods where day never came. Ugly roots and malignant hanging nooses of Spanish moss beset them, and now and then a pile of dank stones or fragment of a rotting wall intensified by its hint of morbid habitation a depression which every malformed tree and every fungous islet combined to create. [...] A reddish glare, too, seemed to filter through pale undergrowth beyond the endless avenues of forest night. [...] Inspector Legrasse and his nineteen colleagues plunged on unguided into black arcades of horror that none of them had ever trod before. (75)

Critics have argued that such exaggerated use of adjectives is a faulty and inappropriate stylistic feature.⁹ However, it can be argued that Lovecraft’s use of adjectives creates a fantastic, almost magical language, an ‘incantatory’ narration that seems to summon up the horrible in the text. In his narrative incantation, Lovecraft adds layers upon layers of descriptions on the object he intends to depict. These descriptions, often long and complex, yet stylistically similar, are presented by Lovecraft in a repetitive, almost chanting, manner. Through such layering of descriptions, Lovecraft summons up an image of that which intends to horrify.¹⁰ It is, however, through the adjectives, the ‘words of power’ in Lovecraft’s conjurations, that the horrifying can emerge. In effect, the forest in the passage above is given its uncanny atmosphere through Lovecraft’s seemingly incessant barrage of adjectives. In their profusion, words like “terrible,” “ugly,” “malignant,” “morbid,” “endless,” and “black” do not clarify the text; rather they obfuscate it with the meanings they carry. And, as

⁹ See, for instance, Nelson 10, Airaksinen 91, or Edmund Wilson in Joshi 153.

¹⁰ Indeed, this form of description is perhaps the one most favoured by Lovecraft, and the instances of its usage are legion. However, the descriptions of the Colour’s departure in “The Colour Out of Space” and the dying Wilbur Whateley in “The Dunwich Horror” are perhaps the most illustrating examples of this narrative mode.

Lovecraft embeds them in his layers of description, the text's meaning ultimately becomes submerged in the excess of information. Such an unintelligibility of meaning creates in the reader feelings of uncertainty and, through the suggestion of the unknown, horror.

Discussing literature in which horror, as an expression of the abject, is a notable feature, Kristeva comments on authors who are fascinated by the horrible, the detestable and the rejected – a category of writers that Lovecraft certainly belongs to. These authors, Kristeva points out, have identified with 'the impossible' within them, which, in turn, leads to a 'perversion of the language' in their writings, both stylistically and thematically (cf. Franzén 46).¹¹ On the whole, Kristeva purports, narratives are "the recounting of suffering: fear, disgust and abjection crying out" (145). In the light of this, it can be argued that what Lovecraft sets out to achieve with his two stylistic devices, his own 'perversions of the language,' is to elicit a feeling of the abject, and thus horror, in his narratives. The feeling of the abject, then, is evoked through what Airaksinen refers to as 'unwriting.'

The technique of unwriting, according to Airaksinen, "aims at somewhere which is beyond all narrative structure and possible worlds" (95). An illustrating example of this is the chanting of the Cthulhu cults: "*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn*"¹² ("The Call of Cthulhu" 74). What Lovecraft presents in this chanting is, on account of its virtually unpronounceable sounds and alien structure, not legible in a normal sense. Hence, the chanting, as a text, is beyond all normal conceptions of what texts should look like. When this is the case, unwriting occurs: the text ceases to be a 'text' and becomes an 'untext,' a sort of 'scream' rather than any controlled form of discourse (cf. Airaksinen 95). However, the process of unwriting eventually leads to a collapse of the text and its language, in a way

¹¹ Kristeva focuses on Louis-Ferdinand Céline, but she also mentions authors like Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Artaud, and Borges.

¹² According to Lovecraft, this translates as follows: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming" ("The Call of Cthulhu" 74).

Airaksinen likens to a collapse of identity; it is something that cannot be described (cf. Airaksinen 96).

The collapse of identity and meaning does indeed bring to mind Kristeva's discussion of the abject. The abject, Kristeva points out, "draws [the subject] toward the place where meaning collapses" (qtd. in Martin and Savoy viii). Moreover, this feeling of the abject, as it arises through Lovecraft's mode of narration, is similar to the 'scream' produced by unwriting. Indeed, Kristeva asserts that in the narration of the abjection, description must yield to a 'theme scream' – a narration that does not narrate in ordinary manner, but 'screams' its message with 'maximal stylistic intensity' (cf. Franzén 47).¹³

As seen in the above discussions, the basis of horror in Lovecraft's two stylistic devices, excess and absence of information, is basically the unintelligibility of meaning, the 'scream.' In his narratives, Lovecraft strives to create impressions of things that are beyond the regular and the normal. In both stylistic devices, this effect is created by means of unwriting. Indeed, "[w]hen logic and physics fail," Airaksinen asserts, "the writing of the story must be replaced by unwriting" (177). In 'unwriting' his texts, Lovecraft evokes a feeling of the abject, whose presence implies disruption of system and order – a breakdown in the relation between signifier and signified. As Parkin-Gounelas points out, "it is as if the failure of the signifier [...] collapses into something more psychologically disturbing, a disruption of the clarity of 'I *versus* not-I' which every infant has to learn to negotiate" (67). Meaning collapses, and, in a way, so does identity. What the reader experiences reminds him/her of the horrifying confusion regarding the borders of the self that distinguished the time of the abject, before individuation and language. The "autonomy of language" (Williams 188) that enabled the subject to exist outside its object is challenged and brought to its limits.

¹³ Kristeva's original term here is *thème-cri* (cf. Franzén 47).

And thus, it is through this evocation of the abject anxiety about language that horror arouses in Lovecraft's mode of narration.

Chaos and Order: The Narrative Structure

This 'collapse of meaning' that Lovecraft's mode of narration elicits is in fact embedded in the structure of the narrative as well. In terms of binaries, there is a tension between order and chaos, a tension in which chaos ultimately prevails. Consider thus the structure of the introduction of "The Call of Cthulhu," which presents a pattern of order and chaos that is present throughout the course of the narrative. Right from the story's opening, a feeling of chaos is present. This is presented in the narrator's laments regarding the knowledge he has accidentally stumbled upon:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein [...]. (61)

Lovecraft presents a horrible vision of the perils that may come with 'wrong' knowledge. The peaceful and ordered is but ephemeral and illusionary, something under constant threat from the chaos that lurks beyond human ignorance. Indeed, full understanding of this situation will, as the narrator puts it, be so overwhelming that "we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age" (61). Hence, the lack of knowledge presents itself as the only safeguard against this threatening chaos. The source of these anxieties about knowledge, it turns out, is the works of the narrator's deceased uncle.

From these first portentous words, however, Lovecraft shifts the emphasis from chaos and situates the story in a scholarly surrounding, a place of order, science and enlightenment. And it is in this well-ordered place the narrator recalls the examining of his late uncle's works. The recollection of the uncle, "George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages in Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island" (62), is one that suggests order, science and knowledge as well. This impression of order is underscored by the narrator's statement that "Professor Angell was widely known as an authority on ancient inscriptions, and had frequently been resorted to by the heads of prominent museums; so that his passing at the age of ninety-two may be recalled by many" (62). As seen here, the words, "Professor Emeritus," "widely known," "authority," "recalled by many" express the law and order that knowledge brings, in contrast to the narrator's notion of chaos in knowledge. Moreover, the professor's death at the age of ninety-two can hardly be considered as something unusual by any scientific standards.

However, as the circumstances surrounding the professor's death are mentioned, the notion of chaos once again presents itself. The professor, the narrator recalls, died mysteriously after having been "jostled by a nautical-looking negro who had come from one of the queer dark courts on the precipitous hillside which formed a short cut [...] to the deceased's home" (62). Originating from a place "dark" and "queer," the subject is clearly an agent of the darkness that lies beyond order: chaos. Further, the dark hue and African-American origin of the subject bring to mind racial stereotyping of the colonial discourses, as well as similar Biblical notions that associate blackness with evil (cf. Loomba 105). Perhaps the most unsettling and telling word here is "nautical," however. While this word can be read as an innocent reference to the African-American's supposed occupation, the meaning it carries is in fact far more ominous, since, given the opposition between order and chaos, the

sailor traverses not the seas of our world, but the “black seas of infinity” that the narrator refers to in the opening.

Moreover, the physicians examining the case, the only embodiments of order in this passage, try in vain to rationalise the cause of death. Yet, they “were unable to find any *visible disorder*, but concluded after perplexed debate that some obscure lesion of the heart [...] was responsible for the end” (62, emphasis added). The absence of a discernable source underlines the danger presented here, as it implies hidden chaotic forces within the boundaries of what is conceived as ‘normal.’

As seen here, in the three introductory paragraphs of “The Call of Cthulhu,” Lovecraft skilfully presents the tension between order and chaos in the narrative’s structure, a tension that is noticeable throughout the story. And, as mentioned above, chaos ultimately emerges as the dominant factor. In the end of “The Call of Cthulhu,” the order of the scientific and scholarly has to yield to the chaos of R’lyeh and Cthulhu. In effect, this tension here creates a theme that runs throughout the text.

Indeed, this theme of chaos and order is present in all elements discussed in this analysis: setting, characters, and narrative technique and structure. Consider the ordered and civilised settings of Boston and Sydney, where the narrator conducts his research, as opposed to the chaos of R’lyeh and the darkened Louisiana woods. In the same vein, the characters in the ordered settings, academics and policemen, can be seen as embodiments of knowledge and law. Conversely, the characters of the chaotic side, Cthulhu and his cultists, represent the very antithesis of such order with their liminal forms and their ‘wrong’ or ‘forbidden’ knowledge. The narrative mode and structure, as seen above, demonstrates the transformation of the text from ordered into chaotic, from familiar to unfamiliar. In effect, this theme reflects Lovecraft’s own anxieties. As Punter points out, “Lovecraft’s greatest fear was of disorder,

chaos, the situation which would result if the walls of convention which surrounded both human perception and the cosmos were to be breached” (*Literature* 42).

However, the disordering Lovecraft fears and depicts is also a prominent feature of his time, the Modernist era.¹⁴ As Thomas Vargish and Delo E. Mook assert, “the order/disorder duality” is “an obsessive concern in literary Modernism” (101). And, as will be shown, in order to better understand the horror in “The Call of Cthulhu,” the narrative must be considered in connection to the context in which it was written.

Contemporary Parallels: Lovecraft and the Zeitgeist

The Modernist era, Vargish and Mook point out, is permeated by an “epistemic trauma,” which is “a kind of primary or initial difficulty, strangeness, opacity; a violation of common sense, of our laboriously achieved intuitions of reality [...]” (14). “The traditional guidelines,” Vargish and Mook continue, “disappear along with the traditional complexities, those organizing ideas and devices that provided keys and coordinates for meaning” (15). Following the same theoretical perspective, John Lye refers to a “loss of confidence that there exists a reliable, knowable ground of value and identity” (*Some Cultural*) as a key feature in Modernism. In art and literature this “epistemic trauma” emerges as a refusal to provide the reader or audience with guidelines for interpretation (cf. Vargish and Mook 14). This can indeed be seen in “The Call of Cthulhu,” especially in Lovecraft’s mode of narration and the setting.

Consider first Lovecraft’s mode of narration. As mentioned above, Lovecraft’s mode of narration is constructed around a combination of extreme absence and excess of information, an obfuscation, which, in turn, results in a collapse of meaning in the text. In Modernist writing, Vargish and Mook refer to a “confrontational difficulty” (37), which

¹⁴ Time-wise, the Modernist era can be said to be situated between the 1860s and World War II.

occurs as a reaction to the text. This difficulty is experienced as “a bewilderment at something left out, at being given *incomplete information*, inadequate data to understand the phenomena [...]” (37). The chaos created by the collapse of meaning in Lovecraft’s narratives does certainly echo such difficulties.

The same notions of difficulties at interpretation are present in Lovecraft’s depictions of architecture and structures. Indeed, the distorted imagery and non-Euclidean geometry described in the city of R’lyeh is reminiscent of that found in the prevailing artistic expressions in Modernism: Cubism and Surrealism. In the art movements prior to Modernism, the ambition was to represent the world according to ‘reality,’ or, as Vargish and Mook put it, according to the principles of “optical similitude or perspective” (25). In those art movements, Euclidean geometry is a prominent feature as it formulates the rules of a linear and proportional picturing of an object (cf. Vargish and Mook 25-6). Hence, Euclidean geometry can, in effect, be seen as an ‘ordered’ framework for artistic expressions. Non-Euclidean geometry, on the other hand, “means that the ‘laws’ of linear perspective are [...] invalid from a physical point of view” (Vargish and Mook 27). Thus, the non-Euclidean geometry Lovecraft depicts in R’lyeh points towards a defying of the ordered perception of objects.

Furthermore, as an allusion to female and maternal imagery, R’lyeh’s geometrical distortions can be seen as an effort at reproducing the irregularities of something organic, something which cannot be mastered by geometry or ‘ordered’ art. As the Modernist art critic and poet T. E. Hulme contends, the “geometrical shape” of such art is “durable and permanent,” and functions as a “refuge from the flux and impermanence of outside nature” (86). Hulme continues:

In the reproduction of natural objects there is an attempt to purify them of their characteristically living qualities in order to make them necessary and immovable. The changing is translated into something fixed and necessary. This

leads to rigid lines and dead crystalline forms, for pure geometrical regularity gives a certain pleasure to men troubled by the obscurity of outside appearance. The geometrical line is something absolutely distinct from the messiness, the confusion, and the accidental details of existing things. (86-87)

Art, in Hulme's view, should be disciplined into rigid forms. It must be controlled, so as not to become threatening. Commenting on Hulme's aesthetic, Max Saunders asserts, "[f]ormal regulation can be a defence against fear, a consolation for a feeling of corruption" (433). The imagery R'lyeh presents is considered threatening as it falls outside such regular, well-defined, geometrical standards of rendering objects. Thus, through its irrational, non-Euclidean structures, the 'impure' "living qualities" of R'lyeh's imagery can emerge alongside its troubling sexual and female connotations.

Moreover, the structural abnormalities that Lovecraft depicts bring to mind Surrealism and, in turn, psychoanalysis, which emerged in the same time period. Surrealism, as is well known, is closely related to Freudian psychology as it draws upon the mind and the unconscious for its expressions (cf. Spector 151). Jack Spector explains this connection: "The dissolution of rational limits, which the Surrealists found in [...] psychotic states [like schizophrenia] and which they tried to emulate in their productions, is a characteristic Freud also found in the dream" (171). To Freud, the unconscious, the origin of dreams and repository of sexual drives, is the "root of artistic creativity" and the source of "all cultural and psychic phenomena" (qtd. in Hutcheon 315, 313). Furthermore, the sexual suggestions that Hulme sees in irregular and 'uncontrolled' art are even more prevalent in Surrealism. Given the connection between Surrealism and psychoanalysis, Spector points out that all forms of Freudian sexual imagery and symbolism can be seen in Surrealism (cf. Spector 155-6).¹⁵ And, as seen above, sexual suggestions and the "dissolution of rational limits" are indeed

¹⁵ Here, Spector mentions artists like Dalí, Breton, Tanguy, and Paul Delvaux.

present in Lovecraft's imagery of horror, which carries many parallels to contemporary art. Consider the liminal and amalgam forms of Cthulhu and his cultists; the latter's sexual implications; or, as mentioned earlier, R'lyeh, which too shares these traits of sexuality and distortion.¹⁶ Thus, the expressions of Modernist art can, in effect, be said to provide fitting images for Lovecraft's descriptions of the horrors of the unconscious.

Altogether, the disorder Lovecraft presents and visualises in his narratives can be seen as a reflection of the Modernist era's *Zeitgeist*. And certainly, the "refusal to provide the reassuring conclusiveness of the past" (Vargish and Mook 14), one of the central features in Modernism's "epistemic trauma," is prominent in Lovecraft's narratives. However, the Modernist expressions in Lovecraft's narratives are also significant when it comes to discussing the aesthetics of horror in his works.

Conclusion

As seen in this analysis, from the discussions regarding the setting, via the consideration of characters, to the study of narration and structure, psychology is indeed significant to Lovecraft's construction of horror. The utterly alien horrors that Lovecraft describes in his narratives stem not from Punter's "unintelligible outside," but from within. As has been shown, what Lovecraft depicts is in fact the fear of loss of self and identity, a fear that can, to some extent, be unearthed and understood by means of psychoanalysis. This fear, and the sources of horror Lovecraft connects to it – imagery that evokes the female, chaos, the unknown – are old and well-known symbols of the frightening. And, as mentioned above, these sources of horror are commonly used in the discourse of Gothic and horror. Yet,

¹⁶ Certainly, the Lovecraftian imagery carries many similarities to Modernist art, both Surrealism and Cubism. Regarding liminal forms and sexuality, consider Dalí's *The Specter of Sex Appeal* (1934), Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), or perhaps his *Figures on a Beach* (1931), which brings to mind both naked women and distorted structures and edifices. More examples of such distortion of structures can be seen in Dalí's *Apparatus and Hand* (1927), René Magritte's *The Annunciation* (1932), and indeed in Picasso's *Factory in Horta de Ebbo* (1909), whose geometry is, as Lovecraft would have put it, "all wrong." *Factory in Horta de Ebbo* and *The Specter of Sex Appeal* can be found in Appendix B.

Lovecraft's ways of expressing these horrors, similar to those found in Modernism, are, as it were, new. In effect, with its "epistemic trauma," Modernism can be seen as a framework for the Lovecraftian aesthetics of horror. As Maurice Lévy aptly points out, "[i]n Lovecraft, fantastic creation rests on the destruction of all structures, those of language as well as those of space and time" (95). Appropriately, Lovecraft's greatest fear, disorder, is a key-feature in the Modernist expressions through which his horrors are visualised.

Regarding horror, moreover, it is notable that Freud himself viewed such things as horror stories with scepticism. According to Freud, supernatural horror stories have no future in our by science "disenchanted world" (Geary 124), as education and reason would bring about the end of ghost stories and their likes. Nonetheless, supernatural horror literature has proliferated, its essence having survived many shifts of paradigms during the course of history. It can be argued that Freud, like many others who doubted the persistence of horror literature, failed to take into account the importance of the paradigm, or *Zeitgeist*, when considering the expressions and forms of the frightening. Granted, given the scientific breakthroughs of the Modernist era, in which Freud wrote, it is apparent why ghost stories and similar traditional horrors lost their appeal. With the shift of paradigms, new expressions are needed for the horrifying. And, as seen in Lovecraft's case, the horrifying will always emerge in one way or another, its aesthetics and expressions depending on context.

"Children will always be afraid of the dark" (*Supernatural* 425), Lovecraft once wrote on the persistence of horror literature. And truly so, in a double meaning. On one hand, the vast and mysterious darkness that lies beyond our knowledge, our "placid island of ignorance," will always be a source of horror. But perhaps the most frightening of all is the dark and unknown which resides deep within us, within the abyss of the mind.

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