The Uncanny in H. P. Lovecraft's Short Stories

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Završni rad

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

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Abstract

The Necronomicon is a collection of short stories by Howard P. Lovecraft, a renowned author of the horror genre and pulp fiction. Being such a prolific author of the horror genre, this paper will show that Lovecraft's works are interspersed with various elements that give his writing an uncanny touch: specific architecture, representation of the Other, temporal displacement, imitation, and anxiety. After introducing the concept of the uncanny, the paper reviews horror as a genre and showcases how it was influenced by the contemporary society. After that, the paper analyses the elements that make up this *uncanny* phenomenon by relating them to human kind's fears best shown in three of Lovecraft's selected stories, each of which showcases an element of the uncanny most fit for the plot. The depth of his works allows for the analysis to relate back to the psychology of the human mind, that is to the innate fear that people have of otherness and that which is unknown.

Keywords: H. P. Lovecraft, horror literature, uncanny, "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Colour Out of Space," "The Shadow Out of Time."

Contents

Introduction

The paper discusses the use of horror elements in the works of Howard P. Lovecraft which in turn make up the *uncanny*. Relying on Ernst Jentsch's paper "Psychology of the Uncanny" and Sigmund Freud's essay "On the Uncanny" as theoretical backgrounds that detail what the uncanny is and how one might experience it, the paper extrapolates the topic by analysing the elements mentioned through several of Lovecraft's stories. The chosen short stories are: "The Call of Cthulhu" as representative of uncanny architecture, "The Colour Out of Space," in which there are strong topics of otherness and terror, and "The Shadow Out of Time," which deals with the topics and theories of imitation, anxiety, and temporal displacement as a source of the uncanny.[1]

The paper's opening chapter deals with the uncanny itself, serving as an introduction and an overview of the elements that will be utilized in analysis later on. Explaining the theoretical backings to the later analysis, the opening chapter looks into Ernst Jentsch's understanding of the uncanny and what causes it to arise in the individual. Following Jentsch's article, it gives a brief overview of Sigmund Freud's "On the Uncanny" through the analysis of Nicholas Royle and his book *The Uncanny* and Heidi Schlipphacke's paper "The Place and Time of the Uncanny."

The subsequent chapter deals with horror as a genre, as an introduction into the works of H. P. Lovecraft. It details a brief history of the genre as a literary staple, the influences on it, and gives a brief explanation as to why the genre is so popular. This chapter introduces the concept of cosmic horror, which is inextricable from Lovecraft's works.

The third chapter delves into the aforementioned analysis, opening up with a brief introduction on how the uncanny relates to H. P. Lovecraft, the leitmotifs in his works, and his style of writing, using authors such as Edmund Burke and Thomas Hull as reference. It focuses on several key topics and explains them through the examples found in Lovecraft's short stories. In "The Call of Cthulhu," the paper analyses the uncanny through descriptions of architecture. Following this, the paper focuses on the uncanny through the lens of otherness and senses in "The Colour Out of Space." The final subchapter deals with the uncanny in imitation, temporal displacement, and the anxiety that can be found in the plotline of "The Shadow Out of Time."

[1] For the sake of brevity, these works will be abbreviated in the citations as *CC, SOT,* and *COS.*

1. The Uncanny

The term “the uncanny” in itself can evoke in the reader a recollection of several correlating terms, such as: the uncanny valley, the supernatural, the otherworldly, the anxiety of the unknown, and so on. All of these terms are closely related to what makes up the uncanny or what gives the reader a feeling of something being uncanny. By definition, the uncanny is something “strange or unusual in a way that is surprising or difficult to understand” (“Uncanny”), but what causes such a feeling to rise inside the reader, or a consumer of any other art form, is often perceived as more specific than something simply being “unusual.” Despite being an adjective, the uncanny is often used as an invoker of a specific type of feeling. A precise definition of something as complicated as the feelings that the uncanny calls to surface, which are often intuitive and not within the control of the person feeling them, cannot be streamlined into a handful of words. As exemplified in the works of H. P. Lovecraft, there are many ways in which one can elicit the feeling of uncanniness, and some of the aspects of the related feelings are analysed by Sigmund Freud and Ernst Jentsch. Both authors exemplify the uncanny as related to the human psyche, to their fears and their states of mind. However, Jentsch’s paper “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” and Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” differ in their approaches to the topic, with Freud criticizing Jentsch and his definitions, providing his own as a sound response instead.

1.1. Ernst Jentsch’s “Psychology of the Uncanny”

In his paper “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” Jentsch depicts his understanding of the word “uncanny” and all that it entails. He begins his paper with an overall review of what the word means, before delving further into an explanation that suits his perception of the word and the related feelings according to his knowledge of the human psyche. In his paper he states that the “uncanny” appears to express the emotions of “someone to whom something ‘uncanny’ happens is not quite ‘at home’ or ‘at ease’ in the situation concerned” (Jentsch 8), which he then equates with a general lack of spatial awareness or orientation. In his paper he focuses quite heavily on this lack of orientation, making it the basis of his further research and his claims. He also writes at length about the human brain and how it can either adapt to a situation, or refuse to believe anything out of the ordinary, any situation that can be signalled out: “The brain is often reluctant to overcome the resistances that oppose the assimilation of the phenomenon in question into its

proper place" (Jentsch 8). It is common sense for people to try and rationalize that which they do not know or that which is not a part of their everyday life, but Jentsch claims that the feeling of uncertainty that is closely linked to the uncanny is not infrequently felt by those who seek knowledge (9). He correlates most of his theories about the feeling and manifestations of the uncanny with knowledge, putting into opposition "new/foreign/hostile" and "old/known/familiar" (9), once again drawing on the lack of orientation, this time as a lack of knowledge of one's surroundings, be it temporal or spatial. When it comes to knowledge, he further writes about insight and how important it is in one's ability to feel the unease that comes with the uncanny: "But one's insight can be especially reduced because of a rampantly proliferating fantasy" (Jentsch 9), comparing the insight of an adult to that of a child – children often disregard things most adults find to "[arouse] strong emotions" (10).

Additionally, Jentsch suggests that people who have a history of mental illness can both serve as those who arouse the feeling and those who feel it the strongest (10). This appears to be because of the feeling that those individuals produce in the "ordinary primitive man" (10). Jentsch takes care to point out how the ordinary human is quick to judge and to ostracize based on what he knows is his definition of normality: "The appearance of this stirring always presupposes the individual's insight into certain higher form of expediency of the phenomenon in question" (10). In regard to the lack of a sane mind, he also writes about how taking away a person's sense can attribute to the feeling, calling those who fear the night (a visible aspect of the uncanny that is often opposed to the psychological) "chicken-hearted" (10).

In the second part of his paper, he talks about the reproduction of the uncanny through the inanimate, the imitation and man's tendency to assume and project. The uncanny through the inanimate manifests in doubt and subversion of the expected: "The mass that at first seemed completely lifeless suddenly reveals an inherent energy because of its movement" (Jentsch 11). The example used is typically found in instances of physical horror, and Jentsch notes that the moment of uncertainty about the origin of this physicality of the inanimate object is what causes the terror to dominate the spectrum of emotions one feels in that situation (11). Despite the nature of this type of uncanny, it also relates closely to knowledge and knowing the source of one's own terror. Next, he speaks about imitation and gives the examples of wax figures, panopticons and panoramas (12). Jentsch points out that true art stays away from total imitation because such a thing can produce unease in those who witness it (12) – namely, it is easy, when one's senses are even slightly impaired, to mistake the imitation for a real thing. Further, he writes about how the uncanny can be achieved through reinterpretation: "In the dark, a rafter

covered with nails this becomes the jaw of a fabulous animal, a lonely lake becomes the gigantic eye of a monster" (13), leading the paper back into the territory of the impairment of one's senses. These senses can also become impaired when it comes to people who are delirious, intoxicated, ecstatic or superstitious: "The boundary between the pathological and the normal is crossed here with particular ease" (Jentsch 13). Lastly, he writes about the human tendency to ascribe their own expectations to things that do not always end up behaving the way they expect them to which causes them unease: "that things in the external world are also animate, or perhaps more correctly, are animate in the same way" (13). And onto these animate things, a person then projects his own fears and insecurities that frighten him because his lack of knowledge confuses him: "threatened by something unknown and incomprehensible that is just as enigmatic to the individual as his own psyche is as well" (Jentsch 14).

Jentsch ends his essay with the sentiment that humans experience and battle the uncanny through knowledge; for better or for worse, they strive to conquer all that is unknown: "The human desire for the intellectual mastery of one's environment is a strong one" (15), but that knowledge also provides "shelter" from "hostile forces" and "a lack of certainty" that one can experience when faced with the uncanny (Jentsch 15).

1.2. Freud's "On the Uncanny"

When it comes to Freud and his disregard of Jentsch's explanations for the uncanny, he sets out to distinguish himself from his predecessor by denying most of what Jentsch had written about it. In his book *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle analyses and delves into the differences, but also the similarities, between these two views of the uncanny. Royle writes about intellectual uncertainty, literature and psychoanalysis and about how these are some of the things that Freud is trying to distance the uncanny from, but are undeniably connected to it (51-52). About the uncanny itself, Royle writes: "It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural" (1). He aligns his views with Jentsch's on knowing oneself, but extrapolates on the simpler definition: "It can take form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context" (1).

In regards to the three things previously listed as parts of Freud's essay, Royle's descriptions sometimes contradict what Freud himself states; Royle then moves onto a deeper analysis. For intellectual uncertainty he writes: "I wish to suggest that 'intellectual uncertainty' is in part what

Freud's essay has to teach and, indeed, that this is a crucial dimension of any teaching worthy of the name" (52), alluding to his belief that intellectual uncertainty is not something to be feared itself, but it is a new experience despite Freud's claims of it being intolerable as a theoretical explanation of why one experiences the uncanny (52). In his essay, Freud tries to distance himself from literature, leading Royle and other critics of his work to comment on the fact that his prose and his form, despite depicting things that Freud has allegedly lived through or encountered, are akin to that of a literary work of a high calibre (52). Freud also claims that any example of the uncanny set in literature loses its inherent uncanniness just by virtue of being fictional or literary to which Royle responds by emphasizing the importance of literature helping one think about the non-literary and broadening one's horizons (53). As for his final part, psychoanalysis, Royle claims that it is in itself uncanny since the science of it is strange to most people, due to its nature of laying things bare, revealing the truth (53).

In the seventh chapter of his book, titled *Darkness*, Royle dives further into an investigation of Freud's connections to the dark and darkness: "Repeatedly he evokes the uncanniness of moving about in the dark, without necessarily remarking that this is what he is doing" (108). Freud does this through, what could be argued as being a Jentsch-like approach in which he invokes the sentiment of the hidden coming to light, of something becoming known. Quoting Schelling in his essay, he points out that what is uncanny about this is that the something that has become known should have remained hidden (108). The moment of darkness, of the unknown, can further be correlated to Jentsch's moments of disorientation, a situation in which one cannot metaphorically see what is right in front of them. This chapter of Royle's book is particularly important because it relates closely to the uncanny in literature. The act of something becoming known is akin to a moment of revelation in a story, it is like the reveal at the end of a great play, an unpredicted "plot twist." Royle states that Freud gives "special emphasis on the visual" and on what is revealed to the eye (108), which gives the revealed truth its literal meaning and relates back to Jentsch's stance on the moment that the inanimate which is seen as animate becomes canny again.

For Freud's essay's conclusion, Royle writes about how Freud poses a question about the origin of the uncanny and the effect of silence, darkness and solitude on it, suggesting it is all clumped together under the same umbrella of equally influencing the uncanny: "And this is how the essay concludes – with a complex, shifting figuration of what remains enigmatic" (109).

Another author who deals with Freud's theory is Heidi Schlipphacke, who, in her paper "The Place and Time of the Uncanny," makes note of how Freud's uncanny does not go into specifics of the human condition: "Freud's uncanny is, then, more concerned with the surface than with the depths, and the depth model for trauma is potentially disrupted" (166). Freud's essay deals with fear and anxiety; he mentions the fear of castration and, where Jentsch talks about the lack of orientation and intellectual uncertainty, Freud focuses on "opposites collapsing into one another and the "blurring of boundaries" (Schlipphacke 166). Imitation is substituted with "doubling" or the Doppelgänger trope for which Schlipphacke writes: "The uncanny feeling here is triggered by a slippage between self and the other, by the blurring of boundaries between the two" (165). Anxiety is one of the motifs in which Freud distances himself from Jentsch successfully, connecting it to trauma and saying: "it was not the repression that created anxiety; the anxiety was there earlier; it was the anxiety that made the repression" (Freud qtd. in Schlipphacke 167). However, this notion of an unstable mind and a "chicken-hearted" personality are not entirely distant from Jentsch's own claims, which point to these types of people as susceptible to the uncanny but also being the cause of it.

2. Horror as a Genre

Having first been prevalent in art, horror has been a prominent part of people's lives since long before anyone thought to name it a genre: "In the fifteenth century woodcuts depicted the grisly executions carried out by Vlad the Impaler, whose other name, Dracula, would inspire the famous vampire" (Colavito 54). An occurrence of macabre themes, body parts and gruesome scenes littered the canvases of many famous painters, such as Hieronymus Bosch with his *Garden of Earthly Delights,* Pieter Burgel with *The Triumph of Death,* Goya's *Pretty Teacher!*, and more (Colavito 54-55).

Much like in the visual arts, horror in literature has been a reoccurring and prevalent topic since long before it became as widespread and popular as it is today. For centuries, stories of horrors were transferred verbally in the form of folklore, myths and legends. Kristin Masters writes in her article on the history of horror literature can be traced back to the ancient civilization of Sumer. The genre's popularity gained traction with the emergence of Gothic literature and the prototypical Gothic novel by Horace Walpole called *Castle of Otranto*. As Masters recounts in her article, the Gothic novel as a form takes a dramatic turn in 1816, becoming high-brow literature: "For three days, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Wollenstonecraft Shelley, and Dr.

John Polidori shared a villa at Lake Geneva", which resulted in Mary Shelley writing the famed novel *Frankenstein,* originating the science fiction genre. Adding to this, Colavito writes that the figures of horror fiction such as Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, Jekyll and Hyde were written to try and bring together the divided parts of their society:

> These horror figures attempted to bridge the contradictory impulses of the society in which they were formed, and they attempted to navigate the shifting boundaries between humanity's traditional role as separate from and ruling over nature with its new position as merely one part of a bloody, violent world of competition, exploitation, and fear. No other genre would come closer to providing a modern mythology by which these anxieties could be so fruitfully explored. (Colavito 77)

As the audience's interest started moving away from the theatre towards other media, the public was introduced to "penny-dreadfuls" as a side effect of the literacy boom and the industrial revolution: "Horror during this time became more visceral and gory. The Penny Blood (or Penny Dreadful) emerged as a cheap form of entertainment for mass audiences" (Masters). As Colavito reports: "For the first time, the majority of people had a literature to call their own . . . [They] were cheap, they were sensational, and they were effective" (71). Calling special attention to the aspect of not needing to be educated to enjoy these types of books, and not needing a lot of money in order to procure them, Colavito writes: "While literary horror, as represented by *Dracula*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and other masterpieces of the Victorian imagination, declined after the turn of the century, horror migrated "down market" to an increasingly less elite audience" (194). Masters writes about how horror as a genre got its definition and name in France during the L'Esprite Decadent movement, later known as *Symbolism:* "it is made of a mixture of the carnal spirit and the sad flesh, of all the violent splendours of the declining empire."

Bloody and gory, horror was always a locus of interest to the public that held a fascination with the uncanny, whether because of how horror reflected reality or how it explored the psyche through safe means. Colavito analyzes horror through contemporary real-world tragedies, the acts of brutal violence, acts of grave robbing and corpse desecration (72). The industrial revolution had brought forth a great number of positive discoveries, many of them in the medical field, but at the cost of several acts of dubious morality. The appearance of "the resurrection men" had plagued the public, causing the rise in anxiety and fear that will later present itself in works of horror fiction. These men were often profiteers or medical students, looking for fresh

bodies to dig up and sell to doctors in order for them to perform dissection, regardless of the deceased's family's wishes (Colavito 72). Further, Colavito writes: "The nineteenth century also had a mortal fear of being buried alive, and popular literature made frequent report of people so entombed" (73), a situation seen in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado." In a Freudian-esque view of literature as a means of dealing with trauma, Colavito writes that literature provides a way in which an individual might be able to better process and cope with the changes in their society: "It was, in a sense, a cleansing nightmare that embodied a culture's fears in order to exorcise them, or at least tuck them safely away between dusty covers" (78).

Colavito writes about knowledge as a reoccurring theme, something Jentsch and Freud had written about in their works as well. He speaks of dangerous knowledge and discovery as sources of horror (78), relating to Freud's theory of the unknown becoming known as a cause for the uncanny. He lists several archetypes of characters one might find in works of horror fiction of this genre, such as: the mad scientist, the "Overreacher," the vampire, the walking corpse, the evil twins (the Doppelgänger), and so on (78). Horror of discovery and "body-horror" (Colavito 78) are followed by biological and spiritualist horror that focus on the individual, which is where Lovecraft's works find their place (161).

2.1 Cosmic Horror

The name of the subgenre itself implies that the bounds with which it deals, the topics it presents, are bigger than human existence itself. As opposed to biological and spiritualist horror which are narrowly defined by their protagonists and their experiences, cosmic horror relies heavily on the individual's place in society (Colavito 161). Interested in society, religion and science, H. P. Lovecraft was a prolific author of the genre – leading to it being called, at times, "Lovecraftian horror" (Davis). With short stories such as "A Color Out of Space," "Call of Cthulhu," and "At the Mountains of Madness," Lovecraft details not only the protagonists' inner states, but also their insignificance in the universe that is bigger than them. Colavito writes that this type of horror "typically deals with entities and experiences that transcend individuals, societies, whole cultures or even humanity itself" (161), bringing to attention the aspect of *entities.* Cosmic horror brings with it the unknown and unknowable, making the entire genre in itself uncanny due to the protagonist's inability to understand the scope of the horror they are faced with: "Cosmic horror represents the individual's fear of losing himself in the face of larger forces beyond his control" (Colavito 161). Colavito also explains how this horror genre did not emerge from nothing, but that it was a consequence of society's understanding of the universe and the trauma that the First

World War had left in its wake (162). Colavito writes about "tensions on Earth" (175), about how, as if following a Marxist theory of conflict, the society was trying to tear itself apart:

> In horror fiction these tensions were transmuted into "cosmic" fiction, which told terrifying tales of individuals who come into contact with vast forces beyond their abilities to comprehend or control. In cosmic horror, the protagonist comes to realize that he (it is almost always a "he") is a small and puny member of a transient and fragile species poised perilously before natural, supernatural, or extraterrestrial forces that at any time could overwhelm him and all humanity. (Colavito 175)

Jentsch and Freud had continually spoken and written about the unknown and the known, about the fear one experiences when they are faced with a lack of knowledge or when their senses fail them, and this is exactly where cosmic horror had made its metaphorical home: "The ambiguity of human knowledge becomes the major subject of this breed of horror. . . facing terrors that shake the soul of character and reader alike with a stark confrontation of the vast changes science had wrought" (Colavito 176).

3. H. P. Lovecraft and the Uncanny

Having established Lovecraft as the father of this particular brand of cosmic horror, it is important to note who or what he was inspired by, and what the common themes of his works that evoked the feeling of the uncanny in the reader were. Lovecraft, influenced by the era of progress and knowledge that he lived in, sought to write horror using "scientific materialism," which views the scientific method as the only logical way to process the world and the happenings in our reality (Colavito 185). Lovecraft was a nihilist and a materialist, drawing inspiration from Spiritualists, Theosophists, and even Einstein himself (Tyson 144). He was interested in "creating an appropriate mood to inspire in the reader a sense of cosmic horror" (Hull 10). This interest of his often culminates in a sentiment that humankind's hopes, dreams, and philosophies are "inconsequential to the larger universe, and that as a result the chaotic forces of nature could wipe out human existence in the blink of an eye without anyone noticing" (Hull 10). Lovecraft does everything in his power to ensure that his stories evoke a sense of isolation and anxiety in his readers, often relying on people's fears of the unknown as a means of achieving this. An often-cited quote of his states: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is the dear of the unknown" (qtd. in Hull 10).

Some of the topics Lovecraft has written about that can also be related back to Jentsch and Freud are the aforementioned knowledge, the anxiety, and the other; utilizing mathematics and his knowledge of the subject in order to create landscapes with words that confuse the reader, Lovecraft creates worlds with words. He writes using the sublime as a motivator that drives his protagonists, writing them into situations that cause both awe and terror. As Edmund Burke states: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (36). Terror, on the other hand, is something that, if we relate it back to Jentsch's theory of knowledge, robs the rational mind of its reasoning (Burke 53). Burke, as opposed to the vast and unknown universe and realistic spaces in Lovecraft's short stories, lists the ocean as an example of something known yet unknown to mankind because it is a "thing of great dimensions" (53) that has largely gone unexplored for years and yet we can see it and believe in it without any further thought. While the ocean is, as stated, somewhat known, the cosmos that Lovecraft speaks of is not. Colavito invokes Nietzsche, saying: "the cosmos is so utterly alien to human reason that it appears beyond good and evil, paying no mind to the small moral creatures on a tiny fleck of dirt. . . This, ultimately, is the horror from beyond" (192).

3.1. The Architecture in "The Call of Cthulhu"

"The Call of Cthulhu," published in 1928, is one of Lovecraft's most famous short stories. Aside from establishing Lovecraft as a promising writer and bringing him into the public eye, "The Call of Cthulhu" is important because it also manages to introduce the public to the many horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos which later become a staple in Lovecraft's works. As Colavito writes: "The Mythos was first and foremost concerned with the role of knowledge in human affairs and the unrelenting horror that knowledge yields when too much of the wrong kind of knowledge pierces humanity's comforting illusions" (186).

The short story itself begins with a fictional excerpt from a few loose sheets of paper found among one of the story's character's belongings. Containing the ramblings of someone in an apparent state of distress, it describes things that appear unfathomable, such as "gods, monsters, and mythical beings," which humanity no longer believes in, implying the possessor of these papers is either no longer of sane mind or that they have passed ("The Call of Cthulhu" 201). Already, with this short paragraph placed outside of the main body of the story, Lovecraft invokes the topics of knowledge, consciousness and monsters, setting the tone for the plot that is

to follow. The first part of the three in which the story is separated starts with a warning against seeking knowledge, strongly advising against future discovery and the sciences: “but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light” (*CC* 201). Immediately, it is obvious that the protagonist of the story, a man by the name of Francis Wayland Thurston, who has sought such knowledge out, has come to regret it terribly. The retroactive way in which the protagonist relates the events that had occurred, and the information he possesses, allows for the readers to immerse themselves, feeling as if the protagonist was telling them a story rather than experiencing it themselves. This type of narration can lend itself to the feeling of the uncanny, leaving the reader uncertain of whether these events actually happened or if the narrator had lost his mind in some way while obsessing over scraps of information. The unreliable narrator that presents himself as reliable claims that his grand-uncle, a man of academic knowledge, a Professor Emeritus, was assassinated by a cult (*CC* 202). Lovecraft uses words such as “ramblings,” “queer,” and “eccentric” to denote Thurston’s stance on what he had found once he was allowed to look at his deceased uncle’s belongings, that stance being Thurston’s belief that his uncle had suffered a “disturbance of an old man’s peace of mind” (*CC* 202). This simple occurrence and short description can be related to Jentsch’s theory about the “mentally disturbed,” but also to his statement about people being quick to judge and project expectations. Thurston has, as seen in the text, written off these ramblings, rationalizing it as something that has come from his uncle’s disturbed state rather than taking them at face value, chasing away any notion of the uncanny that these papers and other belongings might have roused in him.

Along with the papers, Thurston finds a bas-relief, a piece of art that he describes. Lovecraft takes care to detail the relief to the point where the reader can imagine it clearly in their mind’s eye. The relief is a materialistic artefact, as opposed to the written mad ramblings; this is something that Thurston holds in his hands, something tangible that holds traces of some form of writing that he does not recognize (*CC* 204). More importantly, above the lettering, the relief features an image: “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. Behind the figure was a vague suggestion of a Cyclopean architectural background” (*CC* 204). Aside from comparing the unknown to the known (recalling that the depiction held traces of an octopus, a dragon and a human caricature), this is also where Lovecraft draws the attention to architecture that becomes a big part of his writing style, both later on and in “The

Call of Cthulhu." As Ljubica Matek suggests, Lovecraft relies "on the upsetting of architectural proportion as a means for the literary figuration of evil" (409).

Further in the story, Lovecraft once again uses "Cyclopean" to denote the size of the buildings and forms, invoking one myth to describe another, writing about "titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze and sinister with latent horror" (*CC* 205). In this second part of "The Call of Cthulhu", he describes Thurston coming into contact with an idol, a statue of Cthulhu, in the swamps south of New Orleans (*CC* 208).[2] Lovecraft describes the statue in as much detail as he has described the relief, bringing to life with words the now-familiar shape of Cthulhu as the cephalopod-like creature he is seen in popular culture and media today (*CC* 209). Although the description of the statue is grotesque enough to invoke the feeling of horror on its own, the uncanny shines through in the description that follows the physical one: "The aspect of the whole was abnormally life like, and the more subtly fearful because its source was so totally unknown. Its vast, awesome, and incalculable age was unmistakable; yet not one link did it shew with any known type of art belonging to civilization's youth or indeed to any other time" (*CC* 209). Here we can see Jentsch's element of temporal disorientation. Not being able to date something that seems so familiar and knowable causes both the reader and the characters to experience a sense of unease and unsettlement, succumbing to the uncanny. Lovecraft continues with the theme of hulking architecture and describes a giant monolith around which these "hybrid spawn" were worshipping and gathering: "From a wide circle of ten scaffolds set up at regular intervals with the flame girt monolith as a centre hung, head downward, the oddly marred bodies of the helpless squatters who had disappeared" (*CC* 211). The entire story is littered with accounts of giant architecture, men losing their sanity, and the descriptions of the Great Old Ones as things not made of matter, but as something no man has ever witnessed and as something of immense power: "When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But although They no longer lived" (*CC* 213-214).

Lovecraft puts a lot of emphasis on the sheer size of the Old Ones and their world, putting the reader and his characters in opposition with something so gigantic and making them feel even more insignificant in comparison. As Matek contends, "horror upholds the perception of scale and proportion as helpful to structural rightness and goodness, but represents the opposite, countering architectural, social, and aesthetic norms" (411). This type of contrast is even more

[2] Here he also describes cultures which he finds fall under the umbrella of "otherness" in less than favorable terms, relying on showing cultures such as voodoo as primitive and uncivilized in order to distance his protagonist from them, further proving him an educated man and adding to his perceived credibility as a narrator (*CC* 208-209).

visible and recognizable in the third part of "The Call of Cthulhu," where the protagonist receives information from a survivor that had entered the realm of the Old Ones and lived. This is where Lovecraft introduces his readers to the concept of non-Euclidean geometry (*CC* 222). Lovecraft writes "He had said that the geometry of the dream place he saw was abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours" and of "crazily elusive angles of carven rock where a second glance shewed concavity after the first shewed convexity" (*CC* 222-223), using mathematical terms and concepts in order to further make the reader feel as if they are witnessing something not from their own reality. A geometry that is "all wrong" is something that could render both the characters and the readers spatially disoriented, unable to "tell up from down," causing uneasiness that comes with the uncanny: "The inexplicable nature of these geometrical shapes undermines the perception on mathematics and science as firm foundations for the knowability of the world" (414). On the topic of Lovecraft's landscapes, Hull writes: "What better way to convey a sense of an unknown, alien, yet powerful landscape than to use mathematical language that, while just as unknown to most readers, simultaneously conveys levels of mystery and legitimacy to the environment?" (11). Lovecraft toys with the ideas of a curved space that is hyperbolic, and of the existence of the fourth dimension that can be found in Einstein's theories (Look 13).

Lovecraft toys with words such as "Cyclopean," "spectral," and "cosmic," and, in "The Call of Cthulhu" in particular, "non-Euclidean geometry"; he thus shows his interest in various topics and subjects through his writing. In service of the uncanny, hulking architecture that does not follow the laws of nature as one might know them is something that can cause spatial disorientation. The reader experiences their own insignificance through the fear of the characters, their lack of cognition and their abundance of forbidden knowledge – darkness becoming enlightened, relating back to Freud's moment of illumination and of unknown becoming known. The uncanniness of such architecture allows Lovecraft to express how lost people can become – both mentally and physically – when faced with things outside of their expected perception of reality.

3. 2. The "Other" in "The Colour Out of Space"

Published in 1927, Lovecraft's short story "The Colour Out of Space" depicts a horrible event that had befallen the citizens of a small New England village located West of Arkham. Lovecraft writes about a meteor striking the Earth – one of the families' farms – causing the ground, the animals, and, eventually, the inhabitants of the farm to become ill and wither away. Shifting

from the supernatural as we see it in "The Call of Cthulhu," this story focuses more on the unknown in the sense of "the other" that is removed from everything earthly. While not strictly part of his mythos, "The Colour out of Space" can be interpreted as a spinoff of the main anthology of short stories connected through the monsters and places that appear in them. But, instead of having tangible monsters or off-kilter architecture to look to as a source of the uncanny and the fear, "The Colour Out of Space" owes its eeriness to the unknown that the characters face.

The story follows an unnamed individual, sent to Arkham, Massachusetts, in order to survey the land for a new reservoir (*COS* 167-168). This individual quickly finds himself faced with witness to an area that appears to look "queer" and unusual for the climate, full of "mattings of infinite years of decay" that the locals call "blasted heath" (*COS* 167). The protagonist assumes that this is a land filled with myths and legends that has been desolate for a long while, but is quickly proven wrong when he meets a man by the name of Ammi Pierce, whom the other inhabitants of Arkham find strange and disturbed (*COS* 168). Namely, following the style of most of Lovecraft's writings, this short story is also told retroactively, reporting the events through a third party rather than having the alleged-protagonist going through these events himself. The narrator, because he is not truly the protagonist, details the story that Pierce has told him about the events that have led to the Nahum farm being called "blasted heath," and what had happened for it to look as strange as it does now. The plot starts with a simple sentence of: "It all began, old Ammi said, with the meteorite" (*COS* 170), letting the reader know almost immediately that what they will be dealing with is not of this Earth, but has come from the great vastness of outer space.

Throughout the introductory part of the plotline, Ammi Pierce describes how the inhabitants of the Nahum property found the space rock, how they reacted and what had transpired when scientists (men of knowledge) tried taking samples of it in order to determine the elements from which it was made (*COS* 170-171). The rock behaved like nothing they had ever seen before and it left everyone that came into contact with it puzzled but excited about the possibilities of discovery (*COS* 171). Here we see an element of Freud's unknown becoming known; however, the context of it harks back to stories by his predecessors that had a big scientific element to them. The behaviour of the meteorite further leads these characters to question their own senses, invoking Jentsch's theory about taking away one's senses that causes them to experience anxiety: "It had now most certainly shrunk, and even the sober professors could not doubt the truth of what they saw" (*COS* 171). More important than the behaviour of the material element

of the rock is the colour it brings with it: “The colour, which resembled some of the bands in the meteor’s strange spectrum, was almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all” (*COS* 171). In “The Colour Out of Space,” Lovecraft focuses heavily on the inexplicable, using phrases like “fathomless” and “entity” to denote just how strange the happenings in Arkham were (*COS* 172).

The otherness further makes an appearance in how the area around the crash site was affected. Ammi Pierce tells the unnamed narrator how nothing had happened until the harvest. He speaks of how the fruit had “grown to phenomenal size” but how it tasted like ash, “A stealthy bitterness and sickishness” (*COS* 172). The citizens were quick to try and rationalize in the face of the inexplicable; the otherness – that which is removed from their reality – was discarded as the meteorite poisoning the soil (*COS* 172). In this particular story, with his style of writing, Lovecraft leaves a lot of blanks for the reader to fill in on their own; everything is always one step removed from being described in earthly terms: things are “not quite right” or “vaguely disquieted” (*COS* 173). This can further be seen as the tragedy at the Nahum farm continues with this perceived illness being contracted by the living beings on it as well: “The proportions of its body seemed slightly altered in a queer way impossible to describe, while its face had taken on an expression which no one ever saw in a woodchuck before” (*COS* 173). The story is one with a tragic end for the Nahum family, filled with death and destruction as the family slowly loses their sanity due to what was released from the meteorite when the scientists had tried to make the unknown, known. The Nahum family is picked off one by one until only the husband is left, but eventually, he too succumbs to madness and perishes in the explosion of colour that had followed the culmination of the strange happenings: “All the farm was shining with the hideous unknown blend of colour; trees, buildings, and even such grass and herbage as had not been wholly changed to lethal grey brittleness” (*COS* 186).

The uncanny of the other shines through in the usage of previously mentioned phrases that leave the reader uncertain in how they should perceive this strange, unearthly thing. This colour out of space is indescribable; Jentsch’s theory about the senses and knowledge allows for Lovecraft to create this sort of second-hand kind of uncanny that affects both the reader and the narrator, while the horror of the events had directly affected the storyteller. By the end of Pierce’s retelling, what has happened to the Nahum family has become legend and myth, with people ignoring the truth in order to exclude the otherness. The narrator reports: “People say the colour of the neighbouring herbage is not quite right in the spring, and that wild things leave queer prints in the light winter snow. Snow never seems quite so heavy on the blasted heath as it is

elsewhere" (*COS* 187). The happenings of that year had obviously left its trace on the surrounding area, and yet, having rationalized this as something scientifically explicable, the only one willing to talk about it was Ammi Pierce, who has lost some of his sanity during that time. The uncanniness in this story can be attributed to the suppression of knowledge, that is, the refusal of letting the night become lightened. As one of the closing sentences of the short story, the narrator tells the reader his musings about the colour: "It was just a colour out of space a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it; from realms whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes" (*COS* 188).

3.3 Temporal Displacement, Imitation, and Anxiety in "The Shadow Out of Time"

Finally, fully leaning into the claim that the Old Ones are not of this Earth, "The Shadow Out of Time," published in 1936, is one of Lovecraft's last major works (Colavito 191). As opposed to the previous two stories, "The Shadow Out of Time" is written with its protagonist, Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee, living through the events of the plot. However, Peaslee is still a degree removed from it, due to the plot being focused on Nathaniel having lost several years of his memory, having his body seemingly overtaken by some other force while his consciousness was absent. "There is reason to hope that my experience was wholly or partly an hallucination" (*SOT* 555) is a sentiment with which Peaslee starts the retelling of the story and also ends the entire experience. Peaslee hopes that the knowledge he possesses and that the things he has learned on his journey through time and space are a part of some sort of an elaborate hallucination, for this new knowledge is inconceivable to the mind of a "regular" human. Nathaniel introduces himself as an average – he stresses that his background is nothing special because what happened to him was truly extraordinary in the worst of ways (*SOT* 556). The uncanny in the story appears in three occurrences (among the others that have been previously mentioned in "The Call of Cthulhu" and "The Colour Out of Space") that Jentsch has written about in his paper, and Freud had subsequently mentioned in his: imitation of life (or the Doppelgänger), temporal displacement, and anxiety (which Lovecraft connects to issues of sanity).

Nathaniel Peaslee speaks about his sudden bout of amnesia that had begun in May of 1908, but he quickly veers off of the path of narration and begins reporting of the changes that had happened to his other-self through remembering what others had to report (*SOT* 556-557). The uncanniness of the imitation begins shortly after Nathaniel's awakening, whereupon he seems unaware of his own identity and "anxious to conceal this lack of knowledge" (*SOT* 557). From

the accounts of friends, family, and physicians, Nathaniel had seemed not to have a good grasp on the English language and had used phrases that were outdated, emulating speech he thought was correct but ended up being "barbarously alien" (*SOT* 557). He had seemed to also possess an unknown sort of knowledge (an obvious leitmotif in Lovecraft's works) that "ranged outside of accepted history" (*SOT* 557-558). Later in the story, once Nathaniel Peaslee recovers from his strange affliction and begins his research, he comes across cases of "split personalities from the days of daemoniac-possession" (*SOT* 562) and begins to refer to the man who he had become during this period of amnesia as "that other one" (*SOT* 561), isolating himself from this alter ego – the Doppelgänger. His research leads him to answers that he regrets finding later on. While his body was being occupied by something other, his displaced consciousness was "thrown back to the displacer's age and body" (*SOT* 569) to be carefully guarded and left mostly unharmed. Eventually, in his research and the dreams he begins having, he remembers the Great Race, a species of immense size that looked like nothing else he had ever seen before (*SOT* 569). With the idea of a race of ancient aliens that have the ability to travel through time and space being the ones causing chaos, it is obvious that Lovecraft feels more at ease with depicting their forms with words, rather than leaving them vague. While describing them, he also describes another account of imitation, this time in the way these beings behaved: "Their actions, though harmless, horrified me even more than their appearance for it is not wholesome to watch monstrous objects doing what one has known only human beings to do" (*SOT* 574). These beings seem to emulate things that Nathaniel is familiar with, and yet they are so strangely shaped that he cannot connect the two – the dichotomy is far too strange.

Temporal displacement and anxiety seem to go hand in hand in this story. The first chapter of this short story ends with the quote: "Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee had come back – a spirit in whose time-scale it was still that Thursday morning in 1908, with the economics class gazing up at the battered desk on the platform" (*SOT* 560), denoting that Peaslee's concept of time and space would be unsettled by his experience. Nathaniel loses five years of his life; this causes him difficulties, but the cause of his anxiety is more sinister than that (*SOT* 560). He speaks of witnessing the Great War and feeling as if he had seen these things before: "The war gave me strange impressions of remembering some of its far off consequences as if I knew how it was coming out and could look back upon it in the light of future in formation" (*SOT* 561). After his return, Peaslee is plagued by dreams that end up coinciding with reality (*SOT* 562). These dream-memories and his temporal dislocation can be seen in the second part of the short story: "My conception of *time* – my ability to distinguish between consecutiveness and

simultaneousness – seemed subtly disordered; so that I formed chimerical notions about living in one age and casting one's mind all over eternity for knowledge of past and future ages" (*SOT* 561). Peaslee exhibits signs of paranoia, speaking of madness and disturbances that plague him due to a lack of knowledge and memory: "There was, too, a feeling of profound and inexplicable horror concerning *myself*. I developed a queer fear of seeing my own form, as if my eyes would find it something utterly alien and inconceivably abhorrent" (*SOT* 563).

Despite the overarching plot of forbidden knowledge, Freud's unknown becoming known despite the consequences, and its discovery, "The Shadow Out of Time" draws on a lot of Jentsch's theories. The idea of dislocation, spatial and temporal, is important to the character of Nathaniel itself, spurring on his descent into the frenzy of research. It also lends itself to the idea of "cosmic indifference" (Colavito 191), layering isolation on top of anxiety and imitation to give the readers a sense of confusion, making them suspend their belief for a moment due to the narrator himself not being an entirely reliable storyteller.

Conclusion

The mythos Lovecraft creates is vast and filled with the inexplicable. From monsters of Cyclopean sizes, buildings that match their stature, to strange and eerie phenomena that fool the senses, Lovecraft weaves words and worlds that doubtlessly evoke the feeling of the uncanny in his readers. Utilizing tools listed by psychiatrists Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud, he writes tales that are filled to the brim with horror of the existential and cosmic kind. In "The Call of Cthulhu," he shows his knowledge by writing about geometry and hulking structures. He aligns himself with Jentsch's theory of spatial orientation in order to disorient and confuse both the reader and the protagonists. He details how the characters in the narrative suffer from the consequences of witnessing this type of architecture, of coming into contact with knowledge that should not have been uncovered. Through picturesque descriptions, he paints scenes of horror and uncertainty, leaving the narrator experiencing the uncanny at the sheer magnitude of what he is being told is truth in a world where it seems impossible.

While giant structures are a prevalent topic through all of his works, in "The Colour Out of Space" he focuses instead on otherness. Lovecraft leans into the theme of the cosmic, writing about a strange colour that has come from space in a meteorite. This colour is left largely undescribed, since the point of its existence is found in it inexplicability, making it something

other. While human senses could perceive the colour so their senses focused on it were not inadequate, the witnesses' minds could not coherently put into words what the colour was. In this story, Lovecraft leaves spaces for the reader to fill in the blanks. The reader could imagine the brightest of purples or the most iridescent pink, but the uncanniness of it is in how this event, the tragedy that befalls the characters, leaves the surrounding area looking unusual and not quite right (similar to reality, emulating it, while not being the same).

Continuing the theme of imitation in "The Shadow Out of Time," Lovecraft writes about giant aliens that behave like people do, but are so strange in shape that it leaves the reader feeling frightened at the possibility of their existence. In this short story, he also writes about temporal displacement and the anxiety it causes. Themes of nightmares and hallucinations, uncertainty in one's place in time and space are common in the genre of cosmic horror, and they are heavily emphasized in "The Shadow Out of Time." He employs Freud's theories of the Doppelgänger and the concept of the unknown becoming known, and leads his protagonist through a series of revelations, each stranger than the previous, ending with a revelation that leaves the reader with more questions than answers.

As a master of cosmic horror, it is only natural for Lovecraft to toy with the psyche of his readers, and being knowledgeable about the concepts of science that the wider public is not familiar with only helps his writing. Horror is a genre that has been present since long before Lovecraft had been alive, but his influence on the subsequent popular writers is undeniable, and the way he conjures the feelings of the uncanny in the reader is truly masterful.

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