



## From beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the place of horror

James Kneale

### ► To cite this version:

James Kneale. From beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the place of horror. cultural geographies, 2006, 13 (1), pp.106-126. <10.1191/1474474005eu353oa>. <hal-00572172>

**HAL Id: hal-00572172**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00572172v1>**

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



HAL Authorization

# From beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the place of horror

*James Kneale*

Department of Geography, University College London

---

The work of the American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft offers a valuable opportunity to study the representation of space in literature, but while Lovecraft's biography provides a useful way of making sense of his horror fictions, it also risks obscuring the importance of his represented spaces. Many of these impossible spaces mark a threshold between the known and unknown, and the paper argues that an attention to narrative demonstrates that these thresholds constitute the fulcrum about which his plots move. The work of Mikhail Bakhtin also suggests that Lovecraft's belief that 'change is the enemy of everything really worth cherishing' explains why these thresholds are represented as threats rather than progressive engagements with social space.

## Introduction: reading horror

This is a paper about the American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937). It suggests that Lovecraft's fictions are important, not simply because they have had an enormous influence on the modern horror genre, but because they can also help us to think about what lies 'beyond'. I use this word because Lovecraft's stories are centrally concerned with the paradox of representing entities, things and places that are beyond representation. Claims to representational truth become haunted by the impossibility of mimesis, and in tracing the limits of representation, we may also be able to imagine what lies beyond them. This paper therefore argues that exploring Lovecraft's geographies of horror has both conceptual and methodological implications for the way we work with texts. I want to consider some of these implications before moving on to discuss Lovecraft and his work in more detail.

Thinking about 'geographies beyond' has led me to consider a wide range of writings on geographies of horror and the supernatural, psychoanalytical work on urban life, poststructuralist critiques of literary representations of space, and recent discussions of non-representational theory.<sup>1</sup> I'd like to suggest that there are two main ways in which critics have approached the idea of horror, haunting, and the beyond.

A first set of writings reads moments of supernatural or fantastic instability in literature, film, or urban daydreams as symptoms of wider social or cultural fears. As Rosemary Jackson suggests, 'Presenting that which cannot be, but *is*, fantasy exposes a culture's definitions of that which can be; it traces the limits of its epistemological and ontological frame.'<sup>2</sup> Recent geographies of horror offer excellent examples of this, as

does work that examines the mechanisms of desire and repression that make the city 'strangely familiar'.<sup>3</sup>

While elements of this approach inform this paper, I am more interested in a second set of ideas concerning haunting, memory, and indeterminacy. Drawing on Derrida and Freud, Julian Wolfreys suggests that recent London fictions by authors like Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd are haunted by traces of the past that disorient the city's readers and walkers.<sup>4</sup> Yet these memories are also excessive because they multiply the possible meanings of the city until it becomes difficult to read, haunted by present absences and absent presences. Considering the phenomena of haunting from a rather different disciplinary perspective, the anthropologist Daniel Miller notes that 'the very longevity of homes and material culture may create a sense that agency lies in these things rather than in the relatively transient persons who occupy or own them'. In other words the materialized agency of those who came before us becomes a troubling ghostly presence: 'where we cannot possess we are in danger of being possessed'.<sup>5</sup> But where Wolfreys sees haunting as an encounter with the unknown, for Miller and writers like Alfred Gell it is inevitable, since many different kinds of objects – houses, art objects, commodities or icons – mediate between people distant from one another in time and space.<sup>6</sup>

The preference of those working within non-representational theory for 'hesitant, partial and situated thinking' also seems to point towards indeterminacy.<sup>7</sup> Nigel Thrift employs interesting metaphors in his discussions of what might lie beyond representations, for example. Rejecting the idea that the modern world is secular and rational, he argues that 'we live in a world which is still populated by myth and magic ... people appeal to all sorts of explanation that are often regarded as "irrational" as they think the borders of the possible'.<sup>8</sup> Like Pepys, Thrift is keen 'to see any strange thing' and to explore 'strange countries' and 'new worlds', the richness of life beyond representation. And this strangeness is compounded by complexity:

Practical knowledge of cities is haunted by apparitions which are the unintended consequences of the complexity of modern cities, cities in which multiple time-spaces are being produced, which overlap, interact, and interfere ...<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Julian Holloway argues that while our attempts to grasp the sacred should begin with embodied experiences rather than representations, we should (and in fact, must) hesitate before naming and explaining these sensations.<sup>10</sup> Of course indeterminacy of this sort can itself be troubling when it appears to be hybrid or monstrous, as a number of writers have demonstrated.<sup>11</sup>

I have found these ideas attractive for two reasons. Firstly, textual indeterminacy can be significant in its own right. J. Hillis Miller's reading of *Heart of darkness* notes that Conrad's use of the phrase 'unspeakable rites' points to the troubling collapse of representations of Africa.<sup>12</sup> This instability is arguably latent in all fictions, but is particularly obvious and important in texts such as Lovecraft's fictions. Secondly, while this paper is not explicitly guided by 'non-representational theory', it does share some of its methodological concerns, like a commitment to avoiding *a priori* reasoning.<sup>13</sup>

This methodological point seems to me to parallel recent discussions of the relationship between geography and literature. Some critics have expressed concern that geographers and other social scientists are too ready to reduce literary texts to their contexts, reading them as simple expressions of ideology, as outcomes of the author's life, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Clive Barnett has argued that 'invocations of the authority of context in human geography are characterized by a reference to context as the explanatory or interpretative principle with which to rein in the apparent threat of linguistic indeterminacy'. He goes on to note that 'the appeal to context is an act that localizes, returning artefacts to their original situations or their proper locations'.<sup>15</sup> I am not arguing that contextual, historicist readings of Lovecraft are worthless, but I am suggesting that we might read his work as *literature* – rather than as biography or history, once removed.

Lovecraft is a good choice for an investigation like this for three reasons. First, his work consistently discusses the 'beyond' in ways that seem to me to be interesting to geographers. Secondly, the places and entities he imagined are stranger than other, longer-established, horrific conventions like ghosts and vampires; so while his work does seem to express unpleasantly familiar fears, it is harder to explain the power of his writing because he does not draw upon recognizable religious or mythic traditions.<sup>16</sup> And finally, aspects of Lovecraft's biography encourage a particular reading of his work, one that I wish to try to supplement rather than replace.

The paper begins by introducing Lovecraft, and then goes on to explore his representations of both horror and space. I then consider a variety of different interpretations and conclude by asking what we might learn from Lovecraft about horror, geography and literature.

## The Outsider: H.P. Lovecraft

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was arguably the most significant horror author of the 20th century. He links the 19th- and early 20th- century authors who were his own influences (Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood) and writers of contemporary horror and fantastic fiction.<sup>17</sup> Robert Bloch, the author of *Psycho*, and Robert E. Howard, writer of the Conan stories, were both friends of Lovecraft, and authors as different as Stephen King, Jorge Luis Borges and Joanna Russ have all published Lovecraftian stories.<sup>18</sup> In 2005 three collections of Lovecraft's stories are in print in Britain as Penguin Modern Classics, and his work has clearly influenced contemporary 'New Weird' authors like China Miéville. His 1927 study *Supernatural horror in literature* is accepted as an important work, and he makes an appearance in Deleuze and Guattari's *A thousand plateaus*.<sup>19</sup> The use and re-use of fictional books, people, places, and entities in the work of Lovecraft, his friends and others has made his influence easy to trace. This tendency was strengthened by August Derleth, whose editing and interpretations played a large part in systematizing Lovecraft's fictional universe and giving it a name – the 'Cthulhu mythos'.<sup>20</sup>

Lovecraft was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1890. His father, a commercial traveller, died in 1898, leaving his mother, maternal grandfather, and two aunts to bring him up. This side of Lovecraft's family was of old and rather wealthy New England stock, but in 1904 the death of his grandfather and collapse of his business meant that the Lovecrafts were forced to move out of the family's mansion. Despite his passion for reading and writing, Lovecraft did not finish high school as ill health – probably depression – led to frequent periods of absence. In 1908 he more or less turned his back on the world, living as a self-described 'hermit' until 1913. What drew him out of this isolation was the opportunity to contribute to the amateur journalism movement. Publishing his own journal and commenting on the efforts of others, Lovecraft began to write fiction again in 1917, and by 1923 he was beginning to contribute to the newly founded pulp horror and fantasy magazine *Weird tales*.

Following the death of his mother in 1921, Lovecraft married Sonia Haft Greene, a Russian Jewish immigrant, in New York in 1924. The first days of their marriage were not easy and they ceased to live together after only ten months. Lovecraft hated New York and returned to Providence in 1926. Sonia was effectively barred from joining Lovecraft because his aunts opposed her plan to open a shop there, and they divorced in 1929. Lovecraft had started writing in earnest in New York in 1925, though, and he continued to sell stories to *Weird tales*, *Amazing stories* and elsewhere until his death in 1937. He was unable to live off these stories, however, relying on the remnants of his inheritance as well as income from revisions and ghost-writing. Lovecraft did not live to see his stories collected in hardcover, though his friends August Derleth and Donald Wandrei set up Arkham House to publish Lovecraft's work posthumously.

It is easy to imagine Lovecraft as the classic outsider, a subject he explored in the story of that name.<sup>21</sup> A seemingly reclusive figure who hated the 20th century and longed to return to the colonial era, he was an autodidact with strong and sometimes antisocial opinions. Yet he did travel and made many friends through his stories, amateur journalism and letter writing.<sup>22</sup> This group of younger friends kept his name alive, and in the 1960s and 1970s Lovecraft was 'rediscovered' by a new generation of readers. The publication of the highly successful role-playing game 'Call of Cthulhu' in the 1980s brought wider interest, as did a number of films that have referred to his ideas in some way. The internet has also provided space for further discussion and elaboration of his work.

Despite his interest in the supernatural, Lovecraft was a confirmed atheist. He described himself as a 'mechanistic materialist', believing that the universe obeyed the principles and laws discovered by 19th-century science.<sup>23</sup> Paradoxically this belief was at the heart of his theme of 'cosmic terror'; the vast gulfs of space and time revealed by sciences like astronomy and geology had no human scale. He wrote: 'the reason why *time* plays a great part in so many of my tales is that this element looms up in my mind as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe.'<sup>24</sup> Lovecraft was not alone in this awareness of the sublimity of 'deep time'; Rosalind Williams suggests that 'deep time retained its aura of mystery and sacredness' despite the achievements of Cuvier, Schliemann, and T. H. Huxley.<sup>25</sup>

In 1927 he wrote 'all my tales are based upon the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large'.<sup>26</sup> As a consequence his horrific extraterrestrial entities were not evil, because this implies a human morality. In 'The call of Cthulhu' Lovecraft's narrator warns: '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.'<sup>27</sup> When his characters do seek to master space and time, like the insane inventor Crawford Tillinghast, who yells 'Space belongs to me, do you hear?' in 'From beyond', they invariably come to a sticky end.<sup>28</sup> Neither magic nor science can make these things human and familiar.

## The unnamable: writing horror

As a consequence of this it makes sense to approach Lovecraft's work as fantastic fictions. As Lucie Armitt explains, the fantastic is a mode or attitude, rather than a genre.<sup>29</sup> Following Tzvetan Todorov, the fantastic encourages the reader to hesitate between conflicting interpretations.<sup>30</sup> Because this hesitation manifests itself within the text, it is possible to extend Todorov beyond his structuralist concerns, and to read Lovecraft's fictions as explorations of the limits of language and representation. In his article 'Notes on writing weird fiction' he wrote that he wished

to achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis.<sup>31</sup>

However he goes on to stress that these illusions must be *realistic* ones:

Inconceivable events and conditions have a special handicap to overcome and this can be accomplished only through the maintenance of a careful realism in every phase of the story *except* that touching on the one given marvel.<sup>32</sup>

Rosemary Jackson suggests that the fantastic attempts to say the unsayable. It relies upon 'non-signification', on severing the connection between signifier and signified, producing all kinds of 'nameless things' and 'thingless names'. She writes:

H. P. Lovecraft's horror fantasies are particularly self-conscious in their stress on the impossibility of naming this unnameable presence, the 'thing' which can be registered in the text only as absence and shadow. [He] circles around this dark area in an attempt to get beyond language to something other, yet the endeavour to visualize and verbalize the unseen and unsayable is one which inevitably falls short, except by drawing attention to exactly this difficulty of utterance.<sup>33</sup>

Lovecraft and his collaborators produced a host of 'thingless names', collected in the *Encyclopedia Cthulhiana*, a reference guide to his invented places, beings, and concepts. The last entry gives a flavour of the book: 'ZVILPOGGUA. See Ossadog-wah.'<sup>34</sup> There are also many 'nameless things' that lurk 'beyond the radius of our sight and analysis' in Lovecraft's stories. Some are so hybrid that they can only be described as a mixture of things they *almost* resemble, as in this example from 'The festival':

They were not altogether crows, nor moles, nor buzzards, nor ants, nor vampire bats, nor decomposed human beings; but something I cannot and must not recall.<sup>35</sup>

Noël Carroll notes that ‘an object or being is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless’, appearing as ‘metaphysical misfits’.<sup>36</sup> The ‘shoggoth’ from ‘At the mountains of madness’ is another good example of formlessness; Lovecraft’s narrator actually describes it as ‘the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist’s “thing that should not be”’.<sup>37</sup> It seems that this ‘terrible, indescribable thing’ *can* be described, but only as a ‘nightmare plastic column’, ‘a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles. . . with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish light’.<sup>38</sup>

It is worth considering an example here in some detail. In the story ‘The unnamable’ Lovecraft works through this problem of naming and knowing. It begins with two friends sitting on an old tomb in a New England graveyard, ‘speculating about the unnamable’.<sup>39</sup> The narrator, Carter, a writer of weird tales, is trying to persuade his friend Manton that it is possible to speak of nameless things. Manton is unimpressed:

We know things, he said, only through our five senses or our intuitions; wherefore it is quite impossible to refer to any object or spectacle which cannot be clearly depicted by the solid definitions of fact or the correct doctrines of theology . . .<sup>40</sup>

Wrapped up in their debate, the two friends barely notice night falling as Carter tells Manton about the history behind one of his stories. It involves a half-human, hooved thing with a blemished eye which existed in Puritan times; a shunned house and a boarded-up attic; and the rumoured survival of this thing in some immaterial form into the present day. Carter offers this as an example of the ‘unnamable’, asking ‘What coherent representation could express or portray so gibbous and infamous a nebulousity as the specter of a malign, chaotic perversion, itself a morbid blasphemy against nature?’<sup>41</sup> This is precisely the question that haunts the writer of the fantastic. Carter then reveals to Manton that he looked for *and found* the curious remains of the creature, restoring them to a nearby tomb . . . the very tomb that they are sitting on.

You might be able to guess the rest. ‘Some unseen entity of titanic size but undetermined nature’ attacks them, and they are found unconscious the next day.<sup>42</sup> The story concludes with our heroes in the hospital:

After the doctors and nurses had left, I whispered an awestruck question:

‘Good God, Manton, but what was it? Those scars – was it like that?’

And I was too dazed to exult when he whispered back a thing I had half expected –

‘No – it wasn’t that way at all. It was everywhere – a gelatin – a slime – yet it had shapes, a thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. There were eyes – and a blemish. It was the pit – the maelstrom – the ultimate abomination. Carter, it was the unnamable!’<sup>43</sup>

This kind of denouement is typical of Lovecraft, and the story is something of a textbook example of the fantastic. A highly realistic description is thrown into relief by the irruption of something impossible, and this tension is further heightened by the indeterminacy of Lovecraft’s descriptions (an unseen entity of undetermined nature,

a slime with a thousand shapes, a maelstrom). This indeterminacy is experienced by both the reader and the narrator. Roger Salomon points out that

the witness role, like so many other devices of horror narrative, involves an aesthetic response to a larger problem: how to naturalize such narrative enough to make it credible without limiting the implications of issues raised and thus explaining away the horror.<sup>44</sup>

Lovecraft was certainly aware of Salomon's 'problem of witnessing'. Many stories start with the narrator apologising for or qualifying his account; 'The whisperer in darkness' begins with the words 'Bear in mind closely that I did not actually see any actual visual horror at the end.'<sup>45</sup> Notebooks and manuscripts are found long after their authors have disappeared; his narrators continue to record their experiences for the reader as they go mad or are consumed by ravening horrors from beyond. Witnessing is central to the plot, as it is to the representation of space.<sup>46</sup>

## The thing on the doorstep: horrific space

In terms of textual geographies, the 'problem of witnessing' manifests itself as a loss of coordinates, as it does in 'The music of Erich Zann':

I have examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet have never again found the Rue d'Auseil . . . despite all I have done, it remains a humiliating fact that I cannot find the house, the street, or even the locality, where during the last months of my impoverished life as a student of metaphysics at the university, I heard the music of Erich Zann.<sup>47</sup>

Lovecraft produced stories set in Providence, Boston and New York, and created richly detailed fictional New England towns like 'Arkham', 'Dunwich' and 'Innsmouth'. Realistically described settings become uncanny as Lovecraft introduces elements 'from beyond' – perhaps the best example is 'The colour out of space', where a meteorite crashes down on the sleepy farms of the Massachusetts countryside.<sup>48</sup> Egypt features in a number of stories, perhaps most famously in 'Under the pyramids', which was ghost-written for Harry Houdini.<sup>49</sup>

As well as these lost corners of relatively familiar places, Lovecraft set many stories in 'empty places' familiar from other fantastic fictions. 'At the mountains of madness' is set in Antarctica, which was still not fully explored when Lovecraft wrote the story in 1931; and 'The nameless city' and 'The shadow out of time' use the deserts of Saudi Arabia and western Australia respectively.<sup>50</sup> Another common device is the island suddenly raised from the sea floor by tectonic activity, bringing with it something that was better buried, as is the case in 'Dagon' and 'The call of Cthulhu'.<sup>51</sup> In many of these cases it is 'deep time' which makes these spaces strange; lost civilisations are returned to the light of day; objects, people or things are found to have survived 'Out of the aeons'.<sup>52</sup> Richard Phillips has noted that 'As *terra incognita* disappeared from European maps, writers of adventure stories retreated from realistic to fantastic, purely imaginary spaces'; Lovecraft's settings also include distant stars and hidden abysses.<sup>53</sup>



But are these spaces more than just settings? Roger Salomon suggests that in horror fiction one geographical metaphor is crucial:

Horror narrative involves thresholds – a narrative in which two worlds, settings, environments impinge, where crossing (and the resulting experience of horror) is the basic action.<sup>54</sup>

Lovecraft's fiction is explicitly concerned with thresholds, with metaphors of contact and transgression. One of his stories is called 'The thing on the doorstep', after all.<sup>55</sup> S. T. Joshi also points out that the Rue d'Auseil from 'Erich Zann' can be read as 'au seuil', 'on the threshold', since Zann's window opens onto a mysterious gulf.<sup>56</sup> In 'From beyond' Crawford Tillinghast boasts 'Have I not succeeded in breaking down the barrier; have I not shown you worlds that no other living men have seen?'<sup>57</sup> Maurice Lévy notes:

At the very heart of the geometrical and rational space of modern times Lovecraft installs a magical space, a forbidden realm, which restores meaning and content to the idea of *transgression* ... The unholy actions, the sabbaths of yore, are perpetuated, but in a parallel space, both prodigiously faraway and dangerously close.<sup>58</sup>

There are two themes here, one concerned with 'shadows out of space' and the other with 'shadows out of time'; the first relates to metaphors of invasion and contamination, the second to metaphors of transmission.

First there is spatial contact, at a number of scales. 'The shadow over Innsmouth' concerns a benighted New England port, whose inhabitants have somehow interbred with a race of inhuman fish-frog hybrids called Deep Ones.<sup>59</sup> It transpires that this practice has been introduced from the Pacific. Where the ocean does not bring this 'impurity' to America, it comes from space ('The whisperer in darkness') or in dreams ('The call of Cthulhu'). And in 'From beyond' there is the shocking realization that 'strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows', not just alongside but *within* our own.<sup>60</sup> Mark Fisher notes that this kind of experience can be explored through Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of seething, teeming multiplicities<sup>61</sup>. In 'From beyond' the narrator experiences a multiplicity of entities '*walking or drifting through my supposedly solid body*'; in 'Through the gates of the silver key', Randolph Carter finds himself becoming 'Carters of forms both human and non-human... no longer a definite being distinguished from other beings'.<sup>62</sup> Fisher notes:

As Deleuze-Guattari write of Lovecraft's Randolph Carter, the self 'reels' as the sense of subjectivity breaks down in the face of an experience of teeming multiplicity that comes from both without – and within (although this 'within' clearly has nothing to do with any supposed psychological interiority).<sup>63</sup>

These multiples inside and outside are potential becomings, 'all the becomings running through us' and packs of 'becomings-animal' that haunt Carter's sense of himself.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, in several stories Lovecraft's concern with 'degeneration' is especially obvious.<sup>65</sup> Inbreeding is sometimes the cause, as in 'The lurking fear'; at other times it is racial or even cross-species miscegenation, as in 'Facts concerning the late Arthur Jermyn and his family'.<sup>66</sup> Maurice Lévy notes that for Lovecraft, 'sexuality carries in it a fatal germ of corruption and the profanation of the race'.<sup>67</sup> One other important version of this is the importance of fate, predetermination and heredity. Hybridity is something

that eventually returns to haunt future generations, as it does in 'The shadow over Innsmouth'. Of course, as Marianna Torgovnick and others have pointed out, the figure of 'the primitive' is a highly complex one, open to quite different readings throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>68</sup>

'The horror at Red Hook', written in 1925 while Lovecraft was living in New York, combines these themes of invasion and inbreeding. The protagonist, a policeman named Malone, investigates strange goings on in the 'polyglot abyss of New York's underworld', specifically Red Hook, Brooklyn, 'a maze of hybrid squalor near the ancient waterfront'.<sup>69</sup>

The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and Negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth...<sup>70</sup>

The physical structure of Red Hook parallels its social decline; the fine old buildings are shabby, falling apart, just as the villain of the tale is from old but 'degenerated' Dutch stock. Malone sees this degeneration as something more sinister:

He was conscious... that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances...<sup>71</sup>

They must be, he felt inwardly, the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the sharers of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than mankind... He had not read in vain such treatises as Miss Murray's *Witch-cult in Western Europe*; and knew that up to recent years there had certainly survived among peasants and furtive folk a frightful and clandestine system of assemblies and orgies descended from dark religions antedating the Aryan world, and appearing in popular legends as Black Masses and Witches' Sabbaths.<sup>72</sup>

Lovecraft is referring here to Margaret Murray, professor of Egyptology and anthropology at University College London. Murray claimed that ancient forms of worship had survived into the present day.<sup>73</sup> While contemporary authorities take a dim view of this argument, the parallel with his fiction interested Lovecraft.<sup>74</sup>

## **'He': biography and interpretation**

The paper now turns to exploring the nature of Lovecraft's horrific geographies. So far I have restricted interpretation to textual matters, suggesting that the fantastic concerns itself with thresholds, with particular kinds of narratives and metaphors. But what might these mean and where might they come from? Searching for contexts to make sense of Lovecraft's transgressive horrors, critics have tended to turn to the extensive biographical and autobiographical records. In this section I want to introduce some of these interpretations, namely 'race', class and embodiment.

Malone's feelings of revulsion in 'Red Hook' are very close to Lovecraft's own reaction to New York. In 1927 he wrote: 'New York is dead, & the brilliancy which so impresses one from outside is the phosphorescence of a maggoty corpse'.<sup>75</sup> He was convinced that Blacks and Australian Aborigines were biologically inferior to whites,

and he dreaded the 'Yellow Peril' represented by Japan and China. New York seemed to inspire his worst outbursts: he wrote that the best thing for Chinatown would be 'a kindly gust of cyanogen'.<sup>76</sup> In the story 'He', written in New York, the narrator sees the future city overrun by 'yellow, squint-eyed people'.<sup>77</sup>

Much of this is related to Lovecraft's beliefs about cultural and biological 'purity'. In 1936 he wrote: 'No settled & homogenous nation ought (a) to admit enough of a decidedly alien race-stock to bring about an actual alteration in the dominant ethnic composition, or (b) tolerate the dilution of the culture-stream with emotional or intellectual elements alien to the original cultural impulse.'<sup>78</sup> He sought to reconcile his racist certainties with his cosmic relativism by arguing:

there is *only one anchor of fixity* which we can seize upon as the working pseudo-standard of 'values' ... and that anchor is *tradition* ... Tradition means nothing cosmically, but it means everything locally & pragmatically because we have nothing else to shield us from a devastating sense of 'lostness' in endless time & space.<sup>79</sup>

This explains his statement to Derleth in 1929: 'New York is no place for a white man to live. The metropolis is a flurried, garish dissonance of aimless speed and magnitude, hybrid and alien to the core, and without historic roots or traditions.'<sup>80</sup> We might, then, relate Lovecraft's particular realization of the fantastic to his personal beliefs, which at times border on the sociopathic. His obsession with borders might reflect a desire to defend national territories and racialized bodies. After all, he wanted the Jim Crow laws extended to the northern states.

Lovecraft was also clearly obsessed with heredity and authenticity, and with the dangers of degeneration and insanity. Clive Bloom notes that 'in his stories the seeker after origins is either destroyed or goes mad'.<sup>81</sup> Bloom's other main argument is that 'Lovecraft's personal traumas were, in fact, the *social traumas* of the group from which his work emerged and to which his work was addressed'.<sup>82</sup> This shifts the focus away from Lovecraft as an individual, making his fears part of ideological struggles over class and 'race' in the US in the 1920s and 1930s.

However, Jack Morgan argues that horror does not have to be a metaphor for something beyond embodied experience. Pointing to the centrality of the body in horror fictions, he rejects critical accounts that 'conceive physicality as symbolically registering a social-political anxiety, as if physicality were an unlikely medium of significance in and of itself'.<sup>83</sup> For him, 'the physical-biological preoccupation [of horror]... is *that per se*, it is not a device referencing something else'.<sup>84</sup> Morgan reads everything, including space, in bodily terms; when some horrific thing invades a house, this is meant as an analogy of injury or disease.<sup>85</sup>

It is clear that beyond the overt racism of stories like 'Red Hook' we can detect an *embodied* sense of horror, what Lévy calls an 'aesthetic of the unclean'.<sup>86</sup> Lovecraft was sensitive to the cold and to strong smells; he hated fish, seafood, liver and milk, and survived on a two- or three-dollar-a-week diet of doughnuts, cheese and canned food.<sup>87</sup> Morgan argues that for Lovecraft 'the organic suggested the unclean ... This phobia contributed positively to his tales of terror, but it unfortunately extended to his virtually psychopathic social philosophy and politics, wherein he projected his loathing

upon selected racial groups.’<sup>88</sup> Lovecraft’s fiction and non-fiction represent what Morgan calls his ‘deflecting project’: rather than horror drawing its strength from his racist or class fears, Morgan argues that it represented a way of dealing with a problematic embodiment.<sup>89</sup>

These readings provide us with a variety of interpretations of Lovecraft’s horrific spaces. Despite this they all rely upon the same critical strategy, ‘fixing’ Lovecraft’s stories through biographical and autobiographical accounts. Clearly Lovecraft’s fears were not his alone, just as his reason for supporting the Klu Klux Klan in 1915 – ‘Race prejudice is a gift of Nature, intended to preserve in purity the various divisions of mankind which the ages have evolved’ – would have found some support in the US and elsewhere.<sup>90</sup> It is not hard to find familiar suggestions of abjection, pollution and the spatial expression of these fears of infection and contamination in his work.<sup>91</sup>

In fact Lovecraft’s work was produced – and has been reinterpreted – through a network of authors and readers. This has been partly obscured by Lovecraft’s distaste for the world of commercial entertainment, and by his recent critical rehabilitation. Much as he hated to admit it, it was the pulps that made Lovecraft famous, and literary hackery that helped pay the bills. And he was what we might now recognize as a ‘fan’, serving his apprenticeship in amateur press associations (APAs), an element of fandom that exists today. The production and circulation of amateur magazines binds authors and readers together; in their responses to each other’s work they participate in a collective enterprise. And just as other authors borrowed elements of the ‘Cthulhu mythos’, Lovecraft’s fictions mention entities and books devised by Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch, Robert E. Howard and others.<sup>92</sup> The question of who created what is further complicated by his ghostwriting and revision work.

So despite attempts to reinvent Lovecraft as a serious author – Derleth’s systematization of the ‘Cthulhu mythos’, and Joshi’s ‘approved’ and ‘textually correct’ editions – his often hastily produced stories, revisions and collaborations positively reek of pulp. Clive Bloom describes pulp fiction as ‘a messy sprawling, indefinite phenomenon with a vitality that is both exciting and terrifying’.<sup>93</sup> Pulp, like Lovecraft’s shoggoths, is a protean thing, constantly expanding and hybridizing, and ‘Lovecraft’ is in a process of endless transformation. This mutation, already obvious in an era of mechanized printing and letter-writing, has become even more pronounced in the age of the internet. Serious Lovecraft scholars are confronted by countless parodies, in-jokes, and reworkings of the ‘mythos’ on websites, in computer and role-playing games, and (ironically enough) in magical rituals.<sup>94</sup> These transformations may be unofficial, but it is also significant that many reject (and sometimes criticize) Lovecraft’s racism.

As a consequence there is no single Lovecraft, which makes it harder to use biographical material to make sense of his texts, even if we accept that material’s ‘truthfulness’. I want to make it clear that this is something that would be true of any other author: it isn’t simply a consequence of Lovecraft’s unusual status (as a pulp author ‘rescued’ from oblivion). And because so many of his letters survive, we actually possess *more* biographical detail than for most authors of his era.

Despite this, once Lovecraft’s racism is discovered, it is difficult not to read him *solely* in terms of these fears and hatreds. His pathology represents a critical singularity, from

which interpretations struggle to escape. But while it is extremely significant, it makes the texts *expressions* of Lovecraft's beliefs. My sense of unease at this critical strategy has lead me back to the texts, to questions of plot and narrative, and Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on the grotesque.

## Two graveyards: Lovecraft and Bakhtin

Lovecraft's stories place fantastic ideas within strong narratives:

... usually I start with a mood or idea or image which I wish to express, and revolve it in my mind until I can think of a good way of embodying it in *some chain of dramatic occurrences* capable of being recorded in concrete terms.<sup>95</sup>

Peter Brooks suggests that 'narrative is [the] acting out of the implications of metaphor' and that in some cases, 'In its unpacking, the original metaphor is enacted both spatially... and temporally'.<sup>96</sup> In addition, the acting out of metaphor as a series of events allows for its transformation, as Brooks explains: 'We start with an inactive, "collapsed" metaphor and work through to a reactivated, transactive one.'<sup>97</sup> In the case of Lovecraft's 'The unnamable', it is the metaphor of the unnamable or unknowable that is reactivated. At the beginning the reader, like Manton, is none the wiser as to what the word might mean: 'he was almost sure that nothing can be really "unnamable."' It didn't sound sensible to him.'<sup>98</sup> The narrative then enacts this metaphor, so that the unnamable is revealed, made (almost) representable, in story time. In the process the graveyard ceases to be a generic background or setting. It becomes vital to the narrative at the point that Carter reveals that the tomb they are sitting on contains the bones of the unnamable thing.

Carroll suggests that 'The point of the horror genre ... is to exhibit, disclose, and manifest that which is, putatively in principle, unknown and unknowable.'<sup>99</sup> Narratives therefore revolve around the point of *disclosure*, 'rendering the unknown known'.<sup>100</sup> This process involves 'a conflict of interpretations' and 'a deliberation about this conflict in terms of a ratiocination, the drama of proof, and the play of competing hypotheses', just as Carter and Manton represent a clash between fantastic and realist interpretations.<sup>101</sup> Hesitancy is followed by disclosure and explanation. A similar process occurs in the detective story, but unlike the detective Lovecraft's protagonists – and his readers – can never achieve complete understanding. Explanations are thwarted because the thing remains, in the final word of the story, 'unnamable'. Since Lovecraft preferred, on the whole, to avoid familiar folklore, his stories resist what Todorov called a 'marvellous' explanation.<sup>102</sup> Noting that narrative redundancy is characteristic of horror writing, Salomon adds, 'it is a redundancy that leads *away from meaning* rather than encouraging its generation'.<sup>103</sup>

We can explore the narrative significance of Lovecraft's thresholds further through the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, whom I want to approach through a brief comparison of Lovecraft and Dostoevsky. Both authors were admirers of Poe, and the latter also wrote a story – 'Bobok' – in which a writer encounters the dead in a graveyard. Bakhtin read

'Bobok' as a form of Menippean satire, where the use of the fantastic is 'justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end: the creation of *extraordinary situations* for the provoking and testing of a philosophical idea'.<sup>104</sup> He argues that this is a key principle in Dostoevsky's work, and in fact Dostoevsky did use very similar terms in his own description of Poe's stories.<sup>105</sup>

This testing of ideas takes place in a particular kind of textual site - the threshold. For Bakhtin this is 'a "point" where *crisis*, radical change, an unexpected turn of fate takes place'; it is where different ideas meet in dialogue.<sup>106</sup> Crucially all the participants in this dialogue are marked by their contact with one another.<sup>107</sup> The graveyard is also a threshold, a point of contact between life and death, and both authors use it as the point around which the plot moves. Bakhtin also understood the grotesque body to be a threshold, a point of contact with other bodies and with the organic and inorganic. The grotesque style was characterized by

the extremely fanciful, free, and playful treatment of plant, animal, and human forms. These forms seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed ... There was no longer the movement of finished forms, vegetable or animal, in a finished and stable world; instead the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into another.<sup>108</sup>

The grotesque body is therefore 'a body in the act of becoming', never complete:

The essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body... Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination ... as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body - all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world.<sup>109</sup>

This is why the grotesque body stresses its 'excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths'.<sup>110</sup>

Read this way the similarities are significant. However the *meanings* of these thresholds are diametrically opposed in Lovecraft and Bakhtin's writing. Bakhtin argues that the graveyard in 'Bobok' represents a carnivalized, heterotopic space where the living are levelled in death; in 'The unnamable' the undead monstrosity is terrifying, and the only laughs are unintentional. It is of course possible that in this story Lovecraft is mocking his own response to the problem of witnessing, but it seems unlikely. This composite description of the inhabitants of the Lower East Side clearly emphasizes bodily thresholds, for example:

...a yellow leering mask with sour, sticky, acid ichors oozing at eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, and abnormally bubbling from monstrous and unbelievable sores at every point...<sup>111</sup>

Lovecraft's 'infections' are also highly mobile: people swarm, or they spill out of buildings, like a 'semi-fluid rottenness' that swells, threatening to burst and spread.<sup>112</sup> It is clear that Lovecraft's formless, devouring entities are grotesquely excessive: sprouting, spawning, oozing, flowing. They represent life, just as Bakhtin's grotesque body represents fertility, change and resistance to closure; however, through Lovecraft's eyes this monstrous fecundity - personified by the god-like entity 'The black goat of the woods with a thousand young' - is corrupt and contaminating.

While Bakhtin and Lovecraft were interested in 'cosmic fear' and 'cosmic terror' respectively they had very different responses to it. Bakhtin's cosmic fear is a reaction to 'the immeasurable, the infinitely powerful', 'the heritage of man's ancient impotence in the face of nature'.<sup>113</sup> This medieval terror is replaced by Renaissance utopianism, which is then displaced by the terrors of the sublime and by modern horror. For Bakhtin fear is always defeated by laughter. Discussing an episode in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* where Panurge receives such a shock that he involuntarily soils himself, Bakhtin argues that 'the image of defecation from fear is a traditional debasement not of the coward only but of *fear itself*'.<sup>114</sup> Derek Littlewood's readings of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Angela Carter's *Nights at the circus* make a similar point, and Jack Morgan also notes that abjection may encourage 'a reawakened sense of fertility and vitality'.<sup>115</sup>

### **'Space belongs to me': fixity and indeterminacy**

So what can we make of this gulf between Lovecraft and Bakhtin? I'd like to suggest that what separates them is a disagreement about the nature of the self. In 1921 Lovecraft wrote:

I could not write about 'ordinary people' because I am not in the least interested in them. Without interest there can be no art. Man's relations to man do not captivate my fancy. It is man's relations to the cosmos – to the unknown – which alone rouses in me the spark of creative imagination.<sup>116</sup>

For all his talk of multiplicity in the story 'Through the gates of the silver key', Lovecraft's view of the self is classically solipsistic. Bodies are closed; connections are dangerous; death is the end of life; and 'change is the enemy of everything really worth cherishing'.<sup>117</sup>

This provides another way of thinking through Lovecraft's textual spaces. Drawing upon de Certeau, Andrew Thacker distinguishes between literary representations of space and place. The former are 'actualized' – performed – through movement and action, while the latter are stable and abstract.<sup>118</sup> This binary opposition is a very common one, often associated with the conservative defence of place that characterises Lovecraft's work. He wrote, 'I have never been tremendously interested in *people*, but I have a veritably feline interest in & devotion to places.'<sup>119</sup> These places – the historic, settled, knowable but ultimately *lost* spaces of his beloved New England – are not social spaces, alive with potential encounters and the possibility of change. Lovecraft's conservative sense of place combines the distance of the cartographer with the antiquarian's lack of interest in the living.<sup>120</sup>

Against this imagined fixity, lived spaces can only be experienced as a 'flurried, garish dissonance of aimless speed and magnitude', as Lovecraft described New York.<sup>121</sup> In Rabelais's and Dostoevsky's fictions, on the other hand, Bakhtin argues that 'streets, taverns, roads, bathhouses, decks of ships, and so on' represent thresholds precisely because they are 'meeting- and contact-points for heterogeneous people'.<sup>122</sup> And from Victor Turner onwards anthropologists have known that thresholds are commonly

understood to mark points of change.<sup>123</sup> But since change is generally for the worse in Lovecraft's fictions, contact points like the streets of New York are themselves horrific. On his return to Providence, Lovecraft was amazed to find that even here there were echoes of 'Red Hook'.<sup>124</sup>

This comparison between open/progressive and closed/conservative senses of place may seem rather familiar, but I am not simply trying to argue that Bakhtin was more progressive than Lovecraft.<sup>125</sup> Instead I want to note three things. First, that the spatial metaphor of the threshold is clearly visible within Lovecraft's fiction *and* his non-fiction; we do not need to give greater weight to autobiographical or biographical material, and in fact I have spent more time on his fiction. Secondly, while thresholds can be read positively or negatively, Lovecraft usually casts his in a negative light because they open up the prospect of change, which can only be threatening to someone obsessed with fixity. And third, we might learn from this in our own research practice, resisting the temptation to 'fix' our objects of study, to have the last word.

## Conclusions: the impossibility of closure

At the beginning of this paper I stated that I did not want to reduce horror to the expression of something else. The horrific can be useful in its own right: Lovecraft's thingless names and nameless things mark the limits of representation and imagination, including our geographical imaginations. Lovecraft's textual thresholds do not simply express his racist fears; they produce the narratives that dramatize his fears of contact and change. In arguing that Lovecraft's biography cannot entirely explain his fictions, I am not suggesting that his racism is unimportant. Far from it – it provides an important way of connecting his personal fears to wider cultural phenomena. But I am suggesting that critical work should not end there, with 'context'.

Paradoxically we are left with a textual convention – the threshold – that is recognizable, functional, generic, utterly conservative; and which simultaneously implies openness, change and lively movement. We are left utterly unsurprised by Lovecraft's spaces while still uncertain as to where they will lead us. This contrast between banality and fantasy suggests two final points.

It reminds us, on one hand, that spatial metaphors like these have histories. Bakhtin's discussions of the threshold suggest that for him it is a particularly modern – and urban – way of capturing lived experience as an open-ended, contingent experience.<sup>126</sup> He is also very careful to distinguish between the fertile laughter of the Renaissance and the 'terrifying world' of the Romantic grotesque.<sup>127</sup> As Marc Brosseau, Andrew Thacker and others have noted, literary texts may represent social spaces, but social spaces are equally able to shape literary forms; particular kinds of experience of space are manifested in and shaped by different metaphors, formal impressions of space, and so on. The threshold suggests this modern ambiguity, just as Sue Vice sees abjection as 'the grotesque of modernity, its darker version'.<sup>128</sup>

On the other hand, the indeterminacy of this spatial metaphor is quite appropriate for a discussion of the fantastic that seeks to open up the meanings of texts through critical



engagement. Todorov insisted that if the reader is to experience the fantastic text as hesitation, it is essential that she 'reject allegorical as well as poetic interpretations', since these allow hesitation to slide into comprehension.<sup>129</sup>

Producing the 'answer' to Lovecraft's fictions risks aping his own conservative attempts to pin down meaning. Introducing his book on horror narrative, Roger Salomon states: 'I eschew explanation, dealing rather with what I consider a phenomenon of experience that cannot be explained, that in fact deconstructs or otherwise mocks or casts into doubt all order or patterns.'<sup>130</sup> Considering two of the horror genre's most famous thingless names, Salomon notes that 'Where *Frankenstein* parodies mythic beginnings, *Dracula* travesties ends'; undeath represents the impossibility of closure.<sup>131</sup> Reading Lovecraft for several things at once – horror *and* race *and* space and so on – keeps our critical engagement with him open and alive rather than closed and dead.

## Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was presented as a seminar for the London Group of Historical Geographers; thanks especially to Jenny Robinson for inviting me to speak. Thanks to Phil Crang, Steve Pile and an anonymous referee for suggested revisions and improvements, to Justin Woodman and Bill Redwood for their helpful comments, and to Julian Holloway for many useful suggestions and references.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Roger Luckhurst has suggested that we are experiencing 'something of a "spectral turn" in contemporary cultural criticism', and it seems fair to say that geographers have not been entirely left out of this. 'The contemporary London Gothic and the limits of the "spectral turn"', *Textual practice* 16 (2002), p. 527.

<sup>2</sup> R. Jackson, *Fantasy: the literature of subversion* (London, Routledge, 1981), p. 23 (emphasis original).

<sup>3</sup> See D. Bell, 'Anti-idyll: rural horror', in P. Cloke and J. Little, eds, *Contested countryside cultures* (London, Routledge, 1997), and the 'Dark ruralities' session convened by Jo Little and Mike Leyshon at the 2004 Conference of the Association of American Geographers in Philadelphia, as well as E. Glasberg's paper 'Thawing out things', delivered at the same conference. A. Vidler, *The architectural uncanny: essays in the modern unbomely* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1999); S. Pile, 'Sleepwalking in the modern city: Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud and the world of dream', in G. Bridge and S. Watson, eds, *A companion to the city* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 2000); S. Pile, 'The un(known) city ... or, an urban geography of what lies buried below the surface', in I. Borden, J. Kerr, A. Pivaro and J. Rendell, eds, *The unknown city* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> J. Wolfreys, 'Undoing London, or urban haunts: the fracturing of representation in the 1990s', in P. K. Gilbert, ed., *Imagined Londons* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 193–217. And see D. Pinder, 'Ghostly footsteps: voices, memories and walks in the city', *Ecumene* 8 (2001), pp. 1–19.

- <sup>5</sup> D. Miller, 'Possessions' in D. Miller, eds, *Home possessions* (Oxford, Berg, 2001), pp. 119–20.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Gell, *Art and agency* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998).
- <sup>7</sup> N. Thrift, *Spatial formations* (London, Sage, 1996), p. 4. See also G. Rose, 'Performing space', in D. Massey, J. Allen and P. Sarre, eds, *Human geography today* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999), pp. 247–59.
- <sup>8</sup> N. Thrift, 'Steps to an ecology of place', in Massey *et al.*, *Human geography*, p. 300.
- <sup>9</sup> N. Thrift, 'With child to see any strange thing: everyday life in the city', in Bridge and Watson eds, *Companion*, p. 405.
- <sup>10</sup> See J. Holloway, 'Spiritual embodiment and sacred rural landscapes', in P. Cloke, ed., *Country visions* (Harlow, Pearson Education, 2003), p. 174, and 'Sacred space: beyond representations', paper delivered at 2004 Conference of the Association of American Geographers in Philadelphia.
- <sup>11</sup> See M. Douglas, *Purity and danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London, Routledge, 2002), and the rather different arguments in S. Whatmore, *Hybrid geographies* (London, Sage, 2002); N. Bingham, 'In the belly of the monster: Frankenstein, food, factisches and fiction', in R. Kitchin and J. Kneale, eds, *Lost in space: geographies of science fiction*, (London, Continuum, 2002), pp. 180–92; and G. Davies, 'A geography of monsters?', *Geoforum* **34** (2003), pp. 409–12.
- <sup>12</sup> J. Hillis Miller, 'Heart of darkness revisited', in R. Murfin, ed., *Heart of darkness: a case study in contemporary criticism* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 209–55.
- <sup>13</sup> See Thrift, *Spatial formations*, p. 4.
- <sup>14</sup> M. Brosseau, 'Geography's literature', *Progress in human geography* **18** (1994), pp. 333–53; M. Brosseau, 'The city in textual form: *Manhattan Transfer's* New York', *Ecumene* **2** (1995), pp. 89–114; J. Sharp, 'Towards a critical analysis of fictive geographies', *Area* **32** (2000), pp. 327–34.
- <sup>15</sup> C. Barnett, 'Deconstructing context: exposing Derrida', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s. **24** (1999), p. 280.
- <sup>16</sup> See S. Pile, *Real cities: modernity, space and the phantasmagorias of city life* (London, Sage, forthcoming).
- <sup>17</sup> See J. V. Shea, 'On the literary influences which shaped Lovecraft's works', in S. T. Joshi, ed., *H. P. Lovecraft: four decades of criticism* (Athens, OH, Athens University Press, 1980).
- <sup>18</sup> S. King, 'Jerusalem's lot', in J. Turner, ed., *Tales of the Cthulhu mythos* (New York, Ballantine, 1990); J. L. Borges, 'There are more things', in *The book of sand* (London, Penguin, 1979); J. Russ, 'My boat', in Turner, *Tales*.
- <sup>19</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural horror in literature* (New York, Dover, 1973). G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (London, Athlone Press, 1988).
- <sup>20</sup> See D. W. Mosig, 'H. P. Lovecraft: myth-maker', in Joshi, *Four decades*.
- <sup>21</sup> Lovecraft, 'The outsider', in *The call of Cthulhu and other weird stories* (London, Penguin, 1999).
- <sup>22</sup> It has been suggested that Lovecraft wrote something like 80 000 letters in his lifetime. 'Introduction', in S. T. Joshi, *Lovecraft's library: a catalogue* (New York, Hippocampus Press, 2002), p. 7.
- <sup>23</sup> e.g. Lovecraft, 'Some notes on a nonentity', in *Miscellaneous writings*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Sauc City, WI, Arkham House, 1995), p. 560.
- <sup>24</sup> Lovecraft, 'Notes on writing weird fiction', in *Miscellaneous writings*, pp. 113–16 (emphasis original).
- <sup>25</sup> R. Williams, *Notes on the underground: an essay on technology, society, and the imagination* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1990), p. 43.

- <sup>26</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected letters II, 1925–1929*, ed. A. Derleth and D. Wandrei (Sauk City, WI, Arkham House, 1968), p. 150.
- <sup>27</sup> Lovecraft, 'The call of Cthulhu', in *Cthulhu*, p. 139.
- <sup>28</sup> Lovecraft, 'From beyond', in *The doom that came to Sarnath and other stories* (New York, Ballantine, 1971), p. 93.
- <sup>29</sup> L. Armit, *Theorising the fantastic* (London, Arnold, 1996).
- <sup>30</sup> T. Todorov, *The fantastic: a structural approach to a literary genre* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1973).
- <sup>31</sup> Lovecraft, 'Weird fiction', p. 113.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115 (emphasis original).
- <sup>33</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 39.
- <sup>34</sup> D. Harms, *Encyclopedia Cthulbiana: a guide to Lovecraftian horror* (Oakland, CA, Chaosium, 1998), p. 360.
- <sup>35</sup> Lovecraft, 'The festival', in *Cthulhu*, p. 116.
- <sup>36</sup> N. Carroll, *The philosophy of horror, or, paradoxes of the heart* (New York, Routledge, 1990), pp. 32, 54.
- <sup>37</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, 'At the mountains of madness', in *The thing on the doorstep and other weird stories* (London, Penguin, 2001), pp. 334–35.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.
- <sup>39</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, 'The unnamable', in *The lurking fear and other stories* (New York, Ballantine, 1971), p. 99.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- <sup>44</sup> R. B. Salomon, *The mazes of the serpent* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 76–77. See D. Vilaseca, 'Nostalgia for the origin: notes on reading and melodrama in H. P. Lovecraft's "The case of Charles Dexter Ward"', *Neophilologus* 75 (1991).
- <sup>45</sup> Lovecraft, 'The whisperer in darkness', in *Cthulhu*, p. 200.
- <sup>46</sup> This is also visible in other fantastic genres; Gregory Benford suggests that 'rendering the alien, making the reader experience it, is the crucial contribution of SF' (cited in C. Malmgren, 'Self and other in SF: alien encounters', *Science fiction studies* 20 (1993), p. 15). However, witnessing remains problematic in horror, while 'SF rigorously and systematically "naturalizes" or "domesticates" its displacements and discontinuities' (C. Malmgren, *Worlds apart: narratology of science fiction* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 6). Of course, this problem lies at the heart of the 'crisis of representation' of social science; Philip Crang notes some of the problems this causes writers of both science fiction and ethnography in 'The politics of polyphony: reconfigurations of geographical authority', *Environment and planning D: society and space* 10 (1992), pp. 527–49.
- <sup>47</sup> Lovecraft, 'The music of Erich Zann', in *Thing*, p. 45.
- <sup>48</sup> Lovecraft, 'The colour out of space', in *Cthulhu*.
- <sup>49</sup> Lovecraft, 'Under the pyramids', in *Thing*.
- <sup>50</sup> Glasberg, 'Thawing out things'; Lovecraft, 'The nameless city', in *Doom*; 'The shadow out of time', in *Shadow*.
- <sup>51</sup> Lovecraft, 'Dagon', in *Cthulhu*.
- <sup>52</sup> H. P. Lovecraft and H. Heald, 'Out of the aeons', in *The loved dead and other revisions* (New York, Carroll & Graf, 1997).

- <sup>53</sup> R. Phillips, *Mapping men and empire: a geography of adventure* (London, Routledge, 1997), p. 7.
- <sup>54</sup> Salomon, *Mazes*, p. 9.
- <sup>55</sup> Lovecraft, 'The thing on the doorstep', in *Thing*.
- <sup>56</sup> S. T. Joshi, in Lovecraft, *Thing*, p. 377.
- <sup>57</sup> Lovecraft, 'From beyond', in *Doom*, p. 92.
- <sup>58</sup> M. Lévy, *Lovecraft: a study in the fantastic* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 48.
- <sup>59</sup> Lovecraft, 'The shadow over Innsmouth', in *Cthulhu*.
- <sup>60</sup> Lovecraft, 'From beyond', in *Doom*, p. 87.
- <sup>61</sup> M. Fisher, 'Flatline constructs: gothic materialism and cybernetic theory-fiction', <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/~posde/trans-mat/FCcontents.htm>, accessed 7 July 2004.
- <sup>62</sup> Lovecraft, 'From beyond', in *Doom*, p. 91 (emphasis original); H. P. Lovecraft and E. Hoffmann Price, 'Through the gates of the silver key', in *At the mountains of madness* (London, HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 256–57.
- <sup>63</sup> Fisher, 'Flatline constructs'.
- <sup>64</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, p. 240.
- <sup>65</sup> Rosalind Williams notes that the convergence of 'deep time' and evolutionary theory prompted a number of scientists and authors (like T. H. Huxley and H. G. Wells) to address the prospect of degeneration: *Underground*, p. 124.
- <sup>66</sup> Lovecraft, 'The lurking fear', in *Lurking*; 'Facts concerning the late Arthur Jermyn and his family', in *Cthulhu*. See Joshi's interpretation of the latter in *Cthulhu*, story p. 365.
- <sup>67</sup> Lévy, *Lovecraft*, p. 57.
- <sup>68</sup> See M. Torgovnick, *Gone primitive: savage intellects, modern lives* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990); B. V. Street, *The savage in literature: representations of 'primitive' society in English fiction 1858–1920* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).
- <sup>69</sup> Lovecraft, 'The horror at Red Hook', in *Lurking*, pp. 72, 73.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- <sup>73</sup> M. Murray, *The witch-cult in Western Europe: a study in anthropology* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1921).
- <sup>74</sup> Lovecraft, *Supernatural*, pp. 18–21.
- <sup>75</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters II*, p. 101.
- <sup>76</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected letters I, 1911–1924*, ed. A. Derleth and D. Wandrei (Sauk City, WI, Arkham House, 1965), p. 181.
- <sup>77</sup> Lovecraft, 'He', in *Cthulhu*, p. 126.
- <sup>78</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters II*, p. 249.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 356–57 (emphasis original).
- <sup>80</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected letters III, 1929–1931*, ed. A. Derleth and D. Wandrei (Sauk City, WI, Arkham House, 1971), p. 30.
- <sup>81</sup> C. Bloom, *Cult fiction: popular reading and pulp theory* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996), pp. 193–94, 200.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.
- <sup>83</sup> J. Morgan, *The biology of horror* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), p. 92.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22 (emphasis added).
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179–99.
- <sup>86</sup> Lévy, *Lovecraft*, p. 25.

- <sup>87</sup> Cold: Lovecraft, *Selected letters V, 1934–1937*, ed. A. Derleth and J. Turner (Sauk City, WI, Arkham House, 1976), pp. 337, 367. Diet: *Letters III*, pp. 190–91, 433–34; *Letters V*, pp. 161, 381–2.
- <sup>88</sup> Morgan, *Biology of horror*, pp. 100–01.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- <sup>90</sup> Lovecraft, 'In a major key', in *Miscellaneous*, p. 425.
- <sup>91</sup> Douglas, *Purity and danger*; J. Kristeva, *Powers of horror* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982); D. Sibley, *Spaces of exclusion: society and difference in the West* (London, Routledge, 1995).
- <sup>92</sup> R. M. Price, 'Introduction,' in R.M. Price, ed., *Tales of the Lovecraft mythos* (New York, Ballantine, 1992), p. xiii.
- <sup>93</sup> Bloom, *Cult fiction*, p. 132.
- <sup>94</sup> For the latter, see G. V. Lachman, *Turn off your mind: the mystic sixties and the dark side of the Age of Aquarius* (London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 2001); J. Woodman, 'Modernity, selfhood, and the demonic: anthropological perspectives on "chaos magick" in the United Kingdom' (PhD, University of London, 2003).
- <sup>95</sup> Lovecraft, 'Weird fiction', p. 114 (emphasis added).
- <sup>96</sup> P. Brooks, *Reading for the plot: design and intention in narrative* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 27.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>98</sup> Lovecraft, 'Unnamable', p. 100.
- <sup>99</sup> Carroll, *Philosophy*, p. 127.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157
- <sup>102</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters V*, p. 197.
- <sup>103</sup> Salomon, *Mazes*, p. 98 (emphasis added).
- <sup>104</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 114 (emphasis original).
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143–44.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169 (emphasis original).
- <sup>107</sup> See J. Holloway and J. Kneale, 'Mikhail Bakhtin: dialogics of space', in M. Crang and N. Thrift, eds, *Thinking space* (London, Routledge, 2000).
- <sup>108</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 32.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.
- <sup>111</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters I*, p. 334.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>113</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 335, 336, n.9.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173 (emphasis added).
- <sup>115</sup> D. Littlewood, 'Uneasy readings/unspeakable dialogics', in D. Littlewood and P. Stockwell, eds, *Impossibility fiction* (Amsterdam, Rodopi 1996). Morgan, *Biology of horror*, p. 228.
- <sup>116</sup> Lovecraft, 'In defence of Dagon', in *Miscellaneous*, p. 155. Of course for Bakhtin 'man's relations to man' and 'man's relations to the cosmos' were connected.
- <sup>117</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters V*, p. 50. Although some of these fictional thresholds seem to represent positive changes (Pickman's transformation, Carter's translation to the Dreamlands), these changes usually become terrifying threats: 'Pickman's model', in *Thing*, and 'The dream-quest of unknown Kadath', in *Mountains*.

- <sup>118</sup> A. Thacker, *Moving through modernity: space and geography in modernism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 29–35.
- <sup>119</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters III*, p. 111 (emphasis original).
- <sup>120</sup> In the ‘Dream-quest of unknown Kadath’ Randolph Carter’s journey towards a distant, mysterious city turns out to be a search for the familiar scenes of his past.
- <sup>121</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters III*, p. 30.
- <sup>122</sup> Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky’s poetics*, p. 128.
- <sup>123</sup> For a reading of threshold markings as performative ritual rather than decorative art, see R. Dohmen ‘The home in the world: women, threshold designs and performative relations in contemporary Tamil Nadu, south India’, *Cultural geographies* **11** (2004), pp. 7–25.
- <sup>124</sup> Lovecraft, *Letters II*, p. 43.
- <sup>125</sup> D. Massey ‘A global sense of place’, in *Space, place and gender* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994), pp. 146–56.
- <sup>126</sup> See Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky’s poetics*; ‘Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel’, in *The dialogic imagination: four essays*, ed. M. Holquist (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84–258.
- <sup>127</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 38.
- <sup>128</sup> S. Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 175.
- <sup>129</sup> Todorov, *Fantastic*, p. 33.
- <sup>130</sup> Salomon, *Mazes*, p. 2.
- <sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.