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Science and Madness: Echoes of Freudian Psychoanalysis in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft and the Weird

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SCIENCE AND MADNESS: ECHOES OF FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS IN THE
WORKS OF H.P. LOVECRAFT AND THE WEIRD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Brandon J. Cordova

2022

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Brandon J. Cordova, and entitled Science and Madness: Echoes of Freudian Psychoanalysis in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft and the Weird, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Heather Blatt

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Date of Defense: March 29, 2022

The Thesis of Brandon J. Cordova is approved.

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Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my loving fiancé and soon-to-be wife. Jenny's love, support, and encouragement spurred me to undertake the challenge of this work and see it through to its end.

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I wholeheartedly thank the members of my committee for their steadfast support in the long journey toward completing this work. The difficult first steps in the writing of this thesis would never have been overcome without their help. Dr. Nathaniel Cadle's seemingly endless library of relevant literature and keen eye for the tailoring of a difficult subject were essential to getting this work off the ground. Dr. Heather Blatt's willingness to work with a complete stranger touched me during the selection of my committee, and only deepened my wish that I could have taken her class on Medieval Monstrosities in my undergraduate years. Dr. Rhona Trauvitch is the one who tossed me into the pool (or vast ocean) that is the Weird through her years of instruction and Canvas discussion boards, and for that I am eternally thankful.

I appreciated the opportunity to work on such an unusual subject with such supportive faculty throughout my graduate career, and I look forward to (hopefully) calling them my colleagues at some point in the future.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
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Miami, Florida

Professor Nathaniel Cadle, Major Professor

The purpose of this thesis was to highlight the influence of psychoanalysis on the writing of H.P. Lovecraft through a literary analysis of his critical essays, scientific essays, personal correspondence, and fiction. The subjects of note were Lovecraft's intense focus on the sciences as an inspiration for his work, his awareness of Freudian psychoanalytic principles, and his application of those principles in his contributions to weird fiction. In doing so, this thesis explored alternative interpretations of some of Lovecraft's more well-known stories and provided nuance to a bigoted, problematic figure of American literature. This paper highlighted the significant role of psychoanalysis in the development of H.P. Lovecraft's writing and broadened the room for speculating on the influence of the psychological science on weird fiction as a whole.

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I. Introduction

In 1927, Howard Phillips Lovecraft's "Supernatural Horror in Literature" was published in the short-lived magazine *The Recluse*, establishing the author's ability as a literary theorist and laying the conceptual groundwork for defining weird fiction as a literary genre. The essay's survey of the connection between Lovecraft's Gothic progenitors and weird fiction proved both enlightening and well-written, with Edmund Wilson in his otherwise harshly critical "Tales of the Marvellous and Ridiculous" asserting that Lovecraft's essay was a "really able piece of work...[written] with much intelligence" (loc 3565). Notably, however, Lovecraft goes beyond simply connecting the Gothic tradition to weird fiction; he articulates a particular quality of Edgar Allan Poe's writing integral to understanding both Lovecraft's own writing and weird fiction as a whole. He describes the "abnormal psychology and monomania" present in many of Poe's stories, as well as the parallels that exist between Poe's writing and the psychology of the Gothic writer, which "possessed much of the depression, sensitiveness, mad aspiration, loneliness, and extravagant freakishness which he attributes to his haughty and solitary victims of Fate" (Lovecraft VII). Thus, one can speculate that, in his 1927 essay (and long-form admiration of Edgar Allan Poe as a literary hero), Lovecraft admits an irrefutable connection between the psychology of a reader or writer, and the substance of fiction.

Given his claim of Poe as his progenitor, one can speculate that Lovecraft's quintessential weird tale explores abnormal psychology but along a different tradition, that of psychoanalysis—a burgeoning science of the era. It can be said that psychology

has always been at the forefront of generating horror in fiction, so why is psychoanalysis particularly important to single out as an influence upon Lovecraft and the weird? Part of the answer to that question is coincidental: H.P. Lovecraft and Sigmund Freud were contemporaries, and the former was firmly dedicated to the importance of grounded sciences versus ungrounded superstition. One may consider dismissing the connection between Freud and Lovecraft outright, given the author's superficially negative opinion of the Austrian doctor. However, such a premature judgment ignores the sentiment behind these negative opinions. Lovecraft's contentions with Freud do not seem to be based on skepticism of psychoanalysis on a theoretical level, but on Freud's own limited scope of its application. "From Beyond," one of the few Lovecraft texts where he mentions Freud by name, dismisses the doctor as a "dupe" and "parvenu" (117). Curiously, however, Lovecraft never denigrated psychoanalysis in his nonfiction writing. He was no stranger to doing so regarding other modes of inquiry, voicing his contempt for astrology in a 1914 issue of *Evening News* where he dismissed the practice as "charlatanry" (*Collected Essays* 260). In "From Beyond," it was most likely the fictional character Crawford Tillinghast speaking rather than Lovecraft himself; Tillinghast, a scientist pushing to discover what lies "beyond," represents the aforementioned Freudian limitations that prevent a full understanding of the unknown. If Lovecraft were as dismissive of Freud as a superficial reading of Tillinghast might suggest, one might find it curious that he never denigrated psychoanalysis in the same manner as astrology.

Contending with the unknown is a theme common to most of Lovecraft's stories, being fairly consistent in both the causes of conflict and the settings that govern their events. Lovecraft focuses on the unconscious, the psychological machinations of the

narrators or protagonists, and the dangers that reside in (either successfully or unsuccessfully) trying to understand them. His reflexive usage of the unconscious as a material cause and setting permeates his writing as a whole, and defines it quite extensively; it was not capture at the hands of a pursuer or the “Innsmouth look” that spelled the end of Olmstead in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, but the departure of “every vestige of mental peace and confidence in the integrity...of the human mind.” (Lovecraft 853).

Devotion to material settings strikes as a curious choice for an author claiming Gothic writers as his Old Masters and crafting tales of fish-people, but it is unsurprising when one considers Lovecraft’s uniform deference to science in his work. Lovecraft has, for example, left us many lesser-known contributions to Providence’s scientific journals, though a majority of these tend to concern themselves with astronomy; indeed, Hippocampus Press subtitled the third volume of *Collected Essays* “Science,” when it could have just as easily been subtitled “Astronomy” given the almost uniform subject matter of Lovecraft’s articles. Still, while speculation on Lovecraft’s thoughts ventures less commonly into his feelings on the social sciences, psychoanalysis’ penchant for explaining the fantastic events of the mind through natural causes falls right in line with Lovecraft’s own ambiguous use of supernatural motifs in his work. Per David Peak, Lovecraft seemed solely concerned with reality (165-66) and used science to define what is known and to identify the horrible things that are unknown—practical things like mental disease and impractical things like the Deep Ones (168-69). Bennett Lovett-Graff shares a similar sentiment, noting that “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” is unconcerned with the spiritual connections between family members (often

the subject of earlier Gothic writing), instead focusing on the “mechanistic reality of biological heredity and its usurpative powers” (371-72), something to give one pause considering the turbulent nature of the entire Lovecraft family’s mental health.

Consequently, the conceptual framework of psychoanalysis provides the means to examine the specific psychological basis of Lovecraftian horror in this thesis. The task of describing psychoanalytic influence on literature is not new, but these descriptions involve themselves more with the actual application of the psychoanalytic process to literature and tend to be less concerned with the more transactional influence of psychoanalytic thought on the authors themselves. With regards to Lovecraft, psychoanalysis is not just a lens through which one can analyze his work, but a lens through which one can understand Lovecraft himself—in turn recognizing the qualities that permeate Lovecraft’s unique brand of writing. In short, we should concern ourselves with Lovecraft’s usage of psychoanalytic concepts in order to understand weird fiction’s odd intermingling of science and horror—an exercise in speculation rather than pure textual analysis.

II. Reviewing the State of the Discourse

Lovecraft has always occupied an odd position in the literary community's retrospective eye. Immediately following his death in 1937, he was virtually unknown outside of pulp enthusiasts and close confidantes who would later go on to found Arkham House, a publisher dedicated to preserving Lovecraft's stories. It took some time after Edmund Wilson's 1945 critique of Lovecraft's literary ability for him to enter serious scholarly consideration, but it turned out to be a grand entrance, largely thanks to the efforts of scholars like S.T. Joshi. The latter proved himself to be, perhaps, Lovecraft's most ardent supporter as the author's position grew more precarious in an increasingly intersectional and socially conscious community of readers.

Greater attention to Lovecraft's writing has generated equal interest in Lovecraft the author, spurring questions about where Lovecraft's racism and anti-Semitism fit into conversations about his work. These are big questions, as Lovecraft's bigoted views reverberate throughout the thinly veiled caricatures that define characters of color in his stories (Callaghan 102-3). Lovecraft's reputation has taken a negative turn in recent years, as seen in 2011 when Nnedi Okorafor and China Miéville's reflections on Lovecraft's problematic history in "Lovecraft's racism & The World Fantasy statuette" led to a call by some writers to "move sci-fi/fantasy out of the past" (Older) by replacing Lovecraft's likeness with Octavia Butler's. The bitter backlash to these critiques, spearheaded by S.T. Joshi, underlined the divisions within the literary community between those who are too willing to brush off Lovecraft's racism as a quality common to "virtually all members of his class" ("In Defense of Lovecraft" 111) and those who find the author's stories to be "vitally shaped by racism" (Mayer 119). Both positions are

simplistic and ignore the great challenge of discussing Lovecraft. We cannot wave away Lovecraft's virulent prejudice; attempting to do so ignores the material threat posed by bigotry, and thus ignores the greatest challenge in discussing Lovecraft. Likewise, allowing racism to be an unmoving underscore for all of Lovecraft's work prevents adequate analysis of a figure who represents a turning point of a genre. Honesty is the solution to this conundrum—as Okorafor states in “Lovecraft's racism,” the aim should be “to *face* the history of this leg of literature rather than put it aside or bury it.”

To face Lovecraft, one must understand Lovecraft's status as a problematic individual while also understanding that his bigotry may not have served as the core of all his work. There are two important things to consider here. First, Lovecraft published the majority of his work in pulp magazines, a market that demanded brevity and simplicity. Unfortunately, achieving these qualities often resulted in “stereotypical, derogatory, and extreme depictions of Otherness,” as noted by David M. Earle, who describes how the stereotypical, racist caricatures prevalent in pulp magazines (e.g., *Weird Tales*) were usually a simple way of denoting Otherness to a readership that carried unsavory perceptions of African and Asian peoples (84-85). This observation is supported by Bill Brown's own descriptions of pulp fiction in his “Popular Forms II,” wherein he notes pulp fiction's tendency to be heavily defined by its market, one filled with a defensive, often White and male readership (359).

Lovecraft's bigotry permeated his personal correspondence, too, however. There were surely prejudices “common” to New England in Lovecraft's time—after all, the *Negro Motorist Green-Book* listed a measly two hotels in Providence as late as 1941 (Green 41)—but, like before, this is too reductive an explanation. The truth of the matter

is that Lovecraft was an unwell man whose mental disturbances may have found a poor outlet in prejudice. In S.T. Joshi's biography of Lovecraft, *I Am Providence*, Lovecraft's correspondence reveals the depth of his psychological issues, such as his contemplation of suicide at the age of 14 (98) and his suffering a nervous breakdown at the age of 18 (126). While his poor mental health cannot account for the "common" prejudices he might have otherwise held from being raised among Rhode Island's Anglo-American aristocracy, it can explain how severely these prejudices were exhibited in a man possibly afflicted by paranoid delusions, which can correlate with extreme racism (Poussaint 4).

Lovecraft's illness aside, the purpose of this thesis is to view the influences behind his writing in an alternative light, not brush off the depth of his problematic history. His economic dependence on a medium which by and large expected a degree of hostility toward women and characters of color is an important factor of his writing to consider, even if he may have been too quick to indulge in those expectations. The question remains open, however, on whether Lovecraft's profound psychological issues and own fascination with the scientific advances of his day served as the thematic cores of his stories. Examination of psychoanalysis' contributions to Lovecraft's writing can contribute to the difficult conversation about his position in the world of American literature—one defined equally by his hateful personal sentiments and his literary devotion to the science of the mind.

This attempt to establish Lovecraft as a conscious user of psychoanalysis as thematic material draws upon earlier work that has linked the weird fiction writer to psychology. Stephen A. Black, formally trained in psychoanalysis, evaluated Lovecraft and his work through the lens of "psychological thinking" in Black's 1979 "Literary

Biography and Psychological Criticism: In the Matter of H. P. Lovecraft.” More recently, David Punter analyzed the prevalence of paranoid pattern recognition and the central nature of psychology in Lovecraftian interpretation. In fact, Punter acknowledged psychoanalysis directly by highlighting the disdain Lovecraft held for Freud’s work; notably, however, Punter does this to showcase Lovecraft’s texts as “test cases of psychological interpretation” (189) rather than as evidence of Lovecraft’s conscious use of psychoanalytic concepts. Clearly, scholars recognize a connection between Lovecraft and psychology, but this connection seems to usually take one of two avenues: the use of psychology (or psychoanalysis) as a tool for literary analysis, or the central presence of psychological themes in Lovecraft’s work. This thesis concerns itself with narrowing the second of the aforementioned avenues by analyzing the central presence of psychoanalytic themes in Lovecraft’s as providing a case for Lovecraft’s deliberate use thereof.

III. Lovecraftian Science in “From Beyond” and “Beyond the Wall of Sleep”

One cannot, except in immature pulp charlatan-fiction, present an account of impossible, improbable, or inconceivable phenomena as a commonplace narrative of objective acts and conventional emotions. 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. (Lovecraft, “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction”)

Throughout Lovecraft’s writing, he almost unilaterally deferred to the sciences as an explanation for the world. As seen in “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction,” Lovecraft recognized an integral characteristic of weird fiction in its devotion to the material subject, to keeping the reader grounded in “conceivable phenomena” that rests squarely in reality. Even in describing the literary turn common to all his writing, the grand revelations of some terrible horror lurking in the background of the reader’s mind, he chose to use the word “inconceivable” to describe this horror, rather than “supernatural” or some other word that suggests unreality. Note how the very notion of conceiving phenomena roots weird fiction in the mind, in the psychology of his readers as much as that of his characters. In short, within the context of Lovecraft’s short stories, the mind operates as a scientific subject that can inflict material effects upon the world. Lovecraft’s recognition of the mind as a setting or actor within his stories closely parallels Sigmund Freud’s own views which, as early as 1891 in his “On Aphasia,” recognized a direct relationship between unconscious “psychical mechanisms” and illness (3-4).

Equally relevant is the distinctly academic context of Lovecraftian stories, an aspect that suggests much about Lovecraft’s appreciation for science as a vehicle of

understanding (albeit with important caveats). In “From Beyond,” the events of the short story are entirely driven by a makeshift scientist, Crawford Tillinghast, whose musings on the limitations of human “sense-organs” (117) reveal a great deal of education behind the mad researcher’s actions. This might suggest a cautionary tale of hubris, taking science as a powerful subject that one should not toy with, as Tillinghast did to his end. That is, however, a half-measured analysis, as Tillinghast dies due to apoplexy rather than the creatures that he brought from beyond (120). Death by cerebral hemorrhage suggests that it is not the destructive power of science at work in Tillinghast’s demise, but rather humanity’s incapability of understanding things beyond our perception. Therein lies a point of intersection, as psychoanalysis also concerns itself greatly with something defined by its imperceptibility: the unconscious. Given this parallel, Tillinghast’s death seems less fantastic than the reader may initially realize. Perhaps Lovecraft is recognizing the danger that resides in the imperceptible—a danger that was already being theorized in the work of Sigmund Freud.

“Beyond the Wall of Sleep” espouses its academic air less directly than “From Beyond,” but nonetheless adheres to the same motif. It takes place in a medical setting, narrated by an intern who takes great care in providing meticulous anatomical descriptions of Joe Slater, as well as providing what one might consider a rudimentary medical and behavioral history for the sake of hospital use, complete with descriptions of psychological episodes consistently labeled as “mental attacks” (38-40). In another deference to scientific developments, the intern uses a “radio” (43)—a relatively novel invention in 1919—to link the intern’s mind with that of the deranged patient. The end result departs from Tillinghast’s gruesome end, but it is no less scientific, with the

narrator stating plainly that the events recounted were facts and nothing more (45). Even the “weird lyric melody” witnessed by the narrator upon his spectacular success with the mind-radio is reduced to a terse set of “chords, vibrations, and harmonic ecstasies” (42). In the end, regardless of the fantastic events that transpire in the narrator’s interactions with the light-being, the deference to science remains: it was science that brought Joe Slater to the hospital, science that allowed the narrator to peer inside his mind, and science that governed the tone of the narration.

“Beyond the Wall of Sleep” is noteworthy for more than just its content, however, for it occupies a distinct position in Lovecraft’s bibliography when discussing the prominence of psychoanalysis as an influence on his writing. The story opens with a short narration on the significance of dreams; that alone warrants interest, but the narrator goes further by dismissing Freud’s “puerile symbolism” (37). As with Tillinghast’s remarks, the crucial choice of the word “puerile” suggests the validity of the interpretation of dreams; for Lovecraft, Freud’s “puerility” rests on the limited nature of his interpretation, not the act of interpreting. Indeed, the entire purpose of the narrator’s mind-radio is to overcome the limitations of Joe Slater’s own descriptive ability and directly observe “things which the simple and halting tongue of dulness could not utter” (40). Yes, the end result is ultimately fantastic, but the mention of Freud and only half-hearted denunciation thereof leaves room for interpreting just how fantastic the narrator’s efforts are. Unlike Tillinghast who met an untimely end, the intern is rewarded with a message from Algol, the Daemon-Star (44). This reward reinforces the intern’s original condemnation of Freud, who could have never predicted an eldritch entity that has

somehow remained unknown thus far and somehow communicated with someone across the cosmos.

An interesting nonfiction text that sheds light on Lovecraft's relation to the sciences is a short essay of his commissioned by William L. Crawford for *Unusual Stories*, "Notes on a Nonentity." The essay reinforces Lovecraft's personal devotion to the sciences as much of his publishing history does, but more interesting still is Lovecraft's summary of his theological and philosophical beliefs. Particularly notable in this short piece of autobiography is Lovecraft's blunt assertion of "Reason removing his belief in the supernatural," an assertion that establishes mechanism as his philosophical foundation (164). Amidst his body of literature that concerns itself with grand, cosmic entities, it seems almost counterintuitive that Lovecraft would so readily discount divine force as an actor in his stories. I say *almost* counterintuitive because, as evidenced by "Notes on Writing," Lovecraft makes evident the importance of maintaining a degree of realism in weird fiction. The living jellies and fungi that make up the more fantastic elements of the Lovecraftian story are outlandish, but they are not unreal nor disconnected from the human plane of existence. Lovecraftian characters tend to lose their minds or otherwise meet their ends because of psychoanalytic causality: real monstrosities having real effects on their psyches.

The last fine detail to consider regarding "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" is its publication date: the spring of 1919. That places the story very early in Lovecraft's career, chronologically as his sixth piece of published fiction. Given the purpose here of establishing a connection between psychoanalysis and Lovecraft's writing, it is very significant that both his early career ("Beyond the Wall of Sleep") and late career ("Notes

on Writing”) demonstrate an awareness of the psychological sciences. Devotion to including the academic and scientific in his short stories, the subject matter of his short stories, and his clear appreciation of the sciences in *Collected Essays* and “Notes on a Nonentity” reveals Lovecraft’s willing acceptance of the unconscious mind as a real, scientific subject, and thus reveals Lovecraft’s at least tentative acceptance of psychoanalysis as an influence upon his work. The horror that Lovecraft created was frightening precisely because it was scientific, grounded within the very real framework of the mind that was vulnerable to the environment around it. His embrace of the new sciences of his era marked a departure from the unscientific supernatural and only tentatively psychological themes that commanded the horror of earlier writers.

IV. Lovecraftian Illness, Madness, Determinism in “The Rats in the Walls”

Thus far, I have established the scientific deference that drives much of H.P. Lovecraft’s writing. Science is a broad umbrella, however, and what remains unclear is the manner in which Lovecraft applies this deference to the narrow subject of psychology and the narrower subject of psychoanalysis. I have touched upon his acknowledgement of the mind as a scientific subject, setting, and material cause, but not upon the effects wrought by treating the mind as such. If the mind holds such great power in driving the Lovecraftian plot, causing the death of one main character and the involuntary enlightenment of another, then surely its material effects must be equally great. At this vital junction is where the psychoanalytic influence on Lovecraft’s writing digs its roots. Lovecraft illustrates a connection between the mind and illness (i.e., the mind’s physical manifestation), in both his retrospective survey of the weird literary tradition in America, and in his active contribution to that literary tradition through “The Rats in the Walls.”

In “Supernatural Horror in Literature,” his outline of the American horror literary landscape, Lovecraft conducts a careful process of linking together weird fiction with three key concepts. First, there is the emotional repression central to the work of early horror writers (and weird progenitors) Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving, based upon the “keen spiritual and theological interests of the first colonists” (VIII). Second, there is disease and madness, beginning with the “elevation of disease” by Poe (VII) and developing into, among other things, the hysteria of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall Paper” (VIII). Third, there is the hereditary nature of memory and thought, notably discussed in Lovecraft’s positive review of Leonard Cline’s *The Dark Chamber* (VIII). All of these are components of weird fiction to varying degrees—

deduced from either Lovecraft's own descriptions or through common interpretations of the work he is surveying. Furthermore, these components seem to exist dependent upon one another in different combinations, with the emotionally repressed falling ill (or mad) and the ill often carrying hereditary malignance that threatens their existence in some fashion.

Stephen A. Black's description of causal determination in the psychoanalytic process ("On Reading Psychoanalytically" 269) serves us well for understanding both the trinity above and the manner in which it is put into practice in "The Rats in the Walls." In "Rats," the mind displays an ability to cause external effects: when the narrator begins to hold certain thoughts, events occur as a result of those thoughts. More importantly, these thoughts seem exclusive to the narrator, with no other character sharing in his perceptions save for cats in the manor. Lovecraft confirms this rather dramatically in the final line of "Rats," where the narrator is imprisoned after a mental breakdown and attributes the terrible events at Exham Priory to "the rats they can never hear; the rats, the rats in the walls" (255). By this conclusion, the narrator Delapore has expressed an awareness of mental events directly causing physical ones. Further still, these events are perceived by no other character, and are at least in part based in Delapore's hereditary memory.

Madness, then, is the physical manifestation of the slow (then sudden) degradation of the narrator's mental state, but something leads to the discoveries that shatter his psyche in the first place. A series of events is brought into motion purely through the psychological machinations of the narrator, as the ominous vault which held the de la Poer family's secrets may have remained hidden if it were not for the rats in the walls.

The first of these physical events pushed into motion is of course the excavation of the vault beneath Exham Priory, the starting point of the narrator's unfortunate discoveries regarding his heritage. The discovery of the vault seems entirely coincidental, a natural choice in storytelling after the gruesome accounts of the de la Poer family's massacre of the local populace. These recollections account for the first third of the story and primarily drive Delapore's restoration of his dilapidated manor, but reveal little about the sub-cellar which serves as the true setting of the horror behind his family history. The sub-cellar only enters the narration because of "dreams of the most horrible sort" that spur Delapore to investigate the source of the scratching sounds within the walls, which the manor's servants do not seem to perceive (247-48). The first time the eponymous rats in the walls are explicitly mentioned is also the first time that their material existence is brought into question, with the servants "replying in the negative" when asked if they had heard the sounds as well (248). The following dream sequence of "unmentionable fungous beasts" then motions the petition for archeological exploration that leads the narrator to what lies beneath Exham Priory and, ultimately, his doom (249-50).

We are left to wonder: what are the rats in the walls? The answer depends upon the influences Lovecraft draws on in crafting this tragedy of the de la Poers' last scion. Despite the prominence of the vermin that serve as the namesake of the story, the narrator makes little effort to ever conclusively identify what they are. Delapore dedicates a single line to speculating on their origin, wondering briefly if they are "creatures of a madness shared with the cats alone" (249). This speculation proves secondary to the excavation of Exham Priory and is never really developed, but the single line is anything but a throwaway; it is a linchpin in interpreting the rats in the walls from a psychoanalytic

perspective. Namely, the line draws madness as the driving force in the excavation of Exham Priory. The horrific discoveries did not cause the narrator's madness; the narrator's madness caused the horrific discoveries.

Lovecraft's portrayal of a cause-and-effect relationship between mental trauma and physical effects falls exactly in line with some of Freud's earliest studies in the mechanisms of mental illness. In 1895, Sigmund Freud wrote in his *Studies in Hysteria* that "investigations show that the causes of many, if not all, cases of hysteria can be designated as psychic traumas" (loc 103). Further, he states:

But the causal connection of the causative psychic trauma with the hysterical phenomenon does not mean that the trauma, as an *agent provocateur* would release the symptom which would then become independent and continue as such. On the contrary, we must maintain that the psychic trauma...must be considered as an agent of the present...individual hysterical symptoms immediately disappeared without returning if we succeeded in awakening the memories of the causal process... (loc 117)

Relevant to the discussion of "Rats" is the determinism inherent to psychoanalysis. Abnormal states of psychology do not exist in a vacuum, anomalous and without cause. Instead, medical conditions like hysteria (among many others) can often be traced to a root cause of psychic trauma.

"Rats" provides an interesting fictional case study through its narrator, in that it displays both a "psychic trauma" leading to mental illness, and the consequences of mental illness itself. The first and most immediately apparent psychic trauma is inflicted by the discoveries beneath Exham Priory; the narrator wonders aloud whether "any man

among us lived and kept his sanity” (253). The second and less obvious psychic trauma, somewhat more obvious after all the analysis conducted thus far, is the one responsible for creating the rats in the walls, which seem solely confined to the mind of the narrator. The narrator never truly defines the second trauma, for we never learn where the rats in the walls stem from, nor whether they were even real. Nonetheless, the second trauma remains essential to our interpretation of Delapore, for it indicates Lovecraft’s understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships within the context of mental health. These relationships are as integral to Lovecraft’s writing as they are to psychoanalytic theory of the mind: for illness or madness, in the case of Lovecraft’s vocabulary, to exist, there must be a cause for the madness. The initial madness’ cause is unknown to us (but something we can speculate on), but the later, more spectacular display of madness is clearly attributable to the “hideous day of discovery” (253) suffered by every member of the archeological team, including Delapore.

The cause behind the rats in the walls continues to resist definition, however. The fact that the potentially imaginary rats in the walls predate any horrific discoveries made by Delapore allows us to move down a particular train of thought: that Delapore was already a mentally unwell man and thus carried with him a psychic trauma from before the events of “Rats” or, at the very least, occurring right at the beginning during the recollections of the de la Poer family’s history. In many ways, the entire story is a recollection of that familial history; the first third of the story concerns itself with their morbid past, and the rest of the story involves that past continuing to operate as an “agent of the present,” as mentioned in the earlier quotation from Freud’s *Studies in Hysteria*.

For Delapore, his family's dark history of kidnapping and cannibalizing the local populace serves as the psychic trauma that generates his principal hallucination.

The de la Poer family's present effect on Delapore is where Lovecraft's usage of psychoanalytic conventions becomes more complex. Freud was not particularly vocal about the role of inheritance in the development of the psyche. That being said, in "An Outline of Psychoanalysis," Freud states that the id is "everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is fixed in the constitution...which find their first mental expression there in forms unknown to us" (27). A crucial third of psychoanalysis' theory of the psyche being related to heritability is no small matter, and so it is reasonable to infer that Lovecraft's usage of hereditary memory as a psychic trauma does not deviate from psychoanalytic theory, but conforms to it in part if not in whole. Thus, Lovecraft's identification of the de la Poer family as the source of Delapore's madness is both an adherence to Freudian tradition and a nod toward the heritability of mental illness. Heritability in itself is a recurring motif in the Lovecraftian weird tale. Therefore, recognizing the alignment of this motif with Lovecraft's usage of psychoanalytic concepts can be valuable in interpreting other works that revolve around genealogy—works often interpreted to be mostly or exclusively about race.

V. Lovecraftian Genealogy in “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family”

Perhaps the Lovecraft story most concerned with genealogy, “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” (1921) follows through with the motif of inherited suffering witnessed in “Rats,” despite predating its writing by about three years. The two stories intersect in their respective acknowledgements of the correlation between family and the mind, but each focuses on a different aspect of the psychoanalytic psyche. “Rats” concerns itself with a broader range of psychoanalytic issues, mostly the degradation of the mind as a result of psychic trauma, with an indirect nod toward heritability as a malignant contributor to madness. “Facts,” on the other hand, is entirely focused on heritability, to the almost complete exclusion of all else: it is a specific narrative account of the Jermyn family, beginning with the grand patriarch Sir Wade Jermyn. This is a crucial digression, as it could be taken in tandem with “The Rats in the Walls” and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* as representative of Lovecraft’s folding of psychoanalysis into his brand of weird tradition. Specifically, “Facts” serves as a Lovecraftian demonstration of inherited illness and its effects reverberating across multiple generations.

An exhaustive breakdown of the Jermyn family is not necessary, but attention should be paid to the manner in which each member of the family is described in turn. In particular, regardless of the events that surround the unusual deaths in the Jermyn family, the subject of discussion ultimately returns to the dispositions of the different men, and how they all seem to be unwell to varying degrees of intensity. In the third paragraph, the long narrative of the Jermyn family is preceded by a recognition that “madness was in all

the Jermyns” (102), a curious detail to state and repeatedly rehash in a story filled with characters that look physically unusual. Sir Wade Jermyn’s “dwelling among terrible ruins known only to him” leads to his imprisonment in a madhouse (103); Philip Jermyn acts brutish, prone to “brief periods of uncontrollable violence” (104); Robert Jermyn appears well of mind but sires three children, two of whom are described by Arthur as “deformed in mind and body” and whom Robert ultimately murders in a fit of insanity (104-5); and finally Sir Alfred Jermyn is a colorful animal trainer, mortally wounded by a gorilla he himself attacks in a fit of rage (105). In short, Lovecraft writes the history of the Jermyn family with an almost clinical tone, consistently emphasizing the abnormal psychology of the patriarchs regardless of their differences in disposition and appearance. In fact, the eponymous Arthur Jermyn receives the most attention in terms of his physical appearance, being particularly odd in a family of “subtly odd” men (106).

It cannot be denied that a distinctly racist influence lingers behind the account of the Jermyn family, for Sir Wade’s stories of a magnificent jungle city are explicitly contrasted by Arthur against those of a “mere negro village” (107). In spite of this casually prejudiced treatment of the Congo’s populace, it does quickly become apparent that Arthur Jermyn’s interest in Sir Wade’s stories emerges as a byproduct of his genuine academic enthusiasm, rather than a result of genealogical obsession that one might expect from H.P. Lovecraft, a known Anglophile. Once again recalling Lovecraft’s deference to the sciences, one must consider Arthur Jermyn’s prominently academic qualities, for he is the only member of the Jermyn family defined by his genuine intellectual rigor (106). It might even be reasonable to identify Arthur Jermyn as among Lovecraft’s more relaxed and measured protagonists; Arthur’s time spent waiting for the stuffed goddess is a

period of patient curiosity, not the anxious escalation common to so many other Lovecraftian stories (108).

The principal emphasis of the story rests on the continuous recurrence of madness in the Jermyn family, which has no explanation until the very conclusion of the story. This unexplained recurrence serves as the source of weird horror in “Facts,” as Lovecraft toys with the notion of heritable illness wielding an effect without a known cause—although, crucially, Arthur’s narration provides a cause in the end. The self-immolation of Arthur Jermyn upon discovery of his bestial origins serves as a rather fantastic finish to a direct recollection of a family’s troubles. Like with “Rats,” this fantastic end leaves room for interpretation. We are not left wondering about the ontological status of rats, but rather the cause of Arthur Jermyn’s self-immolation. The answer seems obvious: the discovery of a truth so horrible that self-destruction offers the only way to cope with the newfound knowledge. At this point, it is prudent to address an odd choice of form used by Lovecraft in “Facts”: the division of a somewhat short story into two parts. This may suggest that, although entirely separate pieces of the narrative, parts I and II are interconnected. This seems unlikely, however, when instead considering the interpretation that Lovecraft was separating the two parts of the narrative in order to call to the reader’s attention to two separate causes contributing to the demise of Arthur Jermyn. Similar to what occurred in “Rats,” the first cause seems rather obvious and the second less so. The first is the ultimate revelation of the Jermyn family’s origins; the second is the intergenerational repression of this knowledge.

I say “intergenerational” repression because of a highly peculiar fact that the narration of the Jermyn family seems to take for granted—that is, the nature of Sir Wade

Jermyn's relationship with Lady Jermyn. Arthur Jermyn consistently characterizes Sir Wade by the grandiose stories of his adventures in Africa, stories which are also responsible for Sir Wade's characterization as mad. Notably, and similar to Delapore, this madness predates Sir Wade's exploration of the Congo and the events of "Facts." With that in mind, the question arises regarding just how voluntary Sir Wade's relationship with the White Ape Goddess truly was, and whether Sir Wade was even fully aware of the late Lady Jermyn's divine, bestial origins. I do not mean to suggest that Sir Wade was not of sound perception, but rather that he was not of sound mind. The psychoanalytic defense mechanism of repression is important here, because it reads as odd that no other Jermyn ever became explicitly aware of their origins despite extreme reactions to any mention thereof (especially Robert Jermyn). Perhaps the terrible secret of the Jermyn family was as much a secret for Sir Wade as for the rest of the Jermyns, given that they each unconsciously blocked—according to psychoanalytic principle (Bailey)—the terrible memory of Lady Jermyn, that proved so heavy a burden on their psyches.

Freudian defense mechanisms were only systematized and enumerated by Anna Freud in 1936, one year before Lovecraft's death, but repression has always had a prominent role in Freudian psychology, and thus should be considered material that Lovecraft was aware of. Repression is a fitting central theme to "Facts" and "The Rats in the Walls" alike. Both stories are focused on the connection between biological inheritance and mental illness. The conflicts that govern the rise and fall of their respective protagonists are inseparable from the subject of repression, furthering the case for a psychoanalytic influence on Lovecraft.

VI. Lovecraftian Psychoanalysis in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*

Thus far, this analysis of Lovecraft's short stories has demonstrated his awareness and application of psychoanalytic concepts to the writing of weird fiction. Critically, however, the examples mentioned have provided case studies of relatively limited scope. The stories have rarely ventured out of their limited settings and limited casts of characters, focusing on single (albeit large) families or singular protagonists. The limitations of the aforementioned stories make it easy to dismiss the hitherto analyzed psychoanalytic observations as anomalies, only applicable to specific places under specific sets of circumstances. What this argument has failed to address until now is whether Lovecraft intended for these psychoanalytic themes to be applied beyond the boundaries of family trees or isolated laboratories.

The Shadow Over Innsmouth resolves that limitation, holding the dual accolades of being among the longest of Lovecraft's stories and with the widest setting. *Shadow* uniquely takes place in an entire town, one with both an extended history and a connection to the outside world—however strange that outside world may find them. Innsmouth's entire residency serves as the subject of interest in the story, an important digression that marks Lovecraft's most earnest attempt to reflect on the broader social implications of psychoanalysis. While isolated to a fair degree by local superstition and xenophobia, Innsmouth still has a bus system that connects it to the rest of (fictional) Massachusetts, as well as a population composed of many individuals working independently (albeit without complete agency). Therefore, if earlier stories like "Rats" can be considered limited case studies of psychoanalysis in the family or in a field of

science, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* can be considered a broad case study of psychoanalysis in a society as a whole.

Until now, I have not mentioned the Freudian concept of the uncanny, a commonplace component of Lovecraft's fiction, though not so much in the stories discussed so far. For the sake of having a clear definition, Priscilla Wald's introduction to *Constituting Americans* succinctly defines the Freudian uncanny within the context of American anxieties. She summarizes Freud's definition of *unheimlich* as something that "grows out of the transmutation of something 'known...' into something frightening," and adds that accounting for this change involves repression of the familiar, which generates anxiety (5-6). Relevant to Lovecraft's application of the psychoanalytic to the literary is Tzvetan Todorov's concept of the fantastic-uncanny—"events that seem supernatural throughout a story [which] receive a rational explanation at its end" (44). In both psychoanalytic and literary traditions, the uncanny resides at the critical juncture where the human mind attempts to rationalize, or cope, with the unnatural or unknown. The enduring image of the "Innsmouth look," that which "sort of makes you crawl...queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, stary eyes" (810-11), provides a quintessential display of the uncanny in Lovecraftian fiction; the look unsettles readers not because it is far-fetched, but because it resides close enough to humanity that it demands understanding. Later encounters with the metamorphosing residents of Innsmouth have the protagonist Robert Olmstead unable to look upon their "forms in which there was no mixture of the normal at all" and who "for all of their monstrousness were not unfamiliar" to him (852-53), suggesting that Olmstead (and Lovecraft by proxy) continues to maintain Innsmouth's tether to reality. The fish-people of Innsmouth may be

strange and in some ways otherworldly, but they were still real people in Massachusetts, down the road from the very real (in Lovecraft's fiction) city of Arkham.

Shadow is, if nothing else, Robert Olmstead's short-lived attempt to understand—or cope with—a fantastic phenomenon. Interestingly, Lovecraft's introduction of the uncanny in *Shadow* does not occur in his descriptions of Innsmouth's denizens, but in Olmstead's interaction with a tiara from the town, a strange artifact that serves as the antiquarian narrator's initial impetus for investigating the reclusive town. Olmstead's description of the tiara would fit neatly into any definition of the uncanny, outlining the disturbing qualities of otherworldliness and the “uncomfortable sense of pseudo-memory” generated by the piece of jewelry (813-14). More interesting still is Olmstead's first detailed encounter with an Innsmouth resident, the driver of “evil impression.” Olmstead very briefly considers the racial origins of the driver in the typically racist manner one may expect from Lovecraft, but these speculations go nowhere and are instead attributed to a “foreign blood” (816) before being quickly discarded. Like in “Facts,” the nativist prejudices of Lovecraft have a fleeting moment in the spotlight, reignited later in Olmstead's conversation with the grocery clerk (822), and then are scarcely mentioned again after that. The narration concerns itself less with discovering the racial origins of the Innsmouth residents and more with the general mysteries surrounding the town as a whole. This is an important distinction because the town of Innsmouth expands on the repression that was central to “Rats” and “Facts,” only this time on a geographical (or even ethnic) scale rather than a generational one.

The greatest insight into psychoanalytic influence upon *Shadow* comes in the last chapter, wherein Olmstead discovers his relation to Obed Marsh and the Deep Ones.

Given Olmstead's genealogical efforts (855-56) that lead him to this discovery in the first place, *Shadow* superficially seems to be heading down the same path as "Facts." However, a critical difference emerges between the two texts in that Olmstead's discovery is not isolated to his singular person. While the reader experiences the story through his perspective, the psychological events that bring the novella to a close are not unique to him. The "Innsmouth look" is as much a mental transformation as it is a physical one, and like in "Facts," this transformation seems to revolve around the bringing of unconscious knowledge to the forefront of the mind, the unfamiliar "Innsmouth look" being made familiar through the afflicted's metamorphosis. When Olmstead dreams, he dreams of his grandmother and the same dreams prevent his suicide (858), suggesting that *The Shadow Over Innsmouth's* conclusion functions as the end of some long-lived repression common to the ancestors of the Innsmouth natives. This can be a clumsy interpretation if weighing this portrayal of repression against strict Freudian guidelines regarding the defense mechanism's manifestation, but *Shadow* never about strictly adhered to Freudian psychoanalysis. Instead, it applies the weird's psychoanalytic influence to an entire town and an entire people, displaying psychoanalysis as a framework that can be amplified beyond the narrow confines of Exham Priory, the Jermyn family's genealogy, or even—perhaps—Lovecraft's writing as a whole.

VII. Psychoanalysis and The Weird

Despite only indirect adherence to Freud's psychoanalytic principles, H.P. Lovecraft's work represents a fascinating juncture in its influence on the development of American horror. His explicit embrace of Sigmund Freud's burgeoning science of the mind set Lovecraft's writing apart from the Gothic writers he idolized and paved the way for future horror writers who sought rational solutions to the fantastic occurrences that governed their stories. For the weird writers who followed, psychology was no longer a burgeoning science insulated from literature in some faraway book written in a faraway academy; it was a tool to be consciously and actively used for the purpose of horror-making and story-telling.

Lovecraft was never a devoted student of psychoanalysis (or perhaps even a student at all), but he was nonetheless aware and appreciative of the science despite his dissatisfaction with Freud's narrow focus. Considering that Lovecraft only ever claimed himself as a writer of the weird and so deftly utilized psychoanalytic conventions in his work, it can be ascertained that psychoanalysis holds a special claim in the development of weird fiction. Despite lack of recognition in life, Lovecraft's posthumous influence on the development of the weird has been considerable. Thus, hopefully, psychoanalysis can be acknowledged not just as a lens for the interpretation of weird writing, but as an active participant in its construction, just as it served as an active (and perhaps begrudging) participant in the construction of Lovecraft's work.

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