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AESTHETICS OF THE UNDERWORLD

MA Thesis

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ESTETIKA PODZEMLJA

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1. Summary

The idea of the underworld has a complex history, reproducing varying outlooks concerning life and death, evil and salvation, and crime and punishment. Nearly every culture and religion in the world describes the existence of some type of underworld or hell, consequently writers, poets, filmmakers, artists of all kind have used underworld imagery in their art, using different analogies and metaphors regarding the underworld and hell in order to essentially express our inner worlds. In the writings of Arthur Machen, H.P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti, authors of short horror fiction, the motif of the underworld is very present and of great importance. It represents the "other world", the unknown. It represents the hidden knowledge of the world, the horrors that hides in the crevices of the world and which happens to bleed into our reality. It also represents the archetype of the collective unconscious and its manifestation, as well as the reaction to the unknown. The world, the culture as obsessively consumeristic as ours creates consumeristic behavior in people which leads to detachment from the world. Detachment has become a great part of human experience and it is necessary to consider the underworld alongside the question of aesthetics. Just as beauty is a part of our lives and creative endeavors, ugliness and obscurity explored through horror fiction are as well.

Keywords: aesthetics, underworld, uncanny, Lovecraft, Machen, Ligotti

Sažetak:

Koncept podzemlja ima kompleksnu povijest, proizvodeći različite poglede na život i smrt, zlo i spasenje, zločin i kaznu. Gotovo svaka kultura i religija na svijetu opisuje postojanje nekog vrsta podzemlja ili pakla, s toga pisci, pjesnici, filmski redatelji i umjetnici svih vrsta koristili su slike podzemlja i različite analogije i metafore o podzemlju i paklu kako bi, u suštini, izrazili naš

unutarnji svijet. U radovima Arthura Machena, H.P. Lovecrafta i Thomasa Ligottija, autora kratke horor fakcije, motiv podzemlja je veoma prisutan i od velike važnosti. Predstavlja skriveno znane o svijetu, strahote koje se skrivaju u pukotinama svijeta, a koje se prikradu u naš svijet. Također predstavlja arhetip kolektivne podsvijesti i njene manifestaije, kao i reakcije na nepoznato. Svijet i kultura koja je opsesivno konzumeristička kao naša dovodi do konzumerističkog ponašanja kod ljudi što dalje dovodi do odvajanja od svijeta. Odvojenost je postala dio ljudskog iskustva, stoga je potrebno promatrati podzemlje u kontekstu estetike. Kao što je ljepota dio naših života, isto tako su i ružnoća i nejasnoća koje su istražene kroz horor fikciju.

Ključne riječi: estetika, podzemlje, uncanny, Lovecraft, Machen, Ligotti

2. Introduction

When thinking about the underworld, it is not hard to come to the conclusion that its presence throughout the human history and the history of literary expression never had any kind of optimistic, positive connotations. Whether we are talking about its literal form or our reading of writing on underworld, we will undoubtedly be thinking about a place of infinite pain, lifelessness, fear and decay. Many religious traditions teach us how this is a place one should genuinely be in fear of. A place, a deep pit or far-away land of darkness – typically underneath the earth – where the souls of the damned or the dead who cannot be forgiven reside. Nearly every culture and religion in the world describes the existence of some type of underworld or hell. Their imageries often correspond with the way those who sin are punished and even how sin itself and sinning is defined. While each underworld is distinctive in its own way, in every one there are elements that are unusually common and appear in many cultures and religions. The most common imagery used to describe underworld is the one of a never-ending, unbearable fire (i.e. Christianity[1], Islam[2], Ancient Egypt)[3]. A generally recognized interpretation is that the fire, or "lake of fire" is symbolic of eternal pain and punishment for the sins. Additionally, the underworld is commonly described as *the* darkness; infinitely worse than any human, mental, or spiritual darkness that could be experienced on earth. Correspondingly, the underworld is often seen as prison. Eternal separation from hope, love, loved ones and ultimately, separation from God because, a crime (sin) committed, has to be punished. Except, while imprisonment on earth usually constitutes rehabilitation, the purpose of this type of prison is just retribution and punishment. The underworld, the hell is often thought of as a place of punishment rather than simply a place of darkness and putrefaction due

[1] "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented" (Revelation 20:10)
[2] "A Description of Hellfire" (part 1 of 5): An Introduction. *Religion of Islam*. https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/344/description-of-hellfire-part-1/
[3] David, R. *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, p. 158–159

to the general belief that a moral universe demands judgment and payment for the sins. The problem of hell is an ethical problem in religion in which the existence of hell for the punishment of souls is regarded as inconsistent with the notion of a just, moral, and omnibenevolent God (Kvanvig 1994).[4] It derives from four key proposals: that hell exists; that it is for the punishment of people whose lives on Earth are judged to have sinned against God; that some people go there; and there is no escape (ibid). Punishment usually parallels to sins done throughout one's life.

At times these distinctions are precise, with souls punished for every sin, but occasionally they are quite general, with condemned sinners sent to a particular level of suffering[5]. Andy Naselli, theology professor theology at Bethlehem Baptist College states: "the metaphors that the Bible uses about hell describe a reality that we cannot relate to immediately on earth". The idea of the underworld has a complex history, reproducing varying outlooks concerning life and death, evil and salvation, and crime and punishment. We use different analogies and metaphors regarding the underworld and hell in order to express our thoughts, feelings and essentially our inner worlds. Moreover, writers, poets, filmmakers, artists of all kind have used underworld imagery in their art. While modern religious writers tend to interpret the pains of hell metaphorically, a great many artistic masterpieces derive their compelling power from their graphic and dramatic depictions of these torments.[6]

In the writings of Arthur Machen, H.P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti, authors of short horror fiction, the motif of the underworld is very present and of great importance. It represents the "other world", the unknown. The hidden knowledge of the world, the horrors that hides in cracks and crevices of the world and which happens to bleed into our reality. It also represents the unconscious, the archetype of the collective unconscious and its manifestation, as well as

[4] Kvanvig, J L. (1994). *The Problem of Hell*. Oxford University Press, USA. pp. 24–25
[5] See for example Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy
[6] *Britannica.com*: "Hell"
https://www.britannica.com/topic/hell/Christianity Retrieved on 19August, 2020

the reaction to the unknown. The world, the culture as obsessively materialistic as ours creates materialistic behavior in people which leads to detachment from the world. Very few people are free from the spell of the daily world and detachment has become a great part of human experience. My belief is that detachment leads to ignorance and ignorance leads to fear. But then again, there are "sensitive ones"[7] who respond to the call of the unknown of that "other world" because they are curious of what lies beneath. To satisfy that curiosity, one must deal with what is disturbing, horrific and ugly.

As this thesis explores, it is necessary to consider the underworld alongside the question of aesthetics. Just as beauty and splendor are a part of our lives and creative endeavors, ugliness and obscurity are as well. It comes as no surprise that artists since ancient times have been fascinated with the human experiences and with judgments of beauty and ugliness. Philosophers have tried to comprehend the nature of those experiences and judgments. The abundance of the discourse about beauty since the 18th century had created a concept of the aesthetic which examines subjective and sensori-emotional values, or sometimes called judgments of sentiment and taste.[8] It contemplates what takes place when we are engaged with aesthetic environments such as observing visual art, listening to music, reading poetry, experiencing a play, exploring nature, and so on[9].

In order to further discuss the role of aesthetics in this particular context, we will turn to Freud, or specifically to his theory of "the uncanny" and his merging of aesthetics and psychoanalysis. It is the study of the subject of aesthetics when aesthetics is understood as not just the theory of beauty, but the theory of the qualities of feeling. The uncanny relates to this thesis because it marries what we do not know with that which we do know. The uncanny in

[7] Lovecraft, H.P. *Essay*. „Supernatural Horror in Literature" (1945) https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx
[8] Zangwill, N. "Aesthetic Judgment", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 02-28-2003/10-22-2007. Retrieved August 19th 2020
[9] Thomas Munro, "Aesthetics", *The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, ed. A. Richard Harmet, et al., (Chicago: Merchandise Mart Plaza, 1986), p. 80

horror fiction is connected to the sense of enlightenment a reader will experience while reading "ugly" horror fiction. The concept of enlightenment in this context will be synonymous with gaining new knowledge, with having awareness that brings change. We will also be discussing Mark Fisher's concepts of the weird and the eerie and how they relate to the horror fiction. My theory is that characters in horror fiction of Arthur Machen, H.P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti actively illustrate that they are representatives of a modern man, of collective (un)consciousness of modern society and as such they show that people are not capable of embracing the mystery and beauty of existence even though he is capable of seeing its divine power. When humanity is not in touch with nature in a harmonious way, chaos ensues. And this is where the horror fiction steps in. the world we live in is becoming more and more absurd. Every day we deal with planetary hazards, climate change/destruction of nature, earthquakes, emerging pandemics, racism, pollution, food and water/global health, inequality, corruption, religious conflicts, wars… despite of our everyday concerns and hopes, it is becoming more and more challenging to understand and respond appropriately to the world we live in. My thesis is that ecological estrangement is closely related to the aesthetics of the underworld. A culture as obsessively materialistic as ours creates materialistic behavior in people which leads from detachment and misbalance with nature. By reading horror fiction the modern man can still be exposed to ecstasy and escape the inevitable fall into chaos and live on the line between our world and the "the other world". To illustrate this, we will first look into the meaning of the underworld, aesthetics, Freud's theory of the uncanny and enlightenment. Furthermore we will briefly discuss the horror fiction then introduce Arthur Machen, H.P Lovecraft, and Thomas Ligotti, and see how concepts of aesthetic and the underworld appear in their writing.

To finish this introduction I will refer to J. C. Ryle, who stated: “The whole extent of hell, the present suffering, the bitter recollection of the past, the hopeless prospect of the future, will never be thoroughly known except by those who go there.”

In this thesis now, in a way, we will not go there but we will let it come to us.

3. The Underworld

As mentioned in the introduction, nearly every culture and religion in the world describes the existence of some type of underworld or hell and this concept "may be as old as humanity itself"[10]. Many religious traditions teach us that this is a mythical abode of departed souls[11] where one infinitely suffers unbearable fear and pain, unimaginable on earth. Most often, in both classic and modern texts, reader is introduced to the underworld through fairly common motif of an individual's journey or descend into the underworld. They travel into the underworld and we see it through their eyes and experiences. It is possible to explore different states of the mind and approach them as a type of a transition into the underworld. In text after text, a sort of invasion of the human world into the one unknown, the one underneath brings us a new point of view. A new perspective. We abandon what is known to us, we challenge ourselves in search of the unknown. By using the underworld, we abandon the human world in desire to discover something that is not known to us.

As frightful as the underworld might seem, there is one truth to it: it is the place filled with the unknown. And the unknown has always been, and always will be terrifying. But at the same time, it teaches us how to live with it. In what way? One could say that everyone decides that for themselves, depending on through what lens they decide to look. John Freccero states that "in the ancient world, the descent in search of understanding was known as *katabasis*"[12]. "The descent into the underworld, particularly to the kingdom of the dead, is one of the central themes in myths explaining the cosmic order, the limits and possibilities of the human being, the relationships between gods, and human relationships with god or the gods."[13] While each underworld is distinctive in its own way, in every one there are elements that are unusually

[10] Loring Wallace, I. Hirsh, J. *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth* (2011), pg. 295.
[11] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/underworld Retrieved 18 August 2020
[12] Freccero, J, *The Poetics of Conversion*, Harvard University Press, (1988)p. 108
[13] *Encyclopedia.com* „Descent into the Underworld"
https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/descent-underworld
Retrieved 18 August 2020

common and appear in other cultures and religions. In the European tradition, the influence of the Homeric *Nekyia* (ninth book of the *Odyssey*) is strong and the descent to the underworld is existent in main literary and artistic works regardless of the differences in culture, chronology and religion between contexts and authors; for example, Virgil's sixth book of the *Aeneid* and the *Inferno* in Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia* (ibid.) That literary motif can also be found in the Middle East: *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the *Book of Enoch* (ibid.) Moreover, we must mention Christ's descent into hell and medieval Christian literature developing the topic of the descent, as well as the classic Greek myth of Orpheus' descent in the underworld after the tragic death of his beloved Eurydice.

In modern psychology, *katabasis* is occasionally used as a term to refer to the "depression some young men experience":[14]

> …the man in him who does not turn towards the day-world, but is fatefully drawn into the dark; who follows not the accepted ideals of goodness and beauty, but the demoniacal attraction of ugliness and evil. It is these antichristian and Luciferian forces that well up in modern man and engender an all-pervading sense of doom, veiling the bright world of day with the mists of Hades, infecting it with deadly decay, and finally, like an earthquake, dissolving it into fragments, fractures, discarded remnants, debris, shreds, and disorganized units.

As a concept, the underworld can have various distinctions that can be applied to different stages of life. One can look at it through physical, psychological, philosophical or spiritual lens. Apart from it being a real space we visualize as a space located underneath another, it can also

[14] Web article: "Jung's 1932 Article on Picasso"
http://web.org.uk/picasso/jung_article.html Retrieved 17 August 2020

be a metaphor or an allegory used psychologically to represent transition into a darker, more painful and even macabre state of one's mind. The underworld can be regarded as a representative or symbolic of something horrific so we can confront our deepest fears and in a way assert control over something dreadful in the world or in ourselves. Some texts on the underworld use an individual's physical journey into the underworld as a metaphor for a psychological transformation, and subsequently those allegorical transitions in the end illustrate a philosophical side of the underworld.

Can it be that our view of the world would be different if we pull our own strings of fate and discover and understand what lies under the surface? Jung wrote:

> A series of images of either kind, whether in drawn or written form, begins as a rule with the symbol of the *Nekyia* - the journey to Hades, the descent into the unconscious, and the leave-taking from the upper world. What happens afterwards, though it may still be expressed in the forms and figures of the day-world, gives intimations of a hidden meaning and is therefore symbolic in character.[15]

Actually, it is Jung who first who first explained the "first archetypal significance" of the idea of descent into the underworld (Washburn 55), [16] According to Jung, the mythological and spiritual interpretations of the descent are the expressions of the "archetypal imagination" as it tries to "make sense of a fundamental reversal that occurs in the life course" (ibid). Meaning, at some point in life we reach an impasse and we need to stop looking at the world around us and see what lies underneath it. We stop look outward and instead turn inward, into ourselves. We "begin to hear a call beckoning us to explore the psychic world within" (ibid).

[15] Web article: "Jung's 1932 Article on Picasso"
http://web.org.uk/picasso/jung_article.html Retrieved 17 August 2020
[16] Washburn, M, *Embodied Spirituality in a Sacred World*. (2003) Pg. 55

Could it be that the deeper we reach into the underworld, the deeper we reach within ourselves? As Hegel writes:

> The human being is this Night, this empty nothing which contains everything in its simplicity—a wealth of infinitely many representations, images, none of which occur to it directly, and none of which are not present. This is the Night, the interior of human nature, existing here—pure Self—in phantasmagoric representations it is night everywhere: here a bloody head suddenly shoots up and there another white shape, only to disappear as suddenly. We see this Night when we look a human being in the eye, looking into a Night which turns terrifying. For from his eyes the night of the world hangs out toward us. (Hegel)[17]

In other words, the underworld must be a completely different world than our own and once we see what is there our perception of the world has to change. By entering the underworld, we also enter another world within ourselves. This happens because, by discovering something new, a new, unknown knowledge that has never before been accessible to us, we look at the world with the new eyes and unlock the doors to transition which is a means to reach deeper into one's soul, the pure night of the human interior. In most accounts, whether mythological, psychological or spiritual, this descend is a challenging journey required part for a longer journey. It is dangerous because it poses a risk of "destruction, damnation, or psychosis". But this is necessary because it "necessary for the attainment of higher life". (Washburn 55 – 56) Once challenges are endured, the transformation can happen. Dante had to educate himself of

[17] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Spirit* (Jena Lectures 1805-6). Part I. "Spirit according to its Concept," https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/jl/ch01a.htm Retrieved 23 August, 2020

the demonic torments in order to be ready for the challenges of the purgatory. More on this will be discussed in the next segment.

4. Aesthetics

Aesthetics it is a complex term that has been broadly defined by numerous researchers. Some are closely related and some are in contrast to each other. Something that we can say is that most of us instinctively associate aesthetics with art and beauty. To put it in simple terms, we link the term to being interested in the way something looks and how it makes us feel. Aesthetic here will be used in the broader sense as "the study of the qualities of our sentiments" as opposed to the narrow sense, "the study of the beautiful", which, according to Freud, limits its scope to positive feelings. We can perhaps agree that this is something subjective and varies from individual to individual. To say that virtually anything can be seen as beautiful from some point of view is likely a correct statement. But on the other hand, how do we decide when something is beautiful and when it is not? Do we decide this in our mind or with our senses? What happens when it is not perceived as pleasing to us and our senses but causes discomfort and unease? Can something ugly be incorporated in the aesthetics? What is the relationship between the beauty and the ugly? Our "experience of beauty crucially depends upon a knowledge of the object in which beauty is seen."[18] This chapter deals with the relationship of the aesthetics and the underworld. What is the effect of that relationship in reading horror fiction will be discussed in later segments.

Aesthetics is "closely related to the philosophy of art, which is concerned with the nature of art and the concepts in terms of which individual works of art are interpreted and evaluated".[19] The term "aesthetics" (from Greek for sensory perception *aisthēsis*) was first created by Leibnizian philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten who also established

[18] https://www.britannica.com/topic/aesthetics Retrieved on 21 August 2020
[19] Ibid.

aesthetics as a discipline, one of the branches of philosophy.[20] In *the Epilogue to The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger points out the "death of art" and he associates that death to the rise of aesthetics to experience:

> Almost from the time when specialized thinking about art and the artist began, this thought was called aesthetic. Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of aisthesis, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension experience.
>
> The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. This dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.[21]

To add more to the definition of aesthetics, we can refer to Immanuel Kant here. In his *Critique of Judgment*, he makes a distinction between two meanings of aesthetics. One deals with sensibility belonging to the object[22]. In other words, the object has its aesthetic, its sensible qualities. On the other hand, "from this meaning of "aesthetic" we have to distinguish a second one, where by means of the aesthetic mode of representation the represented is not related to the faculty of knowledge, but to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure" (Kant 1987 – 409). Meaning, aesthetics belongs primarily to the subject. This second sense is the one accepted by the aesthetic approach. The philosophy of art we call aesthetics therefore has its basis in a more

[20] Gottlieb Baumgarten, A. Reflections on Poetry (Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus), trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954).
[21] Heidegger, M. "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," Holzwege (1935–1946), Gesamtausgabe, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977). p. 67; "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, Language, Though (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 79.
[22] Kant, I. "First Introduction into the Critique of Judgment, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett,1987), 409-410

subjective approach to art that has the tendency to reduce the work of art to a kind of pleasant experience. It is not the work of art that is enjoyed, but the experience or state of mind produced. The question that arises then is, is there an aesthetic experience of the ugly? This might be challenging to answer since very little research has been done on the aesthetics of ugliness. Kant, for example, does not provide answer to this question. His *The Analytic of the sublime* could possibly deliver an answer considering he stated that in the experience of the sublime the imagination aches. The sublime sprang from beauty but is more created in the mind rather than the senses. "Pain mediates the pleasure that one experiences in the sublime. The experience of the sublime brings the mind into a state of tension and relaxation. What is significant is that even in this situation the mind is still able to have an aesthetic experience".[23]

After the nineteenth century, the idea of the "decline of beauty" becomes more prominent – largely thanks to Hegel. Likewise, there has been a noticeable shift in mainstream arts in recent history where the usual fondness for beauty has changed to actual distancing from it. It can be seen in periods of Naturalism and Realism where the connection of goodness and beauty and ugliness and ethical evil starts to become noticeable. Even today, in children's fairytales, the princess always has the unparalleled beauty while the evil witch is as ugly as ugly can be. We can read into this that from the earliest age, we have been thought to reject the ugly and to stay away from it since it gives us the feeling of unease. This childish practice continues on even in the grown up age, where many carry on with the habit of isolating themselves from what everything that causes them discomfort. It is easier to live if one pretends that the ugly of the world does not exist then to confront it. Staying in the state of numbness is quite a bit easier than meeting the ugly of the world head on. In his essay, Umberto Eco writes: "The sensibility of the common speaker reveals that, whereas all the synonyms for beautiful

[23] Parret, Herman. (2011). On the Beautiful and the Ugly. Vol. 34, 21-34. https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0101-31732011000400003 retrieved 22 August 2020

could be conceived as a reaction of disinterested appreciation, almost all the synonyms for ugly contain a reaction of disgust, if not violent repulsion, horror, or fear."[24] To put it differently, beauty can be observed objectively without emotional response, while ugliness almost always elicits a reaction: disgust, fear and repulsion amongst others. But there comes a time where tapping into ugliness is required in order to make a meaningful expression no matter how strange that idea might seem. "Ugliness is not a descriptive but an evaluative category and has a necessary affective meaning."[25] The ugly is not conflicting to the beauty but it is its continuation and therefore, from that, we can conclude that the ugly can be and is an aesthetic experience.

4.1 Theory of the Uncanny, the Weird and the Eerie

In order to further discuss the role of aesthetics in this particular context, we must, once again, turn to Freud, or specifically to his theory of "the uncanny" which he elaborated in his essay titled *The Uncanny*, merging aesthetics and psychoanalysis. It is the study of the subject of aesthetics when aesthetics is understood as not just the theory of beauty, but the theory of the qualities of feeling, as we mentioned previously. Freud starts his essay by providing a definition of what he means by "the uncanny": it is "undoubtedly belonging to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror…" (Freud 1) The uncanny is the subject of aesthetics due to reason that it deals with a type of emotion, with emotional instincts. A shift in focus of aesthetics happened when during Modernism and a fascination with the ugly, the grotesque happened – a "dark" aesthetics. Freud's essay is important because it enhances the aesthetics of the "beautiful" by examining what we might call the aesthetics of the "fearful", the aesthetics of "anxiety" and therefore confirming once again that the ugly can be an aesthetic

[24] Eco, U. Essay „On Ugliness" (2007)
[25] Parret, Herman. (2011). On the Beautiful and the Ugly. Vol. 34, 21-34. https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0101-31732011000400003 Retrieved 22 August, 2020

experience. In the essay, Freud is intertwining psychoanalysis with literary criticism by examining E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story "The Sandman*"* (1817) in order to study the aesthetic elements of the uncanny in literature and fiction. To illustrate what the "uncanny" is, Freud refers to the German words "heimlich" and "unheimlich". "Heimlich" means "familiar," "native," "belonging to the home" and "unheimlich" is obviously the opposite of "Heimlich" and it means unfamiliar, something which is concealed or kept out of sight (Freud 3). According to Freud, we find things to be uncanny (unheimlich) when they are familiar to us (heimlich) yet also in some way feel foreign or unsettling. Feelings of the uncanny can appear when we detect something strange in insignificant everyday life, which awakes repressed feelings that come from past experience. Nevertheless these two marry to form the "uncanny"; something unfamiliar is added to something familiar. A person must first be presented with something that is familiar, then bring in the unfamiliar and that creates an uncanny feeling; something is strangely familiar, rather than simply mysterious.

Mark Fisher allows Freud's theory, but in his book of essays *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016) defines the concepts of the eerie and the weird in relation to Freud's original "unheimlich" or "uncanny". The simplest way to differentiate between them is to think about the difference between presence and absence. Weirdness is produced by the presence of "that which does not belong". It should not exist there – but nonetheless there it is. In some cases of the weird, those with which Lovecraft was obsessed (ibid.) the weird is marked by "the conjoining of two or more things which do not belong together" (ibid.) The weird as a mode often occurs when everyday life (the inside) is contrasted directly with a more metaphysical realm (the outside). Although the weird surely was present in literature prior to Modernism, this period is almost without doubt the time of its peak. On the other hand, the second chapter of Fisher's book of essays is on the eerie. A bird's cry is eerie, he states. "If there is a feeling that there is something more in the cry than a mere animal reflex or biological mechanism". It

is not so much about the disturbing intrusion of something that does not belong there, but about a fear-provoking absence where "there is nothing present when there should be something" (ibid.) Fisher suggests: "The eerie concerns the unknown; when knowledge is achieved, the eerie disappears. It must be stressed at this point that not all mysteries generate the eerie. There must be also be a sense of alterity, a feeling that the enigma might involve forms of knowledge, subjectivity and sensation that lie beyond common experience" (Fisher 62).

Why is this so important to the horror fiction? We frequently see it used in horror fiction in form of frightening supernatural elements put beside familiar environments. My argument is that these concepts are important for horror fiction in terms of eliciting fear since it brings supernatural in proximity with our reality. They give the reader a sense that the monsters, the horrors we are reading about could be walking among us every day. The appeal is undeniable; we will both enjoy the weird and yet also think beyond the thrill and terror and bring us to understanding what is at stake in horror stories; for our own experience of our environments. Horror stories reveal our anxieties about security and familiarity, and they perhaps ease them through exposure. This will be seen in analysis of Arthur Machen's work, for example. Machen penned stories that explored the dark unconscious of humanity in search of underground monstrosities while inviting his reader to take of the mask of the daily life and look at the horrifying aspects of reality we rarely stop long enough (or refuse) to notice. But his ultimate power lies in linking what is predictable and familiar in the mundane world to that which is obscure, sinister, impossible and abnormal.

This made Machen's work a tremendous influence for other horror fiction writers (such as: H.P. Lovecraft (the Cthulhu mythos was heavily influenced by Machen), Thomas Ligotti, Clive Barker...) In his short story *N*, Machen explores what would happen if the mythical and otherworldly would intrude upon the mundane, everyday world. His character felt a degree of

rapture and delight such he had never experienced before.[26] In other words, the weird and the eerie in horror fiction are connected to the sense of enlightenment a reader will experience while reading "ugly" horror fiction.

4.2 Enlightenment

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that art's truth is closely linked to its ability to express the suffering that nature endures for the sake of enlightenment. He argues, "beauty – and then the "new beauty" – can only be approached by taking distance from the beautiful".[27] We must recognize our connection to the nature, to acknowledge how dependent we are on her. This theory might be best described with the words of Camilla Flodin:

> …the progress of civilization is entwined with a detachment from nature. Through the domination of both internal human nature (desires, needs) and external non-human nature, humanity has been able to break free from nature's immediate grasp. The process of enlightenment is characterized by a growing skepticism against the mimetic relationship that represents an acknowledgment of the kinship between the (human) subject and the (natural) object. This relationship is expelled into the domains of art.[28]

To quote H.P. Lovecraft, "The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from every-day life." How does this relate to this thesis? Our learned emotional suppression consists of inhibiting external signs of our internal feelings. We are often thought that emotional

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[27] Parret, Herman. (2011)." On the Beautiful and the Ugly". Vol. 34, 21-34. https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0101-31732011000400003 Retrieved 22 August 2020

[28] Flodin, C. (2011) The wor(l)d of the animal. Adorno on art's expression of suffering, Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 3:1, DOI: 10.3402/jac.v3i0.7987

suppression is the best strategy for emotional regulation, even though plenty of professionals suggest otherwise; suppression produces not only behavioral and physiological consequences but also clear cognitive consequences as well[29]. This approach might help with external expression but not the internal emotional experience. Meaning, suppression does not help the emotion to disappear – especially the negative one. It only helps to hold on to it which is causing more pain. Human emotions are like ocean waves, like a natural phenomenon, and preventing any natural phenomenon simply creates a fertile ground for more devastation. This is where we draw a parallel with the aesthetic and art. Perhaps, one of the best ways to express our inner world, the depths where our mind retreats is by creative acts or art. Works of art make inner feelings public and invite the viewer to share in artist's search of self-discovery, which requires emotional participation balanced by the intellectual mind in order that we may experience delight and wonder.[30]Truly, up here above the ground, things are never as orderly as we think they are; even if we turn our gaze away from the disorderly parts of our world. But looking below into the underworld, the realm where the odd and the strange are at home and familiar and where no earthly rules apply, that world shuns the artificial decorum and egocentrism of the world above and exposes the real truth and brings us to much needed enlightenment. Similarly to Nietzsche's words: "…if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you". Based on his other work, I do not believe Nietzsche's intention here was to suggest that the abyss is "negativity" or something inherently evil, but rather that taking an interest in the abyss, the void sooner or later causes a change in one's consciousness. The passive act of self-reflection turns into the interactive process of enlightenment and transformation. Corresponding to what was already stated, the unbalanced relationship between the individual and nature creates a ripple effect and becomes the cause of the suffering.

[29] Richards JM, Gross JJ. *Composure at Any Cost? The Cognitive Consequences of Emotion Suppression*. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. (1999):1033-1044.
[30] Van de Windt, G. Bachelor of arts thesis (2001) Artistic creativity: Transforming sorrow into beauty, truth and art

Adorno's argument is that expressing the suffering of repressed nature is closely connected to expressing human suffering. Even thought it might not seem like it at the first glance, but Adorno's theory grounded within a tentative hope for a better world. "The impression of ugliness stems from the principle of violence and destruction." (Adorno 1997, 61)

Yet the destruction of what is beauty can be even more essential. For that reason, following the enlightenment model, this is where we come to horror fiction. Begley quotes Freud saying: "horror is appealing because it traffics thoughts and feelings that have been repressed by the ego but which seem vaguely familiar" (Begley, 2011)**.** My thesis deals analyzing how horror fiction which is deeply infused with the aesthetic of the underworld, and psychological and emotional curiosity for what is morbid play into our innate need to express our own underworld, as well as what is the impact of unique horror aesthetics and art on individuals and society. I claim Freud's theory of the uncanny, and Fisher's weird and eerie help us comprehendthe sense of discomfiting new knowledge a reader can experience while reading horror fiction, and this will be illustrated by considering short stories by Arthur Machen, H.P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti.

5. Horror fiction

The history of the genre of horror can be traced all the way back to earliest recorded stories. Some of the widely known literature pieces with elements of horror can be found in in the early 14th century, when Dante published *Inferno*, the first part of his *Divine Comedy*. His representation of Satan, as a frightening literature character, served as a great influence for John Milton and his writing in *Paradise Lost* in the 17th century. A couple of centuries later we have a new subgenre of horror – Gothic novels – which incorporate horror, death and romantic elements by putting emphasis on emotion and enjoyable and pleasurable type of fear. The most common kind of these "pleasures" among the audience of Gothic literature movement was the *sublime* – an emotion that "takes us beyond ourselves"[31]. The most fruitful time for this genre was the 19th century with the famous works from authors such as: Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollenstonecraft Shelley, Percey Shelley, Bram Stoker, Edgar Allan Poe, to name some.

The definition of horror genre has evolved a lot over the years. Today's definition is under the heavy influence of horror movies and their ever-changing and increasing explicitness. When it comes to horror literature, it draws inspiration from various different sources, including religion, folklore and history, drawing attention to people's deepest fears through different ways and means. With a strong pattern in oral history and literature, it comes as no surprise that the genre of horror, even in its earliest days was very swift to get its feet under the table among other popular genres. The reason for this might be due to its exhilarating ability to elicit an emotional response from its audience; predominantly sense of dread, fear and even repulsion, among others. This is even in the definition of the term itself since it stems from the Old French "*orror*", which means "to shudder"[32]. Literary historian J. A. Cuddon, sees the

[31] MPhillips „The Sublime; From a Poet's Glossary". The Sublime: From a Poet's Glossary. Retrieved August 24 2020

[32] *Literary Terms*: "Horror"
https://literaryterms.net/horror/ Retrieved August 24, 2020

central boost of horror literature residing in the short form, and this thesis will focus on fictional short prose – horror short stories. As Edmund Burke states: [33]

> It is a common observation that objects which in the reality would shock, are in tragical, and such like representations, the source of a very high species of pleasure. This taken as a fact, has been the cause of much reasoning.

In *Introduction* of *The Penguin book of Horror Stories*, Cuddon defines the horror story as "a piece of fiction in prose of variable length which shocks, or even frightens the reader, or perhaps induces a feeling of repulsion or loathing".[34] No one can deny that there is certain allure in challenging yourself and getting scared without any real dangerous repercussions. Apart from the entertaining aspect, these narratives help those who struggle to cope with terrifying and strenuous world, which for many may possibly look a lot like a tormenting version of the world we live in that might seem hopeless, increasingly (it seems) devoid of optimism and purpose (just in recent history we had Covid-19, terrorism, racism, ecological crisis, etc.) My claim certainly is not that if horror in the world increases, horror fiction increases as well but that the appeal of this genre of fiction is that some has a philosophical touch. It does not simply focus on single-mindedness of empty shock value, but has the ability to marry pessimism and really thought-provoking, speculative macabre fiction into a unity which mirrors human pain. "…that which is familiar to us, and which we indeed are, is also the most profound, frustrating and compelling of enigmas. Fear and desire — so intrinsically linked — and witnessed through the creation, compulsion and destruction of the body" (Salu 2011).[35]

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[33] Burke, Edmund. (1759). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin Of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Second edition.
[34] Cuddon, J.A. (1984). "Introduction". The Penguin Book of Horror Stories. Harmondsworth: Penguin. pg. 11
[35] Salu, Michael. (2011, November). The Art of Horror. Granta.com [Online Publication]. http://www.granta.com/New-Writing/The-Art-of-Horror Retrieved August 24, 2020.

In the words of Neil Gaiman: "Fairy tales are more than true: Not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." Horror uses the "monsters" that lurk in every dark corner of the world and points them out and teaches us how to deal with them. Horror utilizes everyday evil and illustrates its fantastical side through fiction and drama, through something we can imagine facing more easily. "Horror is one of the ways we walk our imagination. It's a way to relieve bad feelings rather than something that causes them."[36] The world is full of terrible things but horror helps us distinguish true evil from mischievousness.

5.1 Aesthetics of horror

In order to talk about the aesthetics of horror, first we should remind ourselves of the definition of aesthetics itself. It is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and what is pleasing to the senses. What we have established earlier is, the "ugly" is not conflicting to the beauty but it is its continuation and as such can still provide a profound sense of aesthetic experience to a certain stimulus. People are innately curious creatures – and we are curious about fear. A part of us likes to be faced with uncertainty and have the satisfaction of finding out "what happens next". "Our nervous system requires a periodic revving, just like a good muscular engine" (Begley, 2011)[37]. The audience of the horror genre chooses this genre with a purpose to "safely" get scared. Horror stories reflect their times to refer to Lou Morgan, "just as the repressed Victorians loved their vampires, we seem to gravitate towards technology, zombies, dystopia and psychological terrors"[38] because the world we live in best corresponds with them, since people are less likely to believe in blood-sucking creatures than living in dehumanized, mechanized dystopia which is a possibility due to rapid industrialization

[36] From "Novelist Loves His Nightmares" by Jack Matthews. Published in Detroit Free Press, November 12, 1982. (© 1982 by Detroit Free Press.)
[37] Begley, S. (2011). "Why Our Brains Love Horror Movies. The Daily Beast" [Online Newspaper]. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/10/25/why-our-brains-love-horror-movies-fear-catharsis-a-sense-of-doom.html Retrieved August 24, 2020.
[38] Morgan, L. "Why do we read scary books?" https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/oct/29/why-do-we-read-scary-books

Our nervous systems react with an adrenaline spike to the frightening imagery horror provides, but in the end it safely calms down. Horror is undoubtedly pushing to the margins our interest, desire for and our experience of the world. "Most fundamentally, horror (films) are popular because they speak to the basic human condition of existential fear, the knowledge that we are all doomed… By sitting through a fictional depiction of that fact — even if the movie's victims slough their mortal coil in a more sensational way that most of us, God willing, will — we face our greatest fear". (Begley, 2011)[39] Some people have phobias they cannot form an explanation for, some openly talk about their fear of dark. What horror stories do, they give us a place to put our fears.

> This is the pleasure constantly attached to the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects. A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, of "forms unseen, and mightier far than we," our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy cooperating elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement.[40]

There are arguments that, due to its nature, horror should not be labeled as "art" but pure entertainment. There is no definite answer to this and the question is still open for discussion, but "art is centrally defined by its goal of expressing an individual's emotion, which distinguishes it from entertainment, whose goal is to arouse emotion in the audience", according to Ligotti.[41] Horror stories let us empty our fear into them before we get lost in it.

[39] Ibid.
[40] Barbauld, A. "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror"
[41] Interview with Thomas Ligotti – web interview from Published in The New York Review of Science Fiction Issue 218, Vol. 19, No. 2

Stories that strike a chord somewhere deep inside give us the means to explore the things that frighten us but only as much as our imagination and experiences tolerate. We are safe while taking a proverbial second to imagine the danger. What we need to keep in mind is that there is a possibility that stories are not about what they are about; each story (if well written) always has a small place somewhere within for us to put our emotions and fears. A little drawer to open and sneak a glance at our fears and acknowledge them and close it to open it again when we are ready. To quote Arthur Conan Doyle, "where there is no imagination, there is no horror". The concepts of eerie and weird coexist well with this. The weird as an approach often happens when everyday life (the inside) is directly in opposition with a more metaphysical realm (the outside). Therefore, a hallmark of weird fiction is often the threshold, as symbolized by doors, windows and holes (as will be seen in Ligotti's writing). Horror as a genre is built around one truth: that the world is full of fearful things. But the best horror stories take us further. They bring us made up horror so we can cope with the real one that are always lurking in the dark shadows of the world. They teach us how to separate real evil from harmless malice. They teach us that we can fight the worst evils, whether or not we all survive them — and how to be worthy of having our tales told afterward.

6. Arthur Machen

Arthur Machen (pen name for Arthur Llewellyn Jones) was Welsh author of the 1890's and is considered to be "the forgotten father of weird fiction"[42]. The majority of his fiction is short and he is best known for his supernatural, fantasy and horror stories which evoke fear and terror while creating a balance with amazement and wonder. Even though we are talking about Machen's work in terms of horror fiction, for the most part his horrors are easy to overlook. They are not as imposing as Lovecraft's for example. His writing is attention-grabbing by reason of curious exploration of immodest sexuality and paganism by linking it with horror. His stories serve as an example of fantastic genre set in a real world while disturbing the reader with familiar risks. He believed that the boring human world secreted a world beyond which is by far more mysterious and strange that "our perception of the external world is just an illusion, and that (…) common objects hide a secret, the key to access the great enigma of existence"[43]. Machen's view of the universe is greatly summed up in a passage from his *The novel of the White Powder* which Franzoni quotes: for him the universe is "a tremendous sacrament; a mystic, ineffable force and energy, veiled by an outward form of matter; and man, and the sun and the other stars, and the flower of the grass, and the crystal in the test–tube, are each and every one as spiritual, as material, and ubject to an inner working" (ibid.) Additionally, his stories can also be classified as moralistic due to underlining discussion of the nature of evil and sin. Machen's writing explores themes which can be found in Edgar Allan Poe and R. L. Stevenson's work: "corruption of innocence, the power of the will, social hypocrisy, evil, and hidden sin"[44]. Machen penned stories that explored the dark unconscious of humanity in search of underground monstrosities while inviting his reader to take of the mask of the daily life and

[42] *The Guardian*. "Machen is the forgotten father of weird fiction" https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/sep/29/arthur-machen-tartarus-press Retrieved 6 September, 2020.
[43] Franzoni, A. *Mysterium Tremendum*. "Terror and ecstasy in the works of Arthur Machen". pg. 160-161
[44] *Old Style Tales Press* https://www.oldstyletales.com/machen Retrieved 6 September, 2020.

look at the horrifying aspects of reality we rarely stop long enough (or refuse) to notice. But his ultimate power lies in linking predictable familiarity of the mundane world and obscure, impossible abnormality. This made Machen's work a tremendous influence for other weird fiction writers, such as: H.P. Lovecraft (Cthulhu mythos was heavily influenced by Machen), Stephen King, Clive Barker, and Neil Gaiman, to name others.

What makes Machen important for this thesis is the relationship between terror and ecstasy illustrated in his work, along with the significance of the underworld in the revelation of hidden knowledge. As it was pointed out earlier, these relationships are interesting both from the point of view of literary aesthetics, and from the philosophical aspect. To illustrate these points we will look more closely into few of Machen's short stories: "The White People", "Out of the Earth", "The Shining Pyramid", and "N".

6.1 The concepts of aesthetics and the underworld in the work of Arthur Machen

Machen's "The White People" is considered by many to be his masterpiece. The majority of the story is told from the perspective of a young girl through her vivid, stream-of-consciousness diary and we are shown her slowly getting seduced by a witch cult. The young girl is now dead but her story is introduced by two men in London, intellectual Cotgrave and the moral philosopher Ambrose. Both can be considered academic and upon meeting, they quickly fall into deep discussion of morality, ethics, and the nature of evil and sin with one of them even arguing that evil can be ugly as well as beautiful: "(…) the essence of sin really is (…) in the taking of heaven by storm. (…) It appears to me that it is simply an attempt to penetrate into another and higher sphere in a forbidden manner. You can understand why it is so rare. There are few, indeed, who wish to penetrate into other spheres, higher or lower, in

ways allowed or forbidden. Men, in the mass, are amply content with life as they find it."[45] This is where we see Machen's ecstatic approach that allows one to see over and through reality. In every corner of the world there are hidden evil shadows many do not care to notice. As it was mentioned earlier in this thesis, "horror is appealing because it traffics thoughts and feelings that have been repressed by the ego but which seem vaguely familiar" (Begley, 2011). Ambrose questions the idea that saints are defined by goodness and sinners by badness. His belief is that sin and holiness are so closely interconnected (each being a means of escaping a mind-numbingly unspiritual reality caught up in the boredoms of materiality) that they can be confused for one another. While the majority is content to live the unstudied life, saints and sinners put everything on the line to experience the wonder and beauty of otherworldly life. What is more, they do this by crossing the line and breaking the laws of society. We read horror fiction to see things we do not want to see. There is a certain allure in challenging yourself and getting scared without any real dangerous repercussions. We protect ourselves from the bad parts of the world by turning a blind eye, but there is a part of human psyche which is curious and wants to turn the light on to see what hides in the shadows. Machen continues: "(...) holiness works on lines that were natural once; it is an effort to recover the ecstasy that was before the Fall. But sin is an effort to gain the ecstasy and the knowledge that pertain alone to angels, and in making this effort man becomes a demon (…) evil is unnatural in a much deeper sense than good. The saint endeavors to recover a gift which he has lost; the sinner tries to obtain something which was never his. In brief, he repeats the Fall" (ibid).

Just like Adam and Eve were not supposed to acquire the knowledge that was not for them, we can interpret Machen's words here as the reader is not supposed to learn of obscure,

[45] Machen, A. „The White People"
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25016/25016-h/25016-h.htm#Page_111

frightening monstrosities that roam beneath the surface, but he still does – through horror fiction. Furthermore in "The White People", Machen recognizes that "our higher senses are so blunted, we are so drenched with materialism, that we should probably fail to recognize real wickedness if we encountered it" (ibid). Franzoni[46] writes that, according to Machen, we see the outward appearance of things, without grasping their essence; on the other hand, we could not bear the sight of that essence, we would be instantly knocked out. Furthermore, guessing the essence that lies behind the reality of things means getting in touch both with their majesty, which causes ecstasy and rapture, and with the "holy terror" that they emanate (ibid). ""Sorcery and sanctity," said Ambrose, "these are the only realities. Each is an ecstasy, a withdrawal from the common life.""[47] In the case of the young girl in this story, Machen builds fear and mystique around her character. He uses fear, Franzoni writes, "as a mean to reach the highest peaks of perception: his goal is to evoke the ecstatic beauty from the horror and the mysterious elements of everyday life. The everyday world is just a door that opens to a further reality, a "world of the spirit"; hidden behind the veil lies the true dimension of reality, that "totally Other" that urges the man to get out of himself." The young girl is too young to be drenched with materialism and through her we are submersed into the dream-like, hypnotic, and even psychedelic otherworld of the White People: fairy folk, other dimensional, demonic creatures and spirits. The young girl is never completely certain everything she sees is real or a part of her imagination, a part of her dreams. She can only compare her experiences to peculiar fairytales of witchcraft and voodoo which were told by her nurse. She is estranged from the rest, and with time drawn back to the hidden dimension until finally agreeing to being absorbed.

[46] Franzoni, A. *Mysterium Tremendum*. "Terror and ecstasy in the works of Arthur Machen". pg. 160-161
[47] Machen, A. „The White People"
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25016/25016-h/25016-h.htm#Page_111

This is also illustrated in the short story mysteriously titled *N*. *N* is a true psychedelic tale about the discovery of an alternative reality existing in the context of London suburb. Corresponding to "The White People", Machen here explores what would happen if the mythical and otherworldly would intrude upon the mundane, everyday world. While looking from the window of the house of one of his parishioners, the Reverend Hampole sees an unknown and heavenly landscape: "I was possessed by a degree of rapture and delight such as I had never experienced. A sense of beatitude pervaded my whole being; my bliss was such as cannot be expressed by words. I uttered an inarticulate cry of joy and wonder. And then, under the influence of a swift revulsion of terror, which even now I cannot explain, I turned and rushed from the room (…)"[48] In this sense, Machen's writing can be seen as an effort to step over the threshold between the two worlds. To achieve this, Franzoni concludes, "these experiences have to break the laws of nature, albeit in antithetical ways, and to make one withdraw from ordinary life"[49]. To put it differently – ecstasy. And for those who try to understand what they have seen, they are equally not successful in convincing others of their sanity (similar can be seen in writing of both Ligotti and Lovecraft). When it comes to Machen, the surreal is so powerful that it cannot be comprehended as it should be.

For Machen, comparable with Ligotti and Lovecraft (who will be discussed in later segments) the other world sometimes hides beneath the surface of the earth. While drawing inspiration from fairy mythology, he created the canon of "little people" mythos, a disturbing narrative of a primitive race of malicious troglodytes lurking beneath the earth. Some sources suggest that this primitive race is the embodiment of the human Id: the personification of violence, cruelty, and chaos, and they serve as a vehicle for Machen's strange form of horror. In "Out of the Earth", he says: "These little people of the earth rise up and rejoice in these

[48] Machen, A. "N" (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2014), https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/machen/arthur/n/.
[49] Franzoni, A. Mysterium Tremendum. "Terror and ecstasy in the works of Arthur Machen". pg. 162

rimes of ours. For they are glad (…) when they know that men follow their ways".[50] In "The Shining Pyramid*"* they are described as "beings under four feet in height, accustomed to live in darkness, and familiar with Mongolian cast of features". They make appearance in multiple stories, wreaking havoc. In "The Shining Pyramid*"* they kidnap a woman, torture her, and sacrifice her by burning her alive (it is also strongly implied that they had raped her as well), in "Out of the Earth", they are so horrible that their presence alone causes a group of children to turn savage. "They were only visible, only audible to children and childlike."[51] This is where we notice the concept of eerie. A few questions arise: What caused the disturbances? What are they? Where did they come from? Where do they go? What happened to the young girl? These questions do not get resolved, nor are likely to be. The eerie concerns the unknown; when knowledge is achieved, the eerie disappears. Machen explores the terror from the underworld in multiple stories, and explores the desire for the unknown, the desire for ecstasy all throughout his work. Horror fiction challenges human-centric thoughts and forces readers to think about the position of non-human in relation to the human: the world around us and its relation to the world for us. But taking everything into consideration, we can say that Machen's characters actively illustrate that they are representatives of a modern man, modern society and as such they show that people are not capable of embracing the mystery and beauty of existence even though he is capable of seeing its divine power. As it was stated earlier in the thesis, when humanity is not in touch with nature in a harmonious way, chaos ensues. And this is where the horror literature steps in. By reading horror fiction the modern man can still be exposed to ecstasy and escape the inevitable fall into chaos and live on the line between our world and the the other world.

[50] Machen, A. „Out of the Earth".
http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks07/0700381h.html
[51] Ibid.

7. H.P. Lovecraft

When discussing authors of horror fiction, H.P. Lovecraft is frequently considered a central figure. Similar to work of Arthur Machen and Thomas Ligotti (who will be discussed in later segment) just about all of Lovecraft's narratives are in the short form. His career began as a "ghost writer" (someone who writes a book or article, etc. for another person to publish under his or her own name[52]) and for pulp-fiction magazines[53], Lovecraft produced a body of work that is still regarded as superior by other authors of dark fantasy tales: Stephen King and Thomas Ligotti, to name a couple who name Lovecraft as a significant influence on their own body of work. Apart from his fiction, of equal importance is Lovecraft's essay on beginnings of weird fiction in the early gothic novel called "Supernatural Horror in Literature*"* (1945), which is an important study in the narrative structure of horror stories[54]. He "both defines and explores the history of the weird tale from the earliest ruminations of "primitive" humanity through the age of the gothic novel and Poe, and on to some of his contemporaries' work in the field."[55] Lovecraft also is the first writer to go to great lengths to publish studies of "the weird" as an aesthetic and style, as well as to propose a genealogy of weird writers[56].

At the dawn of his writing career, soon after the end of the World War I, he came to the conclusion that, since the world is becoming progressively more influenced by technology and centered around science, in the literary world, familiar faces of the old horror story characters – ghosts, witches, vampires, werewolves, and such – are not carrying the same weight like they used to. There was a need for something different, something more appropriate for the changing world. Some kind of fusion of supernatural fiction with unnerving elements that were credible

[52] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ghostwriter Retrieved 9 September, 2020
[53] "The Vintage Library" https://www.vintagelibrary.com/pulpfiction/authors/HP-Lovecraft.php Retrieved 9 September, 2020
[54] Ibid.
[55] Poole, W. Scott, *In the Mountains of Madness. The Life and Extraordinary afterlife of H.P. Lovecraft*. Pg 148
[56] Sperling, Alison Nikki, "Weird Modernisms" (2017). Theses and Dissertations. 1542. https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/1542

scientifically. For this reason, during the 1920's and 1930's, he created his self-sufficient fictional universe "The Cthulhu Mythos"[57] ruled by a pantheon of terrifying, ancient deities that have become the "Horror Pantheon of the science fiction and fantasy reading cosmos" (Poole 2016, 23). Multiple sources say that Lovecraft was influenced by Arthur Machen so he implemented some of Machen's techniques and terminology his Cthulhu Mythos stories. There are certain parallels we can draw in writings of Arthur Machen, H.P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti and the concepts of aesthetics and underworld in short horror fiction. In the next segment the focus will be on H.P. Lovecraft's short story "The Call of Cthulhu*"* in order to demonstrate this connection.

7.1 The concepts of aesthetics and the underworld in the work of H.P. Lovecraft

The story is written as a sort of a documentary, with three independent storylines interconnected by narrator's discovery of notes that were left by his grand-uncle. The Cthulhu Mythos is set in fictional New England and is focused on the Great Old Ones, the Elder Gods (a pantheon of terrifying, ancient deities) who once ruled the Earth but were exiled and fell into deep sleep. Cthulhu is the name of the most well-known deity, who resides in the underwater city R'lyeh in the southern hemisphere and Pacific Ocean: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming." The day "the stars are right", R'lyeh will rise up from beneath the sea, and Cthulhu will be awakened and once again create chaos on earth. He first appears in Lovecraft's short story "The Call of Cthulhu*"* and his name is used to refer to the old gods created by Lovecraft while also being incorporated in the stories of other writers who were inspired by Lovecraft's cosmos. The theological focal point of the mythos is held by the god-demon called Azathoth, so despite his hazardous and malicious nature, Cthulhu is not the most powerful of

[57] The term was coined by August Derleth. Also sometimes called the Lovecraft Mythos, most notably by the Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi, it has long since moved beyond Lovecraft's original conception.

the deities but to this day we can say he is the most important one considering he continuously appears in other stories, videogames, movies, and such.

The story "The Call of Cthulhu*"* is told from a point of view of a man who is on a quest to uncover the real truth of events that ended in the death of his grand-uncle George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages in Brown University. In order to do this, he studies his uncle's notes and questions the people who knew his uncle and witnessed his last days. Lovecraft begins the story with daunting words: "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents."[58] As it was discussed in the segment on Machen's writing, in Lovecraft's stories as well there is an underlining indication that there is a certain knowledge of the world that people do not know of and if they did, it would be too much to bear. Lovecraft writes that "(…) the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age" (ibid). And truly, characters in the story who looked for and uncovered this knowledge either ended up dead or insane. But why do we seek what is this thing that we do not know, then? Why do we read such stories? In his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (1945), Lovecraft writes: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." Horror has little to do with fear of what the known, but a lot with fear of the unknown.

Surely, a story about sinister deities trying to take over the earth does not provide logical answers one could apply to their life, but their answers can be found in their underlining philosophy and symbolism. As we mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, what horror

[58] Lovecraft, H.P. "The Call of Cthulhu". I. The Horror in Clay. https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/cc.aspx Retrieved 9 September, 2020

does is express our "blind spots" in the form of supernatural creatures. A simple glimpse of Cthulhu is enough to drive a man downright insane: "I shall never sleep calmly again when I think of the horrors that lurk ceaselessly behind life in time and in space, and of those unhallowed blasphemies from elder stars which dream beneath the sea" (ibid.) It looked like "an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature (…) a pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the general outline of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful." (ibid.) Similarly to Machen's stories (and we will see the same in Ligotti's writing), the ones who are aware of the hidden monsters are the sensitive ones. "Mankind was not absolutely alone among the conscious things of earth, for shapes came out of the dark to visit the faithful few", Lovecraft writes. In "The Call of Cthulhu", it is Henry Anthony Wilcox, who calls himself "psychically hypersensitive". His whole life he had strange dreams of even stranger cities and creatures, and soon after he was not the only one cursed with strange dreams. Other people reported as well that they had dreamed very bizarre and unexplainable things. But that is how those otherworldly deities, Great Old Ones rule in the underworld: "They could only lie awake in the dark and think whilst uncounted millions of years rolled by. They knew all that was occurring in the universe, but Their mode of speech was transmitted thought. Even now They talked in Their tombs. When, after infinities of chaos, the first men came, the Great Old Ones spoke to the sensitive among them by molding their dreams." (ibid.) How can we interpret all this in relation to horror fiction? The Great Ones are symbolic of what we do not know of the world, and the sensitive are the readers of the horror fiction.

Coming back to the concept of the weird, as Fisher suggests: "it allows us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside." The weird is a scary intrusion of something from the outside which tries to come inside. As Lovecraft put it in his essay, the weird is "a certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces." The story "The

Call of Cthulhu" perhaps serves as a symbol of the Weird. It deals with the amazement and horror at the edge of human consciousness and as such demonstrates "the relative inconsequence of the human species in relation to the deep time of the universe," in the words of writer Alison Sperling[59]. Thus, Lovecraft's writing, is "about a steady dethronement of anthropocentric models"[60]. These strange entities, strange deities are trying to escape "routine imprisonment inside the implicit hierarchy of the subject/object binary" (ibid). Lovecraft describes Cthulhu as following: "If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing…but it was the general outline of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful" (Cthulhu 160). He provides the reader only the general "outline" of the strange creature – a dragon, an octopus, a human – but describes it as vaguely as possible without even trying to reduce horror in his reader.

Ever since there is humanity there is human tendency to understand our environment and the secrets of the universe. There is a psychological pattern, a streak of curiosity to uncover those secrets. There is an "information gap" between what we want to know and what we currently know. Curiosity is reflected in seeking out information that can reduce or resolve this discrepancy, and yet, the more we learn about the world, the odder it becomes to us. Some of those secrets cannot be explained rationally and we turn to religion or superstition in order to explain them. Lovecraft explained it the best in his essay, "the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos". Sometimes, our conscious mind cannot process everything it does not know due to human limited experience so it turns to dreams and to power of the imagination. The unknown of the world is unpredictable, and the unpredictable is scary, it causes fear. What

[59] Sperling, Alison Nikki, "Weird Modernisms" (2017). Theses and Dissertations. https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/1542

[60] Luckhurst, R. "Making Sense of "The Weird and the Eerie" https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/making-sense-of-the-weird-and-the-eerie/ Retrieved 18 September, 2020

Lovecraft, Machen and Ligotti do is creating the fictional space and giving the unknown a form of a monster, a powerful, omnipotent deity hiding in the underworld that has the power to destroy. And that is the appeal of horror fiction, it demands from the reader "a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from every-day life", to quote Lovecraft. All that arouses dread and creeping horror is just a means to reach the higher level of perception, an enlightenment. What horror fiction does then is, it challenges human-centric frame of thought and forces readers to think about the position of non-human in relation to the human: the world *around* us and its relation to the world *for* us. Us and our connection to nature.

8. Thomas Ligotti

Thomas Ligotti is a contemporary American author who has identified himself as a horror writer.[61] His writing has elements of several literary genres and critics have tried to label him otherwise but when he says he writes horror, he wants to say that "he writes from the center of what he knows best as a human being" (ibid.) His initial motivation for writing was the beginning of what would become a life-long battle with an anxiety disorder and *anhedonia* (reduced motivation or ability to experience pleasure) (ibid.) which exposed to him "the monstrous nature of everything that is" (ibid). All this made him appreciative and responsive to the writings of Arthur Machen, H.P. Lovecraft, and Edgar Allan Poe (ibid.) who were his precursors and acknowledged influencers. What makes Ligotti's writing alluring to the reader is his clear disregard for coloring inside the lines of modes of realism. He "employs the supernatural like a surgeon wielding a scalpel, cutting away the soft tissue of our so-called "reality" to expose a more visceral existence lurking beneath".[62] His work features loners, isolated characters who encounter the supernatural which pushes them to insanity (ibid.), while on other occasions playing with "typical" genre tropes such as zombies ("*The Last Feast of Harlequin"*) , vampires ("*The Lost Art of Twilight*") and demons ("Notes on the Writing of Horror: A Story*"*). I discussed the purpose of horror in earlier segments of this thesis. Ligotti himself writes in "Professor Nobody's Little Lectures on Supernatural Horror" that the purpose of horror is to "take all the things that victimize us in our natural lives and turn them into the very stuff of demonic delight in our fantasy lives". He states:

> In story and song, we could entertain ourselves with the worst we could think of, overwriting real pains with ones that were unreal and harmless to our species. We can

[61] Interview with Thomas Ligotti – web interview from Published in The New York Review of Science Fiction Issue 218, Vol. 19, No. 2 (October 2006). Retrieved August 27, 2020
[62] Springer, M. "Thomas Ligotti and the Derangement of Creation"
https://www.fictionunbound.com/blog/thomas-ligotti-and-the-derangement-of-creation

> also do this trick without trespassing onto the property of supernatural horror, but then we risk running into miseries that are too close to home. While horror may make us squirm or quake, it will not make us cry at the pity of things. The vampire may symbolize our horror of both life and death, but none of us has ever been uprooted by a symbol. The zombie may conceptualize our sickness of the flesh and its appetites, but no one has ever been sickened to death by a concept. By means of supernatural horror we may pull our own strings of fate without collapsing—natural-born puppets whose lips are painted with our own blood.[63]

This is the reason why I have chosen Ligotti for this thesis. His motivations as a storyteller correspond with the aesthetic of horror (as well as the underworld). His goal is not to soothe our existential unease through catharsis or assurances that evil can be defeated; but "to reveal the fundamental disorder of reality" (ibid). Ruthana Emrys states in her article[64]: "As terrifying as the world becomes, we still turn to imagined terrors to try and make sense of it." His characters in stories such as "The Shadow at the bottom of the world*"* and "Flowers of the Abyss*"* are given a chance to glance into "a far-off realm of secret truth whose gateway is within the depths of our own blood"[65], into perpetual darkness which is often presented in a state of decay. In his writing, "the sublime, albeit a perverse version that forgoes any sense of pleasure, is transposed onto decay and death, and it is only through the embrace of these that one can achieve anything close to satisfaction".[66] However, these newfound dimensions are not so much as alternative universes as much as interpretation of ours; a universe overlaid by the world we live in. Ligotti provides a chance for the reader to confront the the other world

[63] Ligotti, T. Songs of the Dead Dreamer. „Professor Nobodys Little Lectures on Supernatural Horror". pg.186
[64] https://www.npr.org/2018/08/05/635052036/reading-horror-can-arm-us-against-a-horrifying-world
[65] Ligotti, T. *Songs of a dead Dreamer and Grimscribe*. pg.302
[66] Reyes, X. M'Rabty, R. *The Dark Arts Journal*. „Better not to have been": Thomas Ligotti and the „Suicide" of Human race

which cannot be easily understood. Same can be seen in in Machen's writing. Ligotti himself concluded in "The Medusa" (1991): "we may hide from horror only in the heart of horror".

8.1 The concepts of aesthetics and the underworld in the work of Thomas Ligotti

To illustrate the concepts of aesthetics and the underworld we will look more closely into few of Ligotti's short stories. Let us first look into *"*The Shadow at the Bottom of the World*"*. This horror short story was first published in 1991 collection *Grimscribe: His Lives and Works*. It is told from the perspective of a nameless author and focuses on people living in a small village. They come across a black mass which seems to originate from the inside of the Earth. Very soon, strange droning noises like buzzing of insects begin to fill the air. The weather becomes unusually warm for that time of the year, and the plants begin to change their colors into strange, unearthly shades. Things like a scarecrow begin to come alive and move of their own. Soon after, even the people begin to fall under its malevolent influence of this cursed place. Almost at the very beginning of the story, the reader is warned that "something dark, something abysmal always finds its way into the bland beauty (…) something that usually holds itself in abeyance, some entwining presence that we always know it's there." (Ligotti 2005, 135) Instead of the scenery of countryside with fields rich with sweet smells of prodigious nature, something strange, an obscure spectacle was happening and "there came a bitter scent in the air, as of sweet wine turning into vinegar" (Ligotti 2005, 135). The narrator himself questions if this was happening already and "had it been secretly invoked by small shadowy voices calling out in the midst of our dreams (ibid.) If we draw a parallel between the underworld and the human unconsciousness, in the context of this story (and this thesis in general), we can say that the strange, obscure happenings that are seemingly coming from the "other world", or the underworld is the symbolic of the turbulence inside of a human mind. One should point out that people vary greatly when it comes to self-awareness, how perceptive

they are when it comes to their feelings and emotions. In general, people are too busy being submerged into materialistic of the world to take a moment to look into themselves. But we all have that ability. When it comes to people in this story, the "decay illuminated their dreams" (Ligotti 2005, 142) at first, it came from within." Freud famously stated that dreams are "road to the unconscious". His idea was to remove the contents of the unconscious into the realm of rational; "where id was, there shall ego be"[67].

If we apply this to the concept of underworld in horror fiction seeping into the reality of the characters, we can interpret this as all the hidden knowledges of the world, everything we do not want to see but have innate curiosity about, making itself known. "The shadow, the darkness uses our world for what it needs to thrive upon", Ligotti writes in his story "The Shadow, The Darkness" (1999), "It has nothing except its activating energy, while we are nothing except our bodies. This is why the shadow, the darkness causes things to be what they would not be and to do what they would not do. Because without the shadow inside them, the all-moving blackness activating them, they would be only what they are—heaps of matter lacking any impulse, any urge to flourish, to succeed in this world."

William Burroughs once stated that the job of the writer is to reveal to readers what they know but do not know that they know. But you have to be close to knowing it or you will not know it when you see it. We can apply this to horror fiction. We read horror fiction to see things we do not want to see. It is a sort of a window which provides a glimpse of a dreary and raw reality. In "The Shadow at the Bottom of the World*",* what grew from underground was something symbolic of the horror we try to make sense of in the world, "an abyss in the outline of a man" (Ligotti 2005, 138): "It was something black and twisted into the form of a man", Ligotti writes, "something that seemed to come up from the earth and grown over the wooden planks like a dark fungus, consuming the structure. There were now black legs that hung as if

[67] Freud, S. *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. Strachey (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 112

charred and withered; there was a head that sagged like a sack of ashes upon a meager body of blackness (…)" (Ligotti 2005, 138) People tried digging up the earth where that thick, black stalk was buried. No matter how far they burrowed, it was not far enough to reach the bottom of that sprouting darkness. What's more, the narrator notices, their attempts were hindered by a perverse reluctance, "as in the instance of someone who is hesitant to have a diseased part of his own body cut away in order to keep the disease from spreading" (ibid.) The point of gazing into the horrors of the world is not in eliminating it, but in embracing it. When the old farmer tried to cut it with his ax, it was to no avail – "It was pulling me back", he said. If we stated that "horror is appealing because it traffics thoughts and feelings that have been repressed by the ego but which seem vaguely familiar" (Begley 2011), then maybe this "pulling back" is what is repressed trying to make itself known. The passive act of self-reflection turns into the interactive process of enlightenment and transformation.

In the story "In the Shadows of Another World*"*, Ligotti's sentiment is the same. He writes: "(…) other realms are always capable of making their presence felt, hovering unseen like strange cities disguised as clouds or hidden like a world of pale specters within a fog. One is besieged by orders of entity that refuse to articulate their exact nature or proper milieu." In this story, a man visits an odd house with a turret and numerous windows. Soon he discovers that that strange house is especially designed by its deceased owner to keep away entities from an otherworldly realm that bleeds into our world. These entities are only visible when the shutters of the windows are opened and the protecting symbols are removed. The deceased owner of the house was "sensitive" to this other realm, but him knowing about it was what brought him to his end. The notes found in his diary are very clear on the suffering caused by his fantastic gifts, his "incredible sensitivity" and how "hopelessly tempted" he was by the visionary. "Nightmares both within and around us had been integrated into a system that seemed to warrant admiration", Ligotti writes in the story.

In relation to Fisher's the weird and the eerie, engaging with the weird, in Ligotti's writing, an outside world emerges both beyond and through his nightmare landscapes. The short story "In the Shadow of Another World" can be read as an in depth "examination of capitalist realism and the ways in which the spectre of the world which would be free haunts the cultural imagination of capitalist realism"[68]. The house with a turret has windows through which one can see beyond but which are kept shuttered. But looking at the world beyond the "spiritual wasteland of capitalist sterility" (ibid.) comes with a price. "Again and again in his notebooks he describes himself as 'overwhelmed' to the point of madness". The narrator closes his eyes because he is overwhelmed and thinks about how this quiet house is "a monument to Terror and the stricken ingenuity it may inspire" and how "the sights were now all inside the house, which had become an edifice possessed by the festivities of another world" (Ligotti). What is so important here is the cost of acquiring this new knowledge. Bringing out this new kind of consciousness in the narrator is something he can only escape from, looking back and wondering what might have been. Greenway put it this way: "Ligotti mixes affect, blending horror with fascination as his protagonists are drawn to the possibility of a radical transformation even if, and perhaps even because such a transformation would necessarily involve the destruction." (ibid) This actively illustrates the idea that we – us, the readers, use horror as a mean to reach the highest peaks of perception[69]. The goal then is to evoke the ecstatic beauty from the horror and the mysterious elements of everyday life (ibid.) I believe Ligotti summarizes this point well with this paragraph in "In the Shadows of Another World*"*: "We sleep (…) among the shadows of another world. These are the unshapely substance inflicted upon us and the prime material to which we give the shapes of our understanding. And

[68] Greenway, J. *Dissolving Nihilism: Washing Thomas Ligotti in Mark Fisher's Acid Communism* https://thedarkartsjournal.wordpress.com/ligotti-post-truth/dissolving-nihilism-washing-thomas-ligotti-in-mark-fishers-acid-communism/ Retrieved 18 September, 2020

[69] Franzoni, A. *Mysterium Tremendum*. "Terror and ecstasy in the works of Arthur Machen". pg. 160

though we create what is seen, yet we are not the creators of its essence. Thus nightmares are born from the impress of ourselves on the life of things unknown."

This consistent philosophy serves as the foundation of Ligotti's work. In multiple interviews he pointed out that he is a writer who writes horror fiction because it helps him channel the pain of being human, while also capturing the mood of our generation. Every time we read a story, there is always a place for us in the middle of it. Through reading, people are transported into other realms of consciousness. A horror story is an abstract counterpart of madness of existence. It is the best way for conveying the uncanny nightmare of our consciousness. It is a sort of a map through the nightmare labyrinth, because we already know where the monsters are since we put them in their place ourselves.

In "Flowers of the Abyss*"*, a teacher of the small town is sent by scared town's people to talk to the mysterious owner of an old house in the forest to learn what malice or indifference he harbored toward their town. Their conversation is centered on owner's peculiar, unfruitful garden, as well as his psychic travels and the occasion when he found the flowers, the "aberration of the abyss". "With the darkness I saw the darkness." The owner of the house explains, "And it was immensity without end around me, and I believe within me. (…) But there were also things within the darkness, within me and outside of me, so that if I reached out to touch them across a universe of darkness, I also reached deep inside of this body." Here we can draw parallel to Ligotti's *"*In the Shadows of Another World*"* and *"*The Shadow at the bottom of the World*"*. By reaching out, by learning about the darkness of the world around us through reading about monstrosities and horrors in horror fiction, at the same time we learn about the darkness within us. We cannot expect to go through this process unchanged. By marrying the two, we learn to embrace it and in the end to create balance with the world nature. There is a degree of joyfulness in dissolving into something new, while destroying what used to bound us.

Conclusion

When thinking about the underworld, its presence throughout the human history and the history of literary expression almost never has any kind of optimistic, positive connotations. Nearly every culture and religion in the world describes the existence of some type of underworld or hell. In the literary world it has been used as a both literal and symbolic motif. As such it continuously appears in horror fiction, as a realm of demons, terror, fear and different kinds of monstrosities. To paraphrase Thacker, when the non-human world manifests itself to us in these ambivalent ways, more often than not, our response is to recuperate that non-human world into whatever the dominant, human-centric world-view is at the time[70]. Therefore, a horror story is an abstract counterpart of madness of existence. It is the best way for conveying the uncanny nightmare of our consciousness. It is a sort of a map through the nightmare labyrinth, because we already know where the monsters are since we put them in their place ourselves.

Taking this into consideration, one can only conclude the following; the world we live in is becoming more and more absurd. Lovecraft expresses the same sentiment as follows: "Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it, peer daemonical hints of truth which makes it sometimes a thousand fold more hideous". Every day we deal with planetary hazards, climate change/destruction of nature, earthquakes, emerging pandemics, racism, pollution, food and water/global health, inequality, corruption, religious conflicts, wars… despite of our everyday concerns and hopes, it is becoming more and more challenging to understand and respond appropriately to the world we live in. Of course, the culture as obsessively consumeristic as ours creates materialistic and consumeristic behavior in people which leads from detachment and misbalance with nature. To oppose this notion it to confront the fact that we are absolutely limited in our ability to understand the world at all.

[70] Thacker, E. *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy*, Vol. 1. pg. 80

And this has been the whole point of horror fiction almost from its beginnings. This has been frequently conveyed in Lovecraft's writing and it has been the foundation of his "cosmic horror": "the paradoxical realization of the world's hiddenness as an absolute hiddenness".[71] Horror fiction is a mean to uncover the hidden knowledge of the world, the horrors that hide in cracks and crevices of the world and which happens to bleed into our reality. Looking below into the underworld, the realm where the odd and the strange are at home and familiar and where no earthly rules apply, that world shuns the artificial decorum and egocentrism of the world above and exposes the real truth and brings us to much needed enlightenment. To quote Nietzsche: "…if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you". I do not believe "the abyss" is "negativity" or something inherently evil, but rather that taking an interest in the abyss, the void, sooner or later causes a change in one's consciousness. The passive act of self-reflection turns into the interactive process of enlightenment and transformation and finally restoring the balance with the world.

[71] Thacker, E. *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy*, Vol. 1 pg. 80

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