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A nameless protagonist, looked after by an elderly confidante, yet cut off from the world around him for many years, emerges from his isolation in a subterraneous dwelling determined to ascend what he believes is a nearby ruined tower. After climbing the tower and discovering that he has in fact just reached the ground level of the forest he has been living underneath all his life, our protagonist vows to head toward the light he spies in a nearby castle. After several hours of traveling, he views a party of revelers and makes toward them, wary, yet eager to befriend them. However, when he nears the partygoers, they are struck by an unknown source of abject horror and flee from the hideous entity they apparently perceive. Left alone, our protagonist gradually and unknowingly approaches a mirror and upon seeing his own reflection realizes that he is, in fact, the monster from whom all those he hoped to befriend have fled.

While this story outline should be immediately recognizable to readers of Howard Phillip Lovecraft’s early Gothic tale “The Outsider,” it is an apt demonstration of popular impressions of Lovecraft that so many critics interpret the tale as being partly autobiographical. Even those who have tended to refrain from such an interpretation have had to admit that “in a very general way ‘The Outsider’ may possibly be indicative of [Lovecraft’s] own self-image” (Joshi and Schultz 199). Indeed, it is possible to see how the story’s concluding line, “I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men,” has proven to be too fine an opportunity for those
seeking to read the author as adhering to that familiar model of the genre writer as a reclusive outcast, at odds with the world (Lovecraft 49). Nevertheless, the last few years of Lovecraft’s life do seem to indicate a withdrawal, voluntary or otherwise, that apparently positioned him as an outsider of sorts. For, at the time of his death, Lovecraft was separated from his wife, Sonia Greene, living alone with his surviving aunt in meager lodgings in Providence, and while he had published a number of stories to moderate acclaim among his contemporaries, he remained a poor man, largely unheard of among the general reading populace. Lovecraft’s increasing feelings of alienation, his dislike of modernity, coupled with his apparent failure to reach the audiences that would come to love his work posthumously, seem to suggest a man ill at ease with himself and his writing. Indeed, as S. T. Joshi notes “In 1936 Lovecraft made what to us seems the astonishing assertion that “I’m farther from doing what I want to do than I was 20 years ago” (Joshi 2007).

Such a statement is certainly astonishing given the skill and power on display in so many of Lovecraft’s best stories. While it is difficult to attempt to summarize the range of approaches and influences apparent in the entirety of Lovecraft’s fiction, drawing as he does from Poe, Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood, and Arthur Machen to name just a few, he is perhaps most well known for the series of stories that have been retrospectively classified as constituting the “Cthulhu Mythology” (a term coined by August Derleth, and which would later become known in the popular imagination as the “Cthulhu Mythos”). The primary element of this fictional construct is the idea that a pantheon of ancient beings, the “Great Old Ones,” once ruled earth but have since fallen into a deep slumber from which they are increasingly threatening to awake. Lovecraft’s stories, while often variable in quality, became more accomplished as his own voice matured. Examples such as “The Colour out of Space” (1927), “The Call of Cthulhu” (1928), “The Dunwich Horror” (1929), At the Mountains of Madness (1936), and The Case of Charles Dexter Ward (1941) retain their ability to shock, scare, entertain, and stimulate. The best of Lovecraft’s tales present the reader with a brand of cosmic horror reliant on a kind of existentialist terror (which Lovecraft referred to as “indifferentism”) that is arguably much more relevant to a twentieth-century reader than the standard Gothic tropes of haunted houses, maidens in distress, vampires, and werewolves. Often edging into the realm of science fiction, Lovecraft’s work has more latterly been classified as “Weird Fiction” by writers and critics such as Ann and Jeff Vandemeer, and China Miéville, whose
The Outsider No More?

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essay on this nascent critical classification positions Lovecraft as “the preeminent figure in the field” (510).

Due in large part to the work of a number of small publishers (most notably Arkham House, founded by Derleth and Donald Wandrei), often modified versions of Lovecraft’s fiction remained in print despite his initial lack of any appreciable critical and commercial success, subsequently garnering a growing number of fans who discovered the author’s work in the decades following his death. Nowhere was this nascent adulation of Lovecraft more apparent than with writers of genre fiction, among whom Lovecraft’s contribution to the development of the field has long been acknowledged, yet this following until recently had little impact on Lovecraft’s marginal status within the canon. The academic community has often been reticent to concede the writer’s influence. Although the preeminent horror writer of the late twentieth century Stephen King, famously declared that H. P. Lovecraft should be considered as “the twentieth century’s greatest practitioner of the classic horror tale” (King npg), and more recently the respected novelist Joyce Carol Oates similarly suggested that Lovecraft be placed alongside Edgar Allen Poe as having exerted “an incalculable influence on succeeding generations of writers of horror fiction” (Oates), for many years there was a scarcity of sustained scholarly material on this significant American writer. Indeed, a great deal of the responsibility for this regrettable state of affairs must be laid at the feet of the many critics who continued until relatively recently to accept Lovecraft into the canon at all; figures such as Edmund Wilson and Damon Knight decry Lovecraft and his followers “for poor writing and for imaginative sterility” (Joshi 2007, 116).

Yet in contrast to the scholarly elision of the writer’s work, during the last ten years Lovecraft’s standing among producers and consumers of genre fiction has undoubtedly been in the ascendancy. This turnaround may be a result of the fact that as time passes there is now a whole generation of academics who grew up with the author’s stories. Often having read them as children or young adults, these readers have sought to incorporate their love of the author’s work into their teaching and research, with the net result that Lovecraft has reemerged in recent years as an increasingly vital figure in the contemporary critical landscape. While a faithful hard core of authors had been publishing work on Lovecraft since the 1970s (the noted critic S. T. Joshi being the most prominent of those involved), the reissuing of Lovecraft’s short fiction by Penguin in its “Modern Classics” series in the late 90s and early part of the twenty-first century marked the beginnings of a “watershed”
period in critical attitudes toward Lovecraft and began a process that would see a groundswell of more scholarly writing being published on the author and his tales.

The release of a volume of Lovecraft’s work in the esteemed *Library of America* series (2005) and the translation of Michel Houellebecq’s *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, against Life* (2005) continued this sea change of opinion about the writer, working to reposition him out of the lowbrow ghetto in which he had previously languished and situating him and his work as a worthy and valid subject for sustained scholarly engagement. Indeed, these pioneering works have been followed by a number of more critical texts. *Tour de Lovecraft: The Tales* (2008) by Kenneth Hite examines many of the more well-known stories, presenting the reader with a brief evaluation of their literary success, while Donald Tyson’s short monograph *The Dream World of H. P. Lovecraft: His Life, His Demons, His Universe* (2010) provides an interesting biographical reading of Lovecraft’s writing. The last ten years have also seen the increasing (if still haphazard) inclusion of Lovecraft in discussions of (American) Gothic. Such works include S. T. Joshi’s *The Weird Tale* (2003) and Alan Lloyd Smith’s *American Gothic* (2005), both of which provide a considered discussion of Lovecraft’s place in the canon of Gothic fiction. Furthermore, and as testament to Lovecraft’s place as “a dark but compelling icon of popular culture” (Joshi *A Dreamer*, 392) recent years have witnessed the publication of a handful of books that bears witness to Lovecraft’s wider ongoing cultural relevance and popularity. Don G. Smith’s *H. P. Lovecraft in Popular Culture: The Works and Their Adaptations in Film, Television, Comics, Music and Games* (2005) and *H. P. Lovecraft Goes to the Movies* (2011) both offer comprehensive overviews of Lovecraft’s influence on many diverse aspects of popular culture.

One of the defining features of many of these texts is their engagement with Lovecraft’s challenging status as a writer whose work often embodies many of the more distasteful aspects of early-twentieth-century thinking. As Miéville notes in his chapter on Weird Fiction, “For Lovecraft, the horror of modernity is above all horror of ‘inferior races,’ miscegenation, and cultural decline… These particular concerns, though central to an understanding of particular writer’s work, are expressions of a foundational underlying crisis” (Miéville 513). Such a crisis encompassed the growth of theories of scientific racism, social Darwinism, and an increase in a divisive cultural elitism, all of which found a place in Lovecraft’s work. Conversely, and essential to this collection, is a reading of Lovecraft that recognizes his place as a fascinating...
yet difficult writer, both popular and critically valid but also problematic in terms of his depictions of race and class and in his often overly poetic and overwrought writing style. Indeed, in spite of these tensions, when one considers the almost wholesale omission of Lovecraft’s writing from much of the critical work concerning the horror genre up until fairly recently, his writing demands to be reconsidered more rigorously using contemporary theoretical and philosophical tropes. *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft* seeks to open any remaining vestiges of this entrenched tendency toward Lovecraft’s work in favor of a more expansive and considered account of the author’s continuing relevance in the latter half of the twentieth century.

S. T. Joshi’s influence on the field of Lovecraft studies is immeasurable, and his reflections in the foreword to this collection examine the development of the field from the perspective of perhaps its foremost expert. Touching upon many of themes that permeate the rest of this collection—Lovecraft’s continuing popular appeal, the growth of critical interest in Weird literature, the increasing appositeness of Lovecraft’s ontological and epistemological concerns and horrors—Joshi concludes by suggesting that what we need now is the kind of sustained study of the writer and his work that is offered by the exciting, yet critically measured, range of chapters in *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft*.

Part I of this collection contains chapters that analyze Lovecraft’s writing, providing informed yet lively discussions of the author’s texts in a manner that is both accessible to those unfamiliar with his work yet stimulating for an audience well versed in Lovecraft’s oeuvre. My own chapter, “‘A Certain Resemblance’: Abject Hybridity in H. P. Lovecraft’s Short Fiction,” uses Julia Kristeva’s theories of abjection to explore Lovecraft’s depiction of Africa and its peoples. I suggest that Lovecraft constructs a version of Africa as an abject postcolonial Other in his fiction, which though ostensibly racist is decidedly more complex than it might first appear. In particular, the presentation of Africa in “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” (1921) and “Under the Pyramids” (1924) explores a process of hybridizing identity that I wish to propose is significant for its self-reflexive expression of Lovecraft’s deep-seated anxieties concerning his own American nationality and subjectivity.

In “‘Spawn of the Pit’”: Lavinia, Marceline, Medusa, and All Things Foul: H. P Lovecraft’s Liminal Women,” Gina Wisker also reads Lovecraft’s writing through the prism of Kristeva’s theories of abjection, focusing specifically on the three types of female characters
(The Witch, the Medusa, and the “Bad” Mother), who she believes recur throughout the author’s writing. While Lovecraft has long been characterized in the popular imagination as an almost asexual individual, afraid to engage with members of the opposite gender in any meaningful way, Wisker offers a critical examination that suggests Lovecraft held a “fascination with women as the source of disruption and disorder,” one that saw the author repeatedly engage with his anxieties in a manner that warrants further feminist investigation.

Such an investigation can be found in “‘The Infinitude of the Shrieking Abysses’: Rooms, Wombs, Tombs, and the Hysterical Female Gothic in “The Dreams in the Witch-House,” in which Sara Williams explores one of Lovecraft’s less revered tales, reading “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1933) as an example of the Female Gothic form alongside more widely recognized examples including “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) and The Haunting of Hill House (1959). In a chapter informed by psycho-analytical and feminist theory, Williams proposes that Gilman’s fear of, and eventual consumption by, the titular house exemplifies the fact that “Lovecraft’s cosmic horror mythology of the limitless universe, incomprehensible to the limits of our senses, is a metaphor for our response to the sublime pre-Oedipal mother’s body.”

Gerry Carlin and Nicola Allen continue the critically rigorous reading of Lovecraft and his work in “Slime and Western Man: H. P. Lovecraft in the Time of Modernism.” In this chapter, the two authors provide a lively yet well-reasoned analysis that situates Lovecraft and his use of time alongside that of some of the foremost Modernist writers of the early twentieth century. Arguing that Lovecraft’s “fiction ultimately partakes in a ‘central paradox’ of modernism,” Carlin and Allen investigate the similarities (and differences) between Lovecraft’s frequent dissolution of chronological time and that of Modernists including D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf. The chapter concludes by proposing that the work of both sets of writers often hinges on an attempt to reconceptualize the notion of linear “clock time” with the net result being that they produce a kind of horror that “reduce[es] man to imagined or actual oblivion in the turn of a page.”

Noted Lovecraft scholar Robert Waugh reads At the Mountains of Madness in relation to selected instances of travel writing in his chapter “Looming at the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft’s Mirages.” Waugh offers a detailed analysis of the story’s use of mirages, proposing that one of Lovecraft’s more famous tales is informed by the “real-life” work of explorers such as Captain Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton,
yet noticeably distinct in its conscious use of the mirage as an ideological
signifier of ontological concerns surrounding knowledge and identity.

Donald Burleson, a renowned expert on Lovecraft and his work,
offers a considered close reading of one of Lovecraft’s most critically
divisive tales in “On ‘The Dunwich Horror.’” Beginning with an
informed overview of opinions toward the story, Burleson proceeds to
make a case for the “mythic import” of “The Dunwich Horror,” reread-
ing it as a concerted attempt by Lovecraft to engage with the archetypal
structures of traditional mythopoeia. Consequently, Burleson makes a
convincing case that rather than being thought of as “a story that on
the surface appears so histrionic as to be either an artistic shortcoming
or a parody of ill-conceived popular prose,” “The Dunwich Horror” is
actually an almost self-reflexive exploration of the quest narrative and
its often problematic conventions.

The chapters in Part II of this collection explore and examine
Lovecraft’s continuing influence on popular culture, in terms of liter-
ature, film, music, and comics. Part II begins with J. S. Mackley’s
“The Shadow over Derleth: Disseminating the Mythos in The Trail of
Cthulhu.” While Derleth’s role in the propagation of Lovecraft studies
has long been considered controversial, Mackley argues that Derleth’s
work, including the posthumous rewriting or completion of several of
Lovecraft’s unfinished tales, contains something of value, particularly
in its construction of the “Cthulhu Mythos.” Indeed, in an exciting
piece of analysis, Mackley contends that the mythopoetic (or myth-
making) processes that Derleth engaged with in his own (often deriva-
tive) writing may have in fact “helped secure Lovecraft’s prominent
position as an innovative writer of the macabre.”

In “From the Library of America to the Mountains of Madness:
Recent Discourse on H. P. Lovecraft,” Steffan Hantke analyzes the
changing critical reputation of H. P. Lovecraft and offers an innovative
reading of the author’s standing among different contemporary audi-
ences. While Hantke believes that Lovecraft has now “been retrieved
from the obscurity and cultural irrelevance of his pulp origins and
elevated to the status of a unique American original voice,” he sug-
gests that Lovecraft still represents a complex web of relationships for
those wishing to engage with the author and his writings, not least
the film director Guillermo del Toro, whose failed attempts to bring
At the Mountains of Madness to the screen proves Hantke’s thesis that
there now exists several different versions of Lovecraft in the public
consciousness.
In “Co(s)mic Horror,” Chris Murray and Kevin Corstorphine provide a lively and analytical survey of the history of Lovecraft in the comics form. Highlighting the incongruous nature of visualizing the work of an author whose horrors so often center on the idea of the unmentionable and the indescribable, Murray and Corstorphine argue that while Lovecraftian ideas and adaptations have remained a surprising constant in the history of comics from as early as the 1940s, “what has changed over the years is the ability of the comics marketplace to publish stories that can communicate these ideas.” This maturing of the marketplace has led to a wealth of ideologically and philosophically intriguing titles, including Hans Rodionoff’s *Lovecraft* (2003) and Alan Moore and Jacen Burrows’s *Neonomicon* (2010), that testify to the continuing interest and importance of Lovecraft’s original work.

In his chapter, “Sounds Which Filled Me with an Indefinable Dread”: The Cthulhu Mythopoeia of H. P. Lovecraft in ‘Extreme Metal,’” Joseph Norman explores the often symbiotic relationship between selected examples of metal music and Lovecraft’s ideas and writings. Indeed, given that Lovecraft’s influence on metal music has been so great, Norman notes, “The official H. P. Lovecraft website lists 127 musical artists from around the world who have referenced Lovecraft in their releases; a survey at Rateyourmusic.com adds approximately another 100 artists to this list.” Norman’s sustained approach to the subject is long overdue. Alongside a review of many of the more significant and interesting examples of musicians using Lovecraft’s work, Norman goes on to analyze some of the reasons why metal musicians may have co-opted Lovecraft to the extent that they have, proposing that many of the author’s short stories contain an emphasis on discordant or dissonant aural manifestations.

Martyn Colebrook’s exciting chapter “‘Comrades in Tentacles’”: H. P. Lovecraft and China Miéville,” explores the links between Lovecraft and perhaps the most recognized writer of the New Weird movement. Miéville himself has written extensively on Lovecraft and his contemporaries, and Colebrook both engages with this critical material while also providing a thoroughly researched and analytically rigorous dissection of Miéville’s Lovecraftian output. In particular by focusing on an underinvestigated area of study—the depictions of urban environments in both writers’ fiction—Colebrook crafts an informed comparison of the stylistic similarities and distinct ideological differences that bring together and separate these important proponents of the Weird.

The final chapter of this collection: “Tentacles and Teeth: The Lovecraftian Being in Popular Culture,” provides an expansive but
simultaneously nuanced exploration of Lovecraft’s influence on popular culture. At the beginning of his chapter, Mark Jones suggests that “Lovecraftian imagery, concepts and modes—albeit usually moderated—have become significant features of mainstream popular culture, while simultaneously retaining their esotericist attractions” and through the course of his considered analysis of such diverse examples as the heavy metal band *Black Sabbath* and the children’s animated series *The Real Ghostbusters* (1986–1991), he makes a strong case for the validity of such an assertion. Indeed, as Jones proposes in his conclusion “the Lovecraftian mythos has proven extremely adaptable, and reflective of contemporary social and political paranoias.” Jones’s statement would seem to confirm both Lovecraft’s increasing relevance to contemporary Western culture and the need for a collection such as *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft* to document this.

The diversity of approaches and range of topics covered in the work in this volume suggests that, in spite of (or indeed perhaps because of) the more challenging elements of the Lovecraft’s work, scholars continue to be drawn toward the author and his writing. The following essays tackle a varied range of Lovecraft’s fiction, offering a diverse set of readings that seeks to continue this wider reappropriation of the author and his output as a significant part of the American Gothic and weird traditions. Indeed, it may not be too grandiose a claim that the enthusiasm and vigorous intellectual responses on display in this collection also point toward a growing desire to relocate Lovecraft, moving him further away from his outsider status and toward a position that would view Howard Phillips Lovecraft as not only central to genre writing but furthermore as an important figure in the wider development of fiction writing in the United States.

**Note**

1. Several critics have suggested that Lovecraft believed in a form of cosmic “Indifferentism.” Most notably, Michel Houellebecq in *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, against Life* writes that “few beings have ever been so impregnated, pierced to the core, by the conviction of the absolute futility of human aspiration [as Lovecraft].” According to Houellebecq, Lovecraft’s stories embody a mechanistic materialism in which “the human race will disappear. Other races will appear and disappear in turn. The sky will become icy and void, pierced by the feeble light of half-dead stars. Which will also disappear. Everything will disappear. And what human beings do is just as free of sense as the free motion of elementary particles” (32).
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