Diseases of the Head

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Diseases of the Head: Essays on the Horrors of Speculative Philosophy.

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Forbidden tomes tucked away in dusty university libraries, an army of dead-eyed fish people emerging from the darkened sea, the all-too-fragile rules of reality bent or broken by non-Euclidean geometry, shadow-haunted Cyclopean ruins, and bookish narrators wilting in the presence of unutterable horror. For better or for worse, Howard Phillips Lovecraft’s signature contributions to the weird tale persist in countless short story anthologies, novels, films, video games, role-playing games, and other forms of merchandise. As Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi has written, “[t]here really is no parallel in the entire history of literature for such enduring and wide-ranging attempts to imitate or develop a single writer’s conceptions.” Perhaps even more impressive is that Lovecraft’s influence has transcended the blindly loyal realm of fandom. In fact, his contribution to the American tradition has been acknowledged by serious-minded Library of America and Penguin Classics editions of his stories and novels.

Furthermore, explorations of his conceptions of horror and the weird frequently bleed into disciplines such as music and philosophy. With all this in mind, this paper seeks to examine why Lovecraft’s so-called Cthulhu Mythos endures as well as how Lovecraft’s Old Ones can be uncovered, and perhaps better understood, through recent speculative trends in philosophy.

Before we can begin, however, we must first discuss the significance and meaning of the Cthulhu Mythos. It goes without saying that using fiction to create a mythos—or the concept of an artificial pantheon and myth background—was far from a novel idea by the time Lovecraft published the first of his Mythos tales (“The Nameless City” in 1921), especially considering Lord Dunsany’s towering influence. Yet a key distinction liberates Lovecraft from merely following in the previous tradition. As Joshi has written,

> [t]he phrase “artificial pantheon” points to Lovecraft’s creation of an ersatz theogony created from his imagination, rather than from existing myth or folklore. […] Many of Dunsany’s gods are clearly symbols for natural forces (Slid is described as the ‘soul of the sea’), the gods of Lovecraft’s pantheon are far less clearly defined in terms of their nature and attributes.²

Despite the misguided efforts of “self-blinded earth-gazers” to equate Lovecraft’s gods with the elements, these entities remain entirely within the realm of the unknown. Lovecraft’s fictional gods are relegated to the background of his stories—they are never the focal point and rarely, if ever, the cause or reason for the unfolding of events—which is an important element of what makes Lovecraft’s horror horrific. Indeed, only that which exists beyond thought, within the vacuous unknown, can instill true horror.

Lovecraft was aware of this distinction, as he believed that beauty, rather than horror, was the keynote of Dunsany’s fic-

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² Ibid., 51.
tion. In his own fiction, however, Lovecraft linked beauty to the strange and the grotesque, seeking to emphasize notions of the unknown. This embrace of the strange and the grotesque also provides an explanation for the difference between the genres of fantasy and horror — namely, that horror, itself a subgenre within the greater classification of weird fiction, is concerned only with reality. When faced with horror, we must accept that reality is at least partly unknowable, otherwise horror would not exist. Coming to know a certain reality can result in a full or partial destruction of the self. Take disease, for example. When given a certain diagnosis, what was not known is made known and is at least partially horrific because the patient did not always know it to be the case. Yet once the presence of the disease is known, it becomes part of the self. There is no resisting such revelations. The sense of horror, then, shifts once more to the unknown. How will this disease affect me? How it will change the ways in which I see and interact with the world? And in this acceptance, this giving in to forces that are by nature incomprehensible, horror seeks to offer direct knowledge of the real. It strips away comforting or cosmetic surface realities and lays bare indifferent inner workings. How we feel about those inner workings, or what they mean to us, is of little to no importance. What matters is the glimpsing of the beyond, of bearing witness, and how this act alters our perceptions of what is or has been.

Fantasy, however, is concerned with unreality, or that which is hoped for, magical, or ideal. It seeks only to show things as they might be, and in doing so embraces the allure of illusion rather than seeking to break its spell. Furthering this concept, Lovecraft’s Mythos, despite the use of otherwise fantastical gods and monsters, is ultimately rooted in scientific notions and present-day concerns. On scientific notions, we need look no further than the famous opening sentences of the story “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family”:

Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer daemonical hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousand fold more hideous. Science,
already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species—if separate species we be—for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world.³

And on present-day concerns, we turn to Joshi once again:

Lovecraft was keenly aware of such radical and potentially disturbing conceptions as Einsteinian space-time, the quantum theory, and Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle, and utilized them to give a distinctly modern cast to such stale conceptions as the vampire (“The Shunned House”) and the witch (“The Dreams in the Witch House”), to say nothing of the possibility of extraterrestrial incursions in such tales as “The Colour Out of Space,” “The Whisperer in Darkness,” At the Mountains of Madness, and “The Shadow Out of Time.”⁴

Lovecraft’s gods and monsters are employed to further such concepts as scientific indifferentism and the existence of a reality beyond human conception. As a result, the Cthulhu Mythos is populated by a series of gods who are perhaps best understood as symbols of cosmic outsideness, which refers to the reality of objects and entities outside an earthly, moral, or ethical understanding, in particular, the monstrous, extraterrestrial deities known as the Old Ones. As entities of pure and unknowable horror, these Old Ones are unconcerned with human life. In fact, they are completely indifferent to it, perhaps more likely unaware of it. Any hint of malevolence is strictly the interpretation of the human who seeks an explanation for the unexplainable. As the old man Castro says in “The Call of Cthulhu,” referring to the apocalyptic return of great Cthulhu, “[t]he time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become

⁴ Joshi, The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos, 189.
as the Great Old Ones: free and wild and beyond good and evil.”

Elaborating on the concept of alien gods existing beyond human constructs such as good and evil, Joshi has written, “[w]e cannot penetrate into their minds or psyches to pass any kind of moral judgment upon them.” All the more fitting then that Lovecraft chose to describe Cthulhu in part as a monster with an “octopus-like head,” as octopi are perhaps the most alien creatures to humans on Earth.

By remaining cosmically outside human knowledge, the Cthulhu Mythos comprises a purposely incomplete body of lore rather than a complete system of knowledge. In fact, Lovecraft knowingly left this lore unstructured to further a sense of realism. Much like the disease, whose presence annihilates the self, so-called knowledge of the Mythos results in madness, or an outright rejection of the mind to process reality as it actually is. By consciously relegating these gods to the background of his fiction, thus emphasizing the unknowability of the unknown, Lovecraft’s goal was to establish “the conveyance of terror at the thought of human insignificance in a boundless cosmos.” As Joshi has written, “[t]he true horror in Lovecraft’s work is the mere knowledge that the Old Ones exist. The psychological devastation in the face of human insignificance makes any actions on the part of the ‘gods’ or monsters seem utterly insignificant.”

This is what Lovecraft meant by science being “the ultimate exterminator of our human species”; it is the self-annihilating disease. With his Mythos tales, Lovecraft sought to emphasize reality as supported by scientific thought — the reality that makes horror horrific — that human life is without meaning, the cosmos itself cold and unfeeling, and that true knowledge of this reality could drive one to the brink of insanity. Further, only insanity can be considered an escape from burdensome knowl-

6 Joshi, *The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos*, 68.
7 Ibid., 19.
8 Ibid., 279.
edge entirely too real and therefore isolating and impossible to communicate to others.

Lovecraft was of course an avowed atheist. In fact, he was outright hostile to organized religion, and his personal philosophy, as far as it was developed, was explicitly materialist. Furthermore, he favored a version of determinism that was mechanistic. On this, Robert M. Price has written, “[Lovecraft] felt there was no reality that natural law and matter could not account for. Everything worked like one big machine. There was no god, no soul, no meaning or purpose. […] He felt sure the universe was just a collection of ‘stuff,’ but he had to know more about it.”

In other words, it’s in our nature to seek answers to questions we cannot begin to formulate — and no good will come of it. This constant compulsion to “know more” motivated Lovecraft to stay informed about the latest scientific discoveries as well as contemporary views of history. For example, he adhered to the tenets of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, the evolutionary principles of Charles Darwin, the connection of evolution to the cosmos put forth by naturalist Ernst Haeckel, and Einstein’s aforementioned theory of relativity. Informed by his materialist beliefs, Lovecraft used horror, particularly its aspects of speculation, as a means of making the unreal real. Much like a body of lore that can only hint at the unknowable, or the disease that changes one’s relationship to the world, such a “horror of the real” must be speculative, as its very nature entails an existence of entities and objects beyond our knowing. Rather than approaching the weird as a means of explaining that which cannot be explained or instilling feelings such as shock or awe, Lovecraft acknowledged that our very best explanations are unable to grasp the truth. Instead we cling to the truths we construct: the useless laws of physics and morality. As David E. Schultz has written, “[Lovecraft’s stories] challenge us to consider the world in which we live in light of what science has told us about it.”

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10 Ibid., 35.
But this is only half of what makes Lovecraft’s horrific vision so profound.

Before we can talk about the other half, we must develop a connection between Lovecraft’s notions of horror and recent trends in philosophy, particularly the speculative realist movement. Defined briefly, speculative realism acknowledges an existence of the world independent of the human mind. Because the philosophical conclusions drawn from such an acknowledgment are by definition speculative, they can seem counter-intuitive or strange. As previously stated, Lovecraft sought to emphasize strangeness in his writing, therefore strengthening the connection to speculation — by which we refer to any type of thinking that claims to be able to access some form of the absolute — fertile ground for planting the seeds of philosophy. It’s worth noting here that the one thing that unites the four primary philosophers associated with speculative realism — Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, and Quentin Meillassou — is a shared interest in the philosophical implications of Lovecraft’s fiction. As Harman has recently written, “[a]lthough the four original Speculative Realists do not share a single philosophical hero in common, all of us turned out independently to have been admirers of Lovecraft. Though the reasons for this are different in each case, my own interest stems from my view that his weird fiction sets the stage for an entire philosophical genre.”

This admiration is particularly relevant to the philosophies of Harman and Meillassou, whose concepts we will focus on in this essay. For example, the Cthulhu Mythos is representative of what Harman refers to as “weird realism.” On this, Harman has written, “[r]ealism is always in some sense weird. Realism is about the strangeness in reality that is not projected onto reality by us. It is already there by dint of being real.” Elsewhere, Harman has written, “[m]ost philosophical realism is ‘representational’ in character. Such theories

12 Ibid., 92.
hold not only that there is a real world outside human contact with it, but also that this reality can be mirrored adequately by the findings of the natural sciences or some other method of knowledge.”\(^\text{13}\) And then, “[n]o reality can be immediately translated into representations of any sort. Reality itself is weird because reality itself is incommensurable with any attempt to represent or measure it.”\(^\text{14}\)

Other writers and philosophers influenced by Lovecraft have turned to similar concepts to grasp the real. Brassier’s philosophy, for instance, defers to scientific representation as the only reliable form of access to reality, in addition to stating that the real is not to be confused with our concepts of it. Ben Woodard connects this idea to the concept of “dark vitalism,” which “accepts a reality that is fundamentally comprised of forces and processes but does not attempt to make this contingency or process-dominated reality something that is immediately thinkable, or understandable within the limits of reason of alone.”\(^\text{15}\) In my opinion, Timothy Morton explores similar territory, using the term *realist magic* to denote thinking about philosophical realism, nonhuman phenomenology,\(^\text{16}\) and theories of causality.

Such thinking, it should be noted, is in dialogue with Lovecraft’s fiction, rather than his personal beliefs. In fact, Lovecraft looked upon vitalism in particular with disdain. Rather than accepting that life originated as a result of nonchemical or nonphysical forces, Lovecraft believed that material interactions led to consciousness. This is seen in the influence of Haeckel, who wrote that “[mind] is a product and attribute of certain forms and processes of matter; and when that matter is disintegrated, it ceases to exist — just as molecular heat ceased to exist upon the dispersal or disintegration of the material molecules which


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 51.


\(^{16}\) This term is a reference to Ian Bogost’s “alien phenomenology.” For more, see *Alien Phenomenology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
make it possible.” 17 In other words, consciousness is nothing more than electrical impulse. Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever. On this, Woodard has written, “[u]nder Lovecraft’s indifferentism humans become just another form of matter in the universe, simply another form of entropic fodder in a mechanistic cosmos.” 18 The human is no different than the octopus, fungi from Yuggoth, or cosmic dust. Vitalism, however, posits a distinction between living organisms and nonliving entities. In this sense, Lovecraft’s beliefs align perhaps most closely with Harman’s object-oriented ontology (ooo), which argues that an object — a unified thing that cannot be reduced to its components or effects — exists independently of human perception, and that all objects can interact with one another, albeit indirectly.

In an effort to square the circle, so to speak, and to move past the inherent limitations of Lovecraft’s dogmatic materialism, perhaps best understood as a product of his time, we will look to speculative realism to see how it can deepen our understanding of the Mythos. It’s worth noting here that speculative realism, Harman’s preferred term, is just as often referred to as speculative materialism, Meillassoux’s preferred term, yet both are concerned with realism, albeit in different ways. Harman posits that his own ooo and Meillassoux’s speculative materialism are essentially opposites. Much like Gilman in Lovecraft’s story “The Dreams of the Witch House,” “Meillassoux thinks that the primary qualities of things can be mathematized, whereas for ooo there is no direct access to them through mathematics or anything else.” 19 Both philosophies, however, are united in their embrace of speculation, which leads to my next point. Ultimately, Lovecraft’s Mythos tales are about wanting to go deeper, even if it leads to unwanted or unforeseen results. This is reinforced by Lovecraft’s aforementioned compulsion to “know more” about the world in which he lived. Yet no matter how deep we

18 Woodard, Slime Dynamics, 43.
19 Harman, Speculative Realism, 100.
go, there will always remain depths still unplumbed. Meillas-
soux refers to such unplumbed depths as “the great outdoors”
or “the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside
which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent
to its own givenness to be what is, existing in itself regardless of
whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought
could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign ter-
ritory — of being entirely elsewhere.”20 In my opinion, ooo pro-
vides the deepest explorations of realism’s unplumbed depths
to date. This opinion is supported by Morton, who has written,
“Graham Harman discovered a gigantic coral reef of mysterious
entities beneath the Heideggerian submarine of Da-sein, which
itself is operating at an ontological depth way below the choppy
surface of philosophy, beset by the winds of epistemology and
infested by the sharks of materialism, idealism, empiricism and
most other -isms that have defined what is and what isn’t for the
last several hundred years.”21

Put simply, reality is hiding in plain sight. Rather than ac-
cepting the way things appear to be as the way they are, to un-
cover reality we must instead strip away appearances. We must
acknowledge a material existence independent of the human,
one filled with objects as they really are, rather than what they
mean to and for us, and in doing so, encounter the realm of
being without thought, in which the ever-changing hints of hor-
ror lurk beneath an illusory “fabric.” As Harman has written,
“[t]he world in itself is made of realities withdrawing from all
conscious access.”22 In other words, some aspect of the whole of
reality will always remain in a perpetually veiled underworld,
out of sight and inaccessible to the human. Furthermore, rather
than accepting that the human remains privileged among non-
sentient objects, such inaccessibility extends to the human as

well. “Even humans withdraw into a dark reality that is never fully understood, while also being present to observers from the outside.”\(^{23}\) \(\text{OOO}\) states that what withdraws from consciousness cannot be mere lumps of objective physical matter but rather a so-called extra-mental reality. Again, we return to old man Castro, who says “[The Old Ones had shape] but that shape was not made of matter.”\(^{24}\) What can this shape possibly be if not physical matter? The answer is perhaps not as important as the asking of the question. Lovecraft was drawn to weird fiction because it allowed him “to achieve momentarily the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic places beyond the radius of our sight and analysis.”\(^{25}\) Meillassoux’s term for such a suspension or violation of natural law over time is “hyper-chaos,” “for which nothing is or would seem to be impossible, not even the unthinkable.”\(^{26}\) Only in such suspension can we begin to fathom the aforementioned inner-workings, or those forces beyond comprehension, hinted at here by those jagged shapes that lurk beneath the fabric of reality: the Old Ones.

The Cthulhu Mythos features five primary deities—Azathoth, Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, Shub-Niggurath, and Yog-Sothoth, all of which are name-checked in “The Whisperer in Darkness”—which are collectively referred to as the Old Ones. Of the five, Azathoth and Cthulhu provide the most philosophical depth, and so will take up the most space here, whereas the significance of Nyarlathotep, Shub-Niggurath, and Yog-Sothoth remains fittingly vague. In the paragraphs that follow, we will explore references to these entities in Lovecraft’s fiction that elaborate on concepts of horror and speculation rather than those that follow in the Dunsanian tradition of fantasy. As previously stated, these deities exist in a dark reality for which

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 40.


\(^{26}\) Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 64.
nothing is impossible, a realm beyond conceptions of good and evil, and beyond human access. Therefore, these entities represent a fundamentally anti-anthropocentric worldview and are therefore emblematic of the “essence of externality.” Lovecraft’s famous letter to Farnsworth Wright makes this point clear: “[t]o achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all.”27 This is remarkably similar to the stated purpose of Meillassoux’s work in his groundbreaking book *After Finitude*, which was to achieve “what modern philosophy has been telling us for the past two centuries is impossibility itself: to get out of ourselves, to grasp the in-itself, to know what is whether we are or not.”28

In “The Haunter of the Dark,” the blind, idiot god Azathoth is described as “Lord of All Things, encircled by his flopping horde of mindless and amorphous dancers”29 at the center of ultimate chaos. Here we return to Meillassoux’s concept of hyper-chaos, the description of which is worth quoting at further length if not only to appreciate its Lovecraftian language, courtesy of Brassier’s fine translation:

If we look through the aperture which we have opened up onto the absolute, what we see there is a rather menacing power — something insensible, and capable of destroying both things and worlds, of bringing forth monstrous absurdities, yet also of never doing anything, of realizing every dream, but also every nightmare, of engendering random and frenetic transformations, or conversely, of producing a universe that remains motionless down to its ultimate recess-

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es, like a cloud bearing the fiercest of storms, then the eeriest bright spells, if only for an interval of disquieting calm.\textsuperscript{30}

Indeed, further strengthening the connection between this concept and Lovecraft’s descriptions of Azathoth, Meillassoux goes on to refer to such omnipotence as “blind.” Azathoth is the ruler of the Outer Gods, a dreaming monster in whose dream the universe resides. As such, he dwells in the realm of being without thought, even his consciousness is unconscious, far beyond our understanding. Furthermore, he is the embodiment of disorder—the thing that adheres to no natural law or order, thus threatening to undo all things. We turn to Meillassoux once more: “[w]e can only hope to develop an absolute knowledge—a knowledge of chaos which would not simply keep repeating that everything is possible—on condition that we produce necessary propositions about it besides that of its omnipotence.”\textsuperscript{31} Meillassoux’s derivation of the principle of non-contradiction from the principle of factiality explains that for knowledge to be contingent in this way, it cannot be anything whatsoever. By establishing the constraints to which an entity must submit to “exercise its capacity-not-to-be and its capacity-to-be-other,” the capacity for things to be otherwise, Meillassoux gives us as clear an explanation as any for why Lovecraft is only able to describe Azathoth as “indescribable.”

Cthulhu is imprisoned in the sunken city of R’lyeh. Like the dreaming Azathoth, Cthulhu is a source of constant anxiety for mankind at an unconscious level, and its mode of speech is transmitted thought. As the infamous opening sentences of “The Call of Cthulhu” make clear, further refining similar sentiments expressed by the opening sentences of “Arthur Jermyn”: “The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but someday 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

\textsuperscript{30} Meillassoux, \textit{After Finitude}, 64.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 66.
from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.” Cthulhu is perhaps representative of an inability to correlate scientific findings into a comprehensible system, a meta-commentary of the Cthulhu Mythos itself. In other words, the significance of Cthulhu is that the representation embodied by the Mythos is the impossibility of representation. As described in “The Call of Cthulhu,” the Old Ones no longer live but never really die. They merely “lie awake in the dark” and watch the universe unfold. Further described as “coming from the stars,” the Old Ones in their very proximity to human life create an ill-defined sense of cosmic outsideness, hinting at themes of panspermia, or the theory that life on Earth originated from microorganisms from outer space. As Woodard puts it, “[t]he teeming biological, if beginning from a unity and moving outwards, dividing into ever more chaotic and divergent forms creates a creeping abyss of biology, where reason is only one feature amidst a taloned and toothed pandemonium.”

To accept this is to think of a world without the givenness of the world, our apparently ironclad natural laws, as Meillassoux would say. And to understand such indifference of the outside to us, we must assign anything outside time or outside space, such as Cthulhu, a “fearsome and unnatural malignancy.” This malignancy, of course, only inheres in the correlation of human consciousness.

Sometimes referred to as a “cosmic shape-shifter,” Nyarlathotep “is a horrible messenger of the evil gods to Earth, who usually appears in human form.” As such, he is a horror of infinite shapes and innumerable forms, the thing to which we assign human features so as to comprehend. In this sense, Nyarlathotep serves two functions in the Mythos: First, he is a go-between for humans and the gods; second, he is representative of our inclination for anthropocentrism. In this sense, he links us to the entities beyond comprehension, existing half-submerged in

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32 Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulhu*, 139.
33 Woodard, *Slime Dynamics*, 52.
unfathomable depths, and is therefore something to fear. This is why Nyarlathotep acts as a messenger of Azathoth: he is the thing that intrudes into our lives, disrupting reality, and reminding us of the existence of that which we cannot truly know, the knowledge of which, or the coming-to-knowledge of which, results in horror.

In a letter to Willis Conover, Lovecraft described Shub-Niggurath as Yog-Sothoth’s wife and a hellish, cloud-like entity. Beyond this, there really isn’t much to Shub-Niggurath, outside of some oblique references, as well as to her children, Nug and Yeb, in various stories, at least not as it relates to the concepts of speculation and horror. The one thing that makes Shub-Niggurath interesting, however, is that she seemingly cannot be described beyond simple, folksy titles, including “The Black Goat of the Wood with a Thousand Young” and “Lord of the Wood.” In this sense, she is beyond understanding to the extent that she can only be referred to as something unknowable (The Not-To-Be-Named one).

Finally, the deity Yog-Sothoth is conterminous with all of time and space — “Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Sothoth”35 — yet it remains locked outside the known universe. According to the text Wilbur Whateley translates in “The Dunwich Horror,” the Old Ones exist “not in the spaces we know, but between them.” This is perhaps one of the clearest connections to OOO. As Harman has written, referring to Lovecraft, “[n]o other writer is so perplexed by the gap between objects and the power of language to describe them, or between objects and the qualities they possess.”36 Harman continues, “[t]he major topic of object-oriented philosophy is the dual polarization that occurs in the world: one between the real and the sensual, and the other between objects and their qualities.”37 In Lovecraft’s fiction, characters often become “stuck” in the gap between reality

36 Harman, Weird Realism, 3.
37 Ibid., 4.
as it is and their conceptions of what it is supposed to be. And this gap is as immeasurable as the realm of horror itself.

As previously mentioned, one half of what allows Lovecraft’s fiction, specifically his Mythos, to persist in contemporary pop culture is his use of an artificial pantheon and myth background to focus on themes of scientific notion and present-day concerns. As a result, Lovecraft essentially moved the weird tale away from vampires and witches and “turned the whole universe into a haunted house,” as Richard L. Tierney has said. The other half of this continued relevance is rooted in Lovecraft’s uncanny ability to hint at future philosophical developments. In my opinion, this is why we continue to turn to Lovecraft, especially today, as the effects of climate change, information overload, and the depletion of natural resources force us to seriously consider the world-without-us. In his unsparing vision of the human as meaningless, Lovecraft offers readers a view of the thing that we cannot—that we will not—see: the universe as filled with cold, dead planets, tearing itself apart at the seams; an impossible reality, one in which humans find themselves extinct, having made no lasting impact on the real. Lovecraft knew there were strange aeons beyond comprehension. And in his attempts to show the outlines of indescribable shapes, he came closer to expressing the ineffable than perhaps any writer of horror or the weird has before or since. As Harman has written,

[t]he cosmos seems to be gigantic in both space and time. It is more ancient than all our ape-like ancestors and all other life forms. It might also seem safe to assume that the trillions of entities in the cosmos engage in relations and duels even when no humans observe them. However interesting we humans may be to ourselves, we are apparently in no way central to the cosmic drama, marooned as we are on an average-sized planet near a mediocre sun, and confined to a tiny portion of the history of the universe.

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38 Joshi, *Dissecting Cthulhu*, 10.
This then is Lovecraft’s Promethean legacy, he who dared articulate that which should not be, the blind, idiot god bubbling at the center of all infinity; he who blasphemed by acknowledging what is and who dared us to gaze into such magnificent vistas of ultimate chaos.
Bibliography


