The Republic of Cthulhu: Lovecraft, the Weird Tale, and Conspiracy Theory

Eric Wilson

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4. To the Grotesque: “The Horror at Red Hook” (1925)

But that fright was so mixed with wonder and alluring grotesqueness that it was almost a pleasant sensation.
— H.P. Lovecraft

For by what laws may we specify the lawless?
— Hugh Kenner

As Fredric Jameson argues in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1992), the fatal flaw of the contemporary conspiratorial imagination lies within its “ambitious program of fantasizing an economic system on the scale of the globe itself.”¹ Globalization and parapolitics combine to form what Jameson calls the “geopolitical unconscious,” the ultimately Sisyphean effort “to think a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of presentation within which human beings normally orient themselves.”² Accordingly, the contemporary author of the “conspiratorial text” is caught in both an artistic and epistemic bind. In order to possess relevance the conspiratorial text must “constitute an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century whose abominations are heightened by

² Ibid., 3.
their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality.” Yet, such a project is doomed to fail at the outset, for the only artistic tools available to the conspiracy theorist are cognitively inadequate. Conspiracy theory “now attempts to refashion national allegory into a conceptual instrument for grasping our new being in the world,” ignoring the fact that both the national and the human scales of reference are precisely that which have been rendered obsolete through the violent irruption of the parapolitical sublime.

Yet conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt — through the figuration of advanced technology — to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world-system. It is in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable [obscure?], other reality of economic and social institutions that, in my opinion, the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized.5

While Jameson advocates new forms of techno-literature (“high-tech paranoia”6), such as the by now hopelessly passé science-fiction sub-genre of cyberpunk — “the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself”7 — as the most suitable cultural vehicle for negotiating the geopolitical unconscious,8 I believe that the resolution of the

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Jameson, Postmodernism, 38.
6 Ibid., 38.
7 Ibid., 419, fn. 1. Emphasis in the original.
8 “Such [conspiracy] narratives, which first tried to find expression through the generic structure of the spy novel, have only recently crystallized in a new type of science fiction, called cyberpunk, which is fully as much an expression of trans-national corporate realities as it is of global paranoia itself: William Gibson’s representational innovations, indeed, mark his work as an exceptional literary realization within a predominantly visual or aural postmodern production.” Ibid., 38; see also ibid., 35. Jameson falls prey to the same sort of deterministic technophilia that he broadly criticizes the post-
to the grotesque aesthetic dilemma articulated by Jameson lies within the tropes of cosmic horror, specifically within its primary mechanism of forcing the reader into a confrontation with the ontologically unspeakable that has already been reduced to the scale of human perception — the grotesque.

If we were to appropriate cosmic horror as a literary genre necessary for the development of a parapolitical aesthetics, then two rhetorical moves become necessary: the conceit of parapolitics as morally evil and the conceit of parapolitics as the politically “weird” — specifically, a “weird” version of the conspiracy narrative. It is surprising to realize the degree to which the narrative devices of the weird tale both anticipate and prefigure the parapolitical analytic.

Horror writers are reactionaries in general simply because they are particularly, one might even say professionally, aware of the existence of Evil. It is somewhat curious that among Lovecraft’s numerous disciples none has been struck by this simple fact: the evolution of the modern world has made Lovecraftian phobias ever more present, ever more alive.

The “points of contact” between the cosmic horror tale and the episodic disclosures of clandestine reality (or “the hideous truth”) are as numerous as they are labored: the misdirected transmission of encoded information that yields catastrophic results (“The Yellow Sign,” by Robert W. Chambers), the accidental modernists for; on the basis of anecdotal evidence, the current dominant paradigms of horror fiction, literary and cinematic, are biological, medical, and their hybrid, biomedical. Also worthy of note is the imprint of feminist-inspired narratives of stalking and serial murder as well as a resurgence in tales of hauntings — a nostalgic reaction, perhaps, to our growing awareness that we really do not possess souls after all. Here, the medium is definitely not the message — information technology is merely a contemporary instance of that terror of boundlessness which ultimately hinges upon the threatened annihilation of a subject both embodied and abject. Everything else is just a gimmick. See Ndalianis, The Horror Sensorium, 15–39.

9 Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft, 116.
10 Mariconda, “Lovecraft’s Cosmic Imagery,” 206, fn. 4.
dental trespass by civilians into the restricted space of encrypted communication broadcasts (“The Willows,” by Algernon Blackwood\textsuperscript{11}), the unintentional disclosure of a “black” rendition and mind-control operation through the recovery of repressed memories (“The White People,” by Arthur Machen). Yet, it is only with Lovecraft’s work that covert agency is poetically reconstituted as a systemic property of parapolitical Existenz. And he achieves his singularity of effect through an unexpected grounding of his equally singular aestheticism upon a radically materialistic version of conspiracy theory, founded, in turn, upon an utterly unique mytho-poetic rendering of racial hatred. I wholly agree with Houellebecq that Lovecraft’s main claim as a “serious” writer lays with his unrivaled appropriation of the racist imaginary as a literary trope for the production of a metaphysical literature of cosmic horror: “The other great cause of my surprise [when reading Lovecraft] was his obsessive racism. [...] The role of this racial hatred in Lovecraft’s work has often been underestimated. [...] [N]ever in the reading of his descriptions of nightmare creatures could I have divined that their source was to be found in real human beings.”\textsuperscript{12} Lovecraft’s singular racism proves inseparable from his signature cosmic disinterestism: “Lovecraft has not so much the steady gaze of objective nihilism as the transmogrifying vision of hysterical nihilism, from which his racism is inextricable.”\textsuperscript{13} Both are manifestations of a post-metaphysical theological/apocalyptic imaginary, highly susceptible to treatment as an aestheticized re-working of conspiracy theory.

\textsuperscript{11} Not coincidentally, this weird tale also contains the greatest piece of “practical advice” for the parapolitical investigator in this era of the global hegemony of the NSA: “There are forces close here that could kill a herd of elephants in a second as easily as you or I could squash a fly. Our only chance is to keep perfectly still. Our insignificance perhaps may save us.” Blackwood, “The Willows,” 39–40.

\textsuperscript{12} Houellebecq, \textit{H.P. Lovecraft}, 24 and 108.

\textsuperscript{13} Mieville, “Introduction,” xix.
Here we approach what lies beneath Lovecraft’s racism [...]. Already the varnish of civilization was cracking; the forces of Evil await “patient and potent” because they are going to regenerate again on earth. Underlying these ruminations on the decay of cultures, which are merely a superimposed layer of intellectual justification, is fear. Fear from afar, preceded by repulsion — it is what generates indignation and hatred.14

Cosmic horror would seem to be the only form of “high art” that racism can possibly take, precisely because a philosophically sophisticated racist aesthetics would have to be grounded upon an anti-Kantian ontology of the monstrous.

The decisive moment in Lovecraft’s literary development occurred between March 1924 and April 1926, when he lived in Brooklyn: “The inescapable truth is that Lovecraft’s fame lies in only a dozen or so stories written between 1926 and 1935; that only his late fiction contains the elements by which we characteristically refer to his work as Lovecraftian.”15 I partially disagree with this assessment; in my opinion, five early tales meet the definition of wholly Lovecraftian, often in novel and unexpected ways: they are “Dagon” (1917), “Nyarlathotep” (1920), “From Beyond” (1920), “The Music of Erich Zann” (1921), and “The Festival” (1923). Nonetheless, it remains indisputable that Lovecraft’s time in Gotham proved the pivotal event, which seems to have operated in two ways. The first, as we should expect, was the para-sublime reaction to New York as an architectonic phenomenon — one that suspiciously resembles Lovecraft’s compelling description of the “impossible” sunken city of R’lyeh. New York is the nameless place “where the verticality of the skyscraper is only an exterior dimension! Instead of being rooted in the earth, these dwellings spurt out vertiginously toward the sky. This is a place devoid of a centre or an identity or ties with the past, a city to which none of the many ethnic groups composing it

really belong.”

Or, as Lovecraft revealingly put it in one of his “New York tales,” “He” (1925), in the “Cyclopean [!] modern towers and pinnacles that rise blackly Babylonian under waning moons, I had found instead only a sense of horror and oppression which threatened to master, paralyse, and annihilate me.”

Houellebecq insightfully comments upon the masochistic nature of Lovecraft’s New York writings; the focus is monomanically upon the abject reduction of the protagonist as the impotent victim of a cosmic conspiracy whose sign is the monstrous template of a diabolical landscape of inhuman architecture. “His descriptions of the nightmare entities that populate the Cthulhu cycle spring directly from this hallucinatory vision,” the outpourings, according to Levy, of a “pitiable paranoiac, the plaything of cosmic forces.”

For full three seconds I could glimpse that pan-daemonic sight, and in those seconds I saw a vista which will ever afterward torment me in dreams. I saw the heavens verminous with strange flying things, and beneath them a hellish black city of giant stone terraces with impious pyramids flung savagely to the moon, and devil-lights burning from unencumbered windows. And swarming loathsomely on aerial galleries, I saw the yellow, squint-eyed people of that

16 Levy, Lovecraft, 36. “Space is a discursive practice of a place. A place is a given area, named and mapped, that can be measured in terms of surface and volume. It becomes space only when it becomes a site of existential engagement among living agents who mark it with their activities or affiliate with dialogue and active perception.” Conley, “Space,” 258. In a letter of Lovecraft to his friend Donald Wandrei dated 10 February, 1927, he writes: “New York […] has no central identity or meaning, & no clear-cut relationship either to its own past or to anything in particular.” Levy, Lovecraft, 127, fn. 3.

17 Lovecraft, “He,” 119.

18 Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft, 107.

19 Levy, Lovecraft, 169. For Airaksinen, masochism is the libidinal foundation of Lovecraft’s singular literary style of “un-writing”: “[a]ll the monsters, and their projections, are based on the simple experience at the root of Lovecraftian horror, namely, the disappearance of our identity.” Airaksinen, The Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft, 101.
city, robed horribly in orange and red, and dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered kettle-drums, and the clatter of obscene crotala, and the maniacal moaning of muted horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen.20

A prophetic vision of New York after the “success” of the reverse colonization. But this striking passage is made even more remarkable when one realizes that it is only a slightly more rarified version of a letter that Lovecraft composed conveying his own impressions of the “real time-space” of Brooklyn.

The organic things — Italo-Semitic-Mongoloid — inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be called human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely molded from some stinking viscous slime of earth’s corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities. They—or the degenerate gelatinous fermentation of which they were composed—seemed to ooze, seep and trickle through the gaping cracks in the horrible houses… and I thought of some avenue of Cyclopean and unwholesome vats, crammed to the vomiting-point with gangrous vileness, and about to burst and inundate the world in one leprous cataclysm of semi-fluid rottenness. From that nightmare of perverse infection I could carry not away the memory of any living face. The individually grotesque was lost in the collectively devastating; which left on the eye only the broad, phantasmal lineaments of the morbid mould of disintegration and decay… a yellow and leering mask with sour,

20 Lovecraft, “He,” 126–27. “He’ was written during the night of August 10–11, 1925, after Lovecraft went on a solitary all-night expedition through various parts of the New York metropolitan area that led him finally to Scott Park in Elizabeth, New Jersey.” Joshi, “Explanatory Notes,” in Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu,” 388.
sticky, acid ichors oozing at eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, and abnormally bubbling from monstrous and unbelievable sores at every point... 21

Lovecraft did not like New York City very much, but his (unpleasant) time there proved invaluable to the execution of his greatest literary effect: the dramatic unification of the architectonic with the degenerate—a utterly improbable but narratively effective synthesis of high and low. More precisely,

New York had marked him forever. During the course of 1925, his hatred of the “foul mongrels” of this modern Babylon, the “foreign colossus that gibbers and howls vulgarly...” did not cease to exasperate him and drove him delirious. It could even be posited that a fundamental figure in his own body of work—the idea of a grand, titanic city, in whose foundations crawl repugnant nightmare beings—sprang directly from his New York experience. 22

As Levy rightly argues, it is in the Cthulhu Mythos, the essential elements of which were formulated during Lovecraft’s sojourn in Brooklyn, “that Lovecraft’s tales gain their profound unity.”

Except for some details, all develop the same central theme; all make reference to the same deities; all put on stage the same characters devoted to the same occult practices. Above all, the same images recur under the author’s pen with an obsessive insistence, to form a tight web around the mythic

22 Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft, 103. “The myths of Cthulhu draw their cold power from the sadistic delectation with which Lovecraft subjects humans, punished for their resemblance to the New York rabble that had humiliated him, to the persecution of beings come from the stars.” Francis Lacassin, editor of the French language edition of Lovecraft’s works, cited in ibid., 108–9.
contents of the work, ensuring its cohesion and giving it its consistency.23

It is within an unparalleled “nomadic bestiary” of the transversal cross-references and intertextual borrowings infusing Lovecraft’s a-theological and apocalyptic imagining24 that suffice in showing how

Lovecraft dreamed his repugnances and with what verbal richness he ranted from purely sensory data. [...] We thus touch [...] upon the heart of the problem in Lovecraft’s fantastic creation, where the hideous monsters are in large part merely the projection, in the “dark chamber” of a sick mind, of obsessive images that his political and racial vision of the American world had given him.25

The correct literary term for Lovecraft’s rants is the grotesque; as Mikhail Bakhtin famously observed in his master work on Rabelais and the carnivalesque, “Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style.”26 The grotesque, perhaps best defined as “the ambivalently abnormal,” is phenomenological in nature, grounded upon a horror sensorium of the body: “a fundamentally ambivalent thing, [...] a violent clash of opposites, [...] an appropriate expression of the problematical nature of existence.”27 When treating the grotesque imaginary, as Bakhtin reminds us, we must always “take into consideration the importance of cosmic terror, the fear of the immeasurable, the infinitely powerful.”28 The body is itself the onto-poetical ground of the grotesque, a body that is eternally teetering on the verge of a chaotic formlessness through the radical and uncontrol-

23 Levy, Lovecraft, 109; see also 84.
24 Ibid., 26–30 and 79–85.
25 Ibid., 29.
26 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 303 and Chapter Five, 303–67.
28 Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 335.
lable proliferation of irreconcilable combinations, the perpetual construction of “what we might call a double body”\textsuperscript{29}: “The grotesque body […] is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body.”\textsuperscript{30}

Like the sublime, then, the grotesque is quintessentially modern, but with this crucial distinction: both modernism and the grotesque “focus on the concepts of alienation, subjectivity, and absurdity, but the grotesque tends to focus on explicit representations of these ideas through disturbing imagery and actions, while modernism tends to focus on more implicit representations of these themes.”\textsuperscript{31} In other words, the aesthetic paradigm of the grotesque requires the coming forth of a monster of some kind;\textsuperscript{32} the “grotesque alienation” that results arises from an enhanced self-consciousness of the protagonist of being embedded within a pre-existent (un-constructed) estranged world/parapolitical landscape: the dark numinous.\textsuperscript{33}

Undertaking the most ambitious analysis of the grotesque as a formal sub-category of the modern, Wolfgang Kayser defines his subject matter in such a way as to render most transparent the artistic and narrative similitudes between the grotesque and cosmic horror: “The modern age questions the validity of the anthropological and the relevance of the scientific concepts un-

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 318.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 317.
\textsuperscript{31} Martin, \textit{H.P. Lovecraft}, 47.
\textsuperscript{32} “Grotesque alienation is usually a result of external, physical change or action, communicated through imagery that may include violent acts, self-destructive behaviors \textit{[sic]}, deformity, transformation, monstrous creatures, and any number of other strange or disturbing scenes. However, the physically-based alienation depicted in such works is merely a catalyst or metaphor for the psychological alienation of one or more characters.” Ibid., 48–49.
\textsuperscript{33} “In modernist grotesque alienation, there is no going back. The world is not alienated due to malignant influences that can be purged, as in the older \textit{[classical?] grotesque}. In modernist grotesque alienation, the protagonist realizes that the world itself has always been alienating, and it is the illusion of stability that must be exposed, for the sake of intellectual integrity.” Ibid., 51.
derlying the syntheses of the nineteenth century. The various forms of the grotesque are the most obvious and pronounced contradictions of any kind of rationalism and any systematic use of thought.”34 (In Kantian terms, we would say that the grotesque is suspended between the absence of meaning and the un-decidability of meaning.) This is wholly consistent with the grotesque’s notoriously difficult-to-pin-down role in the history of art. Although the style first emerged in 15th-century Italy, the grottesche (“of the underground”35) long served as nothing more than a highly suspect form of ornamentalism, but one that carried with it a powerful metaphysical punch: the unbridled proliferation of hybrid images36 in the empty spaces or margins of frescoes and manuscripts alike afforded a radical de-structuring of the central text (or image) of the allegedly “serious” work of art immediately juxtaposed to it. In this way, the monstrous was reconstituted as a rival system of meaning, or subtext, to the ostensibly non-monstrous imaginary of the text: “with the advent of human-animal figures, ornament was beginning to present a potential rival to the central message, a competing text.”37 As Harpham has powerfully argued, the “problem of the relation between center and border is raised in miniature by this [grotesque] figure — which is within which: which is the dominant principle and which the subordinate element?”38 The impossible hybrids of the grottesche signify a radical reversibility be-

34 Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, 188.
35 Unforgettable savaged by the Roman architect Vitruvius thusly: “In the stucco are monsters rather than definitive representations taken from definite things […]. Such things neither are, nor can be, nor have been.” Cited in Harpham, On the Grotesque, 26. The invention — or recovery — of grotesque art was occasioned by the excavation of the Domus Aurea (Golden Palace) of Nero in Rome around 1480. See ibid., 23–47.
36 As Harpham remarks, “Grotesque forms place an enormous strain on the marriage of form and content by foregrounding them both, so that they appear not as a partnership, but as a warfare, a struggle.” Ibid., 7.
37 Ibid., 34–35.
38 Ibid., 35. As a result, “All grotesque Art threatens the notion of a center by implying coherencies just out of reach, metaphors or analogies just beyond our reach.” Ibid., 43.
between monstrous and non-monstrous realities, a “paralysis of language” which is the condition of the uncanny: “When an absence of meaning is created by unprecedented strangeness, so that we know that our experience has not adequately prepared us to interpret or read the design, the ornament not only soothes, but stimulates as well.” The grotesque is nothing more than Otto’s daemonic–divine in decorative form. If the monster is The-Thing-That-Should-Not-Be, then the grotesque is The-Image-That-Should-Not-Be-Made, bearing within it the primal duality and sacred pollution of the holy. I would go so far as to argue that grotesque art was Western civilization’s way of making the abject aesthetically permissible; modernity’s artistic privileging of the grotesque/abject is itself decisive confirmation that, following romanticism, the center does not hold—or that the “marginal” prevails.

For Kayser, the grotesque consists of three signature themes, all of them daemonic. The first is “the grotesque as the estranged world”: “It is our world which has to be transformed. Sudden-ness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque.” The grotesque “world,” or landscape, as Bakhtin makes clear, is the aesthetic continuation by other means of the phenomenological primacy of the grotesque body.

Thus the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and the impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths. Mountains and abysses, such is the relief of the grotesque body; or speaking in architectural terms, tow-

39 Ibid., 6. In the alternative, “If the grotesque can be compared to anything, it is to paradox.” Ibid., 19.
40 Ibid., 33.
41 “Grotesque figures test us […] for they seem to be singular events, appearing in the world by virtue of an illegitimate act of creation, manifesting no coherent, and certainly no divine, intention.” Ibid., 5. In other words—blasphemous.
42 Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, 184.
ers and subterranean passages. [...] This grotesque logic is also extended to images of nature and of objects in which depends (holes) and convexities are emphasized.\(^{43}\)

The “estranged world” of the grotesque, unifying both the high and the low, is, therefore, an artistic device deployed primarily in order to stage the mimetic rendition of the trauma-inducing encounter with the radically alien “sublime.” The grotesque “is primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe [...]. We are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel unable to live in this changed world”\(^{44}\): in short, Scott contemplating the “truth” of American history after 9/11. But not only Scott; Lovecraft as well.

The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death.\(^{45}\) Structurally, it presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable[;] [...] the fusion of realms which we know to be separated, the abolition of the law of statics, the loss of identity, the distortion of “natural” size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order.\(^{46}\)

Second is what Kayser denotes as “the Grotesque as a Play with the Absurd,” signified by the operational hegemony of determinism (natural or otherwise) and the concomitant manipulation of reality by occult forces: “the unity of perspective in the grotesque consists in an unimpassioned view of life on earth as an empty, meaningless puppet play or a caricatural marionette

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\(^{43}\) Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317–18; 318, fn. 6.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) The existential situation of Thurston at the conclusion of “The Call of Cthulu.”

And third is the rather convoluted “the Grotesque as an Attempt to Invoke and Subdue the Demonic Aspects of the World,” which may perhaps best be defined in the following manner: “In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have the power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged.”

The applicability of Kayser’s theory of the grotesque to Lovecraft’s cosmic horror should be obvious, although it is necessary to slightly qualify the performative function of “exorcism.” While Kayser faintly echoes the classic trope of the heroic, both Lovecraftian landscape and narrative signal nothing more clearly than decadence: “Decrepitude, corruption settle wherever the supernatural has intruded. The Lovecraftian fantastic is manifestly decadent: The bizarre does not fall from space to terrify or confound, but to corrupt. It is a type of gangrene that gnaws,

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47 Ibid., 186. For the intimate connections between the grotesque and caricature, see Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 38–40. Striking here is the utter aptness of the marionette theater as the signifier of the Deep State.

48 Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, 188.

49 As made clear in such seminal tales as “The Color Out of Space,” Lovecraft’s “blasted heath” is “not so much a physical phenomenon as a psychological process, a fear-response and an awe, in a mind that by the very experience discovers its own minuteness and precariousness in a cosmos far vaster, far more indifferent to human concerns than that mind has ever imagined.” Martin, *H.P. Lovecraft*, 175. According to Levy, “It is well known that the truly fantastic exists only where the impossible can make an irruption, through time and space, into an objectively familiar locale. […] These imaginary places form, in the real topography of New England, a zone of shadow, a zone of mystery, a dream-zone, which spreads little by little to the rest of the countryside, contaminating the diurnal space of the maps and charts and giving it a suddenly different aspect. […] Arkham is, in the most precise sense of the term, a structure condensed from dreams, around which is built and organized an entire universe of inexpressible wonders and blasphemous horrors. Arkham and its vicinity are, in the Lovecraftian topography, the fault through which the bizarre, the horrific, the disquieting, the morbid, and the unclean spread.” Levy, *Lovecraft*, 36–37. In short, Lovecraft’s topography is parapolitical.

50 Lovecraft, “The Colour Out of Space.”
wears away, and finally rots the familiar world through and through,” with the result that “[p]erspective itself is distorted.”

Not surprisingly, the “world depicted by the grotesque artist is our own world turned upside down; our standards, conventions, convictions are upset.” Nevertheless, Lovecraft’s weird tale does manage to effect a kind of an exorcism of its own, one, we should come to expect, that is infused with parapolitical implication: R’lyeh re-surfaces and then re-submerges while waiting to re-surface again. Not the least of Lovecraft’s literary innovations is that he managed to successfully obviate the central dramatic impediment of the science fiction tale of alien invasion (or reverse colonization): how can mere humanity possibly defeat an alien civilization possessing super-advanced technology (or hyper-atavistic primitivism)? Lovecraft’s ingenious solution lies with his singular utilization of anti-Kantian cosmic measurements of time — the “invasion” is not defeated, but indefinitely delayed; the decadent un-hero learns the truth and perceives the alien menace (dark alētheia) but survives through the fortuitousness of the not-quite-yet-completed winding down of the cosmic clock. This, of course, broadly corresponds to the defining “triple rhythm” of both the Gothic tale and the race fantasy of reverse colonization: “the monster appears, the monster terrifies, the monster is expelled.” Even more revealing is the manner in which the grotesque tale directly imitates the more encompassing narrative structure of the Gothic tale, which “first invites or admits a monster, then entertains or is entertained by monstrosity for some extended duration, until in its closing pages it expels or repudiates the monster and all the disruption that he/she/it brings.” No less an authority than Abdhul Al-Hazred himself declares in his darkly magisterial Necronomicon that “Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall

51 Levy, Lovecraft, 38.
52 Ibid., 37. As a “cosmic conspiracist,” perhaps Lovecraft’s most obvious counterpart is Thomas Pynchon. See Meikle, “Other Frequencies.”
53 Clayborough, The Grotesque in English Literature, 71.
55 Wisnicki, Conspiracy, Revolution, and Terrorism, 173.
soon rule where Man rules now. After summer is winter, and after winter summer. They wait patient and potent, for here shall they reign again.”56 First and foremost, Lovecraft was a Spenglerian.57 Predictably, Lovecraft identifies race conspiracy as the primary degenerative factor governing the death of civilizations: “The supreme calamity of the western world…was the rashly and idealistically admitted flood of alien, degenerate, and unassimilable immigrants…Its first results we behold today, through the depths of its cultural darkness are reserved for the torture of later generations.”58

“The Horror at Red Hook” (August 1925), perhaps the first of Lovecraft’s New York tales, is exemplary in the manner in which it unites both the grotesque body and grotesque space into a single narrative device for the re-staging of the race conspiracy theory of reverse colonization. Readers who are already familiar with Lovecraft may wonder why I have not chosen to base my discussion on the late tale of “The Shadow over Innsmouth,” published in 1931 and arguably Lovecraft’s most spectacular foray into the grotesque.59 Although I discuss “The Shadow over Innsmouth” in the conclusion, my main reason for affording priority to the artistically inferior “Horror at Red Hook” is the centrality of the New York connection: it is Lovecraft’s grotesque re-imaginings of Brooklyn as a landscape of both cosmic horror and race conspiracy that is essential not only to the development of Lovecraft’s own work but also to the relevance of his oeuvre to the development of a parapolitical aesthetic. Essentially devoid of a plot, the text is a series of paranoid and increasingly phantasmagorical vignettes in which the illegal immigrant and alien

57 Mieville, “Introduction,” xix. See also Joshi, H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West, 133–45.
58 Lovecraft, cited in Joshi, H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West, 137.
59 “Are we not told, in the Necronomicon, that the Old Ones exist ‘not in the spaces we know, but between them?’ And did not Lovecraft, by 1931, evolve an aesthetic of weird fiction that exactly embodied this conception?” Joshi, “Introduction,” Lovecraft, The Thing on the Doorstep, xv. For the virulently eugenic subtext of the tale, see Lovett-Graff, “Shadows over Lovecraft.”
conspirator is reduced to a free-floating signifier of a nameless but *globalized* grotesquerie.

Daily life had for him come to be a phantasmagoria of macabre shadow-studies; now glittering and leering with concealed rottenness as in Beardsley’s best manner, now hinting terrors behind the commonest shapes and objects as in the subtler and less obvious works of Gustave Doré. He would often regard it as merciful that most persons of high intelligence jeer at the innermost mysteries; for, he argued, if superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the work, but threaten the very integrity of the universe.60

In essence a detective story, although not a camouflaged one as in the case of “The Call of Cthulhu,” “The Horror of Red Hook” is noteworthy in two ways. The first is the complete synthesis of the grotesque space with the alien body, yielding a landscape that is in equal portions both absurd and conspiratorial.

And now, as he reviewed the things he had seen and felt and apprehended, Malone was content to keep unshared the secret of what could reduce a dauntless fighter to a quivering neurotic; what could make old brick slums and seas of dark, subtle faces a thing of nightmare and eldritch portent. […] [F]or was not his very act of plunging into the polyglot abyss of New York’s underworld a freak beyond sensible explanation? What could he tell the prosaic of the antique witcheries and grotesque marvels discernible to sensitive eyes amidst the poison cauldron where all the varied dregs of unwholesome ages mix their venom and perpetuate their obscene terrors? He had seen the hellish green flame of secret wonder in this blatant, evasive welter of outward greed and inward

blasphemy, and had smiled gently when all the New-Yorkers he knew scoffed at his experiment in police work.\textsuperscript{61}

The second is the absolute distinction between perception and reality, a re-deployment in a popular manner of Schopenhauer’s post-Kantian formulation of the binary relationship between the noumenal and the phenomenal.

[Malone] was conscious, as one who united imagination with scientific knowledge, that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances; and he often viewed with an anthropologist’s shudder the chanting, cursing processions of blareyed and pockmarked young men which wound their way along in the small hours of morning. […] They chilled and fascinated him more than he dared confess to his associates on the force, for he seemed to see in them some monstrous thread of secret continuity; some fiendish, cryptical, and ancient pattern utterly beyond and below the sordid mass of facts and habits and haunts listed with such conscientious technical care by the police. They must be, he felt inwardly, the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the shares of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than mankind. Their coherence and definiteness suggested it, and it shewed in the singular suspicion of order which lurked beneath their squalid disorder.\textsuperscript{62}

Consistent with Lovecraft’s a-holy numinous, the element of the grotesque, both as body and as Boschian landscape, are both recast in a materialist form, with both the eugenic theory of racial degeneration and the reactionary’s paranoia of reverse colonization serving as the vehicles of translation. The pockmarked sub-humans of Red Hook are narratively appropriated by Love-
craft as the non-Caucasian denizens of what was to become the Cthulhu cult of the later Mythos; here, the so-called “plot” concerns the resurrection of a Kurdish/Zoroastrian “devil-worshipping” cult — an unsolicited “cultural import” from the Middle East.

[Robert] Suydam’s new associates were among the blackest and most vicious criminals of Red Hook’s devious lanes, and that at least a third of them were known and repeated offenders in the matter of thievery, disorder, and the importation of illegal immigrants. Indeed, it would not have been too much to say that the old scholar’s particular circle coincided almost perfectly with the worst of the organized cliques which smuggled ashore certain nameless and unclassified Asian dregs wisely turned back by Ellis Island. […] They had come in steamships, apparently tramp freighters, and had been unloaded by stealth on moonless nights in rowboats which stole under a certain wharf and followed a hidden canal to a secret subterranean pool beneath a house.

The topography of the narrative is the grotesque space reworked as metropolitan desolation: the “grotesque” body of New York perforated by the channels of invasion and clandestine penetration; in this case, “underground” people-smuggling networks, which are merely the narrative pretext for the “true” horror of the demonic/immigrant slum — miscegenation.

Suydam was evidently a leader in extensive man-smuggling operations, for the canal to his house was but one of several

63 It is interesting to note that throughout the tale Lovecraft explicitly references his earlier paradigmatic text, “The Music of Erich Zann”: “All at once, from an arcaded avenue leading endlessly away, there came the daemonic rattle and wheeze of a blasphemous organ, choking and rumbling out the mockeries of hell in a cracked, sardonic bass. […] The strange dark men [Kurds] danced in the rear, and the whole column skipped and leaped with Dionysiac fury.” Ibid., 142.

64 Ibid., 132 and 133.
subterranean channels and tunnels in the neighborhood. There was a tunnel from this house to a crypt beneath the dance-hall church\textsuperscript{65}; a crypt accessible from the church only through a narrow secret passage in the north wall, and in whose chambers some singular and terrible things were discovered[,] […] including four mothers with infants of disturbingly strange appearance. These infants died soon after exposure to the light; a circumstance which the doctors thought rather merciful.\textsuperscript{66}

Consistent with the meta-narrative pattern of reverse colonization, which is itself the racist expression of the anterior form of the gothic tale, the monster is encountered, endured, and finally defeated. But this time in strictly Lovecraftian terms; the middle sequence of “the monster terrifies” is presented as the brain-blasting trauma of epistemic rupture.

Avenues of limitless night seemed to radiate in every direction, till one might fancy that here lay the root of the contagion destined to sicken and swallow cities, and engulf nations in the foeter of hybrid pestilence. Here cosmic sin had entered, and festered by an unhallowed rites had commenced the grinning march of death that was to rot us all to fungous abnormalities too hideous for the grave’s holding. […] The world and Nature were helpless against such assaults from unsealed wells of night, nor could any sign or prayer check the Walpurgis-riot of horror which had come when a sage with a hateful key had stumbled on a horde with the locked and brimming coffer of transmitted daemon-lore.\textsuperscript{67}

In a similar manner, the “exorcism,” or “the monster is expelled,” sequence is staged as both a critique of Kant and as a re-affirmation of racist paranoia. The irreducible diversity of the noume-

\textsuperscript{65} Described as “nominally Catholic.” Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 144.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 141.
nal realm is safely “exorcised” through the arbitrary reassertion of ratio and “human measure.”

*Of course it was a dream* […]. But at the time it was all horrifyingly real, and nothing can ever efface the memory of those knighted crypts, those titan arcades, and those half-formed shapes of hell that strode gigantically in silence holding half-eaten things whose still surviving portions screamed for mercy or laughed with madness.68

Secondly, the attempted reverse colonization is defeated by means of a displacement that moves toward future time — within a Spenglerian world-history, decay and downfall are inevitable, although the apocalypse may be preempted by means of surveillance and intervention.

The soul of the beast is omnipresent and triumphant, and Red Hook’s legions of blare-eyed, pockmarked youths still chant and curse and howl as they file from abyss to abyss, none knows whence or whither, pushed on by blind laws of biology which they may never understand. As of old, more people enter Red Hook than leave it on the landward side, and there are already rumors of new canals running underground to certain centers of traffic in liquor and less mentionable things.69

An expressly parapolitical reading of “The Horror at Red Hook” should be easy to make out. The subversive “affect” of the text ultimately relies upon the dual reading — one biological, the other political — that the hybridity of monstrosity, represented as racial degeneration, permits. For Levy,

It is […] useful to say that a monster is not *by nature* fantastic. It becomes truly so only if it manifests itself outside

68 Ibid., 140. Emphasis added.
69 Ibid., 145.
all systems and all doctrines. Animated with a perverse autonomy, it must assert itself in total freedom. […] [Monsters] are characterized above all by their hybridism — a hybridism that is not the simple juxtaposition of disparate elements as in some monsters of antiquity, but as a result of a sort of contamination or collective pollution.70

The “monsters” of Red Hook themselves, therefore, “are not the objects of fear, but rather the paradigm crisis that they symbolize”71: alterity. More specifically, the alterity of the monsters and what they signify “is raised to the extreme degree by a systematic emphasis on its complete and utter incompatibility with anything known by means of the senses or reason, understandable by logic, or expressible in discursive language.”72 The issue of the tactile sensibility, or the crypto-materialism of the grotesque (as opposed to the always immeasurable magnitude of the sublime), is essential for the aesthetic effect of cosmic horror. In Lovecraft’s own words,

It may be well to remark […] that occult believers are probably less effective than materialists in delineating the spectral and the fantastic, since to them the phantom world is so commonplace a reality that they tend to refer to it with less awe, remoteness, and impressiveness than do those who see in it an absolute and stupendous violation of the natural order.73

As Houellebecq has once again rightly noted, “Howard Phillips Lovecraft was not a theoretician[…] […] by introducing materialism into the heart of fear and fantasy, HPL created a new genre. […] There exists no horror less psychological, less debatable.”74 It is this critical highlighting of bodily horror, or horror sensori-

70 Levy, Lovecraft, 56.
71 Martin, H.P. Lovecraft, 178.
74 Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft, 46.
um, which enables Lovecraft’s singular appropriation of the phenomenological aspect of the grotesque: “Lovecraft’s rationalistic intellect could conceive no weirder or more bizarre happening than a dislocation of natural law. […] Being a materialist, Lovecraft created the materialistic tale of supernatural horror.”

There is considerable debate within Lovecraft scholarship as to the exact nature and role played by the “supernatural” within the Cthulhu Mythos. Although nearly all of Lovecraft’s classic early texts are clearly within the supernatural vein, such as “The Outsider” (1921) and “The Festival,” many of the tales of the Mythos, including “The Whisperer in Darkness” and “The Shadow Out of Time,” seek to provide a crypto-scientific “explanation” of the Old Ones by classifying them as extra-terrestrials. My own feeling is that the issue can best be resolved by holding to one of the central conceits of the Mythos that what is conventionally denoted as “black magic” is really a highly encoded form of a radically alternative physics. Hence the extreme, and grotesquely repulsive, materiality of Cthulhu at the shrieking climax of the seminal text: the fleeing seamen, desperate to escape the pursuing anti-god, turn their own vessel against “him(?),” using it as a projectile.

Slowly, amidst the distorted horrors of that indescribable scene, [the vessel Alert] began to churn the lethal waters; whilst on the masonry of that charnel shore that was not of earth the titan Thing from the stars slavered and gibbered like Polyphemus cursing the fleeing ship of Odysseus. Then, bolder than the storied Cyclops, great Cthulhu slid greasily into the water and began to pursue with vast wave-raising strokes of cosmic potency. […] There was a mighty eddying and foaming in the noisome brine, and as the steam mounted higher and higher the brave Norwegian drove his vessel head on against the pursuing jelly which rose above the unclean froth like the stern of a daemon galleon. The awful squid-head with writhing feelers came nearly up to the bowsprit of

75 Berruti, 408, fn. 41.
the sturdy yacht, but Johansen drove on relentlessly. There was a bursting as of an exploding bladder, a slushy nastiness as of a cloven sunfish, a stench as of a thousand opened graves, and a sound that the chronicler could not put on paper. For an instant the ship was befouled by an acrid and blinding green cloud, and then there was only a venomous seething astern; where—God in heaven!—the scattered plasticity of that nameless sky-spawn was nebulously *recombining* in its hateful original form, while its distance widened every second as the *Alert* gained impetus from its mounting steam.76

Even more audacious is the descent into full-blown pseudo-science in the late masterpiece “At the Mountains of Madness” (1931) which features, among other things, the content of a medical autopsy of the remains of a deceased Elder One.

Important discovery. […] Arrangements reminds one of certain monsters of primal myth, especially fabled Elder Things in *Necronomicon*. […] Objects are eight feet long all over. Six-foot five-ridged barrel torso 3.5 feet central diameter, 1 foot end diameters. Dark grey, flexible, and infinitely tough. Seven-foot membraneous wings of same colour, found folded, spread out furrows between ridges.77 Wing framework tubular or glandular, of lighter grey, with orifices as wing

76 Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu,” 155 and 156.
77 See Kayser on the flying rodent as a signifier of the grotesque. “The grotesque animal incarnate […] is the bat […] the very name of which points to an unnatural fusion of organic realms concretized in this ghostly creature. And strange habits complement its strange appearance. An animal of the dusk, the bat flies noiselessly, has exceedingly subtle senses, and moves so rapidly that one could easily suspect it of sucking the blood of sleeping animals. It is strange even in the state of repose when its wings cover it like a coat and it hangs, head down, from a rafter, more like a piece of dead matter than a living thing.” Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, 183. One of the most unique, and uncanny, characteristics of the Old Ones is that they undertake their periodic interstellar migrations by means of winged flight — vast waves of Goya-esque bat-like aliens flapping through the absolute darkness of the cosmic abyss is an image not readily dismissed.
tips. Spread wings have serrated edges. Around equator, one at central apex of each of the five vertical, stave-like ridges, are five systems of light grey flexible arms or tentacles found tightly folded to torso but expansible to maximum length of over 3 feet. Like arms of primitive crinoid. Single stalks 3 inches diameter branch after 6 inches into five sub-stalks, each of which branches after 8 inches into five small, tapering tentacles or tendrils, giving each stalk a total of 25 tentacles. […] Cannot yet assign positively to animal or vegetable kingdom, but odds now favour animal.78

A more perfect (and deliberate) account of the heterogeneous nature of the grotesque can be neither imagined nor improved upon79; “the grotesque consists in the very contrast that ominously permits of no reconciliation […] [which] totally destroys the order and deprives us of our foothold.”80 For Houellebecq, the style of scientific reporting adopted by Lovecraft “in his later stories operates according to the following principle: the more monstrous and inconceivable the events and entities described, the more precise and clinical the description. A scalpel is needed

78 Lovecraft, “At the Mountains of Madness,” 19–21. Compare this passage with Kayser’s historical account of the emergence of the grotesque: “By the word grottesco the Renaissance, which used it to designate a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one—a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid.” Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, 21. The pseudo-clinical revelation of the radical hybridity of the Old Ones is discursively tantamount to the suspension of transcendental reason in the unmediated encounter with the grotesque.

79 For Houellebecq, Lovecraft “is the first to have discovered the poetic impact of topology; to have shuddered in the face of Goedel’s work on incomplete systems of formal logic. The vaguely repulsive implications of such strange axiomatic constructs were undoubtedly necessary for the dark entities of the Cthulhu cycle to emerge.” Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft, 75. This reenforces Lovecraft’s status as the maestro of fusion monstrosity.

80 Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, 59.
to dissect the un-nameable.” I agree, but I would go one step further. It is the novel materialism of Lovecraft’s weird tale, the by-product of the artistic re-imagining of a virulent racism in accordance with the canons of the aesthetics of the grotesque, that allows him to successfully pull off his greatest literary trick: the hybridization of the grotesque with the sublime. The unprecedented juxtaposition of the abject bodies of the Old Ones with the formalist epistemology of the medical examination discursively migrates the text from the merely grotesque to the (post-)Kantian sublime — the faculties of the cogito itself are parodied through their naïve deployment in the presence of the inconceivably and irreducibly heterogeneous object that is itself the signifier of an infinite time–space continuum.

In the final analysis this heterogeneity is no less a political problem than it is a biological one: alterity renders the parapo-

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81 Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft, 79. Emphasis in the original. See also ibid., 74: “If there is a tone one does not expect to find in the horror story, it’s that of a dissection report. […] It would seem to be a discovery he made alone: that using science’s vocabulary can serve as an extraordinary stimulant to the poetic imagination. The precise, minutely detailed content, dense and theoretical, encyclopedic in its perspective, produces a hallucinatory and thrilling effect.” This accords perfectly with Harpham’s definition of the grotesque: “In all of the examples that I have been considering, the sense of the grotesque arises with the perception that something is illegitimately in something else. The most mundane of figures, this metaphor of co-presence, in, also harbors the essence of the grotesque, the sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together.” Harpham, On the Grotesque, 11.

82 It should also be pointed out that this maneuver enables him to introduce an element of fascination, or mysterium, into his account of the uncanny Wholly Other. As Otto brilliantly expresses it, the “daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind as an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own.” Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 31. By the end of this weird tale, the narrator has become hopelessly seduced by the artistic and scientific achievements of the Elder Ones.

83 The “multiform descriptive methods of science […] all serve to evoke a multi-faceted universe where the most heterogeneous fields of knowledge intersect and converge to generate the poetic trance that accompanies the revelation of forbidden truths.” Houellebecq, H.P. Lovecraft, 76–77.
political “nameless” inherently inassimilable into the onto-political discursive framework of liberalism, which is governed by an un-reconstituted representational theory of language. Lovecraft’s racially spawned monsters (or Wholly Others), whose hybridity is the sign of miscegenation, double as the signifiers of the failure of orthodox liberalism: as the cross-bred hybrid, they are the unassimilable remnant within the ultra-neutralism of the bourgeois politics of modernity — the bearers of a radical, but indivisible, subjectivity, a sensible diversity that cannot be made subject to the requirements of the ratio of the public state.

Singular analogies seem to be established between the foreigner and the monster, between the immigrant Kurd or Chinese and the “outsider.” For Lovecraft […] the displaying of these execrable mutants seems perhaps, in an obscure and confusing way, a testimonial to the failure of America’s politics of racial assimilation, a deliberate rejection of the notion of the “melting pot,” which forms so integral a part of the American dream.84

It is not unreasonable to view what is conventionally denoted conspiracy theory as the discursive “residue” of the crisis or state of emergency following the collective realization of the failure of liberal (neutralist) assimilation; the irreducible “diversity” of the Other yields the pluralistic exercise of an extra-judicial clandestine power, the phantasmagorical “Fifth Column.”

It is the Kurds, we note, those foreigners with repugnant faces, who by their impious cults have revived certain sleeping forces of evil. Clandestinely installed amid garbage and stench, in one of the many areas where no efficacious police control is possible, they support this secret horror, which, by slow internal corruption, insidiously undermines the foundation of the most prestigious city in the United States. Under the skyscrapers of New York, these subterranean avenues

84 Levy, Lovecraft, 61.
branch out, opening on infamous cesspools, flowing into black and putrid rivers where primordial horrors swim.\footnote{Ibid., 66.}

The unassimilable nature of the Monster/Wholly Other serves as the semiotic precondition for the emergence of the extra-judicial (non-rational, or “anti-Euclidean”) parapolitical space of a race-based conspiratorial politics, grounded upon an irreducible moral and epistemological relativism: “They form, at the heart of American society, irreducible, unassimilable nuclei, which menace it from within.”\footnote{Ibid., 90.} Within the referential system of the Cthonoi, they are the black and mindless denizens of the anti-demi-god of liminal spaces and thresholds, YOG-SOTHOTH THE ALL-IN-ONE, THE ONE-IN-ALL (a.k.a., THE LURKER AT THE THRESHOLD; THE KEY TO THE GATE, WHEREBY THE SPHERES MEET\footnote{Harms, \emph{The Cthulhu Mythos Encyclopedia}, 327–28.}) who, along with the other ultra-nomadic power, Cthulhu (whose worshippers are malformed mulattoes), are the primary subjects of the master-text of clandestine reality, the \emph{Necronomicon}: “The Inadmissible, which is also the Abominable […]. The Impossible, which is the Evil, gnaws secretly at the very foundation of American civilization.”\footnote{Levy, \emph{Lovecraft}, 63.} In short, the anti-gods of the Cthonoi are the criminal sovereigns of parapolitics: “criminals behaving as sovereigns and sovereigns behaving as criminals in a systematic ways.”\footnote{Cribb, “Introduction: Parapolitics, Shadow Governance and Criminal Sovereignty,” 1.} The ultimate blasphemous truth is simply this: the Old Ones, the denizens of the parallel domains, are the true creators of the visible realms.

\[V\]ertebrates, as well as an infinity of other life-forms — animal and vegetable, marine, terrestrial, and aerial — were the products of unguided evolution acting on life-cells made by the Old Ones but escaping beyond their radius of attention. They had been suffered to develop unchecked because they
had not come in conflict with the dominant beings. Bother-some forms, of course, were mechanically exterminated. It interested us to see in some of the very last and most deca-dent sculptures a shambling primitive mammal, used sometimes for food and sometimes as an amusing buffoon by [the Old Ones], whose vaguely simian and human foreshadowings were unmistakable.90

Cosmic disinterestism with a grotesque vengeance.91

The lynchpin of the grotesque that underlies the meta-narra-tive conceit of the Mythos is that the (medically dissected) Elder Things of “At the Mountains of Madness” are identical with the (clairvoyantly announced) Old Ones cited in the Necronomicon of Abdul Al-Hazred. The shadowy presence of the “mad Arab” takes on an even greater significance that Lovecraft consciously allows when we see him within the terms not of literary cosmic horror but of parapolitical metaphor. In his mock account of “The History of the Necronomicon,” Lovecraft provides us with the following: A “mad poet” originally from Sanaa in Yemen, c. 700 CE, who

spent ten years alone in the great southern desert of Ara-bia—the Roba el Khaliyeh or ‘Empty Space’ of the an-cients — and ‘Dahna’ or ‘Crimson’ desert of the modern Ar-abs, which is held to be inhabited by protective evil spirits and monsters of death. […] He was only an indifferent Mos-lem, worshipping unknown entities whom he called Yog-Sothoth and Cthulhu.92

90 Lovecraft, “At the Mountains of Madness,” 63.
91 “Lovecraft never passes up an opportunity to diminish human accomplish-ments. […] The guiding principle [of the Cthulhu Mythos is always] the same: the utter decimation [sic] of human self-importance by the attribu-tion of a grotesque or contemptible origin of our species.” Joshi, H.P. Love-craft: The Decline of the West, 142 and 141. Lovecraft’s paramount concern was with abjection.
In other words: a deranged Arab visionary, in occult communion with invisible global forces, who has secretly wandered the shadowy domains of Arabia and Yemen, and then created a worldwide underground cult whose followers, penetrating the hidden byways and passages of the grotesque political bodies and spaces of diverse world-cities, have formed themselves into an underground anti-religion/death-cult committed to the overthrow of the West and the destruction of a civilization grounded upon pure reason through the performance of encrypted blasphemous rites.

This is almost too good to be true.