

THE UNKNOWN AND THE UNFAMILIAR:
DEPICTIONS OF THE MONSTER IN LOVECRAFT AND MIÉVILLE

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BY

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DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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ISTANBUL, 2023

PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

The present study compared selected works of H.P. Lovecraft and China Miéville in terms of the representations of monster figures by creating a theoretical framework using Lovecraft's "Five Definitive Elements of Weird Literature". A comparative foundation was first laid down by examining the etymology of the word monster throughout history, as well as touching upon Saussure's theories of language. Following this, an intrinsic analysis of Lovecraft's three selected works was made. The analysis highlighted the importance of factors such as cosmicism, and fear of the unknown, as well as the importance of human insignificance in the narration. Additionally, the uncanny in both Jentsch's and Freud's definition was included for a later comparison. The lack of context in details regarding the monsters was also highlighted in accordance with the established importance of fear of the unknown in Weird Literature. Then the same analysis was done on Miéville after a glimpse of his past with tabletop games such as "Dungeons and Dragons", and the importance worldbuilding has for him. Following an analysis of *Bas-Lag*, a comparison was made based on the five definitive elements by first interpreting them on what could they refer to, and how the two works handled them in this context. The results from examination through the monster representation, cosmicism, fear of the unknown and the five elements helped the study argue the point that; The monster representation functioned as the source of paranoia and uncanny in both the works. Yet, while Lovecraftian narrative's monsters achieved the feeling of uncanny by presenting a small piece of the whole; Miéville's *Bas-Lag* did the same with a mirrored approach of a key piece missing from the whole.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, H.P. Lovecraft'ın "Tuhaf Edebiyat"'ın beş tanımlayıcı ögesi olarak belirlediği maddeleri kullanarak teorik bir çerçeve oluşturuldu. Bunun aracılığı ile H.P. Lovecraft ve China Miéville'nin seçilmiş eserleri canavar figürlerinin temsilleri açısından karşılaştırıldı. Karşılaştırmanın temelini oluşturmak için önce tarih boyunca canavar kelimesinin etimolojisi incelendi ve bunun yanında Saussre'nin dil teorilerine değinildi. Bunu takiben Lovecraft'ın seçilen üç eserinin içsel bir analizi yapıldı. Analizde, kozmizm ve bilinmeyenden korkma (Fear of the unknown) gibi elementlerin öneminin ve anlatımdaki insan önemsizliği ve küçüklüğünün etkisi vurgulandı. Ek olarak, Jentsch ve Freud'un tanımındaki tekinsiz (uncanny) daha sonraki bir karşılaştırma için dahil edildi. Canavarlarla ilgili ayrıntı ve bilgideki eksikliğin tuhaf edebiyatındaki ve bilinmeyenden korkma faktöründeki önemi vurgulandı. Daha sonra aynı analiz, "Dungeons and Dragons" gibi masa üstü oyunları ile olan geçmişi ve dünya kurmanın (worldbuilding) onun için önemi incelendikten sonra Miéville'nin Bas-Lag hikayeleri için yapıldı. Bas-Lag analizinin ardından, beş tanımlayıcı unsurun önce ne anlama gelebileceğini yorumlayıp, bu yorumlamaya dayalı olarak iki eserin bu bağlamda her unsuru nasıl ele alındığı incelenen bir karşılaştırma yapılmıştır. Canavar temsili, kozmizm, bilinmeyen korkusu ve beş element üzerinden yapılan bu incelemeden çıkan sonuç, çalışmanın şu noktayı savunmasına yardımcı oldu; Canavar temsili her iki eserde de paranoya ve tekinsizliğin kaynağı olmuştur. Ancak Lovecraft'ın anlatımındaki canavarlar bu bütünün küçük bir parçasını sunarak bu tekinsiz hissiyatı elde ederken; Miéville'nin Bas-Lag'ında, bütünde eksik olan bir anahtar parçanın eksikliği ile aynı etki elde edilir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As months of labor is poured into one's work, the most priceless gift of all throughout this journey is the care and support given to you by your most loved ones, whether it is an affirming pat on the back, or a thoughtful cup of tea after a tiresome day.

This humble work of mine I dedicate to my sweet and loving mother Bahar Çökmez who continues to help me at every step in my life, and my adorable cat Maya, who's irreplaceable company by my side kept my spirits high.

I would like to thank my teacher Associate Prof. Dr. Catherine MacMillan for being my thesis supervisor first as her priceless guidance through this endeavor made this study possible. I am ever grateful for having had the chance to learn from her.

I would also like to thank all my previous teachers in my life of education, and a dedicated thank you to Prof.Dr. Gülşen SAYIN for inspiring me to continue studying literature with her lectures.

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In the field of fantastic fiction, the question of world-building is not uncontroversial. But I grew up with ‘Dungeons and Dragons,’ so that whole world-building thing is very close to my heart. (Miéville, n.d).....	58
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of creation, sentient life forms that are capable of differentiating danger from safety have always treated their surroundings in a spectrum of dangerous and hostile to the safe and friendly. In this context, what we can't recognize and categorize has always been associated instead with danger, sometimes also with curiosity. It is this notion that I believe underscores the monsters in H.P. Lovecraft's work. The portrayal of these otherworldly beings in his stories, and in their movie and media adaptations, inspirations, as well as the source material itself, has always emphasized their unfamiliarity. This trait of not being associated with the massive lexicon of human vocabulary or centuries-old knowledge reflects the greatest source of immersive fear that Lovecraft made use of within his works, the fear of the unknown. A saying frequently found amongst several commentators and critics of modern-day horror media is along the lines of the phrase: "What you can't see, is always scarier than what you can." . And to a great extent, this has been proven, as this is what stems from the aforementioned primal urge of self-preservation, and the mental state of recognizing the unknown as a threat. This can be seen in movies and stories alike along the history of storytelling. Thus, movies like *The Blair Witch Project* by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, or *Bird Box* by Susanne Bier have greatly made use of an unknown or incomprehensible figure as have short stories such as *It Comes Out At Night* by Dennis Etchinson or *The House On The Borderlands* by William Hope Hodgson.

Lovecraft's intricate toying with this part of the human psyche is equally easy to see when it is understood in the context of the period in which the stories were composed. Before and during the two World Wars, humanity had already discovered

all the landmarks and regions of the globe, except for the two other planes of inhabitation, the deep ocean, and space, which remained beyond human reach. If we take time to thoroughly examine the depictions of the Lovecraftian horrors, the distant aquatic physique that's akin to no known fish or sea creature is apparent in some original stories with their tentacles, fins, scales, and deep dark purple color schemes. This apparent aquatic resemblance, I believe, can be greatly attributed to the fact that mankind, more so at that time, had little to no information on what lies beneath the deep bodies of water. This can be connected to thalassophobia, a fear of deep bodies of water and the ocean, as the primal urge of concern and dread is mostly attributed to two things that are equally apparent in the horror depicted in Lovecraft's works; firstly the feeling of incapability, of being unable to do anything and being completely defenseless, and secondly the feeling of being at a complete loss regarding what lurks beneath the deep dark unlit bodies of water.

The combination of the uncertainty of the situation with the apparent and almost unguaranteed struggle for survival is something we can see in Lovecraft's work. The antagonistic force of the monsters in Lovecraft's work is depicted in such a way that even the mere sight of them strikes fear and madness into the minds of feeble human beings, producing the very same incapability of acting that is caused by a phobia such as thalassophobia. Similarly, if we consider the elements of cosmicism and cosmic horror, the similarity between these two is strong enough to further facilitate this argument. Scientifically speaking, space is comparatively the least habitable place for mankind. These days space is "least habitable" rather than uninhabitable, as we've already established space stations and are gradually working towards life outside the borders of Earth, ushering in a new space age perhaps within the current century. However, on that thought, the fact remains that at the time of

these stories' writing, such things were nothing more than conceptions and what ifs. Therefore it is easy to attribute space and the cosmic forces of the universe in these stories to the complete unknown. The concept of the sleeping city in Lovecraftian narrative, as well as the depiction of the old gods as ancient and otherworldly beings that exceed planets in size, emphasize the same feeling of powerlessness, in addition to describing a completely unknown environment where human beings cannot even exist. One thing the deep dark oceans and the limitless space share is incapability, the very same theme that can easily be considered one of the key pieces of cosmic horror. Places such as space or deep bodies of water are domains where the limits of the human body are evident, as these places are where we are not able to breathe, let alone traverse, nor live for longer than seconds without assistance.

The second characteristic of these Lovecraftian horrors has always been the unrecognizable physique of what can essentially be called a mass of squirming dark flesh and several mouths and eyes (eg: The Fiend of a Thousand Faces). Similarly, the human characters that are occupied with the unusual traits of the universe within the narrative are also often portrayed as residents of the Orient, the eastern part of the world, or anything culturally distant from the "norm". The fictional "Mad Arab" Abdul Alhazred from the first of the trio of short stories is one of the reasons I've brought up this example, as Lovecraft's choice for portraying a mad character who is involved with the elements of cosmic horror in the universe is from the Middle East. While whether if this is an example of minority misrepresentation or not can be a debate for another paper, his choice of character design for an insane character is perfectly in line with the Orientalist discourse, as Edward W. Said has described in his book *Orientalism*:

Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest mission civilizatrice. (Said, 1978)

Whether this cultural opposition, reflecting the other and the monster alike, can be perceived as a notion of orientalist mentality or not could be a research topic for another paper. However, due to the focus of this research, the example was primarily brought up with the author's portrayal of an insane character in mind.

Thus, the importance of the unknown should be apparent enough from our previous paragraphs, it is within this field of comparison that the depictions of monsters in the "New Weird" genre can be differentiated from more traditional depictions of monsters by introducing culture, knowledge, and context into its forms. The races of Bas-lag in Mieville's stories, as well as their names (which when compared to Lovecraftian monsters sound like incomprehensible rambling), possess a certain cultural and historical significance. They share both human and animal characteristics, there is little unfamiliar about them, as the resemblance to our world and mythology is strong. Importantly, at the time these stories that belong to the New Weird genre were written, humans were already able to explore beyond the boundaries of space and sea. What was previously left unknown in Lovecraft's period has now been almost completely, if not totally explored thanks to scientific and technological development. As the unknown is gradually erased, there is less and less scope for writers to create an atmosphere that thrives on the fear of the unknown. It is

for this specific reason that I think Weird Literature's elements that emphasize the fear of the unknown are a byproduct of its period. And once again, it is for the very same reason that I can hypothesize that New Weird, as a genre, is the inevitable evolution of the Weird Literature genre, as it is a continuation of the predecessor, with the removal of the unknown, as culture, knowledge, history, and context is further weaved into the narrative of the "other".

Lovecraft's Five Definitive Elements primarily refer to a specific paragraph in his essay "*Notes on Writing Weird Fiction*", where he states:

Each weird story—to speak more particularly of the horror type—seems to involve five definite elements: (a) some basic, underlying horror or abnormality—condition, entity, etc.—, (b) the general effects or bearings of the horror, (c) the mode of manifestation—object embodying the horror and phenomena observed—, (d) the types of fear-reaction pertaining to the horror, and (e) the specific effects of the horror in relation to the given set of conditions. (Lovecraft, 1937)

Almost in a guidebook fashion, he tells the readers what to look for when reading a fictive work of weird literature, and what to aim to achieve when writing one. The expansion and analysis of the five elements, then, serves as a structural basis in order to examine both his own work and Miéville's work through the same scope. The structure of this research starts by building sufficient background information, primarily in the area of semiotics in order to examine the historical usage of the word "Monster", along with a few examples from contemporary and modern works. Here, I intend to reaffirm the idea that the word itself has not only shifted in terms of the kind

of unnatural creatures it describes in fiction, but the fundamentals of the word have undergone variation as both the figurative and literal meanings gradually changed over time. Following this, the thesis focuses on the primary concepts that make up the body of horror writing in the case of Lovecraft, and to an extent, Miéville. Here, the research includes information about the concepts of cosmicism, and attempts to build connections to various phobias, such as thalassophobia, a fear of deep bodies of water. The importance of human insignificance and inability against something they can't comprehend is also thoroughly explained here to explain the idea behind cosmicism. Then this established information is once again examined, this time through the concept of the uncanny, according to the interpretations of both Jentsch and Freud.

Finally, the importance of the fear of the unknown is also explained, as this concept will be the centerpiece of the research for both authors. The research will then shift focus to Lovecraft's primary works concerning the Cthulhu mythos, using the five elements, as well as the concept of cosmic horror and fear of the unknown to examine what the monstrous figures and the monster idea is used for extensively in the works, emphasizing the importance of the lack of context. Thus, the analysis of Miéville's work focuses on the concept of the uncanny. Finally, the concluding chapter compares both authors' works based on the five elements, and, thus, cosmic horror and fear of the unknown. The conclusion is reached that while monsters in Lovecraft's work, as horrors that are not meant to be understood, bring their sense of the unknown and lostness by showing a fraction of the whole, the opposite often takes place in Miéville's work as the majority of complete races and monsters of Bas-Lag are understandable and comprehensible, albeit lacking key and distinct features so that most of them never ever truly resemble humans. Regardless of their differences, this research interprets both the works through their usage of monsters, builds towards the

same concept of the uncanny, one by only showing a fraction of the whole, and the other the opposite.

1.1. Literature Review

A multitude of research papers, as expected, have already been written on Lovecraft and Miéville from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Some of them have been carried out from a comparative perspective on the two authors. C. H. Sederholm & J. A. Weinstock's "*The Age of Lovecraft*", for instance, is an extensive study of modern horror and its inspiration by Lovecraft. In an interview about his Lovecraftian inspiration, Miéville (2016) states: "I suspect that like a reasonable number of people my age and people who are in "geek culture," I came to him via role-playing games. It was through *The Call of Cthulhu*, so I was one of those people who got it the wrong way round." He thus alludes to the fact that many contemporary titles, video games, movies, or fiction, are falsely attributed to the "Lovecraftian" genre. Another article by Tony Venezia called *Weird Fiction: Dandelion meets China Miéville* briefly touches upon the subject of defining Miéville's genre of writing, adding that his incorporation of different elements from different genres differentiates itself from weird literature and can be said to form a new genre, New Weird, blending fantastic fiction and his inspiration from Weird Literature .

While comparative works that specifically focus on the monster representation are not as widespread, a PhD thesis by Robert James O'Connor for the University of Leeds, focuses on the monster figure, which naturally encourages an examination of hybridity and liminality. The work demonstrates how Miéville uses hybridity and liminality to critique the contemporary late-capitalist social landscape. Another comprehensive research project that includes more than these two authors was the

seventh volume of *The Popular and the Weird: H.P Lovecraft and Twenty-First-Century Adaptation* by Studies in Gothic Fiction of Cardiff University, comparing Miéville and Lovecraft along with other authors, emphasizes the source of the mingled fear and fascination, and how Lovecraft's horror focuses on what's outside ordinary human perceptions and experience, essentially a transference of fear from the everyday world to something beyond it, which China Miéville himself identified as "Ontological" terror.

A significant portion of the comparative works on these two authors often focus on the direct comparison of the two genres, or the differences between New Weird and Weird Literature. The intention of this thesis while focusing on Lovecraft's five definite elements of horror is to distinguish its contents by narrowing down this approach by specifically focusing on the representation and depiction of monsters. More specifically, it focuses on how horror is portrayed through the usage of the monster figure based on their physique, social structure, civilization, and their partial resemblance to human life. The resulting research contributes to the literature on both authors, and to the fields of semiotics, cosmic horror, fear of the unknown, and, lastly, the importance of worldbuilding and context, or the lack thereof, in horror fiction. In addition, as this research focuses on matters of semiotics and resemblance, it may also contribute to the literature that looks into the uncanny in the works of both authors, either by Jentsch's description, or Freud's.

Lastly, the final aim of this thesis is to highlight the importance and contribution of the unknown in horror narrative. The unsettling sense of dread and uncanniness provided by an apparent lack of context, and a sense of incompleteness in the information portrayed to the audience, in short, the fear of the unknown, is in a sense the most crucial aspect of this research. The unique contribution to the literature

on Lovecraft and Miéville will be the exploration of how both authors greatly make use of this phenomenon, yet differ immensely in their methods and execution, and how each of the five elements of weird literature or cosmic horror revolves around this concept of fear.



CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Due to its diverse nature, the word monster has created a vast field of interpretation in the field of semiotics. A word we use to describe a common object like a chair may signify objects with a different design or color. Yet based on function and purpose, there's a substantial consistency, as almost everything we use the word for had the same reason to be produced. This consistency can, to some extent, also be seen in the figurative use of the word, most often signifying a position of power. However, much in accordance with Saussure's view of language in its two functions, namely both as a system of signs, and a social phenomenon, the appearance of some words evolving into drastically different meanings like an organic being, compared to a simple case of a signifier attached to a signified, makes itself more apparent with certain words that are hard to pinpoint. As he put this into words more clearly by saying that time changes all things; there is no reason why language should escape this universal law. (Saussre,1916)

In the case of the word "Monster", even before looking into the differences between the figurative and the literal use of the word, we can certainly see that no two monsters from two literary eras of fantasy or gothic are the same, either in their design or in their purpose. Despite this, however, it would still pose a challenge to conclude whether this variation is merely because “monster” is an umbrella term or not. This is because the attempt to draw a clearer judgment on this is further clouded by the nature of the word upon looking at its history. We're near-guaranteed to find a contradictory example to any characteristics we may try to attribute to the word. Even incredibly broad and general classifications like simply calling them all evil or beings bearing immoral characteristics would both be contradicted by Frankenstein's Monster .

Similarly, attempting to classify them according to their inhuman looks is contradicted by the vampires of early gothic-like Count Dracula and modern-day fantasy interpretations in video games and novels.

Similarly, the process of a character becoming a monster in a fictive work is not always an instant one. An excerpt from Cassandra Eason's *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols* describes the Medusa, who was:

...not always a hideous monster as described by the patriarchal Greeks. It has been suggested that Medusa was once part of the Libyan Triple Goddesses (sometimes called Ath-enna- associated with the Egyptian Neith), the primal goddess of fate and weaving whose name meant I am sprung from myself. It is said that Medusa, in this earlier form, was Athene's true mother because another name for Medusa was Metis. (Eason,2008)

This creates an unusual situation where yet another monster in mythology is a parent to another, well-respected goddess. This further challenges the definition of the word, as we know Medusa was not always a monster but was once a beautiful girl. She was transformed into a Gorgon by Athena after Poseidon raped her in Athena's temple. Therefore, while in a sense she was still born from an immoral transgression of a religious place, this is still a case of an innocent human being turned into a “monster”. Just as these contradictions don't end with the physical depictions connected to the term “Monster”, moving onto the figurative side of the word, the contradictions seem just as endless. A horrendous act against all common sense and

morals may be called a monstrous act. But in a much more humorous situation, a person may also call someone else a monster upon watching them devour an immense amount of food in a short period. Even this example itself can be easily branched out as it can carry both a light-hearted positive connotation, as well as a negative one, comparing the person to a glutton.

While on the topic of the figurative meanings of the word, even two arguably similar monsters in two different works of fiction, despite both being pursuer figures, can have drastically different functions in their respective works. Purpose, in this context, refers to their in-text characteristics like their mission, looks, characteristics, race and type, while function refers to the function, or role, they play in the narrative.

A most fitting example of this could be two monsters from contemporary fiction, where authors gradually have a bigger information cluster to refer to. The two examples are both from multi-platform franchises that span across books, comics, video games, and movies. The „Nemesis“ from Shinji Mikami's „Resident Evil“ (CAPCOM, 1999) and the „Dahaka“ from Jordan Mechner's „Prince of Persia“ (Ubisoft, 2004) both serve as inescapable figures to the respective protagonists of their titles. Both of them are tall, menacing, supposedly invulnerable, and relentless figures that chase their targets from the start of their story to its end, where the protagonists finally overcome and defeat them. Their resemblance doesn't end there, as both protagonists also refer to them as “The Pursuer “, while both of them also end their stories with the deaths of their pursuers.

Yet despite their identical function of being an obstacle to the protagonists, there are considerable differences between the two monsters. The existence of

Nemesis makes a statement about the lengths and destruction mankind is willing to carry out for profit, as it is a bio-weapon created by the game's fictional company, Umbrella, all for profit. In this context, Nemesis is merely following orders to chase the protagonist Jill Valentine across Raccoon City in the middle of the virus outbreak, all for Umbrella Corporation to convince potential future buyers by displaying his combat capabilities, as well as relative intelligence, capable of taking orders. In stark contrast to this, the Dahaka in Prince of Persia, acts as the embodiment of time's will, chasing the prince after he attempted to change his fate and gain dominance over time. The Dahaka, despite its similarities in form, purpose, and powers, instead makes a statement against characters that try to take the role of God. This gives us an example of two seemingly invulnerable, towering relentless pursuers that essentially do the same thing but for drastically different causes, showing that even at times when two monsters share the same purpose or origins, they may still end up having different functions in the story, and thus, necessitate different descriptions.

To further complicate things, there are situations in which the term monster is used within its physical context for beings that aren't part of fiction, but our reality, such as the Covid-19 virus which has drastically altered society's shape and lifestyle, similarly to the "Black Death" plague that ravaged Europe centuries ago. According to an article released by the National Center for Biotechnology Information in 2016 regarding a survey in Sub-Saharan Africa which was home to 90% of the world's adolescents with HIV, one of the three themes observed in the responses was that the disease was perceived as a punishment from God or the ancestors.(Pantelic et al. 2016) This is much in line with the original definition of the word monster, given during medieval times. Similarly, in politics several historical figures, particularly between WW1 and WW2, have been frequently referred to as monsters as well, such

as Adolf Hitler or his actions (Kurlander, E. (n.d.). Hitler's Monsters, Grosz, G. (1933-1958) Cain, or Hitler in Hell (Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin). Yet some acts committed by the opposing allied forces have also been deemed "Monstrous" such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a great example to this being Godzilla itself, supported by Peter H. Brothers' splendid analysis; *Mushroom Clouds and Mushroom Men: The Fantastic Cinema of Ishiro Honda* (Brothers, 2009). This claim is further solidified as the credited father of the atomic bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer, used a phrase from the Bhagavad Gita in an interview "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." (Oppenheimer, n.d.). Thus, looking back on the events of the war, he metaphorically compared himself to a monster for what he had created. This also shows that the phrase monster can be easily associated with two opposing factions of the same conflict, demonstrating its inability to be classified in terms of good and evil.

This difficult nature of the word, however, is further intensified with the introduction of Lovecraft's Monsters. The great old one Cthulhu (Lovecraft, 1926), for example, not only exceeds the boundaries of evil and good with his godlike nature, he continues to contradict even this form of thought by his slumber and acting through his cultist worshippers, quite literally fabricating a religion that would otherwise be the opposite of a monstrous order. This even goes as far as the religious phrase "In his house at R'lyeh dead C'thulhu waits dreaming." (Lovecraft, 1926). Yet even in his god-like form, he still contradicts his nature, as we can read within the Lovecraftian mythology. The Outer God Yog-Sothoth is the progenitor of Cthulhu, who is himself described as thirteen iridescent globes, along with his other depictions such as "The Lurker at the Threshold" (Lovecraft, 2020, p. The Dunwich Horror). These are intricately different descriptions that neither fit into a hybrid nature, nor a chaotic

contradiction of nature, but simply depict a cosmic entity of unimaginable power that evokes a feeling of incapability and insanity upon exposure.

These figures in Lovecraft's mythos have their system of cults, worshippers, rituals, and world orders that proceed simultaneously with the lives of humans in these stories, so in a sense, they share characteristics from both sides of the spectrum. To elaborate; while their design doesn't seem to originate from nature itself, it is not a direct perversion of the natural order, as they're great beings within the order they themselves have established, a second nature, to put it in other words. From the figurative perspective, their acts and influence in our world through their cult and rituals cannot be classified as unjust or evil, just as they can't be classified as good and morally correct, as a godly being, in this case, is the judge of itself. Thus, a being that is neither natural nor unnatural, neither lawful nor chaotic, and neither good nor evil, imposes a new challenge to semiotics regarding the word "Monster", as it further broadens the term's complex nature. This issue that stems from the monsters in Lovecraft's fiction challenges the definition of the term given by some sociological studies, such as the description given in John Law's *A Sociology of Monsters, Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, which states that:

Monsters are the embodiment of that which is exiled from the self. Some feminist writers have argued that monsters often represent the wildness which is exiled from women under patriarchal domination, perhaps the lesbian self, and that apparently dichotomous pairs such as Beauty and the Beast, Godzilla and Fay Wray are actually institutions of a healthy female self. (Law, 1991)

The term 'monster' has thus become harder and harder to describe and define, but a broad, and admittedly confusing and complex, attempt to define the word would be as follows: A term with no definite set boundary or context that can be used to portray a figurative title for acts of unusual qualifications and physical beings of different characteristics to our known world.

Regardless of the definitions we as scholars and researchers may try to assign to the word, however, it is safe to assume that the word itself will never truly fit into any of these for more than a short period. This does not include the cases where the word exceeds its boundaries to represent things that other words would normally do. The term "Demon" is the best example I can think of for this, especially in contemporary fantasy fiction. In contemporary fiction, both in its written forms and movie and video game adaptations, regardless of their scientific and futuristic, or medieval and dark setting, the words monster and demon have been proven to be interchangeable. This is truly a testament to the reach of the word "monster" for the simple fact that, while it is perfectly possible to describe any demonic character in a fictional work, (regardless of whether the said being is based on a real or fictive religion, or simply one that's an apostle of an antagonistic force's will) by using the word "monster", it is not possible to describe every monster across the history of fiction as demons.

The word initially meant "an evil spirit, malignant supernatural being, an incubus, a devil", coming from the Latin word, *daemon*, "spirit". This version originated from the Greek term *daimōn* "which also meant "deity, divine power; lesser god; guiding spirit, tutelary deity". The word was split into two terms: "Daemon", which was eventually stylized as "Daimon". The negative connotation

attached to this word has its roots in its usage in Christian Greek translations as the "god of the heathen, heathen idol", as well as "unclean spirit" (Harper, n.d).

Doubtless, however, the term demon itself is by no means limited to only this meaning, and my goal in giving this information isn't to play down the diversity of the word but to show its residence within the umbrella term of monster. Demon, notably, is frequently used in metaphorical ways, for example, where an individual has to "face their demons", most often in the sense of self-redemption, atonement, or achieving a breakthrough over a weakness.

To signify the existence of an immoral, malignant force or being, "monster" is one of the appropriate words we may use in today's world to denote an emphasis on the severity of what we're describing, the roots of the word, however, had a multifaceted history.

early 14c., *monstre*, "malformed animal or human, creature afflicted with a birth defect," from Old French *monstre*, *mostre* "monster, monstrosity" (12c.), and directly from Latin *monstrum* "divine omen (especially one indicating misfortune), portent, sign; abnormal shape; monster, monstrosity," figuratively "repulsive character, object of dread, awful deed, abomination," a derivative of *monere* "to remind, bring to (one's) recollection, tell (of); admonish, advise, warn, instruct, teach," from PIE **moneie-* "to make think of, remind," suffixed (causative) form of root **men-* (1) "to think." (Harper, n.d)

The implication is that the meaning of the word originated from divinity. *Monstrum*, meaning divine omen, indicates misfortune, a harbinger of something terrible, along with the word *monstre* from French, signifying "Malformed animal or

creature afflicted with birth defect” (Harper, n.d.). Thus within the original meaning of the word, the human or animal resemblance, a form of similarity is still present. Similarly, it also seems to have derived from the Latin term “Monstrate” or simply to demonstrate. This suggests that there's still a connotation to something that pre-existed in our world, unlike Lovecraft's monsters which are often depicted as masses of dark-colored flesh with multiple limbs and eyes, the often-noted hybrid nature of the monsters is almost completely absent in the depictions. To further support this claim, we can investigate the history of the early depictions of monsters. Being primarily creatures that are mixtures of different species of animals and humans, these include mythical monsters like centaurs, sphinx, minotaurs.

Marie de France's *Bisclavret* is another 12th-century example. The werewolf in the story is not only depicted as a hybrid between the animal wolf and man, but also a hybrid of two morals and worlds. A man turned into a monster embodying both the ferocious instincts of a wolf, as well as the chivalrous ideals of a noble knight (France & Embleton, 2021, p. *Bisclavret*). From this, we can understand that the term "hybrid" used to describe these creations is not limited to form or race, but rather a hybridization of life from all aspects. The continuation of this line of thought has possibly led to the creation of the Gothic genre, based on the earliest depictions of the monsters of the genre such as Frankenstein's monster or vampires as perversions of the natural order and society in some way or meaning. Whether it is the monster in Frankenstein which results from a man's attempt to take on the role of a creator, or the vampires in other works and their general aversion to sunlight., they form a binary opposition to the society of our world. Perhaps it is at this point that a further deviation has happened with Lovecraft's creation of weird literature. In a sense, the rejection of social norms and nature is taken one step further, so that any kind of

similarity or point of comparison is almost completely omitted, to empower the fear of the unknown.

As time went on, the word's meaning expanded from the physical realm to that of morality and ethics, so that "Monster" was also used to portray a human being that had "Inhuman cruelty or wickedness, a person regarded with horror or moral deformity". We should keep in mind that both in the figurative and literal meanings of the word, the mutual factor here is a deformity. This further supports our earlier argument that the original meaning of the term monstrous is something that is opposed to the social order and nature; as one represents order and correctness, the other signifies chaos and wrongness. The original meaning of the term monster could be seen, then, as a binary opposition with the term nature, as anything against the natural order of things or how things should be can be deemed as a monster.

Within that line of thought, we can make the claim that everything out of ordinary, whether a human being or an animal, could be regarded and titled as a monster, as supported by the Oxford English Dictionary, which provides an example from 1558 stating that:

a woman . . . exercise[ing] weapons" was a "monster in nature" (Oxford English Dictionary). While this might not seem monstrous to a modern audience more accustomed to seeing images of armed female soldiers, for example, this dated application of the term alludes to the fact that it was a strange sight—an "amazing event or occurrence" (Oxford English

Dictionary)—to witness a woman with a weapon.

Furthermore, this image serves one of the monster's main purposes, according to Cohen: the monster is a warning. The image of a woman with a weapon carries implications that threaten traditional gender roles, evoking fear in those invested in patriarchal power structures and warning against the female potential for violence. By looking to the contextual implications of a term's usage, we can learn both about the contemporary culture of the time and about the differences between then and now, between here and there. (OED, n.d.)

Based on the early usage of the word, we can speculate that the fact that the term is affiliated with religious meaning and depictions of divine warnings and ill omens is something that can be attributed to the lack of knowledge and information prevalent in the society of the time regarding life, philosophy, and higher education. To clarify this further, the common people of the period could construe anything unnatural as a religious omen of evil, making the connection that this is a punishment for their wrongdoings. It is safe to say that this is no longer the case for the large majority as in our present day, with the advance of modern science and exploration, we would have to refer to any and each new life form of microscopic size, or any new underwater animal or an insect we've discovered as a monster.

However, this old-fashioned form of thought is still present to a certain extent today, for instance in some religious sects. A few examples of these can be seen in the world where a significant margin of the population (ranging from 70%'s to 30%'s across the last 4 decades) believed the statement that "AIDS might be God's punishment for immoral sexual behavior" (Pantelic et al, 2018). This also further proves the reach of the word monster as an umbrella term. It has been used to portray

creatures, hybrid beings within our physical world, horrendous acts, and normal people with immoral ideologies, as well as diseases that kill millions. Another example can be seen today, as the pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus can be perceived as yet another monster humanity faces. (Social Science Research Council, 2020)

An issue, or what can be perceived as a linguistic matter of debate is the multifaceted nature of some of the words we use in a daily basis, a quotation from an article in Cambridge University explains this more thoroughly.

Monster came to also mean huge or enormous around 1500 and soon came to describe things that were figuratively absurd, such as a particularly disturbing thought. While the original meaning of monstrum as an omen is no longer present in the modern monster, this sense lingers on in words derived from the OF and ME monstre like premonition, demonstrate and muster (Lawrence, 2015).

Today, as with most notions and terms, the word monster continues to be used heavily both with its literal and figurative meanings. The usage of the word ranges from a common enemy in fictional fantasy or video games to a common phrase to depict inhuman actions of a country or political figure. Thus, it can be interpreted as an umbrella term for many things, but the shortest way to put it into words would be an antithesis of nature and society.

In this context it is interesting to discuss the fact that Lovecraft's early stories, specifically *At The Mountains of Madness*, seem to imply a straight rejection of

science. As the journey undertaken by the company consists of people who have strayed away from the commonly accepted science, the journal indicates how their expedition site is merely shrugged off as a myth (Lovecraft, Chapter: At the Mountains of Madness, 2019), and in addition, stating to the readers of these travel logs that he is forced to speech because of it, as otherwise his warnings would amount to nothing:

I am forced into speech because men of science have refused to follow my advice without knowing why. It is altogether against my will that I tell my reasons for opposing this contemplated invasion of the antarctic—with its vast fossil-hunt and its wholesale boring and melting of the ancient ice-cap—and I am the more reluctant because my warning may be in vain. Doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible there would be nothing left. (Lovecraft, 1936)

Based on this, if we were to create a four-way chart of Scientific or Religious, Natural or Monstrous, the unique nature of Lovecraft's work would make it a difficult task to find a suitable place in such an imaginary chart, as the work is considered neither strictly religious nor following the science of the time, while Lovecraft's monsters in his work have no resemblance to monsters in any other contemporary work of fiction.

The term "monster" itself has a unique meaning in Lovecraft's weird literature. From a brief overview of the usage of the word across history and literature, it is possible to narrow it down into two clusters, the first signifying a disfigured, or twisted creature of animal or human resemblance, the second one being the figurative usage of the

word, depicting acts of grievous immorality or of a despicable nature. The problem stems from the fact that the nature of the monsters in Lovecraft's work falls into neither category. Having little to no resemblance to anything in our daily lives, their nature as unrecognizable horrors that incite insanity upon looking at them means that the general themes associated with the term monster only ever loosely covers the monstrous beings in Lovecraft's narrative.

The traditional discourse on monsters has stood the test of time, as even today, while describing monsters in literature, media, movies, or video games, the term "monster" is often used to describe monsters of a wide spectrum, for example, a bipedal colossus along with an archetypical sly goblin of western fantasy literature. Yet anything with the slightest Lovecraftian resemblance to it requires the affix "Lovecraftian" monster required to be added to the phrase. The term "Lovecraftian" itself is a byproduct of this long ongoing notion, further signifying the distinctively unique nature of the monsters in Lovecraft's literature.

CHAPTER 3

H.P. LOVECRAFT, COSMIC HORROR AND FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Starting the analysis with *At The Mountains of Madness*, the importance of the fear of the unknown is deceptively subtle, yet clearly visible from the beginning of the story. What this means is that, to understand what elements empower the effect of the fear of the unknown in the story, we would have to look at what is missing, rather than what is there, hence the subtle nature of the analysis. This begins with the form the story was written in, a travel log or a journal. The fact that the story is narrated by one of the main characters means that information can be safely omitted, poorly explained, or even outright mistold. The willing suspension of disbelief created by having a narrator that is neither omnipotent nor a godlike entity, means that objectivity is destroyed. (Davison, 2019)

The primary strength of the fear of the unknown lies with the creativity of the readers, as the morbid part of their imagination will always fill in the gaps in the information with their greatest fears, meaning it will be scary and morbidly intriguing for every reader in their own way. This is integral part of the psyche of many living beings is explained by another dissertation paper by Coltan Wayne Scrivner, where he states that;

To keep their edge in the face of ever-increasing predation efficiency, prey species have evolved sensitive detection thresholds when it comes to potential predators. By erring on the side of over-detection, prey will commit more false alarms, but fewer missed detections. A missed detection is far more costly

than a false alarm. While the former might cost the prey some cognitive and metabolic resources, the latter could cost the prey its life. In the evolutionary literature, this bias framework has been called error management theory (Haselton and Buss, 2000).

This also guarantees that, should the fear of the unknown take hold of an individual, the powerful emotions it evokes will always be present. While a thoroughly explained horrific setting has the chance to be much more entrancing than this phenomenon by simply evoking a new form of horror that was unknown to the reader until that point, the chances of this happening are not as reliable as the fear of the unknown. The unknown simply allows the audience's fear to cultivate itself within their minds, with minimal input from the author. Having said this, the second element that indirectly supports the fear of the unknown is the constant deconstruction and twisting of realism. Another comparative thesis written by Angel Hinojosa at University of California, Santa Cruz, further supports this claim;

...More than just supernatural elements which affect the Natural world, Lovecraft's fiction is, according to Darrell Schweitzer, "aware of the whole cosmos and man's place in it [...] Lovecraft's horrors from other dimensions or distant space can only be confronted with stoic fatalism, an apt metaphor for the 20th Century condition." The Unnatural that characters face is then an¹⁴ undisguised form of experience which not only forces the protagonist to confront the illogicalness of Nature, but also depicts the society and horrors humans have created. The encounter with the Unnatural is not brought on by

mere chance. Lovecraft connects the human confrontation with the Unnatural as an effect of human imposition onto Nature itself. (Hinojosa, 2018)

According to the narrator's explanation of the purpose of the team and their trip to the frozen wastes, we find out that all the supporting characters present in the story specialize in different branches of history, science, archeology, biology, or another branch of scientific study. Yet despite this, the scientists struggle to give any believable reasoning to the events that occur around them such as the slaughter of the second team. The skeleton fragments they uncover bear unrecognizable wounds and the creature's corpse with the huge wingspan they uncover reminds them of the creatures depicted in the "Necronomicon":

Lateral breakages, as of thinnish stalks, are at equator in middle of these ridges. In furrows between ridges are curious growths. Combs or wings that fold up and spread out like fans. All greatly damaged but one, which gives almost seven-foot wing spread. Arrangement reminds one of certain monsters of primal myth, especially fabled Elder Things in Necronomicon. (Lovecraft, 2019).

A person of science referring to a grimoire instead of a scientific source is juxtaposed with our reality, which collapses the dependable pillar of science in the story, otherwise the first and most reliable source of information for mankind. More examples of this are shown throughout *At the Mountains of Madness* as the author states that existing biology can't explain the creature's corpse, which can't be dissected with manmade tools. Yet Lovecraft doesn't stop here, as further stated in the

story, the odor released by the creature's body makes the dog aggressive towards it. This event, followed by the fact that upon closer examination they conclude that this otherworldly creature has more than 5 senses, is something that can be perceived as another successful attempt on Lovecraft's part at uprooting the foundations of nature. He himself directly supports this claim as he states in *Supernatural Horror In Literature* (1927) that; "...a malign and arid particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of nature which are our only safeguard against the assault of chaos and the daemons of our unplumbed space.". By creating an antagonistic force that can be comprehended neither by science nor by nature, Lovecraft effectively removes the two most dependable sources of information out of the equation, leaving only the guesses and imagination of the readers. Therefore in a sense, even the apparent collapse of science and nature strengthens the fear of the unknown. Yet this is not an entirely destructive aspect, as in place of the reliable information, according to the authentic travel logs of the narrator, we get to discover more about this ancient alien society through their architectural work. The ancient underworld civilization they slowly uncover is described in minute detail regarding its architecture in the second half of the story. Throughout these depictions, whether of their approximate age or their size and detail, as well as his discussion of the event "The Great Cold", Lovecraft establishes these sapient creatures in a society of their own, with its apocalyptic events and religion. A frequent observation of this ancient and sunken city is how the narrator can only ever truly understand and describe what's physically visible to the group, namely the architecture of the city, leaving everything else to speculation. An example of such analysis in the traveling log goes as follows:

The ceaseless five-pointedness of the surrounding architecture and of the few distinguishable mural arabesques had a dimly sinister suggestiveness we could

not escape; and gave us a touch of terrible subconscious certainty concerning the primal entities which had reared and dwelt in this unhallowed place.

(Lovecraft, 1936)

As a result, *At the Mountains of Madness* unroots and collapses the foundations of science and nature by rendering known science inefficient and dependable nature invalid. Having nothing to rely on in this sense, he then builds on the foundations he destroyed by establishing a society for these otherworldly creatures with their own religion, architecture, apocalyptic events, anatomy, and powers. All of this takes chunks of reliable information away from the reader and lets them fill in the gaps with their imagination, creating a cultivation ground for the fear of the unknown, the main driving force of morbid curiosity and horror in his stories.

This trend of the destruction and re-establishment of foundations continues in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. In the case of this second story, however, the focus is more on the establishment. After having arrived at the ruined town of Innsmouth, the narrator, after some bleak city descriptions, finds out about the deep ones from a drunken, supposedly deluded man called Zadok Allen. Much of these depictions however, resemble nothing but a drunken and crazy man's rambling, while providing bits of information to the readers through its obscure use of language;

Hey, yew, why dun't ye say somethin'? Haow'd ye like to be livin' in a taown like this, with everything a-rottin' an' a-dyin', an' boarded-up monsters crawlin' an' bleatin' an' barkin' an' hoppin' araoun' black cellars an' attics every way ye turn? Hey? Haow'd ye like to hear the haowlin' night arter night from the churches an' Order o' Dagon Hall, an' know what's doin' part o' the haowlin'? Haow'd ye like to hear what comes from that awful reef every May-

Eve an' Hallowmass? Hey? Think the old man's crazy, eh? Wal, Sir, let me tell ye that ain't the wust! (Lovecraft, 1931)

Later on, the readers and the protagonist also learn about the Esoteric Order of Dagon, a cult dedicated to an underwater civilization and their god, which has overtaken not only the town but also the establishments of religion such as the churches of the city. Not stopping there, we find out that these creatures also bring untold riches in jewelry and gold in exchange for human sacrifices, and can procreate with humans, creating hybrids that resemble them more and more as the offspring reaches maturity, extending their influence over nature even further by creating what are essentially aberrations, as explained once again by Zadok Allen;

Nothin' was to be diff'runt on the aoutside, only we was to keep shy o' strangers ef we knowed what was good fer us. We all hed to take the Oath o' Dagon, an' later on they was secon' an' third Oaths that some on us took. Them as ud help special, ud git special rewards—gold an' sech— No use balkin', fer they was millions of 'em daown thar. They'd ruther not start risin' an' wipin' aout humankind, but ef they was gave away an' forced to, they cud do a lot toward jest that. We didn't hev them old charms to cut 'em off like folks in the Saouth Sea did, an' them Kanakys wudn't never give away their secrets. (Lovecraft, 1931)

In addition to all of this, we also find out that, despite being openly against the deep ones, the rambling drunken man is not killed until their judges decide so. This brings forth a whole new dimension into the society of these creatures, as their

miniature society includes matters like jurisdiction and law. At the end of his speech, any kind of attempt at rationalizing the man's rambling as drunkenness or a paganistic religion from the East is rendered invalid as, at the end of his encounter with the drunken man, the narrator finds out that he has to survive a night in the city. It should be noted that throughout his escape up until the moment he passes out by the railway, he never has a direct encounter with any of the creatures. And even then, by the last section of the story, he finds out that he is related to captain Obed Marsh, as well as having ties to the Deep Ones, as he evolves. A key factor, however, that once again emphasizes the fear of the unknown and the uncertainty of cosmic horror is that he is still unsure of the accuracy of this information:

From that day on my life has been a nightmare of brooding and apprehension, nor do I know how much is hideous truth and how much madness. My great-grandmother had been a Marsh of unknown source whose husband lived in Arkham—and did not old Zadok say that the daughter of Obed Marsh by a monstrous mother was married to an Arkham man through a trick? What was it the ancient toper had muttered about the likeness of my eyes to Captain Obed's? In Arkham, too, the curator had told me I had the true Marsh eyes. Was Obed Marsh my own great-great-grandfather? Who—or what—then, was my great-great-grandmother? But perhaps this was all madness.

(Lovecraft, 1931)

What may be emphasized from this encounter is the fact that, at no point in it, do we ever get to directly see these "Deep Ones" do anything other than pursuing the narrator across the town. We do not see anything regarding their abilities, powers, or

see them fight. The constant lack of information fed by subtle foreshadowing and depictions told in the third person continues to keep the fear of the unknown prevalent throughout the story, which, just like in *At the Mountains of Madness*, is the main driving force in creating horror and morbid curiosity (Lovecraft, 1931).

Based on the appearance of these monsters, a possible connection can be made with the fear of the deep bodies of the sea, Thalassophobia. The way they're depicted with their aquatic resemblance, dark purplish skin color, scales, gills, tentacles, and many other traits of aquatic lifeforms, in addition to the fact that most of them come from the underworld and deep-sea can further support this possibility that either Lovecraft himself was afraid of deep bodies of water, or he attempted to evoke the same fear within the readers. A direct description of these followers of Dagon is present by the last quarter of the story; Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad that they had no more than four limbs. Their croaking, baying voices, clearly used for articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked. (Lovecraft, 1931)

It should be very well noted that at the time of this story's writing, we had even scarcer information regarding deep ocean life-forms, this information slowly began to make itself more apparent by the 1960s, but even then, it is claimed that we've yet to uncover and explore about 80% of the Earth's bodies of water (NOAA, 2021). This means that the deep ones and their nature, as well as many other Lovecraftian creatures, were based on the limits of the author's imagination. In a

sense, the missing chunks of information regarding marine biology were filled with the help of Cosmicism. The word “Alien” appears very frequently while portraying these creatures, 17 times in both stories to be specific. A certain saying attributed to not one person, explains this occurrence more accurately: ; What you can't see is always scarier than what you can. This is, after all, the fundamental idea behind cosmic horror and the fear of the unknown. By portraying the monsters as either entirely otherworldly, shapeless, or unrecognizably aquatic, sea-dwelling monstrosities that no common person knows anything about, it is easier to make the argument that even the choice of anatomy in Lovecraft’s depictions of his monsters is made to support the underlying fear of the unknown. Among these, there’s also the notion that interacting with these beings either by hearing them or their language, looking at them, or even knowing they exist incites a fear in the hearts of men enough to drive them insane. A good example of this is one we can see once again in the last quarter of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936) at the moment where the protagonist encounters these aquatic creatures close up the first time;

They were the blasphemous fish-frogs of the nameless design—living and horrible—and as I saw them I knew also of what that humped, tiaraed priest in the black church basement had so fearsomely reminded me. Their number was past guessing. It seemed to me that there were limitless swarms of them—and certainly my momentary glimpse could have shewn only the least fraction. In another instant everything was blotted out by a merciful fit of fainting; the first I had ever had. (Lovecraft,1936)

Lovecraft’s decision to make these monsters incomprehensible, coupled with the fact that in his stories the narrator always arrives in the aftermath of a catastrophic occurrence, only to discover the past events on scale which signifies human

insignificance in face of the grand cosmos (The grand Architecture in *At the Mountains of Madness* or hearing the events through the third party in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*). empowers the fear of the unknown with the support of Thalassophobia, cosmicism, and unrooting the foundations of science and nature. From the point of view where one would expect an example of a type of monster or event to depict the said form of horror, the concept of cosmic horror is a somewhat paradoxical one. However, it is possible to pinpoint the defining features of cosmic horror, and highlight its evident ties to fear of the unknown:

...the true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft & Bleiler, 1973).

Indeed, this definition of cosmic horror proposed by Lovecraft himself aligns with the aforementioned traits of his short stories, especially regarding the destruction of the laws of the universe. By definition, and in the first example set by Lovecraft himself, it is possible to make the argument that any modern horror media that consists of fleshly monsters or formless space entities, are in fact not Lovecraftian or cosmic horror, but simply Lovecraft inspired horror, carrying over a distinct aesthetic inspiration from his earlier works. The reason for this is the fact that by definition,

cosmic horror is above and beyond the idea of monsters, but rather, it is something that formulates and affects the readers within their awareness of their own human limits.

By only partially depicting and describing an opposing force of power that's neither completely understandable nor perishable, the media that portrays cosmic horror can make the audience or the readers feel aware of the limits of their human minds and bodies. This also correlates to the "Cosmos" in cosmic horror, putting the human body and mind against the cosmos, or signifying the horror of the cosmos shows its insignificance in the face of things that it simply cannot understand. In a sense, cosmic horror is difficult to replicate and create, since in essence, it is describing something that shouldn't or can't be described. This branch of horror evidently evokes the feeling of dread that comes from the fear of the unknown. A formless entity that's not prevalent on the screen, nor described to its finest detail anywhere is a challenge in itself to portray in all forms of media from writing to movies, and even video games, in which the term Lovecraftian has been thrown around very frequently. However, based on what Lovecraftian horror stands for, it would be perfectly possible to make the argument that Lovecraftian horror doesn't necessarily always have to boil down to fleshly grotesque monsters with unrecognizable origins and dark purplish colour palette choices. Instead, cosmic horror can convey the fear of the unknown, which can easily be achieved by incomplete and incoherent depictions made with the idea of being "unfamiliar, unusual and unknown" in mind. An apt example of this occurrence would be The Backrooms, a recently popular internet urban myth believing in the existence of "Liminal Spaces" of endlessly looping hallways and corridors where everything is almost like our world, but slightly off. This collective internet culture that expanded

with authors across the world creating their own “Floors” has always made use of the unknown, while very rarely, if at all, relying on a grotesque monster, but instead using slightly twisted beings from our everyday world, usually barely out of view or deliberately described with little context. In essence, this culture of horror can be described as one of the spiritual successors to Weird Literature. (Backrooms Fandom, n.d.)

The difficulty in portraying these aforementioned qualities stems from the fact that the writer must never show the whole picture to the audience in order to prevent cultivating the feeling of familiarity or relatability. A good metaphor for this would be giving the readers a puzzle, but deliberately taking away a few key pieces so that, while no one could ever figure out the full picture, there would be enough information to almost build a general idea, but never let go of a lingering sense of dread stemming from the fear of the unknown. This is also the reason that I’ve decided to discuss these two subjects in the same section, because in a sense, cosmic horror is the fear of the unknown. Lovecraft’s excellence in depicting this element of cosmic horror can be seen in the way that he portrays the monsters in his works. According to letters he exchanged with other writers, the “Cthulhu Mythos” or the family tree he created for his old gods primarily began as satire. (Mosig, 1997) The American literary critic S.T. Joshi explains this in his own words (Connors, 2002) as;

Lovecraft's imaginary cosmogony was never a static system but rather a sort of aesthetic construct that remained ever adaptable to its creator's developing personality and altering interests.... There was never a rigid system that might be posthumously appropriated.... The essence of the mythos lies not in a pantheon of imaginary deities nor in a cobwebby collection of forgotten tomes, but rather in a certain convincing cosmic attitude. (Connors, 2002)

This description, as well as the sources consulted, can lead us to the idea that perhaps in Lovecraftian storytelling, monsters are only devices that are here to portray cosmic horror, and were never meant to be understood to begin with, nor to be given meaning by categorization and context. Perhaps this is also why another aspect of cosmic horror in Lovecraft is the noticeable trend of it containing no conflict born from hatred or rivalry between two races. The existence of these vastly more advanced races in Lovecraftian lore, prospering or existing without any connection to mankind, such as in the underground architecture of *At the Mountains of Madness* further solidifies this claim. In the stories we have consulted, humanity wasn't being hunted because they were targets or enemies that have caused a significant enough harm to the old ones or deep ones to warrant aggression. Instead, humans are merely being utilized in different manners. Perhaps this is cleverly done by Lovecraft, as any further purpose for conflict would give humanity meaning and importance, which is ultimately against the idea of cosmic horror. In nature, we see ourselves as the dominant species, or the apex predators, with nothing above humanity in the food pyramid, in all senses and regards, we're considered the most advanced lifeform on earth. In this sense, it is possible to view Lovecraftian narrative as a post-humanist discourse. In a sense, the natural course of mankind in their stories would eventually lead to their extinction or complete assimilation into Lovecraftian monsters, which would leave behind the question that asks what is next for the earth. The situation in Lovecraft's stories also not only destroys the aforementioned foundations of science and nature but also depicts new races that dethrone humanity from that scheme by being superior to mankind in just about every way imaginable. Yet this trend of declining human significance is, once again, cleverly done by not imposing Lovecraftian monsters as things with tremendous strength or on-screen visceral acts

of grotesqueness, but instead, via stories and events learned through third party sources. The result is once again the human inability to either understand or oppose these beings, strengthened by the unknown. Supported by the fact that these Lovecraftian stories are unique in their distinct lack of character progression and development, Lovecraft successfully shows the insignificance of humans against that which they can't understand and oppose.

From another perspective, it is possible to make the argument that since this cosmic force is not something mankind can fight against, the conflict in these works can be seen as a rather philosophical one. As most of this is common knowledge, since ancient times, human beings have always tried to bring order and meaning to their lives. Some examples are the early cultivations of civilization into villages, towns, castles, and eventually the world structure we know today coming into reality without any outside influence. Another example with regards to meaning is religion and mythology. Greek mythology, for example, which in its time was considered a religion, tried to bring meaning and reasoning to things happening, through depicting a godlike being controlling the skies and the storms, or the oceans. This can be seen as a form of reasoning more merciful for the human mentality than the complete unknown. This human instinct for bringing order and meaning into chaos and the unknown can be used as a magnifying glass to view the conflicts in Lovecraft as meaning and insignificance, or order against entropy. The idea comes from the observation that in Lovecraftian stories, the human characters rarely, if ever, openly fight and struggle against Lovecraftian monsters, but instead, a significant portion of their narration is simply spent trying to understand this unstoppable force they're up against and making sense of the events they're experiencing to the best of their ability. The execution of this is also difficult, as the fictional characters discuss things

the author doesn't necessarily intend to be explained. They instead rely on rumours, hearsays, and untrustworthy third-party sources in order to keep the information deliberately shallow. One of the many examples can be seen in the introduction of *The Whisperer In Darkness*:

It would have been less uncomfortable if the stray accounts of these things had not agreed so well. As it was, nearly all the rumours had several points in common; averring that the creatures were a sort of huge, light-red crab with many pairs of legs and with two great bat-like wings in the middle of the back. They sometimes walked on all their legs, and sometimes on the hindmost pair only, using the others to convey large objects of indeterminate nature. On one occasion they were spied in considerable numbers, a detachment of them wading along a shallow woodland watercourse three abreast in evidently disciplined formation. Once a specimen was seen flying—launching itself from the top of a bald, lonely hill at night and vanishing in the sky after its great flapping wings had been silhouetted an instant against the full moon.

(Lovecraft, 1930)

Lovecraft's five elements of weird fiction serve here as a brief guideline for discerning the must have, inherent qualities of the genre that he himself pioneered. These can be perceived as foundations of cosmic horror to thrive in the readers mind, or simply a set of rules to follow to successfully replicate the effect of cosmic horror;

Each weird story—to speak more particularly of the horror type—seems to involve five definite elements: (a) some basic, underlying horror or abnormality—condition, entity, etc.—, (b) the general effects or bearings of the horror, (c) the mode of manifestation—object embodying the horror and phenomena observed—, (d) the types of fear-reaction pertaining to the horror, and (e) the specific effects of the horror in relation to the given set of conditions.” (Lovecraft,1937.).

The first element, underlying horror or abnormality – is perhaps the most general one of all and is not a quality pertaining only to weird fiction. And despite their subtle and off-the-spotlight appearances in their respective works, the deep ones, the cultists of Cthulhu, or the aquatic creatures of Dagon are some of the examples where, in every story of Lovecraft’s, horror is present in a physical form, despite the infrequency of their appearance. Supporting this is the fact that we learn more about the physiological characteristics of these creatures indirectly, with the help of third-party sources, such as the scientific researchers in *At the Mountains of Madness*, or the drunken sailor Zadok Allen in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* who narrates everything in detail in a half-crazed fashion. It is also possible to interpret this quotation in the figurative sense, as the lingering feeling of dread in the face of the cosmos is a condition. In fact, it is possible to make the argument that, due to the nature of cosmic horror, the condition these eldritch horrors create is a bigger focus than the monsters themselves, as their limited appearance in the works is often overshadowed by the constant state of fear and morbid curiosity they create for the human characters. The general effects of the said horror can be easily seen in two

primary forms that supplement each other. The first is the aforementioned lingering sense of dread, whether it is the protagonist of *At the Mountains of Madness* struggling for safety from whatever has killed the other team or the protagonist of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* desperately trying to cling to safety in his hotel room. Coupled with this, the discovery of the inherent superiority of these eldritch races in every aspect of life that evokes the feeling of human insignificance creates the fear of the unknown, which also happens without any form of direct confrontation with the monsters. This is especially highlighted and signified as a key factor right in the beginning of *The Whisperer In Darkness*:

Bear in mind closely that I did not see any actual visual horror at the end. To say that a mental shock was the cause of what I inferred—that last straw which sent me racing out of the lonely Akeley farmhouse and through the wild domed hills of Vermont in a commandeered motor at night—is to ignore the plainest facts of my final experience. Notwithstanding the deep extent to which I shared the information and speculations of Henry Akeley, the things I saw and heard, and the admitted vividness of the impression produced on me by these things, I cannot prove even now whether I was right or wrong in my hideous inference. (Lovecraft, 1930)

The mode of manifestation is quite possibly the most distinct factor, as mentioned earlier, as the creatures that convey the horror in Lovecraft are never under the spotlight, but instead, they are figures that the audience learns more about through different sources, ending up with a semi-coherent narrative that tells a story of cosmic

horror. The reaction of the human characters to the danger surrounding them is also one that stood out as a characteristic of cosmic horror; the struggle for survival of the human characters in these stories not only stems from the danger these monsters impose, but also from their superior nature as part of a society of their own that is perhaps leagues above human society. These human characters, then, lack any means of understanding what they are against, a characteristic signature of cosmic horror.



CHAPTER 4

MIÉVILLE'S BAS-LAG

A factor that is often taken for granted, but rarely truly appreciated, is the fact that in our modern age, writers, especially those indulging in fantasy and the supernatural, have an international, even global range of references including a myriad of supernatural races, creatures, beings, and phenomena originating from fantasy, gothic, or other supernatural genres, or from past mythologies. From this perspective, modernist poet Ezra Pound's familiar saying "Make It New" is, in a sense, applicable to any literature indulging in fantasy. Two fantasy races, for example, elves and orcs, can be seen in franchises like Chris Metzen's *Warcraft*, or Bethesda's *Elder Scrolls*, as well as in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings*. In line with the injunction to "Make It New", these authors have given these archetypal races their own personal twist to suit their narrative, either in their function and nature or their appearance. Because of this immense catalog of supernatural creatures and phenomena, it is admittedly a drastically greater challenge for a modern-day writer to create a work that truly sets itself apart from everything else with a completely original idea. Instead, as in the aforementioned examples, most authors prefer to take the preexisting archetypal creatures of fiction and weave them together with their own themes and setting. The universes created are instead made new by presenting a combination of creatures, settings and conflicts that has yet to be bundled together in a story.

With this in mind, aside from the obvious strength and quality in a conflict or theme that puts forth a compelling and interesting argument, another factor that sets good writing of this branch apart from the rest is what I believe to be Miéville's

greatest strength; worldbuilding. A great example of this is the inclusion of the map in the books, and the subtle hints given by the author for the readers to examine it thoroughly to build a better image of Bas-Lag. In this context, an essay on this subject by Stefan Ekman at the University of Gothenburg states:

The spatiality of the city is foregrounded. Not only are there geographic references to which particular way the character goes, but also references to which path he might have taken. The function of the references is as much to describe the city as to encourage the readers to turn to the map, to find the geographical relationships between the locations, and to create the mental spaces that turn into New Crobuzon through readerly world- building.

Together with the city districts, the main reference points are provided by the skyrail and railways, by militia towers and railway stations. (Ekman, 2018)

Bas-Lag is the name of the world in which *Perdido Street Station*, *The scar* and *Iron Council* take place. One of the many dimensions of this universe is that it is a widely uncharted world with a variety of natural and unnatural hazards, as well as incredibly dangerous wildlife. It is inhabited by numerous races that resemble humans in one way or another, in addition to mankind itself. With a geography containing both immense bodies of water and land, it is speculated that the world of Bas-Lag spans indefinitely like an infinite plateau rather than a spherical planet. It is possible to argue that the very nature of Bas-Lag defies the laws of our universe to make a statement towards creating a truly unique world. A non-spherical, uncharted and multidimensional world that contains a fantasy iteration of hell which deconstructs the

concept of religion by bringing solid evidence, geography and astronomy with its peculiar nature is a solid foundation for creating a new layer of reality to create new gaps of information for the cultivation of the fear of the unknown. A world that is yet to be thoroughly explored, covered by a myriad of different races that have their own micro civilizations, is expertly tailored with detailed depictions of these races, some of which are similar to human societies, some of which are more animal-like, as well as everything in between. The qualities of these races are fed to the readers by the characters, who provide glimpses of information about their culture and lifestyle, such as the Garuda in *Perdido Street Station*

Perhaps you have flown in a balloon, Grimnebulin. Looked down at roofs, at the earth. I grew up hunting from the skies. Garuda are a hunting people. We take our bows and spears and long whips and we scour the air of birds, the ground of prey. It is what makes us garuda. My feet are not built to walk your floors, but to close around small bodies and tear them apart. To grip dry trees and rock pillars between the earth and the sun. (Mieville 2000)

Thus, whether it is the *Anophelii* having the qualities of most insectoid lifeform that shared an equally diversifying almost human-looking male counterpart, or the nomadic race of Garuda with their distinctively unique system of law, every race of *Bas-Lag* is distinguished by a setting of their own that's unique.

Having stated these qualities however, it should be apparent that such a thoroughly detailed world, where context isn't lacking at all, makes it more difficult for the general characteristics of weird literature, namely the fear of the unknown and cosmic horror, to exist. Yet it is for this exact reason, along with many more, that this

genre of writing, has been called, along with many other names., ¹“The New Weird”. And while there may be drastically more context in everything regarding the foreign lifeforms, it should be kept in mind that the setting of this universe is a completely alien planet, meaning there’s uncertainty regarding the laws of nature and everything else we would otherwise carry over from our world to make sense of things. A great example of this was the city of New Crobuzon, explained in the introductory paragraph of chapter six;

New Crobuzon was a city unconvinced by gravity.

Aerostats oozed from cloud to cloud above it like slugs on cabbages. Militia-pods streaked through the heart of the city to its outlands, the cables that held them twanging and vibrating like guitar strings hundreds of feet in the air.

Wyrmen clawed their way above the city leaving trails of defecation and profanity. Pigeons shared the air with jackdaws and hawks and sparrows and escaped parakeets. Flying ants and wasps, bees and bluebottles, butterflies and mosquitoes fought airborne war against a thousand predators, aspises and dheri that snapped at them on the wing. Golems thrown together by drunken students beat mindlessly through the sky on clumsy wings made of leather or paper or fruit-rind, falling apart as they flew. Even the trains that moved innumerable women and men and commodities around New Crobuzon’s great carcass fought to stay above the houses, as if they were afraid of the putrefaction of architecture (Miéville, 2000)

¹ *Another term used before was “Next Wave”* (Wolfe, Gary (2014). The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction. Latham, Rob. Oxford. p. 66.)

This uncertainty can be perceived as a starting foundation for the fear of the unknown, as it is the starting point for many mysteries so long as things are not completely kept unexplained. In addition, the reason that cosmicism hasn't been mentioned so far is simply because of the fact that, while Cosmic Horror is based on the unknown, the fear stemming from this phenomenon is not unique to cosmic horror. To put it more simply, Cosmic horror cannot exist without the fear of the unknown, but fear of the unknown can and has existed outside the boundaries of cosmic horror, as it is the simplest variant of horror that stems from the creative human mind. A research paper by R. Nicholas Carleton on this subject, for instance, has emphasized the role of the fear of the unknown in depression and anxiety disorders fear of the unknown to support this claim:

Hong and Cheung ([Hong & Cheung, 2015](#)) further evidenced FOTU as a common factor for treating anxiety and mood disorders with a 73 article meta-analytic assessment of vulnerabilities for depression and anxiety. The meta-analyses examined relationships between “six cognitive vulnerabilities associated with depression (*i.e.*, pessimistic inferential style, dysfunctional attitudes, and ruminative style) and anxiety (*i.e.*, anxiety sensitivity, IU, and fear of negative evaluation)” (p.1). Their results supported FOTU as accounting for substantial variance in higher-order constructs ($r_s = 0.45$ to 0.57) and underscored the primacy of FOTU as a vulnerability with the highest core factor loading of 0.81. “First, IU had the strongest factor loading—implying that a fundamental fear of the unknown ([Carleton, 2012](#)) may feature heavily in this common core. This element of unknown may encompass external environmental uncertainties and threats and an

individual's internally oriented uncertainty about his or her own resources to deal with such threats (Hong & Cheung, 2015; p.13).

The mind tends to fill the gaps of information in a situation with its own greatest fears, creating a horrifying opposition in the imagination with incomplete stimuli from the outside world. In a way, having great resemblance to a point of reference compared to complete unknown like the monsters of Lovecraft's literature and still somehow being able to portray horror in a different sense might be comparable to the uncanny.

The uncanny is a concept that has been thoroughly researched in the studies of Freud and Jentsch in a conflicting manner and is a phenomenon that's used in certain genres of horror (Milinski, 2020) (Terry, 2018). As an example, analog horror, meaning a type of horror media which utilizes real life elements and techniques for visual narration while mixing the elements of digital editing and distortion, such as VHS recordings or footage style videos and screen recordings, often relies on humanoid figures, constructs, mannequins, and silhouettes of a living being they resemble. Most examples of these can be found within web series by independent authors, like the woodcrawlers in Gemini Home Entertainment², or the company mascots in Walten Files.³ However, the source of the feeling of the uncanny has been a subject of debate both today and in the past. Freud's argument that the uncanny is provoked by familiarity clashes with Jentsch's idea that the uncanny is provoked by the anxiety about the unknown. (Freud , 1919) (Jentsch, 1997) And while both forms

² (*Gemini Home Entertainment (TV Series 2019–), 2019*) : *An indie analog horror series by Remy Abode.*

³ (*The Walten Files (TV Series 2020–), 2020*) : *An indie analog horror series by Martin Walls.*

put forth a compelling point of view to interpret a subject of horror from two opposite angles, a definition for the term from Nicholas Royle's book "The Uncanny" is most helpful as a starting point:

The uncanny can be a matter of something gruesome or terrible, above all death and corpses, cannibalism, live burial, the return of the dead. But it can also be a matter of something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy ('too good to be true'), or eerily reminding us of something like déjà vu. It can involve a feeling of something beautiful but at the same time frightening as in the figure of the double or telepathy. (Royle, 2003)

Indeed, in parallel with this quotation, I would like to argue the uncanny feelings which may arise from the depictions of monsters in the world of Bas-Lag are unclassifiable with binary terms like good and heartwarming, or frightening and evil. Instead, the inhabitants of Bas-Lag possess various features of human beings while lacking other ones, and their distinct qualities like the nomadic nature of the Garuda with their unique system of law or the artistic talent of the mute Khepri presuppose concepts of races with human-like qualities that have traded off certain qualities resulting in a different race. (Miéville, 2001,2002) It is debatable, however, whether the uncanny features of these races are provoked by their familiarity. While it is perfectly possible to argue that a humanoid looking woman with the head of an insect that cannot talk features enough human qualities to have its uncanny factor stem from familiarity; it is equally possible to counter argue that with the opinion that she would

be lacking the required human characteristics to float by the uncanny valley⁴, a hypothesized point in a degree of resemblance of an object to a human being where the emotional response is altered, often with uneasiness (Mori et al., 2012). Instead of this, her uncanny characteristics stem from being almost human, yet having an unknown side that evokes a sense of uneasiness through incompleteness. Although, in this particular example of Bas-Lag, the source of the uncanny feeling leans more towards Jentsch's original argument regarding the source of this feeling. More importantly, this form of the uncanny that is prevalent in the universe of Bas-Lag doesn't use the lack of context or extreme similarity, but instead a combination of the familiar characteristics of humans with other living beings or mythical creatures, in a sense, a combination of the familiar with the unfamiliar. In his book *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle's description of the term uncanny closely aligns with what the uncanny of Bas-Lag represents;

The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from the Latin proprius 'own'), a disturbance of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions, and events. (Royle, 2003)

The fact that this broad description touches not only on resemblance to human beings, but anything man-made like establishments and institutions is one of the reasons this quotation may shed light on Miéville's stories. This is due to the fact that the feeling

⁴ "Uncanny Valley": used to refer to the [unpleasant feeling](#) that some [people](#) have when they [see robots](#) (= [machines](#) that can [carry out actions automatically](#)), or [pictures](#) of a [human](#) being [created](#) by a [computer](#), that [appear](#) very [similar](#) to a [living human](#) (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

of the uncanny may not exclusively stem from the physiological qualities of the inhabitants of Bas-Lag, but their society as well. As just about every race that's been narrated has their own micro societies, like the garuda, explained by one of the characters;

Cymek garuda are egalitarian... completely egalitarian, and completely individualistic. Hunters and gatherers, no sexual division of labour. No money, no rank, although they do have sort of uninstitutional ranks. Just means you're worthy of more respect, that sort of thing. Don't worship any gods, although they do have a devil-figure, which may or may not be a real eidolon. Dahnesch, it's called. Hunt and fight with whips, bows, spears, light blades. Don't use shields: too heavy to fly with. So they sometimes use two weapons at once. (Miéville, 2000)

Some readers may feel a sense of uncanniness from these societies which resemble the different establishments of civilization we've seen throughout human history, while differing enough in key points to retain their almost alien unfamiliarity. The combination of these two characteristics, the familiar and unfamiliar, in their display of the uncanny is briefly explained further in Nicholas Royle's book as:

But the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. (Royle, 2003)

Indeed, in the case of Bas-Lag's inhabitants, their uncanniness can't come from one side alone. While one can argue that the human characteristics of the inhabitants of Bas-Lag are a source of familiarity, their resemblance is nowhere close to human to truly evoke the feeling through resemblance alone and nothing else, such as the Repliee Q2 actroid developed by Osaka University (Norman, n.d.). Another reasoning is that Jentsch's description of the uncanny through the unknown closely resembles, and is in fact, almost identical to the concept of fear of the unknown. The sense of caution and fear towards these races of Bas-Lag don't come from a resemblance which is almost too perfect, but rather, from the unknown aspect of their nature, as they seemingly possess certain qualities of humanity to varying degrees, but lack others that are replaced with those of animals or other supernatural abilities. Indeed, this is not too different from the fear of the unknown predominant in Lovecraft's work, albeit with much more context given to the readers. A pertinent example of an uncanny resemblance in Miéville's work is when Isaac, one of the main characters, goes through a myriad of expressions upon seeing the slake moth;

But he was so tired, so befuddled, so miserable and in so much pain, he left it too late. Blearily, unclearly at first, he saw the slake-moth's wings. The rippling tide of colours unfolded like anemones, a gentle, uncanny unfurling of enthralling shades. On both sides of the moth's body, the perfectly mirrored midnight tinctures slipped like thieves down Isaac's optic nerve and smeared themselves across his mind. (Miéville, 2000)

Because of Bas-Lag's unique nature as a world different from our earth with a myriad of different races capable of civilization, which may be either weaker or stronger than mankind, the fear of the unknown is still subtly persistent across the narrative. Basically, when we perceive a completely new experience in our world, we

are able to consult the laws of nature and previous experience , but in a fantasy world like Bas-Lag, one that's especially proven itself to be multifaceted and not merely a safe haven nor a reflection of hell, the fear of the unknown now stems instead from the feeling of exploration of a new universe, starting from its very rules.

The most crucial aspect for the cultivation of cosmic horror has been previously established to be the insignificance and lack of strength of the human body against the unknown cosmos and monsters. The foundations of knowledge like science and nature that mankind could rely on are also demolished in Lovecraft's cosmic horror. To quote Angel Hinojosa's work once again:

To borrow Scott W. Poole's words, Lovecraft's short stories are about prosaic people whose very foundations are rocked by the Unnatural and who are forced to encounter the true nature of the cosmos: chaos. The 'parameters' that Poole refers to can be then read as the rationality of the human mind. The human mind, while rational through self-imposed solidity, divulges its weaknesses when encountered with the illogics of Nature. (Hinojosa, 2018)

However, in the universe of Bas-Lag, not only are the said foundations still to be explored by the readers, but the humans are also in a position where they are able to perform formidable things on par with the other races, namely Thaumaturgy. Thaumaturgy is the umbrella term for the science and practice of magic in this universe, and it seems that humans aren't an exception to its practice. Thaumaturgy is practiced by the human residents of Bas-Lag as an institution. It has its several different schools, or branches that specialize in a certain aspect. And with a tutoring

system similar to a modern education system, thaumaturgy is defined as something fundamentally different from anything that exists in our known world:

Well, you never took Introductory Bio-Thaumaturgy, did you? As I remember, you did about two terms of the Intermediate course, much later. You missed my first lecture. That's the story I use to entice our jaded young knowledge-hunters onto the road of this noble science." Vermishank spoke in a completely deadpan voice. Isaac felt his distaste return with interest. "Calligine disappeared," Vermishank continued. "Went off flying south-west, towards the Cacotopic Stain. Never seen again. (Miéville, 2000)

What seems like a detail as minor as a human being's ability to perform a fantasy act in a fantasy setting is arguably also the key element in setting 'Miévillian' horror apart from "Lovecraftian" horror. While acknowledging the fact that this notion doesn't completely omit the possibility of certain elements of the story being perceived as cosmic horror, its tone is different enough to be unique. The humans in the world of Bas-Lag aren't necessarily the apex predators, but neither are they the insignificant, bottom-of-the-barrel race of the batch. Instead, in Miéville's work, so many races have been seen to have taken up certain qualities of human civilization while lacking some others. For example, in addition to their matriarchal society, the semi-insectoid race of Khepri embodied the artistic finesse, namely sculpturing of our world's artists. So much so that the character Lin's sculpture work is a prevalent point brought up several times over the course of the novel, the most important of which was the sculpture of Motley commissioned to her. The Khepri's indulgence in her work is explained by the last quarter of the first book:

Lin was an artist. She created with her touch and taste, making tactile objects. Visible objects. Sculpture to be fondled and seen. She was fascinated by colour and light and shadow, by the interplay of shapes and lines, negative and positive spaces. She had been locked in the attic for a long time. In her position, some would have sabotaged the vast sculpture of Motley. The commission had become a sentence, after all. But Lin did not destroy it or skimp in her work. She poured everything she could, all her pent-up creative energy into that one monolithic and terrible piece. As Motley had known she would. It had been her only escape. Her only means of expression. Starved of all the light and colour and shapeliness of the world, she had focused in her fear and pain and become obsessed. Creating a presence herself, the better to beguile her. (Miéville, 2000)

The avian race of Garuda, on the other hand, possesses the superior ability of flight as well as their nomadic lifestyle. Moreover, they have a unique form of law, in which the only crime is theft. Among this supposedly endless catalog of unique races, it is apparent that in the world of Bas-Lag, humans aren't completely defenseless against the opposing races, but instead, live in their own micro societies amongst the other races while being superior to some in certain regards, and falling short in others. This is one of the greatest differences that sets it apart from Lovecraftian horror s, as there is no emphasis on the insignificance of humanity, but instead, the establishment of a society in which the humanity is a part of.

This difference means that the fifth element, the specific effects of the horror in relation to the given set of conditions, makes itself apparent in a different manner compared to weird fiction, as instead of facing a complete unknown, immutable and near invincible antagonistic forces and races, humanity in the world of Bas-Lag blends in with the society of the world. Thus, in order to differentiate the specific effects of horror in relation to the given set of conditions, I think that it is easier to ask a simple question about both universes to lay out the differences; “What’s at stake?”. On the off chance that the Lovecraftian horrors prevail in their agendas and goals beyond human understanding, the stakes for mankind of the Lovecraftian universe are the almost guaranteed destruction of mankind, or at least a drastic shift in their role and function in the universe.

The Dagon and his Esoteric Order in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* would replace more of humanity with each passing day until their race is fully assimilated into their deep-sea society, the ancient society discovered by the scientists in *At the Mountains of Madness* would reawaken and perhaps retake the surface. The point is, the inhabitants of earth in Lovecraft’s stories would simply stand no chance against them, meaning everything would be at stake. It wouldn’t be farfetched to claim that the survival of the human race in these stories is simply dependent on these advanced societies deciding not to take action yet, meaning, it is not a matter of “if”, but a matter of “when”. Whereas in the universe and the narration of the Bas-Lag stories, the conflicts humanity faces, especially in the context of the narration’s focus, emphasize the people’s individual struggles and conflicts, in contrast to Lovecraftian narrative, where there’s a purposeful distinct lack of character development which places humanity lower down in the hierarchy. The city of Crobuzon, the landmark that is predominantly made of humans in the universe of Bas-Lag that is still inhabited

by people from other races, would be a suitable example of this. The fact that the prosperous city of Crobuzon was the target of pirates, and that the destruction of the city caused mass migrations and the re-establishment of the city as New Crobuzon, may imply that the conflicts between the races in this universe are of either a political, or profit driven nature due to circumstances. Even the result of the aforementioned war was simply the restructuring of the city into a chaotic state where humans still predominantly reign over the rest of the races of Bas-Lag. Thus, the beginning of chapter six explains the state of New Crobuzon clearly:

New Crobuzon was a city unconvinced by gravity. Aerostats oozed from cloud to cloud above it like slugs on cabbages. Militia-pods streaked through the heart of the city to its outlands, the cables that held them twanging and vibrating like guitar strings hundreds of feet in the air. Wyrmen clawed their way above the city leaving trails of defecation and profanity. Pigeons shared the air with jackdaws and hawks and sparrows and escaped parakeets. Flying ants and wasps, bees and bluebottles, butterflies and mosquitoes fought airborne war against a thousand predators, aspises and dheri that snapped at them on the wing. Golems thrown together by drunken students beat mindlessly through the sky on clumsy wings made of leather or paper or fruit-rind, falling apart as they flew. (Miéville, 2000)

This means that, while the stakes are mostly public in the Cthulhu mythos of Lovecraft, there's a distinctive focus on individual struggle and personal stakes in the world of Bas-Lag. In the context of the fifth element of horror, this means the lasting effects of the aforementioned horror would not be as grand-scale, but would rather

have great personal impact on each character instead, meaning that while the results are perhaps cataclysmic, and even world ending for the Lovecraftian stories, in the universe of Bas-Lag, it is much more comparable to a real-life political struggle.



CHAPTER 5

COMPARISON

In the field of fantastic fiction, the question of world-building is not uncontroversial. But I grew up with ‘Dungeons and Dragons,’ so that whole world-building thing is very close to my heart. (Miéville, n.d)

The worldbuilding of Bas-Lag by Miéville, as established earlier, greatly emphasizes that the universe is very much alive, with the characteristics of the world being told to the readers either for story related reasons or simply for flavour. Dungeons and Dragons, abbreviated as DnD, the fantasy tabletop role-playing game, and arguably, later a term that is used for every game of a similar nature, is a narrative focused game where, usually, one dungeon master or storyteller guides the players’ characters through a story told by them, solving conflicts, exploring, engaging in battles, and advancing in both the narrative sense of character development, and in the game rules of experience and statistics. Seeing that Miéville grew up with this blank canvas of a game, it is no surprise to anyone that a system requiring immense worldbuilding and a feeling of adventure is reflected upon his universe of Bas-Lag.

This is perhaps why the conflicts, like the rivalry between Motley and Isaac in *Perdido Street Station*, are more often than not focused on the individual characters, their ambitions, and their goals. Compared to Lovecraftian storytelling, which is almost completely devoid of character development if it isn’t for further empowerment of the old ones (eg: The protagonist’s transformation in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*), the sense of progression both in personality and power, as well as the feeling of being part of a vast new world that one has a direct impact on, is indeed one of the core characteristics of Dungeons and Dragons, and therefore to an extent, in the worldbuilding of Bas-Lag. As previously mentioned, the actions of the human characters in Lovecraftian horror are nowhere impactful enough to create drastic

changes in the ongoing conflicts. However, the much more character focused narrative of Miéville makes it possible for even the smallest actions taken by the characters to leave a lasting impact on the smaller conflicts threaded across the story. So in a sense, while in Lovecraft, the thrill comes from the battle for survival and delaying what can only be considered the inevitable, in the stories of Bas-Lag, the thrill comes from the aforementioned Adventure. While on that topic, it should be noted that the concept of adventure is not limited to a journey like the first few literary examples of adventure such as the Odyssey. This is further supported by a brief etymology of the word:

1200, aventure, aventure "that which happens by chance, fortune, luck," from Old French aventure (11c.) "chance, accident, occurrence, event, happening," from Latin aventura (res) "(a thing) about to happen," from fem. of *adventurus*, future participle of *advenire* "to come to, reach, arrive at," from *ad* "to" + *venire* "to come," from a suffixed form of Proto-Indo-European root **gwa-* "to go, come." .Meaning developed through "risk; danger" (a trial of one's chances), c. 1300, and "perilous undertaking" (late 14c.) to "novel or exciting incident, remarkable occurrence in one's life" (1560s). Earlier it also meant "a wonder, a miracle; accounts of marvelous things" (13c.). (Harper, n.d.)

Within this line of thought, while there are very few common points between the two narratives, both can be considered an adventure. However, if we were to view both stories as individual DnD campaigns, the Lovecraftian adventure would be one that's destined to end in peril, with no focus on character development, and almost

mirroring a normal adventure with the Old ones being the centerpiece of the story where they are the actual players. On the contrary, the adventure set in Bas-Lag would be more in line with the traditional adventure that emphasizes individual character development, the thrill of adventure and personal struggle, and an indefinite journey.

Examining the obvious DnD inspiration in the Bas-Lags universe makes comparison under the scope of Lovecraft's second element of weird literature, the general effects or bearings of the horror, easier to compare. At first, the horror presented in both the stories has to be thoroughly understood. In the case of Lovecraftian narrative, it is in order for humans to completely understand what they are up against, however, due to the advanced nature of these monsters from the mythos, and the general nature of the storytelling that emphasizes the fear of the unknown, it is never truly possible to completely understand their nature. In the case of the Bas-Lag trilogy, in the cases where an ongoing theme of fear is present, due to the focus on worldbuilding and individual character development, understanding the fear is more possible for the characters. This is because, in most cases, the risk and fear factor is delivered through the other inhabitants of the world with more predetermined information at hand. The effects of, and reactions against, this fear is where the two universes differ completely, as unlike in Lovecraft, the conflicts in the Bas-Lag trilogy are able to be solved in confrontations (The battle between Isaac's group and the slake-moth's nest), meaning the horrors simply create new adversaries and challenges that the characters have the chance of overcoming. More importantly, even before a conflict takes place, we can read an intricately detailed description of what the main characters are up against, for example, the slake moth:

It was taller than a bear. A clutch of sharp extrusions like dark cartilaginous whips blossomed from its sides and flickered out towards him. Other, smaller, sharper limbs flexed like claws. The creature stood on legs like monkey's arms. Three pairs jutted from its trunk. It stood now bipedally, now on four legs, now on six. It reared up on its lower legs and a sharp tail slithered forward from between its legs for balance. Its face—It had no eyes that they could recognize, only two deep sunken hollows sprouting thick, flexing antennae like stubby fingers, above rows of huge slab-teeth. As Isaac watched, it cocked its head and opened that unimaginable mouth, and from it a huge, prehensile, slaving tongue unrolled. It waved quickly through the air. Its end was coated in clumps of gossamer alveoli that pulsed as the enormous thing flailed like an elephant's trunk. (Miéville, 2000)

Unlike this, however, in Lovecraftian storytelling, whether it is the scientists slowly uncovering the ancient sunken city in *At the Mountains of Madness* or the protagonist realizing the town is filled with “fish-men” posing as humans in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, the realization only leads to their struggle for survival. The confrontations, past the point of discovery and understanding, are limited to escape attempts and feeble attempts to avoid death, such as the protagonist in Innsmouth making his final escape through the hotel roof:

I would have to count on sheer speed, and the chance of getting to a window before any hostile forces became coordinated enough to open the right door toward me with a pass-key. My own outer door I reinforced by pushing the bureau against it—little by little, in order to make a minimum of sound.

I perceived that my chances were very slender, and was fully prepared for

any calamity. Even getting to another roof would not solve the problem, for there would then remain the task of reaching the ground and escaping from the town. (Lovecraft, 1931)

This means that, in the scope of the second element of Lovecraft's weird fiction, the differences make themselves apparent in the sense that Lovecraft's protagonists start their struggle for survival, whereas the protagonists of Miéville's work simply gain more adversaries. This doesn't, however, prove that the quality of the horror in one is more outstanding than the other, but instead, the differences are made visible when one of Lovecraft's five elements is used as a magnifying glass for both the stories. These qualities can also be connected to the third element of Lovecraft's weird literature, namely the mode of manifestation-object embodying the horror-and phenomena observed. Compared to a monster in a work of fiction from Lovecraft's era, certain archetypes and expected characteristics definitely had emerged for template monsters in fantasy fiction. Examples include vampires which are nearly immortal with their only weaknesses being sunlight and garlic, or werewolves vulnerable to silver armaments. Similarly, in most religion-inspired fantasy writings even today, recitals from the holy books as well as instruments of religion seemed to repel demons or damage them in some way. In the case of Lovecraft, however, the manifestation of horror spans the entire story, and the characters like the scientists of *At the Mountains of Madness* spend the entire short story looking for answers, only to find fractions of information through scarce archeological findings and autopsies of seemingly dead creatures. Thus it can be said that their manifestation, the object embodying the horror and the phenomena observed is mostly limited to third party rumours, research findings, and examinations of scenes where the horror has already come to pass. The lasting effects of the horror make

themselves apparent without the human characters ever fully understanding what they are up against, and understanding more about these Lovecraftian monsters only makes the horror more apparent to them. In a sense, their revelations are in line with the common phrase “Less is more.” This phenomenon is something these characters also rarely get to observe as well, so that it would be more suitable to call them glimpses, such as the protagonist of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* slowly fading in and out of consciousness as he attempts to escape the denizens of Innsmouth:

Then, as my gaze circled inland from the town, something less tranquil arrested my notice and held me immobile for a second.

What I saw—or fancied I saw—was a disturbing suggestion of undulant motion far to the south; a suggestion which made me conclude that a very large horde must be pouring out of the city along the level Ipswich Road. The distance was great, and I could distinguish nothing in detail; but I did not at all like the look of that moving column. It undulated too much, and glistened too brightly in the rays of the now westering moon. There was a suggestion of sound, too, though the wind was blowing the other way—a suggestion of bestial scraping and bellowing even worse than the muttering of the parties I had lately overheard. (Lovecraft, 2000)

This is not so much the case with the Bas-Lag trilogy however, due to Miéville’s past experience with DnD, his habit of classifying abilities and magic, giving each race a distinct set of characteristics and signature abilities, as well his great emphasis on worldbuilding leaves little to no space for an unknown horror to

manifest. The horrors that the characters face are, instead, apparent, and they are able to confront them head-on, such as their battle with the help of the “Weaver” against the slake-moth. This, then, is another factor that sets this universe apart from Lovecraft’s, where godly beings of unfathomable power, and barely within humans’ field of understanding, are not completely against them all the time, but rather, ally with them. The premise of the unknown even then, is still present, as the monster announces its assistance in a cryptic manner, leaving everyone in confusion momentarily:

... without you ask the Weave is tight rucked colours bleed textures wearing threads fray while I keen funeral songs for soft points where webshapes flow I wish I will I can coils of monsters shade slatescapes wings moil suck worldweave colourless drab it is not to be I read resonance prance from point to point on the web to eat splendour rear and lick clean red knifenails I will snip fabrics and retie them I am I am a subtle user of colour I will bleach your skies with you I will sweep them clean and knot them tight ...”

“It took several moments for Rudgutter to realize that the Weaver had agreed to help them. (Miéville, 2000)

The dangers imposed by the horror are still there, albeit in comprehensible form, with the characters having the opportunity to overcome them. In this context, it is worth mentioning the clear and obvious difference between the horror atmosphere of the two universes. While it is thoroughly established that the universe of Lovecraft’s work is a playground of cosmic horror, it is quite possible to make the argument that Miéville’s Bas-Lag trilogy isn’t necessarily a horror series, but rather, a

novel of the new weird genre that encompasses certain horror elements. In this story, perspective is perhaps the most important factor in tracing the subtle horror elements to their roots during their analysis. To elaborate, while analyzing the horror present in *Bas-Lag*, instead of focusing on the horror felt by the readers, it is more appropriate to empathize and see through the eyes of the characters to trace the roots of horror more objectively, which has been the route that has been followed during the earlier analysis. Regarding this point, it should be noted that Lovecraft's universe isn't excluded from this methodology, as it is possible to trace the fear of the unknown with an equally accurate analysis from the eyes of the characters. However, the difference lies in that very same factor, the fear of the unknown, while the minds of the readers may be used to seeing a fictional character struggle against all forms of horror and monsters and may not precisely empathize with their horror, the fear of the unknown that's predominant in Lovecraft's narration is unknown both to the audience and to the fictional characters, an important detail that's mutual to both parties. It is because of this distinct lack that, I believe, the horror in Miéville's *Bas-Lag* is more suitable to be researched through the eyes of the characters rather than from an omnipotent viewpoint .

After all, the term "Horror" isn't necessarily a notion limited to the specific genres of literature that are designed to evoke reactions of fear and dread, but rather, a natural feeling that's demonstrated by fictional characters and people alike, which is supported further by the origin of the words. Through taking a look back in history, based on the early 14th century description of the word itself, horror would refer to a feeling of disgust, dread, veneration, religious awe, or shaking and trembling with a sudden chill (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022), and , plausibly, so long as the characters

go through these sets of emotions when they face adversaries in Bas-Lag, it is perfectly feasible to analyze the horror within the narrative.

The fifth element of the specific effects of horror in relation to the given set of conditions, possibly referring to the result of the horrors, or the monsters' effect on the world building and characters, is another element that may set the two stories apart in characteristics from the perspective of the concept of allies. Whether we're referring to *At the Mountains of Madness*, or *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* or any Lovecraftian work for that matter, it would impose a great difficulty to truly classify any non-human character as an "Ally" of the protagonists, in this case, humans. While they may indirectly help the humans or eventually join forces like at the end of *Innsmouth*, they remain as a mostly hostile and almost always a vastly superior faction that directly opposes humanity. When it comes to Miéville's Bas-Lag trilogy however, the difference makes itself apparent as, right from the first of the novels, we come to realize that Lin, a Khepri artist who is the girlfriend of one of the main protagonists, Isaac, is also a core ally throughout the story. While the monsters of Lovecraft would either fall into a neutral or evil classification, only following their nature or lawful evil with their underwater societies, it is not as easy to similarly classify the monster races of Bas-Lag. While the anophelii with their vicious and somewhat mindless females and scholarly males seem similarly chaotic neutral, the avionic race of Garuda differs from this classification as Garuda feels closer to a law-abiding neutral place with its unique set of laws.

To sum up the key points once again, while the basic underlying horror is present with its subtle and untold state in Lovecraft's work, often only showcasing itself through the usage of third-party mediums like crazed sailors or rumours, it's still

present. Comparatively, to observe the horror in Miéville's work, the reader would need to see the narrative through the eyes of the characters, as otherwise, there isn't sufficient emphasis on horror and the fear of the unknown to truly evoke the uncanny feeling. Because of this difference, evidently the general effects or bearings of the horror on their respective worlds differ greatly. As stated earlier, the clearest way to have an answer to this comparative question with this element in mind is "What is at stake?". In Lovecraft's work, the stakes are high enough to determine the fate of the human race, and perhaps the world, as the races unearthed by the scientists or the secret societies exposed by the travelers of the stories are often biologically far more advanced than the human race, but they are also incomprehensible according to mankind's known laws of nature and science. An unstoppable force that defies logic and reason evokes the type of fear that can be described as "Inevitable." For Miéville's stories, while the stakes aren't as grand-scale and colossal, they're more intricate, character driven and based on ambitions and goals. The primary conflict of the novel starts from the search of Yagharek, a garuda whose wings have been removed, to find someone who will restore his ability to fly:

Flight is not a luxury. It is what makes me garuda. My skin crawls when I look up at roofs that trap me. I want to look down at this city before I leave it, Grimnebulin. I want to fly, not once, but whenever I will. "I want you to give me back flight."

Yagharek unclipped his cloak and threw it away across the floor. He stared at Isaac with shame and defiance. Isaac gasped. Yagharek had no wings.

(Miéville, 2000)

The resulting conflicts often lower the stakes to a more personal level while providing them with more context. Their mode of manifestation, however, is easily the most different characteristic between the two authors' works. Even the term manifest is somewhat paradoxical in the case of Lovecraft's horrors, as the monsters in his work are rarely ever even described in full detail. As beings that incite insanity upon eye contact, they're devices of cosmic horror that are never meant to be fully explained, understood, or manifested at the forefront of the narration; instead, they provide a continuous stream of unease caused by the fear of the unknown among the readers, trusting the creative human mind to fill in the gaps in the narration with its own creations much scarier than anything the author himself could have come up with.

In the world of Miéville's *Bas-Lag*, this fear of the unknown is present to a degree in the seemingly infinite and flat geography of the world and the physical manifestation of a hell in another dimension, thus challenging our world's science and religion. However, it is much less apparent in the monsters, as they not only are members of the same civilization that humans live in, they're able to be understood, spoken to and peacefully interacted with, but they also exhibit many of humanity's characteristics, with slight alterations such as missing a feature or having a distinct characteristic. Because of this, the fear of the unknown which exists in this universe lies mostly in the laws of nature and science of the universe, leaving readers without secure knowledge of what is possible and what isn't. In addition, due to this difference, the type of fear reaction pertaining to horror is, similarly, different in the respective stories. As beings written in a way according to which they're not meant to be explained nor understood, the monsters in Lovecraft's work cause insanity and

complete helplessness in the human characters exposed to them. Combining the elements of thalassophobia, fear of the unknown and body horror, the monsters of Lovecraft's literature embody cosmic horror in its purest form, evoking the sense of fear both in the readers and characters through a distinct and intentional lack of information, preventing the normalization and stagnation of the atmosphere. The fear that is unearthed by empathizing with the characters of Miéville's *Bas-Lag* fall much more in-line with the traditional sense of dread coming from fearing for one's life in a battle or conflict, a typical fight or flight response to imminent danger. While this is not necessarily the intent or the goal of the narrative, it is still present in a subtle form.

Lastly, the specific effects of the horror in relation to the given set of conditions of both stories start having some similar characteristics born from the feeling of the uncanny. It has been already established that the feeling of the uncanny, either by Freud's or Jentsch's description, relies on the feeling of incompleteness, either by a piece of a puzzle providing an uneasy feeling of familiarity to the complete picture, or the incomplete picture making one feel that something is off. This exact phenomenon is present in both the stories as the primary lasting effect in their given set of conditions. The followers of the old gods of Lovecraft's work, or the great old ones themselves may embody a fraction of human characteristics like a completely out of place set of eyeballs, or a humanoid silhouette, whereas the monster races in *Bas-Lag* often embody almost all of the human qualities, but lack a few. These qualities that mirror each other, while starting from opposite foundations, work towards the same uneasy feeling of the uncanny both for the characters and the readers. This is very much comparable to the fear of the unknown, of which the uncanny is a vital element. This is because both approaches, that of the whole

resembling a part and a part resembling the whole, eventually evoke the same feeling of the uncanny that Jentsch himself described:

In telling a story one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton and to do it in such a way that his attention is not focused directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately. (Jentsch, 1906)

Based on these comparisons, it is possible to claim that the differences in Miéville's *New Weird* works stem from the inclusion of great context and worldbuilding, removing most of the unknown from narration, and, instead, replacing some of it by creating a universe with its own laws of nature and science. The resulting narrative created by this depiction being capable of providing the sense of uncanny by crossing the boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar. And while the resulting work doesn't make use of the elements of Cosmicism, the detailed interactions between the thoroughly explained races provide a new, yet equally familiar feeling of the uncanny through mirroring the structure of Lovecraft's work in the visibility and understandability of its monsters.

The fundamentals of this thesis were built upon Lovecraft's five definitive elements of Cosmic Horror, which has been the main point of comparison on the subject of how monsters or the unknown have been portrayed in the Lovecraftian narrative and Miéville's world of *Bas-Lag*. In this context, the thesis begins by researching the background of the word "monster", the main focus of differentiating

the works of the two authors' depiction of their forms of horror. . Together with the etymological background of the word, I have also touched upon the evolution of the word , referencing its ambiguous and multifaceted nature extensively, both with examples from modern day fiction and earlier historical examples. Along with these, I have given examples of how monstrous entities, both figuratively and literally, have been used over time in contexts ranging from historical events to video games in order to further solidify the word's rich background in sufficient detail.

While using the aforementioned information in the analysis of Lovecraft, I've moved on from this etymological background to an analysis of Lovecraftian narrative by using his five elements, and more importantly, the function of monstrous figures as a magnifying glass.

Due to the nature of the subject, an intrinsic approach was the best choice, as what the many races of Bas-Lag or the monstrous creatures of Lovecraftian narrative may represent, or allude to, is not necessarily the focus of this research. As such, the focus has purely been on their importance in terms of the horror they represent, their status and situation in the universe, and lastly, their nature, or lack thereof.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

It is no surprise that the literature that covers Lovecraft's work alone is vast. As one of the founding fathers of cosmic horror, his Lovecraftian narrative, whether it is the Cthulhu saga or other standalone stories, or the poems, there is little to nothing that has not been said before regarding H.P. Lovecraft. In an effort to focus on a niche that contributes to this literature in a unique way, in my theoretical framework, I've given sufficient examples of the history of the word monster, how it stands out from the rest, and how a simple word can signify an entirely different notion despite seeming identical on the surface. The resulting comparison with its meaning in Lovecraftian narrative, both to its contemporary and historical usage, made it possible to make the argument that monsters in Lovecraft were never meant to be understood. This point also brings forth one of the key concepts of this paper, the fear of the unknown, and to an extent, cosmicism, or cosmic horror.

In Lovecraft's storytelling, fear of the unknown has been proven to be integral in portraying the horror of his works, as he said so himself in his papers on cosmic horror. For this reason, much of the reasoning behind the lack of visibility and on-screen representation of these horrors has been attributed to the development of cosmic horror through the fear of the unknown. Human insignificance, in parallel with this narrative, has also been a factor that empowers cosmic horror, which is based on human powerlessness and insignificance in the face of something far beyond our understanding. In this regard, the uncanny feeling stemming from the Lovecraftian monsters falls in line with Ernst Jentsch's description of the uncanny where a particular figure raises uncertainty, provoked by the anxiety about the unknown. Lastly, the focus was on the importance of an unreliable narrator, and its function in

enhancing the fear of the unknown, supported by the Oregon State University article “What is an Unreliable Narrator?”.

When it comes to Miéville’s work, the thesis has focused on the key factor that sets it apart from Lovecraftian narrative, creating a new genre called “New Weird”. As an apparent fan of Dungeons and Dragons, his usage of maps for his fictional locations, and avid focus on worldbuilding gave his work immense context and background. I’ve then provided examples of his worldbuilding fleshing out and removing most of the “unknown” away from the world of Bas-Lag, while still leaving enough unfamiliarity with the depictions of monstrous races. The resulting uncanny portrayal was more akin to Sigmund Freud’s description of the uncanny, where an individual may find strangeness in the ordinary, such as a single detail off and away from an otherwise whole object. This however, varied with each race of Bas-Lag, as some of them were easily distinguishable.

This literal comparison of what monsters refer to answered the first of the five elements, the basic, underlying horror or abnormality, condition. The second element, the general effects or the bearings of the horror, were observed to be vastly different in my analysis, as the horror of a character unable to even have eye contact with something without going insane far outweighed a vivid and morbid world of races living in unison. The following mode of manifestation, or the third element was also explored in the earlier comparison, focusing on the key aspect of Lovecraftian narrative, i.e. the lack of context. The fear reaction pertaining to the horror was where another important key factor that set Bas-Lag’s universe apart from cosmicism was brought forth. While all forms of grotesque and non-grotesque monsters populated the world of Bas-Lag, the existence of which did not drive human characters into a state of madness or a struggle for survival, but where the races actively cooperated

and lived together in a civilization. For the last element, the specific effects of horror in relation to the given set of conditions, and also to an extent for the previous elements, I've asked the question "What is at stake?" to both the narratives, as the answer of which would be the comparison of this element. And while the failure of humans would possibly either mean their complete extinction or assimilation in most of Lovecraft's stories, the triumph of antagonistic monsters in Bas-Lag would mean a lot less on the grand scale of things, on par with Miéville's worldbuilding-focused narration that focuses on the individual character struggles more, rather than a complete struggle between two or more races like Lovecraft's humans.

The result that this research aimed for, and hopefully achieved was the conclusion that examining the stories through the scope created by Lovecraft's five definitive elements and the concept of the uncanny from both Jentsch's and Freud's definition, we can observe that the fear of the unknown is an integral part of the representation of the monster in both stories. While they approach the same feeling of the uncanny, Lovecraft's world of cosmic horror that heavily relies on a constant lack of understandability does this by showing a fraction of the whole, and Miéville's Bas-Lag trilogy, which brims with context and worldbuilding achieves the same effect by leaving out key pieces from the whole picture to portray their horror. Thus, despite their differences, the uncanny built from the fear of the unknown is the primary drive for the horror present in both sets of works to their respective degrees.

The conclusion that highlights some of the differences regarding horror in terms of weird literature and new weird can also point towards future research topics; The importance of human insignificance and human incapability in Lovecraft's work that's present throughout all three main stories, and the civilizations in the world of Bas-Lag that live in varying degrees of peace brings up the question whether the

monsters of both works have post-humanist features, in this case, especially Lovecraftian horror where the inefficiencies of the human body and mind are a key element in its narrative. An example question for a potential future research paper would be whether Lovecraft portrayed the human body as flawed, insignificant, or weak in any way, and whether the monsters in his horror in their incomprehensibly vast and powerful civilization signify a perhaps utopic and unachievable lifeform. This can be purely intrinsic, focusing within the boundaries of the stories alone, or perhaps looking into the troubled life of Lovecraft.

From a different angle, the differences between Weird Literature and New Weird, and the latter's dependence on fantasy elements and diversion from clear usage of fear of the unknown into a subtle one, may also highlight a search for other spiritual successors to the genre of weird literature that emphasize cosmic horror. By deviating from the comparison to the new weird genre, other genres can be the subject of an analysis focusing on how they portray their horror through monsters. Analog horror, the form of horror media that utilizes old VHS recording effects and attempts of gritty realism for immersion and expression of the uncanny, is a genre that, by its low-budget nature, forces indie artists across the world to utilize the fear of the unknown for their artistic medium. Analyzing the monster representations in a few works of this genre may yield supportive evidence that analog horror is also a spiritual successor to cosmicism, and to an extent, Lovecraft's work in general.

Moreover, aside from specific examples, this research can also function as a resource to look into the horror portrayed through the monsters of any fictive work to create yet another comparative research between the work in question and Lovecraft's and Miéville's portrayal of a monster race. Finally, while not entirely plausible, looking into any fictive work of horror where no monster character is utilized within

the same theoretical framework can yield research that compares these two genres to the portrayal of horror where no monster figure is apparent, but instead, the horror is portrayed through fully comprehensible humans. Examples of these can be horror fiction where the antagonistic forces are either humans or man-made things, such as murderers, serial killers, an oppressive regime, an invading force, or perhaps a synthetic race created by mankind that revolts against it. As well as this, even the human insignificance or inability to change things emphasized in cosmic horror can be searched for in these potential fictive works in order to draw parallel lines.

In conclusion this research examined the monster representation in Lovecraft and Miéville's works through five definitive elements and the fear of the unknown, and the results highlighted their similarities despite their drastic difference in approach, and will hopefully inspire future research on the subject of what the supernatural monsters can represent, and how each author handles them in their respective works.

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