

2026 ARMITAGE SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE AND ABSTRACTS

The Seventh Biennial Dr. Henry Armitage Memorial Scholarship Symposium
of New Weird Fiction and Lovecraft-Related Research – 14-16 August 2026

Location: Omni Hotel, Providence - Providence Ballroom, 3rd floor

Symposium Chair: Dr. Elena Tchougounova-Paulson, editor of *Lovecraftian Proceedings*
(Hippocampus Press)

SCHEDULE -----

Friday 14 August

9.30am - Session 1: *"We are all roamers of vast spaces and travellers in many ages"*
Weird Fiction Itineraries: Literary Geography and Archival Landscapes. Chair: **Eric Steinhart**

1. **Daniel J. Holmes** "From Quebec to Kadath: Echoes of Canada in Lovecraft's Late Fiction"
2. **Heather Miller** "Vigilant and Insomniac Rationality" in Conrad and Lovecraft"
3. **Katherine Kerestman** "Galahad in the Rubble: Frank Belknap Long's Letters to Donald Wandrei, 1927 – 1975"

11:00am - Session 2: *"...the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents"* *Transcendence and Transgressions in Mythos-making.* Chair: **Eddie Guimont**

1. **Byron Nakamura** "A Shared Bond through Greece and Rome: Classical References in the Letters of HP Lovecraft and Frank Belknap Long"
2. **Eric Steinhart** "Liberation and Transcendence in Lovecraft's Fiction"
3. **Luke Matthews** "Lovecraft's Influence on UFO/UAP Ontologies"
4. **Eric Williams** "Two-Fisted Horror: Baring-Gould's *Grettir the Outlaw* and its influence on Robert E. Howard's weird fiction"

3:30pm - Session 3: *"...the beauty, the terror and the mystery of those obscure realms"*
H.P. Lovecraft and the Literary Traditions of the Gothic, Romantic, and Decadent Eras.
Chair: **Daniel J. Holmes**

1. **Dale Allen Crowley** "Gothic Echoes, Spectral Narratives, and Daemonic Rats: Lovecraft's "Rats in the Walls" as Mimesis for Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*"
2. **Perry Harrison** "H.P. Lovecraft and Mediaeval Literature"
3. **Sean Moreland** "*Animi Terrores*: The Lucretian Roots of Cosmic Horror and Folk Horror from M. G. Lewis to H. P. Lovecraft"
4. **Rosie Sentman** "Degeneration and Decadence in the Dragon's Court: How Fin-de-Siècle Paris' Gay Cruising Scene Gave *The King in Yellow's* Play its Cognitively Poisonous Power"

Saturday 15 August

9:30am - Session 4: “No death, no doom, no anguish can arouse the surpassing despair which flows from a loss of identity” *Shadow Over the Self: Uncanny Anatomy, Body Horror and Disability in Lovecraft’s Fiction*. Chair: **Carlos Gonzáles**

1. **Adia Reynolds** “Hearing Horror: Disability Representation and Lovecraftian Horror in the Fiction Podcast *Malevolent*”
2. **Benjamin Breyer** “Cold, Circulation, and Cosmic Affect: Bodily Experience and Sensory Language in Lovecraft’s Fiction”
3. **Bradley Will** “Rehabilitating Cthulhu and Decodifying Fishpeople”
4. **Warren Bigcang** “Fishfolk and Kinsfolk: Trans Resonances in H.P. Lovecraft’s ‘The Thing on the Doorstep’ and Other Stories”

11:00am - Session 5: “...that which we call shadow and illusion is substance and reality” *Filming the Unnameable: Adapting Cosmic Horror for the Screen*. Chair: **Dale Allen Crowley**

1. **Sean Lovitt** “The Mooncussers of Antonio Bay: Weirding John Carpenter’s *The Fog*”
2. **Seán Martin** “Uncanny Wallops and Weirdly Perfect Embodiments: Archive, Memory and the Self in the First Lovecraft Documentary”
3. **Taylor Province** “Lovecraft in Louisiana: The Intersection of Cosmic Horror and Detective Fiction in *True Detective*”

3:30pm - Session 6: “Pleasure to me is wonder—the unexplored, the unexpected, the thing that is hidden” *Cosmic Horror and the Subconscious: Exploring Lovecraft through Jung and the Occult*. Chair: **Michael A. Torregrossa**

1. **Carlos Gonzáles** “Drawing Dagon Down: Lovecraft’s Presence in the Contemporary Occult”
2. **Peter Muise** “Unwholesome Nocturnal Meetings: H.P. Lovecraft, Margaret Murray, and the Witches’ Sabbath”
3. **Kyle Gamache** “The Universal Syzygy: Freud and Jung in *The Masks of Nyarlathotep*”
4. **Taylor Walker** “The Dream Quest of Carl Jung: Synchronicity in Jung’s Collective Unconscious and Lovecraft’s *Dreamlands*”

5:00pm - Session 7: “...the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age” *Mythos, Misinformation and Conspiracy: Analysing Cosmic Horror through the Lens of Propaganda*. Chair: **Elena Tchougounova-Paulson**

1. **Angela Reitz** “A Comparative Analysis of the Cthulhu Mythos and its Connection to Antisemitic Propaganda”
2. **Eddie Guimont** “Lovecraft and the UFO”:
3. **Melissa Stuart** “Lovecraft and Eugenics: for HPL, It was Personal”
4. **Rolf Maurer** “When Cognitive Dissonance Fails: Confronting the Inextricability of Lovecraft’s Imagination and Xenophobia”

Sunday 16 August

9:30am - Session 8: *"...a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it" Eco-Horror and Cosmic Decay: Monstrous Environments in Lovecraft's Works.* Chair: **Byron J. Nakamura**

1. **Fred Lubnow** "In the Absence of Light...An Assessment of Lovecraftian Non-Photosynthetic Ecosystems"
2. **Daniel Zygiel-Clague** "Climate of Cthulhu: The Cosmic Horror of Environmental Disaster"
3. **Matthew Buffington (ft Zachary Griebenow)** "Towards a classification of the HP Lovecraft creature-universe"
4. **Prema Arasu** "The Antipodean Weird in Lovecraft and Others"

11:00am - Session 9: *"We see things only as we are constructed to see them" Decoding Mythos: How Linguistics, Comics, and LLMs Reframe Cosmic Horror.* Chair: **Heather Miller**

1. **Eric LaFreniere** "Lovecraft's Unspeakable Grammar: Moore's Excavation of the Alien Holophrase in *The Courtyard*"
2. **Nathaniel Wallace** "Eidolic Augmentation: Machine Generated Grimoires and Stage Plays"
3. **Michael A. Torregrossa** "New England Legends in Comics"
4. **Timothy Jarvis** "A Simple Obstinacy: Weird Fiction and Transgression"

3:30pm - Session 10: *"The vengeance of the infinite abysses" Cosmic Pessimism: Investigating Lovecraftian Politics and Epistemological Critique.* Chair: **Kyle Gamache**

1. **Ethan Cohnat** "Correlating the Mind's Contents: Lovecraft's Challenge to Philosophers"
2. **Robert Ames** "From Theory-Fiction to Petropolitical Exegesis: Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* and 'the Spouter'"
3. **Troy M. Rondinone** "Cryptid Country: Making Sense of America's Monstrous Landscape"

ABSTRACTS -----

1. **Adia Reynolds** "Hearing Horror: Disability Representation and Lovecraftian Horror in the Fiction Podcast *Malevolent*"

Malevolent is a 2020–2026 horror podcast which follows the newly disabled private investigator, Arthur Lestor. The first thing listeners learn as the pilot episode begins is that Arthur is newly blinded because he dared to leaf through the pages of the in-world text of *The King in Yellow*. Moreover, Arthur continues to lose sensation and control of his limbs as a spirit systemically possesses more of his body. *Malevolent*'s depiction of disability not only demonstrates how a disabled person can and should exist in leading roles, but also how different means of navigating the world result in different experiences of the eldritch. As an audio drama based upon the *Call of Cthulhu* TTRPG (table top roleplaying game) which itself is based upon Lovecraft and his contemporaries, *Malevolent* demonstrates a nuanced understanding of genre unlike any other current horror podcast.

This paper will analyze the relationship between the storytelling format, genre conventions of Lovecraftian horror, and the depiction of a disabled protagonist navigating a world of horrors beyond comprehension. By studying the depictions of disability in *Deaf, Dumb, and Blind* by H.P. Lovecraft and C.M. Eddy Jr., *Shadow of Innsmouth*, and *The Dunwich Horror*, the paper demonstrates *Malevolent*'s position as a unique installment into Lovecraft fiction. This history includes both a broad scope development of weird fiction in the 20th and 21st century, and a timeline tracking disability representation within the genre. From there, the paper will debate the quality of disability depictions in *Malevolent*, and whether the protagonist meaningfully represents blindness or if the condition is merely a convenient plot device.

2. **Angela Reitz** "A Comparative Analysis of the Cthulhu Mythos and its Connection to Antisemitic Propaganda"

H.P. Lovecraft's fear of other ethnic groups and religious organizations is predominant within his pulp horror fiction. Lovecraft's world building with the Cthulhu Mythos conveys similar attributes to Esoteric Christian theosophy, a system of thought that American fascist extremist William Dudley Pelley used in order to perpetuate anti-semitic propaganda through his The Silver Scripts newsletters in the 1920's through the 1940's. Pelley was the leader of a group called The Silver Legion of America, which was more commonly known as The Silver Shirts. This group was pro-Nazi pro-fascism white supremacist hate group that operated around the same time Pelley was publishing The Silver Scripts. Comparing both men highlights their similarities due to being born and raised around New England, their time writing in pulp fiction, and their racist political beliefs. The Nazi Party of Germany used Esoteric Christian Theosophy in order to create their antisemitic propaganda and its perpetuation of anti-semitic conspiracy theories. This essay pulls in further knowledge of other Esoteric beliefs of this time period, and the relation it has with anti-semitic conspiracy theories that were in circulation. Through this knowledge, comparisons can be made to H.P. Lovecraft's plot to "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" and how it reflects these same anti-semitic conspiracy theories. This research analyzes and compares the similarities in philosophy and Nazi themes present in both Lovecraft and Pelley's separate works through

comparing the personal letters and Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos to the Esoteric Christian anti-semitic propagandic newsletters written by William Dudley Pelley.

3. **Benjamin Breyer** "Cold, Circulation, and Cosmic Affect: Bodily Experience and Sensory Language in Lovecraft's Fiction"

H. P. Lovecraft's unusual sensitivity to cold has long been noted in his correspondence and in reminiscences by contemporaries. Lovecraft himself frequently remarks on his intense discomfort in low temperatures and his aversion to cold weather in his letters, while S. T. Joshi's biographical and editorial work likewise documents Lovecraft's recurring comments about cold and its bodily effects. Although these references appear throughout both Lovecraft's correspondence and later biographical accounts, they have generally been treated as incidental details rather than as elements with interpretive significance for his writing.

This paper revisits those observations by examining Lovecraft's documented cold sensitivity cautiously through the lens of Raynaud syndrome-like symptoms, specifically cold-triggered numbness, pallor, and impaired circulation, without proposing a retrospective medical diagnosis. Drawing on evidence from Lovecraft's correspondence as well as later biographical accounts, the paper considers how these experiences may illuminate the sensory vocabulary of his fiction. Across stories such as "The Colour out of Space," *At the Mountains of Madness*, and others, Lovecraft repeatedly mobilizes imagery of chilling atmospheres, numbing dread, and bodily paralysis to convey encounters with the cosmic unknown.

By situating Lovecraft's physiological sensitivity alongside the language of cold, numbness, and bodily disruption that permeates his fiction, the paper argues that symptom language becomes aesthetic language. What appears as atmospheric description can also be read as a transformation of lived bodily experience into narrative affect. This approach does not pathologize Lovecraft's imagination but instead suggests that his distinctive sensory vocabulary may partly emerge from recurrent embodied experiences of cold and circulatory distress, helping to shape the affective textures of cosmic horror in his fiction.

4. **Bradley Will** "Rehabilitating Cthulhu and Decodifying Fishpeople"

This presentation will explore three modes of rehabilitating the Cthulhu mythos—rehabilitation in the sense of the twenty-first century effort to confront and recast racism, misogyny, and homophobia of the mythos and of the genre of weird fiction in general.

The least successful rehabilitation is that of tabletop gaming. Here, in games such as *Cthulhu: Death May Die*, *Mansions of Madness*, and the various *Arkham Horror* titles, people of color, women, and LGBTQ persons are well and thoroughly represented among the characters that players can adopt as alter egos facing off against cultists and monsters. However, problematic aspects of monsters of the Cthulhu mythos persist. For example, the racist unease of miscagenation persists as Deep Ones and associated hybrids threaten players with the possibility of transformation and "mixing blood" with another race or species.

Pulling in a different direction are the literary rehabilitations, such as John Langan's *The Fisherman*, which presents a new weird monstrous demigod and its minions. Langan's horror references the biblical Leviathan but avoids the low-hanging temptation of directly evoking Dagon and the Deep Ones of the Cthulhu mythos. *The Fisherman* problematizes the dehumanizing politics of miscegenation by having a first-person narrator who identifies his ethnic heritage as Melungeon, the multiethnic people who built a refuge from early colonial racism deep within the Appalachians.

Most powerfully, a handful of contemporary authors engage the Cthulhu mythos directly, confronting, reversing, and decodifying or perhaps recodifying the mythos. Ruthanna Emrys' *Innsmouth Legacy* trilogy recasts Deep Ones, reworking the monstrous into the sympathetic. Emrys, Victor LaValle (in *The Ballad of Black Tom*), and others use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house—or perhaps better, to reclaim it as their own.

5. **Byron Nakamura** “A Shared Bond through Greece and Rome: Classical References in the Letters of HP Lovecraft and Frank Belknap Long”

The recent publication of the definitive edition of the Letters of HP Lovecraft and Frank Belknap Long (*A Sense of Proportion* [Hippocampus 2025]) reveals a treasure trove of correspondence between the two men, including 500 folio pages of heretofore long-lost and unexamined material. What becomes clear through an examination of these letters are the abundant references by both writers to the classical world of Greco-Roman antiquity. Prominent works of classical literature, architectural/archaeological examples, historical events, as well as references to figures both great and obscure from the ancient world make their appearance in these letters.

Lovecraft and Long shared these classical allusions and employed them in various contexts. These would include clever inside-jokes, the playful use of pseudo-Latin names for each other, and even illustrated caricatures of themselves as Romans. Other examples punctuated more sober discussions between the two like Lovecraft's grief over his mother's death and Long's frustrations over an editor's criticism of a manuscript. What we find is a deep and profound influence of the classical world in both authors' conversations over serious issues such as racial identity, philosophy, aesthetics, and even sex. Both writers used classical allusions not only to demonstrate their respective powers of erudition, but in a way buttress their intellectual credentials as Lovecraft and Long were college drop-outs and neither possessed formal academic degrees.

6. **Carlos A. González** “Drawing Dagon Down: Lovecraft's Presence in the Contemporary Occult”

Despite Lovecraft's well-documented disdain for superstition and religiosity, contemporary occultists and members of a variety of so called “left-hand” paths have appropriated numerous elements of the Lovecraftian mythoi into their ritual and religious traditions. From Satanists to chaos magicians to eclectic witches, the deities and dark forces who shatter the lives of many of Lovecraft's protagonists are summoned, venerated, feared, and supplicated by fans of his weird tales as if they were existing entities. This, despite the fact that their first appearances as fictional characters can be precisely identified as publishing dates, and their characterizations are generally apathetic or inimical to human, or indeed all, life, reflects real

religious experience and informs a wide variety of occult traditions, manifesting in everything from eldritch spellbooks to official ritual. I borrow and adapt the notion of *presencing*, a framework which describes how an image could make manifest the presence of a deity, from the cognitive study of religion proposed by scholar Dan McClellan to describe how fictional characters of an avowed atheist have been successfully integrated into the magical workings of believers, and how *The Satanic Bible*, *The Necronomicon*, sigilcraft, and other occult artefacts and practices make use of Lovecraft's cosmic others. I argue that *presencing* accounts for the religious experience(s) of Lovecraftian belief which arrives without cognitive dissonance, and how Weird fiction makes use of *presencing* to compensate for the unthinkability of such eldritch deities.

7. Dale Allen Crowley "Gothic Echoes, Spectral Narratives, and Daemonic Rats: Lovecraft's "Rats in the Walls" as Mimesis for Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*"

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is widely considered to be the first true Gothic novel, and the Gothic aestheticism created in *The Castle of Otranto* used crashes of lightning, dark foreboding castles, dungeons, moaning ghosts, and evil portents to introduce an influential narrative style. Separated from Walpole's eighteenth-century novel by more than 150 years, weird fiction emerged in the early part of the twentieth century as a unique sub-genre of fiction, and one weird writer rose above the other authors of the time – H. P. Lovecraft. An examination of Lovecraft's 1923 short story, "The Rats in the Walls", finds an interesting parity between it and Walpole's *Otranto*. Until recently, critical examinations of "The Rats in the Walls" have attempted to situate it as a pastiche of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher". I would argue that this is not necessarily accurate, and that Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls" was heavily influenced by and shared undeniable similarities with the Gothic narrative of Horace Walpole and his gloomy, genre-defining *Castle of Otranto*. There is a consistency in the way Walpole and Lovecraft engage terror-inducing narrative techniques of early eighteenth-century Gothic novels, of which Horace Walpole's was the progenitor of, to provide a conduit through which primal fear is transmitted into the modern prose tradition that became weird fiction. The 1923 short story, "The Rats in the Walls", by H.P. Lovecraft is in fact an homage to Walpole's seminal Gothic novel, and Gothic aestheticism in general.

8. Daniel J. Holmes "From Quebec to Kadath: Echoes of Canada in Lovecraft's Late Fiction"

In his introduction to the first publication of Lovecraft's Quebec travelogue, L. Sprague de Camp claims that Lovecraft's Canadian excursions "abolished the xenophobic prejudice he had long held against French Canadians and other foreigners. In fact, the decline of his benighted ethnocentrism may be said to have begun at this time." Although this argument is likely a bit overstated, it does correspond with a distinct shift in Lovecraft's fiction which I noted in my presentation at the 2024 Armitage Symposium. In that paper, I had discussed the ways that Lovecraft's virulent disdain for both immigrants and Catholics (as expressed in early works like "Rhode Island in 2000 AD") contrasted with a more positive depiction of Catholic rituals, architecture, and immigrant populations in his later fiction (such as the Polish and Italian parishes featured in "The Dreams in the Witch House" and "The Haunter of the Dark," respectively). There is no doubt that Lovecraft's trip to Quebec exercised a hypnotic influence on his imagination - his *Description of the Town of Quebec* is the single

longest text he ever wrote, and he never even intended for it to be published. Although Lovecraft's xenophobia was likely never truly "abolished" in the way that de Camp argues, it seems fair to suggest that Lovecraft's fascination with the City of Quebec influenced the more nuanced depiction of Catholic immigrants in Lovecraft's late stories. In Rhode Island, Lovecraft was repulsed by the "clamorous plague of French-Canadians" that had settled in cities like Woonsocket, and by the "effeminate and repugnant" religion which the "snivelling little mass-whiners" brought with them. In Quebec, however, he encountered a cultural and aesthetic tradition which seemed to him every bit as ancient and "native" as his own New England heritage, and he wrote glowingly of "heroick" Jesuit missionaries like St Isaac Jogues, whose "fortitude possesses a splendour worthy of epick literature." This paper will establish Quebec as a turning point in Lovecraft's fiction, softening (though not eliminating) his anti-immigrant sentiments and laying the foundations for later creations like St Stanislaus Parish in *Witch House* and Spirito Santo Church in *Haunter*.

9. **Daniel Zygiel-Clague** "Climate of Cthulhu: The Cosmic Horror of Environmental Disaster"

This year marks nearly a century since Lovecraft wrote *The Call of Cthulhu*. Since that time, and since his death, humanity has borne witness to myriad "horrors beyond comprehension" from nightmarish global warfare to the atom bomb, innovations and terrifying new discoveries in space exploration, disturbing technological trends and discoveries, and diabolical experiments in fields of medicine, physics, bioengineering and more. In the time since his passing, adaptations of his work from Reanimator to the popular *DELTA Green* RPG have sought to capture the feel of his work while incorporating modern geopolitical, social and scientific changes. But perhaps no modern challenge forces the human mind to reckon with a true Cosmic horror as much as the Leviathan of Climate change which stands today poised to shift the balance of power and human history, and to potentially undermine or destroy modern civilization. Climate change is a monster on the scale of Cthulhu; something which no single scientist (or even scientific field) fully comprehends the long term impact from, which few individuals can wrap their minds around. Yet in the current political climate, it seems the majority of people are ignorant at best or actively accelerating the conditions for personal gain at worst which intensify Climate change. The real life "cult of cthulhu" today worships industries that will make its adherents enough money to keep them and their families safe and well supplied while the rest of the world drowns, either out of ignorance or from an understanding that if they do not profit from the dwindling resources available, they will drown while others profit. The intensifying drive of consumption and consumerism of the modern era accelerates the most visible symptoms of climate disaster and promotes the notion of ignorance or individual survival rather than collective cooperation, and the clock continues to accelerate. All the while, those who have developed an understanding or appreciation of the scale and threat of climate disaster often find themselves at the fringes of radical politics, or treated like madmen, ostracized or criminalized for speaking out and driven to extremes trying to stop an impending apocalypse.

In these and many more ways, climate change has demonstrably taken the throne as the modern manifestation of Cosmic horror in fact. Unfortunately, all too many efforts to interpret Cosmic horror on the screen or in other adaptations fundamentally misunderstand what Cosmic and eldritch horror is. Slapping tentacles on a boss battle in a video game may

be reminiscent of cthulhu but enabling the notion that an individual can singlehandedly stop an apocalyptic event on a cosmic horror scale flies in the face of the notion of what Cosmic horror truly is. For a long time, the idea that a person could simply witness a disturbing entity and be driven mad from the inherent “eldritch knowledge” of such an experience forces any adaptations to then imagine what such an entity might look, sound, or behave like, and something inherently comprehensible by design is the result. Some of the best modern Cosmic horror fiction, such as the *Southern Reach* novels by Jeff Vandermeer, the novella *Ammonia* by William Holloway from *The Abyssal Plain: The R'lyeh Cycle*, *The Three Body Problem* by Liu Cixin and related short or longer form stories and adaptations have incorporated elements of the scale or terror of climate disaster into their storytelling to the benefit of the stories, or have demonstrated a clearer understanding of what makes a cosmic horror truly mind-melting. Witnessing such horror is not terrifying because they are ugly or appear unnatural, but because of the implications they carry; when we stare at a true eldritch horror, we see a preview of the apocalypse reflected back, and when we realize how little we can do to stop or change such things as individuals, or even that other humans are striving to worsen them, we experience cosmic and eldritch horror.

10. **Edward Guimont** “Lovecraft and the UFO”

Since the mid-2000s, H. P. Lovecraft’s influence on the “ancient astronaut theory” popularized by Erich von Däniken’s 1968 *Chariots of the Gods?*—the idea that aliens visited Earth in the distant past, built mysterious monuments, and inspired ancient religions—has been well charted. In contrast, much less focus has been given to Lovecraft’s influence on the perception and analysis of modern-day UFOs which emerged a decade after his death with the first “flying saucer” sighting by Kenneth Arnold.

This talk (and the *Lovecraftian Proceedings* article that will come from it) will work to fill in this blank spot in scholarship by exploring Lovecraft’s connection to pre-1947 “mystery airship” sightings, including one by his friend Clark Ashton Smith and the influence of a colonial-era sighting to Lovecraft’s early story “The White Ship;” Lovecraft’s debunking of a supposed mystery flying vehicle sighting in 1909; Lovecraft’s citations by early alien conspiracy advocate Richard Shaver, as well as later investigators as John Keel and Jerome Clark; the contributions of early UFO writers Donald Keyhoe and Robert Spencer Carr to *Weird Tales*; how items of interest to Lovecraft, such as Antarctic exploration and artist Nicholas Roerich, also inspired early UFO authors; and the similarities in Lovecraft’s blending of New England pastoralism, cosmic horror, conspiratorial coverups, and suspected experimentation and infiltration paralleled the setting for early UFO and alien abduction reports by Boston journalist John Fuller. The talk will end with prospective routes for future archival exploration of this topic.

11. **Eric La Freniere** “Lovecraft’s Unspeakable Grammar: Moore’s Excavation of the Alien Holophrase in *The Courtyard*”

H. P. Lovecraft’s narrators don’t fail to describe the cosmic unknown because it exceeds language — they fail because it exceeds the human Umwelt entirely. Drawing on Jakob von Uexküll’s biosemiotic principle that every species inhabits a perceptual world constructed from its specific physiology — a principle Lovecraft understood through his engagement with

weird fiction — this paper argues that Lovecraft’s indescribability is not aesthetic but ontological: his prose breaks not against the indescribable but against the incommensurable. Like Einstein with quantum uncertainty, Lovecraft averted his gaze from the full implication of his work. Alan Moore’s *The Courtyard* (prose, 1994; comics adaptation, 2003) excavates what Lovecraft’s materialism prevented him from developing.

Building on prior work in language emergence and the Lovecraftian novum (see Presenter Biography), I argue that Moore treats Aklo, Lovecraft’s deliberately undefined ritual vocabulary, as an alien holophrase: the Ur-syntax of a wholly separate perceptual field, elaborated not from mammalian physiology but from a cosmic base incommensurable with human cognition. Our language elaborates upward from the holophrastic cry through contingency-based abstraction, tethered to our embodiment; Aklo elaborates from an altogether alien ground that encodes, as Moore writes in *The Courtyard*, “preconscious orderings wrung from a hot incoherence of stars.”

Moore’s excavation of three Aklo terms drawn from or elaborating Lovecraft’s Mythos vocabulary — *Wza-Y’ei*, *Dho-hna*, and *Yr Nhhngr*, left undefined by Lovecraft but given precise syntactic function by Moore — reveals nested holophrases: each elaborating not meaning but perceptual foundation, pulling the initiate into a world incommensurable with human life. Lovecraft’s consonant clusters and adjectival excess were symptomatic of that incommensurability. Aldo Sax embodies the diagnosis: his murders are failed translations of our flesh into an alien grammar. Lovecraft’s prose strains toward the ceiling of our Umwelt; Moore excavates beneath its floor and finds only alien ground.

12. Eric Steinhart “Liberation and Transcendence in Lovecraft’s Fiction”

We all know Lovecraft’s fiction contains an intricate system of threat signals (horrors beyond horrors...). But I believe a close reading of his fiction – which focuses on the texts alone – also reveals an elaborate transcendence signal. If that’s right, several surprising consequences follow. First, Lovecraft’s fiction really is sublime. Second, cosmicism is only one side of the Mythos, a side whose nihilism the Mythos overcomes with an extraordinarily beautiful vision. Third, the *Dream Cycle* functions as an essential part of the larger Mythos, and is in fact systematically woven throughout the Mythos. Fourth, many apparently ordinary objects (like the stars) perform metaphysical functions. To get at the transcendence signal, start with Azathoth, who lacks form, light, color, time, mind, and vision – in short, Azathoth lacks beauty, both in its manifestation and its appreciation. To satisfy his hunger for what he lacks, Azathoth dreams beauty into existence. Azathoth generates a pantheon of hypostatic artistic powers. Through them, Azathoth dreams into being music, dancing, visual artistry, architecture, and finally sculpture. The pantheon generates the Dreamlands, glorious worlds of infinite aesthetic meaning, awful purpose, and transcendental value. Who are we really? We are in truth luminous dreamers, brothers and sisters of light. Yet we have fallen out of the dreaming, through the stars, and into wakefulness. To be awake is to be stuck in an eternal loop, which fails to increase beauty, and which therefore is meaningless, purposeless, and valueless. We are trapped and tormented in our fallen wake-bodies, in our bleak wake-universe. From Cthulhu through Nyarlathotep, the pantheon works to rescue us from the ugly illusions of wakeful life. When the stars are right, they will liberate us. We will again be brothers and sisters of light.

13. Eric M. Williams “Two-Fisted Horror: Baring-Gould’s *Grettir the Outlaw* and its influence on Robert E. Howard’s weird fiction”

In a 1926 letter to *Weird Tales* magazine, a twenty-year old Robert E. Howard referred to *The Saga of Grettir the Outlaw* as the “peak of horror” and particularly highlighted the power of the “terrific, night-long battle” recounted therein. It has been suggested that Howard had read George Hight’s *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, a 1914 translation of the Icelandic saga; however, textual evidence suggests that the version he’d read was actually Sabine Baring-Gould’s 1889 translation, titled *Grettir the Outlaw*. A close reading of Baring-Gould’s work demonstrates how important an influence this liberal adaptation of the saga was on Howard; story elements as well as several scenes in Howard’s seminal weird western “The Horror from the Mound” were directly borrowed from Baring-Gould’s idiosyncratic adaptation, elements largely invented by Baring-Gould and with no precedence in either the original saga or in other contemporaneous translations. In addition to providing a key model for the action-oriented horror that typifies Howard’s oeuvre, this is another example of the important though underappreciated influence Baring-Gould had on the development of weird fiction. Baring-Gould’s *Grettir the Outlaw* (1889) stands alongside his *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (1877), mentioned in Lovecraft’s “Supernatural Horror in Literature,” as a key influential text in the genre.

14. Ethan Kovnat “Correlating the Mind’s Contents: Lovecraft’s Challenge to Philosophers”

H. P. Lovecraft’s *The Call of Cthulhu* famously begins with the words, “The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents” (Lovecraft 2008, 355). The idea of correlating the mind’s contents seems to describe major themes in late 19th and early 20th century philosophy, much of which was concerned with synthesizing domains of knowledge (see Spencer 1915) or clarifying thought (see Wittgenstein 2014). If philosophy is about correlating the mind’s contents, then it seems like Lovecraft’s words can be interpreted as a criticism of the discipline of philosophy. On this view, practicing philosophy is futile, since the mind is unable to correlate its contents, and actively dangerous, since successfully correlating the mind’s contents would cause us to “either go mad from the revelation of flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age” (Lovecraft 2008, 355).

Lovecraft’s criticism of philosophy is further developed in *Herbert West—Reanimator* and *The Thing on the Doorstep*, which derive horror from opposite answers to the same philosophical question. One of the central questions in the philosophy of mind concerns the relationship between the mind and the body. Some philosophers, most notably Descartes (2008), subscribe to a dualist answer to this question, arguing that the mind and the body are composed of separate substances or possess different properties. Others reject dualism and subscribe to monism, the view that the mind and the body are the same entity. One such monist is Herbert West, whose experiments aim to show “that man has no central connective spirit, but is merely a machine of nervous matter” (Lovecraft 2008, 200). West’s experiments prove disastrously successful, and the horror of his story is derived from the truth of his monist hypothesis. Meanwhile, Asenath Waite, the antagonist of “The Thing on the Doorstep,” is a student of metaphysics who “often made wild claims about the nature of

consciousness and about its independence of the physical frame” (Lovecraft 2008, 923). The horror of the story, which centers on minds transferring between bodies, is derived from the truth of her dualist hypothesis. Lovecraft shows that either answer to this central philosophical question results in horror, in which case one could reasonably interpret him as suggesting that this question ought not to be investigated.

The irony, of course, is that despite Lovecraft’s apartment criticism of philosophy, he engaged in philosophy himself. Lovecraft’s works are interpreted as presenting a unique philosophical outlook according to which the cosmos is fundamentally indifferent to humanity (see Joshi 2008) and reality is ultimately indescribable (see Harman 2012). However, I think these aspects of Lovecraft’s views are not in tension because Lovecraft does not assume that engaging in philosophy is an entirely voluntary act. Perhaps it would be better for us not to do philosophy, but trying to correlate the mind’s contents is an unavoidable symptom of the human predicament. This, I think, enhances the horror of Lovecraft’s work, especially for philosophers.

15. Fred S. Lubnow “In the Absence of Light...An Assessment of Lovecraftian Non-Photosynthetic Ecosystems”

(Illustrations by Steve Maschuck)

Many of the organisms and their associated environments described by H.P. Lovecraft were not structured and did not function as most ecosystems found on Earth. Specifically, the majority of Terran ecosystems are structured where the base of the food web is comprised of autotrophic organisms, primarily plants, algae, and cyanobacteria. These photosynthetic organisms are the producers, which are grazed upon by herbivores who in turn are feed upon

carnivores. Decomposers then break down both dead biomass and biological waste into nutrients and other compounds that allow the producers to continue to grow. However, in many of Lovecraft’s stories specific ecosystems and the organisms that populate them are not anchored in an autotrophic food web.

This presentation will review several Lovecraftian ecosystems that are not autotrophically based. Some will of these Lovecraftian ecosystems are on Earth, such as the deep sea and the frozen Antarctic. Others are on other planets or in interstellar space. Others still may be in other universes and involve quantum mechanics. Examples of such ecosystems will be reviewed and, where possible, compared to more familiar ecosystems. The goal of the presentation is to identify how these Lovecraftian ecosystems may function in spite of not having an autotrophic base for their food webs.

16. Heather Miller ““Vigilant and Insomniac Rationality” in Conrad and Lovecraft”

Critics have accused Joseph Conrad of being too ambiguous about the “darkness” in his novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), saying he does not define what he means by the term. Others, such as writer Chinua Achebe, see the darkness as Conrad’s evading the full burden of European history in Africa. Tied up with the idea of darkness is the question of “civilization” and its consequences, which is left open at the end of the novella. Marlow reckons with a difficult matter: despite the efforts of The Company and those who work for

it, the company's projects stagnate, people die at a brisk clip, and Marlow seems to do nothing with what he learned.

Although similar accusations of ambiguity cannot be launched against HP Lovecraft, whose descriptions are richly detailed and whose intent is usually clear, he does present a similar view of Western civilization but with subtly different outcomes. For Lovecraft, civilization is the most reliable bulwark against what he believes are the eroding effects of modernity, yet for his narrators, the opposite is the case: human civilization, weak and invisible to alien horrors, is destined to fail.

"It is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters, but vigilant and insomniac rationality," write Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* while discussing the unconscious, but they could have equally been discussing the West. The state of civilization that Conrad's and Lovecraft's narrators find themselves within is a liminal space, full of terror and potentiality. In contrast to what proponents of civilizing missions believe, civilization itself is fragile, transient, uncertain, untrustworthy. It is supported by that vigilant and insomniac rationality that, in turn, creates the monsters who destroy it. This paper will discuss, via selected works by Deleuze/Guattari on monsters, horror, and liminal spaces, how Conrad and Lovecraft problematize the notion of civilization by their valorizing of it, placing civilization in a liminal space between the human and the alien.

17. Katherine Kerestman "Galahad in the Rubble: Frank Belknap Long's Letters to Donald Wandrei, 1927 – 1975

The packet of twenty-nine letters, postcards, and Christmas cards written by Frank Belknap Long to Donald Wandrei discussed herein are relics of a human life and a literary relationship. From apprenticeship in the amateur journalism community, Frank Belknap Long grew to manhood and artistic maturity under the wing of friend and mentor Howard Lovecraft, in a rarified atmosphere peopled with writers of weird fiction and disciples of his mentor. The innermost circle around Lovecraft were the Kalem's, but, over time, the circle grew wider and wider, attracting writers, who were drawn by both the man himself and the art he espoused. The greater Lovecraft's esteem, the more diverse the growing cohort, so that, by the time of his death, ideological factions and personal animosities among his admirers clouded his legacy and broke up what had been a family to Long.

Frank Belknap Long was at the forefront of modern science fiction, continued writing supernatural and weird tales, cranked out pulp novels and comic books, edited magazines, and tried to be a good family man and true friend. He has bequeathed us all a legacy of fantastic tales and all-too human stories of his own life among the friends of Lovecraft.

18. Kyle Gamache "The Universal Syzygy: Freud and Jung in The Masks of Nyarlathotep"

The *Masks of Nyarlathotep* (198X) module for the *Call of Cthulhu Role-Playing Game* (198x) has been lauded as one of the best RPG adventures ever written. The globetrotting adventure pits the player characters against the remnants of the Carlyle Expedition, an ill-fated group of archologists and socialites that were corrupted into servitude of the dark Mythos god Nyarlathotep. Rich writing through the various editions of the game has expanded on the world of 1925 and the backgrounds of the Carlyle principals. This paper

focuses on one of the chief villains Dr. Robert Huston and the use of early 20th century psychological theory. In the game, Huston is a world-famous psychiatrist that studied under the Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, using his training to make sense of the madness of Nyarlathotep. Surprisingly well written, the supplemental material for the *Masks* modules attempts to blend historical psychoanalytic theories to explain how Huston's mind shatters, and broadly employs Jungian archetypes in describing the many faces of the Crawling Chaos. This paper examines these themes and elements to show the influence of real theories on the story.

19. Luke J. Matthews "Lovecraft's Influence on UFO/UAP Ontologies"

H.P. Lovecraft set out to write compelling fiction through dedicated practice at narrative craftsmanship much as did his idol E.A. Poe. In his correspondences, Lovecraft emphasized his materialism and that his fictions were crafted as hoaxes to which the reader willingly submitted. Paradoxically, however, his fictional explorations of ancient aliens provided an ontological grounding that made modern UFO/UAP paranormal research a logical undertaking, even if one that has not (yet?) produced dispositive evidence of alien contact. Related also is Lovecraft's self-professed philosophy of cosmicism, which can be viewed as a modern-day resuscitation of archontic Neoplatonic and Gnostic views, but which provides an epistemological grounding for human ignorance of alien contact as well as an ontological grounding for alien contact via inter-dimensionality. Scholarly influence often proceeds in unexpected ways, and Lovecraft's influence on citizen paranormal research need no intention from Lovecraft to be a real effect. A close reading of Lovecraft's oeuvre, however, suggests Lovecraft himself may have had a late-developed interest in whether, and how, his fictions might be true. In particular, two of Lovecraft's last works, *The Dreams in the Witchhouse* and *The Haunter of the Dark*, include hard science speculation about mechanisms, and ecumenical validation of immigrant Christian metaphysics, that contrast starkly with his earlier and more thoroughly skeptical fiction.

20. Matthew Buffington and Zachary Griebenow "Towards a classification of the HP Lovecraft creature-universe"

Classifications in natural history provide a framework for efficient information retrieval about our world. Species are organized into genera; genera into families, etc. This process is analogous to organizing a library; without the Dewey Decimal system, for instance, a library may be comprehensive, but impossible to navigate. Here we provide a preliminary classification of the creature-universe of H. P. Lovecraft, premised on the taxonomic principles used to describe actual living organisms. To avoid confounding the classification with interpretations by subsequent authors and historians, we draw exclusively from the original texts of Lovecraft's published pieces. We will also attempt a summary of general trends observable in the morphology, behavior, and origins of Lovecraft's creatures—through his writing—unlocking insight into how he viewed the world.

21. Melissa M. Stewart "Lovecraft and Eugenics: for HPL, It was Personal"

Lovecraft's racism has always been a controversial topic and thorn in the side of his fans who wonder how one of the most visionary artists, and the most rational and eloquent of human beings, could also be capable of such unrelenting prejudice. Yet HPL came of age in the

heyday of US eugenics, when thought, society, and policy was virtually saturated with eugenics. Eugenics theory was expounded not only in books and articles (both scholarly and popular), but in public forums such as exhibitions and state fairs; even the *Encyclopedia Britannica* advocated the “organic betterment of the race through wise application of the laws of heredity.”¹ In Lovecraft’s world, the most applauded public figures beginning in the late nineteenth century through the first three decades of the twentieth century were committed advocates of eugenics, with the “US eugenics movement . . . funded by the industrial titans of America—Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Mary Harriman . . . and championed, to a remarkable extent, by graduates of Harvard, Yale, and other Ivy League universities.”² In the first part of my presentation, I will reconstruct the world in which HPL actually lived in to support my contention that HPL’s position was hardly the minority point of view. My evidence consists of a chronology that compares the significant events in HPL’s life, as well as the completed manuscript dates of his works, to the milestones of the eugenics movement, including media (books and movies), studies, and public policy. I will also examine those publications that HPL actually owned and read, as well as publications he would have been aware of: through book reviews, articles in the popular press, and publications directed toward a “lay audience,” especially individuals like HPL who valued education and viewed science as the new paradigm for thought and action. In the second part of my presentation, I will consider the personal implications of eugenics for Lovecraft. HPL, with an “insane father” and an “insane” mother, would have been considered “defective” himself. Thus, underlying his hatred for the “half man”³ may have been his personal fear, anxiety, and ambiguity toward the genetic monstrosity he himself could be.

22. **Michael A. Torregrossa** “New England Legends in Comics”

A few years ago at the Armitage, I highlighted some of the ways that writers and artists working in the comics medium have adopted and adapted the works of H. P. Lovecraft. Since then, I’ve discovered that creators of comics have also appropriated many of the legends that are part of the wider realm of Weird New England. These include the Bridgewater Triangle, the Lake Champlain Monster, the Palatine Light, the Gloucester Sea Serpent, suspected vampire Mercy Brown, the abduction of Betty and Barney Hill, the Dover Demon, and strange occurrences at Rocky Point Park. Like the majority of Lovecraft-inspired comics, these works have received little to no critical attention. In this presentation, I’d like to alter that and offer an assessment of New England legends in comics to address the value of these texts for us as scholars and teachers of American culture.

23. **Nathaniel R. Wallace** “Eidolic Augmentation: Machine Generated Grimoires and Stage Plays”

H.P. Lovecraft’s *Necronomicon* and Robert E Chambers’ *The King in Yellow* (KIY) are fictional texts that initially existed as mere fragments, or simulated quotations, embedded in the authors’ short stories. Lovecraft often referred to such concepts and fragments like the *Necronomicon* as “background”, and relegated it in his stories to minimal references and descriptions. From their initial exposure to the public, these fictional texts have prompted considerable speculation and efforts by subsequent writers to reconstruct their own versions, claiming varying degrees of “authenticity”. Most notably, with the *Necronomicon*,

versions were later created by George H. Scithers and Peter Levenda and with *KIY* by James Blish, Lin Carter, and Michael Helsem, to name a few. In such instances these phantom texts, initially represented as fragments by their initial creators, were expanded upon using varying techniques and approaches to render what was “missing”.

In a similar manner to these follow-on authors, the capabilities of machine learning, exemplified by current generative AI systems, offer a novel approach to bridging the gap between fictional fragments and a more comprehensive treatment by using Large Language Models (LLMs). Trained to correlate disassociated information and synthesize information to generate output, such systems can potentially be used to augment fictional texts, like the *Necronomicon*, to create output subjectively considered more “complete” by an audience. Such a syncretic process finds parallels with the techniques of the collage of the surrealists like Max Ernst, and Brion Gysin’s cutups, but unlike those processes, eidolic augmentation is not limited to taking existing elements and placing them in new contexts, but rather such contexts must follow an analogous orientation with the original fragments. This analysis seeks to examine the *Necronomicon* and *KIY* to highlight their ability to produce eidolic augmentation, by both human and generative AI systems, in an effort to examine issues of poesis, perceived unity and authenticity.

24. Perry Niel Harrison “H.P. Lovecraft and Medieval Literature”

In his essays “Supernatural Horror in Literature” and “Suggestions for a Reading Guide,” H.P. Lovecraft describes the influence of the Middle Ages in crafting his perception of horror. Citing his influences, Lovecraft mentions *Beowulf*, Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, and Dante’s *Divine Comedy* by name, and he gestures towards the influence of John Mandeville’s travels and Chaucer’s works. For Lovecraft, medieval literature and thought were important ingredients in his literary “soup.”

In this presentation, “H.P. Lovecraft and the Medieval Literature,” I will detail the influence of medieval writers on H.P. Lovecraft’s literature and worldview. To do this, I will examine the works of medieval literature that Lovecraft specifically cites in his essays and letters. For the purposes of this presentation, I will direct significant attention towards the travels of Sir John Mandeville as a “test case.” This text contains significant elements, such as hybrid “monsters” that become more prevalent as Mandeville moves away from familiar society. Using this text as an anchor, I will explore how Lovecraft drew upon the imagery and literature of the Middle Ages to craft his own fiction. By tracing these this strand, I will demonstrate that the medieval world was a vital contributor to Lovecraft’s literature and overall philosophy.

25. Peter Muise “Unwholesome Nocturnal Meetings: H.P. Lovecraft, Margaret Murray, and the Witches’ Sabbath”

In this talk, I’ll discuss how Lovecraft incorporated a key concept from Margaret Murray’s 1921 book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* into his fiction and utilized it to support his ideas about cosmic horror.

In *The Witch-Cult*, Murray claimed that the victims of Europe’s early-modern witch hunts were actually members of an ancient, secretive fertility cult. Although her book’s thesis was debunked by professional historians at the time, it was nonetheless widely read and was

very influential on popular culture and religion, inspiring innumerable folk-horror themed films and novels, as well as the modern religion of Wicca.

Lovecraft read *The Witch-Cult* in the early 1920s and, like many readers, accepted it as being historically accurate. More importantly, though, it stirred his imagination as an author. Prior to reading *The Witch-Cult*, Lovecraft mentioned witches just twice in his fiction. After reading it, he included witches, witchcraft, or the “witch-cult” in 31 additional stories, and even mentioned Murray’s book directly in “The Horror at Red Hook” and “The Call of Cthulhu.”

Lovecraft was particularly intrigued by the idea of the Witches’ Sabbath, which he included in 20 stories, beginning with 1923’s “The Rats in the Walls” and ending with 1935’s “The Haunter of the Dark,” one of his final pieces of fiction. For Murray, the Sabbath was a purely human affair, where the leader of each cult’s local congregation impersonated a horned fertility god. In Lovecraft’s hands, the Sabbath is transformed into a celebration of the non-human, a barrier-breaking festival demonstrating humanity’s insignificance in a cosmos controlled by inimical and uncaring forces.

26. **Prema Arasu** “The Antipodean Weird in Lovecraft and Others”

In his short life HP Lovecraft barely ventured outside New England. His works, however, contain several maritime voyages across the Pacific and Indian Ocean, with the dénouement of *The Call of Cthulhu* taking place at R’yleh in the Pacific Ocean East of New Zealand. Moreover, *The Shadow Out of Time* takes place in the Western Australian desert, where Professor Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee finds ruins of a Yithian city. The story makes reference to “how the sight of the low, sandy West Australian coast depressed me, and how I detested the crude mining town and dreary gold fields where the tractors were given their last loads”. It also references the superstitions of the ‘blackfellows’ and the local legend “Buddai”.

This paper will examine the representation of Antipodean landscapes and seascapes in the work of HP Lovecraft and other writers of the weird, such as William Hope Hodgson and James Francis Dwyer. It will consider their representation of Australian Aboriginal and Māori myth and cultural practices and how Indigenous mythologies are integrated or appropriated into the Lovecraftian mythos.

Finally, this paper will discuss contemporary writers of what could be considered “New Weird” fiction from the Aboriginal Australian writer Ellen van Neerven (“Water”) and Asian-Australian writer and illustrator Shaun Tan (*Tales from the Inner City*). Both authors have resisted genre specific labels for their works and even categorisation as speculation; deeply problematising the notion of tracing an Antipodean Weird from Lovecraft to the present.

27. **Robert L. Ames** “From Theory-Fiction to Petropolitical Exegesis: Negarestani’s *Cyclonopedia* and “the Spouter”

This paper aims to position Jed Bickman’s “Spouter” essays (2022-Present) as an commentary upon Negarestani’s *Cyclonopedia* that is uniquely capable of illustrating the political significance of non-human sentience. Recent decades’ philosophical attempts at centering the non-human (or decentering human perspectives), including (but not limited to) speculative realism, speculative materialism, and object-oriented ontology, which often

appeal to Lovecraft or Lovecraftian figures, have often faced criticism that they are apolitical at best or reactionary at worst. Bickman's essays, however, offer a commentary upon Negarestani's work that highlights its political salience by presenting contemporary capitalism as a function of the ability of one sentient, non-human object (oil) to act in the world.

Lovecraft has been a prominent reference for philosophical projects that take the intelligence or agency of non-human objects seriously since at least the late 1990s, with Lovecraftian references appearing in the work of Nick Land and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit and Lovecraft taking center stage in Graham Harman's *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*. While less open about its debt to Lovecraft, Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* nonetheless draws on Lovecraftian themes in its particular depiction of non-human agency (its exploration of the the Middle East in general and the region's fossil fuels in particular as sentient entities). Bickman, in turn, adopts Negarestani's position but presents the economic and political import of sentient oil in much clearer terms than *Cyclonopedia*.

28. **Rolf Maurer** "When Cognitive Dissonance Fails: Confronting the Inextricability of Lovecraft's Imagination and Xenophobia"

The ascendancy over the last ten years of Cancel Culture in politics, the arts and social life has drawn renewed import to what reporter and essayist Claire Dederer has referred to as the *Fan's Dilemma*, that occasional, yet unavoidable divide between the celebration by devotees of gifted composers, filmmakers, writers, and other artists and widespread social condemnation of ironically objectional activities outside their creative lives.

By examining various famous (or infamous) examples pre-/postdating Lovecraft, including poet Ezra Pound's endorsement of the Nazis, Hollywood producer Elia Kazan's abject cooperation with Senator Joseph McCarthy anti-Communist HUAC investigations and Chiarascuro pioneer Carravaggio's acts of theft and murder, among others, *When Cognitive Dissonance* will demonstrate how the distinction in each case is shaped by numerous variables, such as the social gravity of the transgression, both in absolute terms and by contemporary standards, the comparative severity of actual deeds over avowed positions, the willingness of admirers to look the other way and, in the case of Lovecraft, the degree to which the captivating power of his Weird fiction is distinctly dependent on his regressive views on class, ethnicity and power.

Further, how this unusual ideational symbiosis has inspired factional grappling with his place in literature in recent years, such as the redesign of the World Fantasy in 2015 and subsequent attempts by Counter-Currents (creator of an H. P. Lovecraft Prize for Literature) and other reactionary interests to appropriate his legacy, will also be explored.

29. **Rosie Sentman** "Degeneration and Decadence in the Dragon's Court: How Fin-de-Siècle Paris' Gay Cruising Scene Gave *The King in Yellow's* Play its Cognitively Poisonous Power"

The 'cognitohazardous' nature of the fictional play which gives Robert Chambers' *The King in Yellow* its name has roots in a real life moral-medical panic of the 19th century. When the

fear of our species' genetic decay via the pseudoscientific theory of 'progressive hereditary degeneration' intersected with the burgeoning artistic movement known as 'decadence', newly born in mid-century Paris as a form fit for describing life in a crumbling empire, it gave rise to one of weird fiction's seminal tropes: a work of art which causes madness when experienced.

Degeneration, a hypothetical disease of the nervous system which caused insanity and 'criminality' in those affected, was easy to catch. In the third short story, *In the Court of the Dragon*, Chambers, who spent eight years in Paris in his early adulthood, maps a remarkably specific route for his protagonist through the 14th arrondissement. All the streets and public gardens noted in this section were well-established locations for gay cruising; I propose that this was intentional. Soliciting sex with other men was decadent behavior, criminal and un-Christian, and thus a possible vector for infecting even the otherwise innocent. You could even catch it simply by engaging with art produced by those already diseased, a clear parallel to Chambers' poisonous play.

To support this queer reading, we will examine the visibility of Paris' queer community during Chambers' time there. We will then use this reading to examine the influences of degeneration and decadence on the work as a whole. We will cover the initial creation of the decadent movement, how it was absorbed and medicalized by the theory of degeneration, that theory's Christian moral roots, its attempts to explain homosexuality in biological terms, and how it all combined to create this staple of both cosmic horror literature and real life moral panics.

30. **Sean Lovitt** "The Mooncussers of Antonio Bay: Weirding John Carpenter's *The Fog*"

On the surface, John Carpenter's 1980 film *The Fog* fits the description of a classic ghost story, or at the most a modern update of one. The deceptively generic plot—maritime ghosts returning to a seaside town on the anniversary of their murder—has led even Carpenter fans to dismiss the film as an unremarkable, minor work. By treating *The Fog*'s antagonists as traditional ghosts, casual viewers fail to perceive their complex Lovecraftian structure and, consequently, overlook this film's contribution to Weird Fiction. Carpenter has added to the confusion by claiming that the catalytic event in the film, the intentional wrecking of a ship, was based on real California history. This shipwreck story threatens to cement this film in a familiar tradition and a comfortable reality, but Carpenter's narrative falls apart on closer inspection. There is no evidence of any intentional wrecking of ships in California or, for that matter, anywhere else. Wreckers or Mooncussers, as they were known, are artifacts of British and New England folklore, deracinated from their origins and redeployed in the film to smuggle these Lovecraftian ghosts onto the shores of California. To borrow a phrase from China Miéville: *The Fog* is utterly Lovecraftian, although Carpenter pretends it is not. The ghosts in this film may wear the costumes of tradition or play the part of representatives of American history, yet, beneath this veil, they are something much weirder. To fully appreciate and understand *The Fog*, it is necessary to investigate its ghosts, who are more surreal and inhuman than they appear.

31. **Seán Martin** “Uncanny Wallops and Weirdly Perfect Embodiments: Archive, Memory and the Self in the First Lovecraft Documentary”

“But with all its defects this thing gave me an uncanny wallop. When I revisited it I saw it through twice—& I shall probably go again on its next return. It is the most weirdly perfect embodiment of my own moods & pseudo-memories that I have ever seen...”

~ Lovecraft to J. Vernon Shea, 4 February 1934, on Frank Lloyd’s *Berkeley Square* (1933)

In 1989, I shot the first-ever documentary about H. P. Lovecraft. A work-in-progress cut was screened at the 1990 Lovecraft Centennial Symposium, but then the project was reluctantly shelved, for want of funds.

I discuss how I am salvaging and reconstructing this archival footage, producing from it a film that retains something of its original intentions: a film about Lovecraft’s life, works, and influence (both literary and cultural), shot as a self-reflexive road movie in the mode of Ross McElwee’s *Sherman’s March* (1986) or Michael Moore’s *Roger and Me* (1989). The film was to portray Lovecraft and his work as if seen in fragments, shooting locations where he lived and set his stories, many of which had changed greatly since the 1920s and 30s. This would reflect the nature of his fiction, which regularly utilised the glimpse of an unseen greater whole as a narrative strategy. Just as Lovecraft’s characters only attain partial understanding of the universe and their place in it, the film was to acknowledge that filmic reconstructions of his life would be forever in the realm of the partial, suggesting a wholeness that can never be fully captured. The film would interrogate the nature and limits of filmic biography, and the role of the filmmaker in constructing this (Cuevas & García 2008).

With the passage of time, this “methodology of the fragment” has acquired another layer: the film itself is in fragments, and I must find my way through the surviving material to see what I actually have to work with. I draw on Katz’s (1991) definition of archiveology to examine my own archive. The project also has an element of auto-ethnography (Rascaroli 2009): I am reconstructing/repurposing my own unfinished film, and in the process, (re-)constructing my own practice, suggesting that the self/memory can be understood as an archive (or archives). The symbiosis between filmmaker and subject, and between filmmaker and archive, points to wider questions of knowledge of self and knowledge of the world (Rascaroli 2017).

Finally, I use Russell (2018) to examine the ways in which various media (e.g. films, videogames, music) form a contemporary transmedia archive, and how this contributes to Lovecraft’s increasing cultural visibility since the original film was shot.

32. **Sean Moreland** “Animi Terrores: The Lucretian Roots of Cosmic Horror and Folk Horror from M. G. Lewis to H. P. Lovecraft”

As David Norbrook writes, “For Lucretius, the *horrore* inspired by the infinite cosmos is to be strongly contrasted with fear of creating or punishing deities, animi *terrores*,” mere terrors of the mind, since “the supernatural machineries and explanations” invented “to accommodate this wonder in fact tame and diminish it.” I begin by contextualizing the contrast between these two affects, “terrors of the mind” linked to superstitious dread,

versus a kind of visceral horror linked to the *divina voluptas* (divine pleasure, sublimity) at apprehending the vastness and power of atomic nature viewed through Epicurean lenses, throughout Lucretius's poem. I then turn to a brief discussion of how four profoundly influential authors of gothic fiction, M. G. Lewis (*The Monk*), Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*), Edgar Allan Poe ("The Fall of the House of Usher" and "Eiros and Charmion"), and H. P. Lovecraft ("The Rats in the Walls" and "The Colour Out of Space"), through their reception of and creative and critical responses to Lucretius's poem, and through their reproductions of the distinction between cosmic (or atomic) horror and superstitious dread, have given rise to various debates about and attempts to define the differences between "folk horror" and "cosmic horror" in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

33. **Taylor Province** "Lovecraft in Louisiana: The Intersection of Cosmic Horror and Detective Fiction in *True Detective*"

In his short story "The Call of Cthulhu," H.P. Lovecraft tells the tale of a New Orleans inspector by the name of John Raymond Legrasse, who uncovers a cult in the woods worshipping the eldritch monster Cthulhu through ritual sex and murder. By including Legrasse and his experience as a Louisiana detective in his story, Lovecraft combines cosmic horror with detective fiction, pointing to an intersection between these genres. This combination of genres proves to be fruitful when looking at the works that continue this trend in popular culture after Lovecraft's introduction of it.

This paper will discuss the intersection between cosmic horror and detective fiction in modern media, looking specifically at season one of Nic Pizzolatto's contemporary television show *True Detective* and the inspiration it derived from Lovecraft. This paper will first cover what defines each genre through its themes, tropes, and settings, which will transition into a focus on *True Detective's* blending of these genres. Through the investigation conducted by main characters Rust Cohle and Martin "Marty" Hart, the narrative pulls off the mask of detective fiction to show the true face of Lovecraftian horror hidden beneath. As the show becomes more disturbing with each episode, it highlights the unnatural horrors of the paganistic cult and the serial killer's design. *True Detective's* take on Lovecraftian investigations draws on the author's works by including features of cosmic indifference, ritual murder, and mythic idols.

34. **Taylor Walker** "The Dream Quest of Carl Jung: Synchronicity in Jung's Collective Unconscious and Lovecraft's Dreamlands"

The beginning of the 20th century marked a revival of public interest in the mystical and the occult. Concurrently, the birth of psychoanalysis and its adoption in America led to scientific exploration of the unconscious as well as its widespread adoption in the cultural zeitgeist. Carl Jung is considered one of the founders of psychoanalysis after being mentored by and subsequently splitting from Sigmund Freud. Over the course of his career, he engaged in anthropological investigations of mythological symbols and their manifestations in modern life. Resulting from these investigations, Jung devised several concepts such as the collective unconscious, archetypes, and individuation. Yet, what is often not told is the inner journey Jung undertook early in his career in order to arrive at these concepts.

This presentation will focus on the “confrontation with the unconscious” Jung undertook in the 1910s and which he described in his *Liber Novus* (The Red Book), the foundation for his life’s work. Utilizing a pre-dream like state he termed “active imagination”, Jung recorded his encounters with several “figures” that arose from his unconscious. Likewise, in the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s, H. P. Lovecraft formulated a cycle of stories taking place in a fantastically terrifying realm called the Dreamlands, a world that defies logic and reason that can only be entered via dreaming. Throughout this presentation, broad similarities between Jung’s inner journey, the journey of Randolph Carter, and Lovecraft’s Dreamlands will be discussed and explored. Aspects of synchronicity in Jung’s investigations and Lovecraft’s works of “The Silver Key” and “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath” will also be highlighted throughout.

35. Timothy Jarvis “A Simple Obstinacy: Weird fiction and Transgression”

One critical consensus on the nature of weird fiction and cosmic horror, is that they are literary modes concerned with borders and limits and their crossing or erosion. Sometimes this is characterised primarily in terms an incursion of alterity, as in China Miéville’s depiction of weird fiction as ‘a radicalized sublime backwash’ (2009: 511). Other depictions focus on a kind of ecstatic transcendence, on passing beyond as a ‘becoming’. Gilles Deleuze has written on this aspect of H. P. Lovecraft’s oeuvre, arguing that it is one in which becomings ‘coexist at every level, following the doorways, thresholds, and zones that make up the entire universe’ (1997: 1).

But another model by which to interpret this feature of weird fiction could be ‘transgression’ in the sense Foucault outlines in his essay, ‘A Preface to Transgression’:

The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable. (1977: 34)

This paper will argue that transgression in this sense is a key feature which evolves weird fiction beyond the Gothic. It responds to the insight of the scientific paradigm which emerged in the same period as the development of the mode in its involved form – that, at its most fundamental level, the cosmos is vibrational, and that the effects of these vibrations are antagonistic to a universe predicated on rational, causal logic. It will analyse this vibrational quality of crossing and recrossing in selected weird tales, and argue it is a key feature by which the quality of weirdness can be defined.

36. Troy M. Rondinone “Cryptid Country: Making Sense of America’s Monstrous Landscape”

According to popular lore, America is filled with monsters. Cryptids, defined as animals yet to be recognized by epistemological authorities, take residence in every state. From Bigfoot to the Chupa Cabra to the Jersey Devil, different locales play host to literally hundreds of mysterious creatures. In this presentation, I’ll discuss some techniques academics in the social sciences use to understand and evaluate cryptids. Specifically calling on my own multi-

year investigation into West Virginia's Mothman, I'll highlight the importance of a cross-disciplinary approach. History, folklore, and psychology, among other fields, offer useful methodologies that can help us make sense of America's monsters.

37. Warren Bingcang "Fishfolk and Kinsfolk: Trans Resonances in H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Thing on the Doorstep' and Other Stories"

This project brings H.P. Lovecraft scholarship into conversation with trans literary criticism. Fans of H.P. Lovecraft who belong to the racial, sexual, or gendered Other must inevitably stumble upon "the truth which drives one to madness" — that is to say, the author's hostility for members of the Other, and how this hostility had saturated his body of work. The Othered reader who scours for traces of themselves in Lovecraft's literary landscape will discover it to be not merely barren, but outright inhospitable. If we have not chosen to repress this knowledge, having instead chosen to acknowledge the maddening truth, we may ask, "What do we do with this hostile literary inheritance?" and "How do we participate in this literary tradition without harming ourselves?"

To answer these questions, I abandon the rubric of identification and borrow from trans literary methodologies that have emerged in response to a literary archive that is devoid of or is hostile towards trans identities. Applying what Alexander Eastwood conceptualizes as hermeneutics of resonance, I analyze how Lovecraft's "The Thing on the Doorstep" explores the immutability of gender and sexuality through the character Asenath Waite. Crucially, I do not argue whether or not Asenath is "trans," nor do I speculate over Lovecraft's own gender and sexual identity. Rather, I demonstrate how resonant reading can expose latent resources for the Other in an otherwise hostile literary environment. Furthermore, in recognizing Lovecraftian literature as a living tradition, I argue that subsequent retellings and adaptations of Lovecraft's fiction, such as Alan Moore and Jacen Burrow's *Providence*, render these latent resources into a usable form for the Othered reader.