

The Old and New Weird: A Study of Lovecraft's Legacy Focusing on the Sublime, the
Uncanny, Narrative Empathy and Projection in *At the Mountain of Madness*, *The Mist* and
The Ocean at the End of the Lane.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the question: How has H.P. Lovecraft's weird fiction transformed into contemporary weird fiction literature? Primarily through the works of: *At the Mountain of Madness* (1936) by H.P. Lovecraft, *The Mist* (1980) by Stephen King and lastly *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013) by Neil Gaiman. Specifically, to examine how different works of literature portray the perception and development of weird fiction, starting with Lovecraft's literary influence. The selection of literature demonstrates weird fiction through time, displaying works from the beginning of weird fiction into new weird in the 20th and the 21st centuries. The analysis focuses on a comprehensive analysis of Lovecraft's work following comparative analyses of the other two literary examples. The approach focuses on the chosen texts' utilization of atmospheric theories together with affectation theories to examine how each narrative incorporates suspense through literary tropes connected with weird fiction. Therefore, the sublime specified by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, together with the uncanny specified by Sigmund Freud, function as an overview of specific literary tropes recognized in old and new weird narratives. Both theories are predisposed as aesthetic devices stemming from Gothic literary traditions. Atmosphere contributes to a fundamental inclination of dread within Lovecraft's weird fiction, which this paper distributes to sublime and uncanny devices when creating a world of incomprehensibility.

Additionally, the implementation of human narrators with a first-person perspective reveals a preferred method of narration within weird fiction. The narration dictates possible empathic reliance, for which Suzanne Keen's narrative empathy theory and Freud's projection theory exemplify literary properties when building positive and negative emotional identification. However, Lovecraft rarely displays empathic characterizations of his protagonists and instead prioritizes suspense through projective and atmospheric means. New

weird fiction more often extends empathic identification with their protagonists, wherein this change is interesting to investigate. This paper thus contributes to a unique perspective on weird fiction and the general ambiguity surrounding the genre, wherein the similarities and differences are examined closely. Conclusively, this paper observes a correlation between elements of weird fiction, exemplifying a significant disparity between each author and how they utilize literary devices connected to the weird. The sublime and uncanny are present in all narratives. However, the prioritization of each element is diverse, where the sublime is more significantly displayed in Lovecraft's work than in Gaiman's novel, where the uncanny is employed increasingly more. Empathy and projection are similarly utilized variously by each author. King's novella requires empathy to constitute tension, while Lovecraft relies mainly on atmospheric devices. These aspects exemplify how each author implements their version of the weird while maintaining some elements from Lovecraft's original cosmic literature.

1. Introduction

Fear, unease and dread are fascinating properties instinctually felt by humankind. Humans have sought to arouse anxieties through literal and visual means for centuries. Audiences seek to endorse emotional gratification through intrinsically negative perturbation and textual engagement (Bantinaki 383). Humanity's oldest and most profound fears harbor things beyond our comprehension, birthing many grotesque and suspenseful tales. *Horror* is pervasive in modern literature, starting with traditions from *the Gothic* literary era. The genre explores a darker side of the human condition and stimulates a deep sense of dread and disgust (Reyes 10). Interestingly, the development of horror extends to several subgenres, such as science fiction, providing distinctive exposition in the production of fear. Each fragmentation of the horror genre demonstrates sheer diversity in the psychological implementation of different tropes founded within Gothic literary traditions. Negative aesthetics and dreadful atmospheric application inform Gothic texts, providing a disturbing displacement of security and comfort (Botting 2).

Given the diverse nature of the horror genre, it is of significant interest to investigate one of the most prominent subgenres, i.e. *weird fiction*. Weird fiction is conceived as an unusual yet significant addition to horror, leaning into a dark, slippery world of alien monstrosities (Miéville, "Weird Fiction" 510). The genre is strongly associated with the work of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Lovecraft identified several aspects of weird fiction stemming from a fundamental fear of the unknown. "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* 12). These words have become a fundamental part of Lovecraft's legacy, and his literary contribution has served as the beginning of a sub-genre within horror, i.e., *cosmic horror*. Cosmic horror functions as an extension of weird fiction. The cosmic horror subgenre explores the instinctual human fear of the unknown and reflects the insignificance of human existence

compared to the vastness of the cosmos (Lovecraft and Joshi 12). In recent years, the literary genre has experienced a revival as *new weird* fantasy tales, inspired by Lovecraft's unique narrative style, are gaining popularity in American contemporary culture. As such, Lovecraft can still be identified as a prominent figure whose narrative contribution continuously affects modern literature. This leads to the following research question: How has H.P. Lovecraft's weird fiction transformed into contemporary weird fiction literature? This paper is aware of H.P. Lovecraft's views on race and how this relates to his works. However, the focus will mainly be on his undeniable influence in creating a unique genre despite his outspoken and controversial views.

To investigate the development of weird fiction, this study will include a comparative analysis of *At the Mountain of Madness* (1936) by H.P. Lovecraft, *The Mist* (1980) by Stephen King and lastly, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013) by Neil Gaiman. This selection of work has been chosen based on resembling themes and literary devices. Moreover, each is representative of the diversity performed in the trajectory of weird fiction while still sharing fundamental renditions initiated by Lovecraft. *At the Mountain of Madness* is a fundamental addition to the mythos established in Lovecraft's literary heritage. The narrative structure and general elements of cosmicism significantly exemplify Lovecraft's writing while also carrying interesting parallels to the science fiction genre. Cosmicism refers to a philosophy developed by Lovecraft and utilized in his literature, wherein he views the human race as insignificant compared to the universe (Lovecraft and Joshi 12). *The Mist* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* have been chosen as illustrative literary material showcasing the tradition invented by Lovecraft. Both narratives partake in Lovecraftian traditions while revising the weird into a contemporary setting. These changes are essential to investigate the general evolution of the weird and Lovecraft's cosmicism. Prior to the analysis of *At the Mountain of Madness*, a comprehensive historical overview has been added to identify tropes linked to the old weird

and its association with Lovecraft. As such, another historical overview has been subsequently added prior to the analysis of *The Mist* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, identifying the new weird and its transformation.

The weird instilled into each storyworld showcases a transformative appreciation of the weird, placing the reader into a surprising and terrifying world with underlying Gothic inspiration. Thus, Gothic theoretical traditions of *the sublime* and *the uncanny* are fundamental groundwork in identifying atmospheric dread. The sublime is especially present in Lovecraft's narratives when expressing tension arising from the unknown. According to Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, the sublime focuses on things the human mind cannot conceptualize and demonstrates an incomprehensible aesthetic born from fear. Sublime horror relates to feeling awe and its fusion with terror (Moreland, "The Birth of Cosmic Horror" 19). Freud's uncanny is then utilized to explore the psychology of weird fiction by identifying the production of fear arising from a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The uncanny is directly related to the weird by disclosing a close relationship to aspects of the unknown used in the genre, which builds fear and discomfort (McWilliam 545). Both theories work to conceptualize the atmosphere to convey feelings of dread. Atmosphere is a concept within literature referring to the creation of specific emotions, moods, or experiences, i.e., the *inner feelings* of the reader (Gumbrecht and Butler 5). These atmospheric elements will be studied in terms of dread and Lovecraft interpretation of the aesthetic construction connected to cosmicism.

Finally, weird fiction's psychoanalytical and emotional aspects are meaningful regarding how the narratives affect the reader and their engagement with the given storyworld. Emotional responses associated with fear and unease are a central aspect relayed through different approaches to the genre. Freud's *projection* theory and Suzanne Keen's *narrative empathy* theory focus on an affective perspective and outline how readers identify with the characters within a storyworld. The characters in Lovecraft's work often portray an almost

flawed sense of curiosity in the discovery of the world. The reader follows this curiosity and delves into unimaginable horrors. These theories are crucial to understanding the human narrators and their motivations within all three narratives. Mainly because all narratives portray a first-person narration style, which should significantly affect the reader's identification (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 93). The analysis will, thus, illuminate how the chosen texts convey identifiable or unidentifiable characters and whether this identification furthers the production of fear and suspense.

2. Theory

The theoretical framework defined in the following section serves as a foundation when analyzing *At the Mountain of Madness*, *The Mist* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. The theories showcase how these texts represent the influence and relevance of the genre created by Lovecraft. This theoretical assessment includes the approaches above, i.e., *the sublime*, *the uncanny*, *projection* and *narrative empathy*. These approaches have been chosen to account for weird fiction and its modern extensions comprehensively. Therefore, the beginning of the chapter will investigate the construction of atmospheric dread and cosmicism, specified by the sublime and the uncanny. The last part of this chapter provides a concise account of narrative practices used to build emotional engagement in narratives, both in terms of positive engagement in the form of empathy and negative in the form of projection.

2.1 Atmospheric Dread

Atmosphere is considered a vital component in Lovecraft's weird fiction literature. Every aspect of cosmicism relies on an affective element of dread built with atmospheric devices. These devices are especially the notion of the sublime and the uncanny and depend on a psychological understanding of human nature and the communication of affective fear. The term atmosphere refers to the nature of the general aesthetic within narratives, whereas atmosphere extends "toward a more figurative dimension, referring to social moods and

ambiences” (Aguilar Rodríguez et al. 131). Research on atmosphere focuses on the qualitative characteristics of a situation referring to the mood expressed through ambivalent or aesthetic narrative choices (Aguilar Rodríguez et al. 32), i.e. allusions to emotional dispositions.

Lovecraft defined the weird in his essay “*Supernatural Horror in Literature*” (1925), weighing the significance of atmosphere in weird tales.

“A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present [...] Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation. We may say, as a general thing, that a weird story whose intent is to teach or produce a social effect, or one in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means, is not a genuine tale of cosmic fear” (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* 17)

Mystery is the foundation of dread, creating unexplainable phenomena which deliver suspense. A mysterious and hostile atmosphere is a tendency recognized in Gothic literary traditions. Dread refers to a unique sensation related to fear. Fear and dread are two separate terms when investigating the weird. Fear refers to the general term for the feeling of anxiety, while dread is an intense feeling of reluctance when faced with deep-rooted anxieties. In Lovecraft’s literature, dread occurs through the fear of the unknown, portraying encounters with beings outside of humankind’s normal comprehension (Svitáková 193). Lovecraft tried to reimagine the English and German Gothic romance by distancing himself from theological terrors. Instead, he focused on scientific naturalism but with a deviation from its religious foundation (Luckhurst, “American Weird” 195). Lovecraft preferred cosmic indifference in his fiction, where he developed an atmosphere based on otherness, sublimity, and uncanniness. Largely, atmospheric elements were built with a curiosity about the human psyche, whereas psychoanalytical theories especially interested Lovecraft (Lacy and Zani 67). The elicitation of instinctual human fear laid the groundwork for the production of fear within horror narratives.

The atmosphere is then built on the assumption that humans instinctually fear the unknown, and the sentiment of cosmic indifference sparks general anxieties. Lovecraft does everything in his power to ensure that his stories evoke a sense of isolation and anxiety in his readers, thus relying on the fear of the unknown. “Lovecraft’s atmosphere derives to a large extent from Poe’s aesthetic criterion, the ‘Unity of Effect.’ Atmosphere offers a sense of expansion, a ‘feeling of magnification in the cosmos—of having approached the universal a trifle more closely and banished a little of our inevitable insignificance’” (Moreland, “Introduction” 4). Lovecraft used Poe’s literature and developed his own characterization of a dreadful atmosphere. The *unity of effect* refers to a literal device founded by Edgar Allan Poe. It provides texts with a constant atmospheric and narrative effect. “Once this emotional impression is determined according to what authors envision their work to be, it is their responsibility to weave such an effect into all the pieces that shape a literary work. By this totality, every single component is interconnected with each other so as ‘to serve the ultimate effect [...] directly or indirectly’” (Jiménez González 1). Therefore, the unity of effect implements a balance of different elements throughout a given narrative and seeks to impact the reader through the early implementation of devices leading to a strong emotional reaction (Jiménez González 1). Lovecraft applies dread by including strong atmospheric devices throughout the scope of his narratives.

2.1.1 Cosmicism

Before venturing into the atmospheric devices, the term cosmicism needs to be established to understand Lovecraft’s brand of weird fiction and underline how atmosphere is dictated by incomprehensiveness. The terminology cosmicism refers to a literary philosophy developed by Lovecraft and can be directly ascribed to his brand of weird fiction.

“Lovecraft found that the most powerful way to express his philosophy in literary terms was through what he termed cosmicism. This is the idea that,

given the vastness of the universe both in space and in time, the human race (now no longer regarded as the special creation of a divine being) is of complete inconsequence in the universe-at-large, although it may well be of some importance on the earthly scale" (Lovecraft and Joshi 12).

The central aspect of cosmicism consists of a fundamental rebuttal of divine presence and the utter insignificance of human existence. Humanity plays a minor part in Lovecraftian narratives compared to the discovery of the so-called old ones, referring to ancient beings inhabiting the earth. Lovecraft's narratives still include a human protagonist who aims to convey the effect of encountering otherworldly elements. These beliefs relate to Lovecraft's nihilistic view of the universe: "The human race will disappear. Other races will appear and disappear in turn. The sky will become icy and void, pierced by the feeble light of half-dead stars. Which will also disappear. Everything will disappear. And what human beings do is just as free of sense as the free motion of elementary particles. Good, evil, morality, feelings? Pure 'Victorian fictions'. Only egotism exists" (Lovecraft and Joshi 12). Humans are shown within Lovecraft's narratives to be only a tiny part of existence, which is bound to disappear and eventually replaced. This notion produces existential dread, which outlines a philosophical standpoint of humankind's meaningless existence. These themes are facilitated within his storyworld by building an atmosphere of dread and detailing clear descriptions of unimaginable monstrosities. Mathias Clasen describes this fundamental tradition within Lovecraft's fiction: "Lovecraft's weird creatures, uncanny forces, and ancient gods are structured to elicit awe as they come into conflict with our understanding of what can be, as they breach perceived natural laws of possibility" (Clasen 48). The unknown becomes objects of awe and curiosity. Curiosity is a key factor in most of Lovecraft's narratives, with characters unwilling to back down from unknown forces. These elements are conveyed through the sublime and the uncanny.

2.1.2 The Sublime

The sublime is a known terminology frequently utilized in early Modern and post-Romantic literature and emerged as an aesthetic theory in the 18th century. The term derives from the Latin word *sublīmis*, which is "a combination of sub (up to) and līmin/līmen (the lintel or threshold of a building)" (Shaw 1). The word has many applications; however, as a literary device, it functions as a pleasing aesthetic or the elicitation of a sublime experience (Shaw 3). Furthermore, it arouses affections of powers greater than the human mind can comprehend, i.e., the indescribable. "Sublimity, then, refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated" (Shaw 3). It is described as something which lies beyond thought and language (Shaw 3), provoking conflicting sensations of being. For instance, the experience of feeling very little while also feeling big in terms of the universe. Sublimity denotes a different experience of nature where its beauty is an experience of transcendent spirituality. Nature's greatness is beyond human comprehension and beyond our power (Shaw 3). This sense of aesthetic incomprehension was picked up by Gothic writers who repurposed the term into a form of negative pleasure, combining the sensation of delight and terror (Botting 6). The English philosopher Edmund Burke discussed this contradicting effect of the sublime in the 1759 paper *"A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful"*. Burke primarily focuses on the relationship between pleasure and pain to explain the effect dictated by the sublime. "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 58). Gothic literature utilized a disrupted balance of nature to evoke terror through awe and wonder (Botting 6). For instance, in literature, when describing detailed natural elements, like mountains, the author can include a sensation or visualization of dread, enhancing the affective

response of fear. To gain this affective response, authors incorporate adjective-heavy descriptions of the awe-inducing element and the feeling of terror.

Burke is but one theorist whose definition of the sublime has created a clear distinction between the beautiful and the response dictated by the sublime. Another is Immanuel Kant, who defined the sublime with a key element of unboundedness. "The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in [the object's] being bounded. But the sublime can also be found in a formless object, insofar as we present unboundedness" (Kant 245). Other translations also use 'limitlessness' instead of unboundedness to convey Kant's impression of the sublime. Whether it is one or the other, the universal implication consists of the sublime as a boundless term which describes more than just distinguishable objects existing in the real world. Weird fiction closely relies on Kant's expression of the sublime, where an overwhelming sensation beyond human control evokes the sublime. In fiction, it can be conveyed through narrators who fail to understand the supernatural manifestations threatening to destroy their world (Wight and Gadd 298).

Burke, Kant and the Romantic poets identified the sublime within nature. The sublime is a feeling tied to nature by attributing natural elements to a limitless sense of incomprehensiveness. This original perception of the sublime contrasts Lovecraft's utilization of nature. Instead, the sublime limitlessness originates from conditions beyond nature and manifestations of the sublime consist of a sense of helplessness stimulated by unclear descriptions of the unknown (Wight and Gadd 298). Thus, the sublime removes the familiar and replaces the recipient's harmonic perception of nature with uneasiness, attributing to the dread occurring within Lovecraft's narratives. Therefore, the most significant aspect of the sublime within weird fiction remains the unknown. "Weird Fiction invokes the sublime by introducing the unknown and the unspeakable as a source of cosmic fear and interweaving it with the horror-inducing transformation of the known and familiar into something grotesque"

(Wight and Gadd 294). The experience of the sublime in Lovecraft's literature is delivered through human protagonists and their reactions to supernatural cosmic objects and beings. These elements are rendered unnatural and are a corruption of nature. The overpowering effect of supernatural forces is constructed through the characters of Lovecraftian narratives, wherein the characters serve to transfer emotions of terror to the reader. These aspects will be investigated to study how the narrators of the chosen texts relay feelings of the sublime and how the narrator and their descriptive language construct atmospheric dread.

2.1.3 The Uncanny

Another atmospheric device utilized by Lovecraft is the notion of the uncanny. The first mention of the concept dates back to 1906. Ernst Jentsch invented the term from the German word *Unheimlich* (un-homely), a word expressing something not quite at home or at ease; thus, *unheimlich* describes a sense of unfamiliarity. Some translations also refer to *Unheimlich* as non-secret, where the feeling of uncanny is attributed to something that can no longer be hidden.

“The German language seems to have produced a rather fortunate formation. Without a doubt, this word appears to express that someone to whom something "uncanny" happens is not quite "at home" or "at ease" in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him. In brief, the word suggests that a lack of orientation is bound up with the impression of the uncanniness of a thing or incident” (Jentsch 8).

According to Jentsch, the uncanny effect is present primarily in the apprehension of identifying whether an inanimate object is, in fact, animate (11). Dolls and mannequins are frequently used to exemplify this feeling of dread because of their human resemblance. When inanimate resemble humans, it constructs a conscious doubt which turns into an uncanny sensation. Freud used Jentsch's idea of the *Unheimlich* in his paper, “*The Uncanny*”, from 1919, to reflect on the feeling of the uncanny. While Jentsch distinguishes the uncanny as an expression of the

unfamiliar, Freud disregards this part of Jentsch's theoretical explanation. According to Freud, the uncanny is not only limited to *Unheimlich* (un-homely; not secret) but also contains a sense of *Heimlich* (belonging to the home) (Freud, "The Uncanny" 2). Uncanniness occurs in relation to past trauma and the repression of said trauma. The moment past trauma reappears, it is unfamiliar, yet familiar. The repressed trauma thus becomes uncanny. "The uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 15). Freud's uncanny relates to what we consider frightening, which arouses dread and horror, i.e., the unwelcome return of something once familiar.

Narratives often replicate feelings of the uncanny to convey dread and uneasiness to the reader. "The storyteller has this license among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 18). Authors take that which is familiar and twist it to construe emotional engagement within their narrative. These narratives use different concepts resembling a familiar object, representing hidden parts of ourselves. According to Nicolas Royle, Freud's uncanny is haunted by literature (52), because of the constant literal reference present within Freud's "*The Uncanny*" article. Though it is a psychoanalytical tool, uncanny feelings are easily exemplified in literature. The uncanny effect in literature relies on adjectives to describe features and the description of other characters and their reaction to convey how the readers should perceive the object of uncanniness. The uncanny emphasizes the visual to convey literal entities as a representation of the uncanny (Royle 108). Entities embodying uncanny elements can be conveyed through different literal objects and creatures. The conventional uncanny evokes an uneasy response through literal monstrosities relating to lifelike or mechanical objects (Royle 2). Other examples include "Something gruesome or terrible, above all death and corpses, cannibalism, live burial, the

return of the dead” (Royle 2). Thus, literal entities partaking in uncanny traditions are produced as literal monsters and sensations of gruesome and unsettling experiences. Darkness and silence can likewise be an uncanny contribution. The uncanny is an experience of unease employed to provide readers with a displacement of themselves and their perception of reality.

The uncanny in Lovecraftian literature derives from the unknown, relaying feelings of terror and anxiety. The object of uncanniness in weird fiction is experienced as a contrast between the known and the unknown, which can be seen as a parallel to the familiar and unfamiliar within the uncanny terminology. The entities themselves are not the sole source of the uncanny. Instead, it is the direct contradiction of existential crisis freed by the encounter with incomprehensible terror (Matolcsy 157). Lovecraft’s narratives constitute dread as the known is intertwined with the unknown, and every aspect of the storyworld becomes reborn and embodies cosmic processes. This notion provokes an atmosphere of dread. Unknown entities manifest in the known, which produces a fearful object of uncanniness, a "non-entity which is an entity" (Matolcsy 157). This unfiltered experience of the uncanny displaces a sense of home of humankind’s place in the universe. “Fear arises when we realize not only that what appears is the opposite of what is familiar to us now, but also that it is so assuredly unfamiliar that it appears as a ‘harbinger of death’” (McConeghy 6). Lovecraft’s interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar facilitates dread by accentuating the unfamiliar and thus disrupting the common understanding of the world.

However, some weird fiction authors argue that the uncanny does not comprehensively describe the effect related to the dread communicated in Lovecraft’s narratives. China Miéville is one author who argues against the direct usage of uncanny in weird fiction. Instead, he has produced the term *abcanny* to describe the unease evoked by the weird. *Abcanny* is said to go beyond uncanny: “To begin to grasp weird fiction is to orient away from the uncanny, then, to disorient it in the twist of the *abcanny* and the other distorted affects that lie beyond.”

(Luckhurst, “The weird: a dis/orientation” 1053). The unknown within Lovecraft’s narrative is not the return of something once familiar and thus is not the return of the repressed. Instead, Miéville claims it “is a function of lack of recognition, rather than any uncanny resurgence, guilt-function, the return of a repressed” (Miéville, “Weird Fiction” 512). The cosmic creatures presented in weird fiction are not a past resurfacing to haunt the present but a new concept of horror with greater power than anything imaginable. Abcanny refers to monsters that are theological expressions of the unknowable and abnormal, hence the ‘ab’ included in the term (Miéville, “On Monsters” 381). This paper will mainly utilize the notion of the uncanny instead of Miéville’s abcanny. However, it was deemed necessary to differentiate between these terms to underline the existence of authors who believe the unknowable aspects of cosmicism undermine the uncanny effect. Furthermore, the element of dread in weird fiction is perceived to stem from the uncanny by utilizing both familiar and unfamiliar aspects. The analysis will, therefore, approach the texts by applying a perspective of the uncanny, which influences the perception of dread conveyed within the chosen narratives. Additionally, Lovecraft’s entities can be perceived as familiar elements produced with social repressions conjured by his controversial views on race (McConeghy 58). Uncanny is embedded within the repressed perception of racism, which is established within several of his narratives. This will be discussed further within the analysis.

2.2 Narrative Empathy and Projection

Empathy is a common terminology referring to the ability to understand others’ emotions. The notion has become a prominent subject for many scholars and derives from psychological fields. Empathy involves actively responding to emotions by reflecting and mirroring the feelings of others. “Empathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 4). An affectionate response necessitates comprehending

someone else's emotions as they express them, distinct from other responses such as sympathy. "This phenomenon is distinguished in both psychology and philosophy (though not in popular usage) from sympathy, in which feelings for another occur" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 5). Sympathy occurs as a product of empathy and is established from supportive emotions like pity, sadness, pain, etc. Sympathy mostly emphasizes negative emotions emanating from affinity towards others and does not imitate shown emotions (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 5). Affections related to empathy transpire not only through negative emotional distress, i.e., pain and pity, but also positive emotions like happiness, satisfaction, and elation. Thus, empathy studies aim to discern the human ability to imitate the emotional states shared between individuals. In textual studies, readers function as affectionate beings with the ability to mimic affections illustrated by characters within a given storyworld (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 5). The potential emotional response depends on different factors inserted into the narrative. Several textual cues are considered necessary to influence a narrative's affectionate experience. Suzanne Keen refers to these techniques as empathic narrative techniques that facilitate empathy. Empathic narrative techniques include certain modes of narration, point of view-presentation and characterization techniques (Fernandez-Quintanilla 126). Adjectives are essential to empathic narrative techniques when conveying the character's emotional state and agenda. Depending on the proposed character qualities, the techniques can also purposely block the reader's empathy.

Keen introduces the concept of *narrative empathy* based on the above definition of empathy. Narrative empathy includes three techniques of *strategic empathizing*: *bounded*, *ambassadorial* and *broadcast*. Bounded strategic empathy "occurs within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality, and leading to feeling with familiar others." (Keen, "Strategic Empathizing" 481). This strategic empathizing technique focuses on the empathy of specific in-groups and consequently prevents outsiders from experiencing empathy. In-group

refers to the intended audience, i.e. the idealized authorial audience (Keen, “Strategic Empathy” 478). The idealized authorial audience belongs to an explicit social group, i.e. race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Audiences associated outside the idealized group will be unable to obtain any significant empathic connection. This empathic strategy can be exemplified in narratives containing painful sensations only male or female readers can relate to, where the readers of the respective gender would react by flinching. In contrast, the opposite gender would be unable to relate. Ambassadorial strategic empathy “addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end” (Keen, “Strategic Empathizing” 483). This strategic empathy technique also aims to transfer empathy onto specific readers belonging to an in-group. However, it deviates from bounded strategic empathy and purposely includes outsiders in the given empathic response. Ambassadorial strategic empathy includes multiple in-groups to sway their feelings towards a common understanding. Thus, the strategy still excludes some readers but is a strong rhetorical tool for reaching and swaying the audience's feelings (Keen, “Strategic Empathizing” 483). For instance, when illustrating unfair treatment of an in-group, like discrimination experienced by a black person, the reader can identify specific emotional cues. The reader might not have the same experiences but can identify the commonplace emotions described. Broadcast strategic empathy “calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group by emphasizing our common human experiences, feelings, hopes, and vulnerabilities.” (Keen, “Strategic Empathizing” 488). The last strategic empathy is a universal tool to place commonplace emotions on the audience. It includes a wide range of audiences, transmits faraway subjects to a feeling reader, and influences a larger audience. For example, characters describing commonplace emotions like sadness, happiness, or anger.

Another theory relating to emotional responses is *projection* and refers to a terminology created by Sigmund Freud in affiliation with psychoanalysis. The term is closely related to

empathy and invokes an affectionate response experienced as a defense mechanism. Defense mechanisms are a Freudian term associated with unconscious actions executed to protect the self and are, according to Freud, a common mental practice (Ornston 119). The practice discloses an empathic tendency enabling the psyche to perceive the emotional state of others. “For Freud, projecting meant that a person experiences his own feeling, impulse, perception, fantasy, or whatever ‘peculiarities’ as equally true of someone else, often quite consciously. Such a person can think diffusely about some of the mental activities of self and other as if they were the same” (Ornston 119). Thus, projection is necessary to recognize feelings outside the individual’s perception of emotion. Projection transfers unwanted feelings onto containers by splitting parts of themselves onto other things, people, or ideas. “The process usually adjusts itself through a special psychic mechanism, which is designated in psychoanalysis as projection. This unknown hostility, of which we are ignorant and of which we do not wish to know, is projected from our inner perception into the outer world and is thereby detached from our own person and attributed to the other” (Freud, *Totem and Taboo* 50). Projection is employed to protect our inner perception by shifting it into the outer world. Negative qualities are transferred, denying any negative aspects of the self to perceive negative traits as belonging to something else.

Projection can be identified in literary studies and is not only a psychological tool. The psychoanalytical tool is utilized when interpreting literary works and realizing hidden meanings within texts. Projection is an action initiated by different parts of the narration and is performed indirectly and directly by the author through the characters presented. Readers can likewise perform associated projective actions by placing their negative traits onto the characters. “It can be through use of familiar issues to the readers or through using remote topics” (Niaz et al. 35). When implying internal and external issues, the reader gains an insight into new perspectives and reacts accordingly. Adjectives, focalization, and point-of-view

constitute essential tools in representing new internalized perspectives and revealing new emotional input. Both empathy and projection give readers unique access to characters and their emotional perceptions. The two affection theories implement different approaches to the emotional identification placed on fictional characters. Empathy contributes to a positive engagement of shared emotions in narratives, while projection produces a negative emotional engagement in terms of providing readers with vessels to project negative aspects of the self.

3. The Old Weird

The following section will define and investigate weird fiction and its historical context. Several scholars have tried to define the genre by identifying the beginning of weird fiction (Luckhurst, “American Weird” 200). This has proven challenging to do precisely. Nonetheless, the general history and its roots can be outlined and illustrated in several scholarly sources, defining what it is and how it came to be. The sources provided in the following section largely examine the new weird. However, they all include insight into the old weird. Thus, the sources are relevant to include when investigating the old weird.

In order to understand weird fiction and Lovecraft’s cosmic horror, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, in his article “*The New Weird*” in “*New Directions in Popular Fiction: Genre, Distribution, Reproduction*” from 2016, suggests two broad definitions of the weird. The first definition refers to deities or beings with supernatural powers influencing the course of events within a given storyworld, i.e., “resonating with the etymology of weird, would be fiction that constructs a world in which the course of human affairs is directed by external powers and forces” (Weinstock 178). These external powers do not necessarily only refer to physical beings but also conceptual powers like fate or destiny. The second definition refers to the contemporary understanding of the weird as “an adjective connoting anything strange, odd, outlandish or uncanny, would categorize as weird fiction” (Weinstock 178). This definition refers to a general perception of weird and narrative characterization of bizarre characters and

events. Both definitions refer to a broad sense of the weird, where narratives outside the weird fiction genre can be placed within the scope of both descriptions. Therefore, these definitions do not reveal enough to definitively disclose weird fiction and the tropes connected to the genre. Instead, Lovecraft defines the weird more specifically, instilling a clear concept of the strange within weird tales. “Lovecraft proposes that the weird tale evokes repressed beliefs in the supernatural. Akin to dreaming and religion, the weird tale—what Lovecraft defines as the ‘literature of cosmic fear’ undercuts post-Enlightenment rationalism and posits instead the co-existence of other worlds and supernatural forces” (Weinstock 179). Lovecraft believed the weird to be closely linked to supernatural forces and otherworldly beings. The weird showcases a dread related to the emergence of supernatural forces greater than humankind. Lovecraft’s weird fiction differs from other horror narratives by eliciting ambiguity through incomprehensiveness, wherein dread occurs from overtly cryptic enactments. Dread develops as emotional turbulence in a lack of descriptive clarity and is overtly different from other horror sub-genres where dread is elicited through clear, descriptive means. This final definition of the weird will be incorporated into the analysis by investigating specific themes within each narrative, which supports Lovecraft’s interpretation of the weird and how it is implemented in later literature.

With a general definition in place, the overall history of the weird can be explored by examining different sources. One such example is the book *"Horror: A Literary History"* (2016), edited by Xavier Aldana Reyes. This book is a comprehensive overview of the horror genre. It explores its development and branches which have emerged throughout the years, with weird fiction being one of several branches deriving from horror. Reyes defines horror by its Latin origins, *horrere*, i.e., tremble or shudder (10). Horror uniquely tries to generate fear, shock or disgust and emotionally relates to feelings of dread. "Horror is largely defined by its affective pretenses. Horror takes its name, in other words, from the effects that

it seeks to elicit in its readers" (Reyes 10). Horror fiction begins with the rise of Gothic fiction (Reyes 16). Historically, the supernatural is of similar importance within horror, starting from Gothic literary traditions, where new and unfamiliar creatures is created to embody fear. Gothic literature is said to have started in the 1760s with the release of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), arising a trend of ghosts, the spectral and supernaturality (Reyes 23). Trends of the Gothic continued through the 19th century, leading to future genres like science-fiction and weird fiction. Gothic was at the time represented through a negative or dark aesthetic formulated through clear descriptions of feelings and images. "An aesthetic characterized in the first half of the eighteenth century, as now, by a morbid fixation upon darkness, death and the relics of the corrupted and corruptible body, both spiritual and material" (Reyes 32). Trends from the Gothic are still a prominent part of the horror genre. The fundamental theories of the uncanny and the negative sublime are Gothic narrative devices wherein the unknown is a source of fear. Weird fiction also uses these elements, where the unimaginable becomes a source of fear. "When conflated with the weird, which itself could be considered a melange of horror, science fiction and fantasy elements, horror may be defined by the terrifying moment of sublimity experienced as human consciousness is faced with its insignificant position in a vast cosmos" (Reyes 12). This idea of the sublime emerged in line with Gothic, grasping the appeal of types of artistic and affective negativity (Botting 6). The unknown or the unfamiliar is transferred through sublime and uncanny devices reflecting a commonality borrowed from the Gothic.

The nature and development of the weird are a source of discussion in several academic sources, as well as its relation to Gothic. Roger Luckhurst discusses, in his article: "*The weird: a dis/orientation*" from 2017, the change from gothic literature into the weird. "It was also not just a continuation of the late Victorian Gothic revival, but a mutation of it: something on the way to modern horror, which had not quite coalesced" (Luckhurst, "The weird: a

dis/orientation” 1043). It is also evident that some science fiction tropes can be found in several weird tales, including Lovecraft’s *At the Mountains of Madness*, which borrows many elements from the science fiction genre (Svitáková 192). Lovecraft’s weird fiction distanced itself from Gothic literature presented at the time and tacked away from theological terrors and toward scientific naturalism (Luckhurst, “American Weird” 195). The term weird was a definition created to categorize fiction in the 1880s that could not be directly attributed to Gothic fiction while also including authors like Edgar Allen Poe in the 1840s (Luckhurst, “The weird: a dis/orientation” 1045). This literary tradition deviated from formerly known literary monsters like ghosts, vampires, and werewolves, which were part of Gothic folkloric traditions. According to China Miéville, the monsters within Lovecraft’s tales are a radical break from the conventional Gothic (“Weird Fiction” 512). Instead, his monsters can be characterized as “agglomerations of bubbles, barrels, cones, and corpses, patchworked from cephalopods, insects, crustaceans, and other fauna notable precisely for their absence from the traditional Western monstrous” (Miéville, “Weird Fiction” 512). Lovecraft transformed Gothic devices like the sublime and uncanny into new reflections of dread through the grotesque, which will be investigated further in the analysis.

Like many examples of literary genres, it is challenging to identify precisely when the weird first came to be. While most sources agree on when the weird was given its name, many refuse to define a specific date of origin. “I have tried to write a relatively ‘straight’ history of weird fiction, but it is also important to acknowledge how arbitrary and contingent this trajectory truly is” (Luckhurst, “American Weird” 200). Luckhurst explains that Miéville challenges the notion of a weird canon and the general human desire to interpret meaning without all the pieces of the puzzle. The discussion is an interesting part of weird fiction where the origin is a chaotic component (Luckhurst, “American Weird” 200). Weird fiction partakes in a tradition where the lineage is impure, and several accounts are made to pronounce an

accurate date of origin. Nevertheless, according to Luckhurst, the name was created in March 1923 in association with the release of the American Pulp magazine "*Weird Tales*", founded by Clark Hennerberger ("American Weird" 194). The magazine published some of the first examples of weird fiction (Luckhurst, "The weird: a dis/orientation" 1042). The previous category of the weird was mainly affiliated with narratives outside the conventional Gothic genre and had no place to call their own. The pulp magazine finalized a definitive clarification of weird tales and its position as a genre. Contributors to the magazine included Robert E. Howard, Seabury Quinn and, most famously, H.P. Lovecraft (Luckhurst "The Weird: a dis/orientation" 1043). Lovecraft became a contributor to the magazine starting with his short story *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) and became a central figure associated with 20th-century weird fiction. The weird associated with Lovecraft started as *weird menace*, a "capacious pulp category that stretched from supernatural tales of the vengeful dead back from the grave via grim urban noir stories of sexual threat or actual torture to exotic jungle terrors of kidnap and cannibalism" (Luckhurst, "Weird stories" 448). Lovecraft utilized the known traditions of the weird established by authors like Poe while providing the genre with his own lineage (Luckhurst, "The weird: a dis/orientation" 1043). The foundation for his lineage was shaped with the release of "*Supernatural Horror in Literature*". The essay specified the weird as a "'literature of cosmic fear', as distinct from the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome" (Luckhurst, "Weird Stories" 449). The term cosmicism was established in this essay, creating a significant terminology in cosmic horror.

4. Analysis of *At the Mountain of Madness*

The first part of the analysis focuses on conceptualizing the old weird through atmospheric and affection theories to investigate how Lovecraft produces suspense. Additionally, it serves as a fundamental example of Lovecraft's fiction and functions as the foundation for the following comparative analyses.

4.1 Summary of *At the Mountain of Madness*

In Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*, a scientific expedition led by an unnamed¹ geologist ventures into the desolate landscape of Antarctica. One of their excursion groups uncovers ancient, otherworldly remains. As the main expedition loses contact with the separate advance group, the protagonist discovers a gruesome massacre of the majority of the researchers and dogs, except one dog and one man. The discovery leads the unnamed protagonist and the student Danforth into uncharted ruins within the mountains of an ancient civilization. The ruins and the unearthly creatures they encounter shatter the characters' perceptions, testing their sanity as they confront cosmic horrors beyond their comprehension. The pursuit of forbidden knowledge leads to a harrowing realization of humanity's limitations as the characters grapple with the fragility of their own minds in the face of the unimaginable. The novella explores themes of isolation, cosmic dread and forbidden and dangerous knowledge. Lovecraft weaves a cautionary tale, highlighting the consequences of hubris and the dangers of probing into realms that should remain untouched. The novella exemplifies important themes within cosmicism, underlining human insignificance when encountering cosmic forces.

4.2 Sublime Structures and Uncanny Creatures in *At the Mountains of Madness*

The narration is composed subsequent to the story's events, which is recounted with an internal focalization and a first-person perspective.

“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 caps. And I am the more reluctant because my warning may be in vain.” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 723)

¹ Lovecraft never specifies the protagonist's name, yet fans have deduced his name as William Meyer from connections with a character in his other short stories.

This can be deduced by how the narrator starts the story because the whole purpose of recounting the narrative is to warn future scientific curiosity. The narrator continuously refers to the events as a recollection of past developments when investigating the Antarctic terrain. Other narrative devices like frame storytelling are likewise utilized to retell the nameless narrator's recollection of events to prevent future expeditions. The frame narrative structure is a narrative device borrowed from Gothic literature. It creates suspense by building the narrative with achronological diversity framed as a letter to potential readers, specifically by including present tense in the beginning. At the same time, the majority of the story maintains a past tense structure. This diverse chronology creates a split sense of time. The narrative is a collection of flashbacks, where the narrator reminisces about regretful events. These devices stimulate curiosity within the reader, working as a hook to keep the reader engaged in the narrative. The narrator continuously jumps in and out of past events to comment on different sequences, and the frequency of the comments becomes an increasingly regular occurrence towards the end. "Our motivation after that is something I will leave to psychologists" (Lovecraft, "At the Mountain of Madness" 786). The clear jump between present and past tense is used to justify their continued curiosity while trying to keep the reader in suspense about the foreshadowed events to come. "Even young Danforth with his nervous breakdown [...] there is one thing he thinks he alone saw which he will not tell even me" (Lovecraft, "At the Mountain of Madness" 750). Foreshadowing is essential throughout the narrative as the narrator slowly reveals Danforth's misfortune and loss of sanity, releasing an expectation of dread.

Lovecraft also used a language with interlocking sub-clauses and highly adjective-heavy sentences to reveal the underlying cosmicism. "On many occasions, the curious atmospheric effects enchanted me vastly; these including a strikingly vivid mirage – the first I had ever seen – in which distant bergs became the battlements of unimaginable cosmic tales" (Lovecraft, "At the Mountain of Madness" 726). Lovecraft modifies the adjectives by adding adverbs like

‘strikingly’, intensifying the narrative's engagement. The readers are compelled to delve into the weird and to think further than the narrative alone. The vastness of the universe is expressed through these narrative devices to engage the reader in a state of awe and curiosity, which urges them to continue with the narrative. The grammar showcased in the above quote illustrates a unique grammatical structure where semicolons and dashes indicate these sub-clauses. Semicolons are exceptionally unique and are an unusual addition to the sentence structure. These sub-clauses aim to confound the reader's perception of time and space by confusingly creating rapid additions to main sentences. It constitutes a sense of frustration and desperation within the narrative as experienced by the narrator. By running his sentences on, the reader rarely experiences breaks. Full stops ensure these breaks, which are sparingly utilized. The narrator's emotional state is conceived through his narrative style, and his state of mind is conveyed by highlighting the intensity of his experiences. Time almost stops as the narrator rambles, which conveys a unique reader experience where their perception of time is severed. It accentuates the narrator's dread in reliving his horrible experience, which is conveyed to the potential reader.

The ambiguousness of the narrative additionally accentuates an extension of the frames within the story (Blacklock 1105). For instance, by producing an ambiguous description, the reader gains access to a more intricate sense of the weird, where dread is prioritized. “The unknown mountains ahead rose dizzyingly up like a fearsome rampart of giants, their curious regularities shewing with startling clearness even without field-glass” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 746). The interplay between the known, i.e., the mountains, and the unknown, i.e., the giants, creates a language structure featured by *similes*, wherein, in the above instance, the mountains are compared to giants to underline the massive structures. The narrator's descriptions and commentary become a way to represent more than just the plot, leading the reader into the weird. Additionally, the usage of similes can be found in multiple

instances within Lovecraft's narrative. Similes are a standard narrative device that typically eases a potential reader into specific imagery. Lovecraft uniquely utilized the device as a personification of objects by comparing mountains to giants. Comparing an object to giants to accentuate the size is also not uncommon; however, by adding the descriptive 'unknown' to the mountain, the dead metaphor becomes something more than just a mountain. The purpose of the similes is not to compare known objects to conceptualize the indescribable. Instead, mountains, a familiar object, are compared to mythical beings to underline a perception of strangeness. The unknown mountains symbolize the weird and menacingly overwhelm the characters, ensuring unease within the narrative. The narrator conveys these intimidating descriptions to express cosmicism and simultaneously accentuates the unknown qualities of the mountains. The personification emphasizes the unnatural by giving the mountains terrifying qualities not generally attributed to mountains. This example is a pattern seen in Lovecraft's literature, where objects gain access to uncommon qualities to highlight the unknown and the weird aspects within his tales.

The atmosphere of dread is produced throughout the whole narrative to build suspense. The beginning especially carries dread by utilizing the sublime. Natural structures within the desolate and vast Antarctic terrain are described to create these aesthetic feelings of the sublime. The narrator uses detailed language in the first chapter to describe affection linked to emotions induced by giant mountain structures and vast regions. "Before noon, we felt a thrill of excitement beholding a vast, lofty, and snow-clad mountain chain which opened out and covered the whole vista ahead. At last, we had encountered an outpost of the great unknown continent and its cryptic world of frozen death" (Lovecraft, "At the Mountain of Madness" 726). The narrator uses conflicting statements to constitute an illustration of a negative sublime. Excitement and awe are at the forefront of the description, yet the narrator also adds negative comments like 'cryptic world of frozen death'. The word 'cryptic' also suggests an underlying

feeling of something beyond humanity, not just beyond nature. It highlights how the weird elements are beyond the confines of nature and everything related to the ordinary human world. The beauty of nature clashes with a sense of terror constituted by the vastness and unknowable aspects of natural elements. The reader gains a vague sense of an obscure underlying horror yet to be revealed. The interpretation of vagueness within Lovecraft's literature is not meant to be a criticism within this context. Instead, the term is supposed to signify a sense of positive ambiguity within the narrative. Vagueness is central to Lovecraft's narratives because it purposely creates a sense of limitlessness, which intrigues the reader. Readers want to read further into the narrative to discover the secrets hiding within the vagueness, which engages their curiosity. The vagueness also carries feelings of dread by producing something more than just the text. Thus, the term is meant as a positive observation, which causes the reader to invest their attention into the narrative. By initiating a sense of curiosity, Lovecraft produces unease early in the narrative to intensify the tension producing a constant atmosphere of dread.

The sublime feeling manifests as a limitless landscape beyond human comprehension where the abundant adjectives capture the narrator's attempts at articulating what is inarticulable. Miéville sees this as a "philosophy of militant adjectivalism" (Miéville, "Weird Fiction" 512), providing the narration with a means to present the world as something unrepresentable while maintaining the limitless sense of sublimity. The adjectivalism mentioned by Miéville draws the reader into the narrative, and words like the abovementioned 'cryptic' create a desire to understand the given storyworld and the mysteries it hides. It almost creates a paradox where Lovecraft releases information through a multitude of adjectives, yet they never reveal anything significant about the world. The number of nouns within his sentences is not as frequent as the adjectives, which makes the adjectives the primary source of information. These linguistic elements motivate the reader to try and decipher the secrets hidden within the narrative, creating a positive sense of vagueness and curiosity. The ambiguity

also refers to a paradoxical commitment to the given story world because it instils a desire to understand the story world, and even after reading, the reader tries to conceptualize the information given, but without complete success.

Discovery and historical exploration are at the forefront of the narrative, as the main character and the student Danforth investigates the deserted city revealed as “the nightmare plateau of Leng” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 778). The city's atmosphere is established early by utilizing feelings of the sublime.

“The effect of the monstrous sight was indescribable, for some fiendish violation of known natural law seemed certain at the outset. Here, on a hellish ancient tableland fully 20,000 feet high, and in a climate deadly to habitation since a prehuman age not less than 500,000 years ago, there stretched nearly to the vision’s limit a tangle of orderly which only the desperation of mental self-defense could possibly attribute to any but a conscious and artificial cause” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 757).

Superior natural power and order is a function within weird fiction, a trope also recognized in science fiction literature. The characters show a clear determination to scientific discovery and rationality, which leads to an interest in life beyond the familiar human world. “The natural world, the physical universe, presents as overwhelming, beyond human control, awesome and threatening, hence ‘super’ natural, overabundant” (Wight and Gadd 298). Sublimity is indicated by presenting a world yet to be discovered by humankind, where supernaturalism takes precedence. However, the discovery is not of scientific origin, instilling a sublime feeling of incomprehension. Lovecraft’s fiction is marked by these sublime descriptions where limitlessness initiates feelings of the sublime. The feelings aim to create awareness of the vast size of the known universe, which consequently constitutes a perception of insignificance when comparing humanity to the scale of the infinitely boundless cosmos (Wight and Gadd 296). The narrative creates a clash between supernaturalism and naturalism to convey these feelings of the sublime. The parallel between the narrator and the reader is the source of sublimity. The

reader's encounter with the limited language and the protagonist's encounter with something beyond science conveys a parallel constituted by the protagonist's desire to describe his encounter scientifically and then failing to express what he saw comprehendingly. The limit of language, expands the reader's experience and imagination. Lovecraftian weird tales identify sublimity in the supernatural, which clashes with the typical understanding of the sublime where it is identified in nature. Kant believed the sublime was not an object of nature, but a feeling produced within the viewing subject when observing objects in nature beyond comprehension. "Concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility" (Kant 99). This inadequacy is the subject's inability to articulate and comprehend the observed object of sublimity, which can be transferred to weird fiction.

Lovecraft directs the reader into the weird by centralizing unnatural objects and their impossible design. "That seething, half-luminous cloud-background held ineffable suggestions of a vague, ethereal beyondness far more than terrestrially spatial" (Lovecraft, "At the Mountain of Madness" 745). The impossibility of articulation produced by the protagonist within *At the Mountain of Madness* conveys the sublime while simultaneously delivering terror to the reader. The sublimity in the incomprehensible and the production of terror can also be attributed to Burke's definition of the sublime. As established, Burke believed terror to be a source of the sublime, which can express a profound sense of dread (58). The vagueness of descriptions conveys uncertainty, which is unsettling to the reader, contributing to the atmospheric dread. Dread is cultivated as the narrator observes natural objects which, in their descriptions, are changed into something unnatural, i.e., beyond nature. Rationality is lost, and the reader is drawn into a world superior to their own, creating an incomprehensible world leading to the sublime.

The lack of definitive answers also motivates the narrator and Danforth to continue exploring the monstrous mountains and the desolate city. The sublime is conveyed through this exploration. Even though there is a tremendous amount of knowledge on murals in the abandoned city, there are still more questions than answers. The existence of the Old Ones and their origins remains a mystery, and their technological advancement is unclear.

“What happened afterwards we could only guess. How long had the new sea-cavern city survived? Was it still down there, a stony corpse in eternal blackness? Had the subterranean waters frozen at last? What fate had the ocean-bottom cities of the outer world been delivered? Had any of the Old Ones shifted north ahead of the creeping icecap?” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 782).

Rhetorical questions raised by the narrator ensure an unease deriving from the unknown. The reader becomes troubled by the inconclusiveness, which augments a creeping feeling of dread. The constant personification is also present within the quote, for instance, ‘a stony corpse’ and ‘creeping icecap’. Lovecraft attaches something not normally animate onto the mystic city to underline the weirdness linked to the structure. The atmosphere of dread is elicited by these discoveries and their vague disclosure of the creatures and what they are. The failure to thoroughly understand the supernatural beings and the ambiguous undertaking of their history evoke a sense of helplessness, conveyed through the narrator’s continued discovery because the answers are not enough to satisfy the narrator's innate curiosity. It signifies a parallel between the reader and the protagonist, where both want to know more. According to Wight and Gadd, this feeling can be attributed to the sublime because of a heightened sense of cosmic fear. “In Lovecraft’s fiction, the sublime is often experienced by human protagonists who react to previously unknown supernatural beings with awe and terror, describing them as unspeakable or unfathomable, beyond the grasp of limited human consciousness.” (Wight and Gadd 294). The reader’s realization coincides with the narrator’s awe-and-terror-inspiring discoveries, which give answers while creating more unanswered questions. These revelations

lead to the awareness of a limitless cosmos beyond the grasp of limited human consciousness, which inspires feelings of the sublime, constituted by something beyond common scientific understanding. Additionally, it leads to further questions concerning the specimens missing from Lake's camp. "And yet we could not help thinking about these specimens – especially about the eight perfect ones that were missing from Lake's hideously ravaged camp" (Lovecraft, "At the Mountain of Madness" 783). The narrator knows the possibility of meeting these creatures and the horror this inescapable meeting will provoke. The rhetorical question also functions as a perceptive device to the reader's imagination, further scrutinizing the events within the narrative. The reader gains access to an unreachable world of alien creatures superseding humankind. Terror evokes the sublime by opening the reader up to a world exceeding their normal comprehension, which is produced by provoking their imagination.

While the sublime is produced by feelings constituted solely within a missing sense of familiarity, the uncanny is instead produced through the repression of the familiar. The familiar must be present in order to perceive the dread dictated by the uncanny. Encounters with grotesque creatures resembling familiar elements or concepts from the known world can inspire the uncanny. Thus, the final encounter with the shoggoth provokes the uncanny.

"Formless protoplasm able to mock and reflect all forms and organs and processes – viscous agglutinations of bubbling cells – rubbery fifteen-foot spheroids infinitely plastic and ductile – slaves of suggestion, builders of cities – more and more sullen, more and more intelligent, more and more amphibious, more and more imitative – Great God! What madness made even those blasphemous Old Ones willing to use and carve such things?" (Lovecraft, "At the Mountain of Madness" 797)

The narrator tries to describe the creature by referring directly to familiar objects like rubber or plastic. Interestingly, there is a continuous theme of the narrator trying to understand the unknown through human science. Rubber and plastic are scientific elements created by humanity, and by comparing these elements to the creature the reader gains a unique insight

into the narrator's mind. The uncanny lies within the familiarity of the materials, giving the reader insight into an attempt at conceptualizing the shoggoth. Though the image is incomplete with prevailing unknowns, the reader tries to create images of the monster, which will differ depending on the given reader. The uncanny effect of the creature thus similarly differs as the potential reader tries to imagen what it looks like, though without much success because of several missing detailed descriptions. Current readers, whose interest in Lovecraft varies, might already have a clear picture of the shoggoth through the appropriation of Lovecraft's fan culture. However, the narrator is never able to articulate its appearance correctly. The unknown entity remains indescribable, affecting the reader's image. The unfamiliar is still an immense part of the creature where the interplay between the known and unknown facilitates uncanny emotions related to the narrator's depiction of the grotesque entity. The narrator himself refers to impressions of the creature and not direct features because of its viscosly changing form, unveiling a dread related to the collusion of both familiar and unfamiliar elements.

The uncanny effect within Lovecraft's writing stems from repressed fears within his own life, where the unknown refers to specific things Lovecraft failed to understand. He elicited dread in his writing by projecting his fears into his narratives, which can be identified as a return of repressed feelings. According to several sources (Kneale 116; McConeghy 4; Bialecki 436), Lovecraft's view on race reveals a personal fear of otherness altered into grotesque monsters presented within the storyworld. Kneale specifies a difficulty in reading beyond these views: "Once Lovecraft's racism is discovered, it is difficult not to read him solely in terms of these fears and hatreds. His pathology represents a critical singularity from which interpretations struggle to escape. But, while it is extremely significant, it makes the texts expressions of Lovecraft's beliefs." (Kneale 116-117). Thus, the shoggoth and several other entities within Lovecraft's narratives represent cultural repressions of attitudes existing within the real world. Lovecraft's racist views are a well-known fact that is directly and indirectly

extended into his work. Any potential reader can discover his problematic views, especially in a poem from 1912, *On the Creation of N******. Even readers with no former knowledge of Lovecraft can discover the extension of his beliefs from more famous works like *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* from 1936. The otherworldly entities represent his xenophobic beliefs and are reflected in his later narratives. *At the Mountain of Madness* can likewise be read as a xenophobic symbolism where the relationship between shoggoths (slave) and elder things (creator) reflects a political structure similar to his political views. Thus, the uncanny sensations manifest in correlation with controversial views held by the author, wherein creatures identified as sublime become uncanny as they are rooted in something real and even familiar i.e., to him, foreign cultures.

As illustrated above, the uncanny is primarily encountered in the subconscious as the repressed emerges from visual depictions of the familiar and unfamiliar. However, Lovecraft also utilized a unique approach to uncanny elements by utilizing other senses like smell and hearing. The sensory system plays a vital role in atmospheric augmentation by accentuating different sensory impressions through the uncanny. The most important of all senses is sight: “So we find two most important senses: dominant by far is sight” (Hölzing 183). Generally, sight is used to recount a failed attempt at registering the unknown visually. When sight fails, it necessitates relying on much less essential senses like smell and hearing. The reader becomes uncomfortable with the restriction of sight because “the preferred input of information is missing and people tend to feel uneasy, even frightened” (Hölzing 183). Smell is one of the first sensory expressions conveyed. “There was an odour – and that odour was vaguely, subtly, and unmistakably akin to what had nauseated us upon opening the insane grave of the horror poor Lake had dissected” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 785). The sensory descriptions help the reader envision the events as an extension of their imagination, which furthers their general engagement. Sensory reception from the five senses (vision, audition,

touch, olfaction, gustation) all contribute to a universal awareness of the surrounding world and internalizes important impressions (Nuessel 101). In literature, the authors employ sensorial experiences through an appropriate selection of vocabulary when conveying each sense. “In addition to verbs and predicates, the use of adjectives, adverbs, and adverbial phrases reflect preferences for a particular sensory system” (Nuessel 102). Lovecraft’s adjectivalism contributes to necessary sensory inputs conveying suspense in the relationship between familiar and unfamiliar elements.

Thus, Lovecraft invites the reader into the uncanny through other means than the conventional visual representation of the uncanny. “Paradoxically, it was both a less frightful and a more frightful odour – less frightful intrinsically, but infinitely appalling in this place under the known circumstances [...] For the odour was the plain and familiar one of common petrol” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 786). Before discovering Gedney, the uncanny sensation is established through smell. Conventionally, the uncanny relies on visual depictions to stimulate reader response (Royle 108). Lovecraft often resisted applying conventional literal devices, and though there is inspiration from Gothic and science-fiction devices, he generally aimed to discover new means to convey suspense. Lovecraft confines the reader into a unique atmospheric world of dread by accessing a unique approach to uncanny impressions. The familiarity placed upon the emerging gasoline smell conflicts with the impossibility of its existence, showcasing unfamiliarity. The unfamiliarity arises when entering the Plateau of Leng subsequently encountering countless foreign objects. The sudden encounter with something familiar integrates the uncanny, replacing feelings of dread from the sublime with uncanny unease. The interplay between both aesthetic devices captures the potential reader, conveying an awe-inspiring and unattainable world of dread.

Correspondingly, accustomed sounds transform into fearful objects, initiating feelings of uncanniness. “What we heard was not the fabulous note of any buried blasphemy of elder

earth from whose supernal toughness an age-denied polar sun had evoked a monstrous response. Instead, it was a thing so mockingly normal and so unerringly familiarised [...] Sound that we shuddered to think of it here, where such things ought not to be. To be brief – it was simply the raucous squawking of a penguin” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 791). Uncanny aesthetics through hearing and smell arousing dread and terror. The extensive adjectives depict the narrator’s emotional state as he emphasizes a mocking return of familiarity. Thus, uncanniness is constructed through literary monstrosities and prospects of everyday sensations twisted into grotesque strangeness. The unknown within the narrative displaces the reader’s sense of home by featuring a corruption of normality. Safe sensations are twisted into perverse perceptions which accentuate unfamiliarity and actualize the atmospheric dread.

4.3 Uncaring Narrators and Projection in *At the Mountain of Madness*

Empathy and projection, as previously established, focus on characterization and the reader’s perception of a character’s emotional state. These perceptions frequently change depending on the narrator’s actions throughout the plot. Emotional engagement depends on the narrative structure, where the first-person point of view effectively produces relevant emotional relatability. The utilization of inner monologue is seen as “invariably more authentic and direct than the more mediated or double-voiced narrated monologue” (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 97). However, other narrative decisions can disrupt the narrative response. The general emotional state of the narrator is frequently described throughout the narrative, revealing the utilization of broadcast strategic empathy. “I think that both of us simultaneously cried out in mixed awe, wonder, terror and disbelief” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 757). Emotions like awe, wonder and disbelief are all conceivable common emotions that the reader recognizes regardless of their in-group. Despite these perceivable emotions, the narrator fails to convey qualities deserving of the reader’s empathy. The construction of the narrator’s

character identification is lacking, and the general perception of sympathy is lost early in the narrative. “Doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible, there must be nothing left” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 723). The narrator presents himself as calculative and clever, where fact precedes emotions. The introduction reveals facts and necessity rather than an affectionate account of the events. This lack of emotion demonstrates a problematic account of the narrator, which functions as a hindrance when the reader tries to perceive relatability. Rationality is prioritized to deliberately decrease the reader engagement of the narrator, whereas the weird is prioritized instead. Nevertheless, the desperation shown in the quote above elicits a condition of empathy generated through a negative affective state provoked by apparent traumatizing experiences. Susanne Keen recognizes a character’s negative affective state as “those provoked by undergoing persecution, suffering, grieving, and experiencing painful obstacles, make a reader’s empathizing more likely” (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 71). The narrator’s panic initiates a sympathetic response led by a curiosity to discover the source of his panic.

The initial empathy is quickly revised. Especially later, as the narrator and Danforth investigate the mountains of madness. The narrator repeatedly questions his own motivations.

“There are those who will say Danforth and I were utterly mad not to flee for our lives [...] Looking back at that moment, I can scarcely recall just what precise form our new emotions took – just what changed of immediate objective it was that so sharpening sense of expectancy. We certainly did not mean to face what we feared – yet I will not deny that we may have had a lurking, unconscious wish to spy certain things from hidden vantage-point” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 787-788)

The reader picks up a sense of hypocrisy within the narrator, whose scientific motivation and hubristic inclination catalyze later consequences. The ramifications are imminent due to the narrator’s curiosity, as he autonomously seeks the unknown while recognizing the possibility of a cosmic encounter. Keen describes the result of a lack of empathy in the inner speech:

“resulting in decoupling of character identification and an abrupt transition from empathy to distance, frustration, or even uneasy snickering at the over-the-top interior monologue.” (Keen, “Strategic Empathizing” 485). Though Keen is discussing another narrative, this quote accurately describes Lovecraft’s narrative style, where the over-the-top internalization works against an empathic understanding of the protagonist. This narrative decision is frequently apparent in several of Lovecraft’s narratives, where the reader experiences frustration with the protagonist’s lack of empathy sparked by the militant adjectivalism. Especially the admission of not leaving despite their awareness of inevitably encountering one of the creatures found in Lake’s camp. This is significantly amplified after they find Gedney and the dog. The narrator maintained throughout the narrative that their motivation was to find Gedney in hopes of finding him alive. “Yet in the end we did let sheer burning curiosity – or anxiety – or auto-hypnotism – or vague thoughts of responsibility toward Gedney – or what not – drive us” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 786). The narrator unconvincedly tries to defend the expedition. Gedney is perceived as an afterthought rather than the main objective, which shows the protagonist as an uncaring narrator who underserves the reader’s empathy. Furthermore, the contradicting nature of his motivation also indicates a projective action where his regretful motivation is projected onto Gedney to protect himself from the reality of his desire to know the unknowable. The narrator must deceive himself into believing his actions are justified and not just a mistake carried out by his scientific faults. The reader recognizes this defense mechanism as a negative affective response, leading to antipathy.

The narrator tries to protect himself by convincing the readers of his regret and awareness of his mistakes. He projects these feelings onto the reader, where the characters in Lovecraft’s tales become a subject of irrelevancy and suffer a violation of the self, which is projected onto the readers and their experience of the narrative. “Yet long before we had passed the great star-shaped ruin and reached our plane our fears had become transferred to the lesser

but vast enough range whose re-crossing lay ahead of us” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 804). The fear they experienced lingers deep within the self, which the narrator tries to project elsewhere without success. Negative emotions like fear and remorse are afflicted onto the reader, who unconsciously recognizes the projective action from the narrator. The projection fails due to an inner struggle where awe and excitement are affectionately described. “Many people will probably judge us callous as well as mad for thinking about the northward tunnel and the abyss so soon after our sombre discovery, and I am not prepared to say that we would have immediately revived such thoughts but for a specific circumstance which broke in upon us and set up a whole new train of speculation” (Lovecraft, “At the Mountain of Madness” 790-791). The reader recognizes his regret but also an excitement stemming from his findings, where the excitement fails to discourage future curiosity despite his attempts at claiming otherwise. The significance of this failed deterrence influences the reader’s affection and thus hinders further empathic identification. Mainly because the readers become motivated by curiosity, experiencing a desire to continue engaging with the narrative. The narrator refuses to acknowledge the inevitable repercussions his tale could encourage and instead uses the reader as an outlet for projection to protect his inner self. The reader becomes a fictional shield for the narrator’s inner feelings. The reader recognizes the tale’s hypocrisy, resulting in the reader focusing less on the storyteller’s emotional state and instead delving deeper into the weird and the creatures lurking in the dark. The narrator refrains from revealing any useful information, increasing a sense of frustration occurring towards the narrator’s identification. The act of narration creates a paradox constituted by a lack of information. The reader is forced to draw their own conclusions and has to enhance their imaginative abilities. The created suspense increases the atmosphere of dread and relies on other means to keep the reader engaged than with empathy.

The analysis of *At the Mountain of Madness* exemplifies important narrative devices Lovecraft utilizes to maintain reader engagement. Reader empathy is shown to be discarded in creating suspense in favor of emphasizing atmospheric devices. The ambivalent nature of the narrative is mainly created through sublime and uncanny descriptions striving to unsettle potential readers and their sense of normalcy through limitless unknowns and the interplay between the familiar and unfamiliar. The sublime is especially significant, wherein Lovecraft emphasizes the unnatural. Readers are not supposed to identify with the narrator, and instead, the narrative advocates for a stimulative atmosphere of dread, where the narrator is an outlet for the weird. The constitution of the weird in Lovecraft's narratives necessitates a militant adjectivalism conveying paradoxical experiences through a human narrator. Thus, the narrator is an articulative device to express the story without revealing too much of the indescribable. Ambiguity is voiced in the general vagueness constituting tension in the reader's perception of the narrative, subsequently initiating an intense response to the indescribability within the narrative structure.

5. The Transition into Contemporary Weird Fiction

Some key elements need to be investigated before investigating the new weird historical context. Namely how his literary contribution has been ascertained in a contemporary context and how specific aspects of Lovecraft's weird fiction have been criticized.

The literary entities presented in Lovecraft's stories are not supposed to represent a literal sense of existing beings. Instead, they function as symbols for the eternal mystery of the cosmos and the boundless possibility of the existence of extraterrestrial beings. Lovecraft's weird fiction tries to move away from the traditions established in the Gothic, in which the literal belief in supernatural beings like ghosts, vampires and werewolves constituted dread (Lovecraft and Joshi 14). Lovecraft instead conveys obscure monsters and purposely characterized them with vagueness. According to Latthapol Khachonkitkosol, Lovecraft's

entities are "metaphorical formulations of humanity's ultimate meaninglessness in an infinitely vast and indifferent universe; and that "fear of the unknown" lies at the heart of anything Lovecraftian." (Khachonkitkosol 3). The extraterrestrial entities represented in Lovecraftian fiction are metaphorical devices utilized to represent the vastness of the universe and the endless possibilities of such creatures existing. By designing a mythos of endless possibilities and inevitable outcomes, the reader is forced to reimagine their position within this boundless universe, consequently creating existential dread. However, Lovecraft would not necessarily agree with Khachonkitkosol's metaphoric reduction of his literary beings. The metaphor assessment is a conventional understanding of literary entities, a tendency seen generally in horror studies (Winter 151). A problem arises when literary monsters are oversimplified into metaphoric devices wherein monsters are reduced to conceptual objects. The purpose of cosmicism is to relay incomprehensibility to convey the insignificance of humanity. This is lost when the reader conducts metaphoric interpretations and manages to visualize the different monstrous entities. The same problem occurs in the newfound illustrative adaptations of his literary works.

Dread functions as an emotional investment where the reader's emotional engagement is essential when unveiling each element of the weird. However, the contemporary interest in the weird might appear counterintuitive in instilling the desired effect. "Fan culture's repeated use of Lovecraftian signifiers and endless reproduction of media—with their surprisingly vivid depiction of supposedly indescribable horrors—resembles this desensitization process. The more you talk about or depict the object of horror the less alien its alienness becomes" (Khachonkitkosol 54). The inclusion of similar weird objects within cosmic horror literature can interfere with the affective response of the potential reader. Lovecraft never detailed his beings, indicating a reluctance to allow the reader to gain information on any deities. The literary devices in Lovecraft's fiction rely on curiosity and avoid any notions of closure. Any

literal addition providing closure reduces the monsters into understandable objects and counters the dread initiated by inaccessible unknowns. The rising popularity of new weird fiction in popular culture and reused tropes within media results in the unknown aspect becoming more known and less fear-inducing. However, depending on the reader and their general consumption of cosmic horror literature, this notion might not be a generalized problem. Furthermore, the reinvention of the weird tries to accommodate the desensitization by reimagining new cosmic creatures and events, shocking the unexpected reader with the vastness of the cosmos. Authors like Stephen King and Neil Gaiman partake in this weird tradition, where they uniquely emphasize the weird through vastly different elements to create suspense.

Critics of Lovecraft's narratives often declare deficiencies in his fiction and notorious narrative style of adjective-heavy sentences. The language within his weird tales is especially critiqued for its verbosity and ambiguity. However, Jeff Lacy and Steven J. Zani argue the significance of this narrative style in their article *"The Negative Mystics of the Mechanic Sublime: Walter Benjamin and Lovecraft's Cosmicism"* from 2007. The language characterizes a critical tradition of cosmic horror inherited by countless new weird authors. The interpreted meaning of Lovecraftian literature is purposely vague to facilitate the importance of the weird. "Lovecraft's fiction, delivered by narrators who recollect fragments of texts and who speak of unspeakable things, deliberately enacts a process of indeterminacy in translation, leading readers to a different relationship to language and, hence, to Lovecraft's version of a mystical truth." (Lacy and Zany 66-67). Weird elements compel readers to reconsider their understanding of the general plot by containing meaning within nonmeaning. As such, the truth of a narrative is never ultimately revealed, and the ending almost always exposes a mystical truth. Open endings are instrumental in this regard, forcing the reader to think further than the plot by not giving a final resolution. China Miéville contributes to this sentiment by writing,

"The abasement to the Weird that this prose represents is also visible in Lovecraft's narrative. He is largely uninterested in plot: 'Atmosphere,' he says, 'not action, is the great desideratum of weird fiction' (Lovecraft 1995: 116). His stories are often little more than excuses for descriptions of Weird presences" (Miéville, "Weird Fiction" 512). To Lovecraft, atmosphere presented a preferred method of acquiring the wanted affective response. By stylizing an adjective-dominated technique, Lovecraft managed to construct a dreadful atmosphere, which worked to accentuate his cosmic philosophy.

6. The New Weird

Lovecraft's definition of the weird dominated the genre even after his death in 1937. The new weird development shows a continuous integration of his literary legacy. This section continues the historical investigation of the weird, focusing on the transformation into contemporary weird literature.

Weird fiction maintains transgressions established from Lovecraft's literature focusing on crossing literary boundaries established within the Gothic era. Authors writing within the weird incorporates elements of Gothic, science fiction and fantasy (Wienstock 182). The number of incorporated elements depends on the author's incorporation of the weird, with infinite possibilities of conducting atmospheric dread. The tradition established by Lovecraft started to experience a significant change, creating a new trajectory for the genre. According to Wienstock, the English author and literary critic M. John Harrison coined the term new weird in 2003, referring to a renewal of the weird (183). Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy's article "*Introduction: Old and New Weird*" (2016) also argues that the new weird started in the 1980s (119) when authors like Thomas Ligotti formulated a new foundation of literary tropes connected to former weird narratives. "Ligotti succeeded in avoiding the pastiche and repetition that had tended to dominate post-Lovecraftian weird fiction and formulated a new and desolate conception of a fundamentally chaotic universe." (Noys and Murphy 119). Ligotti's work

challenged the thematic and narratorial practices in weird fiction at the time. He crossed commonplace boundaries placed by old weird writers, formulating a perspective of more than the formerly known separation between ontologically perplexing humans and godlike monsters (Omidasalar 718). Ligotti started his literary career with short stories published in American small press magazines, including his short story *The Chymist* (1981). He focuses mainly on maintaining the short story format and has published multiple collections of weird tales. For instance, “*Teatro Grottesco*” (2006) is a collection of short stories that contain tales written throughout his career, like *Purity* (2003), *The Clown Puppet* (1996), and *The Red Tower* (1996). His Stories often twist reality where the weird is utilized to destabilize the ordinary everyday world of the characters within his narratives (Lopes 170). Authors like Ligotti ensured a replacement of the narrative style within the old weird created by Lovecraft by introducing more explicit articulation and descriptions. Though Ligotti is a less-known central figure in the new weird, his literary influence has contributed to a continuous expansion of the definition of the weird.

China Miéville is another key figure in establishing the new weird, ensuring a replacement of the narrative style within the old weird created by Lovecraft by introducing more explicit articulation and descriptions. Miéville’s fiction shows a transition from only maintaining the short story or novella format to utilizing the novel form (Noys and Murphy 125). As previously established, the stylization of the atmosphere stems from a reproduction of Poe’s unity of effect. Lovecraft focused on a constant sense of atmospheric dread placed into every aspect of narrative design (Moreland, “Introduction” 4). New weird novel writers chose to deviate from producing one consistent atmosphere. Therefore, the tradition borrowed from Poe is no longer a fundamental part of weird fiction narratives but is still utilized by authors maintaining a close relation to the short story format. Sublime and uncanny entities are still an essential addition to the construction of atmospheric dread. However, the reliance on each

element heavily depends on the given author, rendering the weird through inhabiting a “Lovecraftian aura” (Noys and Murphy 124). Therefore, the most successful new weird narratives succeeding Lovecraft’s work are not direct adaptations but closely relies on maintaining specific fragments of Lovecraft’s ambiguous atmosphere.

The debate on weird fiction includes the nature of labelling sub-genres within speculative literature. According to Carl Sederholm in *“The new weird”* in *“Twenty-First-Century Gothic”* (2019), “the authors associated with the New Weird emphasized originality through an ‘uninhibited commingling of fictional genres’ that mostly included elements of fantasy, science fiction, Gothic and horror, but might also freely draw on Westerns, New Wave science fiction, slipstream or steampunk” (Sederholm 161). The variety of the genre is the main aspect of the debate, mainly produced by the genre’s redefinition of existing genres. New weird is the creation of something new while still preserving key elements of the weird, thus reimagining the weird while retaining fundamental tropes and ideas. The weird no longer imitates Lovecraft too closely and instead “embraced weird fiction’s general tendency to interrogate the human experience of the world and the cosmos and added to them an interest in exploring how human beings perceive the world.” (Sederholm 161). The element of the strange and unknowable is not only placed within the events and the characters of the narrative but also in the general experience of the potential reader. The old weird was a reaction to an unstable modern world following the First World War in the 1910s, reflecting a lack of a stable status quo (Wienstock 183). New weird fiction writers convert the instability of normalcy into a modern setting, adopting a more postmodern perspective. Depending on the author, weird narratives display an acute awareness of the modern world, whether disguised through literary metaphors or in a literal sense. Some pick an overt political agenda, while others focus on less societal-heavy issues (Wienstock 183). The visual reliance is especially a deviation from Lovecraft’s distorted imagery. New weird manifests as a vivid world of visual detail refraining

from the non-articulative style performed by Lovecraft. The general rendition of the weird experiences' constant alternation between Lovecraftian elements while practicing more conspicuous explicitness in reader perception. Thus, new weird is a genre born with boundless possibilities in creating a unique fantastical world facilitating dread motivated by different authorial styles. These elements are interesting to investigate by exploring the chosen texts within the analysis, especially by comparing how authors have adapted and changed Lovecraft's original narrative style into their own intricate style. Furthermore, the changes can be reviewed more thoroughly by studying new weird literature from both the 20th and 21st centuries.

7. Analysis of the *The Mist*

This part of the analysis focuses on the similarities and differences between the above analysis of Lovecraft's *At the Mountain of Madness*. The main character, David Drayton, will be investigated by comparing how Lovecraft and King build their narrative and characters and how the atmosphere is utilized to build suspense.

7.1 Summary of *The Mist*

The Mist revolves around the narrator, David, his son Billy and a group of characters who find themselves trapped in a supermarket when a mysterious mist descends upon the town. As they grapple with the fear and uncertainty of their situation, grotesque, horrifying creatures lurk within the mist. The shoppers face a harrowing reality wherein their survival is balanced between the monsters hiding in the mist and the intensive social struggles inside the supermarket. The tension among the characters is palpable as they struggle to make sense of the inexplicable events while the social order is split into separate groups. The novella explores the human condition in the face of the unknown and the horrors that can be unleashed when society's norms and conventions break down. Each encounter with the unknown entities obscured by the mist unearths horrors and impends inevitable losses of human lives, pushing

survivors against each other. Themes of isolation, loss of humanity, and survival when faced with inexplicable circumstances precede the unveiling of dread. King closely follows similar themes in Lovecraft's literature, showcasing unknown forces contorting readers' normal perception of reality.

7.2 The Power of Atmosphere and Cosmicism in *The Mist*

The structure of *The Mist* is closely related to a frame storytelling structure; however, this is mainly identified closer to the end of the narrative. Unlike *At the Mountain of Madness*, the storyteller rarely jumps back and forth in tenses and starts the story by writing, "This is what happened" (King 3). The story proceeds as a storm approaches, where the narrator calmly states what happens. "On the night that the worst heat wave in northern New England history finally broke – the night of July 19 – the entire western region was lashed with the most vicious thunderstorms I have ever seen" (King 3). The narrator never reveals before the end that he is writing the story down; "Now, as I sit in the Howard Johnson's near Exit 3 of the Maine Turnpike, writing all of this down" (King 222), only hinting subtly at the later events. "I haven't seen my wife since then" (King 41). The foreshadowing is less clear where the suspense is built as a subtle sense of dread. The achronological sense of time happens within the last chapters, and the chapter names suddenly signify a recollection of events. For instance, the third chapter, "The Coming of the Mist" (King 49), is foreboding and elicits anticipation within the narrative. The chapters function as a foreshadowing created by the narrator purposely to reveal a limited sense of the events in the narrative, which creates the same sense of split time as within Lovecraft's novella. The narrative device stimulates curiosity within the reader while constructing suspense and an atmosphere of underlying dread. Even though Lovecraft was not the founder of frame storytelling, he often utilized this form of narration (Blacklock 1105) because of its proficient atmospheric effect. Therefore, later, weird fiction narrators similarly utilize some form of framed narrative structure inspired by the Gothic tradition. The openness

revealed in the narrative structure elicits unease through an open ending wherein the readers must interpret answers without success, stimulating suspense within the narrative.

An interesting aspect of new weird fiction writers is an adjustment of Lovecraft's adjectivalism, meaning a transition into less adjective-heavy sentences. King still utilizes several adjectives to convey desired imagined pictures but at a less considerable amount than Lovecraft himself. "The Harrison side of the Lake was gone. It had been buried under a line of bright white mist, like a fair-weather cloud fallen to earth" (King 25). Similes are instead frequently utilized to describe the mist vividly and later the monsters surfacing from the unexplainable phenomenon. The disparity between King's and Lovecraft's writing is evident in their usage of similes, where King lacks the personification exhibited in Lovecraft's writing style. The lack of personification shows a shift in weird fiction writers where the weird is more accessible to conceptualize, and the reader perceives the information more clearly. Consequentially, the general ambience of the weird is changed into a conceivable concept, where the monsters no longer serve as the central weird aspect. Instead, the mist itself serves as the paramount sense of limitless sublimity. "They were no Lovecraftian horrors with immortal life but only organic creatures with their own vulnerabilities. It was the mist itself that sapped the strength and robbed the will" (King 207-208). The creatures are easily imagined as unambiguous and comparable to known insects and animals. "One of the spiders had come out of the mist. It was the size of a big dog" (King 193). King never attempts to hide the creatures behind a veil of mystery like Lovecraft's unknown indescribable creatures, and instead fashions the mist as both the source of the creatures and as the primary ambiguous mystery. The mist symbolizes the hidden and inexplicable and is an element of seclusion and isolation, directly inspired by Lovecraft's cosmicism. The character explains that the mist is unnatural and works to cloud both sight and sound.

The initial introduction of the mist especially carries sublime feelings of limitless dread as it appears over the Lake.

“[...] then glancing out into the mist again. It seemed closer, but it was very hard to tell for sure. If it was closer, it was defying all the laws of nature, because the wind – a very gentle breeze – was against it. That, of course, was patently impossible. It was very, very white. The only thing I can compare it to would be fresh-fallen snow lying in dazzling contrast to the deep blue brilliance of the winter sky. But snow reflects hundreds and hundreds of diamond points in the sun, and this particular fogbank, although bright and clean-looking, did not sparkle” (King 27-28).

The lake becomes hidden, the atmosphere becomes uncertain, and unanswered questions assemble within the reader's mind. The parallel between the reader and the protagonist closely resembles how Lovecraft initiates resembling feelings within readers and his narrators. However, the characters within King's narrative are more easily accessible regarding their emotional state and descriptions, which can further identify the characters. The unease deriving from the unknown is elicited through an inconclusiveness resembling the unease found in Lovecraft's narratives, which contributes to powers greater than humanity, thus creating a feeling akin to cosmic fear. The mist is unnatural and is said to defy the laws of nature, which Wight and Gadd distribute to elicit the sublime within the reader (294). The reader imagines the mist clearly as they engage with David's portrayal of the unnatural phenomenon. These depictions evoke the sublime through David's experience of sensations identified as he witnesses the unnatural occurrence. “The unease was back, tugging at me” (King 28). The explicit representation of unease reproduces similar feelings onto the reader and their identification of David. The feeling of unease is repeatedly narrated throughout the first chapters as David fails to shake a feeling of dread from his consciousness. The reader quickly picks up the affectional input, which produces atmospheric dread.

The description of terror and the cultivation of dread can be recognized in this paper's chosen narratives and is a fundamental part of Lovecraft's legacy, i.e., cosmicism. Burke and Kant contribute the sublime to a general sense of something beyond human comprehension where the feeling stems from the insignificance of human existence compared to divine or incomprehensible powers (Kant 99; Burke 58). King utilized the mist to obtain the sublime sense of terror elicited by the reader's perception of themselves and humanity, showing powers superior to their own. "I didn't like it. I felt very strongly that I had never seen a mist exactly like this one. Part of it was the unnerving straight edge of its leading front. Nothing in nature is that even; man is the inventor of straight edges" (King 38-39). The reference to the weird nature of the mist is furthered by illustrating elements of impossibility. Everything created by humanity is outside of the bounds of nature, and by referencing elements that are solely manmade the weird is emphasized. Lovecraft also utilizes this to separate his creatures from nature, as seen in the analysis of the shoggoth. It conveys a deep sense of the weird and separates the mist from any natural occurrences. The boundlessness in Lovecraft's cosmicism and its elicitation of dread is a direct trope fabricated to complete the atmosphere of dread. However, the mist as the central weird aspect demonstrates another distinction from Lovecraft's elicitation of dread, where the negative sublime is mainly produced by unnatural elements conveyed through literary monsters. The mist is a natural phenomenon that has turned unnatural and produces dread from something that exists within the real world. The mist thus comes closer to the natural sublime, where the incomprehensible lies within its ability to contain monsters while also being able to rob the will of the characters.

The utilization of known worldly creatures produces an intense atmosphere of dread by constructing a contrast between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The uncanny affection can primarily be found in David's descriptions of the many creatures and the terrifying encounters he describes.

“Tendrils of mist, as white and fine as floating lace eddied inside. The air was cold. It had been noticeably cool all morning long [...] He saw it. So did I. So did Ollie. A tentacle came over the far lip of the concrete loading platform and grabbed Norm around the calf. [...] The tentacle tapered from a thickness of a foot – the size of a grass snake – at the point where it had wrapped itself around Norm’s lower leg to a thickness of maybe four or five feet where it disappeared into the mist” (King 83)

Natural elements of the known world augment the atmosphere of dread differently than Lovecraft’s original grotesque cosmic creatures. Lovecraft’s creatures represent a repressed production of societal aspects which he viewed as frightening. These societal attitudes have changed significantly, and the unknown, as a result, is likewise becoming less frightening and cannot be regarded as a societal anxiety. Generally, contemporary readers do not fear the same degeneration depicted in Lovecraft’s writing. This is especially apparent in the commercialization of Lovecraftian products and art, where depictions of some of his most famous creatures are illustrated clearly. Modern readers experience Lovecraft’s narratives differently, and the return of the repressed through the uncanny differentiates depending on the reader's experiences. The change in depictions can be ascertained within King’s narrative and the monsters. The uncanny remains within the confinement of the familiar and unfamiliar. However, the familiar is, in contrast to Lovecraft, more transparent. For instance, the usage of creatures feared by many within the general populace. Spiders, snakes, tentacles, and insects are culturally feared organisms, triggering high levels of fear and disgust (Frynta et al. 1). The tentacle is especially a reference to Lovecraft’s frequent usage of the concept. King purposely introduces this archetype as the first encounter with grotesque monsters surfacing from the mist to throw the reader into the weird and solidify the actuality of the main character's situation. Additionally, the depicted narrative monsters change significantly from Lovecraft’s unrecognizable entities. The dread is kept within the confines of unimaginable horrors in which the characters shroud the reader’s imagination. The reader becomes unable to envision the

creatures, eliciting fear through obscurity. King contrasts this notion of ambiguity and replaces it with distinctive creatures as a foundation of his literary monsters.

The repressed is shown to be closely connected to fear connected to everyday creatures, where their large and dangerous size strengthens the experience of dread. The production of fear is powerful for readers who already have this fear. However, the readers without this fear still experience unease due to the interplay between the monsters and the unnatural isolating mist. “I took one glance back over my shoulder and saw that the Federal had been swallowed by the mist [...] I felt more isolated, more simply alone, than ever in my life” (King 188). The mist provides the reader with anticipation and suspensefully assures uncanny and sublime affections. By creating a clear depiction of the creatures within the reader’s mind while simultaneously obscuring them within the mist, the creatures gain a similar form of dread found in Lovecraft’s narrative.

By implementing the mist as an obscuring entity and enhancing the uncanny dread production stemming from the monsters. King applies atmospheric dread through shrouded sensory input, which is also an element in Lovecraft’s narratives. “There was that thin, acrid, and unnatural smell of the mist. By the time I got out the door, Miller and Ollie had already faded into it, and Hatlen. Who was third, was nearly out of sight” (King 187). Visionary input is essential when applying cosmic and atmospheric dread, specifically by limiting the reader’s visionary imagery. The mist is the limiting factor and ensures unease through the hidden. King also adds smell and hearing as significant components of the mist. Smell is indicated as an unnatural element supplying the reader with a creeping unease. At the same time, the mist is also given the ability to modify any travelling sounds: “The mist had a way of screwing up the acoustics, making things that were close sound distant and – sometimes – things that were far away sound close” (King 188). However, sensory input is not an implementation of the uncanny; instead, it functions as a sublime element enhancing the dreadful atmosphere. The

ambiguity of the senses is accessed through the unfamiliar, which differs from Lovecraft. Lovecraft mainly maintained a consolidation of the familiar and unfamiliar when utilizing senses in his narratives, which provoked feelings of the uncanny. King utilized the senses to amplify the uncanny monsters through sublime elements. The sublime and uncanny combine to create the same impression of cosmic fear through an alternate perspective of the weird. The connotation is distressing, which elicits uneasiness in the reader, and the King builds his narrative around this suspense.

Nonetheless, the similarities between King's and Lovecraft's writing are mainly based on the mist representing the hidden and underlying fear of the unknown. When investigating the uncanny, the two narratives differ when looking at the repressed fears represented in *The Mist* and *At the Mountains of Madness*. Lovecraft bases his repression on an implicit social degenerative fear, while a unique utilization of multiple sensory imitations elicits the uncanny. King instead applies the uncanny through general fears within the population without applying the same form of social commentary. This is not to say that there are not any social commentaries like, for instance, the assimilation of human nature when submitted to extreme circumstances and the comments on religion born from fear. "When technologies fail, when conventional religious systems fail, people have got to have something" (King 200). The quote refers to the division within the market as they separate into individual groups. One group, led by a character called Mrs. Carmody, perceives the apocalyptic events as the punishment of a higher power. However, David also attributes the religious founded group to being generated by the mist's abnormal abilities.

"Let me hear you say it like you mean it!' Mrs. Carmody shouted. The veins stood out on her neck in bulging cords. Her voice was cracking and hoarse now, but still full of power. And it occurred to me that it was the mist that had given her that power – the power to cloud men's minds, to make a particularly

apt pun – just as it had taken away the sun’s power from the rest of us” (King 209).

The social commentary becomes less about human nature and more about the supernatural abilities of the mist, which lessens the impact of the message and strengthens the sublime feelings of the mist. Thus, the repressed fears within *The Mist* are based on anxiety of creatures, like insects and spiders, which is augmented by providing the readers with the mist as a fantastical element of dread. The difference in repressive fears shows a transition within the new weird narratives where dread is elicited through more than just the incomprehensible.

The development indicates a general change in the authorial approach to the weird. Each weird fiction writer has their own particular absurdity and stylistic preferences when expressing the weird. Though Lovecraft can be found in some capacity within King’s work, new ideas and approaches take precedence. King is a successor to Lovecraft, creating his own foundation of weird tales and introducing the weird to a new audience. Authors and audiences are part of the change seen in the new weird genre. Other visual media, like drawings depicting literary creatures from Lovecraft’s narratives, affect the audiences’ sense of the weird. The transition has become more evident in later literature as access to these depictions has become widespread, and most contemporary audiences will have, to some extent, encountered illustrations of Lovecraft’s weird fiction. Adaptations of Lovecraft’s fiction are excellent examples of the development. For instance, *At the Mountain of Madness* was adapted into a film from 2021, directed by Matthew Cooper, providing the audience with a clear picture of what creatures like the shoggoth might visually appear. This will be discussed further in the analysis of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*.

7.3 Empathic Characters and Projected Feelings in *The Mist*

When comparing Lovecraft and King’s narratives, it has become apparent that their narrative styles differ in several aspects, including their general characterization. The ambiguity found

in Lovecraft's narrative is not as prominent in King's writing but is still present in some of the weird elements. Despite the similarities and differences, it shows a fundamental part of weird fiction where the ambiguity adds to the overall atmosphere of dread. The empathetic aspect of Lovecraft's writing also focuses more on the overall atmosphere, resulting in a limited emotional engagement with his characters. The identification of the characters in Lovecraft's narratives is unimportant when building suspense and visual deferral is prioritized. While empathy is a tool for creating literary tension, Lovecraft emphasizes other narrative components to convey suspense. The primary method identified in his writing is the constant ambiguity, revealing a lack of closure. The deferral created in *At the Mountain of Madness* lacks reassurance, which invokes unease.

Some original weird fiction elements can be found, whereas a lack of closure has been identified in *The Mist*. Nevertheless, new weird fiction changed Lovecraft's old weird lack of empathic characterization. The characters in *The Mist* do not conjure the same deferral as the protagonist in *At the Mountain of Madness*, relying on different means to insert the weird and delivering suspense. "I stood behind her with my hands in my pockets, wondering why I felt so uneasy about Steff, and why the unease should be all wrapped up with that line of white but unsparkling fog" (King 45). David mainly describes his negative emotional state as the unease sparked by the mist. Unease is central to the narrative and is a common, comprehensive emotional state. Therefore, one of the primary devices to relay affection is broadcast strategic emphasizing. Negative emotions create suspense, leading to sympathy related to David's characterization. According to Keen, negative emotions more easily lead to sympathy when expressing different affectional states. "The dominant concern with the effects of negative emotions in empathy studies reflects researchers' beliefs that empathy with pain moves us more surely toward sympathy and altruism than shared joy does" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 41). The engagement of empathy through sympathy renders the reader more accessible when

relating to David, and their general experience of the narrative is improved without being frustrated with the character.

Other empathic devices are additionally utilized to guarantee sympathy. Ambassadorial strategic empathy is present at the beginning of the narrative to illustrate David's relationship with his son and wife.

“One of those terrible visions came to me – I think they are reserved exclusively for husbands and fathers – of the picture window blowing in with a low, hard coughing sound and sending jagged arrows of glass into my wife's bare stomach, into my boy's face and neck. The horrors of the Inquisition are nothing compared to the fates your mind can imagine for your loved ones” (King 7).

King separates the narrator from readers outside a particular in-group, i.e. husbands/fathers. David underlines a solid emotional bond with his family. Readers generally understand emotions like love as one of the most complex and influential of all affects (Morrison 7). However, only a specific in-group can directly relate to the panic sparked by fear-generated hypothetical scenarios. David's position as a husband and father is an essential aspect of his character, and most of the narrative revolves around his desire to find his wife and protect his son. Ambassadorial strategic empathy “may teach readers to feel with otherwise alien fictional others” (Keen, “Strategic Empathizing” 483), constructing a means to understand David and his motivations throughout the narrative. The reader can recognize the horror experienced by David but might not be able to relate. Instead, the reader recognizes perceivable inner emotions like fear and unease. The potential reader connects to his characterization through commonplace emotions, which becomes an effective tool to ensure emotional engagement. Ambassadorial strategic empathy thus provides the narrative with a necessary affinity component to capture the reader's attention while creating a means to understand David's character. Empathy becomes an essential aspect of the narrative and keeps the reader immersed.

The immersions conjure suspense when the reader successfully realizes character identification. King relies on this idea of empathy because the reader cares about the danger the narrator is subjected to. The emotional interpretation showcases a variation between the old weird and new weird narrative engagement, where new weird utilizes a deeper empathic reliance to maintain tension and atmospheric dread. In Lovecraft's narratives, the evasiveness to visually present aspects of the entities prevent the reader from identifying with the characters. The prevention occurs as an apprehensiveness towards the characters showcasing an alternative means to convey tension within weird narratives. Lovecraft's narrative relies on other elements to keep his readers engaged in the given narrative. The characters in his narratives lose empathy to supply the reader with the weird, creating vagueness as a positive means to keep their interest in the given storyworld. King's narrative shows a significant change within this aspect of Lovecraft's weird fiction.

Nonetheless, some elements of the negative emotional engagement can be found within *The Mist*, closely related to Lovecraft's characterization of his protagonist. David utilizes the reader as an outlet for his negative emotions, much like the nameless narrator in *At the Mountain of Madness* projects his fears and unease. "I am going to leave these pages on the counter and perhaps someday someone will find them and read them" (King 230). The found manuscript structure is a Gothic device picked up by various weird fiction narratives, including Lovecraft. David never reveals why he writes the events down, and the reader can only speculate on the motivation behind it. The inclination to write feelings down can be a defense mechanism utilized to excuse his actions throughout the narrative, much like the projection found in Lovecraft's narrative. However, it is never directly specified within the narrative.

Projection is an inevitable part of the human psyche and is a mechanism to protect the self from unwanted emotional damage. Projection can occur through direct and indirect actions (Niaz et al. 1) and is carried out by David when confronted with unwanted feelings. "I looped

a fist at his face. He was too surprised to even try to block it [...] ‘You got him killed!’ I shouted. ‘Did you get a good look at it? Did you get a good look at what you did?’” (King 89-90). It is one of the first instances of projection showing the readers an aggressive side to David. The protagonist’s violent reaction is a consequence of projected feelings of guilt. He is unable to save the bagboy Norm from the monster lurking in the mist and blames others even though he also gives up on him. “If one of those things got hold of me, there would be no one to watch out for him – except maybe Norton. So, I let go of Norm and dropped to my hands and knees” (King 86). There is a slight sense of hypocrisy where the anger against Ollie, Jim, and Myron reflects his guilt. However, unlike the hypocrisy within Lovecraft’s narrative, the motivation is justified. The narrative includes David’s position as a father as the primary motivator for his actions. The reader never withdraws their initial sympathy towards David because of the ambassadorial strategic empathy placed at the tale’s beginning. The reader will not retract their empathy because the narrative ensures a recognition of his inability to abandon his son.

Overall, the devices reflected throughout the analysis of *At the Mountain of Madness* can be identified in *The Mist*. However, their usage is practiced differently. Particular aspects of empathy are found to modify the suspense, adding alternative measures to creating atmospheric dread. Atmospheric dread is facilitated by augmenting sublime and uncanny creations through sympathetic identification with David. The reader’s empathy ensures unease by assuring concern for the character’s well-being while simultaneously maintaining sublime and uncanny descriptions. The lack of militant adjectivalism exemplifies a new weird transition with a reluctance to create ambiguity through inarticulation. Instead, King reinforces dread with a conventional utilization of sublime naturalism wherein the negative aesthetic is constituted by distorting natural elements like the mist. The uncanny is similarly utilized to reflect creatures familiar to the real world, altered to reflect common fears. The visualization

is shown to be accessible, constituting fear through imaginative elements. The displacement of normalcy is conveyed differently, reflecting different means to convey the weird.

8. Analysis of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

This final part of the analysis introduces a modern text from the 21st century, working to exemplify the continuation of ambiguity within weird fiction. Therefore, the comparative analysis will continue to focus on the weird investigated in *At the Mountain of Madness*.

8.1 Summary of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

Niel Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* centers on an unnamed protagonist as an adult and his memories from when he was a child. After a funeral service, the narrator returns to his childhood home and finds himself drawn to his old friend's farm. Visiting the farm triggers lost memories from events that occurred when he was seven. The protagonist recalls meeting a girl named Lettie Hempstock and her insistence on calling the pond near her house an ocean. The encounter with the strange Hempstocks reveals a supernatural world and subsequently leads to strange occurrences leading into a world of ancient and mystical forces. Malevolent entities are released into the real world, where the unnamed narrator, together with Lettie, must confront otherworldly threats. Throughout the story, themes of memory, childhood innocence, and the power of friendship prevail. Ultimately, it is a tale that merges the mystical and the mundane while exploring the resilience of the human spirit in the face of extraordinary challenges. The relationship between the mystical and mundane is typical of weird fiction narratives, where the fantastical disrupts the reader's perception of normalcy.

8.2 Fluctuating Atmosphere in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

It has been established in the above analysis of *At the Mountain of Madness* and *The Mist* that weird fiction writers commonly utilize the frame storytelling structure inspired by The Gothic literary era. It should then come as no surprise that Neil Gaiman utilizes the literary device to carry the narrative. Unlike the analyses above, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* has an

interesting take on the frame storytelling and is not framed as a letter to future readers. Instead, the narration contains the same nameless narrator as an adult “[...] and they would ask me about my marriage (failed a decade ago, a relationship that had slowly frayed until eventually, as they always seem to, it broke) [...] And they would ask about my children (all grown up, they have their own lives, they wish they could be here today)” (Gaiman 5), and as a 7-year-old child “Nobody came to my seventh birthday party” (Gaiman 11). The narrative is framed as a memory, i.e., a flashback, and showcases the narrator’s childhood occurrences. The narrative style changes depending on the narrative perspective; however, it maintains a first-person point of view with an inner focalization. Gaiman devises the narrative into two separate parts where the narrator has two identities: a *narrating I*, i.e., the adult and an *experiencing I*, i.e., the child (Rocha 5). The focalization thus changes depending on which part of the nameless narrator is speaking in the tale. This is especially evident in the amount of information presented to the reader. The narrating I have a profoundly monotone narrative style where the information given is sparse: “The pond was smaller than I remembered [...] I sat on the bench and stared at the reflection of the sky in the water, at the scum of duckweed at the edges, and the half-dozen lily pads” (Gaiman 9). When the experiencing I is the focalizer, the narrative is smoother and richer in detail.

“I gazed around, taking in the grass, a reddish-brown chicken pecking at the side of the driveway, some rusty farm machinery, the wooden trestle table beside the road and the six empty metal milk churns that sat upon it. I saw the Hempstocks’ red-brick farmhouse, crouched and comfortable like an animal at rest. I saw the spring flowers; the omnipresent white and yellow daisies, the golden dandelions and do-you-like-butter buttercups, and, late in the season, a lone bluebell in the shadows beneath the milk-churn table, still glistening with dew” (Gaiman 47)

The information from the experiencing I have several adjectives to emphasize important aspects of the child’s mind; however, it contains expressions a typical 7-year-old would be

unable to comprehend and actively use in sentences, like ‘omnipresent’ or ‘trestle’. The overtly adult language can be interpreted as the adult narrator revealing itself, and the child narrator is just a memory. “It all came back and even as it came back, I knew it would not be for long: all the things I remembered, sitting on the green bench beside the little pond that Lettie Hempstock had once convinced me was an ocean” (Gaiman 16). The indication suggests the presence of a single narrator with two separate focalizers, wherein the distinction follows Gérard Genette’s definition of the terms. Genette utilizes mood and voice to distinguish focalization and narrator, wherein mood refers to the perspective of the narrative (focalizer), and voice refers to the speaker (narrator) (Philpot 25). Additionally, though the experiencing I narrate by utilizing phrases commonly unknown by children, this specific part of the narration also contains childish commentary. “Our house was large and many-roomed” (Gaiman 17). The distinction in narration creates a unique structure where there is constant conflict between the adult and child, showcasing a clear distinction between the two focalizers.

The general atmosphere of the novel is structured differently when compared with Lovecraft’s work. Lovecraft utilized a sense of Poe’s unity of effect where every aspect of the novella has the same atmospheric effect. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* purposely does not maintain the same continual sense of atmospheric dread. Instead, it utilizes a creeping sense of dread with fantastical, nonfrightening elements. The novel’s length ensures a gradual increase in dread, where the narrator is slowly thrown into a strange and dangerous world. The novel relies heavily on the uncanny to reveal the underlying dread. The limitless sublime also functions as a means to facilitate dread, although significantly less compared to Lovecraft’s novella. The initial part of the narrative establishes the sublime by introducing Lettie Hempstock’s ocean. “We came on it suddenly: a wooden shed, an old bench, and between them a duckpond, dark water spotted with duckweed and lily pads. There was a dead fish, silver as a coin, floating on its side on the surface. ‘That’s not good’, said Lettie. ‘I thought you said it

was an ocean,' I told her. 'It's just a pond really'. 'It is an ocean'" (Gaiman 29). The dead fish in the pond signifies a small, almost undetectable piece of dread. The reader is not alarmed by the death of the fish as it is a natural occurrence. However, the death of the fish becomes a significant commencement of later dreadful events within the narrative. The ocean is in appearance and size, and only a fishpond is placed on the Hempstock farm. The general ambivalence surrounding the Hempstocks inserts a weird element where mystery coincides with a childish curiosity created by the experiencing I. The nature of the ocean is unclear, grabbing the reader's attention. The sublime element is utilized as a fantastical element to build a general atmosphere of the unknown. The limitless and incomprehensible are still present but are used to advance the general sense of the narrative while simultaneously revealing small pieces of dread within the fantastical.

Gaiman focuses on repressed childhood fears to convey dread through uncanny creatures. The classical psychoanalytical usage of the uncanny separates Gaiman's novel from Lovecraft's narratives. Gaiman's variation of the weird closely relates to typical tropes from the Gothic, deviating from Lovecraft, who wanted to separate himself from the typical tradition seen beforehand. The novel presents two different creatures to convey the uncanny. The first creature is the narrator's new housekeeper, "Ursula Monkton" (Gaiman 77). Ursula represents a childhood fear of strangers taking over the household and splitting up the perfect family unit. "I was no longer scared by what happened in the bathroom; now I was scared by what it meant that my father was kissing the neck of Ursula Monkton that his hands had lifted her midi skirt above her waist. My parents were a unit, inviolate. The future had suddenly become unknowable; anything could happen" (Gaiman 104-105). The fear Ursula Monkton represents is advanced by reflecting a child's mind. Even though the adult part of the narration is present with phrases like 'inviolate', there is still tension in the lack of insight into the adult world. The experiencing I is unable to comprehend the specifics of his father cheating on his mother but

understands the underlying inclination. The target audience will understand, which creates a separation between the reader and the experiencing I. This notion vastly differs from Lovecraft's narration, where the reader and narrator are paralleled. The separation creates a new form of tension, where the reader has knowledge, the narrator cannot attain within the tale. The tension conveys a helplessness that the reader cannot escape, where the awareness elicits dread. The elicitation of dread occurs through uncanny characterizations of Ursula's appearance and mannerisms. "Her feet touched the ground, illuminated by her own lightnings, like a painting of a woman in greys and greens and blues, not a real woman at all" (Gaiman 113). Each time the narrator uses similes to describe Ursula, he compares her to inanimate objects like paintings and wax figures. There is no personification, and instead, the narrator dehumanizes Ursula to underline the unnaturalistic elements and confines the woman into a dreadful monster. The goal is similar to Lovecraft's personification of nonhuman elements displacing the reader's sense of the mundane. Normalcy is twisted into unnaturalistic components and conveys dread. The unease deriving from the dehumanization in Gaiman's narrative and the personification in Lovecraft's narrative is essential when conveying the weird. It changes the reader's perception of normalcy to augment the atmosphere of dread following a general tradition within the weird literary genre.

Gaiman employs the typical notion of the uncanny, where something impossibly animate unleashes uncanny sensations. "In storytelling, one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character" (Jentsch 13). A significant sensation is linked to the uncanny caused by the displacement of the reader's sense of the home. The uncanny conditions of confusion associated with normalcy cause questions to arise about aspects existing in the real world. Ursula's unfamiliar integration disturbs the reader's normal perception of the world and initiates questions emanating from

uncertainty. The narrative is generally aimed at a younger audience compared to Lovecraft and King. Gaiman tends to take classical story structures like conventional Gothic and weird components and directs them to younger readers. Questions arising can be found in old and new weird tales and are a significant tool to induce dread in the storyworld. Uncertainty positions the weird as an ambiguous object wherein the reader seeks answers. The prevailing questions focus on a disconnect between adulthood and childhood, pointing out issues emanating from a search for self-identity. These issues are a significant theme for young adults whose identity is starting to take shape, creating a unique experience of uncertainty for the target audience. The ambivalence can be found in all three narratives and consequently arises from inconclusiveness in the descriptions and endings. There are never any specific answers to the overwhelming curiosity placed on the readers, and the reader is left with a desire for more.

The sublime augments the uncanniness constructed by Ursula. Her nature is unknown, and the impossibility of her existence is unexplainable, leading to a sense of limitlessness. “Her face was wrong, somehow: an accidental assemblage of features that simply put me in mind of a human face, like the knobby grey whorls and lumps on the side of my bench tree” (Gaiman 164). Comparing an uncanny creature to nature, like a tree, initiates the negative sublime by twisting natural elements. Sublime descriptions deliberately convey a perversion of normalcy, where the unknown outweighs the familiar. The familiar is lost, turning the uncanny into a sublime sensation. The sublime is essential to convey an incomprehensiveness closely related to Lovecraft’s narrative, in which the unknown precedes the known. The narrator becomes less able to describe the creature later in the narrative, resulting in an imaginative encounter with the boundless possibilities of an endless cosmos. “It was talking without words” (Gaiman 168). The description conveys a similar vagueness present in Lovecraft’s narrative. The lack of clear depiction creates an ominous dread, closely relying on Kant’s definition of the sublime. However, there is some deviation from Lovecraft’s narratives in the amount of information

given to the reader, wherein old weird narratives never give the reader enough to visualize in any meaningful way. Gaiman releases enough information to stimulate the reader's imagination while maintaining a deep sense of ambiguity. The openness arouses different images where each reader's perception will differ immensely while providing unease and curiosity. The effect is similar to the response stimulated in Lovecraft's narratives.

The second uncanny creation is the creature later presented as "Varmints" (Gaiman 152). These creatures represent scavengers and function as supernatural cleaners. Their job is to rid the world of things that do not belong. They are introduced as aggressive, uncaring and controlled by their hunger. "They descended, then, as if they had all been waiting for the first of their number to move. They fell from the sky on to the thing that held me, nightmares tearing at a nightmare, pulling off the strips of fabric, and through it all I heard Ursula Monkton crying" (Gaiman 169). These creatures are indifferent to the natural world and do everything in their power to achieve their goal. Sentient animal-like creations in fiction often represent interior repressions of inescapable human impulses (Heholt and Edmundson 2). Varmint's ability to destroy and consume the world acknowledges an inability to separate human and animal bodies, wherein they symbolize a human trait repressed to protect the self. "Our knowledge of pathological mental processes enables us to add that nothing in the content arrived at could account for that impulse towards self-protection which has caused the ego to project such a content outward as something foreign to itself" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 10). Readers fear the similarity of human nature portrayed within the scavenger, creating uncanny sensation from the correlation, such as human indifference when destroying nature for their own personal gains. Gaiman introduces the uncanny as a part of the story, whereas with Lovecraft, the uncanny is located mainly in the narrative style.

The narrator struggles to describe the creature and underline familiar animals and items to convey their appearance: "High in the sky they were, and black, jet black, so black it seemed

as if they were specks on my eyes, not real things at all. They had wings, but they were not birds” (Gaiman 168). However, unlike the uncanny sensation established by Ursula Monkton, the source of dread changes as their shape somehow shifts: “They landed, and I stared at them, but saw nothing but shadows” (Gaiman 171). The uncanny is not conveyed through their appearance, and instead, their actions resemble an interplay between familiar and unfamiliar human activity within the real world. Gaiman provokes the reader by illustrating an ambiguous description resembling Lovecraft’s negative descriptions. The descriptions depict an openness in the appearance of the Varmints, whereas the reader cannot identify their appearance correctly. This follows closely a tradition prominent in Lovecraft’s writing. The ambiguity portrayed closely resembles the incomprehensiveness in old weird narratives with a description that is really a non-description. However, despite the resemblance, there is still some possibility of imaginative flexibility in Gaiman’s depictions, which the reader is deprived of in Lovecraft’s narratives. Gaiman’s narrative thus does not carry the same form of vagueness, leaving the reader with different perceptions of the narrative monster. The difference creates tension similar to Lovecraft, where there is provocation in the description, and both authors capture a strong sense of suspense, alluring a sense of curiosity through unease.

The Varmint's appearance is diverse from the uncanny with a creeping sense of sublimity. They constitute the sublime similar to Ursula Monkton but are considerably sooner than the formerly introduced monster. “Not everything, sighed the wind in the rhododendron bushes and the rustle of the grass” (Gaiman 172). Again, natural elements constitute an incomprehensible characterization of the monster. The experiencing I cannot describe the structureless creature and elude any specific information. Even their voice is carried by the wind, lacking any intelligible knowledge of the origins of the voice. The ambiguity in Lovecraft’s narratives can be found in these conflicting statements: “I had thought that there were hundreds of them, but I might have been wrong. There might have been twenty of them.

There might have been a thousand. I could not explain it; perhaps they were from a place where such things didn't apply, somewhere outside of time and numbers" (Gaiman 171). Dread from the unknown is gained through these descriptions, and the encounter elicits the underlying fear.

Ambiguity and vagueness are a positive addition to the narrative's characterization of cosmic creatures. Cosmicism deliberately practices a limitless supply of impressions within the reader's mind constituted by a lack of definite adjectives. Adjectives add to the mystery presented by the narrator because of their imprecise rendition of the Varmints. The purpose of incomprehensibility is to identify uneasiness in the aspect of the powerless nature of humanity where the existence of supernatural powers goes beyond the limitless human consciousness. Thus, the purpose of showing Varmints as sublime entities while maintaining a deep sense of uncanniness through their nature is that they work together to showcase uneasiness deriving from the unknown. However, the reduction of humanity into insignificance found in Lovecraft's work is less prominent, and other fantastic elements within the story undermine the dread. This shift in weird fiction is a condition within long fictional narratives like the novel, a necessity to keep the reader entertained. Furthermore, the change constitutes a new depiction of the weird within the postmodern world where the incomprehensible becomes challenging to depict. The reader has access to countless illustrations of weird depictions, and the creative output of the narrative is accessible to the average reader. Suspense must be constituted through other narrative methods to convey the atmospheric dread. Gaiman allows readers to imagine their own version of the illustrated creatures, and the ambiguity present is open for interpretation following Lovecraft's incomprehensiveness. However, Lovecraft's weird has become conventionalized, solidifying particular images as the actual appearance. Cthulhu especially has gained attention in popular culture, where images and products are produced to recreate one constant actualization of its visual image. Newcomers to the weird fiction scene will have a clear depiction of the creations in Lovecraft's narratives, a clear opposition to the

authorial intention initially expressed. Lovecraft wanted his creations to be mysterious entities, captivating his readers with ambiguity. The unease becomes less profound by solving several mysteries conveyed in Lovecraft's work. Authors like King and Gaiman are part of this change in weird fiction. However, Gaiman maintains a deep sense of ambiguity, while King deviates significantly from this original idea of the weird.

8.3 Empathic Tension and Projected Memories in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

Empathy is built very differently depending on the change in narrator, where the narrating I, i.e., the adult focalizer, narrates more monotone and expresses blank spaces in his life he tries to fill "I make art, sometimes I make true art, and sometimes it fills the empty places in my life" (Gaiman 5). The adult focalizer closely follows a tradition within Lovecraft's narratives, and empathy is hard to develop. His monotone and serious demeanor disconnects the readers from empathetic feelings. However, the disconnection occurs differently from the narrator in *At the Mountains of Madness*. The narrator avoids describing relevant feelings, meaning there is almost no appliance of strategic emphasizing. "I thought of turning around, then, as I drove down a wide street that had once been a flint lane beside a barley field of turning back and leaving the past undisturbed. But I was curious" (Gaiman 4). The narrative is carried by curiosity, which is a perceivable emotion caused by broadcast strategic empathy. However, the narrating I never expresses deep-felt emotions like love, happiness, or sadness. The reader never gains enough direct information related to the general emotional state. Gaiman deliberately aims to underline a clear separation between the two focalizers. Each element of a narrative is essential when determining empathy. "Merely naming a character may set readers' empathy in motion; indeed, information leading to precise placement of a character in terms of species, race, age, gender, and other aspects of status often appears after an emotional hook has connected reader and character." (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 68-69). Every element of characterization initiates empathy, whereas a given character's name allows for a sense of

identity. Names generally reflect a considerable amount of information like gender, race, culture, etc. (Peterson et al. 39). By withholding the name, the reader loses some information related to the identity of the narrator, which can result in a decoupling of an empathic response. This same occurrence can be identified in *At the Mountain of Madness*, where empathy is significantly lost. However, the child narrator gains empathy through other means; for instance, his age is revealed, which is not the case for the adult narrator.

Therefore, though they are represented as the same character, they display vastly different identities. Even after regaining his memories, the narrating I maintains a depressing outlook on life and death and is void of most emotions. “I only remembered that Ocean had grown into a cat, and that I had adored her for years. I wondered what had happened to her, and then I thought, it doesn't matter that I can't remember the details any longer: death happened to her. Death happens to all of us” (Gaiman 227). The unnamed adult narrator performs projected actions in these instances of emotional shortfall to protect himself. When trying to remember his kitten, which is expressed to have been previously adored and loved, he rejects these emotions by transforming them into negative entities, blocking any positive emotional input. The reader distances themselves from these negative emotional expressions, especially in the prologue, after experiencing the affectionate perspective of the narrator as a child.

The experiencing I express emotion very differently from the narrating I. The added descriptive narrative style utilizes adjectives to convey the feelings of the child narrator, conveying broadcast strategic empathy. “I was sad that nobody had come to my party, but happy that I had a Batman figure” (Gaiman 12). Gaiman conveys a childish sense of emotions, with sadness and happiness present. These basic emotional states are easy to perceive and convey a child's simple worldview where things are separated clearly into good and bad. The readers are shown a clear shift in perspective, which is distinguishable from the adult world presented by the narrating I. Furthermore, by openly portraying the narrator as a child, the

reader can more easily access empathy and sympathy. “Character identification often invites empathy even when the character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways” (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 70). Keen identifies a commonplace occurrence of affection where readers experience a great sense of empathy for children in narratives. Especially children subjected to cruel or unfair treatment (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 69). Thus, the first sentence provokes empathy: “Nobody came to my seventh birthday” (Gaiman 11). Immediately, a sense of pity is aroused by a sense of unfairness. The narrator is conveyed as a lonely and friendless individual whose only solace is escapism through books: “I lived in books more than I lived anywhere else” (Gaiman 17). The emotions evoked by the experiencing I and the reader identify commonplace emotions within the narrative.

The identified separation of the narrator's identity is caused by a projective action exercised by the adult narrator. All the narrating I's emotions are projected onto his former child self, especially his negative emotions like fear and sadness. He tries to protect his adult self by using his childhood self as a container for his past experiences. The distinction in their narrative styles is apparent in the narrative, even though the adult narrator is the main narrator. “I was not happy as a child, although from time to time I was content” (Gaiman 17). This sentence leads into the story's central part, showing the reader the linkage of narrators. The reader distances themselves from the adult version of the narrator because of his inability to express his emotions. This conflict evokes frustration with the adult narrators, commonly seen in Lovecraft's narratives. Consequently, the disconnection from the narrating I encourages a profound attachment to the experiencing I. The reader experiences a unique relation to the child part of the narration strengthened by the absence of empathy from the adult. The purpose of creating a sympathetic child and apathetic adult focalizer is to demonstrate perplexity when transitioning into adulthood to a younger readership. The reader is affected by the tense

separateness that conflicts with their sense of self, constituting a reflection of their own experiences as they enter adulthood.

The suppliance of indifference through a lack of empathy coexists with ambiguity occurring in an incomplete description of the monster's appearance. Generally, ambiguity is a central piece of Lovecraft's legacy, creating a sense of curiosity. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* also tries to convey this inarticulation, leading to curiosity. Frame storytelling structures constitute the projection presented in Lovecraft's and King's narratives, whereas Gaiman's narrative utilizes a distinctive structure. The audience is not framed as containers for the narrators' negative emotions, establishing a distinctive reader experience. Tensions between the narrating I and experiencing I confine the reader into a confusing world where their sense of self is disrupted as they realize the separation between their childhood self and adult identity. This notion produces a different form of identification of the narrator where distance is created to protect themselves from identifying with the narrating I.

The last comparative analysis of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* illustrates the autonomy exhibited by several weird fiction authors. The transition from old weird narratives, namely Lovecraft's fiction, into new weird narratives practices similar literary devices to accomplish atmospheric dread. Authors purposely select literal preferences inspired by different literary traditions, starting with the Gothic, while trying to maintain central aspects of the weird conveyed through cosmicism and the fear of the unknown. Gaiman maintains a strong sense of Lovecraft's literal traditions while moving his weird narratives towards a traditional Gothic, with conventional uncanny utilization. The transition is constituted through longer narratives, removing a constant atmospheric effect while conveying a deep sense of tension. Suspense is built closely to Lovecraft's narrative while also introducing narrative empathy. Apathy is still largely present, showcasing how both empathy and apathy elicit tension within the narrative. Therefore, the weird can be facilitated through different methods while still

recognizing essential aspects of the genre through Lovecraft's original narrative implementation.

9. CONCLUSION

This master's thesis aspired to answer how H.P. Lovecraft's weird fiction has transformed into contemporary weird fiction literature. It has become evident that weird fiction reflects dread through literary devices inspired by Gothic literary traditions. Lovecraft reinvented the devices to fit into his cosmic perspective on the weird. The inexplicable is practiced in Lovecraft's narratives to convey unknown entities contorting conventional perceptions of reality and displacing perceptions of the mundane. Fear through the unknown remains a centralized aspect of weird fiction following the rise of new weird narratives. Gothic devices like the sublime and uncanny similarly function to elicit different aspects of the weird, evoking tension through a dreadful atmosphere. Lovecraft mainly utilizes sublimity to convey unnatural aspects within the confines of extraterrestrial unknowns but also combines the limitless feeling of the universe with uncanniness. The uncanny functions as a gateway into the unfamiliar through familiar elements, confining the reader to a senseless world of the unimaginable. The prioritization of fear elicited through the atmosphere precedes the need for an empathic identification through strategic emphasizing. Suspense in Lovecraft's work mainly utilizes the human narrator to illustrate the incomprehensibility when encountering the unknown, wherein their emotional relatability is less critical.

This general perception of weird is found to have changed significantly since the emergence of the new weird. New weird narratives like *The Mist* rely more on strategic emphasizing to relay the dread presented from sublime and uncanny usage. Suspense is built due to a close relationship between the character and the reader's emotional engagement. Furthermore, the implementation of unknown elements greatly differs depending on the authorial implementation of the weird. King applies a very visual interpretation of the weird,

clearly depicting different monstrosities and their horrifying imaginative properties. The atmosphere of dread is built by combining the reader's emotional identification with the conventional usage of Gothic elements. The apparent trajectory from Lovecraft's undepictable entities shows a tendency within weird fiction of narrative freedom when implementing specific devices to convey dread. This becomes especially apparent in analyzing the second modern text, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. Gaiman exemplifies a new weird narrative with a non-visionary effect resembling Lovecraft's ambiguousness yet with more focus on providing atmospheric dread through a conventional uncanny appliance. Empathy is observed to be of significance when building tension while also applying a form of apathy towards specific narrator identities. King similarly returns to a natural sublime implementation, deviating from Lovecraft's insistence on diverging from the typical Gothic. The implication suggests a divergence in the general authorial perspective in which each narrative contains its own prospect of the weird. Nevertheless, there is a sentiment shared between all three narratives in the continued attitude towards the unknown. Fear through the unknown is essential to the weird despite its distinguishable dispositions. This shows a tradition continued from Lovecraft's approach to his storyworld where the unknown precedes the known. The change signifies a range of new authors whose purpose is to reinforce and reinvent the heritage placed by Lovecraft.

Lastly, the general ambiguity placed upon Lovecraft's narratives has experienced a significant change in the contemporary interaction with his literary work. Mysticism is no longer a prevailing interpretation. The interaction with several images discloses the concealment placed within militant adjectivalism, placing his literary entities in an exhibition that neutralizes the limitlessness in his fiction. This occurs in concurrence with authorial influence, whose interpretation of the weird varies and stimulates the readers through several weird elements. King, especially, has been a part of the developmental change within the new

weird, producing a world of imaginative freedom. The ramification advances the weird into a constant development with recurring elements of Gothic, science-fiction and fantasy, all using selective devices to produce dread. Whether with visual or ambiguous elicitation, the genre aims for similar elements of unease, continuing to recreate a great sense of cosmic dread.

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