



Daylight Nightmares

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The unusual, the odd, and the grotesque have always fascinated readers. Critics generally agree, however, that the Gothic tradition in literature is "born" when Horace Walpole, the author of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), subtitled his work "A Gothic Story." Having coined this name for his own tale, Walpole then bequeathed the title, if not the tradition, to a generation of his successors. Typical Gothic conventions such as haunted castles, flickering candles, time-yellowed manuscripts, and dimly-lighted midnight scenes¹ figure prominently in the works of a significant number of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British and Continental writers. In the twentieth century, the appeal of the tradition continues to exercise a force in both its popular and serious forms. The emphasis, however, has shifted with time. In the last few years especially, it is generally acknowledged that the ambiguities, the unknowables, and the uncertainties, which derive in large measure from man's sense of his incalculable inner world, are deeply woven into the Gothic fabric.²

The vogue, which begins in England in the 1760's reaches the American shores by the 1790's. In America, Brockden Brown, Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne are customarily treated as the heirs of the tradition. That much of their fiction is built upon a frame of convention—the Gothic devices of tone, setting, situation, and characterization—is a critical commonplace. Less usual, however, is the identification of other American writers such as Melville, Bierce, and James or German writers such as Tieck, Arnim, Eichendorff, and Hoffmann as artists who explore the same genre. Yet, these writers also manipulate the Gothic clichés in an artistic quest to describe depths often kept in check because they were alien to the nineteenth-century vision.

Some scholarly attempts have been made to trace links between English and German, and German and American, Gothic story-tellers. Such studies have tended, however, to concentrate on cross-cultural borrowings and influences, or on such intriguing but essentially slight literary matters: how many English Gothic romances had Ludwig Tieck in his library; to what extent was Poe familiar with the German language; or, what difficulties did Hawthorne encounter while learning to read the language.³ This study, on the other hand, is concerned with examining significant

correspondences between the Germans and the Americans, particularly the similar manner in which romantic writers in both countries employed Gothic devices to explore various terrors afflicting the human soul.

The essence of the Gothic and the relationship of Gothicism to the romantic imagination and to Romanticism is to be found in a comparative analysis of American and German nineteenth-century tales. In these works especially, one moves far beyond those "doors that slam by themselves"—creaking Gothic machinery—to a mysterious realm that is the real source of the terror. Evidence of the connections between the tales is more than just casual. Consideration of the fiction underscores and illuminates the use of the traditional Gothic elements to explore the ambiguity of the inner and outer worlds—an ambiguity resulting from the artists' increasing perception of the complex subconscious world in tension with the harsh, often chaotic external world. As the writers look to the Gothic vocabulary in order to convey a reality outside the sphere of the tangible and the material, the trappings are infused with real substance.

Perhaps the most striking correspondence between these complementary stories is the ever-present use of the tradition to examine the irrational element of human experience. The Gothic elements serve as vehicles through which the "daylight nightmare" is probed and presented. Haunted by himself, man scares up his own ghosts and struggles futilely with his own horrifying fantasies as he is self-blinded and self-victimized by his nightmare—one that wells from the blackness within, often in the clear light of day.

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Walpole's attraction to the Gothic spirit found its most notable expression in Strawberry Hill, the house he purchased in 1749. He spent the next forty years transforming it into a miniature Gothic castle. The massive, looming dwelling becomes the Gothist's most promising and important symbol.⁴ A container of the life within, it is the tangible representation of psychological, spiritual, and moral evil. The Gothic castle, a structure of catacombs, ascending turrets, and winding subterranean passages, comes to stand for the blackness and the mystery of the twisted inner self, as well as the darkness of the external world.

Thus, Gothic settings serve as analogues for convoluted minds and souls; as the characters explore their confused and confusing environments, they explore themselves. In Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, Clara's house, filled with its shadows and closets, is set off from the rest of the world

rather than looking toward every part of that innocent-seeming room. That chill tingle that could extend itself down the stair and out through the house now seemed to be concentrated in one spot nearly in the middle of the painted wooden floor. Reluctantly, I moved toward it and looked down. There was a crack outlining what seemed to be a trapdoor. I knew, surely as sunrise, that something was under it.

I had no trouble getting down to the kitchen and back up again with Will's claw hammer and wrecking bar. It was a little different when I set the tang of the bar into the crack and began to pry at the wood. A rush of cold, acrid cat-odor whooshed up at me, and those flat hands seemed to be impeding every motion of the heavy tool. I let it be, for a moment, and put Mama's prayer book in my pocket, then returned to my work. The hands drew away, and the bar moved freely. With a creak of strained nails, the trapdoor rose on its hinges.

Beneath it was a cranny less than three feet long and about eighteen inches wide. In that space lay a ginger-colored cat, mummified by the dry Oregon summer, but smelling strongly of panic-released urine. Around its neck was a chain of some black metal, twisted deeply into the fur. It went, also, around the front paws, between which had been wedged a broken ebony crucifix. The Christ had been partly torn away, and the top of the cross was missing.

A dead cat always has a horrible expression on its face. This was more horrible than most. I hurried to find a plastic bag to put the poor beast in, but when I had it in hand and squatted to lift the cat out of the hole, I paused and removed the chain and cross from its body. There was a soft rustle in the air around me. The terrible rictus that had clenched the cat's jaw muscles relaxed, becoming simple death rather than torment.

I put the creature in the bag and twisted its top securely with wire. I set the broken cross on the tray and laid the big cross on top of it. I stood straight in the middle of the room and began to speak aloud.

"I told you not to bother the children. You did it anyway. Now you will leave my house permanently and you will not return. I think that poor cat was your anchor here, and, somehow, the source of your strength. He is going to be buried with full feline honors, and I'm going to burn that cross and bury the ashes with one of these rosaries. The big cross is going to go down in this hole, and the other rosaries are going to be tucked around the room wherever I can find a place for them. The candles will burn the rest of the day, just about. And if you survive that, I'll find a minister or a priest who will do an exorcism. I don't know who you are, but I have a sneaky feeling that those Raufs begot you, one way or another. Now I am banishing you."

From somewhere I can't explain, a flood of confidence and strength poured into me. The silver tray, the clear water, and the rose glowed brilliantly in the light of the bare bulb overhead. I raised my hand, and I heard my own voice say, "Go! Go back into that from whence you came!"

My hand dropped. The room was quiet. There was no feel of any untoward thing in it. I gathered up the tray and turned off the light, when I had finished my strange decoration of the place. The stair was comfortable to walk down.

As I settled, at last, to my typing, a mouse began to nibble in the wall.

Two Views of St. Armand's Lovecraft

Barton Levi St. Armand. *The Roots of Horror in the Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*. Elizabethtown, New York: Dragon Press, 1977.

Professor Barton St. Armand's book seeks to explore the literary and psychological roots of horror in the stories of H. P. Lovecraft, with primary focus on "The Rats in the Walls." The book is, overall, penetratingly and provocatively done, within the limits of its coverage, though some points are questionable. One general problem is that the treatment of Lovecraft's fiction is not so broad as St. Armand's title would suggest; the final conclusion drawn is one of a breadth requiring assessment of most or all of the major Lovecraft stories, and it is a conclusion which would not clearly seem to follow, even from a more synoptic study.

The distinction between terror and horror is interestingly explored. Terror is identified as that experience in which the soul expands to meet the hideousness of the external cosmos, while horror is that experience in which the soul contracts to confront hideousness within. The distinction is that of macrocosm and microcosm; this dichotomy is explored in Progoff's *Jung, Synchronicity, and Human Destiny*, in which it is suggested that the psyche reflects the macrocosmic workings of the universe. For present purposes the suggestion is that "horror within" and "terror without" could be aspects of the same thing; it is Lovecraft's task to attempt synthesis of the two, and as St. Armand points out, it is a task of epic proportion. For Lovecraft, the synthesis must be that of the inner world of dream and deeper realms, on the one hand, and the outer cosmos of ultimate chaos (what James Joyce calls the "chaosmos") on the other.

The insights of Jung are brought irresistibly into play. St. Armand traces archetypal significance in Lovecraft's work; the inattentive, primal collective unconscious is mirrored in the "twilit grotto" of "The Rats in the Walls," and that tale's culmination suggests the ineluctable confrontation between man and the darkly bestial past which he carries within him. It is unfortunate that St. Armand does not broaden his book's scope to examine similarly Jungian overtones in such other works as "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "The Outsider," but his treatment of "The Rats in the Walls" is thought-provoking. The nether regions of Bxham Priory are seen as a metaphor for the archetypal depths of man's psyche, the very collective unconscious itself, and it is pointed out how remarkable were Lovecraft's dreams as germinal story sources; Maurice Lévy is aptly quoted as describing Lovecraft's fictional houses as vehicles of dream. There are objectionable points; the dead issue of Lovecraft's alleged "negrophobia" is pointlessly exhumed by St. Armand, who also makes a strained comparison of Lovecraft's dissolving of the distinction between primitive and civilized man, and Jonathan Edwards' dismissal of free will—Edward's view of original, inherited sin is seen as parallel to Lovecraft's theme of atavism. The comparison smacks of the erroneous Derlethian interpretation of the Lovecraft Mythos as parallel to the Christian Mythos of good versus evil, but it is clear that the conceptions of good and evil are meaninglessly provincial in Lovecraft's world-view.

St. Armand remarks that Lovecraft argues in various tales that it is dangerous for man to come to know too much. At this point, and at certain others in the book, St. Armand comes dangerously

close to blurring the distinction between the flesh-and-blood author and his *persona*, his mask from which issues a narrative voice. Certainly the narrators in several stories express such a view, but, the autobiographical content of much of Lovecraft's work notwithstanding, it is unsafe to identify a narrative voice automatically and fully with the author. For example, Lovecraft found the notion of inherited memory a highly potent and appealing fictional motif, but he makes it clear in his letters that he personally does not believe in inherited memory. On the whole, the Lovecraft Mythos does tend symbolically to reflect Lovecraft's personal view of a purposeless and indifferent universe, but one should be slow to equate author and narrator on specific points.

St. Armand provides a good look at the final transformation scene in "The Rats in the Walls," surely one of the most strikingly Jungian scenes in Lovecraft's works. Lovecraft is rightly called innovative for portraying reversion to type from the point of view of the character undergoing degeneration. However, the claim that the central character's final "gibberish" is a parody of the ending of T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" is problematical, for St. Armand fails to mention that the passage in question is Gaelic, derived from *The Sin Eater*, by Fiona MacLeod, who in fact translates the passage as "God be against thee and in thy face—and may a death of woe be yours. Evil and sorrow to thee and thine!"

Probably the strongest point of St. Armand's book is his recognition of the symbolic importance of viscosity in Lovecraft's writing. It is pointed out that the more traditional seas of blood, as found in *Macbeth*, are transmuted as ichor or other liquid imageries in Lovecraft. In "The Rats in the Walls" such descriptions as the "foamy sea of bones" and the "viscous . . . army" of rats underscore the view of the sea as symbolic of the human psyche's depths, in that the sea forms our primordial origins and still flows in our depths. One may wish, here, that other Lovecraft works were examined; certainly "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and the sonnet "The Bells" strongly suggest this archetypal, mythic significance of the sea.

There are particular remarks, in places, that one may vigorously contest. Lovecraft is said to have been "driven back in defeat" from New York, but this view is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the post-"exile" period was the time of Lovecraft's greatest burst of creative genius. And when St. Armand suggests that Lovecraft's marriage to Sonia represented a succumbing to attraction-repulsion, in that Sonia (being Jewish) represented to him the abhorrent slime of the pit, one must needs recoil—the inference is a dreadful distortion of the truth as known from the facts of their lives.

Curiously, in the end, St. Armand (after praising Lovecraft's work in many ways, assesses Lovecraft's attempt at the epic synthesis—the synthesis of inner psychic horror with outer cosmic terror—as an epic failure. The conclusion comes suddenly and does not appear readily to follow from the preceding arguments. And at any rate, if the epic synthesis effort is to be called a failure, that conclusion surely cannot be drawn from a study so textually narrow. "The Rats in the Walls," however good, is an early tale affording only a partial view of the *oeuvre*. It is one thing to confine one's scrutiny largely to this tale, but quite another to form such an assessment without discussing Lovecraft's works in general—which works, in fact, tend to support a view that Lovecraft's efforts at the grand synthesis were a remarkable success.

But overall St. Armand's book is a ponderous treatment of those portions of the *oeuvre* which he does treat, and this study is certainly one of which students of Lovecraft, whether they agree or disagree on specific points, should partake.

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In his book, *The Roots of Horror in the Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*, Barton Levi St. Armand helps contemporary readers of Lovecraft's tales of horror and the supernatural to understand the artist's exploration of the primal, non-rational forces which lie beyond human consciousness.

The exploration could be accomplished in the short story genre, Lovecraft felt, only by crossing unawares the line between the rational (the "normal") and the non-rational (the "abnormal"):

To make a fictional marvel wear the momentary aspect of exciting fact, we must give it the most elaborate possible approach—building it up insidiously and gradually out of apparently realistic material realistically handled. The time is past when adults can accept marvelous conditions for granted. Every energy must be bent toward the weaving of a frame of mind which shall make the story's departure from nature seem credible—and in the weaving of this mood the utmost subtlety and verisimilitude are required. In every detail *except* the chosen marvel, the story should be accurately true to nature. The keynote should be that of scientific exploration—since that is the normal way of presenting a "fact" new to existence, and should not change as the story slides off from the possible to the impossible (St. Armand, p.v; all page numbers refer to the text).

St. Armand uses scientific exploration to make clear the "chosen marvel" of "The Rats in the Walls"—namely, that a man's mind falls down the spiral of evolution as he searches out his aboriginal past. Delapore (the story's protagonist) unearths the overt atavism of his remote forebears by buying and rebuilding Exham Priory, an ancient family edifice in England. Under the old house, he discovers subterranean vaults and passages used by family members for certain "unspeakable" rites in olden times. Successively more primal revelations cause Delapore's mind to revert to those ancient, savage times, and he ends his days in an asylum, listening to imaginary rats scurry about in the padded walls.

St. Armand feels that the disintegration of Delapore's personality is a gradual splintering of his ego by terror—the engulfment by the sublime and the cosmic, counterpoised by horror, which may be interpreted as a descent into the archetypal unconscious. Conjunction of the opposing kinds of fear seems to multiply itself, and the primal, non-rational mind overwhelms the rational ego. Cosmic terror and Gothic horror unite to render the Jekyll-Hyde motif in anthropological terms.

The author emphasizes the archetypal nature of Lovecraft's story by comparing Delapore's exploration of the many-layered (Gothic, Saxon, Roman and Druidic or Cymric) Priory to an archetypal dream of Carl G. Jung:

I [Jung] had a dream [circa 1909] when I was working with Freud. . . . I dreamed that I was in "my home," apparently on the first floor, in a cozy, pleasant sitting room furnished in the manner of the 18th century. I was astonished that I had never seen this room before, and began to wonder what the ground floor was like. I went downstairs and found the place was rather dark, with paneled walls and heavy furniture dating from the 16th century or even earlier. My surprise and curiosity increased. I wanted to see more of the whole structure of this house. So I went down to the cellar, where I found a door opening onto a flight of stone steps that led to a larger vaulted room. The floor consisted of large slabs of stone and the walls seemed very ancient. I examined the mortar and found it was mixed with splinters of brick. Obviously the walls were of Roman origin. I became increasingly excited. In one corner, I saw an iron ring on a stone slab. I pulled up the slab and saw yet another narrow flight of steps leading to a kind of cave, which seemed to be a prehistoric tomb, containing two skulls, some bones, and broken shards of pottery. Then I woke up (p. 15).

The similarity of Jung's dream with the plot line of Lovecraft's story, together with the virtual certainty that Lovecraft never knew of the psychiatrist's dream, gives the tale an added dimension of artistic universality. Placing Lovecraft's story in the mainstream of human evolutionary thought by making Exham Priory "a metaphor for the levels of human consciousness," St. Armand gives psychological and anthropological credence to his literary analysis.

In his frantic search for the truth about his family, Delapore leaves the rational world of civilization behind him; he becomes "fully aware of the grip of nightmare and can feel [himself] being overtaken by it." In his deadly quest for ultimate truth, the protagonist becomes lost forever in the collective unconscious.

The world of horror which Delapore enters contains what St. Armand terms "the forbidden genealogy of the larger family of man." The rats in the walls of the Priory seem to represent appetites in man's nature which heretofore were covered by the veneer of civilization which Delapore destroys in himself. Thus the anatomy of insanity is illustrated both symbolically (with the rats as symbol) and realistically (through the increasing derangement of the protagonist).

St. Armand develops the close conjunction of the "normal" with the "abnormal" in Lovecraft's work as he writes that the artist "is at once a defender and upholder of a strict universe of natural law as well as its secret saboteur." This fruitful dichotomy leads one "from the ordinary to the extraordinary, the particular and detailed to the monumental and the epic, the mundane to the sacred, unholy, or archetypal." The process of transversion in Lovecraft's stories enables him "to take the old Gothic machinery [the 'ordinary'] and invest it with new, archetypal ['extraordinary'] meaning." That is, he makes archetypal ideas palpable in space and time, and horror touches our senses with them:

The strategy of Lovecraft's stories of horror . . . is precisely to reverse the repression of the supposedly "irrepresentable" archetypes and make them no longer objectless but imagistic and symbolic—in short, to "embody" terrors (p. 40).

At last Lovecraft's protagonist and seven "luminaries of the scientific and archaeological world" reach the lowest level under the Priory:

It was a twilight grotto of enormous height, stretching away further than any eye could see; a subterranean world of limitless mystery and horrible suggestion. There were buildings and other architectural remains—in one terrified glance, I saw a weird pattern of tumuli, a savage circle of monoliths, a low-domed Roman ruin, a sprawling Saxon pile, and an early English edifice of wood—but all these were dwarfed by the ghoulish surface of the ground. For yards about the steps extended an insane tangle of human bones, or bones at least as human as those on the steps. Like a foamy sea they stretched, some fallen apart, but others wholly or partly articulated as skeletons; these latter invariably in postures of daemonic frenzy, either fighting off some menace or clutching other forms with cannibal intent (pp. 47-48).

St. Armand writes that this grotto is the Jungian collective unconscious:

In the depths of every man's psyche is this foamy sea of bones, this obscene sanctuary, which tells of the primacy of the carnal, the bestial, and the animal. It becomes most virulent in families like the Delapores in Roman, Saxon, Elizabethan, and now, modern times; it takes many forms: sadism, satanism, cannibalism, sexual perversity. In discovering and resurrecting this knowledge, Delapore's fate is sealed (p. 48).

As the men explore the hideous ruins, Delapore staggers on toward the dark void beyond, where he goes through a transformation made vivid by the spoken word. The utterings, which begin with Elizabethan English, pass from Middle English to Old English to Latin, and conclude with words from the old Gaelic tongue and savage sounds found only at the bottom of the evolutionary spiral. St. Armand describes the changed Delapore: "Delapore's atavistic nightmare has become reality, and reality has become madness."

St. Armand takes us beyond mere cannibal madness to the strange magnetism of blood, the life fluid which is near the sea's "primal ooze" on the scale of life's forms:

The problem . . . is not so much the voluntary acceptance of, or dissolution in, the sea, but precisely what occurs when the sea takes us—with the further emphasis that we also are conscious that it is taking us. To become part of that sea without losing consciousness was the ultimate horror of Lovecraft's land-locked world. It was the triumph of viscosity, the triumph of filth, the triumph of all alien mixtures, and especially the triumph of the alien blood (p. 63).

Added to the thought of "alien blood" in Delapore's unholy feast is the idea of viscosity, the final, devouring dissolution:

My searchlight expired, but still I ran. I heard voices,

and yowls, and echoes, but above all there gently rose that impious, insidious scurrying; gently rising, rising, as a stiff bloated corpse gently rises above an oily river that flows under endless onyx bridges to a black, putrid sea.

Something bumped into me—something soft and plump. It must have been the rats; the viscous, gelatinous, ravenous army that feast on the dead and the living . . . (pp. 68-69).

St. Armand sounds the depths of Edgar Allan Poe's "well of Democritus" when he sees viscosity as the ultimate horror in Lovecraft's story; St. Armand quotes from Bernard Keith Waldrop's dissertation entitled "Aesthetic Uses of Obscenity in Literature":

Viscosity is the most consistent symbol of crude states between life and death. Its effectiveness doubtless depends on its vagueness: one can hardly speak of viscous objects. The object disappears in its modifier. It cannot be imaged, one cannot be lucid about it or define it. Its essence is in destroying limits.

The symbol is basically psychological. It immediately suggests the water of birth, the lubricants of sex, the wastes of excrement, and the dissolution of death (p. 71).

The psychological symbol of viscosity takes us beyond the collective unconscious to death itself.

Barton Levi St. Armand has given us a map for further exploration of the inner world of Lovecraft's art; he has also provided a key to an understanding of the artist's creative process.

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Best-Selling Horror

Stephen King. *The Shining*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977. Stephen King. *Night Shift*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978.

Like Lord Byron, Stephen King became famous fast. *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, and *Night Shift* followed each other in rapid succession. A popular culture figure to be sure, King has also made it big in film. Altogether, his is a name to reckon with among modern writers of the horrific. As might be expected, *The Shining* and *Night Shift*, the titles under review here (the first a novel of 447, the second a collection of stories well over 300 pages), reveal some high and low points of much that typifies recent terror fiction. They also indicate something of the tradition from which their heritage springs.

The Shining centers on the adventures, increasingly unsettling adventures, befalling Jack Torrance, his wife Wendy, and their five-year-old son Danny, after they arrive at the Overlook, an imposing Colorado resort hotel, where Jack is assuming duties as a winter caretaker. He is a transplanted English teacher-writer from a Vermont prep school. There his drinking problem had created more general difficulties. Like the opening of another best-seller horror novel of recent years, Thomas Tryon's *Harvest Home*, King's chronicle of the gradual onslaught by psychic evil opens with a youngish family's attempt to begin anew, to discover for themselves an Eden in the west (a familiar theme in American fiction). Like Tryon's Cornwall Coombe, King's "paradise" is tainted by hauntings from the past, and in this wintry Eden the consequences are sufficiently violent to satisfy the cravings of a reading public eager for thrills and, in *The Shining* quite literal, chills, with every ironic twist that earmarks King's writing.

A near divorce (Jack believes that his creative impulses are stifled because of his marriage); a dash of explicitly detailed sex ("She smiled a little in the darkness, his seed still trickling with slow warmth from between her slightly parted thighs. . ."); another, toward the close, more strident "*Unmask, and let's fuck!*"; Danny's experiences with his "friend," Tony, who temporarily wards off the evil in the sentient life within the Overlook; Dick