

# **The Fourth Biennial Dr. Henry Armitage Memorial Scholarship Symposium of New Weird Fiction and Lovecraft-Related Research**

**Providence, RI, 23-25 August, 2019**

**Location: Bristol-Kent Room, Omni Hotel 3rd Floor**

**Symposium Chair: Prof. Dennis P. Quinn, Cal Poly Pomona, CA and Editor of  
*Lovecraftian Proceedings* (Hippocampus Press)**

**Friday 8/23**

**9:00-9:20**

**Opening**

Niels-Viggo Hobbs, Welcome to the Armitage Symposium

Dennis P. Quinn, "The Armitage Symposium and *Lovecraftian Proceedings*"

**9:20-10:30**

**Literary & Visual Studies  
Session Chair: Lars Backstrom**

***"An Almost Unparalleled Influence": Horace Walpole through a Lovecraftian Lens***

**Karen Joan Kohoutek**

**Bio:**

Karen Joan Kohoutek, an independent scholar and poet, has published essays about weird fiction and cult film in various journals and literary websites. Recent and upcoming publications have been on subjects including the Gamera films, the Robert E. Howard/H.P. Lovecraft correspondence, folk magic in the novels of Ishmael Reed, and American Gothic writer Charles Brockden Brown. She has won two Robert E. Howard Foundation Awards for scholarship.

**Abstract:**

This essay will look at the pioneering work of Horace Walpole (1717-1797), generally acknowledged as the founder of Gothic literature, by way of the critical perspective given by H.P. Lovecraft in his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (originally 1925-1927, revised

1933-1934), and explore the common threads between the two writers.

Informed by, but diverging from, Edith Birkhead's less well-known *The Tale of Terror* (1921), Lovecraft's analysis was for many years one of the few significant works on the Gothic that were readily available to scholars. He filters his overview of the Walpole's eccentric writing through his own highly personal ideas about cosmic horror, acknowledging Walpole's immense significance within the genre, at the same time deeming his work "tedious, artificial, and melodramatic," and full of "intrinsic ineptness."

Despite their differences in style and intent, and a distance of two centuries, the writers have a surprising amount in common: antiquarians interested in past times and archaic architecture, they both followed their idiosyncratic tastes, with a sense of confidence in their aesthetic beliefs. Significantly, both also attempted to free themselves, in actuality or at least conceptually, from the inhibiting constraints of the marketplace. This was easier for Walpole, an independently wealthy nobleman of leisure with his own printing press, but Lovecraft's efforts in small-scale self-publishing, and the important role of not-for-profit amateur journalism in the development of his art and professional career, point in a similar direction, which led them to write weird fiction that would exert "an almost unparalleled influence" on the genre.

### ***Weird Christmas (with "Krampus", Ligotti, Lovecraft and Spark)***

#### **Ann McCarthy**

##### **Bio:**

Ann McCarthy lives in Boston. She studied at Barnard College and Boston University, where she was a Presidential University Graduate Fellow, receiving her M.A. in English Literature in 2001. Her particular focus in school was 18<sup>th</sup> century British literature and culture. You can read her Armitage Symposium essay from 2017, entitled "The Pathos in the Mythos: Academic, Platonic and Filial Love in Lovecraft and Lavalley" in the 2019 Lovecraft Annual.

##### **Abstract:**

I will explore the genre of Christmas stories to determine recurring themes/features of its Weird subgenre, through close readings of the works: Lovecraft's "The Festival"; Thomas Ligotti's "The Christmases of Aunt Elise"; Muriel Spark's "The Seraph and the Zambesi"; and Michael Dougherty's film "Krampus." Recurrent themes among these works include: masks, torment by ancestors, the horror of the enforcement of ritual, and the powerful role of sound.

In "The Festival," ancestors distantly, mutely impel the vulnerable narrator to a Yuletide celebration in the town of his people, and the experience leaves him briefly hospitalized. A relation leads him down into the earth, where he hears lunatic piping, and realizes his guide's true face is covered by a waxen mask. In "The Seraph and the Zambesi," sound is dulled and deformed by the intense Zambian December heat. The performance the protagonist attends is repeatedly referred to as a Nativity "masque," a particular word choice that emphasizes the ancientness of the undertaking. The events that follow are definitely Weird, but any horror is evaded by the extreme aridity of the characters.

Ligotti's narrator in "The Christmases of Aunt Elise" is being directly tormented by the eponymous ancestor; the whole narrative is revealed at the end to be dead Elise invading his brain to replay his Christmas memories over and over again for her entertainment. Part of his dislike of the holiday is conveyed by his revulsion at certain sounds in the story. "Krampus" tells the story of a family punished for not being happy enough about Christmas, for not observing its secular, social rituals adequately. Krampus, his toys, and his elves all wear really magnificent masks. The film's sound design is extremely rich and central to its effect.

### *A Sequence of Paintings so Horrid: "Pickman's Model" Visual Adaptations*

**Nathaniel R. Wallace**

**Bio:**

Nathaniel R. Wallace is an independent scholar and research administrator at Ohio University in Athens, OH. He received his Ph.D. from OU's Interdisciplinary Arts program in 2014 and wrote his dissertation *H.P. Lovecraft's Literary "Supernatural Horror" in Visual Culture* (available to read via OhioLINK) based upon specific formal properties in visual adaptations of the author's work. Nathaniel continues to conduct research on visual adaptations of weird literature, and has incorporated music adaptations into his studies in recent years, beginning with "The Cosmic Drone of Azathoth: Adapting Literature into Sound", found in *Lovecraftian Proceedings 3*.

**Abstract:**

Like many of H.P. Lovecraft's well known tales, such as *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Nameless City", the short story "Pickman's Model" includes numerous descriptions of visual images that, when collated together, tell a history of the immediate events in the main story; namely the relations the fictional race of ghouls have with the residents of Boston. These descriptions serve as a network of cursory fragments highly associated with the technique of montage within the greater narrative. Noted film theorist Andre Bazin defines montage as "the ordering of images in time" and "the creation of a sense or meaning not objectively contained in the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition". Through montage, the fictional history communicated within "Pickman's Model" is strongly connected with these textual fragments' orientation and relationship to each other through their placement within the overall text, but also the spatiotemporal qualities attributed to the subject matter they depict.

When adapting "Pickman's Model" into a visual medium dependent upon sequences, whether in film or comics, an artist serves as curator in selecting which descriptions to render visually and what aspect of this fictional history from the original texts they wish to communicate to the audience. It is this juxtaposition of montage fragments in visual adaptations of the short story that will be analyzed in this presentation for the formal qualities by which they disrupt the narrative through their orientation in the text. Many such adaptations commonly include a photograph or film footage of a ghoul to serve as the climax of the narrative, but more significant to the notion of montage are the contrasting images in these adaptations that require the audience to make associations between two or more images which are bound up with the relations between ghouls and humans. This presentation will chronicle the various comic, television and film adaptations of "Pickman's Model" and will focus primarily on the *Night*

*Gallery* (1971) television adaptation of the story and Herb Arnold's comic "Pickman's Model" (1972).

**10:30-12:00**

## **On the Lovecraftian Mind**

**Session Chair: Karen Joan Kohoutek**

***Phantom Normalcy: The Threat of Discreditable Social Stigma in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft***

**Tonya Maynard**

### **Bio:**

Tonya Maynard is a PhD student of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma. She holds a Master's in Sociology from Ohio University, where she did her thesis on stigma and belonging in nerd culture. Her areas of specialty include sexualities, deviance, and inequality. She teaches introductory sociology courses as well as courses in deviance. Ms. Maynard's doctoral dissertation will focus on American Pagan attitudes toward LGBTQ+ identities. Her most recent publication on the impact of faculty mentorship on first generation college students can be found in *Intersectionality and Higher Education: Identity and Inequality on College Campuses*, from Rutgers University Press.

### **Abstract:**

What horrors are lying in wait just past the threshold of social acceptance? In this work, I endeavor to connect the depictions of the insane and asylums in the works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft with theories of stigma and identity in the social constructionist school of thought. Erving Goffman's *Asylums* (1961) and *Stigma* (1963) put forth the most in-depth analyses of social stigma and spoiled identity seen in sociology or any social science at the time. By looking to the ways in which many characters in the works of H. P. Lovecraft are depicted in their disturbing and fascinating descents into madness, we can understand better how the social foundation of interpersonal contact and identity management served to inspire terror in Lovecraft's time, as well as Goffman's, and still now in our own. Beginning with an overview of Goffman's theories on stigma and insanity, my piece continues into a brief survey of Kirkbride asylums and their powerful impression on the mind of the American public (Lovecraft himself included), and finishes with an application of Goffman's theoretical framework onto characters from "The Call of Cthulhu", "Pickman's Model", "The Outsider", and "The Shadow over Innsmouth", among other works. "Pickman's Model", in particular, explicitly equates madness with a lack of humanity – something Goffman considered a social truth and often acknowledged in his discussion of those attempting to manage a hidden, or discreditable, stigmatized identity.

Where does one find themselves when the veneer of sanity has been socially stripped and their madness is laid bare, subject to the scrutiny of others, others who are undoubtedly shielding their own dark secrets from the public that they, themselves, compose? Lovecraft and Goffman

both assure us that this all-encompassing shame and terror of social stigma lies sleeping, waiting only for our foolishness and mortal incompetence to rouse its grand and furious power.

### ***Abnormal perception and mental illness in weird fiction***

**Michael-Paul Schallmo**

**Bio:**

Michael-Paul Schallmo is an Assistant Professor in Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at the University of Minnesota with a Ph.D. in Neuroscience. His research focuses on understanding neural dysfunction that underlies abnormal visual perception in mental disorders, including schizophrenia and autism. His published work uses methods including brain imaging, electroencephalography (EEG), computational modeling, and visual tasks to understand how the brain processes visual information differently in these mental health conditions.

**Abstract:**

Mental disorders can dramatically affect how people perceive the world, but scientists have only recently begun to understand the physiological basis of these sensory abnormalities. However, abnormal perception in people with mental health conditions has been a topic of interest for fictional authors for over one hundred years. In particular, short stories in the horror, science fiction, and weird fiction genres have described how perception may be disrupted by mental illness in remarkable detail, and in ways that are relevant to modern science.

Abnormal sensory experiences occur with some frequency in certain mental disorders. For example, people with schizophrenia may experience hallucinations – hearing or (less often) seeing things that are not present in the external environment. While it is difficult to study hallucinations in a controlled, scientific way, researchers have developed other methods to investigate abnormal perception in psychiatric conditions. Using images that evoke visual illusions, research from myself and others has shown that people with schizophrenia have trouble integrating and organizing information in laboratory tests of visual perception. When combined with measurements of neural physiology, such as brain imaging, this research gives us clues about the biological basis of abnormal perception in these disorders.

Weird fiction stories from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries include many characters whose mental illness affects their sensory perception. The works of H.P. Lovecraft are notable in this regard; in tales such as “The Rats in the Walls” and “The Color Out of Space” the author details how characters with troubled minds see and hear things that others cannot. Well-known works from other authors, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” deal deftly with the same subject. Drawing from knowledge gained first-hand, these stories give the reader insight into the subjective experience of disordered perception in mental illness.

### ***Ebb of Sanity: The Night Ocean and Bipolar Disorder***

**Kyle Gamache**

**Bio:**

Kyle Gamache is an adjunct professor of psychology at the Community College of Rhode Island where he teaches courses on general psychology, cognitive development, psychopathology, and social interaction. He is also a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and psychotherapist, specializing in clinical risk assessment. Kyle conducts research on mental health and forensic psychology, presenting his studies at national and international research conferences and publishing in academic journals such as the *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, and *Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice*. Beyond psychology, Kyle is an avid fan of weird and horror fiction.

**Abstract:**

H.P Lovecraft and R. H. Barlow's collaborative work *The Night Ocean* is one of the more poignant and atmospheric pieces in early weird fiction. It is a simple piece about an artist spending a lonely, late summer in a small seaside town. Compared to other works, there are limited supernatural occurrences, but the weird world is alluded to in the peripheral. The strength of the story is in its subtlety and milieu. The premise of this paper is to explore a deeper meaning present within the story. The story of the artist exploring the town can be seen as a metaphor for bipolar disorder. Mental illness perseverated in Lovecraft's life and fiction, and it would not be surprising if mental illness were a theme in *The Night Ocean*. The cluster of bipolar disorders share similar symptomology: the presence of depressive states, with spikes of elevated manic episodes. This ebb and flow is explored directly in the piece with great attention placed on the passing of the tides and seasons within the setting. The nameless narrator also describes frenzied activity followed by melancholy and disinterest, common staples of bipolar disorder. The limited supernatural experiences in the piece are indirect and murky, possibly able to be explained by paranoid delusion and brief hallucination. The paper will present an overview of the story, and argue that the symptoms of bipolar disorder are present within the mood and action of the piece, intending to show that *The Night Ocean* is more about bipolar disorder than cosmic entities.

**3:00-4:30**

**Lovecraft & The Other**

**Session Chair: Nathaniel R. Wallace**

*The Other Others: Mapping Lovecraft's Loathing*

**Paul Neimann**

**Bio:**

Paul G. Neimann (Ph.D.) teaches at the University of Colorado Boulder. His background in eighteenth-century literature informs his interest in the Gothic and Weird in book and film. He frequently offers courses on horror genres and popular culture. He is also at work on a study of early modern thinking about religious toleration.

## **Abstract:**

HP Lovecraft's ethnic and national prejudices understandably have received substantial attention. This essay takes a broader look at his animosities, as he mapped them on a range of characters: from benighted rustics to Victorian prudes to degenerate aristocrats and provincials. These suspicious personae recur frequently, in similar stories, often set on a cosmic timeline that suggests Western history. But HPL's fictional schemas rarely reveal clear values. His tales contrast undesirable qualities with positive traits, like curiosity and imagination; but these accounts sometimes fit poorly with his usual preferences for high culture and tradition over modernity.

One might ask, then: Who is the real Lovecraftian villain? Instead of piecing together a unified cosmology, I explore a pattern-seeking or folkloric approach to repeated narrative units. Early works, for example, furnish different iterations of one or two underlying templates or ur-stories. These arguably have some final expression in efforts like "The Rats in the Walls" (1924) and "He" (1926). Looking for common elements yields a sense of HPL's peculiar triangulation between patrician elites, mass culture, and pulp fiction. Finding "other others" does not imply obscuring specific prejudices and looking for a general misanthropy. Instead, we might see how HPL used different kinds of outsiders to stand for different cultural dangers he perceived.

## **Žahhāk Beside Cthulhu: Philosophizing with Monsters in Persian Mythology and American Horror**

**Robert Landau Ames**

### **Bio:**

Dr. Robert Landau Ames is an independent scholar of Persian literature and Iranian history. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations in May 2018 and was a lecturer on Persian literature in that same department during the Spring 2019 term. He previously taught at St. Francis College in Brooklyn and is currently based in Queens, New York. Rob has previously published articles in *Comparative Islamic Studies* and Brill's *Journal of Sufi Studies* and his first book is currently under contract with Gorgias Press, an independent academic publisher.

### **Abstract:**

This paper attempts to apply the terms in which recent exponents of speculative realist tendencies in (post-) continental philosophy have analyzed horror and monstrosity to the study of classical Persian literature. Just as Graham Harman adopted Lovecraft as the poet laureate of his philosophical project (*Weird Realism*, per the title of his 2012 book), this paper asks what positions might result from a similar attempt to philosophize with Žahhāk, the serpent-shouldered king who features prominently in the Iranian national epic, the *Shāhnāmah* (En. *Book of Kings*) of Firdawsī (d. 1019 or 1025), rather than Cthulhu.

As the *Shāhnāmah* tells the myth, Žahhāk is an Arab prince who the devil convinces to commit patricide, invade and conquer Iran, and kill its king (Jamshīd). Following Žahhāk's conquest of Iran, the devil appears again and kisses Žahhāk's shoulders. After the kiss, a

voraciously hungry serpent grows from each of Žahhāk’s shoulders, and he rules over Iran for a millennium, attempting to sate his snakes’ hunger by feeding them the brains of Iranian youths all the while. A rebellion led by the blacksmith Kāvah eventually overthrows Žahhāk and restores a native Iranian, Faraydūn, to the throne.

While most interpretations of this myth tend to focus on its apparent nationalist dimensions by dwelling on Žahhāk’s role as a tyrannical foreign king, I aim to use Žahhāk’s monstrosity, and not his Arab origins, as the basis for my analysis. Applying the method Harman uses with Lovecraft (a close reading of the primary source’s specific descriptive language), however does not necessarily imply the same philosophical priorities. Indeed, while Harman’s Cthulhu points to an ontological project, I argue that Žahhāk ultimately points to an ethical one.

### ***The Horror of ‘White Trash’ in H.P. Lovecraft’s Work***

#### **Troy Rondinone**

#### **Bio:**

Troy Rondinone is a Professor of History at Southern Connecticut State University. Troy received his Ph.D. in History at UCLA, and his areas of scholarly interest include cultural, working-class, economic, and radical history. He has published pieces in *American Quarterly*, *The Journal of American Studies*, *Psychology Today*, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, *Connecticut History*, *Lovecraftian Proceedings*, and *Labor Studies*. In addition, he has written chapters in the *Oxford Bibliographies in Latino Studies* and the *Cambridge Companion to Boxing*. His books include *The Great Industrial War: Framing Class Conflict in America, 1865-1950* (Rutgers University Press, 2010), *Friday Night Fighter: Gaspar “Indio” Ortega and the Golden Age of Television Boxing* (University of Illinois Press, 2013), and *Nightmare Factories: The Asylum in the American Imagination* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

#### **Abstract:**

In his short story “Beyond the Wall of Sleep,” H.P. Lovecraft references a mental patient named Slater, a “typical denizen of the Catskill Mountain region, who corresponds exactly with the ‘white trash’ of the South.” These degraded people exist without “laws and morals,” their low “mental status” even making them susceptible to alien occupation. In this essay, I will focus on a less-analyzed aspect of Lovecraft’s racialized horror landscape—monstrous whiteness, or “white trash.” Like others of his day, Lovecraft was preoccupied with racial degradation. Poor, rural whites figure as touchstones of horror in several of his stories. Incorporating recent scholarly studies of racial formation, including the landmark book *White Trash* by Nancy Isenberg, as well as work by horror theorist Noel Carroll, I will examine some of the ways that Lovecraft demonized “inferior” whites and incorporated the terrors of racial decline into his stories.

**4:30-6:00**

**Dual Sessions Chair: Philip Chang**

## I. Lovecraftian Americana

### *The Weird Within the Real: Common Territories in Lovecraft's Fiction and Southern Literature*

**Heather Poirier**

**Bio:**

Heather Poirier is a writer/editor living in Washington, DC. After teaching at the university level for 10 years and working at a biomedical research center with a world-class researcher for 5 years, she moved to Washington, where is a senior editor at a scientific journal. She has published articles on Lovecraft and detective fiction and is currently working on two books, one of which explores Lovecraft's relationship to Southern literature and the detective in popular culture.

**Abstract:**

HP Lovecraft famously argued that William Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" could not be considered weird fiction because, despite its bizarre events, the story was plausible and thus did not liberate the imagination. Indeed, weird fiction would not seem to have much in common with Southern literature, especially that of Southern literature written during and just after Lovecraft's life. Likely because of this, literary critics do not offer much analysis of Lovecraft's weird fiction and Southern literature, which prevents us from understanding the commonalities shared by the two.

The lack of research is understandable. Lovecraft's devotion to New England would distract most scholars, while researchers in Southern literature rarely concern themselves with weird fiction. The barriers to research begin with the conceptual: for instance, Lovecraft's New England seems quite distant from the South. Elements such as cultural divergences, images of conflict and war, and assumptions about the inhabitants of both New England and the South present other obstacles.

This paper addresses and explores some of the implications of common territories in Lovecraft and Southern literature. Lovecraft's immersive world-building in New England renders it as vivid as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, and both Lovecraft and Southern writers are concerned with matters such as family lineage; the almost mythical power that the land holds over its inhabitants; religious strangeness; perversity; murder; and weird locals mixed with backwoods degeneracy. After moving toward a definition of Southern literature, this paper examines the common ground of realism, communal knowledge, and communal truth-telling, including how the grotesque becomes a fluid capacity derived from abjection that merges and overlaps the works of various authors. The truth-telling mechanism of the grotesque bridges the common characteristics found in Lovecraft's fiction and Southern literature. The paper concludes with a discussion of its implications and possible directions for future research.

*Lovecraftian Silver John: Wellman, Lovecraft, and the Appalachian Occult.*

## **Daniel Schnopp-Wyatt**

### **Bio:**

Daniel Schnopp-Wyatt is a professor of counselor education and supervision at Lindsey Wilson College where he teaches qualitative research methodology, ethics, substance abuse treatment, and group psychotherapy. He has published on a variety of public health issues but has more recently focused on aspects of Appalachian culture, human sacrifice, and authorial hermeneutics.

### **Abstract:**

By virtue of Manly Wade Wellman's prolific publication history in *Weird Tales*, a single story written as a Lovecraft tribute, and themes found in some stories, the Silver John stories are sometimes considered as Lovecraftian in nature. Wellman, like Lovecraft, presents a cohesive mythology built around an occult worldview in which supernatural powers can be summoned and exploited. Wellman's mythic world is, however, explicitly Christian. That said, Wellman's Christianity is not that of the church house or the theologian, it's the Christianity of the isolated quasi-pagan frontier. It is a Christianity of magic words, sacred metals, and ritual magic. Like Lovecraft, Wellman referenced many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore. Unlike Lovecraft, the books Wellman referenced were actual texts, in the Pow-Wow tradition, used throughout Appalachia for occult purposes.

This paper takes the form of an essay examining approaches to the topic, Wellman's life context, points of comparison and contrast with Lovecraft's work, the Pow-Wow tradition as an enduring influence on Wellman's writing, and ends with an argument for considering Wellman's work as a parallel to Lovecraft's and as an exemplar of the Appalachian folk horror tradition.

## **II. Lovecraftian Gender**

### **“His Active and Enthralled Assistant”: Homoromanticism in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft**

#### **Erica Sumrall**

### **Bio:**

Erica Sumrall is a published poet and weird fiction enthusiast. She developed an interest in combining her passion for literary criticism with her love for Lovecraft's stories, with hope that her perspective could offer something unique to the field. Her husband Justin, and their beloved eldritch beast of a cat, inspire and support her.

### **Abstract:**

It is readily apparent that male friendships dominate and shape the tales of H.P. Lovecraft. Male companions are the primary emotional touchpoints for Lovecraft's characters. Familial ties have diminished importance compared to intense friendships. His male characters trust each other with eldritch secrets and fears, in addition to their own lives. The ardor and passion of Lovecraft's friendships are transgressive to the twenty-first century mores of male affection.

Stories such as “Herbert West: Reanimator,” “The Thing on the Doorstep,” and “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” have uncommonly involved protagonists. The unnamed narrator of “Herbert West: Reanimator” dedicates his life to West’s obsession. They live and work together; the bond is so impenetrable that it continues throughout military service. Even as the narrator becomes fearful of West, he still stands by his side. Only West’s shocking death is sufficient to break the spell of the relationship. A more positive example of Lovecraft’s male relationships would be that between the characters of Dr. Willett and the titular character of “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward.” Dr. Willett’s friendship with Ward leads him into macabre, but ultimately heroic, circumstances. In comparison, the relationship between Daniel Upton and Edward Derby in “The Thing on the Doorstep” is perhaps the most poignant and tragic friendship in Lovecraft’s entire canon. Upton has such belief in Derby that he is willing to kill at his imploring. Lovecraft himself had intense correspondences and friendships with other male authors. Without these connections, Lovecraft would have lost much of his support and inspiration. Male trust and bonding are the pillars on which H.P. Lovecraft’s stories stand.

### ***Sword-& Sorcery, Gender-& Genre: Non-Binary Heroism of C.L. Moore’s Jirel of Joiry***

**Anthony Conrad Chieffalo**

#### **Bio:**

Anthony Conrad Chieffalo has been an educator in the state of Rhode Island for six years. He is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Rhode Island where he researches both nineteenth and twentieth century American literature with a growing emphasis on literary modernism. His interests include psychoanalytic literary criticism, cultural studies, gender studies, feminism, pulp fiction, and weird fiction. He has previously published an article in *Lovecraftian Proceedings No. 1* titled “Poe, Lovecraft, and ‘The Uncanny’: The Horror of the Self.”

#### **Abstract:**

Catherine Lucille Moore, better known by her penname C.L. Moore, created the first female sword-and-sorcery hero with protagonist Jirel of Joiry. Published in 1934, “Black God’s Kiss” presents Jirel’s journey through a hellscape of hyperbolic contrast constituting a metaphor for twentieth century gender binarism. The tale features a revenge plot centered on a patronizing villain. Jirel’s quest takes her through a vibrant setting capitalizing on Moore’s motif of brightness and darkness. Moore’s metaphor for twentieth century gender binarism presents a world of incessant conflict due to conventional conceptions of gendered identity and heteronormativity. Moore’s sword-and-sorcery inscribes a figure of heroism upon the consciousness of her readers transcending phallogocentric precedents of the genre.

Revolutionary perspectives on masculinity and femininity have been addressed in American pulp magazine fiction since the 1930s, but these texts are rarely read as transcending gender binary. They are rarely read as challenging patriarchy and sexism. However, C.L. Moore’s tales of Jirel of Joiry combat exploitation and oppression while envisioning a form of heroism regardless of sex or gender. Her fiction constructs a poignant critique of heteronormative notions of “masculinity” and “femininity” predating cultural critic and theorist Judith Butler and her seminal work *Gender Trouble* in 1990. The Jirel of Joiry series stemming from “Black God’s Kiss” challenges rigid notions of representation and identity while positing

gender as both socially constructed and performative in nature. C.L. Moore's sword-and-sorcery forms a feminist critique of normative heroism and an evolution of the subgenre into one disrupting social prerogative. Rather than phallogocentric heroism or even gynocentric heroism, Moore's *Jirel of Joiry* is a manifestation of non-binary heroism born from literature that challenges systemically imposed and policed gender binary.

**Saturday 8/24**

**9:00-10:30**

**Literary & Philosophical Studies  
Session Chair: Edward Guimont**

*Neo-Gothic decadence as a pervasive challenge in works of H.P. Lovecraft, A. Machen, and A. Blok*

**Elena Tchougounova-Paulson**

**Bio:**

Dr Elena Tchougounova-Paulson got her PhD at the A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature, Russian Academy of Science, Moscow. Her PhD is in 20th Century Russian literature. She has worked as a Research fellow at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow. As a textual scholar and translator, she took part in several editorial projects.

Dr Tchougounova-Paulson is now an independent researcher, resident in Cambridge. She takes part in a variety of literary projects and translations. Her subjects include Russian Literature, American Literature (Lovecraftian Studies in particular), Ukrainian Studies, Theory of Literature, History of Literature, Horror Studies.

**Abstract:**

The Decadent movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century has evolved from different sources, it has had a variety of forms and reflections, it has gone through several phases, but there are two things that connect them all:

- *Validation of fear* as a primal philosophical and aesthetical force;
- *acknowledgment of the art of decay* as a new cultural phenomenon.

Since then, the new, Modernist, culture was shaped in such a way that it absorbed the elements of Symbolism (primarily French), supernatural (i.e. mysticism and reframed Gnosticism, alongside other post-Hellenistic traditions), and the philosophy of pessimism (mostly established by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche), giving to the contemplative audience of the *fin de siècle* era an absolutely new, eschatological and irrevocable, outlook, which we could define as *Neo-Gothic Decadence*.

Our main task in this talk (and later, potentially, in a paper) is to reveal how the omnipresence of Neo-Gothic/Decadent ideas, reflections and thoughts has appeared—and has been manifested—in the works of H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur Machen, and Alexander Blok. Every one of them could be

defined as a perfect type of a Decadent author, with different backgrounds (American/Welsh/Russian) yet similar perceptions of the artistic dynamics. All three of them were also ahead of their time with their pioneering writings (Lovecraft's Weird/horror fiction; Machen's Edwardian supernatural works; Alexander Blok's mystical Symbolism). If in case of connections between Machen and HP Lovecraft, we can definitely demonstrate the direct impact on one on the other ("Machen is a Titan—perhaps the greatest living author—and I must read everything of his", H.P. Lovecraft wrote to Frank Belknap Long on June 3, 1923), Alexander Blok's name from the first glance could be regarded as superfluous in this list. This view however changes if we take a careful look at Blok's poetry, essays, and correspondence and prove that he was one of the neo-Gothic/Decadent league.

### ***A Realism so Hideous: Reflections of Heidegger in H.P. Lovecraft***

**James C. Lethbridge**

**Bio:**

James C. Lethbridge is a doctoral candidate in philosophy at Binghamton University. His research focus is currently on the social/political concept of toleration, its meaning, and its limits, and more broadly on social and political philosophy and ethics. He has also done research on American intellectual history, the intersection of philosophy and literature, philosophy of religion, Christian Philosophy, and applied ethics. He has also published a paper regarding the history of pulp comic books during the Cold War. Although this is his first presentation on Lovecraft, he has also written papers exploring the philosophy of horror fiction in general, with a focus on gothic literature.

**Abstract:**

This essay utilizes the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, particularly his conception of Being and truth as found in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, to construct a three-part framework for interpreting the horror fiction of H.P. Lovecraft. Drawing on Heidegger's distinctions between Being and otherness, truth and appearance, and grounding and concealment, I construct three phenomenological/literary lenses or moods by which Lovecraft's horror fiction can be interpreted. The first of these, which I term "the deception of appearance" involves the crucial difference in Heidegger between Being and seeming/appearance, under which distinction human beings are often liable to error owing to failures do appreciate the ways in which the appearances of Being can color our conception of its truth. The second, "uncovering the deception" relates to Heidegger's conception of both rational inquiry as "unconcealment" or a clearing away of false appearances, and human beings' natural and insatiable drive to do so. The third and final lens I term "the horror of truth," which involves the oftentimes shocking results of clearing away false appearances and observer biases, and the horror of confronting the truth of Being. Having reconstructed these three aspects of Heideggerian phenomenology, I then apply them to two of Lovecraft's novellas, *The Call of Cthulhu* and *At the Mountains of Madness*, interpreting both tales as following a similar literary structure including a process of passing through each of the three Heideggerian moods. The paper closes with some suggestions regarding how this interpretive framework can be applied to a large portion of Lovecraft's horror corpus, and offers

some conjecture as to how these three lenses might be strengthened and refined to create a strong critical tool for Lovecraftian literary analysis.

### ***Anti-Utilitarian Economics and Post-Capitalist Social Visions in Lovecraft and Bataille***

**Christian Roy**

**Bio:**

Christian Roy (Ph.D. McGill 1993) is an independent scholar in intellectual history by calling, a multilingual freelance translator by trade, as well as an art and film critic. Living in Montreal, he has written widely on twentieth-century Western thought, about figures ranging from Paul Tillich to Marshall McLuhan and from Jacques Ellul to Georges Bataille, whom he discussed in previous editions of the Henry Armitage Memorial Symposium. Roy is also the author of *Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia* (2 vols./e-book, ABC-Clio, 2005) sampling rituals and folklore from all continents and periods, available in most North American college and public libraries.

**Abstract:**

Surprising overlap and revealing contrasts can be found between Lovecraft's later social views and economic thought and those articulated by Georges Bataille a few years later during the war in *The Limit of Usefulness*. Both are driven by a fundamental aversion for the utilitarian assumptions of political economy, which they historicize in reference to pre-capitalist ways of life, particularly those of landed aristocracies. Bataille expresses renewed appreciation for their ethos as he moves away from his previous calls for revolutionary extremism. Lovecraft hopes to avoid its attendant cultural ravages by articulating a gradual path to socialism as a way to generalize conditions of freedom from toil and insecurity once reserved to the agrarian élites he had long revered, as the happy few alone able to develop disinterested pursuits amidst pre-industrial conditions of scarcity which the easy abundance of the machine age had since made untenable. But too much energy was still wasted in the calculative struggle for necessities, while untrammelled accumulation only served socially useless gain, instead of liberating energies for the real development of human personality through good education and minimum economic stress for all as conditions for creative leisure. Lovecraft's ideal was thus one of humanistic *Bildung*, while Bataille's aim was to lavish human energies in glorious self-destruction on the pattern of the sun and galaxies: a sacrificial impulse of intimacy with death in violent ecstasy, by then however largely confined to erotic literature. Similar cosmic horror was also the stuff of weird tales Lovecraft hoped to see flourish through grants to non-profit presses, free from pulp's commercial imperatives. The 18<sup>th</sup> century gentry's life of genteel contemplative self-cultivation held up by Lovecraft as a model yet marks a different post-capitalist path from Bataille's retrieval of the 17<sup>th</sup> century nobility's reckless "religious" performance of sovereign self-expenditure, deliberately courting disaster.

### ***From Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Freud, Lucretius, Lovecraft and The Locomotive-God***

**Sean Moreland**

**Bio:**

Sean Moreland teaches in the English Department at the University of Ottawa. Their essays, primarily focused on Gothic, horror and weird fiction in its literary, cinematic, and sequential art guises, have appeared in many collections and journals. They also write short fiction and poetry, including recent publications in *Dissections*, *Lackington's*, *Black Treacle* and *Over The Rainbow: Folk and Fairy Tales from the Margins* and occasionally interview, review, and blog about weirdness at *Postscripts to Darkness* ([www.pstdarkness.com](http://www.pstdarkness.com))

**Abstract:**

In a 1929 letter to Derleth, Lovecraft acknowledged professor, poet, memoirist and translator William Ellery Leonard as “A character, & a figure of real importance in American letters.” This paper explores Leonard’s importance for Lovecraft, focusing on two intersections between their work crucial to Lovecraft’s developing conception of cosmic horror. The first is between Leonard’s 1916 translation and interpretations of Lucretius, *On The Nature of Things*, and Lovecraft’s early expression of cosmicism with the 1918 poem “The Poe-et’s Nightmare.” Analysis of a number of significant imagistic and verbal parallels between Leonard’s translation and Lovecraft’s poem provides insight into one of the sources of Lovecraft’s early cosmicism, while also illuminating aspects of his reception of both Lucretius and Edgar Allan Poe.

The second intersection is between Leonard’s 1927 psycho-biographical account of his phobic obsessions, *The Locomotive-God*, and a number of Lovecraft’s post-1929 fictions. Lovecraft’s letters praise the penetrating psychology of traumatic obsession that *The Locomotive-God* offers; for example, a 1931 letter recommends it to Robert E. Howard as essential reading for anyone interested in psychobiography. *The Locomotive-God* was crucial to Lovecraft’s conception of the power of atmosphere, the *sine non qua* of cosmic horror; he writes in a 1931 letter to Moe: “Unless one is steeled against the ascendancy of the capricious and meaningless subjective feelings, he is lost so far as the power of rational appraisal of the external world is concerned. Thus poor W. E. Leonard sees and feels things that aren’t there--and knows he does--yet continues to see and feel them just the same. That shows the power of irrational mood over rational perception.” In conclusion, I explore how the traumatic temporality and alien entities at the heart of “At The Mountains of Madness,” “The Whisperer in Darkness” and “The Shadow Out of Time” represent Lovecraft’s attempts to formulate this power in a fictional framework, one significantly informed by Leonard’s phobic autobiography

**10:30-12:00**

**Lovecraft-Related Music & Popular Culture**

**Session Chair: Ray Huling**

*The Farnese Settings of “Mirage” and “The Elder Pharos”*

**Philip Chang**

**Bio:**

Philip Chang teaches undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he is senior instructor in music theory at the College of Music. He previously presented at the Armitage Symposium in 2015, examining narrative and extra-narrative musical issues in “The Music of Erich Zann.”

**Abstract:**

After receiving Lovecraft’s permission in July 1932, Harold S. Farnese composed musical settings for the sonnets “Mirage” and “The Elder Pharos” from *Fungi from Yuggoth*. In an August 1932 letter to Elizabeth Toldridge, Lovecraft wondered what Farnese might do “in a musical way, with my fantastic images.” Over the decades, Kenneth Faig, Jr., James Wade, and S.T. Joshi have addressed partial reproductions of the music. Recordings of the songs were released for the first time in 2015 by publisher Fedogan & Bremer, and in 2017 the entire scores became more widely available in *The Annotated Fungi from Yuggoth*, edited by David E. Schultz. We can now address Lovecraft’s curiosity and more fully examine the songs’ text/music relations, a long-standing practice in music theory and musicology.

According to August Derleth, Farnese’s perspective was to create a musical atmosphere to “exude” the “fragrance” of Lovecraft’s poetry. This audiovisual presentation shows how Farnese’s compositional strategies, from the immediately hearable to more long-range subtleties, illustrate or enhance the meaning of Lovecraft’s lines.

In addition, we can see that the songs are not, per Wade, entirely “inept” and “sub-professional.” Indeed, the texts seemed to have determined a marked musical contrast: “Mirage,” which harkens back to Romantic *Sehnsucht*, demonstrates fairly conventional compositional practice, whereas the bizarre imagery of “The Elder Pharos” provokes modal chords, unusual key relations and harmonic shifts, and whole-tone scale ambiguity.

***Eldritch Calling: Examining the Influence of Cosmicism on Black Metal*****Jennifer Loring****Bio:**

Jennifer Loring’s short fiction has been published widely both online and in print, including the anthologies *Tales from the Lake* vols. 1, 4, and 6, and *Nightscript vol. 4*. Her work also appears in the NecronomiCon 2019 memento book and *Would but Time Await: An Anthology of New England Folk Horror*. Longer work includes four novels and three novellas. She holds an MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University with a concentration in horror fiction and teaches online in SNHU’s College of Continuing Education.

**Abstract:**

Black metal is a genre of extreme heavy metal characterized by its ideology, primarily in terms of anti-religion and trenchant misanthropy, almost as much as its musical style. It comes as little surprise, then, that the themes of human insignificance prevalent in cosmicism resonate with

many black metal artists. These artists often engage with not only cosmic horror and the weird in general but with Lovecraft's work in particular. Bands such as Obed Marsh, Crafteon, and The Great Old Ones, for example, have constructed their entire raison d'être around Lovecraft's original characters and locations.

Lovecraft famously stated that, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." Cosmic horror, in short, uses the unknowable to create a pervasive sense of fear, particularly that of humanity's meaninglessness on a universal scale. He insisted that "...[I]n the case of weird art the emphasis must fall upon...*the mood of intense and fruitless human aspiration typified by pretended overturning of cosmic laws and the pretended transcending of possible human experience* (emphasis Ligotti's) (Ligotti, 184). Thus, lacking characters the reader can relate to or care about, the weird tale by Lovecraft's definition must rely on atmosphere, and here too we find a corollary in black metal, which among its other essential characteristics emphasizes atmosphere. That atmosphere is usually cold, bleak, and in the language of music and lyrics, conveys the same sense of cosmic hopelessness.

### ***The Shadow Over Cyrodil: Elder Things and The Elder Scrolls***

**Daniel J. Holmes**

**Bio:**

TBA

**Abstract:**

One of the more engaging topics at the intersection of religious studies and the digital humanities is what theorist Robert Geraci has termed the "virtually sacred," or the incorporation of mythological and spiritual themes in video games (and especially in fantasy role-playing games). The advent of electronic entertainment mediums has created a participatory mode of mythic story-telling, allowing players to actively immerse themselves in supernatural and fantastic narratives. An especially exciting (and so far entirely unexplored) expression of this phenomenon can be found in the wide variety of games to draw upon HP Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos - a catalogue of titles stretching from 1992's "Alone in the Dark" (often considered the first survival horror game) to the upcoming electronic adaptation of the classic Call of Cthulhu tabletop RPG. This paper will seek to open a new discussion on Lovecraftian gaming by adapting the concept of the virtually sacred to explore Cthulhoid influences on the popular Elder Scrolls series of RPG's, published by Bethesda Softworks. The lore of the Elder Scrolls games is heavily influenced by Lovecraft (a debt openly acknowledged by designer Todd Howard in a discussion regarding the "Dragonborn" expansion to The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, which features a tentacled, entirely amoral elder god whose holy text - bound in human flesh, of course - drives readers mad with forbidden knowledge). Although this paper will touch upon the entire Elder Scrolls series, its particular focus will be The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind. This 2003 title not only incorporates aesthetic elements of Lovecraft's work, it also directly reflects upon the metaphysical tension between materialism and supernature that underpins the entire Cthulhu

mythos - thereby providing an especially dynamic case study in how the "virtually sacred" can offer players a sense of mythic participation entirely distinct from literary narratives.

***The Shadow Over Horror Tropes: The Shadow Over Horror Tropes: An Analysis of the Blighted Location Trope Pioneered by H. P. Lovecraft***

**Jeremiah Dylan Cook**

**Bio:**

Jeremiah Dylan Cook writes horror tales inspired by the weird worlds of H.P. Lovecraft. His obsession with the author will probably lead him to madness, eventually. While attending St. John's University, Jeremiah received the Mario Mezzacappa Memorial Award for Outstanding Achievement in Poetry and Prose. He completed his master's degree in Writing Popular Fiction at Seton Hill University. Along with serving as the managing editor of *New Pulp Tales*, Jeremiah is a member of the Horror Writers Association and the Ligonier Valley Writers. When he's not meddling with eldritch forces, he's playing with his cat or adventuring with his wife.

**Abstract:**

Horror is a genre of tropes. There are haunted houses, dark forests, clowns, creepy gas station attendants, and countless more. H.P. Lovecraft contributed a vast number of tropes to popular horror fiction. One that is particularly interesting, but seldom discussed, is the blighted location trope. In this trope a protagonist visits a location, such as a town, city, or even a space station, only to discover the inhabitants are hiding a dark secret, and the discovery of that secret puts the protagonist in mortal danger. While endeavoring to prove that H.P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* pioneered the blighted location trope that runs through popular culture today, I analyzed the trope from its birth to modernity.

My research delved into Lovecraft's seminal *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic *Young Goodman Brown*, and of course a textual analysis of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. When my studies moved closer to current popular culture, I examined the blighted location trope's impact on James Cameron's *Aliens*, and Capcom's *Resident Evil* franchise. In addition to these works, I delved into traditional academic books and essays dissecting Lovecraft's fiction. I believe this research illustrates that Lovecraft's influence on horror tropes is even greater than many realize. Casual fans of Lovecraft, horror writers, and academics should all find this topic interesting as it blends literary analysis with popular culture. Hopefully, this subject encourages other fans and scholars to continue expanding this line of research to illuminate the many ways Lovecraft's imagination inspired a diverse array of tales across every form of entertainment media.

**3:00-4:30**

**Lovecraftian Grimoires: East & West  
Session Chair: Fred S. Lubnow**

## *Hideous Writing Systems in Lovecraft Country*

**Shawn Gaffney**

**Bio:**

Shawn Gaffney holds Masters degrees in Linguistics (Boston College) and Egyptology (NYU). He has explored magic and ritual in his research and writing. Shawn is currently employed as a Writing Tutor at Suffolk County Community College and, in addition, teaches SAT prep and English literacy courses to college-bound high school students. Shawn has spent the last few summers at archaeological digs in Turkey and Connecticut and also studied various aspects of ancient Indo-European in the Netherlands. He enjoys languages of all sorts and has been focused on the hieroglyphic and cuneiform writing systems in the ancient Near East.

**Abstract:**

Lovecraft and his contemporaries regularly refer to sources of obscure knowledge in the form of ancient books, manuscripts, and tablets which have been identified as Latin, Greek, Arabic, Coptic, as well as R'lyehian, Aklo, Tsath-yoan, and Naacal. These languages were written in the Roman, Greek, Arabic, and Coptic scripts, as well as R'lyehian and Naacal hieroglyphs. Several other stories reference writing, including an alphabet in "The Nameless City", the "cryptic writing" in "The Call of Cthulhu", the hieroglyphs in the library in "The Shadow Out of Time", and the elaborate historical record depicted visually in *The Mountains of Madness*.

Numerous authors and illustrators have used these texts, languages, and orthographies in their own works as well as creating new systems. Though connected to Lovecraft's original works these new pieces often reflect the changing understanding of his works, as well as evolving ideas regarding Lovecraftian imagery, relationships, and languages. Many of these newly invented systems show similarities, sometimes related to the descriptions that Lovecraft gave but also because the medium of writing and visual communication have their own limitations. Additional imagery from grimoires, television, and video games, as well as the constructed-language community, appear to influence much of the art. This talk will examine some of the newer imagery and hieroglyphs, attempt to connect them, when possible, to previous works, and discuss the divisions between Lovecraft's descriptions and the adapted works. I hope to identify some of the less explored areas, and those areas that have various overlapping interpretations, including insight from the artists. The goal is to examine the expanding nature of the visual elements of "cosmic horror" and its ability to work inclusively, bringing in new interpretations and understandings of how to represent the weird, and how to communicate the uncommunicable.

## *Who is Lovecraft's True Protagonist?: The Oriental Semiotician and His Necronomicon*

**Lucas Townsend**

**Bio:**

Lucas Townsend is currently a graduate student working on his master's thesis at Florida Atlantic University. His research interests primarily revolve around both imperialism and various structuralist theories found in works of Modernist speculative fiction, and his current master's thesis applies narratology to the pre-war invasion narratives of Robert W. Chambers, Erskine Childers, and John Buchan. He has possessed an interest in H.P. Lovecraft from a young age, and emphatically continues to discuss, present, publish, and advocate towards the canonical recognition of Lovecraft's literary merit.

**Abstract:**

Abdul Alhazred, who Stephen King calls “that quaint pre-OPEC Arab” in his *Danse Macabre*, is perhaps H.P. Lovecraft's most conspicuously present character from across his entire body of work. My question is why—why should a mad Yemeni scholar and his notorious *Necronomicon* be the mediator through which no less than nineteen of Lovecraft's tales is negotiated? While Lovecraft's narrators are often pastiches of himself and his life, Alhazred is a different enigma altogether. Given the early views of a Spengler-inspired Lovecraft, it is quite surprising that a dead eighth-century poet from the Orient is as influential, multilateral, and convincingly well-developed as he is. The author of the *Necronomicon* exists as the filter through which Lovecraft's pastiche-narrators interpret the sign systems of inhuman alien identities, giving Alhazred nearly limitless power within the available textual space. His position therein as subaltern intermediary between the human and alien of disparate metaphysical aeons offers commentary on his capability as hermeneutic interpreter for both worlds; in the case of the Anglo-American-Aryan Lovecraftian narrator, said narrator often goes insane upon interaction with the Oriental sign systems presented by Alhazred's forbidden tome. This project hopes to discover the etymological and conceptual origins behind Alhazred, delve into the true textual and semiotic significances of the *Necronomicon* using Jacques Derrida's notion of iterability, and uncover the answers to how the Yemeni scholar accepts, rejects, or converses with the characteristics of other Modernist narrators and protagonists. The significance of an Orientalized character existing as perhaps the most memorable takeaway from the work of H.P. Lovecraft—possibly more so than even his pantheon of alien entities or his cosmic indifferent philosophy—cannot be understated, as this interpretation opens up Lovecraftian studies to even greater postcolonial conversations than have been previously realized.

***Mad Poets and Howling Daemons: The Anglo-Saxon and Nordic Ancestry of Lovecraft's Grimoires***

**Cole Donovan**

**Bio:**

Cole Donovan is a graduate student in the Humanities at the University of Chicago where he conducts interdisciplinary research in the areas of literary, cultural, and educational analysis. While most of his research focuses critically on the relationship between pedagogical praxis and theories of culture and aesthetic, he also looks more broadly at the history of literacy and literature as it is taken up by cultures.

## **Abstract:**

Foundational to Lovecraft's core mythology is the fictional grimoire the *Necronomicon*. Though the contents of this text remain largely obscure in Lovecraft's own work, the nature of the text is clear: it is an account written by a "mad Arab" of dark and hidden forces that lie just beyond the horizons of understanding and the grasp of sanity. As a literary invention, the *Necronomicon* is a unique and powerful unifying device for Lovecraft's mythos; however, despite its seemingly singular nature, it has clear roots in reality. Taking a cue from Lovecraft's essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, in which he describes the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* as a text "full of eldritch weirdness," my research looks carefully at the weirdness, both literary and cultural, of the early medieval period as a means of understanding Lovecraft's own fictional texts.

My research seeks to orient Lovecraft's work within a larger cultural tapestry that, for the purposes of this project, begins with some of the very earliest texts of the European Middle Ages. Drawing parallels between the fractured and often self-contradictory world of the Norse and Anglo-Saxon peoples with that of the American Modernists, I critically compare the mythos with both literary and quasi-scientific sources including *Beowulf* and *The Wonders of the East* respectively.

Drawing on contemporary Lovecraft research, I identify links between the Christian/Pagan dissonance of early England with that of the Pentecostal/Scientific dissonance of Modernist America and the Orientalism that pervades Lovecraft's fictional texts and medieval texts alike, concluding that despite Lovecraft's seemingly radical departure from the Gothic and supernatural fiction that immediately preceded him, his understanding and use of the "weird" is not exclusively a twentieth-century phenomenon and has a tangible heritage in medieval literature.

## ***In Search of the Lost Kitab Al Azif***

**Lars G. Backstrom**

### **Bio:**

Lars G Backstrom works as an IT consultant at a company that only hires people on the autism spectrum. He has advanced degrees in Geophysics from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and in War Studies from King's College London. Lars has numerous non-fiction publications in different disciplines and his Cthulhu Mythos short story *The Passion of the Son of Man* won a literary award in 2007. Two of his main special interests are the academic study of the works of HP Lovecraft and raising awareness of autism. He has previously presented at the Providence *Necronomicon* Armitage Symposium.

### **Abstract:**

According to HP Lovecraft, the mad poet of Sanaá Abdul Alhazred wrote the *Necronomicon* in Arabic in the years before 738 CE in Damascus. At the time, Damascus was an economic hub, important religious center and capital of the Second (Umayyad) Caliphate. The caliphate was vast, stretching from Morocco and Portugal in the west to China's T'ang Dynasty in the

Transoxiana region in the east, but in 750 CE it was replaced by the Abbasid Caliphate. This began an extremely dynamic period in world history as the Abbasid Caliphs ordered the translation of books of knowledge into Arabic, the Far East entered a Golden Age under the T'ang Emperors, and the Byzantine Empire revived intellectually and culturally after the great iconoclasm. It was during this revival that in 950 CE Alhazred's work was translated into Greek and given the name of Necronomicon proper. Many years later, at around the same time as Olaus Wormius translated the text into Latin in the early thirteenth century CE the Arabic original was, according to the History of the Necronomicon, lost. Or was it? Could it not be so that this most dreaded tome still exists?

In the first part of my presentation, I will give a very brief overview of the world of the Al Azif between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries CE. In the second part, I will carry out a literary critical analysis of *The History of the Necronomicon* (1937) to show that it cannot be treated as a reliable source, nor does it tell the complete history of the Necronomicon. Based on this I will present a number of locations, some quite surprising, where intrepid, foolish or just plain unlucky investigators might find a copy of this abominable work.

**4:30-6:00**

**Lovecraft. Science, and the Environment**  
**Session Chair: Elena Tchougounova-Paulson**

*American Franksteins: The Magnificent Nightmare of Dr. Porter & Prof. Poe and Their Attempts to Reanimate the Dead in Victorian New England*

**Michael J. Bielawa**

**Bio:**

Award-winning author and historian Michael Bielawa is well versed in New England's paranormal heritage. He has authored numerous articles and books, including *Wicked New Haven* and *Wicked Bridgeport* (which received the first-ever New England Paranormal Literary Award). His efforts to preserve New England history have been featured in *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Bielawa has also discussed Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* on NPR and presented at NEPCA's Frankenstein Bicentennial Conference at Worcester State University. Mike leads Wicked Walks for The Barnum Museum each autumn documenting Bridgeport, Connecticut as one of America's most paranormal downtowns.

**Abstract:**

H. P. Lovecraft's name has long embraced a shuddering association with the ghoulish imagery of reanimation. Rightfully so. What acolytes of the horror master may not realize is that the midnight exploits of Lovecraft's fictional reanimator, Herbert West, have a very real foundation in bizarre research conducted in nineteenth century New England.

Well before Herbert West's, or even Victor Frankenstein's, undead monstrosities took to menacing the countryside, scientifically trained individuals had been dabbling with electricity

and dead things. Following an overview of the origins of galvanism in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, this presentation provides an in-depth look at the lives and experiments of Dr. George Loring Porter and Prof. George Poe. Though largely forgotten, reanimation experiments were conducted by these extraordinary Victorian gentlemen while they resided on the shores of Long Island Sound. George Poe actually succeeded in raising deceased animals while George Porter focused his attentions solely on reanimating a human being.

But an even more astounding story arises when pondering how Porter and Poe, so preoccupied with the mechanisms of reviving the newly-dead, somehow simultaneously arrived in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Were Porter and Poe on a clandestine mission to convert this New England city into a realm for the reanimated?

Murder trials, the morbid task of securing corpses, and strange experimentations in front of terrified audiences all swirl around the lurid tale of Porter and Poe, the American Frankensteins who attempted to reanimate the dead in Victorian New England. This true-life adventure would certainly shock Herbert West's own pulse to pound all the faster.

### *A Lover of Past Phantoms: Lovecraftian Reflections in R.H. Barlow's Science*

**Thomas Schwaiger**

**Bio:**

Thomas Schwaiger is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Linguistics of the University of Graz, Austria, where he has taught several courses in core linguistic areas like morphology, syntax and semantics. He has also worked and published on cross-linguistic aspects of human grammar and the history of linguistics. Being interested in H.P. Lovecraft since his first contact as a teenager with a few Cthulhu stories translated by Viennese poet and writer H.C. Artmann, Schwaiger has only recently discovered and begun to explore a connection between his Lovecraftian and linguistic interests as represented by the anthropologist and linguist R.H. Barlow.

**Abstract:**

Recent years saw a growing interest in the mutual literary influence and personal relationship between HPL and RHB (e.g. Jarett Kobek's talk at the Armitage Symposium 2015 and Paul La Farge's 2017 novel *The Night Ocean*). However, apart from La Farge's (semi-)fictional account, Barlow's further path after Lovecraft's death in 1937 seems a less investigated one.

Accordingly, this paper explores a hitherto neglected avenue: HPL's possible posthumous influence on RHB's notable scientific career as an outstanding Mesoamerican anthropologist and linguist up to his suicide at the beginning of 1951. G.T. Smisor, his co-founder of anthropological journal *Tlalocan*, reminisced about Barlow in 1952: "He had an intellectual driving force that never seemed to relax, that picked me up and carried me along with it, as it likewise did later many others. He had a facility of expression that brought to life long-dead happenings. This happy facility was a carry-over from his years of reading and writing fantasy fiction and composing poetry."

The present contribution aims to show that this carry-over was additionally a 'carry-on' and even 'carry-beyond' with respect to HPL's influence: While the young Barlow notoriously

started more projects than he completed—for which he received mild critique but also advice by Lovecraft—the later scholar underwent a considerable turnaround and, eventually, according to HPL biographer S.T. Joshi, “he had fully justified Lovecraft’s predictions of his precocious genius, and would have accomplished far more had he lived.” This transformation is clearly reflected by RHB’s studies in anthropology and linguistics (e.g. his recording and editing of old Mexican folktales like *The Phantom Lover*), revealing a rationalism akin to Lovecraft’s and their shared interest in the past, which ultimately brought him as far as the libraries of Paris and London—destinations that had always remained mere places of longing for HPL.

### ***Lovecraftian Georgics: Horror, Disgust, and the Ecology of Agriculture***

#### **Ray Huling**

#### **Bio:**

Ray Huling is a Ph.D. student in Communication at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. His research concerns questions of community and sustainability, with an emphasis on the folklore of people who work in sustainable food production and service. He has published on monstrosity and community in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* and has an article on Lovecraft and fascism forthcoming in *Lovecraftian Proceedings* and an article on ecology forthcoming in *Moveable Type*. His book, *Harvesting the Bay*, on shellfishing in Rhode Island, was published in 2012.

#### **Abstract:**

The most dire threats of our times are environmental, and the most dire environmental threat lies in farming. A Lovecraftian sensibility, attuned to the horror and disgust that ecological knowledge should evoke, has an important role to play in practical responses to these threats, especially with regard to those found in agriculture.

Ecologically-minded thinkers have confronted environmental catastrophe in a Lovecraftian mode: Eugene Thacker and Ben Woodard have done so straightforwardly; Donna Haraway has done it coyly. John Michael Greer has addressed environmentalism in a series of Mythos novels. All of these authors have applied Lovecraft to ecology generally; this paper considers a particular case, that of agriculture, and, even more particularly, William Vogt's work on guano.

In 1948, Vogt's book, *The Road to Survival*, was a sensation, a best-selling environmentalist screed that decried material growth and inspired action at all levels of governance. The intensity of his warning came from his experiences researching Guanay cormorants for a Peruvian guano company. From 1938 to 1941, Vogt lived in a hut on a guano island, to discover how to improve this crucial agricultural resource. There, he witnessed the abandonment of millions of Guanay chicks by adults whose fishing grounds had been depleted by El Niño. He recorded their starvation and analogized their circumstances with humanity's. He knew the horrible and disgusting truth of how his civilization fed itself.

Horror and disgust aroused by science form the emotional core of Vogt's work, and, alongside hope, these feelings should lie at the heart of all efforts to make agriculture sustainable—once we refine our sense of them by reflection on the work of one of their most

sensitive connoisseurs. Lovecraft's infamously stunted emotional range nicely plugs the hole left by an equally stunted ecological optimism. This paper argues that Lovecraft's fixations can play a crucial role in developing the emotional wholeness necessary for realistic environmental action.

***Fear and (Non) Fiction: Agrarian Anxiety in "The Colour Out of Space"***  
**Antonio Barroso**

**Bio:**

Antonio Barroso is a high school English teacher in his hometown of Marshall, Michigan. He obtained his master's degree from Eastern Michigan University, where he wrote his thesis on "The Colour Out of Space." In addition to academic writing, he has also published short stories, including "Haberdashers and Shoggoths" for Insomnia Press.

**Abstract:**

This literary and sociological study examines H.P. Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" alongside New England agricultural societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as their members faced socio-political change. Anxieties expressed in the short story reflect fears of communities facing change at the hands of a reservoir project. Lovecraft's status as a literary reactionary is on full display in this short story, as his activities with historical conservation as well as his travels along New England made him acutely aware of this problem. One community in particular, the Swift River Valley, caught Lovecraft's attention as it was facing not only change but complete erasure. Though once a promising agricultural community, nearby metropolitan expansion and industrial progress doomed the towns of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott. Boston's need for water necessitated the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir, which would displace the people of the valley, destroy their homes, and irreversibly alter their culture. The particular strain of fear that Lovecraft addresses in "The Colour Out of Space" can be found in the residents of the Swift River Valley when reading their newsletters, interviews, and essays describing their plight. By analyzing the story together with a culture that experienced this kind of fear, we can discover how the Swift River Valley's fate inspired Lovecraft to write a tale that resonates with many cultures similarly menaced by forces beyond their control. Patterns of historical American rural communities facing destruction in the name of progress as well as modern communities facing similar threats show the endurance of Lovecraft's specific brand of fear.

**Sunday 8/25**

**10:30-12:00**

**Polar Myths & the Old Ones**  
**Session Chair: Heather Poirier**

***Encounters in the Mountains of Madness: H.P. Lovecraft and Werner Herzog at the World's End***

## **Lúcio Reis-Filho**

### **Bio:**

Lúcio Reis-Filho (PhD, University Anhembi Morumbi) is a film critic and historian specializing in the relations between cinema, history and literature. Focusing on the horror genre, he wrote essays about zombies in contemporary Brazilian and Latin American films, published in journals such as the *SFRA Review* and horror-themed anthologies. Currently, he researches the oeuvre of H.P. Lovecraft, and, along with Laura Cánepa and Jamer de Mello, the connections between Lovecraftian mythology and Werner Herzog's documentaries. He has recently published an article, "Lovecraft out of Space: Echoes of American Weird Fiction on Brazilian Literature and Cinema" in *Lovecraftian Proceedings No. 3*.

### **Abstract:**

The documentary film *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007) is the record of Werner Herzog's expedition to Antarctica. There, the German filmmaker and his crew attempted to capture the beauty and the strange life forms of the ice-cold continent, as well as investigating the human characters that inhabit it, members of the community of scientists and workers at McMurdo Station. Published seventy years earlier, H.P. Lovecraft's novel *In the Mountains of Madness* (1936) was set in the same place, in the surroundings of Mount Erebus. Written in the pseudo-documentary style that characterizes Lovecraft's fictional texts, the novel narrates a disastrous incursion of a group of scientists and engineers into the mysterious Antarctic continent. The proposal of our ongoing research is to suggest an approximation between Herzog's documentary film and Lovecraft's pseudo-documentary novel, based on the premise that they are part of a bicentennial tradition of narratives about Antarctica, many of them fictional reports inspired by historical expeditions. Not coincidentally, both Herzog and Lovecraft make references to some of these expeditions in their works. The analysis also seeks to observe the philosophical ground that underlies Herzog's and Lovecraft's worldview, since both authors represent Antarctica as a place that miniaturizes human life, reducing it to its insignificance within an infinite and hostile universe, about which very little is known. Such perspective, tied to Lovecraft's Cosmicism, creates not only fantastic environments, but also ends up leading the characters to the brink of sanity and eventually to madness in the face of the unknown.

## ***Icy Portents of Doom: Clark Ashton Smith's Hyperborean Cycle and the Polar Myth* Ian Feters**

### **Bio:**

Ian Feters is a researcher of the Weird and the 2017 fellow for the S.T. Joshi endowed research fellowship at Brown University. He is also the first recipient of the Donald Sidney-Fryer fellowship for Clark Ashton Smith related archival research at UC Berkeley in 2018. The research conducted during both fellowships is part of a book tentatively titled *Polar Rhetorics*. Ian holds a Master's degree in English Literature from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo; he has also

taught writing in the English department at Cal Poly. He is currently a library specialist at Robert E. Kennedy Library in San Luis Obispo.

**Abstract:**

Clark Ashton Smith's Hyperborean Cycle, a thematic collection of prose tales set on the northernmost continent of Earth in the earliest days of Mankind, is considered a lesser myth cycle in the poet's prolific catalog. Smith scholars tend toward the consensus that the Hyperborean tales are at best a mixed bag of sardonic prose and poetry fragments that are more amusing than vital – a minor speed bump on the road to *Averoigne* and *Zothique*. Yet, this critical diagnosis ignores a crucial element of the cycle: the Arctic setting of the Hyperborean continent. And beyond setting, the cycle's 'Arctic-ness' – the collective sense of space, time, and historical and mythological context of the far North – has the potential to illuminate a greater significance for the Hyperborean tales in Smith's oeuvre. To fully understand this new context, one must delve into the foundational myths and apocryphal histories of the Arctic region, defined here collectively as the Polar Myth, in an effort to reimagine the cycle not as a lesser work but a new centerpiece of the rich and long-standing tradition of Arctic myth in literature. With the help of archival materials from the Bancroft Library's Clark Ashton Smith collection, this paper employs textual analysis and close reading of Hyperborean Cycle manuscripts, as well as Smith's personal correspondence, as a way to peer into the writer's creative mindset. Analysis of texts like "The Coming of the White Worm" and the mythopoetic fragment "Ultima Thule" reveals Smith's obsession with the interdependent motifs of coldness and doomed civilizations that recur across the cycle. Contextualizing these motifs against the backdrop of the Polar Myth imparts a new characterization on the Hyperborean Cycle and its 'Arctic-ness' that bridges the gaps between myth, history, and fiction.

**The Lackey / Fifer Hypothesis: The Weakness of the Old Ones**

Fred S. Lubnow  
(Illustrations by Steve Maschuck)

**Bio:**

Fred Lubnow received his Bachelors of Science in Biology at Susquehanna University, Pennsylvania (1988), his Master's degree in Environmental Sciences and his Ph.D. in Limnology (1994) both from U. C., Davis, California. He is the Director of Aquatic Programs at Princeton Hydro. Fred is also an adjunct professor at Delaware Valley University, Pennsylvania. He also hosts the web site [www.lovecraftianscience.wordpress.com](http://www.lovecraftianscience.wordpress.com) and has given talks at the 2013, 2015 and 2017 NecronomiCon conferences and frequently collaborates with Steve Maschuck who produces artwork for those presentations and for several volumes of "The Journal of Lovecraftian Science."

**Abstract:**

Many of the entities described by H.P. Lovecraft were originally thought of as Gods but over time, as his tales became more ingrained in science rather than the supernatural, these entities

were more appropriately described as aliens. Initially these extraterrestrial and / or extradimensional beings were thought to have incredible powers, manipulating energy, matter and even time. However, a critical review of many of Lovecraft's stories reveals that in spite of being extremely powerful, these Lovecraftian entities can be considered weak in some capacity. This is particularly the case for those entities that are not endemic to our universe.

The H.P. Lovecraft Literary Podcast, created by Chris Lackey and Chad Fifer, has been reviewing Lovecraft's work and other weird fiction for a decade and when it began in 2009 it reviewed all of Lovecraft's literary work in sequential order. Reviewing Lovecraft's fiction in this young media format has identified an interesting pattern in Lovecraftian entities. That is, those that are not native to our universe can be easily defeated. Examples of this include the death of Wilbur Whateley and some members of the Mi-Go, both as a result of dog attacks, as well as the destruction of Cthulhu by a ship and the dissipation of the Flying Polyps through electrical discharge. Thus, using information outlined by the creators of the H.P. Lovecraft Literary Podcast, this paper presents the "Lackey / Fifer hypothesis: The Weakness of the Old Ones," which outlines the pattern of powerful extradimensional entities being easily destroyed in our universe. It also presents some possible explanations for this seemingly contradictory situation of powerful entities that can be easily defeated.

**3:00-4:30**

## **Lovecraftian Places**

**Session Chair: Ian Jacob Fetters**

### **Lovecraft i(a)n Connecticut**

#### **Edward Guimont**

#### **Bio:**

Edward Guimont is a doctoral candidate at the University of Connecticut Department of History. His dissertation is on the mythic history of Great Zimbabwe, and his work has been published in *The Tufts Historical Review*, *Contingent Magazine*, *Lapsus Lima*, *Dead Reckonings*, *Lovecraftian Proceedings*, and *The Block Island Times*.

#### **Abstract:**

At the 1990 H. P. Lovecraft Centennial Conference, Will Murray – perhaps the premier Lovecraftian cartographer – noted that in Lovecraft Country, “all the great fictitious cities are in Massachusetts... certainly not Connecticut – I don't think Lovecraft ever wrote of Connecticut.” This presentation will refute that, integrating Connecticut back into the New England of Lovecraft Country alongside Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

When Connecticut is mentioned in relation to Lovecraft, it is typically done in one of three ways: the influence on legends from the town of East Haddam on “The Dunwich Horror;” Hartford being the final meeting place for Lovecraft and his wife Sonia Greene; and the possibility that one of several Connecticut rivers was the inspiration for the Miskatonic. This presentation will briefly explore the extent of Lovecraft's exploration of Connecticut and his

friends (and distant family) who resided there, and take a position in the river debate in favor of the Connecticut River, while then primarily making four arguments.

First, that the Arkham Sanitarium of several of Lovecraft's stories, and the wider pastiche Mythos, may have been inspired by two Connecticut hospitals he became aware of in his travels. Second, claims that Lovecraft drew inspiration from Connecticut 'megaliths' or that Miskatonic University was inspired by Yale have no merit; but that Yale does have a subtler influence. Third, that in *At the Mountains of Madness*, both Professor Pabodie and the discovery of the fossilized Old Ones have Connecticut links. And finally, that a number of legends specific to southwestern Connecticut have parallels to elements from "The White Ship," "The Outsider," "The Shunned House," and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, indicating that Lovecraft may have at least partially drawn influence for those stories from the Connecticut legends, just as it is widely accepted that he did for "The Dunwich Horror."

### ***Cthulhu and King Arthur?: Lovecraft's Knowledge and Use of the Matter of Britain***

**Michael A. Torregrossa**

#### **Bio:**

Michael A. Torregrossa is a graduate of the Medieval Studies program at the University of Connecticut (Storrs) and works as an adjunct instructor in English in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts. His research focuses on adaptations of the Arthurian tradition in popular culture, and he has published four essays, two bibliographies, and a number of encyclopedia articles on this topic. Michael is also active in the Northeast Popular Culture/American Culture Association and will be organizing sessions under the newly created Monsters and the Monstrous Area for their annual conference in the fall.

#### **Abstract:**

In approximately 40 texts, produced from the 1960s through at least 2017, creators have co-opted themes from the writings of Howard Phillips Lovecraft and combined them with motifs from the Matter of Britain, the millennium-and-a-half-old conglomeration of stories about King Arthur and those associated with his court at Camelot, to create a series of innovative subtraditions within the larger Arthurian tradition that I have elsewhere referred to as Lovecraftian Arthuriana. Initially, I thought these mash-ups of the Cthulhu Mythos and the Arthurian legend to be original contributions to each tradition with no direct connection to Lovecraft. However, further research into Lovecraft's non-fiction writing, letters, and interpretations of his fiction offers a potentially deeper connection, suggesting, perhaps, that Lovecraftian Arthuriana might be an authorized tradition. This paper will trace Lovecraft's use and knowledge of the Matter of Britain by looking closely at his references to Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Chivalry*, and Alfred Tennyson's Arthurian poems in his essays "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (1927) and "Suggestions for a Reading Guide" (1936) and his correspondence as well as highlighting recent scholarship on his work by fellow medievalists to evaluate what and when Lovecraft may have known about Arthur and the activities that went on at Camelot.

## *The Influence of The Great Game on the Writings of H.P. Lovecraft: From Tibet to the Mountains of Madness*

**Benjamin Davis**

### **Bio:**

Ben Davis is an analyst and program coordinator for the Department of Defense. He received a M.S. in Defense and Strategic Studies from Missouri State University. Apart from his professional interests, Ben has also been a fan of Lovecraft since he read “The Dunwich Horror” in middle school. He went on to back the Kickstarter for *Necronomicon Providence* in 2012 and has attended each one since.

### **Abstract:**

In numerous letters H.P. Lovecraft wrote about his love and use of geography and architecture in his works. The modern exploration of Tibet, especially its geography and architecture, provided indirect and direct influences on Lovecraft. It began with the closing of Tibet to outsiders in 1792, sparking a desire to explore and encounter the unknown. In the mid-19th century, at the height of “The Great Game” between Imperial Russia and the British Empire, explorers from both countries raced to be the first to explore, map, and possibly claim Tibet. Stirred up by initial reports from Tibet, private citizens across Europe and America became determined to be the first Westerner to reach the capital Lhasa. The extreme lengths required to access such a remote and inhospitable place, along with the Tibetan’s overly polite methods of turning away travelers only fueled the desire. All of these stories drove speculation and excitement, providing ample material for newspapers, books, and paintings. Weird tales began flowing out of Tibet, from the true (the seemingly cannibalistic drinking from skulls and sky burials) to the false (flying monks). Though the Treaty of Lhasa in 1904 opened Tibet to the world, it continued to inspire the imagination of artists and authors. Some of these include Alexandra David-Neel, whose book *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* inspired ideas Lovecraft recorded in his *Commonplace Book*. As well as Nicholas Roerich, whose strange paintings of “forbidden and half-fabulous” Tibet directly inspired Lovecraft.

Ruled by a God-King and isolated for decades, Tibet became a place of speculation and mystery, and for Lovecraft possibly a place filled with forbidden knowledge. The wild and rugged geography, lore, and architecture influenced Lovecraft’s use of setting and scenery in “At the Mountains of Madness” and the Plateau of Leng.