

RECLAIMING HORROR FROM EUGENICISTS:
A STUDY ON H.P. LOVECRAFT, EUGENICS, AND MODERN ADAPTATION

By

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Abstract

Howard Phillips Lovecraft's weird fiction has been highly influential since the time of his death, permeating into popular culture through both imagery and narrative. Lovecraft's literary work has long been criticized for eugenicist themes, but there has been little scholarship engaging with Lovecraft's filmic adaptations. This thesis analyzes eight films that represent direct Lovecraftian adaptations, spanning from 1963's *The Haunted Palace* to 2015's *Innsmouth*. It assesses each film's adherence to eugenicist tropes as established in Mitch Frye's formation of the Lovecraftian genotypic horror – a genre of literature that focuses on both the fear of genetic degradation from within and the fear of the genetic Other. Despite drawing source material from various Lovecraft short stories, all eight films elevated eugenicist themes in one way or another and added a distinct narrative element not found in Lovecraft's original canon. Namely, instead of focusing on the consequences of genetic interbreeding, the films featured the explicit rape and often subsequent impregnation of a white woman. It is through these added elements that the films adhered to the generic expectations of exploitation horror, and later, splatter film. Filmic adaptations fail to break from Lovecraft's eugenicist narratives, using generic expectations to emphasize explicit sexuality and violence that enhance themes of interbreeding and genetic mutation.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born in 1890 in Providence, Massachusetts¹. His work, written throughout the early 20th century, laid the foundation for what horror is known as today. His work did not gain popularity during his lifetime, with Lovecraft dying in relative obscurity, but with the establishment of Arkham House publishing in 1939 by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, Lovecraft's corpus was consolidated and preserved². His work persists throughout modern popular culture from video games to children's television shows, and the image of his Elder God, Cthulhu, can be found adorning merchandise sold at Comic Cons. However, direct adaptations of Lovecraft's work have been few and far between, as filmmakers struggle with his more obscure themes and descriptions. Yet filmmakers and artists remain drawn to Lovecraft for his brand of horror, different from the work of other seminal horror writers like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Edgar Allen Poe. H.P. Lovecraft's literature asserts a fear of the Other through its use of genetic mutation and hybridity as allegory of miscegenation and immigration within the Eastern coast of the United States. Miscegenation is a term, coined in the late 19th century, "to describe intermarriage, and reproduction, between racial and ethnic groups"³. With the rise of the eugenics movement into the 20th century, pseudoscience heavily influenced Lovecraft as a justification for the use of racially charged language to express his own fears

¹ Joshi, S. T. A Dreamer and a Visionary H. P. Lovecraft in His Time. *Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001): 10.

² Weinstock, J. A. "Lovecraft's Things: Sinister Souvenirs from Other Worlds". In *The Age of Lovecraft*. Ed. Sederholm, C. H., Weinstock, J. A. Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2016, 62-78.

³ Givens, Ron. "Lexicon. (Gazette) (meaning of Miscegenation) (Definition) (Brief Article)." *American History* 47, no. 3 (2012): 13.

about racial “interbreeding.” However, critical engagement with this work is still a new field of study, one that is growing larger every day.

The History of Critical Analysis of Lovecraft

Critical analysis of H.P. Lovecraft’s work is relatively new, despite most the author’s work being published in the early 20th century. Searches through databases revealed most critical studies existing within the last ten years. One of the major scholars of Lovecraft’s literature and life is S.T. Joshi.

In his book *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism*, Joshi comments that the relative lack of critical literature on Lovecraft may be explained by the writer’s position as a fixture in weird fiction and pulp magazines – both which, until recently, were not considered legitimate literature⁴. Horror, science fiction, and fantasy up until the 1980s were very much cult phenomena. Joshi notes that the Lovecraftian cult did exist in the 1950s with pulps purely dedicated to Lovecraft and his literature, but overall, biographical and critical work was only being done by close colleagues of Lovecraft⁵. Mainstream and peer-reviewed critical literature was hard to come by. Joshi attributes critical works to amateur fan magazines throughout the mid-20th century and into today, including two lovingly-named publications – the Order of Dagon and the Necronomicon.⁶ However, Joshi rarely engages with the more unsavory realities of Lovecraft’s fiction. In his 2012 biography of the author *Nightmare Countries*, Joshi does mention Lovecraft’s racism as coinciding specifically with his work. A key moment in Lovecraft’s life was in 1925 when he moved to New York, an experience that would leave the man bitter. Joshi suggests that it was because Lovecraft, “resented the fact that so many of these immigrants were succeeding in their work, whereas he, an Anglo-Saxon of good stock, was in the depths of poverty.”⁷ But Joshi failed

⁴ Joshi, and Joshi, S. T. *H. P. Lovecraft, Four Decades of Criticism*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980): 20.

⁵ Joshi, pg. 23.

⁶ Joshi, pg. 25.

⁷ Joshi, S.T. *H. P. Lovecraft: Nightmare Countries*. (Metro Books, 2012): 91.

to critically analyze the nature behind the racism, rather reporting on Lovecraft's own words and the words of others.

Eugenics and Race

According to *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, eugenics encompasses “the idea that one can improve the human race by careful selection of those who mate and produce offspring”, but the theory has been largely debunked due to its popularity within the Nazi regime⁸. The theme of eugenics permeated the scientific discourse throughout the early 20th century, and as an avid follower of scientific progress, Lovecraft was exposed to the ideologies surrounding this movement. Early Lovecraftian scholars address the influence of eugenics and nativism within Lovecraft's fiction, drawing light to Lovecraft's often overt racism.

Bennett Lovett-Graff in his 1997 article explained that in Lovecraft's lifetime, August Weismann had proposed the germ-plasm theory, dictating that evolutionary change could only occur at the plasmic level.⁹ More importantly, this meant that any genetic traits that occurred within an individual, say their economic status or color of their skin, could never be changed. Lovecraft more than aligned with these beliefs, obsessively checking his family tree for “lesser” genetic stock. To his relief, he turned out to be firmly Anglo-Saxon, but his paranoia would influence his works – particularly, as Lovett-Graff suggested, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.¹⁰ Lovecraft shares many similarities with the narrator of *Shadow* – a man searching for his heritage in the fictional town of Arkham. However, unlike Lovecraft's ease at being white from the roots, the narrator discovers that he has the ‘Innsmouth Look’ – a genetic mutation that turns one into a monster. These grotesque beings, as described by Lovecraft, are born from

⁸ "Eugenics.(Definition)." *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 3rd Ed. (2002).

⁹ Lovett-Graff, Bennett. "Shadows over Lovecraft: Reactionary Fantasy and Immigrant Eugenics." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 38, no. 3 (1997): 176.

¹⁰ Lovett-Graff, pg. 177-178.

“unnatural” couplings of New England sailors and ports from all over the world, namely Africa and Asia¹¹. Further, it is revealed that the Insmouth Islanders engage in interbreeding with the ‘Deep Ones’, a race of monsters they worship. The very description of these people and their proclivities, Lovett-Graff asserts, reflect Lovecraft’s distaste and fear of immigrants and other races that he deems inferior to the American Anglo-Saxon¹². The vivid, gut-wrenching descriptions of both the Insmouth residents and the Deep Ones represent an Other coded immediately as evil, marked by racial coupling. Lovett-Graff offers that Lovecraft was in fact fascinated with the inbred creations – the narrator attempts to join the Deep Ones through his connection with his heredity.¹³ The assertion suggests that Lovecraft wanted to align with the Other, but earlier analysis shows a different story. However, Lovecraft’s fascination with genetics is clear through *Shadow*, and this article marks one of the first attempts to examine Lovecraft’s relationship with race and American nativism through the pseudoscience of eugenics.

This linkage was further explored by Brooks Hefner in 2014 with his comparison of Lovecraft and another pulp fiction author, Dashell Hammett, that reflect the Anglo-Saxon pseudoscience of the time. While the analysis focuses primarily on Hammett’s 1928 serial *The Dain Curse*, Lovecraft and Hammett ran in the same literary circles. Hefner coins the term “eugenic epistemology” to describe the way American nativist writers use taxonomic descriptions of peoples to provide character development.¹⁴ Instead of actual personality identifiers, this method bases a person’s entire character on the color of their skin, shape of their body, etc. For Lovecraft, this meant that the epitome of good was those bodies of Anglo-Saxon, able-bodied men. These weird tales formed at a pinnacle moment in nativist history – the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 which restricted immigration from

¹¹ Lovett-Graff, pg. 181.

¹² Lovett-Graff, pg. 182.

¹³ Lovett-Graff, pg. 187.

¹⁴ Hefner, Brooks "Weird Investigations and Nativist Semiotics in H. P. Lovecraft and Dashiell Hammett." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 60, no. 4 (2014): 652.

Southern and Eastern Europe. Combined with the eugenics movement, the Act sparked anti-immigrant ideologies throughout the country, which only supported Lovecraft's position.¹⁵ Hefner identifies tropes like those found in Frye's genotypic horror – an Anglo-Saxon academic protagonist dealing with the racially and genetically different, Othered antagonist.¹⁶ Hefner's study also builds on a foundation for defining and critiquing Lovecraft's influence through popular culture. Through genotypic horror and the eugenic epistemology, Lovecraft crafted a model for weird horror writers to explore stories of genetic degradation¹⁷.

Historical nativism continues to be a framework for analyzing Lovecraft's work. From his article in 2015, Sophus Reinert asserts that Lovecraftian horror draws fear from economic turmoil surrounding the Great Depression.¹⁸ Clearly, Lovecraft capitalized on racial fears of the Anglo-Saxon population, reflecting those fears of his own. Moving from the micro to the macro, Reinert identified a correlation between Lovecraft's genotypic writing with the work of Norwegian eugenicist Jon Alfred Mjøen, a man who solidified the fantasy of the Nordic race within America. This fantasy posited that only a genetically united Norway would lead to a politically united Norway, ensuring that the economic interests of the country belonged to the 'biologically superior race'. Only true Norwegians should be allowed to reproduce and thus maintain political power and nationalism through similar genetics¹⁹. This can be linked to a fear of race born from the fear of losing economic privilege – something incredibly poignant in the Great Depression. Reinert also identified a eugenicist fear of 'atavism' – the phenomena of the reappearance of traits in an organism that are present in the organism's ancestors²⁰. The existence

¹⁵ Hefner, pg. 654.

¹⁶ Hefner, pg. 657.

¹⁷ Hefner, pg. 657.

¹⁸ Reinert, Sophus A. "The Economy of Fear: H. P. Lovecraft on Eugenics, Economics and the Great Depression." *Horror Studies* 6, no. 2 (2015): 255-82.

¹⁹ Reinert, pg. 261.

²⁰ Adams, J. & Shaw, K. "Atavism: embryology, development and evolution." *Nature Education* 1, no. 1 (2008): 131.

of these ancestral memories appeared throughout Lovecraft's work, including "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" and "The Rats in the Walls."

In 2004, genre theorist Mitch Frye formed a prototypical analysis of Lovecraft's corpus, aligning with Lovecraft's eugenicist ideals. Frye asserts a new genre of horror was launched by Lovecraft – the genotypic horror, or the exploitation of genetic fears. The genotypic horror explores the struggle between an individual and their own genes; this also makes any being that is genetically different from the protagonist a threat, namely that of the racial Other.²¹ Frye wishes to start at the micro with his analysis of "The Rats in the Walls" (1924), a story that details the corruption of a familial genetic line. Genotypic horror in "Rats," Frye posits, lies in the degradation of the human body and genome through past ancestral wrongs – namely cannibalism and devotion to the monster, Nyarlathotep.²² However, this kind of genotypic horror is in its early stages, interacting specifically with a single individual and their ancestors. When does this begin to blend with the ideologies behind miscegenation? Frye identifies two stories that delve into themes of forbidden couplings between monster and human – "Arthur Jermyn" and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth".²³ Beginning with the exploration of the protagonist's past, much like the other stories, "Arthur Jermyn" explicitly details the marriage of an Anglo-Saxon man and "the queen of [...] half-ape, half-human missing links [from Africa]." This revelation leads to the title character's suicide due to his "malformed" features, someone, Lovecraft asserts, who would rather die than continue existence with genetic abnormalities.²⁴ Frye also notes Lovecraft's creation of a racial hierarchy through his language – referring to Jermyn's wife as a "jungle hybrid." This language use, drawn from eugenic pseudoscience, demonstrates Lovecraft's mental division between people of color

²¹ Frye, Mitch. "The Refinement of 'Crude Allegory': Eugenic Themes and Genotypic Horror in the Weird Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 17, no. 3 [67] (2006): 239-240.

²² Frye, pg. 242-244.

²³ Frye, pg. 244.

²⁴ Frye, pg. 245.

and white people, in order to justify disgust towards race as a natural occurrence.²⁵ Interestingly, Frye stresses at the end that his work is not a condemnation of Lovecraft's stories – rather, critics must remain neutral towards Lovecraft to really examine the political and social impact surrounding his fiction.²⁶ Is this attainable? Can one completely remain neutral when examining works that struggle with potentially eugenicist ideology?

Newer scholars have complicated these analyses, re-interpreting past assertions. “The Shadow over Innsmouth,” one of the prototypical stories of the Lovecraft canon, is a favorite of scholars, who often study it through this genotypic horror lens. Tracy Bealer further explores the relationship between “Shadow” and the modernist horror stories’ ambivalence towards those considered ‘Other’ in her 2011 essay²⁷. With the genetic connection between the Islanders and the narrator, the fear of the racial Other is overthrown by making the narrator an Other. While this is a horrific revelation, the narrator does not commit suicide like “Arthur Jermyn”; the narrator accepts his heritage. Bealer argues that this does show empathy towards the otherness.²⁸ While there are complications in defining an individual as wholly racist or not, Lovecraft explicitly does use racist language and themes. These scholars, and many others, fight with whether to condemn Lovecraft's work or to brush off the more racist elements. Bealer argues that, with her analysis of “Shadow”, “modernist genre fiction might be a place to discover, even in the canonical author, an empathetic and progressive strain that comprises a counternarrative to nostalgic despair and detached irony”²⁹. On the other end of the spectrum, writers like Lovett-Graff approach

²⁵ Frye, pg. 247.

²⁶ Frye, pg. 252.

²⁷ Bealer, Tracy. “‘The Innsmouth Look’: H. P. Lovecraft's Ambivalent Modernism.” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 6, no. 14 (2011): 44.

²⁸ Bealer, pg. 3.

²⁹ Bealer, pg. 4.

fiction like “Shadow” and assert “[Lovecraft’s] need to hate [immigrants] because of the contemporary pressure to exempt himself from the degenerative sexuality they represented”³⁰.

Scholars, having defined Lovecraft in genre and in historical analysis, also attempt to position Lovecraft within his time. David Simmons attempts to align Lovecraft within greater Gothic literature and the literature’s penchant to create racialized abjection. Drawing from Anne Williams, Simmons identifies Lovecraft’s literature as a portrayal of the self versus the abject horrors that threaten a protagonist’s identity³¹. He also comes across a more complicated reading of Lovecraft, one that recognizes Lovecraft’s condemnation and, yet also, fascination for non-Western peoples. Though Lovecraftian protagonists often encounter non-Western Others, they rarely attempt to colonize or dominate them; rather, the protagonists find connection with their antagonists, as seen in “Shadow”³².

Curiously, these genre defining analyses are occurring relatively late for an author – almost 70 years posthumously. A larger question remains – why now? Why has Lovecraft gained status in popular culture in the last 30 years? Lovecraft, whether admired or loathed, is a staple in contemporary popular culture. As literary critiques offer a background to Lovecraft’s character and work, not much work engages with the filmic adaptations of Lovecraft’s work. These filmic adaptations, while separated from the text, may also reflect similar themes of miscegenation and justification of racism through eugenic pseudoscience. If that is true, one must examine the cultural impact of Lovecraftian fiction as a whole – both within cult and in more mainstream media. Lovecraft’s influence on such directors as Guillermo del Toro and John Carpenter may, in fact, also influence the racial discourse surrounding horror. The following seeks to examine select filmic adaptations to determine if those themes present in Lovecraft’s

³⁰ Lovett-Graff, pg. 189.

³¹ Simmons, pg. 15.

³² Simmons, pg. 19.

literature are reflected and, if so, to understand their cultural impact. This analysis will reveal how and to what extent Lovecraft's work can be separated from the eugenicist ideologies present within it.

The Trouble with Adaptation

First, we must define adaptation. Dudley Andrew explains that adaptation is “the matching of the cinematic sign system to a prior achievement in some other system [...] in a strong sense adaptation is the appropriation of meaning from a prior text.”³³ Put simply, it's the representation of a text in one medium transferred to another – in this case, novel or short story to film. That complicates the relationship between the two texts. McFarlane identifies the distinction between text and film as “the verbal sign, with its low iconicity and high symbolic function, works conceptually, whereas the cinematic sign with its high iconicity and uncertain symbolic function, works directly, sensuously, perceptually.”³⁴ There are also two distinct codes between the two texts – one dictated by vocabulary and the other through learned film “code,” namely the employment of different film styles to create meaning³⁵. The difficulty lies in translating one to another without losing the fidelity of the main story, but perhaps making a film that is overly “accurate” goes against the purpose of an adaptation. McFarlane suggests that “[film adaptation's] aim is to offer a perceptual experience that corresponds with one arrived at conceptually”, invoking the spirit, so to say, of a text.³⁶ It's quite impossible to include every word and description in a novel onto the screen with the industrial constraints of Hollywood, independent or studio. Film adaptations also struggle to be truly “faithful” to the original text through the collaborative power of the film medium; one must consider the artistic decisions of the director, producer, actor, etc. while also considering the historical and industrial contexts of the time of

³³ Andrew, Dudley, Syndy M. Conger and Janet R. Welsh, “The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory”, *Narrative Strategies*, (Western Illinois University Press, 1980): 9.

³⁴ McFarlane, pg. 26-27.

³⁵ McFarlane, pg. 28.

³⁶ McFarlane, Brian, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996): 21.

the adaptation's creation and release. McFarlane's solution to these issues is called the 'adaptation proper', a mix of elements that transfer easily between text and visuals and those which do not.³⁷ He distinguishes this difference as that between narrative (easily transferred) and enunciation (not easily transferred), and the adaptation proper must navigate between these two elements to create a 'faithful' adaptation.³⁸ Essence or feel gained from the enunciation of a text seems just as valuable as direct transfer, particularly when a direct transfer is challenging.

Next, we must determine the criteria for adapting Lovecraft's work onto the silver screen. H.P. Lovecraft's work, pervasive as it may be, is not easily adaptable material. It is not that filmmakers are not interested in the work. In his book *Danse Macabre*, horror writer Stephen King explained that Lovecraft's tales "make us feel the size of the universe we hang suspended in and suggest shadowy forces that could destroy us all if they so much as grunted in their sleep."³⁹ However, adapting his writing style into concrete visuals proves difficult for even the most abstract filmmaker. In Julian Petley's essay "The unfilmable? H.P. Lovecraft and Cinema", he identifies a rather long, complex list of reasons why Lovecraftian adaptations can't perfectly match their literary sources. Lovecraft's tales, in Petley's analysis, are:

"short on 'characters' (especially female ones) and 'action' as conventionally understood, no sex (except occasionally – and only implied – in the back-story, and then between degraded humans and unspeakable monstrosities), heavy on description, sometimes only a few pages in length,

³⁷ McFarlane, pg. 20.

³⁸ McFarlane, pg. 23.

³⁹ King, Stephen, *Stephen King's Danse Macabre*. 1st ed. (New York: Everest House, 1981): 80.

underpinned by a complex and not always coherent mythos, and informed by a philosophy of the bleakest pessimism [...]”⁴⁰

Returning to McFarlane’s adaptation proper, Lovecraft’s work is not so easily transferred, but filmmakers can rely on an enunciation of the material to try and connect the two media. Therefore, it proves difficult to narrow down the criteria for an ‘accurate’ Lovecraft adaptation. One must make a distinction between a film that is an ‘adaptation’ versus a film that is Lovecraftian in nature or form, isolating the transferable narrative from the more abstract essence. Nonetheless, there’s popular contention over which films are true ‘Lovecraftian’ pieces depending on the fidelity to the original story. In a *Cineaste* interview S.T. Joshi, the Lovecraft historian, asserted “the early film adaptations suffered from lack of budget, but mainly because screenwriters didn’t get Lovecraft.”⁴¹ So how does one get Lovecraft? Christopher Sharrett, much like Joshi, asserts that “the crucial element of Lovecraft’s horror is his theory of ‘cosmicism’. [...] All of his stories convey the idea that a humancentric stance is absurd, with the human subject desperately alone at the edge of the abyss.”⁴² Lovecraftian stories aren’t necessarily about their protagonists – they’re about the pantheon of cosmic ‘gods’. But how can that be actualized within the film frame? Filmmakers cannot seem to conform to the standards of fidelity demanded by the Lovecraftian fanbase. This returns once more to McFarlane’s analysis of film adaptation; no film adaptation can be perfectly transferred from the written text. Therefore, it is not useful to rely solely on the fidelity of the adaptation, despite fanbase concerns.

⁴⁰ Petley, Julian, Richard J. Hand, and Jay McRoy, “The unfilmable? H.P. Lovecraft and the Cinema”, *Monstrous Adaptations: Generic and Thematic Mutations in Horror Film*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2007): 43.

⁴¹ Sharrett, Christopher, "Lovecraft Today: An Interview with S. T. Joshi." *Cineaste* 41, no. 1 (2015): 27.

⁴² Sharrett, Christopher. "The Haunter of the Dark: H. P. Lovecraft and Modern Horror Cinema." *Cineaste* 41, no. 1 (2015): 23.

In choosing the films for analysis, I considered what, based on these texts, would be Lovecraftian enough. I was also interested in the how filmmakers navigate and negotiate Lovecraft's racism in their representations. These themes may be understated or enhanced depending on the context of the film. Therefore, I judged the films using the following criteria: 1) there must be a clear written text that the film either adapts or emulates, 2) the original text must be one that deals with issues of eugenics or miscegenation, whether implicitly or explicitly, and 3) the film adaptation must have made it to some form of exhibition (script attempts or rumors do not count). While there may be some contention over the film's place in Lovecraft canon, these films are undoubtedly Lovecraftian. My analysis will focus on how closely the film resembles its initial story (i.e. what is transferred and what is just Lovecraft-esque), whether it incorporates themes of miscegenation or genotypic horror, and the consequences for the decisions made in the film process. I will be comparing written text to adaptation based on both the plot and overall story arc, as well as recognizable Lovecraftian elements of setting, sacred items, or characters. These elements include, but are not limited to: Arkham, Massachusetts (or New England more broadly); the Necronomicon, a spell book which first appeared in the 1924 short story "The Hound" and written by Abdul Alhazred; Miskatonic University; and any of Lovecraft's Elder Gods of the Cthulhu Mythos, including Nyarlathotep, Yog-Sothoth, and Cthulhu himself. If we are to align ourselves with Sharrett and Joshi's critiques of Lovecraft adaptations, there must be some mention of these cosmic beings. I will also incorporate Petley's list of challenges of Lovecraft canon and how a film may get around these issues.

It is also important to note that of all the films, only those with loose connections with Lovecraft's corpus were produced and distributed by major Hollywood studios – namely, *Alien* (1979) distributed by 20th Century Fox and *The Thing* (1982) distributed by Universal. The rest were produced and distributed by independents. Stuart Gordon in an interview with the Austin Chronicle "encouraged

other filmmakers to look at the Lovecraft back catalogue, all of which is out of copyright.”⁴³ This allows films to be cheaply made, perfect for the likes of independent and exploitation horror filmmakers. However, while some films have garnered cult status, these films didn’t have mainstream success at their release.

American International Pictures and Lovecraft

American International Pictures (AIP), founded in 1954, specialized in quickly and cheaply produced exploitation double features, aimed at the young drive-in audience. Exploitation is not a genre on its own, rather a means of production that capitalizes on genre films, like horror, and taboo topics, like sex and violence, to make targeted at the growing adolescent male audience throughout the 1950s.⁴⁴ However, as studios caught the exploitation craze, AIP needed to differentiate from the market. Inspired by Hammer Film Productions, AIP producer-director Roger Corman to create longer, bigger-budget, color spectacle films to counter the other drive-in distributors. Corman chose to adapt Edgar Allen Poe’s classic poems and short stories featuring Vincent Price.⁴⁵ Misattributed as Poe, but nonetheless credited, Lovecraft made his debut on-screen in 1963 with the Corman-directed film *The Haunted Palace*.⁴⁶ Though considered part of AIP’s Poe films, the film is loosely based on Lovecraft’s short story *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. After inheriting a castle in the foggy New England town of Arkham, protagonist Charles Dexter Ward learns about the dark history of his ancestor Joseph Curwen, a wizard who kidnapped women in the town and sacrificed them to ancient gods from below. Ward, played by Vincent Price, is possessed by his evil ancestor and forced to continue Curwen’s plan to take over the

⁴³ Whittaker, Richard. “Fantastic Fest: ‘From Beyond’,” *The Austin Chronicle*, (2010).

⁴⁴ Roche, David. “Exploiting Exploitation Cinema: an Introduction,” *Transatlantica*, 2 (2015): 1.

⁴⁵ Benschoff, Harry M. "The Gothic Revival (1957–1974)." *In A Companion to the Horror Film*, (Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014): 273-91.

⁴⁶ Vincent Price and Lon Chaney Jr. *The Haunted Palace*. Directed by Roger Corman. (Los Angeles: American International Pictures, 1963): DVD.

world, one monster at a time. A 1963 review in *Boxoffice* praised *The Haunted Palace*: “the screenplay by Charles Beaumont is filled with terror, black magic and macabre events, beautifully photographed in Panavision and Pathecolor, and acted in fine style by [Vincent] Price, Debra Paget, and Lon Chaney.”⁴⁷ The movie is praised today for being the first of Lovecraft’s canon to be realized onscreen. In Migliore and Stryzik’s book *Lurker in the Lobby*, they herald *The Haunted Palace* as “a seminal film for Lovecraft lovers.”⁴⁸

Chronologically, it’s the closest film to the time of Lovecraft’s writing, but it also marks the tradition of shaky fidelity between written word and screen. The original story is written as the diary of Charles Dexter Ward’s family doctor, Dr. Willett, investigating the escape of the titular patient from a mental institution. The film instead focuses the perspective of Ward and the events preceding the original. The film is less about the consequences of horrific events, rather the events themselves. This gave Corman more artistic freedom with the source material, adjusting it to fit a gothic narrative reminiscent of Poe and emphasizing elements that were downplayed in the original story. AIP’s exploitation filmmaking limited Lovecraft’s narrative to fit a niche, namely the demand for sex and violence. By aligning Lovecraft with Poe and gothic horror, AIP bypasses the more overt sexuality and violence present in other films at the time, but the shock value associated with exploitation cinema is still present. The film not only features Lovecraft’s genotypic horror as described by Mitch Frye through the struggle of control between Curwen and Ward, but also delves into the eugenicist idea of ‘atavism’ as identified by Reinert.⁴⁹ The film’s conflict is centered around Ward’s fear of his own genetics and reverting to a less evolved version of himself, as expressed by Curwen. The film adaptation also features the actual moment of consummation between human and monster Other that normally exists in

⁴⁷ "FEATURE REVIEWS: The Haunted Palace." *Boxoffice* (Archive: 1920-2000) 83, no. 19 (1963): A11, A12.

⁴⁸ Migliore, Andrew, and John Stryzik. “The Haunted Palace” *The Lurker in the Lobby: A Guide to the Cinema of H.P. Lovecraft*. (Night Shade Books, 2006): 63.

⁴⁹ Frye, pg. 242-244 and Reinert, pg. 261.

expositional description within Lovecraft's stories. AIP stripped Lovecraft's stories of elements that Petley describes as being difficult to portray on screen, namely the lack of action, sex, and female characters, and redefined Lovecraft's horror through the silver screen.⁵⁰ Through the kidnapping of white women in the village and the hybrid 'monsters' that roam the streets, *The Haunted Palace* inflates issues of miscegenation to the point of the sensationalism that AIP and Roger Corman were known for throughout the 1960s, adjusting Lovecraft to fit exploitation production.

The conflict of the film is two-fold: Ward must grapple with both genetically different Others through the deformed people of Arkham and the degradation of his own genetics through possession by Curwen. The film begins at an unknown date in Arkham, Massachusetts, but the past and the present are conflated to exist within a single space. Frances Auld explains that in *The Haunted Palace*, "time is not so much ruptured as indefinable in any linear way. Characters in [*The Haunted Palace*] are enacting cycles that fuse identities and negate a static knowable individual at a recognizable point in a set story"⁵¹. This makes it far easier to connect the ancient Curwen and the recent Ward as the same person, beyond the use of Vincent Price in both time periods. The film also reuses other characters like Dr. Willett and Ezra Weeden in both time periods, using the same actors in slightly different costumes. The same set is used, as if nothing has changed after generations past. In order to delineate between past and present, *The Haunted Palace* begins with Curwen. After kidnapping a young woman at the start of the film, Curwen's estate is stormed by the villagers, demanding penance for his black magic. They strap him to a stake, and in his final words, Curwen exclaims, "As surely as the village of Arkham has risen up against me, so shall I rise up from the dead against the village of Arkham [...] all of you and your children and your children's children shall have just cause to regret the actions of this night."⁵² Curwen

⁵⁰ Petley, pg. 43.

⁵¹ Auld, Frances. "Issues of Problematic Identity in *The Terror* (1963) and *The Haunted Palace* (1963)." *Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no. 5 (2008): 747-61.

⁵² *The Haunted Palace*.

intends to not only target those who wronged him, but their genetic descendants as well, putting entire family lines at risk. This threat reflects Reinert's notion of atavism, or the reappearance of traits from an ancestor. The actions of the Arkham villagers would return to haunt their descendants, and this is expressed through the genetic degradation of some of the villagers and their families. While certain characters are reprised from Curwen's time, Arkham is also home to deformed monsters. In Ward's time, Ward and his wife, Ann, encounter these creatures while trying to prepare Curwen's castle for sale. The creatures have flesh covering their eyes, walking towards the couple in shambling steps. The music intensifies, aligning these deformed people as monsters, closing in on the Ward couple. In response to a shocked Ward couple, Dr. Willet later describes these beings – "They were born mutated. You see, Mrs. Ward, it takes an extraordinary combination of elements to form a normal person. In their case, the combination was wrong. [...] That's how they explained the mutated births, unsuccessful experiments passed on from generation to generation, carried in the blood."⁵³ Willet sets up a dynamic that carries through Lovecraft but becomes more explicit in *The Haunted Palace*; normal (white) people are good and abnormal (anything else) people are genetically inferior. Not only are these children subject to the curse enacted on their ancestors, but they are aligned with monsters due to their different blood. Blood as a marker of genetic difference is not a new concept in the United States. When determining the race of an individual, the United States historically used a principle called "hypodescent" or the "one drop of blood" rule. This can be defined as "anyone with a visually discernable trace of African, or what used to be called 'Negro', ancestry is, simply black", and while not in any legal precedent today, it erases the identities of mixed-race people.⁵⁴ For the mutated people of Arkham, this rule would suggest that despite having the appearance their white family members, they are still classified as genetically different.

⁵³ *The Haunted Palace*.

⁵⁴ Hollinger, David A. "The One Drop Rule & the One Hate Rule." *Daedalus* 134, no. 1 (2005): 18.

The second indicator of genotypic horror lies in the ancestral struggle for the body of Charles Dexter Ward, a mainstay of both the film and the story. In Ward's case, the reappearance of traits is the literal possession by his ancestor Curwen. In Lovecraft's stories, his fear of atavism is the fear of regressing on the evolutionary path.⁵⁵ For Lovecraft, this was a racial issue, particularly the fear of a 'lesser being' overtaking a 'higher being'. Reinert identifies this fear, explaining that "in addition to the possibility that a degenerate race might corrupt the Teutonic one, there was the possibility that the latter itself, deep down in its animal past, carried the seeds of its own devolution."⁵⁶ This is explicitly felt as Ward fears the erasure of his own identity to that of Curwen, a less evolved man. Curwen is identified as degenerate through his connection with black magic and superstition, reminiscent of a less-knowledgeable past. Ward, however, denounces the superstitions of the villagers. When the Wards meet the locals, the locals warn them of the curse that plagues the town. However, Ward brushes it off, explaining, "I'm sorry, sir, but we don't happen to believe in the supernatural," referring to the villagers as "quaint."⁵⁷ Ward appears better educated; a more evolved version of the mystical Curwen seen in the beginning. The villagers are the first to notice Ward's connection with Curwen; Willett asserts that "I'll admit there's a strong resemblance [between Curwen and Ward], but that's a matter of heredity, not magic."⁵⁸ Already, the two are interconnected, despite the time difference. As the film progresses, Ward begins to lose his identity, possessed by Curwen. Ann notices that Ward is getting sick, acting erratically and distinctly not like himself. After Ann has gone to bed, Curwen finally speaks to Ward, exclaiming, "Your blood is my blood, your mind is my mind... your body, my body."⁵⁹ The ancestor overtakes the descendent, using his genetic markers to possess both mind and body in a literal expression of atavism.

⁵⁵ Reinart, pg. 264-265.

⁵⁶ Reinert, pg. 267.

⁵⁷ *The Haunted Palace*.

⁵⁸ *The Haunted Palace*.

⁵⁹ *The Haunted Palace*.

It's important to note that the genetically degraded Other, as expressed through the mutated children and Curwen, are all white. They are not the racialized Other, as marked by Lovecraft in many of his short stories. However, both the children and Curwen are genetically different than the white protagonist, aligning them nonetheless with the Other through both appearance and act. While Curwen looks identical to Ward, Curwen's use of black magic and his kidnapping of white women in the village work to Other him from the more civilized Ward. The genetic ancestry is tainted by these actions. This is a theme throughout Lovecraft's fiction. In "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", Lovecraft describes in a few sentences the origins of the "Innsmouth Look", tracing back the roots to unnatural couplings between the women of Asia and Africa and Anglo-Saxon sailors as well as the blood sacrifices committed by the people of Innsmouth to satiate their god.⁶⁰ Both the tainting of the blood through interracial breeding and through insidious actions work to create the genetically inferior descendants, and that is evident throughout *The Haunted Palace*.

In fact, suggestions of miscegenation in *The Haunted Palace* are far more explicit than in Lovecraftian literature. The actual act of racial interbreeding isn't in the forefront of the stories, rather the consequences of this genetic 'soiling'. However, in *The Haunted Palace*, the interbreeding between a white woman and ancient god is the driving goal of antagonist Curwen and his men. In the beginning of the film, Curwen is condemned not only for his use of black magic, but the kidnapping of a young woman in white. She is drawn to Curwen's estate in a trance, and then led to a sacrificial rig beneath the castle. She is restrained with her legs spread over a large pit, as Curwen chants from the Necronomicon in order to raise an Ancient One. With her legs spread over the pit, it is implied that the Ancient One would engage sexually with the woman. Assuming the coding from Lovecraft's stories, the Ancient One is the perceived Other, the opposite to the white villagers within Arkham. The coupling between

⁶⁰ Lovett-Graff, pg. 181.

monster and woman is meant to create superhumans, as expositied by Dr. Willet to Charles Dexter Ward in the film. Willet explains that, “[The people of Arkham] claimed that Joseph Curwen was trying to mate those beings with humans to create a new race through which the gods could regain their control.”⁶¹ None of this is done consensually. The Fitch girl at the beginning is coerced through a trance created by Curwen and his mistress, leaving her free to suggestion and submissive to Curwen’s demands. The rape of the white woman and subsequent impregnation by an ancient being is tied to the creation of genetically abject creatures, namely the deformed children of Arkham. Later, when Anne Ward tries to stop Curwen, she is kidnapped and spread over the same rig. At last, the audience finally sees the grotesque monster that lives beneath the castle. The monster bears a humanoid face with multiple arms, and its skin takes on a strange green in the smoke of the pit. When Willett asks Curwen what he’s doing to Ann, Curwen states that he is “honoring her” by allowing her to be raped by the monster beneath the castle.⁶² Although she does escape with her life, the monster cannot remain alive to continue impregnating women in Arkham. Willett and Ann knock over one of Curwen’s sacrificial torches and set fire to the castle. Not only does the film show us the attempted rape of two women, but the only catharsis is the complete destruction of the Othered being. These tropes fit into the industrial nature of the exploitation film, though muted in *The Haunted Palace*, by featuring the taboo. In fact, according to analysis of rape in film by Deveryle James, “many rape films speak to and understand [...] ‘sadistic nature’ and capitalize on it, realizing that this appetite for cruelty, mixed with desire as universal appeal to many spectators”⁶³. Part of the pleasure for the male spectator is to engage with sexual taboos without the consequences, something exploitation film can readily use to make a profit.

⁶¹ *The Haunted Palace*.

⁶² *The Haunted Palace*.

⁶³ James, Deveryle. *A Zoo of Lusts ... a Harem of Fondled Hatreds: a Historical Interrogation of Sexual Violence against Women in Film*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011): 17.

The Haunted Palace, while a more gothic undertaking of Lovecraft, doesn't shy away from the eugenics featured in Lovecraft's canon. Events implied in the stories are placed in the forefront of the adaptation, focusing on both the consequences of miscegenation and the fear of attempted sexual assault and impregnation. This paints the genetic Other as the villain, one that must be destroyed at all costs. The audience is aligned with the white, able-bodied, human protagonists, and little attention is given to the genetic Other beyond demonization. However, the film is rather tame compared to AIP's second foray into Lovecraft.

In 1970, AIP took on their first and last H.P. Lovecraft solo production, *The Dunwich Horror*, produced by Roger Corman and directed by Daniel Haller.⁶⁴ This was the first instance of a direct adaptation of Lovecraft's work, as well as the first time that a Lovecraft film received top billing.⁶⁵ AIP was also riding the newly-created ratings system, created by the MPAA in 1968 as an alternative to the Production Code in order to avoid government censorship and support parental concerns about, what they deemed, explicit filmmaking.⁶⁶ Now, exhibitors would show more risqué films, appealing to AIP's exploitation production methods. Whereas *The Haunted Palace* had to adhere to a (then faltering) Production Code, *The Dunwich Horror*, rated R, could show more titillating content without the fear of losing exhibition venues, drawing in more audiences. *The Dunwich Horror* maintained AIP's exploitation production formula, integrating both sex and violence to decent reviews. The Independent Film Journal described *Dunwich* as "Gothic goings-on amidst the California coastline, which fluff its chances at a good scare but is fun just because it does so."⁶⁷ The film follows Dr. Henry Armitage, a mainstay character in the Lovecraftian mythos, who must track down and return the ancient book, the

⁶⁴ Sandra Dee and Dean Stockwell. *The Dunwich Horror*. Directed by Daniel Haller. (Los Angeles: American International Pictures, 1970): DVD.

⁶⁵ Migliore, Andrew, and John Strysik, 55.

⁶⁶ Doherty, Thomas. "Sex, Violence, and Adult Themes: The MPAA and the Birth of the Film Ratings System." *Cineaste* Xlii, no. 4 (2017): 15.

⁶⁷ "Buying & Booking Guide: Current Film Reviews - THE DUNWICH HORROR." *The Independent Film Journal, Archive: 1937-1979* 65, no. 4 (1970), 1180.

Necronomicon, stolen by Wilbur Whatley, a Dunwich native and mysterious pagan, who wishes to use the book to kidnap, seduce, and sacrifice Nancy Wagner, as played by Sandra Dee. The story is a relatively faithful adaptation, including main characters, main objects of the Lovecraftian mythos, and the consequences of an unnatural coupling between monster and woman. However, with the added character of Nancy Wagner, the film diverts towards a similar narrative as *The Haunted Palace*. The main goal of antagonist Whatley is to sacrifice a white woman to the god Yog-Sothoth in order to breed a hybrid monster to allow the Old Ones to once again walk the Earth, bringing the end of times. *The Dunwich Horror* employs many of the same tropes used in *The Haunted Palace*, including fears of racial mixing and rape, though far more explicit than its predecessor. While the original story suggests a relationship between Wilbur's mother and Yog-Sothoth, there is nothing explicit in the story, rather, once again, only the consequences. *The Dunwich Horror* sensationalizes the consequences of and the actual event of interbreeding through the portrayal of the two Whatley brothers, as well as explicit scenes of Nancy being sacrificed and raped by Whatley as both a source of horror and eroticism.

Both Whatley brothers are coded as the Other in the *Dunwich Horror*, setting them opposite the white protagonists, Armitage and Wagner. This is done not through racial identity, but rather genetic difference and the participation in cult worship. The town of Dunwich isolates the Whatleys for engaging in pagan rituals, first seen in the opening credits as Wilbur Whatley's pregnant mother writhes on a bed as a man chants in an unknown language. The ritual, as it is later implied, ended with Lavinia, Wilbur's mother, having two illegitimate children with the god, Yog-Sothoth. The unnatural birth drove her to a psychiatric hospital, leaving Wilbur to leave on the outskirts of town with his grandfather. These implied genetic differences question Wilbur's place within Dunwich and among humans. The film creates this divide more explicitly with delves the representation of Wilbur's twin brother, who is never actually seen on screen. Instead, the audience is given the creature's perspective, and bright lights flash

over the screen as he wreaks havoc on Dunwich. Unlike Wilbur who has the appearance of a human, the twin brother is implied to have genetic similarities with Yog-Sothoth. In one of the final moments, Armitage explains the nature of the twin: “it was caught between this world and another. Wilbur’s twin took after the father.”⁶⁸ Genetically separated from the protagonists, the Whatleys are aligned more closely with Yog-Sothoth, and thus, the antagonists. The Whatleys’ ritual is passed down between the men of the family, starting with Wilbur’s great, great grandfather, Oliver Whatley. Wilbur derisively mentions the ritual to Nancy, explaining that the people of Dunwich lynched Oliver after claiming Oliver had sacrificed a young girl to his gods. This is the same ritual implied at the start of the film with Lavinia, and later perpetuated by Wilbur. The repetition between the implied rituals of Oliver and the rituals perpetrated by Wilbur suggests a genetic carryover, something the Whatley men are destined to complete. The ritual itself Others them from the people of the village, but the continued ritual throughout their bloodline suggests a deeper genetic urge – one that moves beyond interest and into obsession. The rituals, and Yog-Sothoth, are also tied to a time before humans, suggesting a more primitive genetic tie. Wilbur explains that Oliver Whatley believed “in another race of beings from a different dimension. An earlier race, superior to man.”⁶⁹ Wilbur and his brother represent a de-evolution from the humans in Dunwich, their genetics a degradation to an abject ancestor, something Lovecraft found particularly abhorrent. The Whatley twins may not be as visibly deformed as the people in *The Haunted Palace*, but their genetics align them with the Othered god, coding them also as non-white, though not explicitly of any race.

The Dunwich Horror also features the explicit kidnapping, drugging, and implied rape of the white female heroine, further expanding on the themes present within *The Haunted Palace*. Once again, the presence of sadism is key to the exploitation production of the film, as it was with *Haunted Palace*,

⁶⁸ *The Dunwich Horror*.

⁶⁹ *The Dunwich Horror*.

focusing on both the horror of the sexual assault and the eroticism of Sandra Dee on an altar. After Wilbur steals the Necronomicon to continue the ritual started by Oliver Whatley, Nancy Wagner, a student of Armitage's, drives Wilbur home from Miskatonic University. Through both hypnosis and drugs, Wilbur makes Nancy more suggestible to his sexual advances. With a pliant, virginal victim, Wilbur can continue the ritual first started by his great, great grandfather. Wilbur describes this ceremony to Nancy: "Then they placed the girl's virginal body upon the altar, naked to the elements. [...] They waited: for the moment: when she would allow the power of darkness to enter her."⁷⁰ This appears to explicitly describe the rape of a white woman from an Othered creature. It is also implied that the same ritual happened to Lavinia Whatley, the birth of her sons leaving her mentally disabled. This ritual occurs twice in the film: first, a dream sequence, and then, the actual rape. In the dream sequence from the drugs, Nancy is spread out on an altar, at the mercy of Wilbur. *The Haunted Palace* also features restraints in the form of a rig, but given the more explicit nature of *Dunwich*, Nancy is shown on her back, wearing very little. Most of this scene focuses on Sandra Dee, the camera trailing up her near bare leg and focusing on her face relaxed in what seems like pleasure. She is painted as vulnerable, an object to be used by the monster. This appeals to AIP's exaggeration of explicit content, further demonizing the Othered Whatley in her vulnerability. Whatley acts as a conduit for Yog-Sothoth in the dream sequence, removing his skirt to reveal intricate tattoos all over his body. He moves between her legs, and it is implied that he is raping her as he chants in another language. This also calls attention to his Otherness, as these rituals are associated with more 'primitive' religions or groups within Lovecraft's writings. This same sequence of shots is repeated later in the film when Wilbur takes Nancy to the actual altar to perform the ceremony. Much like *The Haunted Palace*, this act of the Othered being is punishable by death as Armitage climbs to the altar to displace Whatley. Whatley cannot be left alive

⁷⁰ *The Dunwich Horror*.

to continue the ritual and allow Yog-Sothoth to enter Nancy. The genetic line must be stopped at the source, in a form of eugenic sterilization. However, Armitage isn't the one to end the Whatley line; rather, a bolt of lightning strikes the man, knocking him off a cliff and into the waters below. The narrative punishes the Other for their actions yet again, but as Armitage declares that "the last of the Whatleys is dead", the focus shifts to the consequences of Nancy's rape. The camera zooms in, and an image of a fetus is superimposed over Nancy's stomach. Like Lavinia before her, Nancy is now forced to carry the burden of the mixed-race child. The act of miscegenation is complete, and it is implied that this fetus will carry the genetic traits of Yog-Sothoth, despite the ritual not being completed.

The Dunwich Horror mimics many of the themes present within *The Haunted Palace*, but the themes are far more explicit than the gothic horror. Due to the loosened Production Code, AIP could get away with showing more sex and violence without losing exhibition. This enhanced the eugenicist themes by focusing on the rape of Nancy, and the consequences of rape through both Whatley and the fetus suggested at the end of the film. The genetic degradation of the children of Yog-Sothoth aligns with the notion of atavism, particularly in Wilbur's twin. The film relies heavily on genotypic horror, pitting the white, scholarly Armitage versus the Othered, pagan Whatley, as well as the fear of continuing a 'soiled' genetic line. By putting Nancy's rape as the central conflict of the story, the film sensationalizes the act of miscegenation, despite Lovecraft's initial story only focusing on the consequences.

With both *The Haunted Palace* and *Dunwich Horror*, miscegenation that existed in the background of Lovecraft's story is sensationalized through the rape of a white woman by an Othered being. Both films sidestep Lovecraft's written couplings between African or Asian and Anglo-Saxon people, but they utilize the horror of racial impurity through the portrayal of female sacrifice. Both films also deal with themes of atavism, where the evils of an ancestor are present within the descendent.

Charles Dexter Ward is possessed by Joseph Curwen, and Wilbur Whatley continues the sacrificial rites started by his great grandfather, Oliver Whatley. Despite being two very different stories in the Lovecraft canon, AIP aligned both films very closely with each other through the narrative similarities, focusing less on the source material and more on the striking image of a woman on an altar. The mutations seen in both *The Haunted Palace* and *The Dunwich Horror* are consequences of the coupling between gods and humans, and their racial impurity marks them as villains when juxtaposed with the white, genetically pure protagonists. The themes of the genotypic horror, as described by Mitch Frye, are also present within both movies. Protagonist Charles Dexter Ward is at war with the returning genetics of his ancestor and struggles to regain his own identity. While *The Dunwich Horror* is a little less explicit, in that sense, Wilbur Whatley's genetic history is seen as a greater evil than any one given monster. Yog-Sothoth isn't ever on screen, but he exists through Wilbur and his evil twin. American International Pictures enhances the eugenicist themes already present in Lovecraftian horror, rather than sidestepping them.

Stuart Gordon, Brian Yuzna, and Lovecraftian Film

Probably the most consistent adaptors of Lovecraft's work, Stuart Gordon and Brian Yuzna began their director/producer/writer partnership in the early 1980s and continued into the 2000s. Over 30 years, the duo worked on four notable Lovecraft adaptations, including *From Beyond* (1986), *Castle Freak* (1995), and *Dagon* (2001), as well as sequels for their most popular venture, *Re-Animator* (1985), which would later spawn a musical adaptation. Narratively, these films are considered relatively faithful adaptations. They focus primarily on some of Lovecraft's lesser known short stories including "Herbert West: Re-Animator" and "The Outsider". However, Gordon and Yuzna focused on the most salient aspects of Lovecraft's horror – particularly, the events that are either implied to happen before or after the actual story. Lovecraft's weaknesses in his fiction are once again, like with AIP, enhanced to appeal

to the niche horror audience. Gordon and Yuzna's films are considered splatter films, a subgenre of "films that feature graphic depictions of gore, hard-core violence, and murder."⁷¹ Given the films' independent nature, Gordon and Yuzna had the freedom to engage with taboo themes much in the same way that AIP did through their exploitation films. Cheap to make, lucrative to sell, these films exaggerate the themes already present within Lovecraftian literature. However, they also add content and female characters to adhere to the tropes set up by the splatter genre, namely explicit sexual content. This, of course, included rape scenes of white female characters by the Othered beings, whether they be re-animated corpses or hybridized fish people. A trope found only in the subtext of Lovecraft's canon, the threatened (and sometimes completed) coupling of Other and white woman drives the horror of each story, despite being from very different tales. These films do little to alleviate the eugenicist undertones, playing up the perceived danger of miscegenation between monster and woman. In an interview with *Lurker in the Lobby*, Dennis Paoli, screenwriter and collaborator with Gordon and Yuzna, explained that, "we're way over on one end of the continuum, and Lovecraft's on the other end of the continuum" in terms of showing explicit horror, and the generic expectations of the splatter films allowed for far more explicit interpretations of Lovecraft.⁷²

"Herbert West: Re-Animator" was initially serialized by Lovecraft in an amateur magazine called *Home Brew* between 1921 and 1922, and Lovecraft was heavily inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.⁷³ While perhaps not interested in the genetic histories of his patients, Herbert West instead seeks to end death through a strange serum, taking the ever-loyal narrator with him on a quest to find fresh bodies. The story itself, while unlike "Shadow" and "Charles Dexter Ward", does little to hide

⁷¹ "Splatter Films," *Library of Congress*, s.v. accessed March 25, 2017, <http://id.loc.gov/authorities/genreForms/gf2012025038.html>.

⁷² Migliore, Andrew, and John Stryzik. "The Haunted Palace". *The Lurker in the Lobby: A Guide to the Cinema of H.P. Lovecraft*. (Night Shade Books, 2006): 287.

⁷³ Stephen Daultrey. "Tales from the Morgue." *Bizarre*, no. 217 (2014): 56-61.

Lovecraft's sentiments about peoples unlike himself, including a section where the narrator and the titular Herbert West are mending a fallen boxer. They describe the African-American boxer as "a loathsome, gorilla-like thing, with abnormally long arms which I could not help calling fore legs, and a face that conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eerie moon."⁷⁴ Regardless of the blatant racism, "Herbert West: Re-Animator" was acquired by Stuart Gordon in 1985 who was seeking to make a movie based on *Frankenstein*. He partnered with producer, and friend, Brian Yuzna to produce the film with Empire Pictures with Jeffrey Combs as the titular Herbert West and Bruce Abbott as Dan Cain, representing the part of the narrator in the original story.⁷⁵ Drawing inspiration from the sensational serial, *Re-Animator* (1985) took the drily described gore in Lovecraft's original story and increased it hundred-fold. Roger Ebert in 1985 described the movie as "a frankly gory horror movie that finds a rhythm and a style that make it work in a cockeyed, offbeat sort of way."⁷⁶ The film has gathered cult fans and is praised as being "one of the more faithful and effective adaptations [of Lovecraft's work]."⁷⁷ While *Re-Animator* doesn't explicitly deal with issues of eugenics, the re-animation of dead subjects reflects a return to a lesser-evolved species. This de-evolution reflects nicely with Lovecraft's fear of genetic degradation, indicative of Frye's genotypic horror tropes. The fear of returning to a time before reason drives *Re-Animator*, differing it from the other films in the Gordon/Yuzna series. However, *Re-Animator*, through the generic expectations of the splatter film, also features the rape of a white woman by the genetically de-evolved Other. The film reinforces similar tropes that began with AIP but adapt and become more explicit as Lovecraft enters the 1980s.

⁷⁴ H.P. Lovecraft. *Herbert West: Re-Animator* In *The Road to Madness*, (Arkham House Publishers, 1996), 113.

⁷⁵ Gordon, Stuart. "Horror Master Stuart Gordon Talks *Re-Animator*, Lovecraft, and MPAA Ratings". Interviewed by Jim Hemphill, *Paste*, July 21, 2015.

⁷⁶ Roger Ebert, review of *Re-Animator*, directed by Stuart Gordon, Ebert Digital LLC, 1985, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/re-animator-1985>.

⁷⁷ Andrew Migliore and John Stryzik. "Re-Animator", *The Lurker in the Lobby: A Guide to the Cinema of H.P. Lovecraft*. (Night Shade Books, 2006): 94.

The film follows a similar path to the original story; protagonist Dan Cain, introduced as a struggling medical student, meets the strange Herbert West. After allegedly murdering his cat, West reveals he can bring animals back to life using a glowing green serum called ‘re-agent’. The line between life and death is seen not as something inaccessible, but rather a hurdle to scientific progress. The re-agent, though not scientifically explained, must be injected directly into the brain stem of a specimen, and after a few seconds, it violently springs to life and begins to attack whatever’s nearest. Soon, small animals are not enough, and he looks for human subjects. West’s serum creates mutated versions of the deceased humans, and these mutations revert the re-animated subjects into a more primal state of being based on violence. Re-animated beings are very much aligned with zombies, and in their book *Does Zombies Dream of Undead Sheep*, Versteynen and Voytek describe the undead’s rage as “stimulus driven and primal”, harkening back to a time without the more evolved frontal cortex of the human brain.⁷⁸ The re-animated are more concerned with direct stimuli, using aggression to deal with pain or threats from the more human characters. This reflects Lovecraft’s fears as dictated by Reinert, namely, “civilization was merely a fragile illusion under siege by baser forces; forces that preceded it and which would undoubtedly outlast it.”⁷⁹ The re-animated are more primitive versions of the humans that preceded them. West asserts this as well, explaining to Cain that, “birth is always painful.”⁸⁰ This suggests that the re-animated are reborn, not just continuing life as they were before. A mutation had to occur, and a new being was born from that mix. There’s a sense that the re-animated are reverting to the moment of birth, only able to react. The lack of reason makes them dangerous, pitting the re-animated against the genetically-evolved protagonists. This is further complicated when antagonist Dr. Carl Hill is murdered and re-animated by West, but this time, in two separate parts – a head and a body. Hill moves

⁷⁸ Versteynen, Timothy and Bradley Voytek. *Do Zombies Dream of Undead Sheep? A Neuroscientific View of the Zombie Brain*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014): 86.

⁷⁹ Reinert, pg. 260.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Combs and Bruce Abbott. *Re-Animator*. Directed by Stuart Gordon. (Empire Pictures, 1985): DVD.

outside these expectations of the undead. He isn't reborn; rather, he reflects his earlier self through a weird form of atavism. Before his death, Carl Hill preys on Cain's love interest, Meg Halsey and attempts to steal West's formula in order to gain fame. Unlike the other, primal specimens, Hill can speak and emulates much of his past self's intelligence and malevolence. He can also control the re-animated, seemingly with only a look. It is unclear through the text why Carl Hill is different than his more primal peers, but perhaps, it has something to do with the strength of his previous self, or genes. Much like Curwen in *The Haunted Palace*, his personality overrides his descendent, namely his re-animated body. It's also curious that only his head remains intelligent. His body mimics a lot of the other re-animated, following Hill's orders and acting out violently. Perhaps it is mind over matter. Regardless, the rebirth of human specimens does reflect Lovecraft's fears of genetic degradation, if not more implicitly than the earlier film adaptations.

There is also a moment of female sacrifice to an Othered being. While the earlier films dealt with an ancient god, *Re-Animator* sees Meg being kidnapped and molested by Hill's disembodied head. There's a lot of the same imagery as is seen in *The Dunwich Horror*, as Meg is strapped to a table, naked. However, due to the temporal placement of the film, *Re-Animator* features the explicit sexual assault, showing Hill's disembodied kissing Meg's restrained figure. While Hill could not impregnate her in the same way Yog-Sothoth could Sandra Dee, there's a fear of being violated by the Other. Not only is Hill a disgusting misogynist, Hill is re-animated and grotesque. He is the mutation, even with his intelligence. Although there are no genetic consequences related to their coupling, the act is still abhorrent. Like the other film adaptations, the white hero saves the white heroine from the Other's advances, as West and Cain burst into the morgue before Hill can do more damage. This is not present in the original story in any form; Meg Halsey and Carl Hill were created for the film. However, Meg's assault is another addition to the trope of female sacrifice and rape throughout Lovecraft's filmic

adaptations, something that was never explicitly in any of his work. The use of rape, or threatened rape, in these films further sensationalizes Lovecraft's fascination with the couplings of different races.

Re-Animator does not feature the same type of genotypic horror as *Dunwich* or *The Haunted Palace*; instead, it focuses on the genetic degradation through another medium. The re-agent acts as a reversal to the process of evolution, turning creatures of reason into primal, uncontained re-animated monsters. The genetic aberration doesn't occur through the interbreeding of monster and man, but it still exists in some form. The film continues themes of rape, but not with the goal of impregnation. Rather, the fear of Meg's near sexual assault is the driving fear. It's a departure from the tropes established by AIP, but nonetheless, it adheres to a form of gene-based horror.

From Beyond (1986) followed quickly after *Re-Animator*, but it lacked the popularity of its predecessor. While Ebert considered *Re-Animator* "one of the great trash pictures of 1985", he found that *From Beyond* was "not trashy enough and it doesn't have the insane tunnel vision of the first movie."⁸¹ The film follows Crawford Tillinghast, who gets his name from the original story and is played by Jeffrey Combs, as he assists mad scientist, Dr. Pretorius, in creating a machine to stimulate the pineal gland, thus dissolving the veil between the human world and the unknown. After the machine malfunctions and Pretorius goes missing, Tillinghast is taken into custody by *Re-Animator* co-star Barbara Crampton's Dr. Katherine McMichaels who wishes to use the machine for her own ends. The actual Lovecraft short story is only reflected within the first few minutes of the film; most of the film is spent in the aftermath of the initial incident with the Resonator, the climax in the original story. *From Beyond* also uses sex as a conduit between the mutated and the un-mutated, but it does so more

⁸¹ Roger Ebert, review of *From Beyond*, directed by Stuart Gordon, Ebert Digital LLC, 1986, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/from-beyond-1986>.

explicitly than *Re-Animator*. Through the re-birth of Dr. Pretorius and Tillinghast into mutated monsters, *From Beyond* asserts a similar explicit fear of the Other violating women.

The mutation in *From Beyond*, much like that in *Re-Animator*, is a man-made phenomenon, created after the Resonator malfunctions. When the machine is on, it emits a distinct frequency that allows humans to see beyond this reality and into another dimension by activating the pineal gland. The pineal gland itself is an interesting focus in both Lovecraft's original and Gordon's adaptation. The pineal gland, located in the center of the brain stem, has been the subject of debate since Classical Antiquity as a source of mental illness; Descartes considered the gland to be the connection between the human soul and the physical body.⁸² While perhaps not a spiritual conduit, the pineal gland does play an important role in creating and administering melatonin, a hormone responsible for sleep regulation⁸³. Most importantly, the pineal gland is referred to as the 'third eye' that still exists in many reptilian species and is theorized to be a "evolutionary relic."⁸⁴ Lovecraft drew upon this; Tillinghast explains that "that gland is the great sense-organ of organs [...] It is like sight in the end and transmits visual pictures to the brain."⁸⁵ The importance of the pineal gland in both Lovecraft's story and the adaptation suggests a connection between the evolutionary past and its descendants. By stimulating and growing the pineal gland, the Resonator acts to revert the evolutionary process. This is another form of atavism, connecting traits from an ancestor to that of the present. Both Pretorius and Tillinghast are reverted, turning into grotesque beings. Much like the re-agent turns the re-animated into animalistic, violent beings, the Resonator turns Pretorius and Tillinghast violent, to the point where Tillinghast hungers for

⁸² López-Muñoz, et.al. "An Historical View of the Pineal Gland and Mental Disorders." *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience* 18, no. 8 (2011): 1028-037.

⁸³ López-Muñoz, pg. 1035.

⁸⁴ The Conversation Africa. "What Our Ancestors' Third Eye Reveals about the Evolution of Mammals to Warm Blood." *The Huffington Post*. (December 2017): Accessed March 08, 2019.

⁸⁵ H. P. Lovecraft "From Beyond by H.P. Lovecraft." *H.P. Lovecraft.com*. (2009).

human organs. The primal drives overtake the personality of the initially meek Tillinghast, and he becomes the Othered descendent. They do not physically resemble their previous selves. Ultimately, the Othered creature must be destroyed.

The tropes of the female rape are also clearly present in *From Beyond*, but they shift into a stranger form of coercion. In the film, Katherine explains that “we know that the pineal gland helps to regulate the sex drive. Perhaps pineal stimulation causes an accompanying sexual stimulation.”⁸⁶ Sure enough, after their first encounter with the mutated Pretorius, Katherine begins to change, but not necessarily in the same way as the men. Instead of mutating, Katherine begins to experience a heightened sex drive when the Resonator is turned on. This motivates her to try to keep the machine on, as well as transforming from bookish, glasses-wearing scientist to leather-clad dominatrix. Driven by the machine’s ‘pleasure’, Katherine finds a closet in Pretorius’ room with a leather lingerie outfit. She changes, dons red lipstick, and then attempts to touch Tillinghast in his sleep. While initially this appears as a reversal between the white woman and the assaulting Other, Katherine is, in a strange way, being coerced by the machine to fulfill sexual desires that may not be her own. This is enhanced further every time the machine is turned on. The second encounter with Pretorius ends with Katherine grappling against the mutated monster who tears open her nightgown and then proceeds to sexually assault her onscreen, much like Hill in *Re-Animator*. After Tillinghast mutates, a phallic pineal gland bursts from his forehead. Now sufficiently mutated, Tillinghast attempts to kiss Katherine, claiming that he wants to be with her forever. Much like Katherine earlier, Tillinghast’s desires are controlled by the machine, driving him to attack and detain Katherine. Once again, there is a perceived fear of sexual assault, coupled with the fear of being consumed by the mutated beings. Whether or not the act is completed, the audience is (rightfully) fearful for the heroine as she struggles to not be raped by the Othered characters

⁸⁶ Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton. *From Beyond*. Directed by Stuart Gordon (Empire Pictures, 1986): DVD.

again and again. Even when it seems like Katherine has agency, she is being drugged by the stimulating effects of the Resonator. The male characters do not receive the same threat, rather they add to the fear once mutated by the machine. The continued presence of threatened rape is only exaggerated by the threatened rape by an Othered being. The grotesque nature of the Other is often more terrifying than the perceived sexual relationships between the un-mutated humans within the films. One could argue that it is worse to be raped by a monster, and these mutated beings must be destroyed not just for their crimes, but for being a monster.

However, *From Beyond* does not deal with the genetic consequences of the interbreeding between monster and man. The genotypic horror within *From Beyond* is the fear of the primal Other and reverting to a self without reason, something reflected in *Re-Animator*. Unlike *Dunwich*, Tillinghast and Pretorius are not consequences of interbreeding, rather they are subject to a genetic degradation from other means, namely the stimulation of a more primitive part of their brain. This is still a form of genetic degradation, but it is a departure from the themes that persist throughout other Lovecraft adaptation. Regardless, it still features the sexual assault of a woman, even if the end goal isn't impregnation.

It took Gordan and Yuzna another 9 years before they collaborated again on a Lovecraftian story, and in 1995, *Castle Freak* was released straight to home video. If *From Beyond* was a disappointment, *Castle Freak* was another nail in the coffin. Philippe Rouyer explained that the film "never equal[s] the sulphurous delusions of *Re-Animator*."⁸⁷ The film is loosely based on the short story "The Outsider" which centers around a man who strays from the safety of a castle dungeon and discovers that he is a monster, an outsider among men.⁸⁸ *Castle Freak*, instead, focuses on a troubled,

⁸⁷ Rouyer, Philippe. "Carrington/Castle Freak." *Positif*, no. 413/414 (1995): 82.

⁸⁸ Lovecraft, H.P. "The Outsider". *Tales of H.P. Lovecraft* edited by Joyce Carole Oates, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997).

American family inheriting a castle in Italy. They discover in the dungeons of the basement something lurks in the shadows, a mutated man thought dead by the community for forty years. A sympathetic character in the short story, Giorgi, or the Castle Freak, becomes the titular villain, Othered by his grotesque appearance, playing opposite Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton as the Reilly couple. *Castle Freak* is the duo's first foray into genotypic horror present in the AIP adaptations, and it continues the gruesome tradition of threatened rape, yet again.⁸⁹ Giorgi represents the consequences of the interbreeding between monster and man, this time suggested between a foreign woman and an American man.

Castle Freak is the first in the Gordon and Yuzna series to contain a consequence of a coupling between a white character and a foreign woman. Instead of an overtly mutated parent, the Other exists in the Duchess, Giorgi's mother, who is of noble Italian descent while his father is an American soldier. She reads as a witch with long scraggly hair and a cat constantly at her side. In the first five minutes of the film, the Duchess whips Giorgi in, what seems like, a routine punishment. She is a brutal foreign entity that mimics Lovecraft's preoccupations of anyone outside Anglo-Saxon blood; she's a monster as much as her son. Giorgi is not only of mixed ethnic blood, but he is physically deformed and castrated. He isn't a villain from the beginning of the movie, but after seeing his reflection in a mirror (the climax to the original short story), Giorgi becomes exceedingly angry before snapping entirely and breaking the glass. His appearance, a representation of his heritage, drives him to start the rampage. The genotypic horror exists towards the end of the film when protagonist John Reilly learns that his father was the same American soldier that married, impregnated, and then abandoned the Duchess, leaving her with the mutated Giorgi. John and Giorgi are siblings, two descendants of the same paternal blood. It is not a question of whether John will mutate, but this emulates the fear of within that is prototypical of

⁸⁹ Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton. *Castle Freak*. Directed by Stuart Gordon. (Full Moon Entertainment, 1995): DVD.

genotypic horror. John must defeat his own blood before Giorgi continues his bloody rampage throughout the town, and as the film ends, John is only able to defeat Giorgi by also killing himself in the process, pitching themselves off the side of the castle. This is a form of sterilization, ensuring that the blood line will not continue. However, Giorgi is not just a mutated creature; he also engages in sexual assault much like the other mutated beings in the Gordon and Yuzna series.

After a nasty fight with his wife, John flees to the comfort of alcohol at a local bar and meets a prostitute. He takes her home, and as they have sex, Giorgi watches on from behind the nearly full wine shelves in the basement. Inspired, he waits until John passes out and chases after the young woman, chaining her to him with the same chains that once bound him to the basement. Giorgi drags her to the basement and then starts to sexually assault her all the while tearing through her flesh. While not coded as a white woman, she is still invaded by the Othered in an entirely brutal scene. This is a departure from the perceived fear of rape in *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*. There is not only a fear of assault but through that assault, death and mutilation at the hands of the non-white Other. The stakes rise dramatically, and while Barbara Crampton's assaults in the previous movies were no less grotesque, the added danger destroys all semblance of morality on the part of Giorgi. Unlike Hill and Pretorius, who while insidious, are cognizant of their actions, Giorgi is reduced to the most primal state. Giorgi can only relate to the world through sex, hunger, and violence, and be an animal that needs to be put down instead of a human being. Much like the re-animated, he has reverted to a genetically inferior state before evolution, free of reason or morality. Later in the film, Giorgi moves beyond this and attempts to assault the Reilly's blind teenage daughter. Giorgi, animalistic in his desires, is now portrayed in a pedophilic way. This adds another layer to the horror of *Castle Freak* - the need to protect the young from the monster. The only way to end both the rape of women and children by the mutated is through extermination, provided by his brother at the end of the film.

Castle Freak marks Gordon and Yuzna's first foray into the more classical genotypic horror of Lovecraft. There's a clearer fear of genetic degradation within oneself and their bloodline, represented by the revelation that John is Giorgi's brother. The genetic Other is the antagonist, not only by his genes but also by his abhorrent acts. While Giorgi has no wish to impregnate the women, the perceived fear of sexual assault drives *Castle Freak's* narrative. Gordon and Yuzna seem far more interested in the primal Other, than the genetic Othering through interbreeding, but *Castle Freak* does lean into the genotypic horror that was exemplified in *The Haunted Palace* and *The Dunwich Horror*.

The final collaboration, outside of the *Re-Animator* trilogy, came in 2001 with *Dagon*. While not based on the Lovecraft story of the same name, it takes its narrative directly from "the Shadow Over Innsmouth". The story follows a young couple shipwrecked on the island town of Imboca, Spain where they are at the mercy of a cult that worships an ancient god beneath the sea. The film was met with far more favorable reviews than *Castle Freak*; Jonathan Holland pokes fun at the film, but admits that "its B-movie revels, skillful textbook helming, strong atmospherics, and the wry smiles dotted throughout make for an enjoyably mindless ride."⁹⁰ *Dagon* is the most prototypical genotypic horror film of the Gordon and Yuzna series through its adaptation of "Shadow", and the mutated fish people of Imboca represent the consequences of unnatural couplings between the Cult of Dagon and the gods.⁹¹ The character of Marsh embodies the genotypic horror of the self, as he is a descendent of the Imbocan hybrids. *Dagon* continues the Lovecraftian adaptation's tropes of female sacrifice and the horror of perceived rape; however, the perceived fear is more explicit.

The genotypic horror lies not only in the mutated Others, represented by the human/fish hybrids that live in Imboca, but also the protagonist who genetically linked to the cultists. According to the last human villager, before Imboca succumbed to the Cult of Dagon, the village was struggling

⁹⁰ Holland, Jonathan. "Dagon, Sect of the Sea. (Film Reviews)." *Variety* 385, no. 5 (2001): 37.

⁹¹ Ezra Godden and Francisco Rabal. *Dagon*. Directed by Stuart Gordon. (Castelao Producciones, 2001): DVD.

financially. A believer of Dagon promised the villagers riches and prosperity if they converted from Catholicism to worship the aquatic god – the only price was blood sacrifices. The town readily agreed, sacrificing their human women to the mercy of the god. There are two levels of horror playing in *Dagon* – the fear of miscegenation and the fear of paganism. The human women are forcibly impregnated in the name of Dagon, much like they are in *The Dunwich Horror*, and the consequences are genetically inferior monsters. Even though the monsters are white, they are still foreign Others as both citizens of Spain (contrasted to the white American protagonist) and hybrids as part of the cult. Beyond sacrifice, the Imbocans also take part in skinning human males, adding to their grotesque representation. It can be inferred that the hybridization led the Imbocans to do so; if they hadn't begun to worship Dagon and sacrifice women, they would still be genetically human and Catholic. These hybrids are antagonistic compared to the protagonist's seemingly human genes, or at least, the lack of presentation of the protagonist's genes. *Dagon*, and "Shadow" before it, also add another layer to the horror, drawing upon similar themes of "Charles Dexter Ward". From the beginning, Paul Marsh, as played by Ezra Godden, is plagued with dreams of a mermaid with razor sharp teeth. It is unclear what these visions mean, but it foreshadows the revelation later in the film that he is of Imbocan blood. It isn't until the very end of the movie when Uxia, the head priestess of Dagon, reveals that she and Marsh are brother and sister. Their human mother escaped after being impregnated, leaving Marsh without any noticeable mutations. Uxia then reveals that they are destined to be lovers. The monster lies within his very genes, and it is his genetic ancestry that aligns him with the monstrous citizens of Imboca. This alignment is too much for him to bear, and he attempts to set himself on fire. Marsh would rather take his own life than live life as an Imbocan hybrid. In a strange sense, he's attempting to purge his bloodline through a eugenicist practice. If he lives, his copulation with Uxia will continue the Imbocan bloodline. There's also a layer of incest, which has connotations of genetic impurity and the mutations that would follow. Ultimately,

this attempt is foiled as Uxia tackles him into the waters below. Marsh then accepts his fate, as the credits begin to roll. Unlike “Shadow”, Marsh explicitly tries to reject his bloodline by self-immolation, and it’s through this that the film suggests that the mutations are more than just antagonistic. The film asserts that it is better to be dead than hybridized, a more decisive stance than Lovecraft took in “Shadow”, but nonetheless was present in his other work.

The continued fear of rape is clear throughout *Dagon*. After their boat is wrecked, Marsh and his girlfriend, Barbara, go to shore in attempt to save the other passengers, Howard and Vicki. Marsh discovers, after returning to the boat with the Imbocan’s help, that Howard and Vicki are gone. After being captured by the Imbocans, Marsh finds a broken, bloodied, and traumatized Vicki. The human Imbocan, Ezequiel, explains that, “[Dagon] have her. Take her”, implying that Dagon had sex with her.⁹² It can also be inferred, based on the other Imbocans, that Vicki is pregnant with a hybrid child. In her grief, she kills herself in front of Marsh and Barbara. Similarly, Barbara is kidnapped again by the Imbocans. She is chained, naked, above a pit leading to the ocean and Dagon below to be sacrificed. Dagon drags her beneath the water, and it is implied that she too has been impregnated. The trauma of the rape and the concept of the hybrid child within leads her to beg for death, killing both her and the future of the unborn mutant. Once more, the film asserts that it is better to be dead than continue the impure genetic line of Dagon and the Imbocans. The Lovecraftian filmic tropes of the sacrificed white women persists well into the 2000s, combined with the idea that it is better to be dead than engage in a form of miscegenation. Given the Imbocans’ alignment with the non-white Other, the film suggests implicitly that hybridization of race comes with consequences far worse than death.

Stuart Gordon and Brian Yuzna’s film adaptations of Lovecraft’s work span four very different Lovecraft stories, but they all feature similar tropes that began in AIP’s adaptations. The implicit and

⁹² *Dagon*.

expository information that is featured in Lovecraft's stories is made explicit and often exaggerated due to the exploitive nature of splatter horror. The films all feature explicit violence and nudity, things that are never featured in Lovecraft's original work, but are appropriate for the horror of the 1980s.

However, these films do little to negate the eugenicist themes. As the duo's adaptations progressed, the themes of miscegenation and fear of sexual violence also become more and more explicit, culminating in the first American filmic adaptation of "Shadow Over Innsmouth" in *Dagon*. While not explicitly eugenicist, *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond* also continue the tropes of white women being sexually assaulted by mutated Others, something that persists in Lovecraft adaptations from 1963's *The Haunted Palace*. These tropes – both the genetic Othering indicative of Frye's genotypic horror and the perceived fear of rape and the following impregnation – both reflect and exaggerate Lovecraft's own eugenicist beliefs, despite the temporal space between his writings and the films' releases. All these representations are supported by the generic nature of the splatter film, films that demand high violence, gore, and sex. Much like the exploitation production cycle, splatter films gain audiences through their taboo subjects, and Gordon and Yuzna's adaptations fit within the generic demands.

Lovecraft Film Today: 'Subverting' Lovecraft?

The preceding adaptations, and Lovecraft's work, are constructed for an audience of a demographic and are often exclusive to a white, heterosexual, male gaze. The films draw on the generic expectations of both exploitation horror of the 60s and splatter films of the 80s to create more and more explicit works, featuring violence and sexuality that would never be explicit in Lovecraft's original canon. The films, while not mainstream successes, have gained cult followings, and they still impact popular culture today. The tropes that originated in the AIP adaptations follow throughout the years, particularly by Stuart Gordon and Brian Yuzna. In the past 15 years, there have been very few 'faithful' Lovecraft adaptations, created by independent filmmakers and with limited distribution. Their independent nature,

once more, serves the more explicit themes and imagery of the following adaptations, giving the filmmakers more freedom to adapt and shift in a way to appeal to a niche audience. Based on “Shadow”, *Cthulhu* (2007) and *Innsmouth* (2015) offer new perspectives on Lovecraftian horror. These films are subversive in the simplest way, swapping the gender of characters present within the Lovecraftian adaptation tropes. While the preceding adaptations focused on white, heterosexual, male protagonists, *Cthulhu* and *Innsmouth* bring different slants to the traditional Lovecraft formula. Despite this, they still engage in the tropes established by AIP in 1963 and do little to comment on issues in representation in Lovecraft’s work.

Cthulhu (2007) follows Russell Marsh, a history professor who returns to his childhood home after the death of his mother and must grapple with reuniting with his cult-like family and the strange citizens of the coastal Riversmouth.⁹³ The film had a limited release and critically faced tepid reviews; *Variety*’s John Anderson asserts that “As it is, each aspect of the movie already seems like a universe out of control.”⁹⁴ The film does deviate from the classical Lovecraft protagonist by subverting his sexuality, allowing the film to comment on the queer experience. Writer Grant Cogswell extrapolated on experiences with gay friends revisiting their pasts, using these metaphors to heighten discomfort of the film.⁹⁵ The film marks an important divergence from traditional queer identity in horror films, casting the queer man as the protagonist. However, the consequences of miscegenation are still present throughout, as well as the rape and impregnation of white women. Where this film subverts the traditional narrative is the victim, focusing instead on Russ being the one to impregnate one of the local

⁹³ Tori Spelling and Jason Cottle. *Cthulhu*. Directed by Dan Gildark. (Regent Releasing, 2007): DVD.

⁹⁴ Anderson, John. "Film Reviews: "Cthulhu"." *Variety* 412, no. 2 (2008): 82-88.

⁹⁵ Wagner, Annie. “Oh, the Horror. The Making of ‘Cthulhu’”. *The Stranger* (2005).

women against his will. Despite subverting the narrative, the film aligns Russ with the feminine role in the trope, using his sexuality as a feminizing factor.

It is important to highlight where the film does diverge from traditional Lovecraft and horror, namely within Russ' sexuality. According to Mark Andrew Hain, "while many queer readings position the monster as the sympathetic victim of irrational hate by a repressive social order, Cthulhu introduces another level of complexity by making the protagonist rather than the monster the site of queer identification."⁹⁶ When compared to his cult-worshipping family, Russ is seen as the normal, despite having a historically marginalized identity. In fact, "the heterosexual members of the Marsh clan are depicted as doomsday cult zealots anxiously awaiting the destruction of the earth by climate change."⁹⁷ This aligns Russ and homosexuality as the ideal norm, whereas the heterosexual relationships in the town seem unhealthy. Those who can bear children suffer the consequences of interbreeding, creating hybridized slug babies who align with their beliefs of the Ancient Ones. The film allows queer representation in a far more positive light than of many preceding horror films, but there are still eugenicist themes present.

A common conflict throughout the film is Russ's inability, or disgust for, birthing heirs to the family. During an introductory dinner with Russ' family, Russ's father, the leader of a religious organization, laments, "we just wish you could raise a family."⁹⁸ The issue doesn't appear to be that Russ is gay. His family emphasizes the need to have children to continue their genetic line, something Russ refuses. Russ, in some ways, is engaging in a form of eugenics by cutting off the genetic line. In fact, Russ is a realization of Edith Lees Ellis' "'eugenically sound' homonationalist gay subject", namely someone "discursively realized as one who rejects the symbolic Child in order to embrace an

⁹⁶ Hain, Mark. "Race, Sexuality, and Procreation in H.P. Lovecraft Film Adaptations." *Offscreen* 18, no. 6-7 (2014).

⁹⁷ Hain.

⁹⁸ *Cthulhu*.

anti-reproductive death drive". The act of not having a child therefore is defined "as a strategy of anti-assimilation and/or a politics of difference" for the queer individual.⁹⁹ If the normal for the cult members is reproduction, Russ deliberately chooses not to engage. This anti-reproductive drive defines Russ as a queer character, and thus, as an Other to the cult members. This seems initially subversive to the eugenics common in Lovecraft's work, but this distinction is muddled by Russ' impregnation of a female member of the cult against his will. Later, in exchange for information about a cult artifact, Russ meets and goes home with Susan, a married woman. Susan attempts to seduce Russ but is turned down again and again. Russ' only motivation is to learn about the artifact. Susan persists before turning Russ to her husband, Ralph. Ralph reveals that he is unable to have children, explaining that an accident left him impotent and unable to conceive with Susan. Ralph asks Russ to have sex with his wife to give them a child. Russ, of course, disagrees. Russ is then aligned with the female victim that was set up in previous films, much like Sandra Dee in *Dunwich Horror*. Much like the fated heroine, Russ is drugged by the couple and, through disjointed hazy shots, is raped by Susan with the sole expectation of having a child. He isn't spread on an altar in the same fashion as most female victims in the Lovecraftian adaptations, but the drugs render him immobile and unable to act. He is forced to carry on the genetic line, regardless of whether he carries the child. Hain notes that "the film depicts the two heterosexual couples [...] as unable to have children, and it is only through the nonconsensual participation of a gay man that Susan becomes pregnant."¹⁰⁰ This is meant to be a subversion of the traditional queer identity, namely being unable or unwilling to procreate. However, Russ' non-consent continues the tropes of the raped white woman, not commenting on the gay man's autonomy within the narrative. The consequences of the interbreeding of the followers of Dagon and strangers also appears in the text.

⁹⁹ Cohler, Deborah. "Queer Kinship, Queer Eugenics: Edith Lees Ellis, Reproductive Futurity, and Sexual Citizenship." *Feminist Formations* 26, no. 3 (2014): 124.

¹⁰⁰ Hain.

Investigating missing children in the town, Russ discovers an underground catacomb. Within the catacomb, strange, larva-like beings hiss at him from the dark. It is suggested that these are the children of the cult, monsters that were created for the coming of Cthulhu. At the end of the film, Russ is introduced to his child. While the child is not actually seen, Russ' expression of disgust at the blood-filled bathtub suggests that his helped to conceive one of these grotesque larvae. Once again, the consequences of mixed-race copulation come in the form of the mutated Other, even if the citizens of the town appear 'human'.

Instead of subverting eugenicist themes within the adaptation, *Cthulhu* continues to use themes as sources of horror. Russ' queer identity centers around him not wanting children, which serves as the central conflict of the film. Despite this, the cult members force Russ to take part in continuing the genetic line to welcome the Old Ones. The horror of Russ' rape and the consequences thereafter continue to create the monstrous, hybrid Other. While the film does place Russ as the protagonist, subverting traditional queer horror identity, *Cthulhu* places Russ within the feminine role, victimized solely for procreation and hybridization. Despite being nearly 40 years after *Dunwich Horror*, *Cthulhu* uses Russ' homosexuality to enhance these tropes, doing little to change the story to provide an inclusive queer narrative.

Innsmouth (2015) marked the first time that a female director took on Lovecraft's adaptations with Izzy Lee's eleven-minute short film.¹⁰¹ In the previous seven films, the filmmakers are all white, heterosexual men, so Izzy Lee, by her very nature, subverts the Lovecraftian formula. In an interview with *Diabolique* magazine, Lee affirmed, "*Innsmouth* was created to make [Lovecraft] roll over in his grave a little by having the cast 98% female and switching the gender roles."¹⁰² Undoubtedly, as noted

¹⁰¹ Diana Porter and Tristan Risk. *Innsmouth*. Directed by Izzy Lee. (Nihil Noctem Films, 2015), DVD.

¹⁰² Yanick, Joe. "Izzy Lee puts a New Spin on Lovecraft with Short INNSMOUTH". *Diabolique Magazine* (2016).

by Petley, Lovecraft doesn't feature many female characters, in general, and no female protagonists.¹⁰³ However, while subverting gender roles, *Innsmouth* asserts the trope of the white woman being raped by the Other, which leads to impregnation and mutant offspring. Lee, unfortunately, adds Detective Olmstead to the list of women raped by Lovecraftian monsters.

The beginning of the film sees Detective Olmstead, portrayed by Diana Porter, investigating the death of a young woman. As she examines the corpse, she discovers an egg sac at the base of her neck. While not a mutated consequence, this egg sac indicates some sort of monstrous reproduction. The corpse is tasked with carrying the offspring of some unknown Other. As Olmstead travels to the infamous Innsmouth, she is kidnapped and drugged by the elusive Alice Marsh, a reference to the story's original protagonist, Obed Marsh. Not much is revealed about the nature of the town, but Alice ensures that Olmstead remains drugged before dragging her to a bathtub. Alice sexually assaults Olmstead, kissing her while under the influence of the drugs. This reverts the queer representation present in *Cthulhu*, casting the queer Alice as the antagonist and rapist within the narrative. She represents the genetically different Other, and Alice's mutation expresses itself as an eyeball protruding from her vagina, continuing an abject sexuality. Alice tears apart Olmstead in an explosion of gore. The film comes full circle when Olmstead is discovered, dead by a swimming pool. An egg sac is growing from her neck. The sexual assault occurred in order to 'impregnate' Olmstead, albeit in a different form than the preceding adaptations. Olmstead can't avoid the impregnation, despite being sexually assaulted by a woman. Alice still represents the Other impregnating the white woman. Despite displacing

¹⁰³ Petley, Julian, Richard J. Hand, and Jay McRoy, "The unfilmable? H.P. Lovecraft and the Cinema", *Monstrous Adaptations: Generic and Thematic Mutations in Horror Film*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2007): 43.

Lovecraftian expectations, the Othered character still sexually assaults a white woman, consequently leaving her corpse with the Othered offspring.

Innsmouth, in eleven minutes, continues these tropes, following in the footsteps of Gordon and Yuzna. The short film, much like *Castle Freak* or *From Beyond*, features explicit nudity and gore that renders any subversion moot. Lee doesn't challenge the themes, rather puts the onus of the rape on a female Other, much like *Cthulhu*. Lee commented that "*Innsmouth* is best described as 'full-frontal WTF by way of Lovecraft'", and it delivers as a Lovecraftian adaptation.¹⁰⁴ The displacement of queer identity does little to support a progressive move in adaptation, rather continuing tropes that have been present since Lovecraft first made it to the screen.

Conclusion

Since his death, Lovecraft's weird fiction has exploded into popular culture. Direct adaptations, though few and far between, attempt to faithfully recreate the author's work within a modern context. Starting in 1963, independent, exploitation filmmakers continue to adapt Lovecraft's narratives, but to what ends? Firstly, Lovecraft adaptors choose to highlight and emphasize the visually grotesque and implicit sexuality within Lovecraft's stories, opposing his more repressive prose. Secondly, Lovecraft adaptations, as of 2019, do not deviate from the themes of eugenics and miscegenation; rather through their exploitative nature, the act of monster and human interbreeding is central to the plot and explicitly shown. Thirdly, the adaptations feature pieces of Frye's genotypic horror, as well as fears of atavism and defining characters through eugenicist terms. Fourthly, all adaptations feature the rape (or fear of rape) of a white character by a mutant Other, aligning the Others as non-white and genetically different than

¹⁰⁴ Yanick, 2016.

the human characters. While not explicitly racialized, the mixing of race (alien or otherwise) is still present and essential piece of the narrative.

American International Pictures established tropes that persist in Lovecraftian cinema today, using the generic expectations of the exploitation horror film to put Lovecraft to film. Bypassing many critiques of Lovecraft's prose, AIP heightened the more bankable aspects of Lovecraft's fiction, namely the horror of miscegenation with an Othered being. AIP added more female characters to their narratives for the express purpose of female sacrifice to the Other. By focusing on the act of interbreeding instead of the consequences, AIP prioritized the sexuality of female characters in order to attract a heterosexual, male audience. Yet, with all the added elements, AIP still engaged with Frye's genotypic horror in both its aspects. Both *The Haunted Palace* and *The Dunwich Horror* focused on the fear of genetic degradation within oneself as well as the projected fear of the genetic Other, in the characters of Charles Dexter Ward and Wilbur Whatley. AIP's adaptations kickstarted and mastered techniques for making Lovecraft bankable on screen, and these tropes would persist into the 1980s.

Stuart Gordon and Brian Yuzna took the mantle of adaptation starting in 1985 and would continue to solidify the tropes associated with Lovecraftian horror. Although *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond* do not directly engage with genotypic horror, the degradation of genetics through artificial means still reflects eugenicist fears. By reverting to a more primal state, the re-animated beings and Pretorius and Tillinghast represent the de-evolution into a genetically inferior being, free of reasoning. They still contain the rape of a white woman (both Barbara Crampton), but not with the goal of impregnation and continuing the genetic line. The duo's first foray into more prototypical genotypic horror with *Castle Freak* returned briefly to the tropes established in AIP's *Haunted Palace*, but overall, only featured the consequences of genetic degradation in the character of Giorgi. Gordon and Yuzna's last film, *Dagon*, solidified the formula, utilizing both genotypic horror and explicit interbreeding

between man and monster. The rape of white women, with the intent of impregnation, harkened back to the tropes of AIP. *Dagon* added another layer to the trope, namely the attempted sterilization of the genetic line through suicide. The film marked a more decisive take on genetic intermixing; it is far better to be dead than carry a mixed-breed child.

Modern Lovecraft adaptations, though few and far between, continue these tropes, albeit with more 'progressive' slants. By reversing the gender of the protagonists, both *Cthulhu* and *Innsmouth* attempt to subvert the classical Lovecraftian narrative. Representation of both queer men and women are finally given light under the writer's name, but genotypic horror remains in the forefront of both of their narratives. Russ' rape in *Cthulhu* places him in the traditionally feminine role of forced impregnation, negating his queer identity as someone who refuses to reproduce. Likewise, *Innsmouth* features the rape (and later ingestion) of the female protagonist, casting the villain as the queer Alice Marsh. Neither film attempts to sidestep the themes of forced miscegenation, rather adjusting those who are in the role of the victim.

Overall, direct adaptations of HPL's work (as of 2015) exaggerate eugenicist themes through the generic expectations of exploitation, and later, splatter horror. Whereas the Lovecraft stories focus on the consequences of interbreeding between monster and man, the film adaptations, instead, focus on the interbreeding itself, often portrayed as the forced impregnation of white women by the Other - whether that be a god or a mutated being. Regardless, by aligning the Other with someone of different - and often inferior - genetics, these films embody the Lovecraftian genotypic horror, as defined by Mitch Frye.

Analyzing Lovecraftian adaptation is essential in not only teasing apart the eugenicist themes central to Lovecraftian fiction, but also critically assessing the roll of eugenicist themes within horror as a genre. Despite not gaining popularity at the time of writing, Lovecraft's work permeates modern popular culture; "Lovecraft's stories have from the early days of his legacy been a target for

appropriation and has now been embraced by popular culture through indirect and passing references”¹⁰⁵. While his direct adaptations are harder to come by, mentions of Cthulhu or the Necronomicon have popped up in everything from video games to children’s television shows. Stores sell Cthulhu mugs and hoodies. Lovecraft is everywhere, and it’s important to conceptualize what precisely makes his stories scary and attractive to modern filmmakers. Through my analysis of Lovecraftian filmic adaptations, the persistence of the genetically divergent Other within the films reflect the core themes within Lovecraftian horror. Despite being from various source materials, all the films engage with Lovecraft’s greater interest in eugenics and fear of the genetic Other. Within Lovecraft’s work, this was heavily racialized, primarily with stories like “The Horror of Red Hook”, but the filmic adaptations do not offer an alternative to Lovecraft’s fear of non-white peoples. They instead sensationalize the racialized and misogynistic notions of the white woman being vulnerable to the rape and impregnation by a higher (or sometimes less evolved) Other. Putting Lovecraft into this context, current filmic adaptations offer little hope for people of color or women wishing to subvert Lovecraftian tropes. Even when subversion occurs, these tropes persist, despite not being tied to a racial context. The fact that the monstrous Other occurs at all comes with the consequences of Lovecraft’s intent – the Othering of ethnic and racial identities. Guillermo del Toro sums up Lovecraft’s horror as “absolutely genuine worry of the evils of mixed breeding – and breeding in general”, and all adaptations of his legacy, direct or otherwise, face these challenges.¹⁰⁶

More research will need to be conducted into the assimilation of Lovecraftian imagery into popular culture and intersections with Lovecraft’s signature horror without the context of the original story. Can mentions of the Necronomicon be used without also understanding the book’s faux Arabic

¹⁰⁵ Melvær, Tor Watten, Melvær, and Løfaldli, Eli. *Imagining the Unimaginable - Lovecraft in Popular Culture*, (2018): 3.

¹⁰⁶ Guillermo del Toro, interviewed in *Lovecraft: Fear of the Unknown*, dir. Frank H. Woodward, 2008.

origins and the rituals of forced procreation? Things will be further complicated with the adaptation of a popular subversion of Lovecraft, Matt Ruff's *Lovecraft Country*, set to air on HBO within the next few years. Produced by notable Black director/writer Jordan Peele, the series will follow Black protagonists through the Jim Crow South.¹⁰⁷ This is a clear departure from the original Lovecraftian formula, centering Black protagonists as well as engaging directly with the racism of Lovecraft's era and beyond. While not a direct film adaptation, *Lovecraft Country* is a step towards subverting Lovecraftian themes, while also directly addressing the problematic elements of his work. Lovecraft may yet become reclaimed by people of color, but more work needs to be done into the implications of Lovecraftian horror in the modern context.

A long-time fan of H.P. Lovecraft's work, I have often had to justify my identification of problematic representations. I can't count how many times I've been told to separate the work from the artist, encouraged to simply enjoy horror as horror. However, what makes Lovecraft's horror work within today's culture is the fear of Other, whether that be through religion, race, or sexuality. As a woman of color, addressing Lovecraft's eugenic themes are essential in interrogating the audience Lovecraft's writing targets – white, heterosexual men. There is still pleasure within Lovecraft's stories, but it's up to modern Lovecraft lovers to take his stories and update them to better reflect the modern context. Genetic differences are no longer a valid source of horror, rather the eugenicists themselves are, and if Lovecraft's canon will survive, it is in desperate need of a makeover.

¹⁰⁷ Otterson, Joe. "Jordan Peele to Produce HBO Series 'Lovecraft Country' With J.J. Abrams, Misha Green." *Variety*, May 16, 2017. Accessed April 16, 2019. <https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/jordan-peeel-hbo-lovecraft-country-jj-abrams-misha-green-1202429550/>.

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