THE SHADOW MODERNISM OF *WEIRD TALES*:
EXPERIMENTAL PULP FICTION IN THE AGE OF MODERNIST REFLECTION

by

JASON CARNEY

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

May 2014
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Jason Carney

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*.

Committee Chair
Kurt Koenigsberger

Committee Member
Michael Clune

Committee Member
Mary Grimm

Committee Member
Timothy Wutrich

Date of Defense
March 21st, 2014

*We also certify that written approval has been obtained for any proprietary material contained therein.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Loveman and Lovecraft</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Shadow Modernism of <em>Weird Tales</em></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: The Age of Modernist Reflection</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: The Visible Invisibility of the Pulp Magazine Marketplace</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Clark Ashton Smith: The Bitterest of the Poets</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Clark Ashton Smith and Modernism as Sensational Excess</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8: Robert E. Howard and the Ephemerality of Civilization</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9: The Populism of Robert E. Howard as Modernist Reflection</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 10: Lovecraft, the Negative Sublime, and the Science of Modernism</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 11: The Transgressions of Lovecraft's Fictional Modernists</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Lovecraft's Final Story, Or, Am I On This Planet?</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I could not have completed this dissertation without the help of many people, too many to list. I would like to highlight a few of them. I would like to thank my committee members. Mary Grimm: for giving me the courage to study popular literature. Michael Clune: for his theories about what fiction and literature can do. Timothy Wutrich: for the enrichment during revision his perspective as a classicist afforded me. I want to give particular thanks to my director, Kurt Koenigsberger, who met and conversed with me regularly about this project. Our conversations were always extremely helpful. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Nicole, for her support through the process.
The Shadow Modernism of *Weird Tales:*
Experimental Pulp Fiction in the Age of Modernist Reflection

Abstract

by

JASON CARNEY

"The Shadow Modernism of *Weird Tales:* Experimental Pulp Fiction in the Age of Modernist Reflection" is a study of the fiction and poetry published during the age of modernist reflection (1923-1938) in the once ubiquitous pulpwood magazine, a medium typified by such titles as *Black Mask, Dime Detective, Astounding Stories, Science Wonder Stories, Adventure,* and many others. It treats a specific pulp magazine, *Weird Tales* (1923-1951), which in its emphasis on formal experimentation and technical innovation echoes in surprising ways modernist little magazines such as *The Dial, Poetry,* and *The Little Review.* It analyzes the short stories, poetry, and memoirs that fictionalize modernists, modernist art objects, and experiences of modern art published in *Weird Tales* in relation to canonical accounts of modernism in the criticism of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, H.L. Mencken, Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson and other associated theorists and critics of the movement, particularly Viktor Shklovsky. It considers the rhetoric of fiction of key *Weird Tales* writers such as H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard, and frames it as a deliberately grotesque suturing together of a modernist aesthetic with conventionalized realism. It argues that the ambitious writers constellating around *Weird Tales* were animated by a troubled yet productive relationship with the aesthetic project of modernism. By situating their fiction in the context of certain poetry, correspondence, and criticism published in and around *Weird Tales,* this dissertation demonstrates how the writers studied sought to fictionalize modernist art objects as enduring forms that reveal "the occult truth of the ordinary," the visible yet not self-evident idea that ordinary phenomena are ordinary only temporarily.
Introduction

Getting Behind the Veil: Poetics of Pulp and De-Reification of Literary Effect of Reality

"Behind the veil of all the hieratic and mystical allegories of ancient doctrines, behind the darkness and strange ordeals of all initiations, under the seal of all sacred writings, in the ruins of Nineveh or Thebes, on the crumbling stones of old temples and on the blackened visage of the Assyrian or Egyptian sphinx, in the monstrous or marvelous paintings which interpret to the faithful of India the inspired pages of the Vedas, in the cryptic emblems of our old books on alchemy, in the ceremonies practiced at reception by all secret societies, there are found indications of a doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere carefully concealed."

-Introduction to Eliphas Levi's Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Rituals (1910)

The Unpoetry of Pulp

In order to understand the popular writing we sometimes refer to as pulp and its fundamental relationship to violating the literary effect of reality, to "de-reification," we must first come to terms with the central quality that invalidated it in the past as an object of serious literary criticism, a subject of intensive (aesthetic) rather than extensive (sociological) reading: its "unpoetry," its crude "representationality," its non-theoretical reliance on a socially and commercially conventionalized rhetoric of fiction, i.e., its naive use of referential language to create imaginary, virtual worlds of the ordinary and extraordinary. In contradistinction to the diverse plot elements of pulp--the hardboiled detective, the flying saucer, the spellbinding sorcerer--the literary techniques executed in these types of writing are often dismissed as homogeneous, as a hardly distinguishable
repetition of "conventionalized realisms." Compared to the minimalism of Hemingway or the lyricism of his sometime patron, Stein--a formal rhetoric where the "medium" of literary language is largely the message--pulp fiction seem oblivious to the "textual" nature of the literary sign and to concentrate on the imaginary "extra-textual" signified or the virtual it evokes. Put another way, pulp relates in an "unpoetic" fashion to the "ready-to-hand" aspects of language rather than its "present-at-hand" aspects. Pulp mimetically represents, fictionalizes a world; its other, the high literary text, has been understood as working against this representational function by exposing linguistic signifiers and the literary effects of reality they produce as aesthetic form.

To refer to the formal rhetorics of pulp as "conventionalized realism" is not, at base, to dismiss that technique as an unfit subject of inquiry. "Realism" is a complex technique. J.R.R. Tolkien appropriately assessed "literary realism" when he referred to his "realism" as "subcreation" and seriously described it as a form of emulating god, a form of worship. Moreover, the extent to which pulp works succeed in creating literary effects of reality and even reifying their virtual worlds has merited productive scholarly attention of late, as exemplified by Michael Saler's study of the literary virtual worlds of Doyle, Lovecraft, and Tolkien, As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Pre-history of Virtual Reality (2012). Instead, to emphasize the "conventional" nature of the rhetoric of fiction of pulp is to theorize its widespread unattractiveness and superficiality to literary criticism and literary elites in the past, an unartistic appearance that demands distracted "extensive" reading practices rather than attentive "intensive" or scholastic modes of reading. Scott McCracken, in his celebrated Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction (1998), sums up the interpretive constraint we must absolutely disregard if we are to
proceed productively here: "Despite their differences, all theorists of mass culture agree that popular culture cannot be understood in terms of individual texts" (24).

Two arguments rationalize and justify modern literary criticism's contempt for "pulp," justify "extensive" reading over "intensive" reading, and they are linked to distinctive formalist and ideological perspectives. Case studies of the formalist apologist (e.g. Ezra Pound and T.E. Hulme) suggest that such critics believe that literary criticism is animated by an awareness of the aesthetic and not representational/referential capacities of literary language, an awareness spawned in the early decades of the twentieth-century; thus, pulp is unworthy from this perspective for its lack of formal or technical complexity and sophistication, its indifference to the unique essence of literary language as self-referential textuality. This explains Pound's awkward celebration of the non-translated hieroglyph or Chinese ideogram as a sufficient example of, and even pure form of, poetry.

Considering cases of ideological apologists (e.g. Ortega y Gasset, Adorno, and later, Bourdieu) suggests that such critics have identified a particular "anti-human" and "anti-representational" taste that derives not from "pulp's" indifference to the textual and formal potential of literary language and narrative but from its contaminating alliance with the profane, the Real figured as degraded. The sociological, real or virtual, referents entailed in the naively representational language of pulp are rationalized as evidencing a quasi-partisan commitment to the fleshy elements of the "bodily," the "market," the "propagandistic," the somatic pleasures of entertainment.

Both formalist and ideologist, however, come to pulp with specific questions of reading practice: does this pulp work merit intensive reading? Is pulp worthy of my
sustained intellectual labor? My limited attention? It must be admitted that neither perspective offers a clear basis for begrudging a clumsy or inattentive extensive reader of pulp works for sociological knowledge rather than aesthetic experience. From their sometimes commensurate, sometimes incommensurate perspectives, such a non-aesthetic glance is all such pulp work deserves. Read a pulp work, toss it aside. Read another pulp work, toss it aside. Let the pile of spent works grow ever higher.

The best way to understand these diverse arguments declaiming and devaluing pulp is to view them within a framework of carbon and silicon, user and tool, flesh and prosthesis. The formalist like Pound, expressing a partisan commitment to the abstract and pure aesthetic form, praises silicon and declaims carbon, the user, the reader, the audience. The ideological critic like Adorno focuses his ire on "impure silicon," the work of art contaminated by intrusions of the profane. Both perspectives are conditioned by the concept of a "pure form," an "enduring form" that serves no function intelligible to merely human desire, if only to hold in tension a novelty so intense and extramundane that it serves as a constant reminder of the unworthiness of our ordinary realities.

How can it be a surprise to pulp enthusiasts today that its study has become the purview not of literary criticism but of "popular culture studies," a field that is premised by a disregard of "elitist" notions underpinning literary criticism and engaged in "extensive" reading practices that reveal less the significance of pulp--i.e. "pulp's" visible yet not self-evident meaning--and more the relationship to the Real that it thematizes in the mode of quasi-journalism. For "pop culture studies" as a discipline, the concept of an aesthetic value tied to the non-referential and immanent nature of literary language and
narrative logic drained of content is just another social phenomenon, an "elitist" and often suspect reading practice that should be historicized.

Can anyone testify to the sacredness of pulp? Can anyone testify to its significance, its visible and therefore readable yet hidden significance? Can it be read intensively as "legend" in both uses of the word--allegorically and symbolically? Are the virtual realities produced by pulp always naively created?

I do not believe so. In the most ambitious pulp works, the works produced by non-commercial "pulp hacks" committed to the art of pulp, the literary effect of reality is dramatized acutely as a strangeness, a mystery, a problem. It is in these works that we can see that the de-reification of the literary effects of reality is, indeed, the apogee of the pulp effect. It is in these works that we can come to understand how the engineers of the realisms and naturalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth century succeeded in honing their technique for creating a reality so substantive, so concrete, so ordinary to the extent that later engineers, publishing elsewhere in the shadow of high literary art, were able to carry their work forward by virtue of their embrace of "unpoetry" in order to dramatize the un-creation of reality as an intelligible human experience.

To see this requires viewing pulp in a serious way: not as "unworthy bad writing" (formalist) nor as "impure" and "contaminated art" (ideologist), but rather as a kind of hybrid, a grotesque combination, the mongrelized and deliberately unpleasing progenitor of high modernism and low realism, a mysterious blend of carbon and of silicon.

The "Realism" of Pulp as Vault Door

The dominant approach to the pulp works I study comes out of "popular culture studies." Popular culture scholars, historically linked to folklore studies, are intrigued by
the social processes that produce widespread conventionalism; these scholars therefore view the "conventional" realism of pulp and its propensity to establish virtual worlds as a convenient occasion for doing sociology. For popular culture scholars, the formation of conventional genres and virtual worlds shared collectively by communities signals a work's relevance. It is because of the acutely referential nature of pulp narrative language, the associated rhetoric of "subcreation" and imagination, that fans can discourse together "as if" the virtual worlds of pulp have an independent, objective existence beyond that of the linguistic signs that constitute them. In other words, fans can argue about the genealogy of hobbit families, Sherlock Holmes's favorite type of tobacco, and the geographical locations of sleeping Cthulhu, because the powerful rhetoric of pulp fiction engages the imagination rather than a strictly literary or aesthetic sensibility. Pulp in this view is history rather than legend (in the sense of an inscription); pulp is virtual-reality rather than myth or symbolism. Stranger still, these virtual worlds--we must never forget they are merely literary effects (there is no Minis Tirith, no Holmes, no Hogwarts)--express a strange fecundity for producing novel empirical realities: real rituals, real commodities, real artifacts. These worlds come to penetrate our world of the empirical senses in concrete ways: one can in fact purchase "Glamdring," the elven sword of Galdalf the Grey; one can read at one's own peril H.P. Lovecraft's horrible Necronomicon; one can even eat "Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans"; one can even be sorted by Hogwort's "sorting hat." These hitherto imaginary referents are now real.

In spite of these interesting phenomenon, the processes of such strange emergences are not, strictly speaking, phenomena the specialized discourse of literary criticism is particularly equipped to understand. This is not to suggest that scholars
trained in the context of literary studies are not suited to study these interesting and important phenomena; many working in the "Pulp Studies" section of the PCA/ACA have doctorates in literature. But when Nathan Vernon Madison, the author of the most recent monograph-length study of the pulp fiction magazine, *Anti-Foreign Imagery in American Pulps and Comic Books* (2013), offers his important conclusion that "a small collection of narratives fairly tolerant and sympathetic" of differences of race are present in pulp magazines--a powerful thesis in direct opposition to traditional understandings of pulp as interwar sites of racist fantasy and cruel nativist sentiment--I do believe he convinces by virtue of "extensive" rather than "intensive" reading, is acting as scholar whose concern is less literary form and more the social reality seen through it as through a distorting prism.

For some critics, however, what distinguishes the literary is its unique ability to turn away from and thereby transform "the actual." In his *Writing Against Time* (2013), Michael Clune frames the non-referential aspects of literary language as its greatest asset, the source, at least at this moment, of a knowledge unique to it: "At this moment in the history of the disciplines, literary criticism's best opportunity for creating new knowledge lies not in the description of art's embeddedness in contexts recognizable to historians or sociologists, but in the description of the forces by which art attempts to free itself from such contexts and such recognitions" (17). From Clune's perspective, past "pop culture" approaches to pulp that are inattentive to its fundamental status as a literary rhetoric and formalism--a technique for creating unreal forms and for transforming and not "reflecting" or "refracting" the historical and social world--are not equipped to fully access the "occult" (visible yet not self-evident and untranslated) secrets it holds.
The realist technique of pulp appears to be a naive conventionalism and thus signals to some the absence of a powerful or interesting literary effect worthy of intellectual labor and intensive reading. To generalize, this prejudice is a historical legacy of "modernist" writing and reading practices that will be explored fully in the next chapter, a literary culture that was canonized at the same time as Anglo-American literary criticism's institutional ascendancy over philology in the interwar period. "Modernism," a literature echoing "sacred" texts and often distinguished by its formal novelty and engineered linguistic overdetermination, continues to shade our tastes as gatekeepers, if not of a closed canon then at least as performers of institutionally credentialled canonizing gestures. Quasi-religious expenditures of attention over solitary worthy texts--intensive scrutiny over extensive reading--continues to be valued; thus, pulp continues to be misunderstood as naive realism rather than the terminus site of realism, the horizon of realism reached after modernist experimental energies diminished. Thus, the apparent stylistic unoriginality of what we sometimes refer to as the "conventional realism of pulp," in spite of its topical and even thematic originality, is a problem that must be addressed.

The realism of pulp might be figured as an imposing "slab of stone" covered with undecipherable legends, an obstacle that confronts the literary critic. It is a door to a sinister vault, not unlike the one featured in famous pulp writer, H.P. Lovecraft's, "The Tomb": "Excavated back into the hillside, the structure is visible only at the entrance. The door, a ponderous and forbidding slab of stone, hangs upon rusted iron hinges, and is fastened ajar in a queerly sinister way by means of heavy iron chains and padlocks, according to a gruesome fashion of half a century ago" (15). Like the protagonist of
Lovecraft's story, Jervas Dudley, getting beyond the alienating conventionalism of pulp will require sustained attention and even perverse scrutiny: "I now formed the habit of *listening* very intently at the slightly open portal, choosing my favourite hours of midnight stillness for the odd vigil" (15).

**Getting Behind the Veil by Opening the Vault Door**

In his polemic history of intellectuals and mass culture, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), John Carey exposes the fear and contempt held by literary intellectuals toward "the masses," the burgeoning populations documented by sociologists and historians of working class and middle class individuals who had but recently acquired literacy. In one of his key moments of insight, Carey states,

> The principle around which modernist literature and culture fashioned themselves was the exclusion of the masses, the defeat of their power, the removal of their literacy, the denial of their humanity. What this intellectual effort failed to acknowledge was that the masses do not exist. The mass, that is to say, is a metaphor for the unknowable and invisible. (21).

Equally so, pulp and "conventionalized realism" do not actually exist in this way, are metaphors, intellectual technologies for holding in the mind the "unknowable and invisible" of a sublime plurality of distinctive rhetorics of fiction pioneered by individual writers. The fiction of "the masses" protected the modernists of the early 20th-century from the threat of anonymity represented by the mustering swarms of individuals who intruded upon them, whose "philistine" tastes, crystallizing as convention, seemed to produce an inauthentic and false art of the market, the parlor, and the counting room.

"Marked differentiations such as those of A and B films, or of stories in magazines in
different price ranges, depends not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers," write Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), two philosophers who never went to see films or read stories published in magazines.

So too the metaphor of pulp and the myth of "conventionalized realism" protect us literary critics from the sublime archive of writing produced during the twentieth century, a period David M. Earle, in his *Re-Covering Modernism* (2009), terms productively as the "Paper Age": "In the latter half of the nineteenth century, technology made possible affordable paper, printing, graphic reproduction, and large-scale means of distribution" (6). These technological developments made possible the production of "national magazines and newspapers, modern advertising and circulation, mass publications, mass entertainment" and "the first media-influenced mass culture," he observes, "exactly what modernism is traditionally said to be a reaction against" (6). Drowning in the sublime archive of the productions of the "Paper Age," the idea of pulp, like the idea of the "masses," justifies and even necessitates (in some contexts) the inattentive and extensive reading practices of the sociologist or the historian outlined by McCracken, what appears as an unfaithfulness to the admittedly "odd vigil" of the literary criticism of "pulp fiction."

Juxtaposing Carey's and Earle's studies suggests that those engaged in producing modernist literature and those involved in literary criticism share cognitive strategies and intellectual technologies for coping with excess, what Earle refers to as a "reductive codifying ethos," an ethos equally applicable to crowds of immigrants, phalanxes of industrial workers, and bourgeois families as to piles of paperback books and magazines.
(4). Does eugenics have its counterpart in designations of "literature" and pulp? Does the cruel de-individuation of pulp have its counterpart in how we relate to others, to the differences of race, gender, sexuality, class, species?

In spite of historical efforts, there continues to be a "reductive codifying ethos" haunting as a ghost the literary criticism of the "Paper Age." This study is part of many continued efforts to exorcise this ghost. From my perspective, our exorcizing efforts themselves have become subject to the same "reductive codifying ethos" they were engineered to correct. The methodologies for broadening the purview of literary criticism, the technique for deconstructing the legacy of the elitism of modernism we have inherited, these intellectual tools, too, need to be scrutinized and innovated.

I address the sublime archive of pulp but also the way certain popular productions like pulp have been addressed by literary critics in this past. Taking as a model Darko Suvin's discipline-founding Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre (1979) and David M. Earle's Re-Covering Modernism: Pulps, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form (2009), I approach pulp from multiple--sometimes incommensurate and sometimes complementary--perspectives: formalism, historicism, periodical culture studies, biography. But unlike Suvin's and Earle's studies that ambitiously treat large concepts like "Science Fiction" and "Modernism," my study is acutely aware of the materiality of the literary text as an artifact and intellectual technology or prosthesis, as a collectible object held in the hand and read by a living person, a phenomenology of reading as a discrete moment, an encounter, a sustained deployment of attention. An awareness of the materiality of pulpwood periodicals, the reading practices of the pulp, is not a trivial theoretical curio that can be shed but is in
fact an important element for understanding the formal rhetoric engineered by the pulp writers who center this study. My use of a horizontal and lateral approach to understand pulp is thus curtailed by an acute awareness of the pulpwood periodicals, their physical distinctiveness, their ephemerality. Printed on acid rich paper and rarely archived by academic libraries, they are crumbling. Where Adorno and Horkheimer's ideology would admit no "marked differentiations" within the pulp archive, I see a paralyzing richness of difference and change: the historical situatedness of the phenomena of the "pulp fiction magazine," distinctions of editors, of publishing firms, writers, audiences, issues of distribution, the vastness of the pulpwood marketplace, the concrete conditions of pulp production, and their ongoing disintegration. Whereas Suvin's and Earle's approaches to "Science Fiction" and "Modernism" respectively were "tele-scopic," scaling individual texts down, integrating them into an ecology, and thereby adopting the perspective of an observer contemplating systems, my approach is "micro-scopic." It considers the pulp archive through the specimen of the key work of key pulp writers of a single pulp magazine that persists as an enduring classic, a rare and valuable collectible preserved by virtue of its value as a legend even as the vast majority of the rest of the pulp archive disintegrates into dust: *Weird Tales* (1923-1952).

In other words, my study does not attempt describe and interpret pulp by executing a longitudinal study of pulpwood magazines, tracing their historical origins, and abstracting out to argue for their cultural significance. This is a challenging historiographical project that is being skillfully executed elsewhere, outside of the academy, at the specialized conventions and in the publications of private "pulp magazine" collectors who, until Sean McCann's *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime*
Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism (2005) and Erin Smith's Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines (2005), were relatively alone in their stewardship of this archive. With the help of this community, I begin to highlight elements of the historical context of the pulp archive generally, but adequate historiographical methods would eschew my admittedly literary ones, my description of pulp as an occasion for staging the violation of the literary effect of reality.

This is understanding the world by virtue of the distorting and often exaggerating qualities of the prism of literature; it is not using literature to understand the world. To my mind, what the pulp aesthetic teaches us is that what we count as "ordinary" is constructed by us, a function of our perspective, a product of our shaping attention. The pulp aesthetic shows how "the ordinary" is an intellectual tool for coping with infinite mystery, for living our lives, for carving out spaces of the quotidian--spaces growing rarer in the state of modernity. Pulp teaches us that what we count as "ordinary" is just a fiction we tell, a yarn we spin, for keeping at bay the irreducibility, complexity, ephemerality, and even beauty of experience.

***

In the course of discussing intellectuals' vexed relationships to "the masses," Carey refers to the "redemptive genius" of the "Holmes method," i.e. Sherlock Holmes's quasi-magical ability to identify and individuate an anonymous person after scrutinizing him briefly: his profession, his criminality, the depths of his very soul. Of this fictional intellectual, he writes, "His function [is] to disperse the fears of overwhelming anonymity that the urban mass brought. Holmes redemptive genius as a detective lies in rescuing individuals from the mass" (8).
My approach to the sublime pulp magazine archive echoes the "redemptive" quality of the "Holmes's method." Rather than trace as a periodicals historian the contours and significance of the pulp archive, I choose instead to illuminate the work of key writers publishing in *Weird Tales*, a magazine legendary in the pulp contexts of science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror, and a neglected periodical I am convinced produced enduring works of literary art on the level with the modernists. It also significantly impacted and continues to impact American culture. I do not eschew essential historical information about this important magazine. Aside from a brief portfolio of historical reminiscences, *The Weird Tales Story* (1977), no full-length scholarly study of the magazine has been written. After an appropriate historiographical analysis of *Weird Tales* is written (I hope it will be written!), one might refrain from punctuating criticism with scholarship; but such a needed study is yet to be written and my dissertation is not it; my personal need to interpret eclipses the collective need to curate this important archive. Nevertheless, over the course of my dissertation, I introduce my reader to *Weird Tales's* history, its key writers, its editors, its readers, to the best of my ability given the scant resources available. My bibliography, however, is extensive and to my knowledge gathers the available relevant resources on *Weird Tales* for the curious reader. This is not a boast but rather indicative of the shallow extent to which extensive readings of pulp have eschewed deeper analysis of its most enduring, important, and ambitious examples of it.

***

My study reveals the unfitness of the term pulp as a designator of literary and artistic value and one of its goals is to initiate for that term a shift in connotation from the
pejorative "commodity literature" to something more historically and technically specific. Accordingly, in executing a corollary assault on traditional notions of pulp and "modernism," the idea of a high and a "low," I hope to offer a less flattering alternative to what Andreas distinguished as "the Great Divide": the "hopeless tangle and enigma" of "the Paper Age," a term I take from H.P. Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook," a racist fantasy of miscegenation and populist carnival that evokes, in spite of and perhaps by virtue of its despicably racist undertones, a more accurate metaphorical frame for understanding the fecundity of twentieth-century American literary production than Huyssen's spatial metaphor: "The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and Negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant." (314)

That the "hopeless tangle and enigma" of the pulp archive of the Paper Age has indeed disgusted the literary critic, the formalist, is worth pausing and meditating on; but, like the sectarian who has finally come face-to-face with the contradictions of a doctrine, we must first cease generalizing, stereotyping, reading extensively as sociologists and begin marshaling our attention. Though we are scared, we need to stop at a street corner in Red Hook and confront alienating difference by giving the gift of our attention to a single, sustained, conversation with one person. This person (this text) just might disgust us. Their speech might seem strange to us. We need to evaluate our aesthetics; we need to learn their language.

**Salvaging the Pulp Archive**

My dissertation might have taken the form of a cultural analysis of the relationship between the high modernist literature of the Paper Age and the "pulp,"
"popular," or "mass" literature from which modernism distinguished itself. I might have executed my project by first discarding strictly aesthetic considerations of literary value based on the formal rhetorics of particular works and their abilities to cultivate literary effects. But to my mind such a Bourdieuan approach would not redeem the pulp works I value. It would instead desacralize the modernist texts I also value, a kind of "eye for an eye" or "pound of flesh" with the offended low works cast in the role of avengers. Such an approach would cordon off the notion of value as cohering outside of sociological or ideological boundaries.

Although theories of the sociological origins of artistic value and taste are useful for critiquing the unfair privileging of a specific canon of literature that reinforces power structures, they are limited. They are rhetorically useful for bursting value bubbles that have become insidious. For example, if *Ulysses* is such a valuable masterpiece that it dominates my understanding of modernism and precludes a consideration of other, less representative novels of non-male, non-European experiences, then the "value-reducing" sociology of aesthetic value is very useful. On the other hand, if a work expressing the hitherto neglected experience of modernity of a non-male, non-European needs recuperating, if it is not valued by criticism, the sociology of aesthetic value and its skepticism toward value, is not only unhelpful but counterproductive. In this instance, the scientific light of Bourdieu blinds; something else like shadows or gloom recuperates. We must leave the bustling marketplace and follow Lovecraft into Red Hook.

We recuperate neglected literary work because of our desire to exchange a unique kind of irreducibly complex knowledge that can only be intuited rather than logically apprehended, and to paraphrase this knowledge makes it sound uninteresting when it is,
to my mind, awe-inspiring: what is new and strange to you can be ordinary to me, and what is ordinary to me can be strange to you. This "occult truth of the ordinary," this insight everywhere concealed and everywhere the same in literature, is what Henry James in "The Art of Fiction" termed "a direct impression of life" (196). The occult truth of the ordinary is that there is nothing that is permanently ordinary. The ordinary is an ephemeral domestication of an otherwise enduring (universal) strangeness. Newness and ordinariness are a function of time. Phenomena are always ordinary at this time and strange at another time. This insight--that nothing stays the same, that the ordinary will soon be extraordinary--can almost magically be communicated through the unique prosthesis of ink shapes on paper, an intellectual technology useful for "fixing" phenomena, holding either their strangeness or ordinariness in place: "A novel," writes Henry James, "is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression" (American Realism 201). To this I append, a novel is a direct impression of life at a particular time.

Via the prosthetic device of the book or yellowing magazine and the intellectual technology or realism, the strangeness or ordinariness of phenomena can be fixed. An unspeakable knowledge is communicated as experience. Such experiences are non-social affairs but also, paradoxically so, exercises in empathy. Their "value" is a private value. James's schema of the value of literary experience parallels what H.P. Lovecraft fictionalized in as "mind-casting," a form of mind-sharing exercised by a sinister time-traveling alien race: "A mind would project itself forward in time, feeling its dim, extra sensory way till it approached the desired period. Then, [...] it would seize on the best
discoverable representative of the highest of that period's life-forms; entering the organism's brain and setting up therein its own vibrations" (*Complete Fiction* 962).

With little revision, the history of reading literature is the history of "mind-casting," and the value of the process coheres in the occult knowledge it produces not of who we are essentially but rather what has *happened* to us, those experiences which accumulate to make us some one. The occult truth of the ordinary conveyed by the violation of the literary effect of reality in the most powerful pulp works I study is that our "ordinary" realities are only ordinary now. Years from now they will be weird.

**In the Shadow of Modernism**

My dissertation theorizes a distinctive formal rhetoric of "shadow modernism" pioneered by pulp fiction writers constellating around the magazine *Weird Tales*. They are H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard. I describe "shadow modernism" as pulp fiction characterized as a grotesque combination of what has been understood elsewhere as the unenlightened representationality of a pulp fiction style with the anti-representationality of modernism. This animating tension, between the concrete organic plenitude of high realism (sometimes "naturalism") and the abstract inorganic minimalism of modernism is captured succinctly and powerfully in H.P. Lovecraft's "The Dreams in the Witch House." The protagonist, a student of "non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics" interested in "fantastic legends of elder magic," is haunted by dreams (859). The description of one his dreams formalizes the confluence of realism and modernism that distinguishes *Weird Tales*:

All of the objects--organic and inorganic alike--were totally beyond description [...]. Gilman sometimes compared the inorganic masses to prisms, labyrinths,
clusters of cubes and planes, and Cyclopean buildings; and the organic things
struck him variously as groups of bubbles, octopi, centipedes, living Hindoo
idols, and intricate Arabesques [...]. (863).

"Shadow modernism" stages a confrontation between the concrete and the abstract, the
organic and the inorganic, referential language and literary language, the mimesis of
realism and the anti-representationality of modernism. Moreover, it stages and dramatizes
the acute failure of mimesis. It uses the enduring forms of modernism to make strange
and display for contemplation the sometimes horrible and sometimes beautiful
ontological limits of the ordinary endorsed by reigning ideologies. It is a symbolic
gesture expressing a radical and unyielding agnosticism, an assertion that everything we
know now will be superstition later; every artifact of our culture that is ordinary today
will be strange tomorrow; the ordinary face we confront in the mirror this morning will
be that weird face we see in a photograph years from now.

To the extent that it simulates a world deconstructing, a reality principle violated,
it is an acutely "agnostically" project with a thesis to impart, captured succinctly in an entry
of Clark Ashton Smith's Black Book: "All human thought, all science, all religion, is the
holding of a candle to the night of the universe" (150). Robert E. Howard, echoing Smith
years later in a January 1928 letter to his friend Tevis Clyde Smith, expressed this occult
truth of the ordinary in this way: "What is a life but an uncompleted gesture, beginning in
oblivion and ending in oblivion? What man of history ever really accomplished what he
desired to accomplish? No, what men name life is simply the sparkle of an electron as it
flashes from the pole of birth to the pole of death" (9).
Chapter 2: Loveman and Lovecraft

On April 29th, 1923, an aspiring modernist poet, Samuel Loveman (1887-1976), received a letter from an aspiring pulp-fiction writer, H.P. Lovecraft. In this letter, Lovecraft tells Loveman a strange story: his experience of gaining entry into and exploring the attic of a colonial house in Salem, Massachusetts, the house of one Rebekah Nurse, a woman hanged for witchcraft in 1692.

I cannot resist representing Lovecraft--a legend in the modern genres of fantasy, science fiction, and supernatural horror--as a literary character: pale; hair meticulously parted; speaking tremulously in his famously high-pitched voice; sharp Rhode Island accent; wringing his hands nervously as he asks the pensive caretaker to allow him to climb into that attic. Lovecraft's successful entry confirms his enigmatic attraction to the past in both his art and life: "I saw something hanging from the wormy ridge-pole—something that swayed as if in unison with the vesper breeze outside, though that breeze had no access to this funeral & forgotten place—shadows… shadows…shadows…" (qtd. in I Am Providence 295). Lovecraft's letter to Loveman--an apprentice pulp writer's letter to an apprentice modernist poet --begins to hint at the network of connections that I outline in this chapter, a relationship between pulp writers and high modernists that, properly traced, troubles traditional "high/low" dualism that for many years conditioned literary history's elite/popular understanding of the interwar period of Anglophone literature: the idea that literature "split" in the early twentieth century between a high and a "low," the "great divide" between elite modernism and populist "mass culture" memorably argued for by Huyssen in his classic After the Great Divide (1987). In the introduction to his study, referring to modernism as an "adversarial culture," Huyssen
sums up his argument succinctly: "Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture" (vii). But Lovecraft's letter to Loveman in 1923, a year after the *annus mirabilis* of literary modernism, their correspondence, their enduring friendship, appears as anything but adversarial. In fact, it would be accurate to say Loveman was a literary co-laborer with Lovecraft, a fellow writer publishing in a variety of small circulation, privately printed magazines. Lovecraft and Loveman were friends with similar artistic ambitions equally invested in each other's literary careers.

In April of 1923 Lovecraft was alone in a shadowy attic haunted by America's colonial past, was metaphorically dwelling in the past, while Loveman was social, living among a group of Bohemians--writers, artists, musicians--recently returned to Brooklyn and Greenwich Village from Europe. Lovecraft and Loveman's correspondence is a confluence of old and new, the past and present. Moreover, these two writers' geographical distinctiveness is also worth emphasizing. As examplar of the most ambitious pulp fiction, Lovecraft in 1923 here reminds us that its production took place spatially as well as temporally outside of the regular sites of modernism and publishing: from Loveman in modern Manhattan in we can distinguish Lovecraft in Colonial Maine, in the shadows of a witch's attic. The Loveman/Lovecraft relationship collapses the distinction between high and low and pulp and modernism. It also emphasizes a unique tension at play in "shadow modernism," a tension characterized by concrete and historical spatial and temporal elements.

**H.P. Lovecraft and *Weird Tales* and the Periodical Culture of Interwar America**
In highlighting these issues of geography and temporality, there is a periodical culture distinction that needs to be emphasized as well, one linked to the publishing context of interwar America. Like many poets living in New York, Loveman sought publication in "little magazine" periodicals like The Little Review, Poetry, and American Mercury, publications highly regarded by the poetry mainstream. Not so Lovecraft. During the summer that Lovecraft was poking about in the attic of a reputed witch, admiring and reflecting on the shadow, he was urged by Loveman and his many literary correspondents to submit to a newly launched, experimental, non-commercial, "all-fiction" magazine titled Weird Tales. Although Weird Tales, published in Chicago by a commercial firm, would later come to be framed as a "pulp," at the time of its launch it was just another "all-fiction" magazine, quality of writing aside.

Along with hastily drafted hand-written manuscripts for five stories in spidery cursive script, Lovecraft enclosed a snobbish letter of introduction to the first editor of Weird Tales, Edwin Baird (1886-1957). Although the role Baird would play in the Weird Tales story was a short one--he left the magazine after it nearly went bankrupt in order to edit another pulp, Real Detective Stories--his contribution to it was important: he made the decision to publish Lovecraft's strange manuscripts.

In his initial letter to Baird, Lovecraft does not cast himself as a professional writer but frames himself as a non-commercial amateur, a gentlemanly idler who merely dabbles in writing grotesque fiction as a distraction, a man who had to be convinced by his well-meaning friends, against his sense of propriety, to consider something so vulgar as selling his work: "I have lately been simultaneously hounded by nearly a dozen well-meaning friends into deciding to submit a few of these Gothic horrors to your newly
founded periodical [...]. I have no idea that these things will be found suitable, for I pay no attention to the demands of commercial writing" (qtd. in Joshi 333). Here is a version of that rhetorical stance familiar to scholars of interwar Anglophone literature--the non-commercial artistic writer who is suspicious of the literary marketplace, editorial demands, the conventional tastes of the newly literate masses--a pose held, in one way or another, by the "usual suspects" of traditional canons of what has been called "high modernist" literature--Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, Woolf, Hemingway, Yeats. It has been documented elsewhere how these high writers appear to withdraw from the anonymity and aesthetic degradation threatened by the market and the conventionalisms demanded by the newly-literate consumer of literary commodities while at the same time participating fully in them, financially capitalizing on their status as cultural elites. The inverse has not been documented, how certain "commercial" and pulp writers, like Lovecraft, also adopted non-commercial stances despite their publishing context. In Lovecraft's letter to Baird is confirmation of Michel Houellebecq's interpretation of Lovecraft as "resolutely anticommercial" (39). To the extent that it suggests modernism, I find it unsettling yet provocative to see the anti-commercial pose held by a writer like Lovecraft who, because he entered the literary world through a "commercial" magazine like *Weird Tales*, has been often framed in the past by literary historians as artistically degraded, as a producer of "mass appeal culture," pleasurable entertainment worthy of appearing in extensive surveys but not worthy of close scrutiny. A gloss of Lovecraft's literary output reveals a writer reluctant to mass-produce literary works; as a writer of pulp fictions, the pace by which he produced manuscripts is low.
Lovecraft would never have suspected it at the time, but his contact with this experimental, non-commercial magazine printed on quickly-decaying pulpwood paper resulted in one of the most enduring cultural productions of interwar America: a fictional mythology referred to today as the "Cthulhu Mythos." Generally speaking, the "Cthulhu Mythos" refers to a series of fictional gods, books, locations, and characters that underpin many of the stories that Lovecraft and others wrote and published in *Weird Tales*. Many of his fellow writers, also publishing in *Weird Tales*, used and expanded on these tropes in their stories. In short, it is a collaboratively-authored archive of references that multiple *Weird Tales* writers used and developed together.

In the past, this "Cthulhu Mythos," named after a chief monster in Lovecraft's fictional pantheon, has been the object of sustained attention by enthusiasts who attempt to chronicle its many elements over a wide range of stories published in and outside of *Weird Tales*. It is significant less as a discrete collection of references that can be coherently cataloged and more as an allegory for producing a particular literary affect—a somatic affect engineered for transmitting knowledge. Put another way, I understand it as an intellectual cartographic technology. Disembedded from the concrete historical/material context that produced it, the triumph of the *Weird Tales* writers appears in its central essence as a formal rhetoric designed to dramatize the violation of the literary effect of reality, a hybrid rhetoric I term "shadow modernism," a term convenient because it does not refer to a discrete archive in exclusivity but rather to a formal rhetoric, an affect, an atmosphere. This *Weird Tales* formal rhetoric becomes distinguishable as a grotesque combination between (1) traditional and conventionalized
realism and (2) innovations coming out of the Anglophone literary avant-garde of the teens and twenties.

This chapter relates the historical roots of this rhetoric, and foregrounds the way that shadow modernism emerges from interwar American pulp writers's vexed confrontation with modernism and in this way follows it as a kind of reaction or reflection. I use the metaphor of the "shadow" to highlight how these writers were aware of their low cultural status as pulp writers compared to "modernists."

The construction of a shadow modernism was a large project that Lovecraft never intended and did not execute alone. When he and his fellow writers succeeded in establishing their allegory and formalizing their strange knowledge-producing rhetoric, they did so accidentally, unconsciously, through de-centered labors characteristic of a dynamic of pulpwood authorship that consisted of interplays among editors, writers, and readers. In this way I view *Weird Tales*, the *Weird Tales* writers I study, and the formal rhetoric they engineered together as expressing the pulp aesthetic in its central essence: pulp has been hitherto understood in terms of its apparent unawareness of its media; however, the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* evidences that, in its most ambitious works, tracing the limits of its media is actually its central preoccupation.

**The Collaborative Authorship and Allegorical Structure of the Shadow Modernism**

Despite being censured by Baird for submitting hand-written manuscripts, all five of Lovecraft's stories were accepted without editorial conditions. Intrigued by the strangeness of Lovecraft's anachronistic epistolary style, Baird decided to publish Lovecraft's letter of introduction before any of his stories. In a preface to the published
letter, Baird introduced the hitherto unknown Lovecraft to the readers of *Weird Tales* as a "master of the Gothic tale."

Lovecraft's stories were highly praised, garnering many comments in the letter-to-the-editor section of the magazine titled "The Eyrie." For the fourteen years that remained to Lovecraft, *Weird Tales* became the writer's primary marketplace for the story manuscripts he produced. Although Lovecraft continued to publish poetry, criticism, journalism, and fiction in privately printed and circulated journals and also to correspond with hundreds of writers and fans (his collected letters are over twelve-volumes), *Weird Tales* was the central way, the "finished" way, Lovecraft was made available to the public until the late fifties when the press, Arkham House, was established for the sole purpose of preserving his neglected literary legacy. Aside from a few early science fiction magazines, *Weird Tales* was the most public literary scene in which Lovecraft participated. It was also the discursive space that occasioned the emergence of shadow modernism.

Despite visions of Lovecraft emerging out of recent serious scholarly analyses of his literary legacy, such as Graham Harman's *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (2011), the engineering of the vexed realism of *Weird Tales* is not the hagiographic epic of a single writer's technique. Lovecraft's legendary connection to the magazine resulted in many cultural productions better understood as collaborative literary productions, intersubjectively authored works. By establishing contact with *Weird Tales* connection, Lovecraft was able to develop a vast network of correspondents who came to depend on each other in multiple ways. He also served as mentor to many *Weird Tales* writers. An
accomplishment that eclipses his stories as discrete works of literary art is his central role in the collaborative authoring of a fictional mythology.

Like Saler, many have approached Lovecraft's "virtual world" as a kind of "secondary world" akin to J.R.R. Tolkien's "Middle Earth" or Frank Herbert's *Dune* universe, and in this way have made canonizing gestures in order to determine which *Weird Tales* works of fiction, characters, fictional places, artifacts, fictional tomes, and so on "belong." I do not follow this methodology, viewing, instead, the publication of *Weird Tales* and the epistolary networks, issues of theme and formal rhetoric, and relationships among the writers as the central organizing principle of the allegory. I accept stories as part of the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* based on the intermingling principles of theme, formal rhetoric, and historical association. The idea of an organized mythology structuring the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* expresses a taxonomic spirit that goes against the radical agnosticism that is a central ethos of the stories told by the *Weird Tales* writers I study. What I frame as the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales*, i.e. the allegory that extends across many works of fiction, is brought together less through the diegetic content of stories and more through the rhetoric of fiction they occasion.

To "use" this allegory as an intellectual technology requires a unique "intensive" reading practice that necessitates both intellectual and somatic engagement, an involved type of "immersive" reading somewhat perverse in light of previous descriptions of pulp writing as worthy of only "extensive" reading. Mirroring the dualism of "shadow modernism's" formal rhetoric (realism/modernism), the intellectually intensive and somatically engaged reading practice demands and requires both an "engaged mind" and
"an engaged gut," a close reader somatically sensitive to empirical descriptions, i.e. a reader willing to dwell in virtual worlds both intellectually and bodily.

Aptly described by Saler as "a distinctly modern form of enchantment" that estranges reality and subsequently prepares the modern subject to deal with "difference, hybridity, and liminality," the shadow modernism-that resulted from Lovecraft's encounter with *Weird Tales*-expresses a historically-derived ideological commitment that will be sketched below. While I partially follow Saler in viewing Lovecraft and company's "virtual world" from a political and "user-centered" perspective--it is an allegory used that is essentially liberating--I deviate from him in his narrow focus on the political nature of the stories we both study.

For Saler, the "Cthulhu mythos" is politically liberating for its capacity to allow the modern subject discursive models for navigating the disorienting liminality of identity in the condition of modernity, a historical epoch theoretically characterized as a time when traditional anchors of identity have been brought into question or even comparatively swept away. This emphasis on identity eschews the profound and deliberate pessimism of "shadow modernism," its deliberate production of a state of radical uncertainty, a quality which influences every other element. To disregard its framing of modernity as an approaching crisis where too much novelty prevents the establishment of ordinary spaces obscures its key contribution.

The shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* is not only a powerful "virtual world" for the modern subject to negotiate liminality and identity in a state of disorienting change, a sociological thesis generalizable to popular culture generally. It is also, and more importantly so, an intellectual technology for bringing something invisible into visibility-
-the occult truth of the ordinary--via the confluence of somatic experience and intellectual apprehension, for tracing the limits of the literary effect of reality and narrative as a form of rhetoric, as a form of organizing the phenomena of experience. The shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* facilitates the perception of narrative and the literary effect of reality as a variety of rhetoric, as a stabilizing of an otherwise ephemeral configuration. These stories reveal the flux of the interwar period, the horizon of that particular reality, that historical moment.

H.P. Lovecraft, and the circle of writers who congregated around him, produced an allegory and rhetoric of fiction for perceiving the truth of modernity as a catastrophic series of accelerating changes. In this way, *Weird Tales* is the apogee of "modernist reflection," and its leveraging of its own ephemerality for aesthetic purposes allowed it to perceive the strategies of "formal endurance" or "classicism" that structures key Anglophone modernist texts. The stories published in *Weird Tales* respond directly to both "high modernism" and the fictional "mass culture" of which it has, in the past, been taken to be a mere outgrowth. Like Lovecraft's witch's attic, *Weird Tales* and the shadow modernism that derives from it appear to us today as a shadowy grotto containing the other of "sanctified" literary art, a kind of "sacrilegious unpoetry." Unlike James Joyce's *Ulysses*, it does not attempt to order and consecrate the chaos of modernity with myth but rather declaims it, reveals its ephemerality by becoming its other.

*Weird Tales* is modernism's corollary, supplementary to, and coextensive with what has been figured elsewhere as "high modernism." Collaborative authorship, ghostwriting, inter-textual exchanges, imaginary archives, and de-centered inventive processes are relied upon rather than "high modernist" strategies of production issuing from
romantic notions of individual authorship, the idea of singular artistic genius, and references to actual archives of elite literary culture. The collaborative labor of authoring narratives through *Weird Tales* becomes a collaborative effort between editor, writer, writers, readers, printers, and distributors. Rather than rely upon a rhetoric of domesticating and sanctifying the radical novelty of modernity, a traditional way of defining "high modernism," the *Weird Tales* writer dramatically stages confrontations with novelty in order to dramatize the disintegration of the literary effect of reality. The shadow modernists of *Weird Tales* invent more and more only slightly distinguishable narrative events in order to convey the experience of too much novelty linked to modernity.

This experience "too much novelty" so often thematized by the *Weird Tales* writers is one I hypothesize is a unique effect/affect of the formal rhetoric of de-reifying the literary effect of reality characteristic of their stories. Because it is a particular concern of the *Weird Tales* writers, they pioneer a distinctive rhetoric to describe it. This rhetoric of the cognitive dissonance produced by modernity is genealogically linked to traditional descriptions of the sublime, and yet I distinguish the *Weird Tales* version the traditional sublime is waked by an unbearable understanding and not of ignorance, the apprehension of too, too much knowledge, too much novelty, rather than an apprehension and acceptance of ignorance or an inspiring intuition of latent cognitive power. The cognitive dissonance that is fictionalized in the *Weird Tales* stories resemble the sublime, but they are structured more like traditional definitions of beauty. In this view, modernity is too beautiful.
Weird Tales represents an aesthetic tradition of early 20th century literature distinct from what has been labeled in the past as "high modernism;" nevertheless, that the weirdness of the magazine, the weirdness of its narrative plot devices, and the weirdness of the Weird Tales writer's literary legacy symptomatizes a cultural logic in dialogic relationship with "high modernism."

**Light and Shadow versus High and Low**

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937)--the most visible of all the shadow modernists--became a celebrated writer in what would become referred to in the '30s as the pulp fiction magazines, came to be mythologized as a prophet of what cultural historian Victoria Nelson aptly refers to as the "sub-Zeitgeist" of the 20th century, the "popular" genres of "science fiction," "fantasy," and "supernatural horror." In affirmation of this legacy, today the most sought after award in fantastic literature, "The World Fantasy Award"--awarded each year at the Annual World Fantasy Convention--is a bust of Lovecraft.

Samuel Loveman's career is less widely known but well documented: he went on to publish poetry in little magazines, to develop a series of relationships with celebrated literary figures; and though his books of poetry never garnered high critical acclaim, he lived a life a literary life among more visible modernists in Brooklyn and Greenwich Village. After the efflorescence of American modernism, he established a rare bookstore and a little press in Brooklyn and wrote a memoir about his close friend, Hart Crane.

Though they parted ways in later life, Loveman and Lovecraft came together in 1924, when both moved to New York to pursue literary careers. Until April 1926--when emotional and psychological disturbances drove Lovecraft from New York--Lovecraft
and Loveman regularly visited one another. Along with other literary aspirants, they established a literary club, "The Kalems." In consideration of their membership in the same club, we can perhaps see the logic of "the great divide" troubled. And yet—this potential narrative of high/low coalition risks obscuring the fact that, in spite of their being part in the same social and aesthetic social network for a time, Loveman and Lovecraft did indeed become part of notably distinct communities, communities whose unique nature are not accurately portrayed by the classic spatial metaphor of the high and "low."

Relying upon past narratives of twentieth century Anglo-American literature, it might seem appropriate to say that Lovecraft took the low road and that Loveman took the "high." However, this "high/low" metaphor, structured by the far too simplistic binary of "elitism" and "mass culture," has come to be seen as unfairly privileging a narrow corpus of literature while, at the same time, as violently homogenizing as "mass" culture a great range of diverse texts hitherto neglected by literary criticism. Lovecraft's letter to Loveman suggests an alternative metaphor—not a spatial hierarchy but a quantitative spectrum of visibility based on light and shadows. It is a more nuanced metaphor that avoids value judgments haunted by the influence of prior literary criticism and that precludes the inherent reductivism that has, at best, set Weird Tales adrift in a great archive of true and not deliberate and aesthetically productive ephemerality and, at worst, interred it, forgotten, not in the attic of Rebekah Nurse but on the garbage heap.

Below I trace the contours of this alternative to the "high/low" metaphor, a task that will require return to a typical scene where "the great divide" was supposed to have taken place.
The "Dividing" of Loveman and Lovecraft

In 1923, Loveman was living in Cleveland, Ohio where he wrote poetry and criticism for the amateur press associations; he sought out relationships with intellectuals and artists and eventually became friends with Ambrose Bierce and a dejected Hart Crane (he would serve as the executor of Crane's estate after the poet's suicide in 1932). In August of 1924, desiring to get closer to the literary world, Loveman migrated to Brooklyn with his friend, the bookseller and printer, George Kirk, who had published in 1922 Loveman's correspondence with Ambrose Bierce in a slim volume, *Twenty-one Letters of Ambrose Bierce*. Though Loveman never rose into wide visibility as a poet, in 1936 the Caxton Press honored him with the publication of his *The Hermaphrodite and Other Poems*. Later in life, Loveman's memoir of his relationship with Hart Crane resulted in his most enduring roles in modernist literary history: a footnote, a poet who never quite made it, a chronicler of Hart Crane's artistically sucessful yet tragic life.

In 1923, Lovecraft was still enjoying a newly discovered freedom, the result of his mother's death in May of 1921. Hitherto a self-professed hermit psychologically and financially bound to his ailing mother, Sarah Lovecraft, Lovecraft seemed to enjoying change in 1923: he was traveling—to Boston, to Cleveland, to New York, throughout New England. He was visiting friends, scouring the countryside for the detritus of the American Colonial period that was his lifelong obsession. Throwing off his paralyzing shyness, he became entangled in a romance. In spite of his deep-seated anti-Semitism, he married in 1924 Sonia Greene, an artistically-inclined woman of Jewish ancestry.

In terms of traditional modernist literary history, Lovecraft--who regularly appears in survey accounts of "Gothic literature," "science fiction," "fantasy literature,"
and "supernatural horror"--is tellingly absent except for a surprising cameo in a letter from Hart Crane to his sisters in October of 1924. Speaking about a walk with Loveman and Lovecraft in Brooklyn, poet Crane complains that Loveman "brought along that queer Lovecraft person with him" (Qtd. in Joshi 345). But aside from giving modernist poets the shivers, Lovecraft was engaging with a kind of literary scene in 1923, although not the same high literary scene Loveman was trying to break into, a world personified, I think, by Crane and the Greenwich Village bohemians who read his modernist-inspired poetry.

Aside from his travels, romances, and antiquarian pursuits, Lovecraft wrote for the amateur press associations. These were highly organized networks of literature and journalism enthusiasts geographically de-centered who privately published their own journals, newspapers, and magazines. In July, Lovecraft was elected Official Editor of the United Amateur Press Association, a humble position from the perspective of the New York intelligentsia of the time but one worthy of celebration from the perspective of Chicago or Cleveland. He corresponded with fellow writers, poets and journalists. He wrote and submitted fiction, poetry, and criticism to magazines published and circulated by the associations—non-commercial affairs comparable to what have been categorized as the modernist "little magazines." He was also dabbling in publishing himself, issuing his own magazine, The Conservative (there was an issue in March and July of that year). But something happened to Lovecraft in 1923. He discovered the experimental magazine that would offer him the rare opportunity of selling his unconventional fiction and broadcasting it to readers outside of the narrow world of amateur journalism.

The Pulpwood Magazine and Weirds Tales as a Problem Case
In hindsight, we would call *Weird Tales* a "pulp magazine," but in 1923 the idea of the "pulps" as kitschy publications of low-grade commercial fiction written by tyro hacks was still in the process of emergence. At this point the reference would have been the "pulpwood paper" magazine, a term which simply referred to the type of paper the magazine was printed on; the allegorical projection which carried the "low-grade/low-cost" connotations of "pulpwood paper" to the aesthetic quality fiction that was printed on it, came years later after the "pulpwood" magazine business model—widely implemented and confirmed to be quite commercially lucrative—caused a boom of titles and the newsstand market became flooded with commodity literature, what one editor writing in the August 28th, 1935 issue of *The New York Times* referred to as "fiction by volume." Consider the following excerpt:

There is another publishing world little known and certainly unofficially recognized, in which volume of production is more important than literary quality. The pulp magazines, month in and month out, regardless of season and almost without concern for economic depression, go on pouring an endless stream of fiction to the news-stand trade. (16)

"Unofficially recognized." This phrase is important to note as it reveals that "pulp magazines" as a discrete "Grub street" endeavor generalizable in terms of high quantity and low quality, only became at hand as a circulating cultural stereotype after and as a result of the massive expansion of the all fiction magazine market. Though East Coast intellectuals would ironically smile at such midwest hubris (*Weird Tales* was published by a Chicago-based outfit), such magazines could and often did entertain literary ambitions in 1923. In fact, *Weird Tales* was founded in response to what the publisher,
Jacob Clark Henneberger, thought of as an aesthetic crisis, a kind of encroachment of the contaminating commercial influence on literary endeavor. Henneberger describes his reasoning for founding the magazine thus:

Before the advent of *Weird Tales*, I had talked with such nationally known writers as Hamlin Garland, Emerson Hough, and Ben Hecht then residing in Chicago. I discovered that all of them expressed a desire to submit for publication a story of the unconventional type but hesitated to do so for fear of rejection [...]. When everything is properly weighed, I must confess that the main motive in establishing *Weird Tales* was to give the writer free rein to express his innermost feelings in a manner befitting great literature. (qtd. in Weinberg 3).

Contemporary literary scholars unaware of the history of pulpwood magazines are ill equipped, I think, to read this sloganeering accurately. Suffering from what David M. Earle aptly calls a "prejudice of form"—value-laden preconceptions linked to the media vehicle of a literary text's first appearance—many will struggle to read this anecdote as nothing more than a rhetorically savvy brand advertisement, a philistine salesman's attempt to "cash in" on what Pierre Bourdieu would call "symbolic capital." Engineered to be purchased on the cheap, printed on acid-rich paper that yellows and disintegrates quickly, adorned with sensationalized art often representing women in sexual scenarios, inaccurately thought to be exclusively read by the uneducated lower classes, one would expect writers who published in what would come to be labeled as "pulp magazines" as having a mercenary vision of their art work more in accord with that of the editor of *The Writer's Digest*, the de-facto trade magazine of commercial writers publishing in cheap
paper, popular publications. Writing in his October 1930 editorial on "Popular Fiction—As It is Today," the editor writes,

Writing for pulp-paper magazines never can be anything but a trade. Writers should face it as such. Say to yourself, 'I am an intelligent writer and have logically figured out the reason why one hundred thousand readers buy a copy of Ravenous Ranch Romances each month [...]. I will write a story that not only coincides with the required word-length, but one that will specifically appease this incentive on the part of the readers. (Locke 34)

Here is an arch pulp writer speaking in harmonious accord with the bipolar vision of modern literature the idea of the high and low divide implies: writers in pulp magazines are tradesmen, not artists; their writing is conventional and formulaic; it takes this inspired shape in order to satisfy readers who crave formula and, worse still, a politically-suspect escape from their daily lives made miserable by a system of exploitation. This glimpse into the trade journal of commercial writers is a confirmation of the vision of popular literature laid out by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: commercial magazines as artistically bankrupt and morally compromised arms of capitalism's "culture industry," an ideological apparatus that pacifies the masses, coaxes them into cooperating in their own exploitation. But at the same time that this passage confirms Adorno and Horkheimer's vision, it subtly opens up space for the artistic pulp writer. The sentence, "Writing for pulp-paper magazines never can be anything but a trade," is written as a dialogic response. The editor of *The Writer's Digest* is responding to, scolding even, a group of pulp writers, publishers, and editors, mute here, who he
thinks inappropriately consider their writing efforts as something in excess of mere market exchanges.

Seven years before this editorial, Henneberger might have been considered one of the idealistic publishers who considered "pulp-paper magazines" as something more than a mere trade censured here. Henneberger officially founded *Weird Tales* in 1923, and in the inaugural issue (March 1923), the editor, Edwin Baird, describes the magazine as a rare market for pulp manuscripts that did not follow conventions established by market-focused editors. Using the clipped, minimalistic idiom characteristic of pulp magazine editors concerned about the reading proficiency of their audience, he "brands" *Weird Tales* in this way:

Weird Tales is not merely "another new magazine." It's a brand new type of new magazine—a sensational variation from the established rules that are supposed to govern magazine publishing. *Weird Tales*, in a word, is unique. [...] Our stories are unlike any you have ever read—or perhaps will ever read—in other other magazines. They are unusual, uncanny, unparalleled. (180-181)

As a commercial enterprise, *Weird Tales* was a failure. Where major pulp magazines like *Argosy* and *Blue Book Magazine* could boast circulation among 200,000 to 500,000 readers from 1912 to 1922, *Weird Tales* circulation was well below what would have been consider viable for a pulp magazine business enterprise (Pulp Magazines Project). Although the scant statistics archive seems to confirm *Weird Tales* tenuous commercial performance (pulp publishers rarely saved their business records), the myth of the magazine's financial struggles is securely established within the communities of pulp magazine collectors whose under-appreciated preservation efforts have resulted in the
magazine's apotheosis: "For all its fame and the legends which still proliferate about it," writes pulp anthologist and enthusiast Peter Haining, "Weird Tales existed for most of its thirty years (1923-1954) in the most precarious financial state, and probably at the height of its popularity could boast no more than 50,000 readers" (261).

Within a year of the magazine's inaugural issue, low circulation had resulted in Henneberger's crippling debt of $40,000 to his printer, B. Cornelius. Because of this, Henneberger was forced to sell his shares in the company that published Weird Tales to his financial partner; furthermore, he was forced to sell his shares in Weird Tales to his printer. As a result of this financial crisis and reorganization, the first editor of Weird Tales, Edwin Baird, left the magazine to edit the more conventional and commercially viable Detective Tales. In the summer of 1924, Henneberger found himself with a magazine that was not selling that did not have an editor.

We can only speculate why Henneberger stuck with the magazine, but he did so, and his decision decidedly repudiates the commercial "mercy killing" logic that typifies the pulp fiction marketplace in such accounts as Harold Hersey's 1937 memoir, Pulpwood Editor: The Fabulous World of Thriller Magazines Revealed by a Veteran Editor and Publisher: "Only the non-sentimentalist in the pulpwoods—the publisher who has both the business acumen and the courage to commit these 'mercy killing'—continues to prosper and expand. A lagging title is worse than useless" (18).

Quick to reorganize, Henneberger enlisted the help of contributors to edit a one-year anniversary issue, indexed as May-June-July of 1924. In this issue appears an anonymously authored manifesto titled, Why Weird Tales?:
We make no pretension of publishing, or even trying to publish, a magazine that will please everybody. What we have done, and will continue to do, is to gather around us an ever-increasing body of readers who appreciate the weird, the bizarre, the unusual—who recognize true art in fiction. […] The writing of the common run of stories today has, unfortunately for American literature, taken on the character of an exact science. Such stories are entirely mechanical, conforming to fixed rules. […] (Qtd. In Weinberg 17)

To an extent, the rhetoric here echoes the clipped editorial of the inaugural issue, but there is a mission zeal in excess of pure commercial branding. Compared to the typical pulp fiction magazine that *Weird Tales* shared the cluttered newsstand with, we have something different.
Chapter 3: The Shadow Modernism of *Weird Tales*

Lovecraft's stance towards his writing efforts and *Weird Tales’s* aesthetic-based mission troubles literary scholars's knee-jerk impulse to indulge in the fiction of "mass culture," that in the past sanctioned nuanced and detail-focused "intensive reading" when works published in "little magazines" held by academic libraries are considered and generalizations, "extensive reading," or even more often than not mere indifference when "pulp magazines" held by collectors are similarly considered. The convenient "reductive codifying ethos" and fiction of a "mass culture," which shades so many of the traditional historical accounts of modern Anglophone literature of the early twentieth century, cannot withstand theoretical scrutiny or being considered in the light of strange writers like Lovecraft — pulp writers with artistic ambition. And *Weird Tales*, the magazine that became synonymous with Lovecraft's name, exposes as ideology generalizations about the commodity-literature that appeared on newsstands of the interwar period: one might point out the fact that they were all commodities; and many conclude that the fiction is kitsch; but *Weird Tales*, a non-commercial and aesthetically experimental enterprise informed by a desire to be a carnivalesque playground for otherwise uncategorizable and unsaleable manuscripts, challenges the notion that these magazines—these "pulps"—were not concerned with issues of "art" or entertain ideas of aesthetic ambition. "We make no pretensions of publishing, or even trying to publish, a magazine that will please everybody. What we have done, and will continue to do, is to gather around us an ever-increasing body of readers who appreciate the weird, the bizarre, the unusual—who recognize true art in fiction," states the editorial manifesto of the magazine published in the one-year anniversary issue in 1924, an evocation of cultural capital that recalls the
slogan of a flagship little magazine of high modernism, *The Little Review*: "Making No Compromise with Public Taste."

*Weird Tales*'s editorial manifesto is not only a brand argument functioning to stake out ground in a specific market niche that held out the promise of profit. *Weird Tales* and Rural Publications, Inc., Henneberger's company, are also, and crucially so, commercial enterprises that sought authenticity amidst an alienated and alienating interwar West. For a long time scholars implicitly hewed to the positions of modernists who offered similar explanations for their art and aloofness from a literary marketplace recent critiques have implicated them in. Recent revisions have attempted to reconsider literary scholars's solidarity with the "high modernists" rhetoric of cultural purity and anti-market sloganeering. In the context of such revisions, withholding judgment though not quite "buying into" *Weird Tales*’s formally and rhetorically comparable rhetoric seems appropriate.

Lovecraft's decision to publish in *Weird Tales*, and Loveman's decision to publish in the little magazines and to be published by little presses, is significant. When the historical circumstances of these writers are scrutinized closely, we see that their careers as literary artists exceed the "high/low" binary. This is particularly so in the case of Lovecraft when the idiosyncratic nature of *Weird Tales* as a literary marketplace is reconstructed. However, to critique the "great divide" in the context of Lovecraft's and Loveman's enduring relationship is to perhaps indulge in the tempting idea that they were both what we might call "modernists." This would be misleading. Though the umbrella term "high modernism"-used to refer to a small corpus of work produced by a coterie of Anglo-American experimental poets and fiction writers--was yet to be widely used when
Lovecraft was choosing "pulp magazines" over little magazines as his primary media, Lovecraft knew of Pound, Eliot, Conrad, Joyce and company, and though he did not refer to them as "modernists," he had a sophisticated opinion of them that evolved throughout his writing career. He sought out their work in rare editions, defended it from uneducated artistic conservatives in publications of amateur press associations, and poked fun at it in letters, a memorable example of this being his parody of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, a long poem titled, "Waste Paper: A Poem of Profound Insignificance." To preview his vexed relationship with the "high modernists," consider this selection from an exemplary letter to fellow *Weird Tales* writer, Frank Belknap Long, written May 26th of 1923: "I have high respect for these moderns as philosophers and intellectuals, however much I may dismiss and disregard them as poets. T.S. Eliot himself was an acute thinker—but I do not believe he is an artist. An artist must always be a child… and live in dreams and wonder and moonlight" (Qtd. in Joshi 230). Lovecraft's repeated criticisms of modernist art and poetry makes considering him a "high modernist" the insincere domestication of an otherwise strange occurrence which leaves in-tact the reductivist fiction of a mass culture. Lovecraft has been studied in other contexts, under various rubrics such as "popular culture," or "Gothic studies," "science-fiction studies," and so on, but these approaches to a solitary Lovecraft disembedded from his artistic ecology--*Weird Tales*, modern art, and early twentieth century commercial fiction--implicitly perpetuate the idea that Lovecraft was a solitary genius among pulp hacks. My impression is that such contexts are ill equipped to consider how *Weird Tales* the magazine contributed to his writing; and it dooms the work of many talented writers who published with and in that magazine to continued neglect. This is not to say that Lovecraft has no place in narratives
of "Gothic literature," "science fiction," and "popular culture." Not at all. It is from and through such discourses that *Weird Tales* and Lovecraft have received enough attention to attract intensive scholarly analysis. To frame as unfinished the uptake of Lovecraft in "Gothic studies," "science fiction studies," and "popular culture studies" is merely to point out that these discourses have yet to adequately take into account the qualitatively distinct nature of the cultural conditions of Lovecraft and company's literary enterprise, its historical singularity, its ambitious nature.

My impression is that popular culture studies have pushed back against such Lovecraft-focused studies and have taken up other famous *Weird Tales* writers like Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, and Ray Bradbury, avatars of the "popular genres" of fantasy, supernatural horror, and science fiction respectively; however, for members of the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association--the institutional arm of pop culture studies in America--the question of literary historical models is irrelevant as is the intensive reading practice his work demands. In such an archive where the chaffmingles with the wheat, where many "works of literature" are supplemented by "popular cultural productions" like Lovecraft based plush toys, board games, and comic books, there would is no reason not to subsume Lovecraft, *Weird Tales*, and company in the monstrous archive of pulp fiction magazines produced during the era. Consider this January 1940 statistical speculation offered in *The Writer's Digest*, a trade journal for writers in the pulp magazines, in order to understand the range of the pulp fiction archive:

The Digest estimates that there are 9000 different authors submitting manuscripts to pulp-paper magazines in any one year. Of this number more than two-thirds are not worthy of being read past 'page one, middle page, and last page.' Thus the
actual competition available to authors submitting scripts to the pulps is 3000.

There are 110 pulps buying about 10,000 stories, shorts, and fillers per year. (qtd. in Locke 85)

To set *Weird Tales*, Lovecraft, and company adrift in the sea of so many magazines ignores the unique conditions of their production; their notable singularity; the way that, unlike the majority of those magazines that have since disintegrated, they have been cherished, preserved, replicated, transferred through anthologists and painstakingly compiled fascimiles anthologies. It disregards the value placed on *Weird Tales*.

How do we literary historians ethically adapt such uncategorizable intrusions into our models of literary history: a pulp writer who thinks of himself as an artist? A financially fraught commercial magazine founded to solve an aesthetic crisis? A group of writers who conditionally hew to dead traditions, who happily plagiarize each other's tropes, and who extend each other's narratives in order to suture them together into a de-centered allegorical framework that has become a self-replicating virtual world, a space for engineering a rhetoric of de-reification? What is required is a not a "canonizing" gesture but an authentic attempt to situate H.P. Lovecraft and company in relation to "high modernism," a movement it learned from and borrowed from.

**The *Weird Tales* Writers and their Rhetorical Awareness of Modernism**

If the metaphor of the low Lovecraft and the high Loveman does not suit, can we imagine an alternative metaphor that does? To find one we might look to recent revisionist scholarship on the nature of modernism deriving from the Modernist Studies Association and its flagship journal, *Modernism/modernity* and consider the prime structuring thesis of their work—the assertion that modernist literature was always already
a fiction perpetuated by writers, critics, and scholars. Since its uptake by the literary academy in the 1940s, the term modernism has been put to work for a diversity of rhetorical purposes: a mere historical period marker (1919-1939), a referent to focus a pattern of formal aesthetic strategies, a "brand name" to highlight a discrete network of interpersonal relationships among groups of experimental artists: the Left Bank Exiles, the Dadaists, the Bloomsbury Group, the Vorticist Movement, the Bohemians of Greenwich Village, the Italian Futurists, the Cubists. Recently, scholars have begun to acknowledge the diminished interpretive fitness of the term modernism and to de-naturalize the hitherto widespread though naive literary historical myth that there were indeed a group of artists and writers, the "modernists," whose diverse aesthetic responses to the conditions of modernity implicitly deserve privileging in historical models of western art. In his book, *Re-Covering Modernism*, Earle opens by critiquing Michael Levenson's genealogical account of "high modernist" literature, *A Geneology of Modernism* (1986). Of Levenson's view on modernism, Earle writes,

> Though a sophisticated study of the criticism of Arnold, Eliot, Pound, and Hulme, Levenson's book just propagates the Monolithic and Elite definitions of modernism: Monolithic because he does not take into consideration the histories of women, homosexuals, and minorities working within (and against) the movement; Elite because he never takes into account how modernism was working within the marketplace or even that there were popular forms and aspects of the movement" (4).

Earle's critique of Levenson's account of modernism parallels many similar critiques of traditional notions of modernism, which have thereby given rise to the notion of the "new
modernisms." This pluralistic notion, Earle claims, is an attempt accurately to come to terms with an early twentieth century literary culture that is a "multivariate, multivalent, and ultimately non-cohesive movement" (4). Earle follows "new modernist" scholar Jennifer Wicke, who suggests that critics and historians of the "new modernisms" should see themselves as "colporteurs," traveling booksellers who "gathered up, collected, and retailed the chaff and the wheat, the flotsam and the jetsam, the cream and the skim milk of published material of their moment" (Wickes 396).

"Retailing the chaff and the wheat." This is a radically elastic modernism drained of all interpretive power. To follow the logic suggested by Wicke in the case of Lovecraft and company carries the real risk of allowing a too quick domestication of the important structuring adversarial stance adopted by the Weird Tales writers toward modern art, i.e. their thematically significant antagonism to modernism. To lift all boundaries and to admit that we were mistaken, that there was no "great divide," and that the credentialing logic that invalidated Lovecraft and company as modernists was merely ideology, is to also ignore these writers alterity.

For the Weird Tales writers there was such an artistic movement properly called modernism that they framed as their antagonist and fictionalized regularly. Moreover, as writers with artistic ambition who were forced to publish in artistically degraded venues, they were acutely aware of what, in the late 1920s and early 30s, was being celebrated as art and literature. Much is at stake in bearing in mind that they were not modernists but shadow modernists.

Inasmuch as the modernists adopted an adversarial stance toward mass culture à la Huysssen, the Weird Tales writers adopted a comparable adversarial stance toward an
approximate field of cultural production that would come to generalized as "modernism."

Lovecraft (and by extension his co-subjects and the Weird Tales community) takes

generalized rubrics of modernism as a point of departure, theorizes himself and his

aesthetic project as a kind of "anti-modernism" that thematizes its own ephemerality and

the enduring forms of modernism. For a demonstration of this, consider this 1935 excerpt

from one of Lovecraft's essays in the amateur press titled, "Heritage or Modernism:

Common Sense in Art Forms": "Remove all sources of familiarity--all the subtle

landmarks supplied by what we know of the past--and no phase of art or life can have

more than the slenderest vestige of appeal, beauty, or meaning" (Miscellaneous 195).

It is important to qualify this passage by pointing out that this is not a clarion call

for a reactionary turn to "traditionalism," a kind of rejoinder to Ezra Pound's famous,

"Make it new!" (Keep it old!). Nor is it a call for his fellow Weird Tales writers to

execute anachronistic pastiches of dead styles—a proposition that a glance of any issue of

Weird Tales will confirm. Rather, Lovecraft establishes here room for an alternative to

modernism that takes as its point of departure a previously established pattern. Here is a

dialogic theory of art, a quasi-ekphrastic rhetoric that will produce works that formalize

reactions to interwar modernity, its distinctive modernist art, and the artists who produced

it.

Irrespective of the actual coherence of a modernist group or unified modernist

style, the presence of such a field of significance is undeniable in the case of the Weird

Tales writers I study. Not representing a "traditionalist" flight into previous styles, their

work will be shown as exhibiting an alternative strategy of stylistic innovation, an
alternative process of "modernizing" literary art that largely emphasizes reflection, incorporation, and hybridity rather than formal stylistic innovation.

*Weird Tales* as Modernist Reflection

The "otherness" I'm trying to hold out for *Weird Tales* is not meant as a justification for considering Lovecraft and company as outside the purview of the "new modernisms." To study Lovecraft as one among many "modernisms" would be to follow recent scholarship deriving from the "new modernisms" movement that has shown equal interest in "recovered" texts that coextend modernism in terms of aesthetic strategies and political commitments as well as in texts that directly work against the movement as traditionally defined in concrete historical terms. The potential pitfall I am trying to avoid with this exclusionary gesture is that of uncritically framing Lovecraft and his fellow *Weird Tales* writers as continuous with modernism rather than as a separate and isolatable "alternative modernism," a quasi-ekphrastic reaction to it. In too quickly imagining an intimate continuity between modernism and the *Weird Tales* writers, we risk downplaying their self-structuring "anti-modernism," a symbolic hostility that is key for understanding what I understand as their "shadow modernism," the extent to which their formal rhetoric is a hybrid of realism and the aestheticism of modernism. This rhetoric dramatizes the de-reification of the world and thereby produces a novel affect, a unique form of the sublime, and reveals the occult truth of the ephemerality of all ordinariness. Their unique way of aesthetically and thematically registering modernity in their work--on the level of form and thematics--becomes clear on a historical plane when their distance from art, the reflective distance of an ekphrastic poet sneering at an art exhibition just beyond the range of perception, is fully understood. The question we must
ask, then, is, could it be that the *Weird Tales* writers I study should be categorized as anti-modernists? Yes. For to try to frame Lovecraft and his fellow writers uncritically as modernists--to frame *Weird Tales* as modernism without careful forethought and thereby to set about the work of discovering analogues for modernistic themes and aesthetic strategies--risks obscuring their radical and self-adopted alterity.

Interpretive payoffs derive from what appears to be an exclusivity-gesture, the strategic boundary-marking entailed in considering *Weird Tales*, Lovecraft, and the *Weird Tales* writers as occupying a marginal position as peripheral spectators among the shadows. The concept of a shadow modernism makes sense of these writers' ambivalent relationship to modern art, their idiosyncratic fictionalization of the aesthetic object generally and modernism specifically, a family of symbols and narrative tropes that pervades much of their work in high frequency. It also helps to theorize a distinctive period of artistic production I term modernist reflection.

A passage from one of Lovecraft's stories, "The Hound," evidences this. Published in *Weird Tales* in February of 1924, the story relates the deviant habits and adventures of two "decadents" who, in addition to creating a "blasphemous" art museum of "satanic taste of neurotic virtuosi," travel to England in order to plunder graves for interred art objects (*Complete Fiction* 216). The story opens with the narrator justifying his perverse archaeological practices as a response to him and his lover's terrible ennui, the source of which is their having exhausted all of the experiences that the world of modern art held out: "St. John and I had followed enthusiastically every aesthetic and intellectual movement which promised respite from our devastating ennui. The enigmas of the Symbolists and the ecstasies of the pre-Raphaelites all were ours in their time, but
each new mood was drained too soon of its diverting novelty and appeal" (Complete Fiction 217). This story of a dangerous amulet, "the oddly conventionalized figure of a crouching winged hound," is worth treating in more detail, but I cite it here briefly as one of many examples where the narrative is structured as a quasi-ekphrastic reflection on and reaction to modernism, where the theme of modern art, or "modernism," functions as a central narrative trope (Complete Fiction 218).

It is an important point that the Weird Tales writers rarely use the precise signifier modernism to refer to the fictional strange art objects or novums that narratively structure their stories. And so, a corollary question should be raised: to what extent can we claim that the fictional art objects that populate the Weird Tales stories are in fact symbolic or allegorical metonymies for what would come to be considered modernist aesthetic objects in later discourses? In the case of "The Hound," the claim that the supernatural amulet that the protagonists come to recover is a kind of "modernism as narrative trope" is valid, contextualized as it is by direct references to modern art movements. But other Weird Tales stories betray less a fascination with particularly modernist art and more a fascination with the enduring form purged of all representational dynamics, all human elements that stand in for modernism.

Reflect on, for example, Anthony Rudd's "A Square of Canvas," which appeared in the second issue of Weird Tales, April 1923. The story relates the life of a young artist in training who cannot find inspiration; however, after he methodically tortures and kills a group of beetles who wander across his drafting desk, he is filled with inspiration: "Here was life, pain, struggle--death close by, leering at the tiny creatures. […] An instinct made me want to preserve some form of record of their supreme moment. I
seized my pencil" (4). He goes on to become a famous artist, and to stoke the fires of his inspiration he mutilates rabbits, then horses, and finally his beloved wife. His drawings and paintings become stranger and stranger until he produces through the inspiration of his wife's sacrificial mutilation, his masterpiece, what the narrator who is interviewing him reports is "a blank square of white canvas!" (12). This fictionalized strange art object, this blank square of canvas, could be seen as anticipating arguments offered by Clement Greenberg in his retroactive description of modernism in his 1965 seminal essay, "Modernist Painting," about the capacity of the modernist artist, by focusing on the immanent particularity of medium--brush stroke, canvas, clay, steel--to translate abstract theoretical propositions into concrete empirical realities.

**The Challenge from Beyond**

"The Challenge From Beyond," written collaboratively over the course of many months in 1935 by five *Weird Tales* writers, was never published in *Weird Tales*; however, its direct association with the magazine is undeniable to the extent that it was collaboratively produced by *Weird Tales* writers, and engages in the same themes and atmospherics of other *Weird Tales* stories. Moreover, it demonstrates the necessity of the *Weird Tales* writers adversarial quasi-ekphrastic distance from modernist art, the enduring form; additionally, as a deliberate collaborative effort, it literalizes the otherwise hidden authorial dynamic operating in the *Weird Tales* community that was hidden behind the market-based convention of attaching a solitary writer to a solitary work.

The fragmentary manuscript of "The Challenge From Beyond" was circulated among the writers through correspondence, each contributing his or her un-coordinated
extension of the story. Though it was never published in *Weird Tales* (it was published in a private fanzine in 1935 titled *Fantasy Magazine*), the writers who composed it with Lovecraft were all regular contributors to *Weird Tales*: C.L. Moore, Abraham Merritt, Robert E. Howard, and Frank Belknap Long. This story compactly demonstrates the status of the modernist art object in the literary enterprise of the *Weird Tales* writers.

C.L. Moore begins the "round-robin" story by relating the camping trip of the protagonist, George Campbell, who wakes up in the middle of the night to discover a fictionalized modernist art object in the woods near his camp. Consider the level of narrative retardation that accompanies the emergence of the aesthetic object, the enduring form, as evidence of its importance to the story:

> It was clear as rock crystal, this queer, smooth cube. Quartz, unquestionably, but not in its usual hexagonal crystallized form. Somehow--he could not guess the method--it had been wrought into a perfect cube, about four inches in measurement over each worn face. For it was incredibly worn. [...] Ages and ages of wearing, years almost beyond counting, must have passed over this strange clear thing. But the most curious thing of all was that shape he could make out dimly in the heart of the crystal. (John Hay Library)

Intrigued and yet repulsed by the cube, he tries to discard it and return to sleep; however, it draws him awake because it "shone for a moment as if with sustained light" (John Hay Library). Here we have a vision of sustained aesthetic contemplation, an ekphrastic description of the enduring form of the modernist art object. Indeed, "The Challenge From Beyond" is a story of an extended contemplation of a modernist art object.
A. Merritt takes up the next section. In his section he relates how the cube continues to "glimmer" with "tiny fugitive lights deep within it like threads of sapphire lightnings" (John Hay Library). Campbell's repulsion towards the cube grows: "He felt a chill of spirit, as though from contact with some alien thing. It was alien, he knew it; not of this earth" (John Hay Library) The cube becomes a symbol for absolute novelty out of time. As alien, it begins to open up a completely dehumanized context, i.e. its exposes the occult truth of the ordinary. Campbell continues to stare at the cube, he becomes drawn into it. The cube begins to change, as if in reaction to his intense scrutiny, his contemplation of it. It gives off a faint sound of music and light: "He heard the murmuring music, the plucked harp strings. Louder grew the sound and louder, and now all the body of the cube vibrated to their rhythm. The crystal walls were melting, growing misty as though formed of the mist of diamonds. [...] While brighter, more bright grew the pulsing light" (John Hay Library).

The dehumanized, enduring form of the aesthetic object becomes a door to another world, and in this violates the ordinary world of realism, the literary effect of reality. Campbell's contemplative gaze becomes steadfastly fixed to the glowing cube and he cannot look away—he is sucked into it.

H.P. Lovecraft takes up the next section of the "round robin." He relates how the disembodied consciousness of Campbell is thrown, via the alien cube, through "greying infinity of shapeless pulsation" (John Hay Library). Here the occult truth of the ephemeral quality of all ordinary realities is exposed. Campbell is disoriented. The scales of terrestrial existence are cast aside. Campbell adopts a Cartesian perspective that becomes an alternation of empirical reference points: "Every standard of speed known to
earth seemed dwarfed, and Campbell knew that any such flight in physical reality would mean instant death to a human being" (John Hay Library). Eventually, Campbell passes into unconsciousness. After Campbell's passing into unconscious, Lovecraft takes the reader through an excursion into the mythology of *Weird Tales*. It is through this excursion that the alien cube's origin and complex function is related. The cube is revealed to be the enduring creation of an extra-dimensional race of "worm-like beings whose attainments and whose control of nature surpass anything within the range of terrestrial imagination" (John Hay Library). The cube functions to suck violently across space and cruelly trap the disembodied consciousness of any intelligent being who gazes upon it. It is a dangerous art object, a powerful psychic-vortex that pulls the subject in.

Lovecraft's narrator further explains that the enduring cube is but one of millions of cubes that have been sent into other dimensions by the worm-like beings in a random dispersion or spray, like a cloud of spores. They are sent by the curious worm-like beings in the hope that they will settle in other dimensions peopled by intelligent creatures that they desire to violate, kill, and eat. But the horribleness of Lovecraft's description of the enduring alien cube does not end there. These cubes, it is explained, also function as Trojan-horse points that allow the disembodied consciousnesses of the worm-like beings to "leap across boundless space to the captive's vacant and unconscious body" in order to visit otherwise inaccessible worlds (John Hay Library). By picking up the cube and being drawn out of his ordinary world, Campbell has also opened a line to another dimension, leaving all of humanity's ordinary reality of earth susceptible to the same violation as his.

Lovecraft calls upon imaginary archives in order to parody the citational style of "high modernism." In addition to this, Lovecraft relates this mythology in order to
"unweave" the discrete edges of the narrative. His mythological citations allow the story to interface with previous *Weird Tales* stories through a profusion of citations and allusions. These citations effectively function to disrupt the framing of the story as a discrete aesthetic object with a beginning and an end while at the same time situate it within the larger, macro-narrative structure of the *Weird Tales* fictional mythology. In this story, the esoteric history of the worm-beings's enduring "cube traps" is called up through reference to the learned occultist, the Reverend Arthur Brook Winters-Hall, who has authored (fictionally so) a 1912 translation of "the Eltdown Shards," a series of clay fragments dug up from the "pre-carboniferous strata in southern England" in 1882." This reference sutures "The Challenge From Beyond" to every other "shadow modernist" story published in *Weird Tales* of strange modernist art objects.

Campbell, waking up disoriented after having been sucked through time and space to the world of the worm-like beings, confirms the demented speculations of the occultist. Though Campbell is confused for a moment, in a flash "his personal background, traditions, experiences, scholarship, dreams, ideas, and inspirations-welled up abruptly and simultaneously, with a dizzying speed and abundance which soon made him unable to keep track of any separate concept" (John Hay Library). To his horror, he realizes that he is in a strange, otherworldly room characterized by disorienting geometry, and, stranger still, "he could apparently see all four sides at once" (John Hay Library). Here the literary effect of reality has been stretched and the ordinary conveyed by realism is having its occult truth revealed.
How could Campbell accomplish such a panoptic, anatomically alien task—seeing the four sides of a room at once? This is because his consciousness now occupies the many-eyed body of one of the worm-like creatures, described in this way:

This thing was nothing human—nothing of earth—nothing even of man's myths and dreams. It was a gigantic, pale-grey worm or centipede, as large around as a man and twice as long, with a disc-like, apparently eyeless, cilia-fringed head bearing a purple central orifice. It glided on its rear pairs of legs, with its fore part raised vertically -- the legs, or at least two pairs of them, serving as arms. (John Hay Library).

Here the alien-creature is a symbol of absolute novelty which, paradoxically, Campbell comes to identify as. He sees a mirror and is horrified to realize "it was not his own body that he saw [...]. It was, instead, the loathsome, pale-grey bulk of one of the great centipedes" (John Hay Library).

Robert E. Howard takes the next section of the "round robin." Following the logic of repulsion transforming to attraction that pervades *Weird Tales*, he has Campbell embrace the centipede body that has hitherto repulsed him: "[Campbell] had long ago exhausted all the physical possibilities contained in that earthly body. Earth held no new thrills. But in the possession of this new, alien body he felt promises of strange, exotic joys" (John Hay Library). Howard relates how Campbell now exults in his new experiences. Because Campbell thinks like a human, he is able to imagine killing his captors with a surgical implement. He then flees through the worm-beings's strange halls, and eventually comes upon a temple-dome that contains their god, a sphere of ivory. This is what he glimpses, another fictionalized modernist art object: "A strange structure rose
in the middle of the rainbow-hued floor, tier on tier, each of a separate, vivid color. The ultimate tier was a purple cone, from the apex of which a blue smoky mist drifted upward to a sphere that poised in mid-air -- a sphere that shone like translucent ivory" (John Hay Library). Howard ends his section with a symbolic apotheosis. Campbell's exultation reaches an apex: "A lawless exultation rose in him. He was a man without a world, free of all conventions or inhibitions of Earth, or of this strange planet, free of every artificial restraint in the universe. He was a god!" (John Hay Library). The sections ends with him taking up the orb which is "no longer ivory-hued, but red as blood...." (John Hay Library).

The final coda section is related by Frank Belknap Long, another Weird Tales writer. He relates how Campbell's discarded human body, penetrated by the consciousness of a worm-alien, has become too unwieldy to control properly. It is related how the red-sphere grasped by Campbell on the alien world is intelligent and speaks. The sphere reports what has happened to Campbell's sloughed-off human body back on earth: "Your body will destroy itself on earth, seeking the blood of its animal kin, seeking the cool water where it can wallow at its ease. [...] It will destroy itself in seeking to return to the slime from which it sprang" (John Hay Library).

What started as an ordinary scene of sipping coffee over a campfire ends in "the white fire of supermundane spirituality." For the Weird Tales writers, the ordinary is a temporary configuration, a "veil," that hides a universal strangeness.

It is highly inaccurate to consider a story such as "The Challenge from Beyond" formally- naive pulp fiction. Rather than being indifferent to issues of literary representation, it expresses a full awareness of them. It is obviously innovative. There is a
pervasive stereotype that all the work published in pulp magazines was "conventional," i.e. that all pulp writers relied upon a "conventional narrative style" derived from nineteenth century realism; however, this idea does not take into consideration how, in fact, pulp writers innovated within their delimited literary enterprise. From its inception, the pulpwood all-fiction magazine marketplace was dominated by genre-specific markets, and the magazine editors prescribed very specific narrative formulas to their writers. To hew to these formula meant commercial success; to deviate from them was generally considered commercially dubious. Successful pulpwood magazines like *Ranch Romances, Cowboy Stories, Fight Stories, Amazing Stories*, and many, many more only featured fiction that adhered to certain content restrictions. "The Challenge From Beyond" could never have appeared in one of those magazines. This was a commercial logic. But the pulp aesthetic derived from that commercial logic created by that context established the conditions for the unique kind of technical innovations represented by "The Challenge from Beyond." We are also lucky a fanzine culture existed to preserve this strange story.

Pulp writers who would dare innovate, then, tended to innovate not only the level of "form" or "style" but by relying first on the conventionalism of literary realism and then on incorporating new techniques into the virtual reality of that world, the literary equivalent of a magician's illusion. "There is nothing in this ordinary hat! There is nothing in this ordinary realist narrative!" And yet, within the commercial fiction / pulp fiction context, to innovate generally meant to compromise the commercial potential of one's work. This nevertheless did not deter all writers publishing in the pulps, particularly Lovecraft.
It is not an exaggeration to say that no other magazine attracted such a concentrated group of "innovative" pulp writers than *Weird Tales*, a magazine specifically conceived as a "catch-all" for stories that would not sell anywhere else. From its beginning, it was the magazine that pulp writers sent manuscripts to that, for this reason or that, could not satisfy a specific editorial formula. Yet, despite its idealistic mission, *Weird Tales* quickly established its own collective aesthetic, its own set of narrative formulas as leading writers emerged--Lovecraft, Howard, and Smith--and the *Weird Tales* readership, enfranchised through "The Eyrie" section, made its desires known. The editors of the magazine cultivated the coalition skills necessary for bridging relationships between writers, readers, and artists. The ultimate result was an intertextual network of intertwined narratives of the supernatural that portrayed shocking confrontations between a contemplative subject and non-representational aesthetic art objects that revealed the truth of interwar modernity as a catastrophic change, as eschewing the very possibility of the ordinary, as approaching crisis. The desire for this type of narrative and aesthetic experience symptomatizes more than the traditional persistence of reactionary anti-modern sentiment. It symptomatizes not a desire to restore modernity to a state of grace, which is arguably the project of the "high modernists" who were the *Weird Tales* writers's self-adopted adversaries. Rather, *Weird Tales* symptomatizes a desire to reveal a version of the truth of modernity, one we would rather not acknowledge while sipping coffee in well-lit rooms reading listlessly about violent atrocities and ecological disasters: everything that appears ordinary to us now--*right now*-will be strange soon.

**Edmund Wilson and *Weird Tales***
In a 1945 review published in *The New Yorker* titled, "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous," Edmund Wilson, a dean of American criticism, pejoratively calls the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft "hack work" (47). He calls Lovecraft's style "verbose and undistinguished" (47). In reference to the enthusiastic printers who were independently publishing Lovecraft's work in little presses (presses like Arkham House, non-commercial affairs organized for the purpose of preserving the legacy of Lovecraft and *Weird Tales*) he states that Lovecraft's fiction "ought to have been left" in the pulp magazines for which it was written (47). He states categorically, "Lovecraft was not a good writer" (47). In his characteristically pompous style, he states flatly, "the only real horror of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art" (47).

"Bad art." Indeed.
Chapter 4: The Age of Modernist Reflection

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin interprets Paul Klee's 1920 modernist watercolor painting, *Angelus Novus*, as a depiction of "the Angel of History," a symbol for him of humanity's tenuous historical agency. Viewing the idea of humanity's mastery of historical forces as a universal delusion, Benjamin portrays "the Angel of History"--the symbol of our agency, our collective grip on the "steering wheel" of history--as teetering on the brink of a horrible disaster:

"His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But the storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." (258)

Here is a literary image inspired and thereby intertwined with a preceding two-dimensional one created by Klee. The angel Benjamin describes is not, strictly speaking, Klee's angel, but an unreal facsimile of it, a virtual and calibrated echo or copy. The actual paint strokes constituting Klee's angel function as an object of ekphrasis, and via translation from a plastic into a literary image, Benjamin layers his interpretation, thereby animating it for his rhetorical aims. This is more than mere interpretation or allegoresis. Nor is it basic journalistic description. It is explicitly rhetorical ekphrasis. Benjamin is *using* Klee's painting.
Benjamin's image of disastrous loss of agency parallels in important ways another one, a central one to the nineteenth century critical tradition he inherits in the interwar period: "Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (Marx 14). From the image of a sorcerer losing control of the demon he has conjured we come to the image of an angel, wings flared, blown wildly out of control by a gust from heaven.

In Marx's image, it is the bourgeoisie who have lost control; in Benjamin's image, it is all of humanity. In these two images, separated by approximately one century, we must bear in mind a distinctive transformation of pathos: Marx's ecstasy in the eschatological unfolding of utopia transforms a century later into Benjamin's genuine horror in the certainty of not mere dystopia but universal apocalypse. But it is important to append to this emotional transformation what has been outlined above as Benjamin's methodological distinctiveness: Marx comes to have faith in his vision of the bourgeoisie's lost agency by virtue of the logic of what is now considered his discredited labor theory of value; as few continue to subscribe to his economic theory, we no longer anticipate his utopia on those grounds. But Benjamin comes to his horrible flash of insight, his unfaith in historical "progress," not through economic theories but by looking at, meditating on, and describing a modernist painting.

In Benjamin's final utterance before his suicide, Marx's materialist philosophy has been discarded in favor of mysticism: spontaneous non-syllogistic insight based on emotion. In the Jewish mystic tradition of which Benjamin was an erstwhile student,
accessing such knowledge was equivalent with looking upon the face of God. The rhetorical effectiveness of Marx's image is predicated on the viability of his theory, on logos; the rhetorical effectiveness of Benjamin's image is predicated not on theory but on pathos. His rhetoric does not make the same appeals as Marx's. Moreover, it is less respectable from a philosophical perspective. Benjamin would not be judged by logical consistency but by affective intensity. He "proves" his interpretation of history as a disaster not by the undeniable power of the syllogism but by the mysterious quality of his virtual Angelus Novus, his panting transformed into a literary image. In spite of its title, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" is not to my mind philosophy at all. It is something more like the "shadow modernism" of Weird Tales.

Modernist Reflection and Shadow Modernism

For Benjamin, who committed suicide in order to escape the Gestapo, the idea of historical progress as a project of self-liberation is the worst kind of delusion. Registering historical change as a catastrophic chain reaction to the reagent of civilization as ancestral sin, Benjamin's acute consciousness of history as catastrophe appears here as an insight of horror, a terrible epiphany. It demonstrates his fervent hostility towards (1) the project of modernity as a totality and (2) the developments that signal its arrival: the increasing of populations, the eclipse of nature by urban and industrial environments, the disenchantment of the world, boredom. Benjamin's hostility towards modernity, his strategic fictionalization of Klee's Angelus Novus in order to formalize that hostility stands as a representative example of what I describe as a coherent aesthetic project extending from modernism, a project I designate by the term modernist reflection, a project of which the "shadow modernism" of Weird Tales is a central phenomena.
To be clear: "shadow modernism" and modernist reflection overlap. Whereas "shadow modernism" is an ahistorical formal rhetoric that combines realism and modernism, modernist reflection is the historical period that produced it. I will clarify this below and in later chapters.

It is the goal of this chapter to theorize and situate historically what I understand to be the distinct aesthetic project of modernist reflection in relation to the archive of the "shadow modernism" of Weird Tales, a project originating from and in reaction to, like acoustic vibrations broadcast from the striking of a gong, the discovery of the enduring form of high modernism, the important event of linguistically, acoustically, plastically, narratively, and spatially hypostatizing in enduring non-representational forms what Fredric Jameson terms the "aporia or double bind" of modernity. "Modernist reflection" is not the project of creating those enduring, non-representational or non-human modernist forms, a project that took place in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Rather, modernist reflection is the effort to use aestheticism engineered by modernists by translating its formal rhetoric into powerful virtual literary images, like Benjamin's Angelus Novus, that are then placed as objects, as narrative events, in the weird fiction published in Weird Tales, to expose the occult truth of the ordinary.

**Lukács and the Perception of Historical Change**

Not only does Benjamin's reading of Angelus Novus exemplify his suspicion of modernity during the increasingly unstable interwar period, it also instances a distinctive rhetorical strategy: his use of modernist art for perceiving the unfolding present of modernity, for perceiving the rapidly accelerating flow of history, for holding in mind the phenomenon of ephemerality and large scale change.
The phenomenon of historical change is something we have difficulty perceiving while dwelling in the ordinary. We can perceive it as distinct events, but unless we live in a particularly troubled country, in the range of our day-to-day lives, things are relatively stable, relatively normal. But even though I sit typing, even though I am sipping coffee, this does not mean that the world is not a swirl of accelerating change around me. The illusion of historical stability, the "veil," is an epiphenomenon of a human mode of perception too weak to totalize. But the occult truth of history, of the ordinary is --hidden yet visible. The issue is that there is something about my mode of perception that prevents me from perceiving this unrelenting, large scale, rapid change. But with modernist art Benjamin can lift the veil.

On a primitive level, Benjamin's leveraging of Klee's painting for historical perception of change evidences the acute persistence of what Georg Lukács theorizes as "modern historical consciousness" in his 1937 study The Historical Novel, which he describes as a manner of perceiving the flow of history in the arena of daily life unique to the experience of modernity. For Lukács, the extent to which we can conceive of ourselves as occupying a point in history, as being historically unique, as being modern, is predicated on our ability to perceive a certain intensity of change. Unknowingly engaging in a phenomenology of history, Luckas attempts to answer the mystical question of, "How do we perceive or intuit significant historical change?" But we need qualify this. The central question for Lukács is not, for example, how did Virginia Woolf know "on or about December 1910 human character changed." The question is, rather, how could she and how did she see, hear, taste, smell, and even touch and thereby register that changing character.
Lukács's answer to this mystical question convinces by virtue of its commonsense character. For him, "the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned" emerged in the western world around the time of the French Revolution as a result of the intensified intrusions into daily life of the concrete, material consequences associated with political reorganization: e.g. the wiping away of the estate system and associated sartorial laws in France, the public execution of the Louis XVI, the massive conscription of citizen soldiers, the economic scarcity associated with large scale warfare, etc. (24). In other words, Lukács speculates that our ability to perceive history, to perceive large scale change, to grasp it mentally as a force that matters, is equivalent with our ability to register its effects within the range of day-to-day activities.

Though speculative, this is not a radical idea. I will, of course, be comparatively unaware of history while paging a book of poetry before a campfire. But when scarcity results in hunger, when officers forcefully conscript someone I care for, when I smell corpses rotting, when I witness the beheading of the king, when I am dragged before a magistrate on charge of treason, then I become acutely aware of something called "history."

Lukács's theory of historical perception begins to but does not completely domesticate the rhetorical distinctiveness of Benjamin's transformation of Klee's *Angelus Novus* into a literary image. Seen from the perspective of this theory of the formation of modern historical consciousness, section IX of Benjamin's essay just might signal the philosopher's acute historical consciousness, his modern way of thinking time. But this
does not fully domesticate the strangeness of Benjamin's literary image, his virtual

*Angelus Novus.*

It is important to hold in mind the distinction that Benjamin's situation is radically
different from Lukács's hypothetical French peasant. The fictional peasant perceives
history through the sight of Louis XVI's execution, the movement of armies, the smell of
rotting flesh. In the instance of the peasant, to be conscious of history during the
revolution it is enough to possess an optical nerve. Thus, the strange question must be
posed in this way: why is it that Benjamin, over two centuries later, seems to require a
modernist painting to perceive his modernity, to perceive rapidly accelerating change?
Can he not be conscious of history without the prosthesis of the modernist painting? Can
he not simply perceive history directly by watching it through military parades?
Newsreels? By listening to radio broadcasts? Contemplating photographs? By reading
sociological studies? No.

Benjamin's reading of Klee brings into focus the interpretive limits of Lukács's
theory of historical perception. But his theory is invaluable to the extent that it conditions
us to apprehend how Benjamin is deploying a unique rhetoric in section IX, a rhetoric
that leverages a sensible element, the phenomena of the "new art"--represented by

*Angelus Novus* ("the New Angel")--as a powerful semiotic field that yields
phenomenological access not simply to the flow of history but to what I call the occult
truth of it: its nature as accelerating change, a process of transforming novelty into
ordinariness and ordinariness into novelty. Put simply, for Benjamin, to look upon a
modernist art object is to look upon modernization in the process of its terrible unfolding
and to apprehend thereby its full significance: the pace of change in increasing and the
duration for which things can count as ordinary is shrinking. The occult truth of the
ordinary is also the universal doctrine of suffering, a doctrine as quotidian as it is
awesome: in juxtaposition to the enduring form, everything is ephemeral, is a brief
configuration of constantly changing matter, even ourselves.

It is by virtue of translating the "new art" into a virtual literary image that history,
that the catastrophe that is modernity, can be apprehended not merely by the corporeal
sensory organs but by some other menas: an emotional mode of understanding,
knowledge via pathos.

**Modernist Reflection as Period Marker**

Benjamin's unique rhetorical strategy of using modernist art in order to perceive
and thereby analyze and assess modernity as a catastrophic acceleration of change
distinguishes it from modernist production proper, i.e. modernist production before
modernist reflection. What I view as "pre-reflection modernism" is equivalent to early
modernism. This is a necessary temporal and discursive distinction, a theory for framing
as a priming event the widespread manifestation in the American, British, and European
contexts, of experimental artistic movements ranging from the plastic, acoustic,
kinesthetic, linguistic, and visual arts--the presently apotheosized groups with such
recognizable names as the "Cubists," the "Imagists," the "Futurists," the "Dadaists," the
"Secessionists"--who ambitiously sought to instantiate formally enduring forms by
creating art objects that held in firm tension the unfolding present.

Oppressed by the weight of nineteenth bourgeois conventionalisms, the young
artists and intellectuals who founded and vitalized the legendary movements of the
modernist period--movements that lived, briefly flourished, and died in the manner of a
locust swarm--achieved their aesthetic ambitions by virtue of their collaborative
cultivation of a legendary periodical culture that made visual and preserved for posterity
the enigmatic aesthetic objects around which maturing critical discourses would
constellate after 1922. Intuiting an alienating contradiction between nineteenth century
ideology of domestic ordinariness and the reality of modernization as rapidly accelerating
change, these modernists were animated by their frustrating aporia, that gap between a
silicon art than can endure and a carbon reality that is ephemeral, that is approaching
catastrophe. Situated within this gap, they were unable to speak it. That was their crisis.
To it they responded by pioneering a set of doctrines and techniques for expressing this
contradiction, for hypostatizing it in enduring aesthetic form, an achievement enunciated
in the Anglo-American literary world in 1922, the so-called "year of miracles" that
heralded T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf's
*Jacob's Room*.

The story has been told of how the crisis of the closing decades of the nineteenth
century through the first two of twentieth were marked by rapidly accelerating changes to
and transformations of social, cultural, and political structures, a sometimes disorienting
and sometimes exhilarating experience that defines the phenomenology of modernity and
creates the crisis to which modernist aesthetics responds and contributes. Although
emphasizing modernist response rather than contribution to upheaval, Marshall Berman's
seminal *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982) is a typical and influential articulation of
this particular narrative. But the story of modernism's aftereffects, the tale of the
discursive ripples that were violently broadcast after the cacophonous irruption of
modernist experimentation throughout the Western world in the 20s, is underreported.
To investigate the "aftereffects" of modernism will mean understanding the movement in a non-exclusive way: modernism is not only an expression of chaotic change nor is it only a contribution to that change (it is both of these things at the same time). Rather, we need to see modernist art objects as the Weird Tales writers saw them: as unique technologies, as forms that do indeed endure, as prosthetic equipment that can be used to bringing into focus the occult truth of the ordinary. In the shadow of modernism, nothing is ordinary. Everything is weird.

In order to grasp fully the significance of modernist reflection, we must see its productions not as reflections of material conditions nor as devices for reinvigorating the intensity of phenomena but as successful hypostatizations of change comparable to the atomic shadows in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They are "enduring forms" that express by virtue of their endurance the ephemerality of any particular reality, any particular historical epoch or configuration of the ordinary.

*The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* do not simply journalistically represent or symptomatize the accelerating change nor structure it as experience but formally stabilize it. They are non-representational angles, colors, vibrations, or shapes disembedding themselves from the changing context that produce them and that they produce. Qualities cut from their substances, they are attractive, repulsive, and by virtue of the occult knowledge they transmit, contaminating. Through their endurance they hold in tension "novelty" and thereby throw into sharp relief the swirling ephemerality and unfolding of everything else. To experience these works from this perspective is to experience change happening everywhere but the anchor of your attention.
The prevailing narrative of modernism tends to frame the closing years of the 1920s as denouement, as a final note diminishing to silence. These post *annis mirabilis* years, although marked by many late modernist classics (an Anglo-American literary perspective brings to mind *The Great Gatsby* [1925], *To the Lighthouse* [1927], *The Bridge* [1930]), express a steady diffusion of modernist artistic energies. Throughout these years, the character of the radically experimental anti-establishment artist committed to "making it new" transforms into the institutionalized and establishment one. This is the story of the radical modernism of the 1920s becoming the academic and commercial modernism of the 1930s. Although this story about the dwindling modernist energies after 1922 and modernism's subsequent acceptance by cultural institutions helps us to understand the comparable dismissal of the artistic productions of the 1930s in fields like Anglo-American literary history, trusting this story risks obscuring an important historical development. It obscures how many intellectual and artistic efforts in the 1930s turn away from the production of new works--more novelty, more "enduring forms"--toward the taking up and using recently created ones in the context of modernist reflection I am proposing.

Following 1922 intellectuals and artists constellating around modernism "split" their efforts. Those who participated in this movement did not create more hypostatizations of novelty. For them, the animating crisis of aporia had already been spoken through. Artists had already crafted enough novelty out of clay, ink, paper, paint, and acoustic vibrations. Thus, the writers I study, stirred by these strange works, took up the challenge silently expressed by the aestheticism of modernist texts, sometimes championing and sometimes criticizing the modernist movement. As if anticipating their
efforts, by 1930 canonical reflections on modernism began to appear in staccato rhythm. These are the dissipating rhythms of the powerful note struck by the ascendency of modernism: Le Corbusier's *Toward a New Architecture* (1923), Ortega y Gasset's *The Dehumanization of Art* (1925), William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1931), Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* (1933), Stephen Spender's *The Destructive Element* (1935), Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), and so on. But these reflections were impaired by discursive conventionalist prejudices.

These notes of modernist reflection were, in large part, weakened by what Mikhail Bahktin calls the protocols of "proper utterance," the traditional expectations governing philosophical and academic writing. These are the laws of public discourse that need to be broken in order to express fully the occult truth of the ordinary revealed by the enduring forms of modernism. These conventional reflections could not speak the truth of modernity. By virtue of its simplicity, the occult truth of the ordinary is difficult to translate or paraphrase. It is not that interesting. To assert that this reality that we occupy and constitute is an ephemeral configuration that will be destroyed, and that modernity is increasing the pace by which ordinary realities are destroyed, does seem to count as knowledge. Moreover, it is a threatening proposition from many perspectives committed to preserving a particular ordinary reality, such as that of a religious fundamentalist or nativist. But formalizing this strange proposition is indeed the challenge taken up by the "shadow modernists" of *Weird Tales* reflecting on modernism. To formalize the radical ephemerality of ordinary reality required a secret place and a
new idiom, pulp paper disintegrating and sensational narratives that incorporated the enduring forms of modernism.

Benjamin's efforts to use Klee's *Angelus Novus* to perceive the occult truth of the ordinary occupies a liminal space, a discursive neutral zone separating non-linguistic but verbal expressions of emotion--a moan, a scream, weeping--from the linguistic and discursive space of philosophy and criticism. This is the zone occupied by the "shadow modernism" and *Weird Tales*, a discourse that appears as a tangle of incommensurables: a conventional realism that incorporates experimental aesthetics engineered in a commercial magazine that is anti-commercial, published by hack writers committed to artistic experimentation. In homage to the magazine that represents this significant strangeness, I term this middle discursive space "weird discourse": quasi-academic, sensational, strategically committed to *pathos* as rhetorical technique and affective revelation as somatic experience rather than logic. It anticipates what has been called "postmodern" discourses, but it is distinct from those later discourses to the extent that its project is ekphrastic. It translates the rhetoric of modernism into a literary image that can be embedded in the virtual worlds of literary realism. Moreover, it emerges in and by virtue of the shadow cast by modernism.

**Malcolm Cowley's Exile's Return: A Sanctioned Discourse of Modernist Reflection**

By situating Benjamin and other writers within the discursive space I call "weird" alongside *Weird Tales* and the writers who published in it, I wish to emphasize their strangeness from a specific angle. In the instance of Benjamin, the significant element is not so much his deviation from philosophy. What is significant is the degree to which his "weird" mysticism approaches the discursive shapes of sanctioned, and therefore
rhetorically muted, examples of modernist reflection. His allegory, his "weird discourse" resembles philosophy; it is not simply undisciplined philosophy.

Interpreting his discourse in this way allows us to perceive the striking family resemblances it bears to other sanctioned discourses of modernist reflection. For example, Malcolm Cowley's Exile's Return, a memoir of the Left Bank of Paris and New York City in the 1920s--a clear instance of sanctioned modernist reflection--reflects on and ultimately comes to terms with the misery entailed in the aesthetically-ambitious struggle against aporia that characterized the program of many of his friends involved in modernism. In this way we might see Cowley's reflective gesture as paralleling the pathetic attempt of the Angel of History to "awaken the dead, to make whole what has been smashed" (Illuminations 258). In Exile's Return Cowley indeed uses "the new art" as equipment for perceiving the accelerating pace of change wrought by modernity. He describes his memoir as a "literary odyssey," i.e. an adventure thematically unified around the intellectuals and artists who produced the experimental literature of the 20s. Significantly, he comes short of articulating the occult truth of the ordinary, an utterance that would have required discursive situation on the fringes of "proper utterances." But in choosing to frame the artistic struggles of his friends as failures, he nevertheless touches on it in select passages. Reflecting on 1929, the final year he chronicles, he states,

It was a year of suicides, not only among stockbrokers but also among wealthy dilettantes. It was a year when faces looked white and nervous; a year of insomnia and sleeping tablets. [...] Most of all it was a year when a new mood became perceptible, a mood of doubt and even defeat. People began to wonder whether it
wasn't possible that not only their ideas but their whole lives had been set in the wrong direction. (306)

Similar in rhetorical technique and tone to Benjamin's reading of Klee's *Angelus Novus*, here Cowley uses the texts of Anglo-American modernism as a conceptual unity to throw into relief the flow of history, the intrusion of accelerating change into the space of the ordinary. But aside from the brief statement, "the underworld and upper world were close to each other," he does not fully express truth of modernity, its catastrophic nature. Like Benjamin, Cowley stands before modernism, meditates on it, and, perceiving accelerating change through it, begins to glimpse the blurring together of heaven and hell. He comes closer to the occult truth of the ordinary near the conclusion of *Exile's Return*, as he cites a story of drinking and dancing in Harlem, describing it as one belonging to one of his modernist friends (unnamed in the memoir): "The room was smoky and sweaty; all the lights were tinted green or red and, with smoke drifting across them, nothing had its proper shape or color. It was as if we were caught there and condemned to live in somebody's vision of hell. When we came out on the street [...] it was bathed in harsh winter sunlight, ugly and clear and somehow reassuring" (308). Reflecting on the story directly, Cowley states, "That was the way a decade came to its end" (308).

"Somehow reassuring." "Came to its end." Though a similar rhetorical structure organizes both Benjamin's essay and Cowley's memoir in comparable ways, Cowley, committed to keeping as occult the catastrophic nature of modernity, speaks of a "reassuring end." Three years later: Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. Six years later: the Spanish Civil War began. Nine years later: the Nazis invaded Poland. Ten years later: Benjamin swallowed a handful of morphine.
Berenice Abbot's *Changing New York* as Modernist Reflection

It is a little known fact that the first edition of Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* had an illustrator except to rare book collectors and bibliophiles who seek out first editions signed not only by the famous chronicler but also by the lesser known artist, Berenice Abbott (1898-1991), who provided the illustrations. From 1918 until 1921 Abbott shared an apartment in Greenwich Village with Cowley along with many other important American artists and intellectuals, such as Djuna Barnes and Kenneth Burke. She befriended Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray when they visited Greenwich Village. She eventually set up a portrait studio in Paris with Man Ray where she composed iconic photographs of figures associated with the modernist movement: James Joyce, Sylvia Beach, Jean Cocteau, Peggy Guggenheim. But I am not interested in Abbott as a curio. Her significance is not exhausted by her sometime role as illustrator or by her friendship with Cowley, Burke, Barnes, and other interwar modernists. She becomes more interesting to me after modernism. Her ascendency, her most significant contribution, corresponds not to modernism proper but to the age of modernist reflection.

After forsaking Greenwich Village in 1921 in order to study sculpture in France and Germany, Abbott returned to New York in 1929. Stirred to her core by dramatic changes that had taken place during her travels, she secured employment taking photographs of the depression-racked city for the Federal Art Project. She collected them into an exhibition titled *Changing New York*. Consisting of over 300 black and white photographs taken from 1933 to 1939, selections of this project were published in a 1939 book that garnered universal acclaim, acclaim that had not ceased by as late as 1973 when Pulitzer-Prize winning art critic, Ada Louis Huxtable, looking back on photography
projects that sought to capture the essence of New York, cited Abbott's exhibition as "unequaled" (Huxtable 182). Describing Abbott as the photographer "who saw the city most truly," Huxtable describes the appeal of her photographs in this way: "They are primarily and penetratingly real. There is an extraordinary sense of the urban essence, of the entire physical and human conurbation rather than of something skimmed off the top" (182). More contemporary accounts of Abbott's important project attests to her power to capture and stabilize in enduring aesthetic form the otherwise visible yet not self-evident phenomena of New York changing. For example, in the preface to the companion to a 1997 re-exhibition of Abbott's 1939 Changing New York project, Robert P. Macdonald, then director of the Museum of the City of New York, states, "Abbott understood the novelty of her subject: a city analogous to the mythical phoenix, raising out of its nineteenth-century physical forms and the human ashes of financial collapse into a new, astonishing world that was both promising and harsh" (8). In other words, whereas most look upon the skyline of New York as a stable pattern, an enduring form carved in stone and steel, Abbott sees the roiling of concrete tides, the occult truth of the ordinary reality of New York from 1933-1939.

Of the many photographs that constitute Abbott's project, consider one in particular here. Indexed as "Brooklyn Bridge, Water and Dock Streets, looking southwest, Brooklyn. (May 22, 1936)," the photograph depicts the Brooklyn Bridge spanning the East River. The iron beam skeleton of a building under construction appears here as a rubbish heap in the center of the photograph. This building under construction is dwarfed by the massive curve of the bridge. In the distance the skyline of the southern point of Manhattan can be glimpsed. Here the bridge, juxtaposed with the half-formed
metal frame of the modern building, brings into focus how New York is changing. The bridge, in this photograph, functions for Abbott as an index of "old New York" as manifested by the sight of the modern construction project. It is a melancholy photograph that forecasts the ultimate construction of the building and subsequent eclipse of the sky by concrete. And the bridge, ancient at 53 years, looms over all, seems to indicate a boundary, an oppressive encircling of sky that will inevitably be eclipsed by even more concrete and metal.

Abbott's 1936 photograph displays the logic of modernist reflection, and does so in a manner similar in rhetorical structure to her former roommate's memoir. Abbott proposed her project to the Federal Art Project as a documentarian accounting of New York City in the process of changing. Her photographs are action shots of a city changing. Her goal in this project is to capture the phenomena of large-scale change. In "Brooklyn Bridge, Water and Dock Streets, looking southwest, Brooklyn," she uses the modern architecture that is under construction as equipment in order to perceive the dissolution of the ordinary, to snap an action shot of radical, large-scale change with her camera.

Yet, it is only inasmuch as one experiences the photograph as latently melancholy, as soliciting a rhetoric of description in key with catastrophe--Could one be inclined to read the photograph as prophesying the inevitable eclipse of a beautiful view of the East River and the sky?--that we can assert that it approaches the occult truth of the ordinary. Dissimilar in this regard to the mysticism of Benjamin and characterized by a diminished awareness of the occult truth of the ordinary qualitatively distinct from Cowley, Abbott's photograph bookends a spectrum of attitudes, a range of awareness that
sweeps from full awareness of the occult truth of the ordinary--Benjamin and *Weird Tales*--to partial awareness--Cowley--to the minimal awareness--Abbott herself.

But our reluctance to say that Abbott's work does not evidence an awareness of the occult truth of the ordinary derives from the nature of Abbott's project. Such a thesis cannot be formalized in a mere fragment of larger text of modernist reflection, which is what a single photograph extracted from the totality of her project inevitably becomes. Let me clarify this with a fictional scenario: I own the beautiful 1999 edition of *Changing New York: The Complete WPA Project*, edited by Bonnie Yochelson and published by the The Museum of the City of New York. I did something weird. I cut off the binding, removed all the leaves, and painstakingly laid out every photograph. I had originally seen a historically stable interwar New York. Meditating on this this strange montage, however, I now see a radically changing New York.

The conventions of Abbott's photographic enterprise rely on what I view as a kind of scopic dismantling, a carving up of the city and holding out for observation its change as a disunity. But the task of conveying "changing New York," however, was weakened by this scopic dismantling. What adequately conveying this change requires is a theory of "ruthless unity," a term Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer applied to the culture industries of film, radio, music, and popular magazines. Abbot's deconstructive gesture of 344 highly composed photographs hides the occult truth of the ordinary, the fact that interwar New York captured by her photographs was dissolving; reconstructing them, suturing them together, however, reveals it.

The occult truth of the ordinary, of modernity as catastrophe, becomes more apparent through the prism of this fuller archive, a point Abbott was aware of as indicated
by the "weird" answer she gave to an interviewer of *Popular Photography* in 1940. Asked to select her favorite picture, Abbott refused, choosing, instead, to articulate a response that typifies what I have called "weird discourse," the unsanctioned utterances that express the occult truth of the ordinary as quasi-ekphrastic and virtual fictionalizations of hypostatized novelty: "Suppose we took a thousand negatives and made a gigantic montage; a myriad-faced picture combining the elegances, the squalor, the curiosities, the monuments, the sad faces, the triumphant faces, the power, the irony, the strength, the decay, the past, the present, the future of the city--that would be my favorite picture" (qtd. in Yochelson 9).

Abbott's gigantic montage of undeveloped film echoes Benjamin's "pile of debris" growing ever skyward and anticipates the many ephemeral stories printed on decaying pulpwood paper in *Weird Tales* that construct virtual images of modernist art objects that endure. In this way, it allows us to apprehend how even in a picture like "Brooklyn Bridge, Water and Dock Streets, looking southwest, Brooklyn" we can perceive the catastrophic nature of modernity haunting modernism, albeit in a fragmentary way. Grasping it fully requires reflecting on a wider archive, adopting a larger perspective not of a single photograph, a single story, but a perspective of multiple photographs, a plurality of pulp stories.

In *Changing New York*, photographer, camera, and modernism fuse to express in unsanctioned "weird discourse" the "occult truth of ordinary"--to the extent that modernity is distinguishable from pre-modernity by an increasing pace of change, is a catastrophe, an ever growing pile of debris, a point Abbott acutely literalizes in another photograph: "Newsstand, 32nd Street and Third Avenue, Manhattan. (November 19,
1935)" (see fig. 2). In this photograph the figure in the dark suit and "newsie" cap gazes on a newsstand bloated with commodity literature: slicks, dailies, pulp magazines, tobacco, chocolate bars, placards: they all lose their distinctiveness and blur before bleary eyes into a tumorous pile of wood pulp, sugar, ink, and weeds. Here is the sublime archive of the Paper Age, a large portion of it being the pulp magazines that filled that newstand. Abbot was not the only cultural elite turning her gaze toward pulp magazines.
Chapter 5: The Visible Invisibility of the Pulp Magazine Marketplace

On August 28th, 1935, an article appeared in *The New York Times* that analyzed commodity literature titled "Fiction By Volume." The purpose of the article is somewhat paradoxical: it is to reveal to the reading public something they were seeing but not seeing, the "invisible visibility" of a print media that they have seen but do not know about. Deliberately designed to thrill them, yet failing to attract their attention, it was always there, a "voluntary circulation" among the distractions of the interwar New York, unacknowledged every time they purchased a newspaper, a pack of cigarettes, a cup of coffee. This was the colorful print media that caused every newsstand in New York City to swell in the 1930s, the all-fiction magazine printed on pulpwood paper: "the pulps."

This article describes the pulps as "little known and officially unrecognized publishing world," a term which highlights the idea that this is a world the reader is not familiar with but is, in reality—at least in terms of sight—familiar with. And this "world" is defined in direct opposition to the "great publishing world," where "manuscripts are being examined on the score of style and originality" (*The New York Times*). This "officially unrecognized world" was the all fiction publishing business, a business that produced *Weird Tales*, the self-styled "unique magazine."

Why does the article perceive a need to reveal these masses to his readers, considering their ubiquity? Could it be that the readers of *The New York Times*, like the figure in Abbot's photograph, never looked beyond the section of the newsstand shelf that held their periodicals of choice? Reflecting on the vast number of pulp fiction magazines being published and sold at the time, the writer observes, "The result of this production system is inevitably an emphasis on quantity rather than quality" (*The New York Times*).
But he concludes his article on a surprisingly positive note, mirroring the paradoxical nature of his term "officially unrecognized." He frames pulp fiction magazines as both a site of hackwork as a well-spring of literary talent. He ends his article by calling--particularly for publishers--to study intensively the seen but unseen "pulps," those garish magazines that clutter the newsstand: "Publishers as well as ordinary readers with a touch of curiosity about the source of literary talent might find it worth their while to inspect them" (The New York Times).

This article represents a rare attempt to hold open the possibility of "intensive" readings of pulp while as the same time justifying "extensive" reading practices of the commodity literature published in pulpwood magazines "by volume." In this article, the pulp magazine marketplace is framed as a kind of compost heap that, though it are for the most part ephemera, it occasionally produces an important literary work. Not everyone held such a subtle and optimistic view of the world of pulp fiction magazines and attempted to engage with the pulps in a nuanced, close-reading way. Moreover, even fewer went a step further and called for more people to buy and read them.

Surveying the newspapers of the interwar periods reveals a more common pattern of dismissal on moral and class-prejudiced grounds: pulp magazines are framed not simply as degraded literature, as contaminated entertainment by virtue of their appeal to the masses, the working classes, the immigrants, but they are also framed as a menace, a sentiment that links the philosophically rigorous invectives of the Frankfurt School concerned about the "culture industry" with the sincere complaints of frustrated high school teachers: "Ninety percent of high school students read 'pulp' magazines and the material contained in them constitute a menace to the pupil's morals, his English and his
mind" decries Anita P. Forbes, a High School Teacher addressing the National Council of Teachers in November of 1936 (The New York Times). She goes on to describe their appeal: "There are three reasons for the appeal of cheap magazines. They afford thrills, they help while away idle minutes and they require no mental effort from the reader" (The New York Times). She summarizes their threatening capacity thus: "The third fact is of most concern, for good books demand the cooperation of the reader and how is that habit of active perception and appreciation to be formed in minds accustomed in finding entertainment without exercise?" (The New York Times).

So we get to the core: pulp fiction magazines are a menace because "they afford thrills" and require "no mental effort." To have a "thrill" is to say one is having a particularly somatic reaction; to "thrill" is to feel a sudden intensity of sensation--tactile, auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory--or emotion such as horror, wonder, lust, anger, curiosity, and so forth. Accordingly, pulp fiction magazines require no "active perception" and they require "no mental effort" (The New York Times). If we take Forbes's criticism of the pulps as a typical version of many other criticisms leveled at the pulps, we understand that the threat they pose is not just causing mental degradation but also moral degradation.

Here the pulps become pornographic in an abstract sense: a magazine that publishes fiction designed to engage the body, to evoke not reflective intellectual apprehension but an embodied sensational and emotional thrill. This frame leverages moral discourses against bodily pleasure as well as secular discourses that privilege detached reflection over emotion-based intuition. In other words, "the pulps" are sinful and atavistic in that they engage the primitive somatic responses and pleasures rather than
intellectual apprehension and reflection, processes that serve to stabilize the ordinary, processes that drive human progress.

The pulps emerge as just another contributor to Western decline as outlined in Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (trans. into English 1928) by animalizing their readers, by over-stimulating readers into a state of thoughtlessness and turning them lazy, unappreciative of fine art that should, necessarily, be mentally difficult, a sentiment that held wide stock at the time. Even Lovecraft, a kind of avatar for the idea of a high-art pulp fiction, corroborates Forbes's cynical hypothesis. For example, he wrote to the poet Reinhardt Kleiner in 1916 of his "reprehensible habit of picking up cheap magazines like *The Argosy* to divert my mind from the tedium of reality" (41). Seven years later he would be publishing in those very magazines.

**The Pulping of Pulp Fiction**

I put these two perspectives toward pulp fiction magazines next to each other in order to theorize a process of change. This is an important process of change that comes to determine the way elements of the book and literary culture of the early twentieth-century were experienced within the pulpwood magazine business environment that produced *Weird Tales*. In the late decades of the nineteenth-Century and into the early twentieth-century, the formal systems intertwined with the paper they were printed on in ink constituted together the archive of "literary art"—narratives, poems, essays published as books, periodicals, or magazines; however, they underwent a kind of schism as publishing production expanded to hitherto unimaginable levels. I theorize that the signifier of literary art (the abstract formal system) became disentangled from the material substrate that embodied it (the literary artifact instantiated in ink and paper and
bound between covers). Literature effectively stopped existing dualistically in a more traditional sense as hybrids of (1) disembodied formal systems and (2) material substrata such as paper and ink.

In certain strata of literary production, the formal systems of the language arts became disassociated with its media vehicle, its material substrate. In other words, literary works, particularly those figured as "artistic" ones, came to be expressed in this period as more or less incorporeal systems. The book could be closed and even burned but the disembodied literary work would live on.

The formal rhetoric and cultural status of the fiction published in the pulp fiction magazine is connected to this process. As the "Paper Age" progressed and more and more material was produced, low literature came to be perceived by many as soulless material goods, mere masses of paper and ink circulating within economies not of cultural but of actual economic capital (e.g. penny deadfuls, dime novels). Today we can refer to many texts considered culturally degraded with a reference not to an abstract idea like "literature" but to a concrete object like pulp. For Example, McCracken's account of the aesthetic of pulp fiction, titled *Pulp: Reading Popular Literature* (1998), rarely refers to pulp fiction magazines. Rather, his study of late-90s romance novels, science fiction novels, fantasies, and mysteries downplays the historical nature of the term, the degree to which the materiality of low literature is foregrounded in its name. He understands the concept of pulp not as a historically contingent outgrowth of modernity but as a transhistorical formal rhetoric, in a manner similar to the way I understand the "shadow modernism" of *Weird Tales* as the apex of the pulp aesthetic, a formal rhetoric with historical causes but that can nevertheless be understood in non-historicist contexts. But it
is important to emphasize that our ability to describe a certain quality of literature as a formless pile of liquid paper has important historical roots that carry significant ideological meaning and discursive consequences.

Liquid pulp has today become the opposite of "literature"--an idea, disembodied, incorporeal, soul like. Pulp is an object, embodied, corporeal, soulless. In the realm of pulp, materiality is a reality ever present. I hypothesize that this full presence of materiality in pulp contexts goes far in explaining why in communities surrounding cultural productions genealogically linked to "pulp fiction"--such as science fiction fanzines and conventions, fantasy roleplaying games, and B-horror movie VHS collecting culture--the practice and ritual of collecting--pulp magazine collecting, comic book collecting, trade paperback collecting, VHS collecting--is still widely prevalent.

But the most important point to emphasize here is how an acute awareness of the artifact nature of writing is an integral influence on the formal rhetorics that were produced by these pulp communities. In these communities, matter is experienced consistent with the cultural logic that associates the quality and value of their productions with the paper it is printed on. The ideology that frames pulp works as degraded, as grotesque non-art, as ephemeral and formless matter that produces laziness, stupidity, and moral atavism, comes to influence the work produced under its auspices. Generally speaking, by 1930 the most ambitious pulp literary works produced and published in the pulp context had come to identify with its own materiality, ephemerality, sensationalism, and conventionalism, and thereby sought to express its absolute degradation by becoming literary ooze that animalizes.
Conversely, in other discourses of literature structured by an adversarial stance toward pulp literature, such as "high modernism," the incorporeal formal systems that constituted literature shed the material substrate that embodied them. Similar to Marx's spiritualized table that speaks and dances that he uses to demonstrate his notion of commodity fetishization, the formal system of literature became a thing without empirical substance, an essence without a body. Literature became the universal form held in the non-material idea of it. Literature became literally the signifying non-substantial form free to roam in realms inaccessible yet parallel to and intimately linked to those of empirical perception.

Coordinately, from the perspective of "high modernism" historically situated elements like the material qualities associated with publication became incidental and irrelevant to the work as such, a cultural logic that clearly informed what would be called the "New Critical" methodologies for analyzing canonical poetry. Literature, thus, came to be understood as radically disembodied, ahistorical forms that endured that were conceived as internally consistent "well wrought urns" fully realized for the most part outside of any extraneous contextual considerations. They existed as quasi-Platonic forms without bodies outside of time. Like the speaker of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" who states, "Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing," the modernist work of literary art has become the opposite of the pulp: where the pulp was formless matter, the modernist poem was form.

In the interwar period, degraded writing now could be soulless, the souls of sanctified books could flee them. Poems could now live beyond the corporeal existence of paper and ink. Thus, with the increased sophistication and power of printing
technology and industrial book and periodical production, marketing, and distribution, this estrangement or "schism" of literature into (1) embodied ephemeral artifacts or pulp literature and (2) disembodied eternal formal systems understood in its apotheosis as "high modernism" became acute. Moreover, degraded low works like the work published in pulp fiction magazines came to be structured rhetorically by an acute awareness of its very own materiality and ephemerality. Sanctified works like modernist experiments in poetry and fiction were structured rhetorically by their unrealizable desire to cast off their material bodies and to rise to the level of immaterial essences, i.e. to become enduring forms out of time. Meanwhile, artistically ambitious pulp works embraced their own ephemerality and materiality fully in the form of a rhetoric of the gut that blasted the organ of the brain with wonder, horror, or tantalizing mystery.

**Opacity and Transparency: The Periodical Culture of Modernism**

In their study of the periodical culture of literary modernism, Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman suggest that considering the table of contents of magazines that published modernist works will help, in part, to explain its difficulty: "Modernism was a self-conscious movement, in which works of art appeared together with manifestoes and critical exegeses. Modernism can almost be defined as those visual and verbal texts that need manifestoes and exegeses (74). They go on to describe how modernist little magazine like *Poetry, The Dial, The Egoist* and *Blast!* published, alongside literary works, explanatory manifestoes and criticism. The little magazine not only introduced subscribers to new forms of modern art, but they also served an additional function: they taught subscribers how to read this new art, to see through its opacity. They taught their subscribers how to experience modern art.
Implied in this publishing practice is the notion of an art object that is bound up with explicating criticism. But this practice also implies an inverse idea, the concept of a kind of transparent art that appears in other places but that requires no explanation at all, that does not need to be published with criticism explaining how to read it. This is a self-evident literature that does not need to be explained. Though Scholes and Wulfman do not comment on this issue, the historically unique dynamics of modernism's rise and its subsequent cultural preeminence has effectively reified this "opaque art/transparent" binary. Modernism is difficult and requires criticism; pulp is easy and even the partially literate can read it. Unlike the experiments of Joyce or Beckett, pulp has no occult meaning.

This ideology of literature in modernity, a partial product of the particular publishing context of modernism, has resulted in many instances with the establishment of an invisible intellectualist prejudice that has become difficult for us to perceive operating: modernism requires explanation, needs to be scrutinized intensively, is incomplete without supplementary explicative texts. Moreover, the difficult literature of modernism is framed as representatively modern, more modern than this other kind of transparent literature that is easily and thoughtlessly consumed.

A major strategy of this dissertation has been the challenging of the troubled thesis that there is anything like transparent or opaque literature from a theoretically rigorous perspective, or that opaque modernism is somehow more representative of modernity than transparent pulp. Though the rich traditions of a living and evolving modernism and the many canons derived from them are based on aesthetic principles intended to be consistent, I think it appropriate in the spirit of continuing to regenerate
those traditions to remind the reader that the cognitive and anthropological sciences teach us that all art medias require comparably sophisticated processes of interpretation and of decoding complex semiotic systems, and, to an extent, can be the subject of rich description. From a theoretically rigorous perspective, the perception of this type of art as "opaque" and that type of art as "transparent" is less a description of the work in question and more a description of the ideology and reading strategy of the critic.

The periodical culture of modernism was only one of many complex elements that contributed to the difficulty of the experimental art of the early twentieth century, and the little magazine was not the only discursive space that produced modernism, other no less important spaces being, the cafe, the art studio, the museum, the little press, the salon, and so on. Traditionally speaking, scholars and historians of modernism and periodical culture choose to separate periodicals into two broad categories, the commercial magazine and the non-commercial, privately published little magazine. This binary has been revised recently by scholars who offer a more nuanced and complex way of categorizing and delimiting the many periodicals of the era.

Past criticism of modernism suggest that the movement flourished in the Anglo-American context because it was given space in non-commercial, privately circulated periodicals to avoid the influence of public taste that required conventionalism. Thus, magazines like Margaret Anderson's The Little Review and Harriet Monroe's Poetry are framed as non-commercial whereas larger circulation magazines like H.L. Mencken's The Smart Set or Scribners, (called slinks because they were printed on glossy paper with expensive ink for the sake of advertisement spreadsheets) are framed as commercial. Recent work coming out of modern periodicals studies has brought into question this
tradition, the unanalyzed assumption that the only authentic site of modernism was the little magazine

I would like to sharpen the discussion of little magazine versus slicks by reframing it from a binary to a tripartite structure, which would include (1) the non-commercial little magazine, (2) the commercial slicks, and (3) the niche-market pulp magazine. Of the three types of literary periodicals, slicks and pulp magazines are assumed to be commercial enterprises, and so often the pulp magazine has been folded into the category of the slicks, their distinctiveness notwithstanding. Yet, there are important differences between pulp fiction magazines and slicks that need to be taken into consideration in order to bring into focus the shadow modernism that emerged in *Weird Tales*.

In addition to pulp magazines, conventionalized mass-appeal fiction and poetry was published in commercial slicks like *Scribners, Cosmopolitan*, or *The Smart Set*. This type of advertisement-filled magazine was contemporary with and is often defined in contrast to the non-commercial little magazine of modernism. Slicks were commercial enterprises that delivered literature and art to consumers who wanted it along with advertisements, contents that were also part of the magazine's mass appeal. These magazines existed solely as commercial enterprises and secondly as occasions for the expansion of literary art (their marketing postures notwithstanding).

Unlike the literature published in slicks alongside advertisements, the literary works published in a typical issue of *Poetry* or *The Little Review* in the 1910s and 20s was the central justification for their existence as cultural and not commercial enterprises. The little magazine often existed by virtue of a small coterie of subscribers or donations,
and the manifestoes, criticism, book reviews, discussion forums that Scholes and Wulfman highlight pervaded these magazines—i.e. the corollary critical extensions that explain the difficult modern art—were coextensions of the poetry, discussion linked to the literature in the service of the literature.

In contrast, in a typical literary-themed slick magazine published in the same decade—e.g. *Scribners, The Saturday Evening Post, Cosmopolitan*—the fiction or poetry printed is often equal with the journalism in different sections and the copious advertisements, sometimes occupying half of the magazine's pages. Put simply, the slick magazine often compared to and denigrated from the perspective of the little magazine did not exist in order to perpetuate and expand art but to produce profit for its investors. Such slick magazines were not primary sites of formal innovation or production. Instead these periodicals were a media for delivering conventionalized literature, a point driven home when it is considered that hitherto scandalous modernist works were published in slicks after they had been incorporated into middlebrow conceptions of art.

**Pulp Magazines as the Inverse of Little Magazines**

To compare the little magazine with the slick magazine is to consider only a small portion of the periodical culture that produced the little magazine and the modernism cultivated through it. Other medias are worthy of consideration, media formats that influenced and shaped the literary and art culture profoundly. Let us imagine a hypothetical type of magazine that delivers what appears to be transparent literature that requires no explanation at all. Not requiring serious intellectual labor or high literacy, the literary works published in this hypothetical magazine satisfies with little effort. Our thought experiment allows us to outline the pulpwood magazine with some accuracy.
Indeed, as a business format and commodity, this was its selling point, its key marketing characteristic: the centrality of fiction that utilized a conventional realist style that readers were familiar with, that readers could decode without accompanying exegesis.

Scholes and Wulfman focus on the continuity between the little magazines of modernism and the middlebrow, "mass," or commercial magazines like *Cosmopolitan, The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Smart Set*, which they define in opposition to little magazines in terms of their larger subscription numbers and the large percentage of their pages turned over to advertisements. They say little of other periodical medias pioneered at the time, particularly the popular all-fiction magazines of which *Weird Tales* is a prime though not typical example.

Ubiquitous throughout North America and regularly exported to Britain and other parts of Europe, the all-fiction magazine printed on pulpwood was not a "mass" magazine in that it was produced for everyone; rather, it was a specialized commodity, marketed to a specific demographic, scientifically honed over the years for a niche audiences with narrow tastes. Compared to slicks, it was similar to the little magazine of modernism in that its audience base was very small and it garnered little if any revenue from advertisement. The ratio of fiction to advertisement in a typical all-fiction pulpwood periodical (*Weird Tales* is no exception) was approximately 1/2 a page of advertisement to every 10 pages of fiction or poetry, compared to nearly half of the pages of a slick devoted to advertisements. But unlike little magazines, the pulp magazines were overtly commercial endeavors, business enterprises that highlighted their lack of advertisements as a marketing tactic. Unlike the slick, which marketed itself not only as a source of entertainment but a technology of cultural or educational cultivation, the pulpwood
magazine was a product, a quantity of "fiction by volume." Unlike the little magazine, which frequently featured advertisements and non-aesthetic material like book reviews, editorials, advertisements, discussion forums, cultural analysis, and so forth, the pulp fiction magazine was, in comparable terms, generically homogeneous: it featured fiction and sometimes poetry and, for the most part, only a few pages devoted to advertisement and editorial correspondences or essays. Magazine historians should not discount the differences in structure, content, and business practices inherent in pulp fiction magazines when compared to middlebrow large circulation magazines. But carving up the periodical culture into "little," "slick," and "pulp magazines" does not evade the inherent reductivism of extensive reading practices. To get around that we must look at a single magazine, the mostly highly sought and collected (and therefore enduring) pulp magazine of the pulp archive: *Weird Tales*.

*Weird Tales*

Very few of the issues of *Weird Tales* contained literary criticism of a type highlighted by Scholes and Wulfman, although readers regularly demanded it. *Weird Tales* was an "all-fiction" magazine, and one of its major selling points was its lack of extraneous material, including advertisement sheets. Unlike most of the publications we would call "little magazines," which typically devoted many pages to full sheet ads and classified pages, the pulp fiction magazine had very little space devoted to advertising and garnered little if any revenue from selling advertising space. This lack of advertisement can be explained by the business model associated with the marketing of pulp fiction magazines. For example, in the chapter "Behind the Scenes" of pulp magazine editor Harold Hersey's 1937 memoir, pulp fiction magazines appear in this
way: "The advertising is the usual run-of-the-mill stuff taken on a contingency basis: not paid for until it pays for itself in results. Still, it does fill the second, third and back covers, and it looks professional. [...] Later on, if our circulation warrants it, we will be able to charge cash for advertising space" (17). *Weird Tales* was typical in this regard, foregrounding fiction over advertisements. Yet, like many modernist little magazines, *Weird Tales* published an important manifesto of goals, an account of aesthetic principles. Although I cited from other sections of this manifesto above, compare this passage to other modernist manifestos:

The writer of a highly imaginative story intuitively knows of the existence of these things, and endeavors to search them out. He has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. He is at once the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet. He evolves fancies from known facts, and new startling facts are in turn evolved from the fancies. [...] To the imaginative writer, the upper reaches of the ether, the outer limits of the galactic ring, the great void that gapes beyond, and the infinity of universes that may, for all we know, lie still further on, are as accessible as his own garden. He flies to them in the ship of his imagination in less time than it takes a bee to flit from one flower to another on the same spike of a delphinium.

(Qtd. in Weinberg 17)

We have here the goal of the fiction of *Weird Tales* defined in terms of cognition and knowledge building. The literature *Weird Tales* hopes to publish will offer a unique mode of thinking, of knowing invisible things. It will function as an organ of perception, an x-ray device, telescope, and microscope offering access to the invisible phenomena.

Furthermore, the scale of knowledge open to the *Weird Tales* writer is framed as
inhuman, cosmic, indefinable. There is an emphasis on speed: the *Weird Tales* writer knows these things not due to laborious research but rather through immediate intuition that comes at the speed of an insect's short flight from one flower to the other. The manifesto, "Why Weird Tales?", was not the only, isolated instance of framing exegesis for the stories included in the magazine. At the end of every issue, the editor, Farnsworth Wright, included a section titled, "The Eyrie," which offered his reflections on the degree to which *Weird Tales* was living up to his stated goals. "The Eyrie" would also showcase readers reactions to the stories, reactions he collated and abridged. Consider, for example, a typical passage from the April 1926 "The Eyrie" section:

> It has until recently been the fashion to belittle the bizarre stories, the stark school of realism insisting that true literature must be tied to the sordid experiences of everyday life. *Weird Tales* has answered these "realists" by presenting bizarre and outré stories that are among the gems of imaginative literature. Many of our stories are mere pleasant entertainment for an idle hour, which take the reader away from the humdrum commonplaces of the life about him into a deathless country of imagination and fancy; but others are a very high type of literature.

(566)

Here is an acknowledgment of the low art cultural stereotype of pulp fiction magazines as commodity literature in the idea that some of the stories are framed as "mere pleasant entertainments for an idle hour." But in addition to Wright's posturing of humility is a serious assertion that much that the magazine was publishing was indeed literature, something in excess of a commodity.
As much as Wright's statement seems to confirm our cultural frame of the pulps as trash, we should guard against the assumption that pulp fiction magazines had then the lurid reputation they have now, a mythology established more after their disappearance from newsstands in the 1950s. Even at the height of their ubiquity, approximately 1935, this stereotype was vexed, with many challenging it. For example, in a *New York Times* letter to the editor (September 4th, 1935), pulp publisher A.A. Wyn writes in response to a negative article on the pulps. His description will allow us to experience some of the contemporary ambivalence toward the cultural status of pulp fiction magazines in circulation at the apex of their ubiquity. Writing as if he speaking to the typical cultural elite, he states,

> You may laugh at the stories we use, you may laugh at the paper we use (we have not as yet archangels for advertising to enable us to sell profitably at a nickel a magazine costing 22 cents to produce). But you can't quite laugh at the 10,000,000 Americans who plunk down their hard-earned cash each month for their favorite magazine. And who knows what some future historian may say about the relative merits of the forests of pulp that go into the magazines and books of today? After all, the masses throughout the world enjoyed the entertainment of slapstick Charlie Chaplin long before the highbrows discovered that he was an artist 'incomparable.' (18)

For Wyn, the central issue of the questionable aesthetic status of pulp fiction magazines is not their essential badness, but their vast quantity, which necessarily precludes assessing anything other than the mere myth, a fiction—"the pulps"—that only outlines them, and vaguely so. Thus, Wyn cleverly draws upon another "mass media" to make his
case: to speak of "the pulps" as trash is to say something like "the cinema is trash." Like the many films of the massive 1930s film industry, dismissing the majority of them as "mere entertainment" seems reasonable; however, to claim absolutely that all films are non-artistic commodities is not to allow the very real possibility that an occasional director or actor's work will rise to the level of art.

Wyn's letter allows us to see how absolutist claims about the aesthetic inferiority of the pulps is an outgrowth of the same anti-modernity, the same anti-technological bias, that condemned film as an ephemeral attraction of modern development. Wyn is therefore prescribing a level of restraint to readers and reminding them that one or two pulp fiction magazines or pulp writers may, in fact, come to be seen in the future as artists.

Returning to "The Eyrie" section of *Weird Tales*, one sees that the genuine audacity of the editor, Farnsworth Wright, can be missed, if we choose to read selectively his editorial from the perspective of traditional canons of modernism, which would very likely though quite inaccurately frame *Weird Tales* as just another degraded mass publication aesthetically contaminated and compromised. More important than Wright's admittance that some of the stories published in his pulp are "pleasant entertainments for an idle hour," however, is his serious statement that some of the stories that *Weird Tales* publishes are "gems of imaginative literature," a "very high type of literature."

The gem metaphor is particularly appropriate here. Precious gems need to be looked for, are hidden deep underground in substrata rock. Wright, like Wyn, was not naive about the wider cultural frame of his commercial enterprise, the extent to which the all-fiction magazine published on pulpwood paper had a low cultural status. Yet,
accounts of Wright published by *Weird Tales* writers describe a man of keen aesthetic sensibilities who was a Shakespeare scholar, a music critic, and journalist before becoming a pulp editor. For example, one *Weird Tales* writer writes in a memoir of Wright, "He loved words, their flavor, likeness of sound balanced against unlikeness in meaning. He rolled words in his mouth as he would an old wine; he savored them, whether his or someone else's [...] Prose, to him, needed rhythm, sonorous phrases; it needed balance and imagery, for he had the heart of a poet (Qtd. in Weinberg 9)

This description of a literary critic does not sync with the myth of the inartistic and business- oriented pulp-fiction magazine editor, brought into focus most sharply, I believe, in Hersey's memoir, *Pulpwood Editor*. Of his decisions as an editor, he observes that financial culpability of the magazine as a business enterprise was prime: "I followed a simple rule: the magazine came first; as long as a successful writer, an artist or associate was happy with his work, I was happy to have him around, but no one was so important that he couldn't be replaced" (*Pulpwood Editor* 65). Of the various writers he had worked with over his long career, the arch-pulp editor Hersey frames those with artistic ambition as out of sync with the industry: "The professional has attained an objective state of mind about his work, the amateur still talks about that inspiration and individuality in self-expression which are so precious to the serious artist and so utterly worthless to the quantity writer" (Hersey 70). For Hersey, the pulps were not a space for art, were in no way a cultural space that cultivated unique forms of knowledge or offered novel aesthetic experiences.

Unlike Hersey, Wright seems to have believed that there was nothing essentially inartistic about the pulp fiction community his magazine was fostering. Unlike the
majority of pulp editors who struggled to find literate writers, Wright, who had a strong
knowledge of literary history and a keen taste, found himself as editor of his pulp in the
uncomfortable position of deciding to reject a work he thought aesthetically powerful but
a commercial liability, if published in *Weird Tales*. A 1937 letter Smith wrote to H.P.
Lovecraft in response to the writer's submission of the story "Through the Gates of the
Silver Key":

I have carefully read through THE GATES OF THE SILVER KEY and am
almost overwhelmed by the colossal scope of the story [...] But I am afraid to
offer it to our readers. Many there would be, without any doubt whatever, who
would go into raptures of esthetic delight while reading the story; but just as
certainly there would be a great many—probably a clear majority—of our readers
who would be unable to wade through it. [...] The story is so much more than a
piece of fiction, and so far transcends not only the experiences of the readers, but
even their wildest dreams, that they would have no point of contact with the ideas
and thoughts presented in this opus. (John Hay Library)

The writers with artistic ambition who published in *Weird Tales* were not ignorant of the
low cultural status of the magazine that was their primary market. Some were even
ashamed of their affiliation with *Weird Tales* and considered their publication in the
magazine only a quasi-publication, an unfortunate precursor to what they really desired
but probably would never achieve: an artistically respectable magazine devoted to the
weird, a dream they wrote about often in their correspondence to one another. They
understood the improbability that their work would ever be considered art by anyone but
themselves. Yet they conceived of themselves as artists in spite of cultural pressures that
tried to convince them otherwise: "The imaginative writer devotes himself to art in its most essential sense," writes Lovecraft in January of 1921 before he had secured the dubious honor of publication in the pulps.

Nevertheless, their literary efforts were shaded by a palpable sense of failure. In spite of the conventional nature of their narrative style, they assumed they would be misunderstood and adopted a defensive posture toward their work. A 1937 letter from Clark Ashton Smith to R.H. Barlow, a close friend, correspondent, and companion of Lovecraft, appears indicative of the general relationship the writers I study cultivated with pulp marketplaces. Less than a year before he completely gave up writing fiction, Smith wrote of his frustrations with what he perceived as the incorrigible misunderstandings of readers, editors, and critics. He comments on how he struggles to continue to write: "I seem to have what psychologists call a "disgustmechanism"[sic] to contend with: a disgust at the ineffable stupidity of editors and readers [...] I find myself confronted with another blank wall of stupidity. Oh well and oh hell: some one will make a "discovery" when I am safely dead [...]" (302). Compare this cynical statement with a letter from Clark Ashton Smith to H.P. Lovecraft postmarked December 10th, 1929, only a few months into his attempt to write fiction as a result of Lovecraft's endorsements. Smith is commenting on the stories he found in pulp magazines he purchased as a research gesture in order to understand what the editors of the pulp fiction markets preferred. Of the work in Science Wonder-Stories and Amazing Stories, he writes, "I can see that if I am to make a real living out of fiction, I am in for a certain amount of quasi-hackwork" (105). Or consider a passage from a letter wherein Smith reflects on a story by Fitz-James O'Brien: "When I got out the W.T. Containing your "Dunwich Horror", to
loan to a friend, I noticed that it also included a reprint of "The Diamond Lens" by Fitz-James O'Brien, which first appeared in the Atlantic back in 1858. [...] What would be the fate of this fine story if it were submitted to the Atlantic now for the first time (119). Or consider a letter where Smith writes of the publication of Lovecraft's work in *Weird Tales*: "Your stories are unique, and I hope you will bring out a volume of them some day. I'd like to see them in a form more permanent and dignified than the pages of W.T.." (2, CAS letters to HPL). Or consider further a dream, one Smith shared with Lovecraft and Howard: "I wish there was a real weird magazine, with you [...] and myself on the permanent staff of contributors" (3).
Chapter 6: Clark Ashton Smith: The Bitterest of the Poets

After refusing to visit friends, or to leave New England for years, H.P. Lovecraft uncharacteristically accepted an invitation to travel by train on July 30th, 1922 to Cleveland, Ohio. He made this trip to visit his long-time correspondent, Samuel Loveman, the poet Hart Crane, and Crane's friend, Alfred Galpin (1901-1983), and a lesser known group of writers, artists, and intellectuals. Galpin was an academic philosopher and literary critic who wrote for the Amateur Press Associations of which Lovecraft and Loveman were leading members. Through these associations, Galpin published one issue of a little magazine, *The Philosopher*, in December of 1920, which included the essay, "Some Tendencies in Modern Poetry." This interesting essay allows us to approximate the aesthetic tastes of Lovecraft's literary associates; furthermore, it shows how poets like Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Amy Lowell (all of who are cited in the essay) and others were received by Lovecraft and company. The following passage from the essay is a representative example of the ambivalence toward modern poetry and art expressed by the *Weird Tales* writers I study:

What benefit, if any, may come then from this ephemeral fad? I doubt if anything substantial will result; but at least the great principle of the vividness, the necessity of the concrete detail, has been recognized. Seen through the transcending, the imaginative eye of the future, there is wonderful raw material for poetry here. […] The present age is one of speculation rather than performance. (241-243)

For Lovecraft, Loveman, Galpin, modernist art and poetry—particularly Impressionism and Imagism—seemed to them an ephemeral fad; nevertheless, it also was acknowledged
by them as a movement that had engineered new techniques for emphasizing "the great principle of vividness" and the "necessity of concrete detail" through "dreaming into semi-consciousness." They intuited the rhetoric of modernist poetry as outlined in the three principles by Ezra Pound in his "Retrospect," published in a 1918 collection of criticism, *Pavannes and Divagations*:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome. (5)

The three phrases Galpin uses in his essay to characterize the technical "tendencies" of modern poetry conform to Pound's three principles quite neatly: "vividness" suggests "direct treatment"; "concrete detail" suggests streamlined diction; and "semi-consciousness" suggests the preference for organic rather than artificial rhythm. Galpin, Lovecraft, and Loveman's theory of modernist poetry anticipated later descriptions quite accurately.

Though the *Weird Tales* writers focused on fiction, they also wrote poetry, and looking at their poetry briefly allows us to see how their fiction leverages a highly theorized poetics. The *Weird Tales* writers's techniques and themes as regards to poetry was a kind of inverse of Imagism, a preference for the "indirect treatment of the thing," for sincere abstraction. A poem published by Lovecraft in *The Providence Journal* in April of 1930 repudiates the principles as outlined by Pound above as well as his injunction to "make it new":

I never can be tied to raw, new things,
Such treasures, left from times of cautious leaven
Cannot but loose the hold of flimsier wraiths
That flit with shifting ways and muddled faiths
Across the changeless walls of earth and heaven.
They cut the moment's thongs and leave me free
To stand alone before eternity. (Complete Poetical Works 92)

For Lovecraft and other Weird Tales writers, the modernist literary image, structured as the direct treatment of the thing—a powerful literary image holding the unfolding present in enduring form—were but "pale wraiths" that "flit with shifting and muddled faiths" across eternity. But there is an important ambivalence here. Folded into Lovecraft's critique of the modernist literary image is a subtle but provocative revelation of its potential: "They" (the modernist work of art) "cut the moment's thongs and leave me free
/ To stand alone before eternity." In other words, it is only by virtue of a confrontation with the absolute novelty of the present, made strange and stabilized by the modernist literary image, that the "changeless walls of heaven and earth" appear changeless. Put another way, the enduring form expresses the occult truth of the ordinary.

This sonnet captures the sentiment of the Weird Tales writers in regards to the modernist literary image. Modernism becomes here a prism that reveals that reality of radical change. The modernist literary image functions for these writers like a point of interest one attends to from the window of a speeding train. This point we attend to anchors our attention and holds it firmly. We jerk our heads to follow it as it shrinks and
diminishes. Only then, after our sensorium has attempted to grip this stability, do we intuit how fast we are going.

While dwelling in Cleveland for over two weeks, Lovecraft stayed at Galpin's residence and spent most of his time mingling with what he referred to as "Loveman's literary circle," of which Hart Crane was a regular. This was a horizon-expanding experience for the provincial Lovecraft, who now found himself being introduced, via Loveman and Galpin, to writers, composers, watercolorists, and architects. Sometime during this visit he was introduced to Crane's poetry, particularly his poem "Pastorale," of which he composed a parody titled, "Plaster-All," an exaggeration of Imagist poetic technique that ridicules what Lovecraft thought was the pretentious idea of a "Cleveland intelligentsia." Subtitled, "(Apologies to 'Pastorale' of Mr. Crane in the Dial), it transforms Cranes beautiful "No more violets / and the year / broken into smoky panels" into,

I, who live,

[...]

In a fashionable neighborhood,

With pictures of Bill Sommer hung on the wall,

And an occasional one by myself--

That one, the woman's face uplifted, for instance--

My best, I think,

A miraculous stroke [...]. (254)

Bill Sommers refers to a modernist painter from Cleveland who founded the Kakoon Arts Club; and so Lovecraft, via direct citation, aligns Crane the poet with the "new art" of the
period. Lovecraft's parody emphasizes what he sees as the faddish and impressionistic quality of Crane's poetry. It ridicules its preoccupation with technique: "A miraculous stroke." In this poem Lovecraft goes on to transfer his parody of Hart Crane to other modernists. And, Like Galpin, he parallels and even anticipates later critical understandings and descriptions of modernist aesthetics, particularly Ortega y Gasset's "The Dehumanization of Art" (contemporary) and Clement Greenberg's writings on Abstract Expressionism (retrospective):

And so,

Realizing, after all,

As I did, and so many before me,

[...]

That what it all amounts to,

In life, as in literature--

Is form.

Not emotion, not poetry, not beauty,

But the hard, visible, outline. (255)

Though Lovecraft was not impressed by the Cleveland poetry centered on Crane, he nevertheless discovered an obscure poet while visiting the Midwest who would come to deeply influence his contributions to the shadow modernism of Weird Tales. This obscure poet, Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961), however, had emphatically not followed Pound's three principles or what Galpin called "the great principle of vividness" and the "necessity of concrete detail." By the time Lovecraft discovered Smith's book of poetry, Smith was a hermit who lived in the Sierras, and he had, by the annus mirabilis, fully
turned away from the literary world, although he had published his poetry in the teens alongside modernists in *Poetry* magazine and other periodical venues associated with modernism. Lovecraft would rekindle Smith's literary ambitions, not as a poet but as a unique "shadow modernist."

Wanting to thank Lovecraft for his visit, Galpin entrusted to him Smith's rare volume of poetry printed in 1912 by A.M. Robertson's San Francisco based Philopolis Press, *The Star-Treader and Other Poems* (1912). At the time, Lovecraft was not familiar with the Smith's work. This is how the title poem, "The Star-Treader" begins:

> A voice cried to me in a dawn of dreams,
> Saying, "Make haste: the webs of death and birth
> Are brushed away, and all the threads of earth
> Wear to the breaking; spaceward gleams
> Thine ancient pathway of the suns [...]. (30)

This poem offends against against Pound's principles.

Smith's cosmic imagery stirred Lovecraft. After reading *The Star-Treader*, Lovecraft wrote Smith a praise-filled letter and in this way inaugurated a literary correspondence that would last the rest of his life and result in Smith's transforming himself from "obscure poet" to the artistically dubious role of "pulp hack," and, later, "one of the godfathers of science fiction" (Park, Poetry Foundation). After introducing himself as a friend of Loveman's (Smith was already a correspondent with Loveman), Lovecraft praises Smith: "I lack a vocabulary adequate to express my enthusiastic admiration. What a world of opiate phantasy & horror is here unveiled, & what an unique power & perspective must lie behind it!" (*Letters* 109).
Lovecraft admires the poet's "cosmicism," the extent to which his poetry turns away from what Harriet Monroe refers to as the "euphuistic tangent" of the "good earth" to concentrate wholly on what Smith referred elsewhere as "the sublimity and vastness of the stars and star-spaces" (*CAS Letters* 5). This is the opposite of that field suggested by the term "concrete detail" that Lovecraft's friend, Galpin, identified as central to modern poetry's innovations.

Lovecraft and Smith shared reverence for these cosmic themes. Five months before discovering Smith, Lovecraft wrote a polemic essay for a privately printed little magazine titled, "A Confession of Unfaith" where he reflects on his agnosticism. A passage from this essay illuminates the extent to which his philosophical and theological perspectives were similar and complimentary to Smith's: "My attitude has always been cosmic; and I looked on man as if from another planet. He was merely an interesting species presented for study and classification. I had strong preferences and partialities in many fields, but could not help seeing the race in its cosmic futility as well as in its terrestrial importance" (536). In this passage Lovecraft reveals how his literary work emerge from a perspective tied a cosmic scale and a cynical attitude toward the present moment as ephemeral. To an extent, it is the inverse of what Galpin and Harriet Monroe identified as modern poetry's distinctive qualities: "concrete detail," "the good earth" is thrown into relief by the vastness of a starfield.

In discovering *The Star-Treader and Other Poems*, Lovecraft had found a poet who seemed to grasp the aesthetic potential of the astronomical perspectives available to imaginative minds. But before exploring the literary works that were produced by Clark Ashton Smith and published in *Weird Tales* as a result of his relationship with Lovecraft-
-his transformation into a "shadow modernist"--let us briefly turn to his past, when he was a "modernist."

"It Seems a Pity to Neglect Any of Them": The Little Magazine as Excess

In his classic A History of American Magazines (1968), Frank Luther Mott focuses for a chapter on a "flagship" little magazine of Anglo-American modernism, Harriet Monroe's Chicago-based Poetry, the magazine remembered as Ezra Pound's organ for introducing the American reading public to the poetry movement he engineered. Beginning his historical sketch, Mott reflects on the large number of important poets whose work appeared in Monroe's magazine. He asks, "How many of the poets represented in the half-century of this magazine's publication should be mentioned in a brief history such as this?" He answers, "It seems a pity to neglect any of them, but most poets' tapers are blown out early, of course. Anyone running down the average table of contents, even if he is fairly well read in the books and magazines of the times, will recognize little than half the names" (237).

In other words, some names are recognizable to us by virtue of the 1930s era mythology of literary modernism cultivated by accounts of modernism like Edmund Wilson's Axel's Castle (1931), Malcolm Cowley's Exiles Return (1934), and Stephen Spender's The Destructive Element (1935). Other names, however, are not. Indeed, the many poets who fade into the table of contents alongside the usual suspects of modernism from the perspective of sanctioned "modernist reflection" are a kind of pulpy excess, are so many weeds strangling twentieth-century Anglophone modernism that need to be cut back as a first principle.
Reflecting on this mass of obscure names productively troubles the boundary marking divisions that literary historians have engineered over the years to understand the vast and multi-layered archive and discourse that is the Anglo-American literary culture of the early twentieth century. This sublime archive of the "Paper Age" includes not simply the literary work and criticism initially promulgated in non-commercial little magazines published out of Chicago, New York, the Left Bank of Paris, and London--an attractive proposition from the perspective of the literary mind. It also includes pulp fiction magazines, nationally distributed slick magazines, newspaper journalism, privately printed volumes, private journals, literary correspondences, and much more. Magazines like *Poetry* are very useful to literary historians for their ability to demarcate an archive; however, as Mott reminds us, even these magazines obscure an underlying excess. To approach the archive as "the magazines of modernism" is not narrow enough. These magazines, it seems, are only useful inasmuch as later critics "filter" them for posterity, tag the enduring and flower-bearing perennials and mark the unidentifiable weeds.

Perhaps returning to the third issue of the *Poetry*, the December 1912 issue, will illustrate Mott's thesis, will confirm via a cursory scan of its table of contents the worthiness of the high reputation of the magazine and its famous editor, who, as early as 1919, H.L. Mencken referred to as the "mother superior" of "the New Poetry Movement" (48). Featuring five poems by William Butler Yeats and a taste-establishing review by Ezra Pound, this third issue of the magazine indeed confirms the magazine's reputation as a primary site of academic modernism's emergence.
But what of the other, shadowy poets featured in this third issue of *Poetry*? I would like to highlight one of them: Clark Ashton Smith, the poet Lovecraft discovered in Cleveland a decade later, in 1922. In spite of a brief cameo here on the mainstage of Anglo-American modernism, Clark Ashton Smith figures as a central writer in the history of the low genres of science fiction, fantasy, and the supernatural. More specifically, Smith became a central figure of the *Weird Tales* circle of writers I study and the shadow modernism that that pulp fiction magazines authored, a rhetoric that came to reflect on and incorporate the rhetoric of modernism into virtual worlds and thereby became the age of "modernist reflection."

Elsewhere, Clark Ashton Smith has been called the grandfather of pulp science fiction. Yet here he is, a pioneer of the "space opera," in the same table of contents as William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound. This unique point of contact between what would later be constructed as the high of modernism and the low of science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror in the years leading up to the Great War and the interwar period represents to me an important point of departure, a penultimate site of what might be termed "miscegenated" modernism that would violently purify itself by exorcizing "cosmic" writers like Smith and exiling them into pulp fiction magazines like *Weird Tales*. Smith accepted this exile in *Weird Tales* because of Lovecraft's influence, and it surprisingly afforded the poet who would become a pulp fiction writer a rare vantage point: in his pulp fictions he would fictionalize the modernist movement that he had once been part of. He wrote stories during the age of modernist reflection that formalize the experience of the occult truth of ordinary, the violation of the literary effect of reality, the catastrophic sweeping away of all ordinary realities understood as ephemeral.
From the perspective of traditional histories of modernism, to consider Smith is to consider a failure, a rear-guardsman who was initially honored by publication in *Poetry* but who was unable or unwilling--as tastes and styles in poetry changed and an aesthetic of productive destruction to dominate--to avoid censure and eventually the indifference of the world of twentieth-century Anglophone poetry. From a traditional literary-historical perspective, Smith's career is a story of rejection by the mainstream poetry establishment, of finding himself artistically out of sync with Chicago, New York, London, and Paris and increasingly frustrated by his fruitless attempts to disseminate his art, to publish it, to gather an income from it. His is the story of becoming an obscure outsider, a subject position he exaggerated, romanticized and adopted for rhetorical purposes. This brief entry in his commonplace book, a notebook he referred to simply as his *Black Book*, demonstrates Smith's attempt to rationalize his rejection and to twist it into a positive element of his aesthetic project: "There are poets whose obscurity consists in the fact that they perceive analogies and correspondences too remote or arcane to be discerned by others" (47). Consider his criticisms of Harriett Monroe's editorial choices. Writing to his mentor, George Sterling, in July of 1913, he wrote, "Miss Monro[sic] has been 'infected' by Ezra Pound, who is rabid for a 'new form,' and she is letting *poetry* [sic] go by the board" (*CAS Letters* 93).

Because of his early artistic pretensions and his subsequent failures, Smith's career arc literalizes the distance from modernism and antagonism toward that movement and the works produced by it that characterizes and formally structures much of the rhetoric of fiction that distinguishes the experimental pulp fiction of the *Weird Tales* writers. Unlike his *Weird Tales* peers, Smith could be considered a modernist as such
the extent that he published alongside those who would become modernists in later accounts. Smith was initially praised as a contributing modern poet in the same significant venues that published those who would become the main characters of modernism. Unlike other *Weird Tales* writers who orbited but did not directly intrude into what might be considered, strictly speaking, the scene of modernism, Smith satisfies all conditions for direct inclusion in the canon of modernism rather than the subsequent period I am calling modernist reflection. Nevertheless, his most significant contributions only come into focus in the context of modernist reflection, when, in order to understand the new art, he forsook poetry and chose to rely, rather, on a grotesque hybridization of realism and anti-representational formalism.

The general quality of Smith and the other *Weird Tales* writers's antagonism toward and distaste of modernism is not a particularly unique or notable sentiment in the years leading up to the Great War and those of the Interwar Period. Modernism's ability to shock and disgust is legendary. Furthermore, a kind of anti-modernist sentiment arose along with the first symptoms of what we might call modernist formal experimentation in literature and the other arts. It was a literature and art premised by the destruction of older forms and modes and could not help be evoke negative responses.

In terms of literature, we can perceive the beginnings of anti-modernism in something as early as the charged correspondence between a frustrated H.G. Wells and a dismissive Henry James; and the fire has become a conflagration by the time we come to the "Entartete Kunst" or "Degenerate Art Exhibition" in Nazi Germany (Munich, July 19th, 1937 - November 30th, 1937). But with Smith and his fellow *Weird Tales* writers we have something more than banal dismissal or reactionary ire. We have in *Weird Tales*
a corpus of art that evolves in reaction to modernism that seeks to represent modernism, pass it through the filter of previous rhetorics of sensational literature, and, in doing so, comes to grasp, I argue, its core rhetoric, its utility: the virtual modernist art object, the enduring non-representational form, brings into focus the occult truth of the ordinary, the idea that the effect of ordinary reality produced by the literary technique of realism masks an unyielding ephemerality.

*Weird Tales* takes as its initial starting point an idiosyncratic but nevertheless sincere vision of what modernist art does and can do: in becoming an enduring form, it throws into horrible focus that which does not endure. Unlike the widespread parodies of modernism published in newspapers and middlebrow magazines of the time, and unlike the widely publicized censorship attempts and indignant disavowals of modernism that have inaccurately linked sexual licentiousness with it, Smith and the other *Weird Tales* writers go beyond simple repudiation and parody of modernism in order to engage in an ekphrastic reflection on it, a form of critical discourse that takes the unsanctioned form of hyper-ephemeral pulp fictions about modernist art objects that endure forever.

In his biographical association and subsequent distance and reflection modernism, Smith epitomizes the "shadow modernism" of *Weird Tales*, and his "second" career as pulp writer conforms to the historical period I am terming "modernist reflection." Indeed, he is like the character of Agathon leaving the Symposium as imagined by Samuel Loveman in a 1924 poem, "Agathon":

[...]

Yet he, before the morning light,

His heart shall grow the bitterest.
Yet ere his laurel wreath be shrunken,
He shall steal out before the rest,
Far from the revel, shrill and drunken,
And from the stranger-woman's breast. (59)

The ancient metaphor for Clark Ashton Smith Loveman draws here is disgusted by the party. The famous Symposium that Agathon/Smith participates in with Socrates is depicted negatively as a mindless celebration of the moment. Loveman portrays Agathon as being an outcast, the "bitterest" of the poets, who "steals out" "before the morning light" into the darkness "far from the revel." This is precisely--though somewhat dramatically expressed--what Clark Ashton Smith did in relation to modernist poetry.

What Loveman's poem does not capture for us, however, is what Smith/Agathon found in the shadows, in the grotto of the "pulps" among the shadow modernists after he left the party. Smith's 1912 poem from The Star-Treader, "Shadows"--a decade before he would meet Lovecraft or J.C. Henneberger would ever conceive of Weird Tales--begins to outline the conversion underwent by the poet from celebrated modernist to obscure "pulp hack," writer of strange fantasies, science fictions, and horrors. This poem, "Shadows," about the inevitable destruction and disappearance of a civilization, expresses the theme of the morbid awareness of ephemerality, the occult truth of the ordinary, that I argue centers the "shadow modernism" of Weird Tales:

Thy shadow falls on the fount,
On the fount with marble wall...
And in alien time and space
On the towns of a doomed race
[...] They shall fall, till the light be done, And none shall have known their meaning Ere the night and shadows are one. (42)

In this poem the ancient meaning of shadows as indexes of passing time is evoked for poetic effect. Shadows are portrayed here as a temporal index, an expression of the catastrophic acceleration of time and change, a herald of the occult truth of the ordinary. Moreover, the "shadows" throw into stark relief the strangeness that anything is ordinary at all. Because everything is dissolving, everything is unique, everything is strange. In this poem, the monstrous procession of all-enveloping shadows bring out the ephemerality of phenomena, and in displaying their ephemerality, their core essence as temporary and drifting configurations of matter doomed to dispersal--the monoliths, the town, the vials, the books of secrets--becomes clear. They are no longer ordinary but strange.
Chapter 7: Clark Ashton Smith and Modernism as Sensational Excess

Clark Ashton Smith, a modernist poet who became a pulp fiction writer, represents in his high to low career arc and "literary outsider" posturing the central themes and formal concerns of the "shadow modernists" of Weird Tales. His career offers a lens through which we can understand the genealogy of the formal rhetoric produced by Weird Tales relationship with modernism, a rhetoric that is best understood as a unique combination of realism and modernism. I briefly relate Smith's early career as a poet publishing alongside modernists. I then conduct close readings of some his fiction published in Weird Tales and related venues to showcase how Smith's particular version of shadow modernism functions to reveal the occult truth of the ordinary, i.e. the radical instability and ephemerality of the quotidian.

Through a process of exchange consisting of sharing fiction tropes and narrative structures as well correspondence with fellow Weird Tales writers, Smith, like Lovecraft, transformed his reading of modernism into his central concern. In Smith's pulp stories about modernism, experience and sensation are always a terrible excess and consciousness is a protective filtering of that excess. For Smith, sensory organs hold off and order the unbearable strangeness that is reality, a reality that is always rapidly changing. Moreover, in Smith's stories of modernist art objects, modernist artists, and experiences of modernist art, the boundary separating human being from the being of the aesthetic object is dangerously unstable. Humans become art objects and art objects achieve consciousness. In this way, Smith's fictionalized aesthetic experiences consist not only in the confrontation of an experiencing subject with an animate aesthetic object, but it is also a moment when those distinctions collapse and artist becomes mere matter and
art becomes conscious. In Smith's stories about modernism, aesthetic experience is excess that derives from the "short circuiting" of the filtering function of the senses, a "short circuiting" the "abstract" art of modernism is designed to produce. Moreover, the experience of modernist art is fictionalized in Smith's work as too much sensation that ultimately results in the dissolution of reality.

To begin we must briefly establish such how Smith found himself publishing in *Weird Tales* where he had once published in Harriet Monroe's celebrated *Poetry*. This story of his transformation from a modernist poet to a pulp fiction writer begins with his "discovery" in 1907 by another poet, George Sterling (1869-1926). From the perspective of traditional canons of twentieth-century poetry, Sterling is a regionalist poet who, outside of California, never achieved great visibility. He was a close confidante of Ambrose Bierce, Robinson Jeffers, and Jack London, and other California-based intellectuals and artists. He was the leader of a respected and publicly supported California-based literary circle, of which Smith was a member. Additionally, as book reviewer, public-relations spokesperson, literary critic, and poet, Sterling consolidated and promoted the work and art of a coterie of journalists, writers, and artists geographically centered around the famous Bohemian Club of San Francisco. Sterling promoted Smith in this way.

Sterling's poetry, rarely reprinted, is worth further analysis; however, for our purposes here, it is Sterling's role as literary mentor to Smith and not as poet that is significant. Like Smith, Sterling had initial success as a poet, was published in *Poetry* alongside key modernists, but would later fall out of fashion. Sterling brought Smith into the literary world by promoting him and helping him to publish. But being out of sync
with modernism himself, he also contributed to the Smith's identification as a literary outsider. Consider an excerpt from a review of Sterling's poetry by Harriett Monroe, published in _Poetry_ in the March of 1916 issue of _Poetry_:

> Already the young poet's brilliant but too facile craftsmanship was tempted by the worst excess of the Tennysonian tradition: he never thinks—he deems; he does not ask, but crave; he is fain for this and that; he deals in emperies and auguries and antiphons in casual throes and lethal voids—in many other things of tinsel and fustian, the frippery of a by-gone fashion. (302)

By November of 1926, with a string of rejections behind him, Sterling's career as a poet had become stifled. On November 4th, 1926 Clark Ashton Smith tried to raise up his mentor's spirit by writing in a letter, "The present orgy of materialism will exhaust itself sooner or later, and perhaps end in some great social debacle. After that—since history never does anything but plagiarize itself—there may be a revival of interest in imaginative literature, and a new Romantic epoch, like that which followed the French Revolution" (_CASLetters_ 94). His efforts to improve Sterling's spirits proved ineffective. Two weeks after this letter was written, Sterling committed suicide by taking cyanide.

I briefly highlight Smith's early relationship with Sterling to emphasize how a distance from modernism, a posture of being disconnected from contemporary poetry, was a central part of Smith's identity as a writer, and this ambivalent identification with high literature and also repudiation of it shaded Smith's later pulp works. Smith's early modernism is largely forgotten, and this is because Smith deliberately distanced himself from it. Smith is remembered today by genre-fiction writers such as George R.R. Martin, Neil Gaiman, and China Mieville as a major artistic influence, a key figure in what is
today referred to as "the new weird" or "the new sword and sorcery." Also, genre-fiction enthusiasts frame Smith as a central pulp fiction writer, science fiction and "sword and sorcery" pioneer. But when Smith is recalled in these contexts, his early career as a poet publishing alongside Yeats and Pound is often a mere footnote. Nevertheless, it was through the establishment of an early correspondence with the rejected poet Sterling—who aspired to be an artist and never a pulp hack—that Smith began to enter into any public notice at all.

Smith attached himself to Sterling and his career, and he saw in him a mentor and a model to follow. Their relationship, documented throughout their long correspondence starting January of 1911 and lasting until Sterling's suicide, consists of Sterling harshly critiquing Smith's poetry as too morbid, Smith praising Sterling's poetry, and Sterling suggesting lines of reading and literary periodicals to consider for publication. Also, both of them lament what they see as the declining tastes in poetry as a result of the rise of materialism. In spite of his harsh critiques of Smith's work, Sterling was convinced of Smith's poetic genius from the beginning. When the unknown Smith sent Sterling manuscripts of his poetry, Sterling, in an uncharacteristic move, responded: "Your work is [...] so much above the average of what comes to me from stranger and friend, I have ventured to make a few comments and suggestions [...] I think a bright future awaits you" (CASLetters 19). Sterling used his literary contacts to promote his friends who were writers, and he did this for Smith with particular gusto. He spoke highly of him to his publishing contacts, secured for him interviews with writers such as Robinson Jeffers, Jack London, and Ambrose Bierce. Additionally, Sterling worked closely with a local printer, A.M. Robertson, on behalf of Smith in order to bring out his first volume of
poetry in 1912, *The Star-Treader and Other Poems*. And he promoted this volume intensely, sometimes excessively so. For example, Ambrose Bierce, writing to the editor of a California newspaper, *Town Talk*, complains about a series of promotional pieces authored by Sterling in which Sterling falsely attributes praise of Smith's poetry to Bierce: "In nearly all of these eulogies I find myself credited with praises I never uttered" (288). He continues in a more sober register, however, stating of Smith's work, "It seems to me uncommonly good work and a promise of better work to come" (289).

Here Bierce highlights an element of Smith's persona that influenced much of his early work: his youth and the promise. Smith's first book of poetry, *The Star-Treader and Other Poems* was published in 1912 when Smith was only nineteen. And in the literary columns of many prominent California newspapers, it received many positive reviews, with many reviewers comparing Smith's poetry to Keats and Tennyson and other romantics. Consider the headline of a front page article on Smith published in San Francisco's leading daily newspaper, *The Call*, August 2nd, 1912: "Boy Is Poetic Genius; Lonely Sierras Inspire Muse." Other California publications lavished Smith with praise. He was a literary celebrity for a time, confirmed, to an extent, by the fact that *The New York Times* reviewed his book of poetry in January of 1913. Unbiased by regional pride, however, New York's assessment of Smith's poetry was more balanced. Compare *The New York Times* headline to the headline of the above cited San Francisco newspaper: "A YOUNG POET: He Has Quality, but Also the Faults of Youth."

The eventual consensus of the literary establishment was that Smith's first volume suggested a successful career to come. This success never materialized. Smith's start resulted, of course, in his publication in *Poetry* and later publication in H.L. Mencken's
The Smart Set. But his success and favor in the modern poetry scene was short lived. His publication of poetry in nationally prominent magazines became scarce after 1912, with rejections from the North Atlantic Review figuring prominently in his correspondence with Sterling. His promise, like Sterling's, did not come to fruition. Smith, like Sterling, continued to write poetry, but no one would publish it, a proposition confirmed when it is considered that by 1925 Smith had been forced to publish at his own expense additional volumes of poetry through regional presses. The Book Club of California published Odes and Sonnets in 1918. But in 1925, having failed to secure the interest of another commercial publisher, Smith self-published Ebony and Crystal and Sandalwood. These books did not sell nor receive attention. Throughout the rest of his life Smith complained to his Weird Tales correspondents about stacks of unsold books stored under his bed. In 1937, to a correspondent, a fellow writer considering self-publication, Smith offered this bit of cynical advice: "The fewer you print, the more the collectors of 1987 will pay for a copy of the volume…. And the fewer you'll have to store in the attic or basement" (312).

Smith's failure as a poet significantly influenced his art, came to structure much of the fiction he published in Weird Tales. But he did not consider the possibility that his work was bad. He chose instead to blame the "materialistic" spirit of the age and a reading public that did not understand his work. Throughout his correspondence with Sterling and his shared experience of rejection, Smith developed a theory to explain the problem of modern literature in terms of its earthly preoccupations, the degree to which it turned away from such large issues as the vastness and emptiness the cosmos and the strangeness and mystery of existence in order to focus instead on the gossip, sexual titillation, introspective psychology and sociology, or what Smith cynically referred to as
"the social upheaval of the ant-hill" (14). This statement of principles Smith wrote in his 
*Black Book* demonstrates his anti-human thematics: "The poet should, with unerring 
vision, distinguish the eternal from the ((topical)) ((secular)) temporary, and maintain a 
glacial purity uncontaminated by the latter" (Black Book 47, "()" denotes crossed out 
words). Or consider a letter to his mentor Sterling in July of 1913: "I'm getting a wee bit 
sick of the introspective element that dominates modern literature. So many present-day 
writers are like the diseased beggars at the gates of Eastern cities, exposing their sores to 
public pity and benevolence" (21). Smith's language of contamination, purity and disease 
suggests that same anxiety of contamination attributed elsewhere to "high modernists," 
who perceived commercialism, popular appeal, and bourgeoisie tastes in art as a 
contaminate. In Smith's case, however, contamination is not based on "elitism" and 
"populism" but on the "insignificantly human" and "profoundly cosmic." For Smith, the 
issue is scale.

If excessive introspection was part of modern literature's sin, the other half was its 
social focus, its propensity to dwell upon social and political issues, concerns Smith 
casually dismissed to Sterling in 1915: "Damn the planet, anyway—it's only fit for the 
habitation of hogs, who enjoy rooting" (26). And earlier, in 1912: "The thing called 
civilization, as the history of the past shows conclusively enough, is only a dog chasing 
its own tail" (10). Smith's rejection of modernism can be succinctly conveyed in a 
statement that appears in one of his letters to Benjamin De Cessares, a New York-based 
journalist who had favorably reviewed Smith's poetry: "To hell with symbology, in any 
serious sense—I'm not D.H. Lawrence. There are more things in heaven and earth than 
are dreamt in phallicism or psychoanalysis" (87). And Smith emphasizes his radical
agnosticism--anti-scientific, anti-religious, and anti-philosophic--in a proverb written in his *Black Book*: "All human thought, all science, all religion, is the holding of a candle to the night of the universe" (*Black Book* 50). Writing to thank a journalist who, in a rare turn, positively reviewed of his poetry in 1913, Smith sums up his criticisms succinctly: "Poetry, particularly work like mine, which is so far removed from the everyday interest of the immense bulk of mankind, stands in little danger of being overestimated in these days" (18).

In spite of Smith's apparent indifference here to the lack of estimation secured by his poetry, in other letters he reveals anger at what he imagines as a genuine misunderstanding on the part of magazine editors and critics. In response to rejections by Harriet Monroe and additional failures with the *North Atlantic Review*, he complained to Sterling in September of 1912, "I wish there were a hell for magazine-editors and their public, in which, for a few hundred thousand years, they could be made to see themselves as you and I see them" (17). Perhaps all of Smith's frustrations with the literary world that rejected him is present in this statement written by Smith to Sterling in one of the earliest letters of their vast correspondence, October 6th, 1911: "I am astonished to find how few really grasp the sublimity and vastness of the stars and star-spaces" (5).

Ten years later Smith met one of those few in Lovecraft. Originally these writers exchanged fiction manuscripts and unsold volumes of poetry, having no hope (or even ambition) of making their work public in any further way. However, when Lovecraft learned about the proposed founding of *Weird Tales* from J.C. Henneberger (it was not founded until 1923), he immediately wrote to Smith in November of 1922 the following note: "I ventured to give the editor your name & address. [...] One need not be ashamed
to write or draw for such magazines—Poe & Bierce, I believe, used to write for any old thing" (82). For Smith, publishing in a pulp magazine like Weird Tales, a self-marketed "artistic" pulp, could be conceived romantically, as a kind of grotto where the true cosmic artists of the period could retreat.

In The Star-Treader and Other Poems, Smith turns away from humanity to contemplate mysteries as a mystic. The speakers of his poems lament their corporeality, their essential rootedness to the mundane, and they long to shed their bodies, like the speaker of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," and become not polished artifices of bronze but nothing material at all. They desire to disincarnate fully—to spiral apart, to fuse with the stars. Furthermore, what Lovecraft refers to in "A Confession of Unfaith" as the "cherished pomps and prides" of human civilization, Smith symbolically obliterates, a destruction he thematizes by morbidly reflecting on the beauty, truth, and creative potential of wanton destruction. Consider this passage from Smith's poem, "Nero," where the sadistic Roman emperor gazes on the city of Rome as it burns: "Destruction hastens and intensifies / The process that is Beauty" (1). To draw back from human civilization and gaze on it from an inhuman, cosmic perspective is a philosophically destructive gesture, a violent disrobing of human conceits, the destruction of the ordinary by juxtaposing it with cosmic scales. For the narrator of Smith's poem, there is something essentially beautiful, cathartic, and even truthful about nihilistically blotting out the whole of Roman civilization, "the toil of many men, / The consummation of laborious years." From the inhuman, cosmic perspective of astronomy, this symbolism parallels precisely the fate of all earth life depending on the brief life cycle of a modestly sized star that is burning out. In Smith, Lovecraft had found a poet who was audacious enough to
confront the "opiate phantasy & horror," the "unique power & perspective" of the implications of astronomy. In other words, Lovecraft had found a kindred thinker who was willing to consider all of human civilization, politics, morality, the totality of human concerns and, to use Smith's language, "the social upheaval of the ant-hill" (CASLetters 14).

There was more to endear the obscure Smith to Lovecraft: as a poet, Smith was a failure, an unfashionable reject who no "respectable" magazine (for Lovecraft, read "aesthetically compromised magazine") would dare publish. Unlike the fashionable Hart Crane, who Lovecraft had just met—who had, incidentally, recently been published in the June 1922 issue of The Dial alongside Santayana, Lawrence, Yeats, Picasso, Aiken, Hesse, Pound, Clark Ashton Smith was absent from the all-poetry magazines of the day. Smith's absence from The Dial, The Little Review, Poetry and magazines similar to them would have practically confirmed for Lovecraft the superiority of the California poet's poetry, its philosophical maturity and aesthetic elitism.

Less than a year after Smith and Lovecraft began their correspondence, Smith wrote to Sterling to report, "There is a new magazine called Weird Tales, which is publishing hell-raisers no other periodical would print. They wrote asking me to send in some verse" (CASLetters 68). Lovecraft secured for Smith this invitation to publish in Weird Tales. Smith appeared in the fifth issue of the magazine with two original poems, and from then on, until 1928, he appeared in the magazine intermittently. In addition to selling his poetry, he also sold illustrations and translations of French poetry to the magazine. For example, the August 1930 issue of Weird Tales features three of his original translations of prose poems by Baudelaire.
Although Smith kept up his correspondence with Lovecraft and other *Weird Tales* writers throughout the twenties, he continued to focus on poetry and drawing. He considered the writing of prose a low art form. For example, writing a month before Sterling committed suicide (October 11th, 1926), Smith commented on the fact that his mentor had been writing essays instead of poetry: "Too bad you have to write prose. It's a beastly occupation" (91). This prejudice toward prose persisted until 1928 when he finally considered trying to write fiction and publish it in *Weird Tales*, as evidenced by a letter he wrote to Lovecraft on March 20th, 1928: "I have some ideas for weird stories, and will try to work them out at the first opportunity. [...] One of my conceptions concerns a man who takes a stroll on Boulder Ridge, the long, rambling, volcanic moraine on which I live, and suddenly finds that he has lost his way, and is wandering in a strange nightmare country" (John Hay Library). This letter would herald Smith's short story sale to *Weird Tales*, a story titled "The Ninth Skeleton."

The protagonist of "The Ninth Skeleton" is a slightly veiled Smith, a young artist in love seeking his love in the wilderness. A large portion of the stories published in *Weird Tales* feature artists, poets, writers, or sculptors as their protagonists. Smith's stories are no exceptions. Like Smith, the protagonist lives in the Auburn countryside in a cottage. Smith's intimate at the time, Genevieve K. Sully, appears in in the story as the protagonist's fiancé, Guenevere.

The narrative itself is not complex. It relates a brief journey in the woods and an encounter with a strange art object. The main character walks through the woods, which become increasingly beautiful. The sight and smell of them intensify to unbearable levels. Eventually, the intense sensory experiences are too much for the protagonist to bear, and
the environment seems to change, to transform from painful beauty to absolute horror:

"The sky had now grown so dark that the whole scene took on a semi-nocturnal aspect, and made me think of a doomed world in the twilight of a dying sun" (15). Here we have in Smith's first story published in *Weird Tales* a nod to the occult truth of the ordinary, the ephemerality of what counts as ordinary. Reeling and disoriented because of the sensory overload, the narrator stumbles upon a statuary garden of enduring forms: huge stones that resemble "headstones and funeral monuments" (15). The stones convey a sense of "awful antiquity": "It was hard to believe that life and death could be as old as they." Written on the stones are indecipherable, alien characters of no known language. The narrator describes them succinctly thus: "About them were was a hoariness and mystery and terror of incomputable Eld" (15).

"Mystery." "Terror." "Incomputable." Alien. Undecipherable. In Smith's first published story in *Weird Tales*, we already have a set of virtual art objects that transcend time and give those who view them access to occult truth of the ordinary. After the protagonist stumbles into the garden of strange stones, he has a supernatural experience heralded by a series of strange sounds. I consider the affect depicted in the scene as a version of the negative sublime, one I will explore in Chapter 10 in further detail: "I turned and listened; there was something in these sounds that served to complete the demoralization of my unstrung nerves; and monstrous fears, abominable fancies, trooped like the horde of a witches' sabbath through my brain" (15). It is enough to note that here the horror that was produced by what started as intense beauty is experienced by the protagonist as "complet[ing]" something. The horror here consists in the apprehension of knowledge.
Here, as elsewhere in *Weird Tales*, the flesh of the brain is foregrounded over the immaterial mind, which is an emphasis that pervades much of the fiction published in the magazine. Later *Weird Tales* writers repeat this trope, will collapse the subject and object distinction by dwelling on the organ of the brain. Moreover, they portray "knot" relationship between subject-perceiving aesthetic objects and the objects they view; in this way, both the subject experiencing art and the aesthetic object blur in essence, ontologically mix. Human being is reduced to the status of base material: brains, meat, skeletal structure, dust. And the aesthetic object is quickened, de-objectified through association with consciousness. Thus, the many instances of the animated aesthetic object—e.g. a moving statue, a glowing painting, a world of poetic vision made manifest—in juxtaposition to a symbolic human being reduced to its base material substructure—e.g. a spattered brain, a mutilated body, a rotting corpse—can be viewed a important moments in *Weird Tales* where the space of the ordinary, structured by clear distinctions between subject and object, collapses. A Venus infused with baleful energies that smashes the human brain to paste; a supernaturally charged ring of stones that vibrate out a keening that "troops through," penetrates, and ultimately destroys brains are kindred allegories, occurrences that can only happen outside of the space of the ordinary after the literary effect of reality has been violated.

Nearly two years passed before Smith published in *Weird Tales* again, in the May 1930 issue with his story, "The End of the Story." This strange tale is set in a fictional province of eighteenth century France, Averoigne, in the year 1789. It relates the story of Christophe Morand, a young law-student, who, traveling through the province, comes to
stay at a Benedictine abbey, a stay that results in his dream-journey into a world of abstract art.

"The End of the Story" is a re-imagining of the "Ode On a Grecian Urn" by John Keats, a poet Smith admired and tried to emulate (and to whom he was constantly compared—some critics went so far as to label him "the Keats of the Pacific Coast"). As in Keats' "Ode," the story is an ekphrastic description of the world of classical mythology, figured as a timeless space of absolute beauty. In the story, the Benedictine abbey Morand visits is distinctive for its grand library. The books are described as works of art: "The long shelves were overcrowded with books, and many volumes were piled high on the tables or stacked in corners. [...] There were innumerable monkish copies of antique authors, bound in wood or ivory, with rich illuminations and lettering that was often in itself a work of art" (23). Here we have emphasized another dimension of the aesthetic object as it appears in Weird Tales: its function as a totalizing intellectual technology. Here the archival range of the artistic library is vast, spatially and temporally. It juxtaposes pre-historicity with antiquity, the western world with the eastern. And as the story unfolds, the library-as-aesthetic-object comes to function like many of the fictional aesthetic objects featured in Weird Tales.

Morand's attraction to the beautiful library intensifies, and so he begins perusing the volumes. While doing so, he discovers a strange but curious book, "a thin volume with plain untitled binding of dark leather" (23). The comparably unadorned book anticipates the logic of aesthetic abstraction and anti-representation followed by the Weird Tales writers. It is the "abstract" and enduring art object that has shed its earthly origins, its concrete qualities, that is fictionalized as the most powerful, the most
dangerous to the space of the ordinary. Color, shape, acoustics not linked to any specific source: such ontologically-vexed entities are later fictionalized in other stories as absolutely horror invoking, intensely beautiful and painfully alluring, but nevertheless heralds of the de-reification of the literary effect of reality. There are many instances where characters literally hurl themselves into the body of these abstract aesthetic essences in order to die in ecstasy, as in *At the Mountains of Madness* when a character is sucked into a curve—not a curving slant of stone, but a curve disconnected to any substance, a mathematical concept. Thus, a richly illuminated tome bound in wood or ivory adorned by mimetic depictions is less dangerous in the context of the "shadow modernism" of *Weird Tales* than a more abstract tome, one that participates in the primal form of "book," i.e. a simple black book.

The Abbot who has invited Morand into the abbey notices the young man's attraction to the "abstract" book. He warns him that to read this strange book is to imperil his soul. But the allure of the book is too much for Morand. He is overwhelmed by curiosity: "An impulsion had become a veritable obsession, a fever of curiosity that bordered upon actual madness, drove me, and if the safety of my soul had really depended upon it, I could not have denied the desire which forced me to take from the drawer the thin volume with plain unlettered binding" (26). Sneaking into the library late at night, he reads the book.

The volume contains a story, which as it is related becomes an embedded narrative. The story handwritten in the book is about a Count who, while wandering in the forest near the abbey Morand is reading in, encounters a goatish satyr in the woods. The satyr tells the Count that in the ruins of a castle not far from the abbey, in the caverns
beneath it, "in places far underground, like the hell your priests have fabled, there dwells
the pagan loveliness, there cry the pagan ecstasies" (27). The satyr disappears and the
Count, heeding the satyr's story, seeks out the ruined castle. When he finds it, he
descends through a triangular flagstone and descends down a flight of stairs into
darkness. But here the story ends, the volume being only six pages long. It is left
unfinished.

Morand is stirred by this story, by its referential relationship to the abbey within
which he reads. He longs to know "the end of the story," hence the title. The virtual world
that narratively frames the story of Morand blurs with the virtual world of the story
Morand becomes immersed in as he reads. Like all the fictional modernist art objects of
*Weird Tales*, the fragmentary story, like the abstract book, stirs Morand, evokes in him an
intense attraction: "The curiosity I had felt concerning the contents of the manuscript was
now replaced by a burning desire, a thousandfold more powerful, more obsessive, to
know the ending of the story and to learn what Gerard de Venteillon had found when he
descended the hidden steps" (27). Driven by his desire, Morand does something quite
strange: he takes the Count's story as fact and steps into the sub-story's plot by following
in the footsteps of the Count. Morand locates the ruined castle and the triangular
flagstone, and he, like the character in the fragmentary story he has read, descends into
the shadowy depths of the ruins. Walking through darkness into brilliant light, he finds he
has come to another land, a dimension that can only be described as a abstract realm of
classical beauty: there is a laurel grove and a marble palace "gleaming with onyx and
polished porphyry"; the grass is described as "more lustrous than emerald velvet" (31;
30). The beauty of the strange land is so intense that Morand wonders if he can cope with
it at all. He reports being "drowned in a sense of ever-growing ecstasy before the utter, ineffable beauty of the landscape" (30). The central spectacle of this world is a woman, described as an "antique Venus" whose "movements were all as effortless and graceful as those of the serpent" (31).

Morand is struck by her beauty and he falls into her arms. They make love and then he loses consciousness. Morand then wakes up to a strange scene: he is not in the world of abstract beauty any longer but is lying on a dirt floor beneath the castle; additionally, the Abbot—who has followed him—is coming into the room shouting Latin spells. The beautiful Venus who Morand has fallen in love with flees in horror. Then the Abbot informs Morand that the Venus who he has coupled with is a demon from mythology, Nicea, "a lamia, an ancient vampire, who maintains in these noisome vaults her palace of beatific illusions" (33). Nicea's beauty, he continues, is merely an illusion: "If you could behold her as she really is, you would see, in lieu of her voluptuous body, the folds of a foul and monstrous serpent" (33). The story ends with Morand reluctantly leaving with the Abbot, but he feels regret. He cannot resist returning to the castle to find Nicea against the Abbot's warnings. The story concludes, "The memory of Nyceea is magically clear, ineffably dear as if she were still beside me, and I still see the rich draperies of the midnight chamber illumined by lamps of curiously carven gold" (34).

Like Keats' "Ode," Smith's "The End of the Story" is a story of an unconsummated love set in a timeless world of mythology; however, Smith calibrates Keats' ekphrastic vision. For Keats, the image of the lovers frozen in passionate pursuit depicted on the Grecian urn represent a world of immortality and eternal beauty. The speaker of the poem longs for this world because, unlike mundane existence, this
mythological world is temporally static. Furthermore, the speaker longs to enter into this eternal world and to adopt a mode of being like those of two lover's whose "wild ecstasy" will not diminish but will go on forever.

Smith is undecided and ambivalent toward a prospect that is horrible. In this story Smith has fictionalized the timeless world of the aesthetic an inescapable realm of absolute and eternal novelty. Nicea, the venus-nymph depicted here, is represented as a coil of serpentine folds that spiral around a victim in order to sap his life energy, reduce him to a husk. The result of a human visiting the aesthetic world for Smith and other *Weird Tales* writers is to invigorate the aesthetic object as the expense of the human. The virtual aesthetic object is beautiful, but too beautiful, and is often quickened, de-objectified and given agency, by the human who comes to serve as a morbid form of fuel. The enduring art object--in this case a Venus statue--attains a kind of transgressive subjectivity; however, the human experiencing the virtual art object, who heeds the siren song of the pure aesthetic object, often times takes on the object-like ontological status of that the art object has shed. The human becomes matter, not only a bloodless corpse but a formless ooze of putrefied flesh that passes away before the enduring timelessness of the aesthetic object that reveals the occult truth of the ordinary.

Like other *Weird Tales* writers, Smith focuses his attention on this theme obsessively. To an extent, he tells this same story over and over. This recursive retelling of the same story is part of the pulp technique. For example, Smith develops his "shadow modernism" in a later story that the *Weird Tales* editor, Farnsworth Wright, rejected. Originally titled, "The Satanist," and later titled, "The Devotee of Evil," the story relates the story of Philip Hastane, a fantasy novelist, and his brief relationship with a mad man,
Jean Averaud, an artist/engineer who creates a musical instrument with which he is able to channel a kind of "black radiation," which is pure evil. This radiation is ultimately the cause of his demise. When he is bathed in it, it transforms him into a piece of grotesque art, a statue of black obsidian.

Smith's first mention of the story seems to be in a letter to Lovecraft on April 2nd, 1930: "'The Satanist' won't deal with ordinary devil-worship, but with the evocation of absolute cosmic evil, in the form of black radiation that leaves the devotee petrified into a sable-image of eternal horror" (Selected Letters 110). A synopsis also appears among his papers, in which he states, "A devotee of absolute cosmic evil, who finally evokes {pure} evil in the form of a black radiation that leaves him petrified into a {...} image of eternal horror [...]" (Strange Shadows 157). Most interesting is the description of the musical instrument that brings about the "black radiation." The narrator, Philip Hastane, first describes monstrous library Averaud has been studying from, a chimeric hodge-podge of science, mysticism, and art:

They were an ungodly jumble of tomes that dealt with anthropology, ancient religions, demonology, modern science, history, psychoanalysis, and ethics. Interspersed with these were a few romances and volumes of poetry. Beausobre's monograph on Manichaeism was flanked with Byron and Poe; and Les Fleurs du mal jostled a late treatise on chemistry" (321).

This strange library is a preview of the totalizing range of the musical instrument Averaud has created, an engineering project ostensibly derived by his esoteric studies represented by this library. Later, the room where the instrument is stored is described. It is a strange triangular concert hall: "The chamber was large, triangular in form, and
tapestried with curtains of some sullen black fabric. It had no windows" (323). Like the chamber in "The End of the Story" that contains the timeless world of art, it is triangular in shape. The narrator goes on to describes the instrument:

I remember that there were many wires of varying thickness, stretched on a series of concave sounding-boards of some dark, unlustrous metal; and above these, there depended from three horizontal bars a number of square, circular, and triangular gongs. Each of these appeared to be made of a different material; some were bright as gold, or transluscent as jade; others were black and opaque as jet. A small, hammerlike instrument hung opposite each gong, at the end of a silver wire. (324)

Averaud begins to play the instrument: he strikes the triangular gongs with hammers and produces a horrible music: "The sound they made was dissonant and disquieting to the last degree—a diabolic percussion unlike anything I have ever heard, and exquisitely painful to the nerves. I felt as though a flood of finely broken glass was pouring into my ears" (325). The music increases in horribleness and volume, and it ultimately causes a strange, visual manifestation: "I noticed a partial dimming of the light above the tripod and its weird apparatus. A vertical shaft of faint shadow, surrounded by a still fainter penumbra, was forming in the air" (325). The music becomes unbearable. It begins to agitate Hastane's mind and threatens to drive him mad. The narrator describes his experience of the music in terms of a variety of the sublime:

My very sense of space was distorted and deformed as if some unknown dimension had somehow mingled with those familiar to us. There was a feeling of dreadful and measureless descent, as if the floor were sinking beneath me into
some nether pit; and I seemed to pass beyond the room in a torrent of swirling, hallucinative images, visible but invisible, felt but intangible [...]. (325)

When the narrator states "my very sense of space was distorted and deformed" he articulates the occult truth of the ordinary succinctly. At the height of this experience, Averaud stops playing the instrument, releasing Hastane from his torturous revelry. He explains to the horrified Hastane that the shaft of black shadow is a kind of pure, concentrated evil, and that the purpose of the musical instrument is to channel this pure evil sound. This is a clear enunciation of a thesis that runs through the *Weird Tales* discourse of the aesthetic object and its condition in the modern context: as art purifies itself, as it becomes more abstract, it becomes more evil because it has become more timeless, more enduring, and the enduring form reveals the occult truth of the ordinary. As aesthetic objects shed the organic, the psychological, the social, the historical and particular and become abstract forms, they become more evil because their previously hidden endurance becomes visible; their endurance thus reveals the experience of the ordinary as ephemeral. It reveals quotidian as a literary effect, a veil, a false image of ontological stability masking eternal flux and strangeness: the parameters of time, the cartographic unities of space, these distinctions between subject and object are shattered.

As the virtual modernist art object sheds its earth-focused representational dynamics and turns away from the human world to approach that realm of pure enduring form, abstractions—an incorporeal shaft of insubstantial color, a few beats of sound, a curve—it reveals the structuring, ordering function of the literary effect of reality. Consequently, the aesthetic object purged of earthly origins shines out in many forms, characteristically minimalist: a sphere, a cube, a cone (gilded in a mirror sheen surface),
color unfettered to a substance, a refrain of music, a square of blank canvas, an almost imperceptible dance of the body. And the pure aesthetic object is fictionalized as inhuman, demonic, as absolutely dangerous, a herald of ultimate doom. When we put the book down, the literary effect of reality shattered, bleary eyed, we see our reality, our actual ordinary reality, as less stable than before.
Chapter 8: Robert E. Howard and the Ephemerality of Civilization

In his 1937 memoir *Pulpwood Editor*, Harold Hersey decries a low business tactic used by pulp magazine publishers looking to capitalize on the success of their competitors: "It is a common practice [...] in the pulpwoods, to eye a successful magazine venture, then bring out one almost exactly like it in title and make-up. [...] A neat trick in layout is duplicated by a rival editor, a new department idea given the sincerest form of flattery, and a fiction theme or set of characters emulated elsewhere" (10, my emphasis). By describing this business tactic, Hersey identifies a way for approximating the success of *Weird Tales*, inaccessible to us today due to a loss of its financial records. From the year it was founded in 1923 and throughout the rest of its life, *Weird Tales* was reported to be in a precarious financial state. It paid its writers "on publication" rather than "on acceptance," a business practice that made it look to professional pulp writers as an unstable market for manuscripts. Accordingly, there were reports from *Weird Tales* writers in letters of bounced checks and requests from the editor and business managers for patience. For example, *Weird Tales* writer, Robert E. Howard, writing to Wright in May of 1935 complains about *Weird Tales* financial troubles: "To a poor man the money he makes is his life's blood, and of late when I write of Conan's adventures I have to struggle against the disheartening reflection that if the story is accepted, it may be years before I get paid for it" (Qtd. in Finn 175). Furthermore, an integral part of the magazine's retrospective legend recounted by knowledgeable collectors is an emphasis on how *Weird Tales'*s readership was very small compared to mainstream magazines but nevertheless committed to buying the magazine every month. It was a weird magazine that published weird manuscripts that were to the tastes of a small, specialized readership.
Because it did not fold until the end of the pulp era (approximately 1952), we must assume as a business enterprise it made a profit. This vision of *Weird Tales* as financially troubled yet persevering needs to be juxtaposed to extensive surveys of pulp fiction magazines that generalize about the all-fiction periodicals of the interwar period, framing them as nothing but commodities, as business enterprises without any aesthetic authenticity. And yet, in spite of this vision of *Weird Tales* as a quasi-commercial enterprise authentically committed to aesthetic concerns in the context of the interwar fiction marketplace, it cannot be denied that the magazine had what might be considered a moment of ascendancy, a few years of if not financial viability then at least a higher aesthetic reputation, a phenomena expressed by the establishment of an imitator title. I mark this period of ascendancy as beginning with an important publishing event in July of 1931, when one the editors employed by the largest pulp fiction magazine firm, The Clayton Group, published the following statement in *Writer's Digest*, the trade journal of pulp fiction magazine publishers, writers, and editors: "The Clayton Group is now buying stories for a new magazine to be devoted exclusively to material of the weird type. In it we welcome stories of the occult, weird, ghost, supernatural, vampire, voodoo, obi, werewolf, reincarnation, mystic, psychic kinds" (*Windy City Pulp* #13, 63). Clayton was publishing a new magazine, an obvious echo of *Weird Tales*. It was called *Strange Tales*.

Its first issue appeared in September of 1931, and it featured one story from Clark Ashton Smith, "The Return of the Sorcerer." But in spite of publishing some *Weird Tales* writers (a common pulp practice was to imitate a title and then "scoop" writers who famously published in the title being imitated) the imitator of *Weird Tales* failed. That *Strange Tales* was not successful (it ran for only seven issues) is less significant than the
fact that it suggests that Weird Tales had, by 1931, cultivated a reputation. What kind of reputation?

Consider, for example, H. Bedford Jones's 1931 editorial for The Author and Journalist where he highlights what he sees as the perverse growing in popularity of weird fiction in the pulp fiction marketplace: "The oddest phenomenon of recent magazine history is the group that goes in for so-called weird or amazing stories. [...] The popularity of this type of magazine is a sad reflection upon the mentality of the reading public" (Locke 38). In spite of Jones's assessment, there were only two magazines in 1931 specializing in "weird fiction": one was Weird Tales, and the other was its short-lived imitator, Strange Tales. To my mind, Jones's characterization of Weird Tales as perverse echoes some of the same charges leveled at modernism. In spite of the Weird Tales deliberate anti-modernism, they were being viewed by the public in similar ways as the modernists who had come before: transgressors who transgressed in the name of art.

We can sharpen this reputation Weird Tales was developing by turning to another piece published in The Writer's digest related to the Clayton Group's decision to emulate Weird Tales with Strange Tales. A month after Clayton's announcement, an article appeared in The Writer's Digest titled, "The Psycho-Mystic, Horror, and Weird Story Field" by a pulp writer named Joseph Lichtblau. The article identifies and describes a new fiction market. Lichtblau writes,

With the advent of the new Clayton magazine, Strange Stories [...] I feel this article should be of the most timely interest to you who have really fertile imaginations. In the past, Weird Tales offered a rather limited field for psycho-mystic, occult, weird, ghost, supernatural, vampire, voodoo, obi, werewolf,
reincarnation, mystic, psychic stories since other magazines did not use them.

(Windy City Pulp 63).

The purpose of articles like the one written by Lichtblau published in The Writer's Digest is to model for mercenary pulp writers how to write for specific types of markets. In his article outline, Lichtblau painstakingly walks his "pulp writer" reader, through what he imagines are the essential tropes of this specific "psycho-mystic" market. He offers example narratives, and in this way emphasizes Weird Tales preoccupation, even obsession, with issues of art, artistic creation, and the figure of the artist. This following example evidences that Lichtblau had read Weird Tales and demonstrates the magazine's focus on the fictional art object:

A widower buys a statuette of a woman that resembles his dead wife. In life, she had been modest, so virtuous that she even refused him his marital rights! He gloats over the statuette; manhandles it sadistically; feels he is getting a giant revenge on his dead wife because that nude statuette is so defenseless in his salacious hands. In the end, it falls down on his head and kills him! (Windy City Pulp 65-66).

Lichtblau is quick to point out the conventionalism of good triumphing over evil is not essential to weird fiction: "In Weird Tales, however, evil can 'put it all over' good, and your stories will never offend the editor! So long as your yarns horrify the reader to a satisfying extent, fascinate, mystify him and make him shudder, you can go as far as you like, it seems" (66). Lichtblau ends his analysis of the "psycho mystic" market in preparation for Clayon's new Strange Tales by describing the current market. He ends his article with a warning to "pulp hacks" who do not consider aesthetic standards or
technique in regards to Weird Tales: "Weird Tales, however, demands a much better style; some of the yarns are written so impressively and in such a 'high brow' manner, that one wonders how talented authors could contribute for 1c per word on publication which is the rate for acceptable stories of this periodical" (67).

Lichtblau was right to wonder about the financial difficulties of the writers publishing in Weird Tales. By June of 1931 many specialists in the pulp fiction magazine world were taking notice of Weird Tales. Its reputation was growing, and the failure of Strange Tales attests that its reputation was responding to robust existing demand. Something else was at work. This early 1930s growth of Weird Tales's reputation must be qualified by how it appeared: it appeared not as a legitimate business enterprise finally worthy of notice by pulp publishers but as a strangeness, a perversion, a sign of the "atavism" of the American reading public. For example, in 1929, before Strange Tales, Wright felt compelled to defend Weird Tales in the Writer's Digest. Responding to a description of Weird Tales that appeared in the journal, he states,

It seems that the descriptive line, "It carries the most ungodly stories a starved writer in a garret could concoct," gives a false impression to the readers of the The Writer's Digest as to the quality of our stories [...]. We admit that the stories in Weird Tales are different from those in other magazines, but to call them "the most ungodly stories a starved writer in a garret could concoct" gives an unfair and misleading impression. (Locke 82)

For Wright, Weird Tales needed defending in 1929 from a growing number of people who were noticing it and understanding it not in terms of aesthetic authenticity but sensational spectacle. The extent to which Weird Tales catered to a specialized, even
strange audience, was becoming part of its identity. Thus, it became known as a specialized market for promoting the weird in fiction, and in this way can be somewhat validated as operating against the simple commercial logic of the pulp marketplace.

Weird Tales's commercial troubles may have been briefly alleviated in the early 1930s due to its growing reputation for strangeness, sensationalism, and literary quality. And it is significant to note that this success parallels a sustained period of heightened productivity and regular correspondence between the three writers this dissertation emphasizes. Two of these writers have received treatment thus far: H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith. The third writer, Robert E. Howard, the younger of the other two writers by nearly two decades, is the focus of this chapter.

This chapter and the following one focuses on the brief life, fiction, memoir writings, and poetry of the most "popular" of the Weird Tales writers this dissertation studies, Robert E. Howard, and it argues that understanding how Howard contributed to the "shadow modernism" of Weird Tales requires this multi-faceted approach. While it treats elements of Howard's biography and excerpts of his poetry, memoir, and correspondence, this dissertation nevertheless focuses specifically on his lesser known experimental "barbarian" stories of King Kull, stories that dramatize and fictionalize confrontations with modernist art portrayed as monstrous violations, as occasions for violence, as entities that offer rare yet threatening opportunities for escaping the boring reality figured as an inescapable and therefore torturous prison without qualities.

Robert E. Howard's first contribution to Weird Tales appeared in the July of 1925 issue. He was eighteen years old. The story he published was titled "Spear and Fang," an action adventure story featuring a prehistoric barbarian who fights a proto-human
primate. In spite of Howard's publication in the magazine in 1925, he did not make contact with Lovecraft until 1930, when he was twenty-four; and shortly after contacting Lovecraft, Lovecraft put him in contact with Clark Ashton Smith.

I argue that Robert E. Howard's significant contributions to the "shadow modernism" of *Weird Tales* did not begin in earnest until approximately 1930, when he began corresponding with Clark Ashton Smith and H.P. Lovecraft regularly. I hypothesize that these two ambitious writers (as well as other *Weird Tales* writers whom they introduced to him) stirred and cultivated the young Howard and expanded his literary vision. By virtue of Lovecraft and Howard's mentoring--direct and indirect--Howard's became an enduring extension shadow modernism of *Weird Tales*.

***

I have been arguing that H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard were animated by the aestheticism of modernism, a project that reached its apex in approximately 1922. This is a widely adopted conventional designation in modernist studies. Moreover, I have been arguing that Lovecraft's and Smith's particular form of modernist reflection, what I frame as a quasi-ekphrastic response to "modernism," can be characterized as an acutely ambitious aesthetic project in its own right. A major outcome of their modernist reflection, I argue, is locating of the occult truth of ordinary in the tension between the enduring formalism produced by modernism's experiments and their own pulp fiction context. Coextending from this is a more historically focused reading of the modern period as a catastrophe, as a state of accelerating change that intensifies the dissolution of the ordinary and will eventually preclude the possibility of establishing the ordinary. These insights are brought about by the collaborative pioneering of a unique
rhetoric of short and sensational pulp fiction that consists centrally of the dramatic staging of the violation of the literary effect of reality produced by conventional realism. I describe this rhetoric as grotesque, and in doing so engage the older etymological elements of the word's meaning as a combination of otherwise distinctive and incommensurate elements--this older usage recalls the strange paintings in Roman basements of fantastical combinations of human and animal anatomy. I have been arguing that this rhetorically engineered shift in perspective is brought about through the combination of two hitherto distinctive formal rhetorics: realism produces virtual worlds that then dramatize confrontations with the modernist literary image fictionalized as an event, as an enduring form that throws into focus the ephemerality of the real. The logic of this "grotesque" rhetoric of "shadow modernism" thus results in the production of exaggerated fictional versions of modernist art objects, i.e. novums: unreal virtual aesthetic objects that endure, that hold in tension the otherwise ephemeral matter of the real. In this way, these strange stories about novums, about fictional modernist objects, can be understood as symbolic gestures that attempt to hypostatize this logical spiral: absolute yet ephemeral novelty that endures that is only fully revealed through the surprising prism of degraded and conventionalized narratives printed on pulpwood paper that does not endure.

I have also outlined the historical roots of the "shadow modernism" of Weird Tales, and attempted to theorize a particular period in literary history that it expresses called "modernist reflection," a historically specific project the Weird Tales writers were able to engage in by virtue of their cultural situation in the degraded field of commercial fiction production, in the media of hyper-ephemeral pulp fiction magazine. In other
words, it was the *Weird Tales* writers's exile from the garden of authentic aesthetic production on a literary plane into the shadows that conditioned and intensified their project, that lent it its perspective and rhetorical intensity.

***

In March of 1924 *Weird Tales* published H.P. Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Wall," and six years later, following an established pulp market practice of reprinting stories praised by readers, Farnsworth Wright chose to include it again in the June 1930 issue. "The Rats in the Walls," a tale of a haunted English castle, is considered H.P. Lovecraft's most conventional "gothic" tale. It features all the typical material of the gothic horror: drafty castle corridors, mounds of skeletons, piles of grinning skulls, secret compartments, a black cat, rats, haunted grottos, and a series of hereditary sins. This story has been framed by many as a deliberate and academic pastiche of the classic gothic tales Lovecraft had been studying when he wrote "The Rats in the Walls" for a different scholarly project, his long critical history of supernaturalism in literature titled *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. Lovecraft's study begins by citing some of the key tropes he identifies as essential to the gothic tale and that incidentally appear in his "Rats in the Walls"--e.g. "secret murder," "bloody bones." It is an intriguing incongruity that he criticizes these tropes here as too traditional and, to some extent, historically exhausted for writer's of horror considering he was, at the time, writing a story that utilized them:

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outré, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of
that most terrible conception of the human brain--a malign and particular
suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard
against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space" (15).

In spite of the fact that Lovecraft identifies these tropes as exhausted, he nevertheless
uses them in "The Rats in the Wall." It was as if Lovecraft was attempting an academic
recreation of a traditional model.

Central to conventional the gothic story's construction of a "certain atmosphere"
as described by Lovecraft above is the protagonist's supernatural and mystical exploration
of the prehistory of Britain. At the end of the story, after the protagonist has undergone a
supernatural reversion into a past consciousness, he screams a sentence in Gaelic: "Dia
ad agaidh 's as aodann... Agus bas dunach ort!" (Complete Fiction 255). In ending the
story this way, Lovecraft engaged in a then controversial anthropological debate. By
having the final language uttered by the supernaturally reverting protagonist in the Gaelic
language, Lovecraft seemed to stake his allegiance to a then radical theory in
anthropology that the Gaelic people preceded the Cymric people in Britain.

But Lovecraft made this decision not out of a polemic commitment to any
anthropological theory or partisan idea but out of simple exigency: he did not have access
to the Cymric language. He did, however, have a Gaelic phrase at hand in a short story he
owned, Fiona Maccleod's "The Sin Eater." Thus, he decided on Gaelic because of
convenience. But he lamented this decision in a letter to his friend in 1923, another Weird
Tales writer by the name of Frank Belknap Long: "The only objection to the phrase is
that it's Gaelic instead of Cymric as the south-of-England demands. But as with
anthropology--details don't count. Nobody will ever note the difference" (Qtd. in
When the story was published in 1924, no one noticed this distinctive use of Gaelic. However, when "The Rats in the Walls" was reprinted in 1930, someone did, in fact, notice this subtly distinctive stroke. This was the twenty-four year old Weird Tales regular contributor, Robert E. Howard.

Howard was intrigued by this because Lovecraft's use of the Gaelic suggested his adherence to a discredited theory of the Celtic origins of the British people, a theory that was debated hotly by historians and philologists at the time; thus, Lovecraft's incidental adherence to this controversial theory would have struck a polemic tone to informed ears. The young Howard was proud of his old-world Irish heritage, was attracted by the idea that Celtic elements could claim a more primary place in terms of British language and culture than Germanic ones. Thus, he wrote to the editor of Weird Tales, Farnsworth Wright, asking if he knew Lovecraft's stance on this controversial issue. Referring to the climax of Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls" (in which the protagonist, who has atavistically reverted to his earliest "ancestral self," speaks Gaelic) Howard writes, "I note from the fact that Mr. Lovecraft has his character speaking Gaelic instead of Cymric, in denoting the Age of the Druids, that he holds to Lhuyd's theory as to the settling of Britain by the Celts. This theory is not generally agreed to, but I scarcely think that it has ever been disproved [...]" (qtd. in Finn 149). Wright, humored and impressed by the twenty-four year old rural Texan's display of erudition, forwarded the letter to Lovecraft, who responded personally to Howard. Thus, a correspondence that would last the rest of Howard's six remaining years began on a scholastic note.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Lovecraft was intrigued by the young Howard, who he saw as a series of paradoxes. Lovecraft circulated Howard's letter to his
correspondents and in this way brought the young writer into contact with other writers who would enrich his work. In an October 1933 letter to his philosopher friend, Alfred Galpin, Lovecraft summarizes his view of Howard in this way:

Robert E. Howard is an interesting Texas character; only 27 years old, yet as full of the reminiscent lore of the old Southwest as any grizzled cattleman of the 1870's [...]. He has an odd, primitive philosophy--hating all civilization [...] & regarding the barbarism of the pre-Roman Gauls as the ideal form of life. He writes fiction purely for money, hence his more or less stereotyped catering to popular trends. Once in a while, though, he unconsciously achieves a very genuine power in his depictions of ruins, catacombs, & cities redolent of unholy antiquity & blasphemous elder secrets (Letters to Galpin 193-94).

To the Anglophile Lovecraft loyal to what he understood as the apex of culture represented by Ancient Greece and Republican Rome and England's Georgian period, Howard seemed a constellation of several paradoxes, an enigma that needed to be solved: the youth was an intellectual who spurned intellectuals, a writer who was embarrassed by his "soft" trade of writing, an "oilfield roughneck" who brewed his own illegal beer and boxed in illegal prizefights yet who spent his time stooped over a typewriter screaming poetry and pulp stories. Here was an audacious writer who engaged in hours of reading to quote Shakespeare, Keats, and Browning in order to criticize the vita contemplativa and celebrate the vita activa. Lovecraft's phrase, "he unconsciously achieves a very genuine power" sums up Howard's distinctiveness when compared to Lovecraft and Smith. Whereas Lovecraft and Smith thought deeply about their technique and philosophies and deliberately deployed them through the nuanced engineering of precise rhetorics of short
fiction, Howard appeared to write spontaneously, scoffed at what he considered excess theory. Memoir accounts of him relate how he shouted and performed his stories of barbarians conquering sorcerers as he typed them.

Robert E. Howard's influence on many elements of popular culture is unquestioned; however, his troubled and intriguing relationship with the elite culture of the 1920s and '30s and his reaction to modernism has never been fully understood because it has been assumed that no significant relationship exists. This oversight is in large part due to the fact that, in terms of his work's popular cultural dissemination, very few associate his specific pulp fiction productions in *Weird Tales* with the widespread cultural tropes they brought about through their influence. For example, many in and outside of the American context are aware of Gary Gygax's *Dungeon and Dragons* roleplaying game and the video games it influenced; of the fantasy imagery of Franz Frazetta's Howard-inspired paintings that adorn so many bestselling novels; of "sword and sandal" and "sword and sorcery" films; however, few would connect these elements to a specific personality like Robert E. Howard, to whose "shadow modernist" pulp fictions they are genealogically linked.

Howard's contributions to popular culture eclipse his status as a literary figure. One critic argues that we should distinguish between the literary Howard and the Howard as producer of popular culture, and I agree with this analysis (Prida). But this dualism means we should proceed carefully. Howard only lived until he was 30 years old, when he committed suicide (1906-1936), and thus his relatively scant yet influential literary output has been overshadowed by the cultural productions that were broadcast from it and based on it: comics, films, roleplaying games, video games, and so forth. This is not
to discount the large fan community of enthusiasts, collectors, and private scholars who have, since Howard's suicide, struggled to keep his literary legacy alive. Many of these enthusiasts are responsible, by virtue of their missionary zeal and editorial efforts, for the widely available and "editorially pure" editions of Howard's fictions, poetries, memoirs, and correspondences that make my dissertation logistically possible.

Of the three *Weird Tales* writers this dissertation studies, Howard is most worthy of a quasi-biographical critical approach to the extent that he epitomizes not just the typical *Weird Tales* writer but also the pulp writer in general. I view *Weird Tales* as the apex of a transhistorical "pulp aesthetic," and thus I view Howard as the prototypical pulp writer of that magazine. He reflects many similar pulp writers' biographies. Howard was a precocious youth significantly unique to his surroundings in rural Texas in the early 1900s, and his enigmatic suicide is a uniquely American tragedy of anti-intellectualism worthy of fuller treatment elsewhere. Though there are no historiographical accounts of this phenomenon due to the youth of "pulp studies" as a subject of academic inquiry, "pulp suicides"--the idea that many pulp writers took their lives at the end of the pulp period--is a relatively commonplace and unquestioned notion in the pulp collecting community. Howard's suicide, romanticized by so many Conan enthusiasts, though tragic, was typical of the pulp writer (Locke).

Howard was the only intellectual in his rural community and was looked upon with suspicion by his neighbors as peculiar. In spite of the fact that he made his living by writing, he boxed, was a committed athlete, and glorified frontier living. Unlike Lovecraft and Smith, who reluctantly came to write for and publish in *Weird Tales* after long periods of literary activity in the 1900s, 1910s, and early 1920s (Lovecraft in private
publications, Smith in poetry magazines), Howard's work as a pulp writer entailed his first (and last) participation in literary culture. Although he unapologetically adopted the stance of the mercenary pulp writer who wrote first and foremost for commercial gain, he was nevertheless a sensitive poet, a voracious reader, and an amateur philosopher who corresponded widely when he could about literary topics, literary technique, politics, philosophy, and current events with many learned people. His engagement with literary and art culture in rural Texas during the oil boom era is an intriguing incongruity that contributes significantly to his worldview and literary output that encapsulated it. Indeed, the central theme of Howard's work is contact between high and low culture, the "elitism" of literary modernism and the "sensationalism" of pulp writing. The barbarian wielding his sword against the decadent sorcerer is always an allegory for the pulp writer reflecting on the "true" writer.

Aside from publishing juvenilia in small high school publications, correspondence circles, and in his hometown's local newspaper, publication in *Weird Tales* was, for Howard, not a mark of cultural degradation that embarrassed but was rather a validating accomplishment. Unlike many modernists like T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, and Virginia Woolf—who lived in centers of culture such as Paris and London and interacted with the apotheosized of literary, artistic, and philosophic culture—Howard was born in the small Texas frontier town of Cross Plains that did not have a public library. Cross Plains did not boast its first radio station until 1922, and in 1919 had a population of 1500 (Finn 44). From the perspective of this town, publication by a magazine firm based out of Chicago was indeed a mark of cultural distinction, one Howard's unique cultural circumstances made even more extraordinary. Aside from the rare book Howard was able
to purchase during trips to metropolitan centers, he relied on pulp fiction magazines for his reading material and for education as a writer. Consider this excerpt from a letter Howard wrote to Lovecraft in 1933:

> It was after I moved into 'town' (speaking comparatively) that I began to buy magazines. I well remember that first I ever bought. [...] It was *Adventure*. I still have the copy [...]. I skimped and saved from one magazine to the next; I’d buy one copy and have it charged, and when the next issue was out, I’d pay for the one for which I owed, and have the other one charged, and so one (Finn 51).

Unlike Smith and Lovecraft, whose contacts in San Francisco and Providence and relationships with successful writers and artists of the day contributed to their cultural knowledge, Howard's culture and views were the product of his own eclectic, self-guided reading, not out of self-adopted iconoclasm but out of physical necessity. If Lovecraft and Smith cultivated their cultural and aesthetic weirdness on purpose, Howard's aesthetic and the cultural productions broadcast from it became weird because of his social and cultural incidentals.

Unlike Smith and Lovecraft who were able to retreat from the forces of history and modernity, the ephemerality of the ordinary that they so often thematized as evil in their work, Howard experienced modernity first hand as an intense shock, one that penetrated his everyday life directly and acutely. He lived in rural Texas during the oil boom years. This important biographical experience can only be glimpsed by drawing a stark distinction between Howard's early life traveling around rural parts of Texas (1906-1919), with the latter part of his life, when his family settled in Cross Plains, Texas (1919-1936). The son of a traveling frontier doctor, Howard often writes in his
correspondences about his earlier residential movements. Consider this brief autobiographical sketch he wrote for himself at 15 years old as part of a composition assignment:

I was born in Peaster, Texas, a small town not far from Weatherford, in January 1906, at an early age [...]. After a few trips, moves and other adventures which I will pass over as I was too small to take notice of them, I found myself in Seminole, Texas, just forty miles this side of the New Mexico Border. This was prairie country--extremely so. Water was scarce there; too scarce, so we moved to Bagwell, Texas, which is between Texarkana and Paris. That part of the country where we lived used to be part of Arkansas. It is all piney woods there, and every time I smell the pine scent I get homesick [...] (Finn 29).

As a child, Howard's life was predominantly rural in nature. He father and mother traveled regularly. They chose to settle in Cross Plains in 1919. In less than two years later, however, the town population had swelled to 10,000 due to the discovery of oil.

Howard lived in an "oil boom" town and this experience influenced his literature significantly. For example, this telling passage from an October 1930 letter he wrote to H.P. Lovecraft demonstrates the impact of these living conditions on Howard: "I've seen towns leap into being overnight and become deserted almost as quick. I've seen old farmers, bent with toil, and ignorant of the feel of ten dollars at a time, become millionaires in a week, by way of oil gushers. And I've seen them blow in every cent of it and die paupers" (Qtd. In Finn 17). I have been framing *Weird Tales* as a discourse community distinctive and worthy of analysis because of its distant vantage point, its ability to read cultures of modernism, i.e. its unique ability to look askance of modernism
and to know it in a way that it could not know itself. *Weird Tales* is able to glimpse modernism in a distorted way but outside of the context of the rhetoric of modernism that so often eschews some of its central features. But by briefly considering Howard's biography we are able to see how part of this distinctive perspective attributable to *Weird Tales* derives from this discourse community's geographical as well as cultural distinctiveness. Consider Howard in rural Texas; Lovecraft Rhode Island; Smith in the Sierra mountains; Wright in Chicago: keeping in mind the extent to which this geographical profile is highly distinct from the geographical profile of traditional "monolithic" definitions of modernism qualifies the uniqueness of the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales*. It suggests that many of its unique discursive qualities derive from its spatial distance from what have been considered traditional geographical hubs of modernist culture, hubs such as New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, and Vienna. *Weird Tales* is not only in the shadow of modernism because it is a commercial magazine printed on disintegrating paper by writers unacknowledged by the cultural elite; it is also in the shadow of modernism because of where it comes from: not from the metropolitan centers that have traditionally produced culture and art. In this way, *Weird Tales* might be fruitfully looked at in the context of folk or outsider art.

As a spatial field of "cultural outsiderness," the writers and the magazine triangulate rural California with rural Texas and New England and the Midwest. Considering these distinctively provincial places were still experiencing an unfolding process of modernization during what I have distinguished as the age of modernist reflection allows us to keep in mind how the magazine is also an important site of confluence between cultural productions linked to hybrid agricultural and industrial
modes of production. Rather than being outside modernity, they have one foot in and one foot out of it. Magical realism has sometimes been explained as an aesthetic emerging in response to a confluence between agricultural and industrial modes of production; perhaps considering *Weird Tales* as "magical realism" in the American context might also prove useful. In any case, the magazine is an important site of contact, a distorting yet revelatory prism, where the otherwise invisible process of incommensurable contexts blurring together produces strangeness about experience and historical change. Howard's biography expresses this.

Howard's biography and the rhetoric of his fiction expresses this structuring distance from "high culture" and modernism and thereby stands out as an intellectual prism for perceiving the occult truth of the ordinary starkly. The shadow modernism of Robert E. Howard consists in his development in fiction, poetry, memoir, and epistolary discourse of a unique idiom for celebrating "barbarism" over "civilization," violent action over intersubjective communication, the animality and materiality of the human creature over the transcendence and spirituality of the human as intelligence and consciousness. To Walter Benjamin's famous "weird discourse" utterance, "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," we can append the famous Howardian aphorism, penned in a rural Texas town swelling and booming from gushing oil wells exploited by eastern corporations. This is an aphorism spoken by Howard's most enduring contribution to popular culture, Conan the Cimmerian. Having helped a town of simple frontiers people flee the onslaught of a cruel horde of plundering armies, Conan says this, as if in consolation: "Barbarism is the natural state of mankind.
Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph" (100).
Chapter 9: The Populism of Robert E. Howard as Modernist Reflection

From the perspective of the popular culture productions and communities that have contributed greatly to the endurance of the *Weird Tales* writers's literary legacy--e.g. horror film, sword and sorcery films, roleplaying games, comics, death metal music, and video games, etc.--Clark Ashton Smith, H.P. Lovecraft, and Robert E. Howard may seem distinctive on the level of theme, hardly elements of what I am arguing is the unified aesthetic project. For instance, Smith is a curio remembered today by the genre writers and pulp collectors. Lovecraft has been taken up by horror film enthusiasts and scholars. Howard has a strong presence in comic book collecting communities due to his influence on the hero comic genre. The shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* persists through popular culture, of course, but rarely together, as a unified aesthetic project and never as representatives of the apex of the pulp aesthetic, which is what I am suggesting they are.

This is particularly so in the case of the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. For example, the typical protagonist of Lovecraft's stories is an erudite scholar who follows the thread of various enigmatic texts and symbols to come to a level of certainty about a horrific truth. Lovecraftian horror narratives can be described as operating on an intellectual plane. Conversely, Howard's fiction--written at a mercenary pulp writer's pace with little or no revision--features protagonists in the more heroic tradition of epic narratives who think less and solve problems with violence. The adventure is somatic; swords flash, blood sprays, people scream, and the hero ultimately triumphs by virtue of instinct rather than reflection.
Unlike the scholar characters of Lovecraft's stories, Howard's most enduring characters are hyper-masculine fighters who solve problems with fists, steel, and gunpowder rather than brains and therefore prefigure many of the superheroes of 1940s comic books. Howard's enduring characters like Conan the Barbarian, King Kull, and Solomon Kane are violent sword, axe, and pistol wielding warriors who fight against the supernatural and often take as their antagonist supernatural enemies framed as compromised by virtue of their occult knowledge and intellectualism that is the source of their supernatural power and evil. This degree of anti-intellectualism in Howard's fiction was first observed and articulated publicly after Arkham House published the first hardcover anthology of his fiction, titled *Skull-face and Other Stories*. H.R. Hays, a celebrated translator of Pablo Neruda's poetry, reviewed this expensive, small circulation book for *The New York Times* on September 29th of 1946. Hays titled his review, "Superman on a Psychotic Bender," and his review is very negative. He nevertheless begins by complimenting Howard's writing, stating, "The stories are written on a competent pulp level (a higher level, by the way, than that of some best sellers)" (167). He then goes on to psychoanalyze Howard and diagnoses him as a schizophrenic. Moreover, he frames Howard's fiction as perverse wish-fulfillments of the "semi-literate" of the industrial age: "Howard's heroes were [...] wish-projections of himself. All of the frustrations of his own life were conquered in a dream world of magic and heroic carnage" (*The New York Times* 167). I like to imagine the youthful Howard, a prizefighter and Texas oil-rig roughneck, as anticipating dismissal of his fiction and psychology in the world of his. I recall a scene from Howard's only novel, *The Hour of the Dragon*, where Conan the Cimmerian, naked but for a loincloth, is chained to the wall
by a sorcerer who has access to the deep secrets of the cosmos. I see this as an allegory of
the pulp writer facing off with the modernist. This ancient sorcerer, Xaltotun, enrobbed in
black silk and wearing jewels and bands of gold, stands before the Cimmerian. He has
captured the warrior with strange magic:

'From what hell have you crawled from, you nighted dog?' muttered Conan,
staring at the man. [...] Xaltotun lifted his head, as if listening to whispers across
the void. He seemed to have forgotten his prisoner. Then he shook his head
impatiently, and glanced impersonally at Conan. 'What? Why, if I told you, you
would not believe me. But I am wearied of conversation with you; it is less
fatiguing to destroy a walled city than it is to frame my thoughts in words a
brainless barbarian can understand.' 'If my hands were free,' opined Conan, 'I'd
soon make a brainless corpse of you.' (110).

The enemies of Howard's barbarian characters are typically intellectual figures like
Xaltotun: sorcerers, bureaucrats, politicians, rogues, and poets who leverage the
supernatural and their access to secret archives to threaten the freedom of the roving
barbarian. Howard's sorcerers are slightly veiled allegories for the cultural elites of the
interwar period.

Robert E. Howard's theme of "barbarian warrior" versus "silver-tongued schemer"
has come to be seen as inaugurating a sub-genre of particularly American fantasy fiction
termed "sword and sorcery," a genre generally celebrated for its populism and anti-
intellectualism, moral ambiguity, and proletarianism. In this way it is distinguished from
British "epic fantasy" typified by J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* figured as
aristocratic in comparison. Consider the extent to which the anti-intellectualism in
Howard's work is praised by John D. Clark, for example, in his 1950 introduction to *Conan the Conqueror*, one of the first anthologies of Conan stories published: "Above all Howard was a story-teller. The story came first, last, and in between. [...] Don't look for hidden or philosophical puzzles in the yarns--they aren't there" (Qtd. In De Camp 11).

And if anti-intellectualism and violence are key elements of Howard's particular fiction, the supernatural as menace is another essential one. For example, when the fantasy writer, Fritz Leiber, wrote in April of 1961 a letter to the editor of the newly established fanzine devoted to fantasy fiction, *Ancalagon*, he coined the term to refer to the specific kind of fantasy fiction pioneered specifically by Howard in the 1930s "sword and sorcery." In doing this, Leiber significantly frames the "supernatural element" as an essential component of the Howardesque "sword-and-sorcery story": "I feel more certain than ever [this fiction in question] should be called the sword-and-sorcery story. [...] The word sorcery implies something more and other than historical human witchcraft, so even the element of an alien-yet-human world background is hinted at" (*Grimoire* 82).

What commentators on Howard's fiction have yet to enunciate is the extent to which these stories thematize the relationship between low art and high art. The Howardian barbarian figure, in this view, is a kind of avatar of the pulp writer, the non-intellectual proletarian writer who is in agonistic relation with the intellectual elites of the day. In the naked barbarian's bringing of steel against the magical elements of sorcerers we can glimpse, once again, the shadow modernist reading modernism. As Andreas Huyssen and John Carey have argued, this alienation of the intellectual world of culture from the fictional "masses" became exaggerated in the early decades of the twentieth century with the unfolding of "the great divide."
Critics and historians of interwar literature and culture have documented and analyzed how artists, writers, and other cultural elites took an adversarial stance toward what seemed from their perspective inauthentic commodity or mass culture. What has not been properly documented was the inverse of this, the adversarial stance taken by populist writers like Howard who wrote thrillers for the pulps. But as I have been showing, "weird" elements like the authentic writers who published in *Weird Tales* experienced this alienation acutely to the extent that they internalized it in their fiction. The naked barbarian confronting the sorcerer spinning magic is nothing less than the pulp writer trying to understand and perhaps even domesticate and defeat James Joyce, Pablo Picasso, Claude Debussy.

In a December 1932 letter to H.P. Lovecraft, *Weird Tales* contributor Robert E. Howard expressed his adversarial stance toward "modern writers" this way:

I think yourself and Jim Tully are the only ones whose work will endure; among the writers now living, I mean. Upton Sinclair may be because of the pictures of economic and social life he draws. As for Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Louis Bromfeld, Ben Hecht, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, George Jean Nathan, Floyd Dell, Mike Gold--three ringing raspberries for the whole mob [...].

I'd rather read Zane Grey the rest of my life" (*Freedom* 510).

Lovecraft responded to Howard with a 22-page letter that ranged in diverse topics: the politics of Texas, theories of animal phobias, and anecdotes about his travels to New York to see what he called "shrieking attic murals" and "modernistic atrocities" at the Museum of Art. In addition to these topics and many more, Lovecraft turned, of course, to modern literature, and when he did so he took on the voice of a seasoned elder
scolding an unsubtle youth. To the twenty-seven year old pulp writer, Lovecraft (then 42), responded: "You are certainly a bit hasty and unjust in giving a blanket condemnation to thoughtful writers like Dreiser, Lewis, Hecht, Bromfield, O'Neill, Anderson, etc.. These are really the greatest writers [...] for they are the only ones who try to understand people and present them as acting from the deep hidden motives which truly animate them" (532). Lovecraft goes on to criticize Zane Grey:

The superficial writers--like Zane Grey--merely reproduce conventional situations and tickle facile emotions of those who like to see certain external tricks of glamour, appearance, and dramatic contrast mechanically and thoughtlessly repeated. They represent people as acting from fictitious motives which do not exist, and distort the whole pattern of life and human nature in the direction of artificial convention and childish oversimplification. (Freedom 532).

And Lovecraft finishes his scolding of Howard by defending H.L. Mencken, a critic he condemns elsewhere: "Mencken--despite his sometimes wearying tendency to keep on shouting after the battle is over--actually performed a valuable service in helping to break up the empty, sterile, and infantile genteel romantic tradition in American literature" (533). These two pulp writers debate about the merit of modernist literature in America troubles stereotypical notions of commercial pulp fiction and those who write it. More importantly, it further brings into focus how Lovecraft, Howard, Smith, and other Weird Tales writers understood the contribution to literature by modernist writers. They were aware of their technical innovations. Howard's dismissal of them as "wet smacks" does not mean he has not read them.
More important is the way Lovecraft and his fellow shadow modernists in *Weird Tales* came to understand the contributions of modern writers as connected with something that can be termed their "realism." Lovecraft scolds Zane Grey (and in this way, scolds many of his pulp fiction peers) for their lack of realism, their penchant for representing people as "acting from artificial motives." For Lovecraft, the "highness" of high derives from its rigorous realism of human psychology and motive. On the surface, this argument for literary value based on a principle of realism seems a strange thing for a fantasist like Lovecraft to value and to promote to his fellow pulp fiction writers; however, Lovecraft is promoting realism not in terms of a narrow representation of what actually exists, an ontological bias. The realism that Lovecraft values is based on philosophical conditions, the degree to which the effect of reality produced by the literature in question gels with his understanding of the occult truth of the ordinary, i.e. the fact that nothing is truly ordinary, particularly psychological motivations. For example, in the opening of his *Supernatural Horror in Literature* wherein Lovecraft appeals to the science of psychology to justify a rhetoric, formalism, and above all artistic and literary quality of the "weird tale," by which he means the literature of the supernatural:

> The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tales as a literary form. Against it are discharged all the shafts of materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events [...] (*Supernatural* 12).
Philosophically speaking, Lovecraft would consider himself a realist. This is because of the extent to which his representations, his "mimesis," his rhetoric of fiction, focuses on confrontations with the unknown and violations of the "materialistic sophistication," of the literary effect of reality. The point of his fantasy is to make strange the ordinary worlds produced by literary realism, to expose the degree to which narrative orders an otherwise unknowable and chaotic plenitude.

Lovecraft influenced Howard. Near the end of his life, Howard was speaking in terms of his Conan the Barbarian character using the term "realism" as well. In Howard's 1935 letter to Clark Ashton Smith he refers to Conan the Cimmerian, fighter against of sorcerers and demon, as his most realistic creation:

It may sound fantastic to link the term "realism" with Conan; but as a matter of fact--his supernatural adventures aside--he is the most realistic character I ever evolved. He is simply a combination of a number of men I have known, and I think that's why he seemed to step full-grown into my consciousness when I wrote the first yarn of the series. (Grimoire 24)

For the Weird Tales writers--despite their distaste for modernism--one of the technical elements that distinguished modernist literature's achievements was its aestheticism, its ability to foreground the "realism" of the media itself. This was an element we can see here they chose to incorporate and expand in their shadow modernist experiments. The virtual worlds the Weird Tales writers create express concrete substance and are then violated by abstract virtual entities such as a color unconnected to an object, a sound unconnected to a source, a curve, a shape.
But if the "realism" of the media made strange was one element that distinguished modernism for Lovecraft, another element was its stereotype as technical experimentation. Lovecraft's attributing of technical originality to modernist literature is not particularly notable in his scolding of Howard. Instead, this distinctiveness comes out in the way Lovecraft outlines the faults of those whom he terms the "superficial writers": these writers "reproduce conventional situations" and evoke "facile emotions" with "tricks of glamour" that are "thoughtlessly repeated" in adherence to "convention." Put simply: non-exceptional pulp writers are not literary because they are conventional. The literary effect of reality they produce is produced naively, is marred by a representation of the ordinary as ordinary. Although he does not specifically speak of technique, Lovecraft faults Zane Grey and other conventional writers like him because of their technical conservatism. And Lovecraft, troubled by a sense of his own inferiority, does not leave his own work out of this harangue:

As for my own junk--let me warn you that it does not merit classification as literature at all. I try to keep it above the pulp-magazine average--but it is not even within striking distance of the solid and permanent merit represented by Poe, Machen, Blackwood, Dunsany, James, and de la Mare. [...] I doubt if anything except 'The Colour Out of Space' and 'The Music of Erich Zann' is worth publication between cloth covers. Whether I'll ever do any better, I can't say yet--but I'm none too optimistic. I hope to get time for some more fictional experimentation before 1933 is over. (533)

"The Colour Out of Space" demonstrates starkly the results of Lovecraft's experimental efforts. It is the story of a color falling into a farm, and, as a result of this color, the farm
disintegrates over time, literally dissolves into slime. To be clear: "The Colour Out of Space" is not the story of an object of a particular color falling into a farm. What falls into the farm is a color, a particular quality disconnected from an object. In spite of the fact that Lovecraft has in this story short-circuited the literary effect of reality, exposing the ordinariness of the farm as ephemeral, he does not consider his work particularly experimental.

***

Lovecraft assumed Howard had no concern for literary technique, but he was wrong. The technical problem of representing reality in literary language was one Howard focused on specifically, although the works where this focus is most clear were not viable for pulp marketplaces. In fact, Howard wrote an entire novel in which he experimented with the form of the novel to see how far he could represent ordinary reality.

While struggling in the early 1930s to secure regular pulpwood magazine markets for his sensational pulp fiction of barbarians fighting sorcerers, Howard composed an experimental novel titled *Post Oaks and Sand Roughs*, which he described as "a realistic account of the drabness, and sham of small town life, the futile and abortive gropings of humanity" that has "no plot, no sequence, no moral" (*Post 40*). Howard never attempted to sell this experimental novel or to publish it in his lifetime, and it appeared for the first time in 1990 when it was released by a private publisher (only 850 copies were printed—sixty four years after his suicide). For Howard, *Post Oaks and Sand Roughs* was a strictly a technical experiment. Significantly, he considered the novel a failure.
Post Oaks is interesting for the degree to which it showcases a famous pulp writer of fantasy, science fiction, and supernatural horror dealing directly with the technical problem of representing reality, representing the ordinary, with the technique of conventionalized realism. Howard's formalization of "the ordinary" took the shape of a virtual space hostile to human beings due to its terrible propensity to recede before the sensorium, to reject the perceiving touch of the sensorium. In key passages from this novel, it demonstrates what Elizabeth Goodstein theorizes as boredom in her 2004 account of boredom from phenomenological, etymological, and literary discourses, Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity (2004). As a writer popularly known for his weird and fantastic tales of "sword and sorcery," this unpublished and largely unread sustained meditation on the inability of literary language to convey "reality" is a consistent yet logical coextension of the shadow modernism of Weird Tales. Where the shadow modernist establishes a literary effect of reality and then stages its horizon, i.e. stages de-reification by dramatizing confrontations with abstract forms, Post Oaks and Sand Roughs questions the possibility of representing ordinary reality at all.

In this novel, the ordinary is fictionalized as hostile space because it structured without qualities and therefore it rejects the mental touch of the sensorium. It is dangerous for the protagonist to find himself in the space of the ordinary because being in this space depresses experience, drains it of value. Consider a vivid demonstration of how the ordinary is fictionalized in this memoir. Some brief context: the protagonist, Steve Costigan has secured employment as the aide to a geological researcher. His job is to hold a rod while the geologist picks up rocks in the desert. Consider the narrator's description of this job:
There was no breeze, and the sun, glancing from the bare rocks of either side made the basin a veritable hell. A strip of mesquite flaps shimmered near him; beyond lay a plowed field. Crossing the mesquite flat, Steve was almost overcome by thirst and heat [...]. As he emerged from the stunted mesquites, he saw a small, warped, unpainted house and directed his steps in that direction to ask for a drink of water. As he approached he saw two women shelling beans on the porch and several small children crawling about the yard, bare-headed and nearly naked of body seeming as impervious to the terrible heat as the green lizards sunning on the rock fences. Steve wondered at this. *(Post Oaks 44-45)*

Here the desert refuses Costigan as not adapted to its ecology. This is so because his perception of the desert is formalized in negative terms, as lacking qualities. The literary images that constitute the description are not entities as such but bring into focus rather negative traces that only partially refer to—that only begin to outline—the existence of things. There is "no breeze," the rocks are "bare" *(44-45)*. The bright sunlight "glanc[es] from the bare rocks" and the "mesquite flaps shimmer." There is a field that is "plowed," but it is yet to be sown with seed. There is an "unpainted" house. The children are "naked." The paint and clothing are missing. The cool breeze is missing. The moss and grass on the rocks are missing. Furthermore, the field is distorted by glancing light. The world recedes before the sensorium of Costigan, who tries to grip phenomena with his sensorium but cannot.

As this example demonstrates, in the ordinary world of *Post Oaks and Sand Roughs*, ordinary phenomena disrupt perception by receding before the sensorium; thus, strictly speaking, Costigan never becomes conscious of the desert. Further, ordinary
phenomena yield to perception in such a way that the illusion is given that sensation happens. Costigan appears to see things. But close inspection of the passage reveals that he sees nothing. That is what makes the ordinary so strange in this novel: Costigan appears to see it, but it is actually invisible. This visible invisibility of the ordinary is the occult truth of the ordinary: the ordinary is an ephemeral domestication of universal strangeness, a thesis Howard is particular concerned with expressing not only in *Post Oaks* but all of the majority of his fiction. The narrator describes Costigan's encounter with the women and children of the unpainted house in terms of an experience without qualities, a vivid demonstration of what I can only cumbersomely refer to now as the "visible invisibility" of ordinary phenomena: "The children halted in their prattle to stare at him, silent and roundeyed. The women continued their work, gazing at him with no gleam of interest. He was nothing in their lives" (45).

Written using the technique of conventionalized realism during the age of "modernist reflection," and executed by Howard to consider specifically the technical problem of representing the ordinary world of rural Texas, a gloss of the writing might result in it being designated a text valuable only to the "extensive" eye of the antiquarian rather than a literary scholar. But "intensive" scrutiny of the style reveals it to be deliberately banal, a testing of conventional realism. In short, *Post Oaks and Sand Roughs* formalizes the failure of realism, the establishment of the literary effect of reality by executing a calibrated realist technique. It constructs an uninteresting world with representational strokes not intended to bring into focus details or achieve what Roland Barthes calls "the effect of reality," but instead intended to test the limits of that technique through formally instantiating an aesthetic lack of commitment to detail.
This is not minimalism in the manner of Ernest Hemingway or Raymond Carver, which isolates the essential elements of a narrative and skillfully curtails supplemental detail in order to intensify form and theme. It is instead a deliberate attempt to formalize scene, character, and action in a marked negative register to thereby hold out for contemplation formlessness, the failure of the literary effect of reality.

The oppressive barrenness that surrounds Costigan is echoed elsewhere in the novel in a description of "Lost Plains," the fictionalized version of Howard's own hometown, Cross Plains, Texas: "He glanced at Lost Plains, the long, dusty main street, the huddle of small, drab brick buildings and the rambling frame structures all dozing like hags in the sun" (Post Oaks 60). He goes on to describe his alienation from this community: "He twitched his shoulders. Here he had no friends. He was a jest, an eccentric" (Post Oaks 60). Like the desert homestead idly lingering uninterestingly in the middle of the desert beneath a harsh sun, Lost Plains is drab, dusty, nondescript, and equally hostile to Costigan.

In juxtaposing the barren desert with the community of Lost Plains, the character of Steve Costigan becomes an occasion for the author to link formally a theme with his technical challenge of representing reality: the inability to connect with reality, to represent it in literary form as a phenomena that can be gripped by the sensorium parallels theme of that of physical and social alienation that characterizes the desert and Lost Plains. Costigan's physical pain--his heart palpitations, his thirst, his dizziness--anticipates his emotional pain derived from his alienated social subjectivity in town. Costigan's inability to perceive the ordinary, to grip it with his sensorium (i.e. the inability of the writer, Robert E. Howard, to represent ordinary reality with substance)
echoes the detachment he feels from his community deriving from his anxiety about his profession as a writer. Unlike the women shelling beans on the porch or the children playing in the mud, both of whom are portrayed as being adapted to the dryness and the heat of the desert, Costigan is portrayed as an ecological outsider. He is equally a social outsider in Lost Plains, a point with is drawn starkly in the author's description of Costigan's job as a pharmacy soda jerk: "All day he would dash back and forth behind the fountain, which he had grown to hate, serving drinks and waiting on customers [...]. At night he staggered home to fall into his bed and sleep the sodden sleep of utter exhaustion. He went to bed fatigued and awoke fatigued" (95).

His attempt to engage in his community's economy and work life here fails on two levels. It results in the disintegration of Costigan's body and the discouragement of his spirit. Recalling the description of the desert cited above, Costigan's work at the soda fountain is equally nondescript. The author does not begin by relating the nature of the work. He chooses, instead, to describe it negatively, in terms of what it pushes out Costigan's life, namely, the activities related to his intellectual pursuit as a writer. As the description unfolds, as the narrator turns to the details of laboring at the pharmacy, Costigan's work as a soda jerk is sketched, only faintly outlined: he "dashes back and forth behind the fountain" (95). He does "many things he was not paid to do" (95). Although the author does not dwell on the concrete details of Costigan's work, which, like the barren desert, is somewhat invisible in terms of literary form, the author nevertheless depicts the effects of the ordinary work on Costigan: like the intolerable desert and the indifferent dwellers in the barren homestead, his employment as a soda jerk confirms, both physically and spiritually, how unfit to the ordinary he actually is.
For Howard, the failure of *Post Oaks* taught him that the literary effect of reality cannot be established to represent the ordinary. His representation of the ordinary as hostile space thus expresses a technical and thematic thesis. Moreover, Costigan's failed attempts to occupy and perceive the ordinary thematizes this technical problem. The author imagines the ordinary as an indescribable, invisible space that threatens Costigan both physically and spiritually. But he contrasts this space with an alternative one, one that cannot be described as ordinary. Focusing on how Howard represents this extraordinary space in *Post Oaks* begins to explain the writer's prevalent use of represented acts of violence in the stories he published in *Weird Tales*. Violence is an essential part of Howard's contribution to the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales*. More than a mere plot device, Howard's violence is part of his mode of literary representation. For Howard, violence is part of establishing the literary effect of reality.

The extraordinary space that appears briefly in *Post Oaks and Lost Plains* as the back hall of a large icehouse where Costigan retreats from the ordinary at night to engage in the transgressive activities of drinking beer and participating in prizefights with oilfield workers. Consider the author's description of the icehouse: "Steve came into the ice plant one night when a strange excess of nervous energy fired him and kept him moving in spite of the fact he had toiled all day with no food since breakfast, and should have been terrifically weary" (102). Costigan is hypnotically drawn to the icehouse at the fringes of the Lost Plains community. His attraction to this place seems to be in response to his need for spiritual as well as physical nourishment. He quickly begins participating in the fights held there. Consider a description of one of these prize fights, and particularly focus on the extent to which the invisible quality of the author's description of Costigan's
work and experience in the desert contrasts here with the deliberate perceptual intensity. Here violence helps solve the technical challenge of establishing a literary effect of reality:

Yells merged crazily, and the entire building seemed to sway and whirl like a dervish. Steve's lips were cut deeply and his mouth was full of blood. His brain was dazed, and still Bill's gloves crashed against his head and jaw. An instant's clarity--as through a mist he saw the frenzied yelling faces, Bill crouched like a jungle beast before him, motionless for a brief instant as he gathered himself for one terrific blow […]. Steve reeled, the blood gushing from his mouth to mingle with the sweat on his chest. And in the fleeting instant before the fighting commenced again, Steven knew life, fierce, red, and vibrant. God, this was his element! To fight, to kill, or to be killed, here in this hell-hot, smoke-laden atmosphere with a gang of roughnecks screaming oaths and obscenities and shouting for his slaughter. (104).

Unlike the silent, windless desert without qualities, the icehouse room is represented by phenomena with qualities. It is pervaded by sound, movement, color, and emotion. The building "whirl[s] like a dervish" and "yells merge crazily" (104). Furthermore, the people who are in this space focus on Costigan. Unlike the people in the desert and the community of Lost Plains—who are absolutely indifferent to Costigan—the roughnecks and fighters cannot see anything but the youth: they shout for his slaughter as Bill lands blow after to blow. Struggling through the barren desert and laboring behind the soda fountain both harm Costigan on a spiritual and physical level, and like these two experiences, participating in the prize fight does indeed seem to result in at least physical
harm. However, the physical violence imagined here is distinct from any actual violence that you or I might experience. Here is a healing type of violence that is not constructed by the author as painful and diminishing but as nourishing, as contributing to the literary effect of reality: it is physically invigorating and spiritually renewing while at the same time it occasions the establishment of the literary effect of reality. Consider the description of Costigan's feelings and reflections after the fight is over:

Steve felt jubilant in a strange manner. His mind was clear now, and the blood raced through his veins. He felt no bad aftereffects form his terrific battle and decided that his heart was as sound as ever. No weak heart could have withstood the strain. He sighed deeply and with relish and glanced up at the stars which seemed somehow less cold, more friendly. He laughed. (106)

I consider this novel to emphasize how Howard's more widely known pulp fictions, framed as *fantasies*, are in fact concerned with the literary effect of reality in their central essence. This is the case of all of the fantasy, science fictions, and supernatural horrors of the shadow modernists. *Post Oaks* taught Howard that to use conventional realism to formalize ordinary experience precludes the establishment of the literary effect of reality. Realism can only be used to formalize extraordinary realities, and in the rural barrenness of Cross Plains, extraordinary realities are hard to come by. His insight, and the insight of all of the shadow modernists, is that ordinary experience cannot be represented in conventional literary language. Ordinary experience is too strange and thus requires extraordinary literary techniques. In this way, the shadow modernists resemble the modernists.
Select passages in this novel are also important to the extent that they show Howard learning how to use violence to establish the literary effect of reality. The lesson he learned in regards to the technical affordance of violence can be seen in a Conan the Barbarian story published in *Weird Tales*, March of 1933, titled "The Tower of the Elephant." The opening of this story demonstrates how violence came to be part of Howard's representational technique, his shadow modernism, his hybrid technique of (1) establishing the literary effect of reality and then (2) violating it. In the final sentence of this opening Howard has adapted fictional violence to his representational technique::

> Along the crooked, unpaved streets with their heaps of refuse and sloppy puddles, drunken roisterers staggered, roaring. Steel glinted in the shadows where wolf preyed on wolf, and from the darkness rose the shrill laughter of women, and the sounds of scufflings and strugglings. Torchlight licked luridly from broken windows and wide-thrown doors, and out of those doors, stale smells of wine and rank sweaty bodies, clamor of drinking-jacks and fists hammered on rough tables, snatches of obscene songs, *rushed like a blow in the face.* *(Coming of Conan 59, my emphasis)*

***

Howard's Conan the Barbarian stories are his most widely known contributions to *Weird Tales*. I understand those stories as technical exercises for establishing and then violating the literary effect of reality. However, Howard's Conan the Barbarian stories have an interesting genealogy that, properly traced, reveals clearly that these apparent pulp sensations are actually technically self-aware works. Before Howard created the character of Conan the Barbarian, he first authored stories of another, lesser-known
barbarian, King Kull. Like many of the manuscripts he sent to *Weird Tales* that were rejected by Wright, Howard excused their failure to sell by considering them "experiments," which they were. The Kull stories were experiments in literary form.

In the Kull story "experiments" we can glimpse an early yet fragmentary element of the "shadow modernism" that emerges in *Weird Tales* in the twenties and thirties. In Howard's Kull stories, "shadow modernism" takes the form of depictions of enduring forms of art as dangerous monsters. Kull's version of "shadow modernism" is unique in that it is representing as a violent form of criticism: the monster of art is generally attacked, defeated, and then forced into yielding up fragments of cosmic knowledge, i.e. the occult truth of the ordinary. Put simply, Kull violates art. His violence is a critical, interpretive gesture.

I call Howard's Kull stories "experiments" because, except for "The Shadow Kingdom" (*Weird Tales*: August, 1929), "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thume" (*Weird Tales*: September 1929), and "Kings of the Night," (*Weird Tales*: November 1930) none of the rest of the Kull manuscripts sold to professional marketplaces, and many of them were left unfinished (though they were posthumously anthologized and even "finished" by other enthusiastic fantasy and science fiction writers in the 1960s). Commentators have observed how Kull is the literary progenitor to Howard's most commercially successful and most popularly recognizable character, Conan the Barbarian. There are also many non-academic precedents (in science fiction "fanzines" dedicated to the work of Howard) for thinking about Kull and his stories as unpolished "false starts" on the recursive path of pioneering and inventing Howard's more commercially viable character of Conan and the genre his stories inaugurate, "sword and sorcery." The idea that Kull was a sort of
embryonic Conan is confirmed when we consider that the first Conan the Barbarian story, "The Phoenix in the Sword"--published in *Weird Tales* in December of 1932--was a rewriting of the last Kull manuscript, a story titled "By This Axe I Rule" (which *Weird Tales* rejected).

This transformation of the final Kull story into the first Conan the Barbarian story, and its subsequent acceptance by Wright at *Weird Tales*, implies an important point: the unconventional Kull was conventionalized, to an extent, and came out as Conan the Barbarian. Relative to the vast pulp fiction market that *Weird Tales* was but a minor part of, the Conan the Barbarian stories delivered on the promise made by the magazine's title: the journeys of Conan the Barbarian were, indeed, weird to the average reader; however, relative to the fiction published in the magazine, the character of Conan the Barbarian was comparatively conventional: a warrior travels into strange and shadowy tombs and fights animated art objects.

Kull, however, seems to have been too weird for the magazine's readers. Seen in the right light, the character of Kull, though he became Conan after a fashion, was quite different, even radically different, than the character he would become. I believe it is not overstatement to say that Kull is a "queer figure" according to Lee Edelman: he is a racially indeterminate, homosexual, sedentary, paranoid, and cynical rather than curious. He is anti-social, future-negating, and at violent odds with the political and social order he ostensibly rules. This is not a typical pulp protagonist. We can see in the Kull character and the journeys he undertakes Howard the experimentalist, deviating from pulp formulas and testing new artistic possibilities (and consequently suffering the economic consequence of a rejected manuscript).
Howard's primary narrative form in the Kull stories is adventure. Though the particular plot devices change in each story, a general adventure narrative pattern does come into focus as Howard recursively hones the ekphrasis delivered by the Kull stories. In the Kull stories, Kull is generally forced to go on a journey and confronts an art object or monster that is supernatural. Hazards and trials tend to emanate from the art object. Eventually, the art object is either destroyed or yields an insight depicted as a totalizing perspective in the form of a fragmentary map of the cosmos. The truth Kull learns is always as awesome as it is simple, another paraphrase of the the occult truth of the ordinary: material existence is essentially ephemerality, and ephemerality is actually endurance, a thesis captured succinctly by the speech offered to a dying Kull by a shadow creature who exists out of time in the published fragment, "The Striking of the Gong":

There are worlds beyond worlds, universes within and without universes [...].

Your barbarian brain clutches at material actualities [...]. You are part of that great ocean which is Life, which washes upon all shores, and you are as much part of it in one place as in another, and as sure to flow back to the Source of it, which gave birth to all Life. As for that, you are bound to Life for all Eternity as surely as a tree, a rock, a bird or a world is bound" (130).

In the Kull experiments, the monster of art is generally violently destroyed, its power diminished; however, as Howard masters the ritual of writing Kull stories, his theme comes into focus and the art object becomes, predominantly, a source of wisdom, although the wisdom it offers is always the same doctrine. To begin to make a case for these claims, I would like to treat one of the earliest Kull story experiments closely, "The
Screaming Skull of Silence," which relates the outcome of Kull's search for a mythical castle and his struggle with a demon who is imprisoned within it.

In seeking out a mythical castle, we can glimpse the emergence of an important macro-narrative pattern coming into focus that structures many of the *Weird Tales* stories I study: a protagonist, inspired by a fragmentary work of art, confronts and explores an architectural art object or grotto--a temple, a tower, a castle, a house, a tomb. This architectural art object--generally figured as living or animate. The architecture then interactively responds to the explorations of the protagonist, and thereby yields its secret contents up: a series of artistic spectacles and eventually a monstrous work of art. This is the geometrical labyrinth of secrets, the maze, the dungeon, that yields aesthetic objects up and reacts to the explorer as a subject with agency (offering traps, riddles, illusions), a common trope taken up in many sword and sorcery video games, novels, and roleplaying games after the pulp era.

The many architectural art objects explored by protagonists in the *Weird Tales* stories are allegories for art museums. In a significant number of the *Weird Tales* stories I study, to be inspired by art to visit a castle, to plunder a tomb, to enter a deserted city, to burglarize a temple, is also to visit an art museum and to engage in a recursive archaeological ekphrasis.

In this story, Kull the King is told a myth by a courtier that concerns a strange castle, "The Skull of Silence," where a necromancer, Raama, imprisoned a demon of silence. Kull, motivated by boredom and driven by arrogance to prove his worth, desires to seek out "The Skull of Silence" in order to confirm if the myth holds any truth. Here Kull engages in a kind of literary criticism similar to that engaged in by Morand in Clark
Ashton Smith's "The End of the Story." Stirred by the myth, Kull decides to enter into it, to seek out material referents of the story in spite of the qualification offered by his courtier:

All is illusion [...] all outward manifestations of the underlying Reality, which is beyond human comprehension, since there are no relative things by which the finite mind may measure the infinite. The One may underlie all, or each natural illusion may possess a basic entity. All these things were known to Raama, the greatest mind of all ages [...]. (119).

He interrupts the courtier's speech this way: "'Enough.' Kull gestured impatiently. 'Raama has been dead so many thousands years that it wearies me to think on it. I ride to find the Skull of Silence; who rides with me?"

Kull eventually discovers that castle and thereby confirms the reality of the myth. Importantly, the castle is described in terms of a monster: "They halted before the castle that crouched there like a dark monster [...]" (121). When Kull approaches the main portal of the castle, he discovers a strange art object, a gong of an indeterminate and perpetually shifting color: "But Kull could not be sure of the color for to his amazed stare it changed and shifted, and sometimes his gaze seemed to be drawn into great depths and sometimes to glance extreme shallowness" (123). Kull strikes the gong and thereby releases the demon, the "soul of all silence" (122). The strange monster is described in vague and obscure terms, as a sense-experience, a kind of negative music:

Silence spreading out over the earth, over the Universe! Men died in gibbering stillness; the roar of rivers, the crash of seas, the noise of winds faltered and ceased to be. All Sound was drowned by the Silence. Silence, soul destroying,
brain shattering—blotting out all life on earth and reaching monstrously up into
the skies, crushing the very singing of the stars! (123).

Realizing to his horror that he has released the demon of silence upon the world, Kull
thinks quickly and seizes the nearest weapon at hand: the mallet and the gong he used to
release the demon from its prison. Kull begins to beat the gong and quickly realizes it is
sound that hurts the demon of silence. In a cosmic level battle of the bands, he fights with
the demon with the percussion emanating from the gong:

Back and back and back—and back. Now the wisps hovered in the doorway and
behind Kull men whimpered and wallowed to their knees, chins sagging and eyes
vacant. Kull tore the gong from its frame and reeled toward the door […]. The
whole Universe should have halted to watch a man justifying the existence of
man-kind, scaling sublime heights of glory in his supreme atonement. (124)

Kull continues striking his gong and driving back the demon of silence. Eventually, he
drives the demon deeper into the castle. Kull's moment of triumph is worth citing at
length for its strangeness, for the unique way it formally negotiates the sense-based
contradictions that tend to structure Howard's portrayals of the supernatural. Here the
literary effect of reality is violated explicitly because Howard attributes action to a
quality: "Now the Silence writhed in a dark corner and shrunk and shrunk. Again, a last
blow! All the sound in the Universe rushed together in one roaring, yelling, shattering,
engulfing burst of sound! The gong blew into a million vibrating fragments! And Silence
screamed!" (125, my emphasis).

Inspired by a myth, having journeyed to an art museum-grotto, King Kull
confronts a kind of negative music, a demon of silence. In spite of the struggle, Kull does
succeeds by force of will to preserve the ordinary, although it comes close to dissolving. Consider the moment when Kull initially confronts the demon of silence: "The silence entered Kull's soul; it clawed at his heart; it sent tentacles of steel into his brain. He clutched at his forehead in torment; his skull was bursting, shattering" (122). In spite of the threat of the demon, however, Kull survives the battle. The ordinary world survives, is protected from universal strangeness, by virtue of "a man justifying the existence of man-kind" (124). We begin to see the latent misogyny of shadow modernism, its desire for what Lacanians would refer to as the Name of the Father. Howard lets us glimpse briefly how ordinary reality, in *Weird Tales*--fragile in the face universal strangeness--has a gender.
Chapter 10: Lovecraft, the Negative Sublime, and the Science of Modernism

In his famous 1948 essay probing the virtue of modern novels, "Technique as Discovery," Mark Schorer, a regular *Weird Tales* contributor, distinguishes modern novels by their acute awareness of the importance of technique over subject matter. In this essay Schorer celebrates the novels of canonical modernists like James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Virginia Woolf and equally censures contemporary novelists such as H.G. Wells and James Farrell, of whose writing he complains, "His prose is asked to perform no service beyond communication of the most rudimentary kind of fact" (82).

For Schorer, and for many American critics coming to terms with the literary experiments in academic contexts in the 1940s, what distinguishes the modernist novel is how it expresses a preeminence of technique, a technique that supplemented, renewed, estranged, and grew out of the subject matter centering the narrative. Schorer wraps up his essay with a prescription for novelists of the future derived from surveying the modernist novels of previous decades: "What we need in fiction is a devoted fidelity to every technique which will help us to discover and to evaluate our subject matter, and more than that, to discover the amplifications of meaning of which our subject matter is capable" (83). The important term here is "discover." For many critics like Schorer, a key component of understanding the formal novelty of modernism is acknowledging not only its difficulty but also its unique rhetoric and technique as a form of knowledge building, i.e. its "research" quality or "scientific" nature. The many discourses around literary and other aesthetic techniques perpetuated in the little magazine culture that generated modernism should not be understood as the product of a single genius who propitiously came upon a unique method. Rather, they should be understood as a specialized,
professional, almost collaborative discourse requiring the labors of both innovating artists and knowledgeable critics. From a traditional perspective, the typical modernist artist seems anti-social, like a host, as figured by Malcolm Cowley, being deliberately rude to his guests; but from the perspective of the magazine archive, what could the many pages devoted to manifestos, critical exegeses, and criticism signify, if not a desire to build knowledge, even scientific knowledge together?

The idea that young Anglo-American artists of the first three decades of the twentieth century were able to experiment with aesthetic form because of the concurrent emergence of a receptive, even scientific criticism is not a difficult hypothesis to test, but to do so rigorously would require the methods of historiography. One can imagine a survey of the little magazine archive specifically devoted to quantifying the percentage of writing devoted not to making public but to interpreting the new art. The task of accumulating and analyzing such quantitative data becomes more possible with the development of digital software for these kinds of tasks, but the absence of such data in the past has rarely stopped literary critics from making strong claims. It will not stop me here from making at least a weak one: we might glimpse this scientific dimension of the enterprise of modernism by treating two salient texts: (1) a vision of modern criticism and (2) a vision of modernist artistic production offered by two key figures of the movement, H.L. Mencken and T.S. Eliot.

In a 1919 essay titled, "The Criticism of Criticism of Criticism," Mencken deploys a scientific metaphor in order to explain the role of the art critic:

A catalyzer, in chemistry, is a substance that helps two other substances to react.

For example, consider the case of ordinary cane sugar and water. Dissolve the
sugar in the water and nothing happens. But add a few drops of acid and the sugar changes into glucose and fructose. Meanwhile, the acid itself is absolutely unchanged. (9)

He explains his metaphor in this way: "This is almost exactly the function of the genuine critic of the arts. It is his business to provoke the reaction between the work of art and the spectator" (9-10). Looking at the logic of this metaphor reveals that, for Mencken, the function of critical-catalysis is to unweave the work of art, conceived here as a quantity of dissolved sugar. The art critic functions as a disassembler, breaks down the work of art into its base elements.

Mencken's essay resembles T.S. Eliot's famous scientific metaphor in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent," also published in 1919, in which he considers not the critic but the artist-poet as a chemical catalyst, a shred of pure platinum, and the art object as a combination of oxygen and sulphur dioxide. He writes, "The combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged" (94).

Although both critic and artist are conceived here as chemical catalysts, they function in that capacity in distinct ways. For Eliot, the artist-catalyst combines elements; for Mencken, the critic-catalyst takes these bound elements apart. And yet, in spite of the inverse ways they function as catalysts, both are unaffected by the chemical reaction they bring about. For Mencken, "the acid itself is absolutely unchanged" (10). For Eliot, the shred of platinum "is […] unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged" (94).
These complementary texts add up to a compelling vision of modernism as a scientific enterprise from which participants keep detached. Through the lens these essays offer, modernism appears as a collaborative enterprise between emotionally-detached artists and critics working together on a project that seems, on the level of emotional valance, scientific in tone. Indeed, the artist-catalyst and critic-catalyst appear more like scientists committed to art as to empirical research, engaged in what Schorer calls a process of "technique as discovery" to produce what Viktor Shklovsky terms the "device" of art, a device that functions to renew experience, to estrange it. And like scientists committed to an objective knowledge over and above them, Eliot's and Mencken's descriptions convey a cabal of modernist researchers anxious about contaminating their project by becoming too emotionally invested.

Such a comparison to science is a widespread motif in canonical accounts of modernism published in "the age of modernist reflection," as when Edmund Wilson writes in 1931, "There is something akin to the scientific instinct in the efforts of modern literature" (295). However, when we fully register that this widespread rhetoric of modernist art's resemblance to scientific endeavor was perpetuated by artists and philosophers ill-equipped, I think, to take fully into account the actual complexity of science, let alone to compare it to art, it becomes less persuasive. As a non-scientist, I may talk at length about chemical catalysis; but in my capacity as a literary critic, the most I can say with confidence is that science is concerned with creating empirically verifiable knowledge of the physical world. Is this correct? If this is the case, what is the artistic analog? If we take the vision of modernism as a kind of science of art seriously, is
it productive to ask what kind of knowledge it seeks to create? What is the body of knowledge modernism as a science is contributing to?

This is where Mencken's and Eliot's metaphors, exposed as ideology, stop being useful and where we need to turn elsewhere for an answer or at least a shadowy outline of an answer. And we can find a fresh perspective of the "scientism" of modernism, I think, in the unlikeliest of places, particularly in the short fiction of H.P. Lovecraft and other Weird Tales writers, pulp writers who saw, apprehended, and theorized the scientism of modernism clearly during "the age of modernist reflection." Unlike Schorer and Wilson, these writers would be able to theorize the knowledge produced by the science of art without a thought to propriety or discursive politeness. Like Benjamin's mysticism and Abbot's strange answer to an interviewer's question, theirs was a "weird discourse."

It would require a community deriving from an uncategorizable publication like Weird Tales animated by the ambitions of Lovecraft to produce a personality like William Lumley, a one-time contributor to Weird Tales. To my mind, Lumley comes closest to articulating the nature of the ambition entailed in both the scientism of modernism and the modernist reflection of Weird Tales when he ranted earnestly to Lovecraft in 1935 the following mysticism: "We may think we think we're writing fiction, and may even (absurd thought) disbelieve what we write, but at bottom we are telling the truth in spite of ourselves" (Lovecraft Encyclopedia 159).

The idea of aesthetic practice as a scientific endeavor, a knowledge-creating or epistemological undertaking like scientific research, figures prominently not just in the later Weird Tales stories published during the era of its ascendancy (1930-1937), but appears earlier, in the earliest of Lovecraft's stories written not for the pulps but for the
amateur press associations that pre-dated *Weird Tales* and the fan magazines produced by fans of *Weird Tales*. For Lovecraft, aesthetic enterprise is a form of seeking after knowledge, and the knowledge art produces is delivered to the inquiring person through emotional rather than intellectual understanding. An affect like horror or wonder or dread is not, for Lovecraft and the *Weird Tales* writers, a simple neutral tingling of the nerves but is rather a signal, a fragment of a larger text to be interpreted. Thus, the art objects created through this enterprise are "somatic" technologies, prostheses, for apprehending the occult truth of the ordinary. In this way, the prime symbol of the artistic object for Lovecraft and the *Weird Tales* writers is the strange book that stirs the body, the obelisk that incites dread, and that reminds the person who reads it (or looks upon it) that his ordinary reality is an ephemeral domestication of universal strangeness. These symbols coalesce into the image of the key or book of occult lore, a metaphor Lovecraft draws starkly in his sonnet, "The Key," published for the first time in January of 1935 in the "Special Weird Poetry Number" the independent magazine, *The Fantasy Fan*:

I had the book that told the hidden way

Across the void and through the space-hung screens

That hold the undimensioned worlds at bay,

And keep lost aeons to their own demesnes. (*Fantasy Fan* 72)

It is not an exaggeration to say that this theme of modernist art objects as tools that stir the body and thereby deliver occult knowledge about the ordinary is Lovecraft's central theme, one that he obsessively dwells on throughout his entire corpus--one that he returns to over and over in an attempt to master it, to hone the symbols needed to express his vision not of a fantasy world per se but of the ephemerality of ordinary *reality*. 
Lovecraft's description of the artist's mission in an essay defending the writing of weird fiction published in the amateur press associations demonstrates his partisan commitment not to fantasy but art-as-fantasy:

The imaginative writer devotes himself to art in its most essential sense [...]. He is the painter of moods and mind-pictures - a capturer and amplifier of elusive dreams and fancies - a voyager into those unheard-of lands which are glimpsed through the veil of actuality but rarely, and only by the most sensitive [...]. Most persons do not understand what he says, and most of those who do understand object because his statements and pictures are not always pleasant and sometimes quite impossible. ("The Defense Reopens")

Lovecraft understood his role as an "imaginative writer" to be a devotee of "art in its most essential sense," an enterprise he understood as a scientific search after occult knowledge that entailed voyaging into "unheard of lands." In this way, his repeated fictionalizations of art, artists, and aesthetic experience as scientific investigations into the unknown nature of the ordinary reveals his resemblance to the very modernists he fictionalized who also understood art not as the subjective expression of deep feeling but as a collaborative pioneering of a technique designed to make experience strange, a strangeness domesticated by the bourgeoisie art they debunked.

Mystical Apprehension in "The Call of Cthulhu" and the Impossibility of the Sublime

No other work out of Lovecraft's corpus demonstrates more clearly the writer's penchant to fictionalize the formal technique and historical movement of modernism as a science for producing occult knowledge of the ordinary than his most celebrated work,
"The Call of Cthulhu," published in *Weird Tales* in July of 1927. This story exemplifies the typical shadow modernist narrative characteristic of *Weird Tales* in that it combines both a conventional nineteenth century realist technique with unreal objects that index and bear as formal structures the rhetoric of the aestheticism of modernism. Put another way, "The Call of Cthulhu," like many other *Weird Tales* stories, fictionalizes techniques of modernism and thereby represents them in a virtual world as so many unreal object so that they can be examined through a series of narrative events. It appears as a formless fragment of aesthetic production, a non-representational aesthetic object purged of all of its signifying, referential, or mimetic dimensions. In the case of "The Call of Cthulhu," this object--what has been referred to elsewhere as a *novum*--is "an almost unpronounceable jumble of letters: Cthulhu fhtagn.

"The Call of Cthulhu" does indeed demonstrate what Paul Halpern and Michael C. Labossiere describe as Lovecraft's ability to "weave the scientific and philosophical discourse of the age into riveting narratives of horror lurking beyond" (513). Structured like a scientific paper, an academic report that weaves together textual evidence to execute a horrifying thesis, the story succeeds skillfully in what Lovecraft scholar Steven J. Mariconda calls "the horror borne […] of the well-ordered laws of science" (66). Expanding on Mariconda's point, Jason Colavito states that Lovecraft's cosmic horror lays bare "the tension between science and superstition, between the known and the unknown, between the quotidian and the infinite" (176).

Registering the extent to which the horror of Lovecraft's work emerges from the conceptual frameworks of modern science, Richard L. Tierney identifies what he calls the "cosmic quality" in Lovecraft's fiction, a feeling he describes as pervading Lovecraft's
work and one that is evoked "by a direct, almost mystical apprehension of the universe as revealed by the implications of modern science" (190). Tierney's observation—in no way unique in terms of Lovecraft criticism—in its emphasis on "mystical apprehension" calls to mind the Kantian notion of the sublime. Characterized by Kant as exemplifying boundlessness, vastness, lawlessness, and terror, the cosmic horrors of Lovecraft's stories seem, after a topical gloss, to correlate quite directly with this concept. The "cosmic quality" Tierney identifies is the key to unraveling Lovecraft and Weird Tales's unique relationship to modernism and also how those pulp writers—like Benjamin does so with Klee—understood the significance of their work more. I agree with Vivian Ralickas, who suggests "Lovecraft's worldview necessarily makes an experience of the sublime impossible" (367). Bearing in mind the impossibility of the sublime in Lovecraft's allegories of modernism as a science is necessary in order to understand the Weird Tales writers' understanding of the power of modernism: it was an aesthetic movement that produced formal devices that let one apprehend occult knowledge, to perceive the occult the truth of the ordinary.

"The Call of Cthulhu" is structured around the narrator Thurston's, report regarding his piecing together of his recently murdered uncle George Gammell Angell's, papers on the "Cthulhu Cult." At the story's beginning Thurston has already come to his conclusions, understands the horror they signify; however, he withholds his conclusion and takes the reader through his piecing together of the various texts and documents that add up to his conclusion. His often cited first paragraph strikes the tenor of the sublime:

We lie on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own
direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of
dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our
frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee
from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (139)

"Terrifying vistas," "seas of infinity": these phrases suggest the sublime as it is generally
understood. However, the sublime, understood by a thinker like Burke as defined by
obscurity, vagueness, and indefiniteness, cannot be present here when phrases like
"deadly light" are taken into consideration, as well as the extent to which the incapacities
of the human mind, i.e., ignorance, is framed as mercy, as the canceling foil for such an
experience. For Burke, the sublime is the unknown. Here, the source of horror and terror
is that which is known, illuminated, and correlated. For the Weird Tales writers, the
science of modernism is not terrifying to the extent that it reveals human ignorance. In
many of their stories, Lovecraft's particularly, ignorance is an edified state of safety. The
risk entailed in the technique of modernism and devices produced by it is rather the
occult truth of the ordinary it produces. However, that previous language attributed to the
sublime is used to formalize a state of knowledge that is worth our attention. The
strangeness and distinctiveness of "The Call of Cthulhu" and other Weird Tales stories is
that the language of the sublime is utilized to describe the apprehension of occult
knowledge and not to signal ignorance.

The story, "The Call of Cthulhu," consists not only of the papers and notes
Thurston draws from but also two stories contained within them: (1) that of George
Angell's encounter with a modernist artist named Henry Wilcox who was suffering from
strange nightmares and creating art based on those dreams; and (2) that of Angell's
encounter with a police inspector named John Legrasse, who was seeking out an antiquarian/archaeologist who could help him on a case by identifying a sculpture he had recovered from a murderous cult in Louisiana. Let us begin with Angell's encounter with Henry Wilcox, the modernist artist.

Lovecraft's Henry Wilcox of "The Call of Cthulhu" is a fictional modernist artist whose work, unattached to previously established artistic tradition, is framed as a dangerous transgression, an artistic undertaking that conveys occult knowledge. Wilcox is introduced as an intensely innovative artist, a radical figure who has been expelled from the Providence Art Club because it was "anxious to preserve its conservatism" (Complete Fiction 358). The narrative of "The Call of Cthulhu" begins to unfold when Wilcox brings a "singular bas-relief" sculpture adorned with strange hieroglyphics to an archaeological expert. It is in this fictional exchange between Professor Angell, the archaeologist, and Henry Wilcox, the modernist, that we can see that Lovecraft has fully sharpened his idiom for reflecting on modernist art, the modernist artist, and the relationship of the artist-in-general to human society and the cosmos at large. Wilcox's strange art sculpture is useful for demonstrating this. Wilcox's sculpture is an enduring form to the extent that it holds in tension both antiquity and novelty. It is equally ancient as well as modern, deriving from the "just now" of the night before (it is described as of plaster "exceedingly damp and fresh") and yet manifesting dreams "older than brooding Tyre" (356). Wilcox also shows Angell a sculpture of a monster from his dream. The monster is described by the narrator as similar in spirit to an "an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature" and registers as a version of the sublime in the typical, Burkean sense: indefinite, obscure, beyond signification (141). His curiosity stoked, Angell attempts to
help the artist and undertakes to interview Wilcox about his dreams. In describing the
dream there is another moment of the sublime:

Hieroglyphics had covered the wall and pillars, and from some undetermined
point below had come a voice that was not a voice, a chaotic sensation which only
fancy could transmute into sound [...] [His dreams] touched wildly on a gigantic
thing 'miles high' that walked or lumbered about. He at no time fully described
this object, but occasional frantic words, as repeated by Dr. Tobey, convinced the
professor that it must be identical with the nameless monstrosity he had sought to
depict in his dream sculpture. (143-44)

"Cyclopean," "titan," "sky flung," "horror," "miles high," "chaotic": these adjectives seem
to suggest the sublime.

Now let us turn to Wilcox himself. He describes himself as "psychically
hypersensitive," and in response to certain geologic disturbances has a "dream of
Cyclopean cities of titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze
and sinister with latent horror (358). Professor Angell, after analyzing Wilcox, undertakes
a study of other artists also influenced. He makes the discovery that during the length of
the geologic disturbance that inspired Wilcox's strange work, other sensitive people were
inspired, particularly in Paris, France. It is related that in Paris "a famous fantastic painter
named Ardois-Bonnot hangs a blaphemous 'Dream Landscape' in the Paris spring salon
of 1926" (361). The Left Bank of Paris was, of course, one of the epicenters of Anglo-
American modernist artistic production in the early 20s, as well as an important
headquarters of the continental European avant-garde. It is telling that Lovecraft
triangulates Wilcox in relation to what the author and other cultural elites would have
understood as a hotbed of experimental artistic activity. Following the narrative logic of
the story from beginning to end, Wilcox's fevered midnight aesthetic enterprise, his
creation of sculptural art disconnected from previously established traditions results in
the terrible revelation of Cthulhu, a monstrous entity sleeping in the ocean who, when he
wakes up, will gorge himself on humanity.

In the second story the narrator relates the notes of the professor regarding his
encounter with a police inspector, John Legrasse. Inspector Legrasse explains how he had
tracked down a mysterious cult in the swamps surrounding New Orleans. This cult had
sacrificed a human before "a great granite monolith some eight feet in height" (152).
After dispersing the cult and arresting them, Legrasse discovers, perched on top of the
monolith, "a grotesque, repulsive, and apparently very ancient stone statuette" (147). It is
worth citing the narrator's description of it at length:

This thing […] was of somewhat bloated corpulence, and squatted evilly on a
rectangular block or pedestal covered with undecipherable characters […]. Its
vast, awesome, and incalculable age was unmistakable; yet not one link did it
shew with any known type of art belonging to civilization's youth—or indeed to
any other time. (148)

"Vast," "awesome," "incalculable": once again, these adjectives seem to register the
sublime. A kind of sublime, or something tending toward the sublime, pervades
Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu." And yet, none of the examples I have highlighted
above register the sublime as it has been defined by classical sources. This can be
understood by examining the ideas regarding the sublime as it was initially formulated by
Burke and Kant. To them I now turn.
Traditional Definitions of the Sublime

In his *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful by attempting to describe the emotions they evoke as well as the material qualities—shapes, textures, size—that are associated with them. Beauty, for Burke, is predominantly a function of our expectations and aesthetic traditions; when art objects or nature conforms to our expectations of phenomena, then they are beautiful. Thus, the beautiful is a function of knowledge and is experienced by the subject when he or she understands fully their own and their society's expectations, i.e. the conditions of beauty. Conversely, Burke figures the sublime as emerging out of the subject's ignorance. A sublime phenomenon, then, is defined by its obscurity and its vagueness and the way it resists or fails to conform to our expectations. The subject experiences the sublime, according to Burke, as terrifying, vast, and beyond comprehension. Though he understands the experience of the sublime as ultimately painful, he suggests that it can be married with beauty.

Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), modifies Burke's formulation of the sublime and the beautiful. For Kant, the beautiful is not necessarily connected to phenomena, i.e. it is an idea primarily. His concept of beauty is somewhat paradoxical in that to formulate it Kant posits that subjective valuations of taste are necessarily imperative commands, i.e. they are subjective but tend toward universality. Thus, the beautiful becomes that which conforms to what we want it to conform to. Furthermore, it emerges from consensus, from our collective striving to articulate an idealized form of beauty that does not in itself exist; therefore, it is an intellectual concept, a codified framework, ultimately connected to reason. Kant understands the sublime, conversely, as
an emotion, as unconnected to reason, as fragmentary. Most importantly, it is a feeling that signals the powerful capacity of the mind to reflect on things that transcend the conceptual frameworks that we have developed and utilize to aesthetically judge the world. It is not enough that a phenomenon be extremely large or vast to be considered sublime in Kant's framework. Sublimity is the emotional response one experiences that signals the powerful capacity of the mind to reflect on things that transcend the scope of our conceptual frameworks.

Kant's and Burke's definitions of beauty conform much easier than their conceptions of the sublime. Both philosophers understand beauty as a function of conformity between human expectations of the world and the satisfaction of those expectations. However, the relationship between their concepts of the sublime is much more vexed. For Burke, the sublime signals an incapacity of the human mind; for Kant, however, the sublime signals a great capacity. For Burke, the sublime is a kind of symptom that there are phenomena beyond our comprehension and perceptive abilities. For Kant, sublimity signals the untapped potential of the human mind, its awesome ability to endure an encounter with that which is beyond the range of its conceptual frameworks.

There is an obvious way these two thinkers' theories of the sublime correlate, and this is that for both Burke and Kant the sublime is registered as an excess; in Burke the sublime is in excess of our understanding, our comprehension; in Kant we can still understand the sublime in the sense that we can perceive it. The sublime does not index a failure of cognition or perception, which is a register of Burke's theory; however, the Kantian sublime is nevertheless in excess of any established conceptual frameworks we
bring to it. In Kant the sublime is boundless, yet conceivable; in Burke the sublime is indefinite and therefore beyond perception. In both theories, however, the sublime is not stable or universalizing. It is excessive, fragmentary, not fully present to our cognitive or merely conceptual frameworks.

This is not the experience of Lovecraft's protagonists, specifically the protagonist of "The Call of Cthulhu." The crisis experienced by Lovecraft's protagonist is that of far too much knowledge, if not complete knowledge. In the opening passage the narrator calls "the inability of the human mind to correlate all of its content" "the most merciful thing in the world" (139). In Lovecraft "the price of knowledge," argues Colavito, "is the loss of one's sanity and reason in the face of a cosmos both grander than any in human imagination and colder and more indifferent than can be conceived" (191). The author registers this point, articulates how it is his acquired knowledge that has damned him and not his ignorance when he writes at the story's close, "I have looked upon all the universe has to hold of horror" (169). Of Cthulhu he states, "the thing cannot be described--there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order;" however, the reader must remember that it was not Thurston who actually encountered Cthulhu, it was Johansen the sailor whose journal the narrator reads; thus, Johansen's language did, indeed, effectively signify the horror of seeing the mountain-sized monster. Of Johansen's writing, Thurston writes, "Poor Johansen's handwriting almost gave out when he wrote of this" (169). The key adjective here, it seems, is "almost" (169). His handwriting did not give out. The message was delivered. Thurston understood.
In these instances that merely tend toward the sublime, ignorance, lack of knowledge, i.e. the failure of signification, is valued. Accordingly, absolute knowledge is figured as the cause of horror. These passages, then, do not conform with Burke's definition of the sublime, which depends on indefiniteness, obscurity, and vagueness. Consider some of the adjectives he uses to describe the sublime in his Enquiry: "rugged and negligent," "dark and gloomy," "obscure," these words seem to be defining the opposite of what the narrator is lamenting, is fearing at the story's beginning, things such as revelation, illumination, epiphany, correlation, and definition (548).

This vexed relationship with Burke's notion of the sublime also holds with that of Kant's: "We call sublime what is absolutely large"; "[The sublime] is what is large beyond all comparison"; "unboundedness"; "ruleless disarray and definition" (520-521, emphasis original). Here the sublime is once again framed as that which is beyond signification, conception within established epistemological frameworks. Though in Kant the sublime is still conceivable in its awesome vastness, it still transcends the framework of our tawdry knowledge. In the passages cited above the narrator's and Johansen's experience do not transcend human knowledge, they are absolutely facilitated by it, by the intellectual technologies of writing and reading. Structurally speaking, the story simulates the execution of scientific study; a thesis is posited, evidence is correlated, a full proof conclusion is reached. Insofar as the citation of the material sciences, the theories that inform them, signify that measurement, indexing, categorization--methods so characteristic of sciences--are the source of horror, the opening of the story does not register the sublime in the sense of Burke or Kant. Something different is going on here. This is the story of a transmission of knowledge.
The Negative Sublime

In Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" we have encountered a new variety of the sublime, a negative sublime to the extent that the emotion of grandeur evoked emerges not out of a failure of signification but out of a pervasive, absolute signification. In other words, here the sublime does not emerge out of ignorance, obscurity, transcendence of the symbolic; rather, it emerges as a response to absolute knowledge, and in this way is more akin to what Slavoj Žižek traces in his *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989).

Taking Kant's and Burke's sublime as a starting point, he figures that sublime as an encounter with the Lacanian Real, that which is in excess of signification, the abject viscera of the world that the subject of the sublime experience has collided with. This formulation, inasmuch as encountering the Real is akin to "learning the truth," is closer in spirit to the negative sublime than Kant's or Burke's formulations; however, it is nevertheless too strong as Lovecraft's protagonists generally succeed, to their horror, in understanding. They do not scream in horror because they have inadvertently stumbled outside of the symbolic to face the abject Real; rather, they follow the symbolic to its horrible conclusion, become wholly enclosed by its web of signification. They translate the hieroglyphics, correlate the news stories, peer within the pages of ancient tomes, grasp the scientific theories, and through these various signifiers they glimpse the Truth.

Robert Weinberg, esteemed pulp magazine collector, articulates this point quite clearly:

Lovecraft's stories were as well constructed as any scientific paper. First, the statement by the narrator of a terrible horror to be revealed (the goal); next the facts are related through first hand evidence, newspaper clippings, or diaries (evidence); third, the confrontation between the narrator or another with the
horror (the experiment); and finally, the realization of the horror as predicated and stated at the beginning (the conclusion). (30)

Here Weinberg highlights the degree to which moments that suggest the sublime in Lovecraft does not emerge out of uncertainty, vagueness, or the unknown. To the contrary, that which is known and has been proved through the convolutions of the plot is the source of the horror: "I must have forgetfulness or death," states the protagonist of "Dagon," the prototype story of Lovecraft's masterpiece, "The Call of Cthulhu" (1).

The negative sublime of "The Call of Cthulhu" is fictionalized by Lovecraft as the appropriate reaction to the apprehension of the occult truth of the ordinary. This horrible awareness of the ephemerality of the ordinary emerges in the "The Call of Cthulhu" not directly because of the gelatinous, aeon-old monster sleeping in the Pacific. Following the twisting logic of narrative, it emerges, rather, out of viewing a piece of modernist art, a plastic sculpture, still wet, that evokes antiquity. This strange sculpture, this enduring form, results in the transmission of occult knowledge about our ordinary realities: they are temporary domestications of strangeness, screens for dismissing a vast cosmic unfolding signified compactly in the story as Cthulhu wakes up: "After vigintillions of years great Cthulhu was loose again, and ravening for delight" (167). Here it is the word "vigintillion" that is key. Meaning ten to the 120th power, it evokes the temporal vastness that functions as a horrifying foil to human time.

The negative sublime is not indefiniteness, a threatening obscurity in the Burkean sense; nor is it an exhilarating boundlessness conceived that confirms the awesome power of the human mind in the Kantian sense. It is an inescapable truth founded on a conceptual framework informed by a science and is therefore more akin to Burkean and
Kantian beauty than the sublime. Cthulhu, like Benjamin's angel of history with wings caught in the winds of history, is beautiful.
Chapter 11: The Transgressions of Lovecraft's Fictional Modernists

I want to emphasize the resemblances between the modernists and the "shadow modernists" of Weird Tales writing afterwards in the age of "modernist reflection," but only to a point. The elements that distinguish them have, in large part, been the central concern of this dissertation. The modernists pioneered aesthetic techniques for making enduring forms that held in tension the experience of novelty, and these aesthetic objects--"devices" that stabilized novelty--were believed to invigorate experience degraded by habit. The shadow modernists of Weird Tales, however, following them, did not set out to engineer new techniques. Instead, they used an old technique--realism--in order to marshal a new one--modernism. Only in this way grotesque way did they produce a new technique. They are artists, but they are also critics of art; their enterprise troubles the distinction between criticism and art. I imagine the shadow modernism of Weird Tales as an attempt to understand the new "art devices" that were the fruit of earlier pioneering efforts. If the modernists thought of their task as a science for producing new techniques and new experiences, the Weird Tales writers and Lovecraft thought of their task as descriptive, tracing the implications of those technique.

But their project was not merely descriptive, but also evaluative. For the Weird Tales writers, and Lovecraft in particular, the knowledge transmitted by the enduring forms of modernism was dangerous, an occult truth better left occult. Using realism to stage confrontations with the non-representational forms of modernism was dramatized by these writers over and over as a violation, a transgression represented as the transmission of an occult truth about the ordinary, about the brevity of our lives, about the fragility of the ordinary worlds we carve out for ourselves in the midst of universal
strangeness. Near the end of his life, after he had ceased writing fiction, Lovecraft struggled to express this thesis in a critical register. For example, in a 1935 essay titled, "Heritage or Modernism: Common Sense in Art Forms," published in a 1935 issue of Hyman Bradofsky's amateur journal, The Californian, H.P Lovecraft puts forth an argument in defense of traditional art styles and thereby censures those ones he characterizes by their intense levels of novelty. As a short-hand he refers to these innovative styles and productions as "modernism," and as concrete examples of the "art" he means to refer to by this term, he cites "Gertrude Stein," "Picasso," "James Joyce," "Frank Lloyd Wright," and others. He criticizes these artists for their belief that "all art ought to be divorced completely from tradition and from earlier art-forms" ("Heritage" 191). In response to the belief he attributes to these innovators of art, he scolds, "Remove all sources of familiarity—all the subtle landmarks supplied by what we know of the past—and no phase of art or life can have more than the slenderest vestige of appeal, beauty, or meaning" ("Heritage" 191). The risk here is nihilism. The subjective quality of familiarity and the social one of established formal convention, Lovecraft aligns with traditional art-forms, and in his enthusiasm elevates them to existential proportions: "There can be no such thing as value, purpose, direction, or meaning, or even interest, except in a strictly local and relative sense" ("Heritage" 191).

Lovecraft's scarecrow modernism in "Heritage or Modernism" is, of course, a caricature based less on an actual understanding of historical modernism— a largely academic concept— and more on an abstraction derived from experiencing modernist works out of their contexts, disassociated from the interpretive communities that understood their unique idiom. For example, one of the central premises in Lovecraft's
essay, modernism's antagonistic relationship to tradition, is wrong. It does not take into consideration the extent to which many of the artists typically designated as modernists in classic and contemporary studies were concerned primarily not with severing their ties to artistic tradition but with the problem of reinvigorating that tradition, to salvaging it in an inauthentic world. But Lovecraft's inaccurate rendition of historical modernism is of less interest here when compared to his fictionalized distortion of modernism, a fiction that, when properly scrutinized, yields a complex theory of novelty and aesthetic production as a science that produces dangerous knowledge about the ephemerality of the experience of the ordinary. This final chapter focuses on Lovecraft's many fictional modernists and the modernist art they create and how their artistic enterprises are fictionalized as transgressive assaults on the ordinary.

Many of Lovecraft's short stories fictionalize artists as characters who produce knowledge-generating art clearly marked as severed from established aesthetic traditions, and can, in this way, be interpreted as modernists, particularly when the author's concrete historical situation in the "age of modernist reflection" is taken into consideration. Furthermore, unlike Lovecraft's many expository polemics and parodies where he censures historical modernism directly, this literary discourse featuring fictional "modernists" allows him to preserve the rich complexities of his reflections on modernist art as an occult science. But unlike Lovecraft's critical discourse, literary language asks for responsible translation. This is what I propose to do. I highlight a few key examples of what I call Lovecraft's quasi-modernists (I drop the "quasi" for convenience) and the knowledge-producing modernist art they create at their (and our) peril. I then trace an aesthetic theory his mode of fictionalizing artists and art objects outline.
I argue that modernist artistic effort in these key instances is portrayed as a form of occult research, a struggle to bring into perception the cosmos-at-large, to bring its telescopic and microscopic scales into the local space of the ordinary. In other words, modernism is framed as a transgressive totalizing gesture that juxtaposes incommensurate ontological planes of space and time. Home and hearth, coffee and madeleine, are thrown out of focus, made strange by the yawning vastness of outer space and cosmic time. Joyce's "mythic method," D.H. Lawrence's uncovering of primitive energies, Conrad's struggle to make us see, Woolf's attempt to formalize the intangible quality that distinguishes the post-Edwardian world, what Schorer would call "techniques of discovery" thus emerge from Lovecraft's perspective as nothing less than the cruel violations of the philosopher in Plato's allegory: the modernist artist produces strange devices for extracting the unsuspecting dweller in the grotto wondering at the shadows. The modernist art object reveals the ephemerality of all realities. Thus, the "shadow" in "shadow modernism" also refers to the phenomena the Weird Tales writers desire to preserve: ordinary reality is the shadow on the wall, is the shadows on the wall. They do not wish to leave the grotto. They are afraid of the philosopher, who, to them, the modernist resembles. Whatever is outside of the grotto, beyond the horizon of the literary effect of reality, can mean nothing to them.

"From Beyond"

Not all of Lovecraft's stories treated here fictionalize artists as engaged in scientific research or art objects as prosthetic devices for perceiving an otherwise hidden reality, what I have been calling the occult truth of the ordinary. Some of his earlier, pre-Weird Tales stories invert this process and fictionalize scientists that express artistic
qualities who produce devices that resemble art. Lovecraft's earlier tale, "From Beyond," is a good example of this type of narrative.

Published in 1920 in the privately printed magazine, *The Recluse*, H.P. Lovecraft's "From Beyond" offers an example of Lovecraft's early attempts to imagine the artistic enterprise as a scientific research for producing a prosthetic device, an art object, for lifting the veil, for learning the occult truth of the ordinary. This story of a mad scientist and his friend can be seen as having all the parts, at least at an embryonic stage, of that distorted vision of modernism as a science for producing knowledge outlined above and embedded in works published in and by *Weird Tales* writers. Adopting the outsider perspective of the artists who would congregate around that experimental magazine, we see that "From Beyond" is not only a story of weird science, a proto-version of what Hugo Gernsbeck in 1927 would come to call "scientifiction"; it is also a story fictionalizing modernism as a grotesque and dangerous blending of scientific and artistic discourses, a suturing together of realism and modernism, empiricism and mathematics, poetry and prose. In this way, I see "From Beyond" as a story of a critic, a modernist artist, and a modernist art object, conceived here as a strange device that amplifies to cosmic levels the human sensorium.

Considered in this way, this story is a beginning in establishing an alternative vision to the mainstream "scientistic" frame of modernism as publicized in the critical writings of figures like Schorer (who was a *Weird Tales* contributor), Pound, Eliot and Mencken, and many more. It will no doubt prove to be that less flattering alternative, to be sure, but nevertheless the more honest one. As will be shown, "From Beyond" strikingly literalizes and dramatizes canonical articulations of key facets of modernist
aesthetics, articulations that came well before modernism, such as Poe's "commencing with the consideration of an effect" in "The Philosophy of Composition," to some that followed on the heels of modernism, such as Viktor Shklovsky's concept of "estrangement," published in *Theory of Prose* in 1929. In his chapter "Art as Device," Shklovsky discusses an abstract, merely conceptual "device of art" that "estranges objects and complicates form." Accordingly, in Lovecraft's "From Beyond," we have an artistic device that makes the world strange in distinct but nevertheless approximate ways.

The story begins with the narrator lamenting the bodily (even racial) changes undergone by his friend, the brilliant yet melancholy Crawford Tillinghast, as a result of his intense "physical and metaphysical researches" (59): "It is not pleasant to see a stout man suddenly grown thin, and it is even worse when the baggy skin becomes yellowed or grayed" (59). He attributes this wilting of Tillinghast's body, his racial change, to his excessive study of "science and philosophy," and frames the mixing of scientific inquiry and aesthetic feeling as a dangerous transgression: "These things should be left to the frigid and impersonal investigator for they offer two equally tragic alternatives to the man of feeling […]; despair, if he fail in his quest, and terrors unutterable and unimaginable, if he succeed" (60). What is the terrible nature of Tillinghast's grotesque blending of science and art? The demented Tillinghast outlines the concerns of his project in this way:

What do we know […] of the world and the universe about us? […] With five feeble senses we pretend to comprehend the boundlessly complex cosmos, yet other beings with wider, stronger, or different range of senses might not only see very differently the things we see, but might see and study whole worlds of
matter, energy, and life which lie close at hand yet can never be detected with the
senses we have. […] I believe I have found a way to break down the barriers.
(60).

How does Tillinghast plan to amplify his sensorium? Drawing on his scientific and
aesthetic knowledge, he has conceived and constructed a strange prosthetic device that
will awake sleeping senses, and in this way literalizes, I think, a typical claim like
Pound's that leverages the mythology of science to execute a thesis about the new art:
"Any work of art which is not a beginning, an invention, a discovery is of little worth"
(82). Growing agitated at his friend, the narrator's, confusion, Tillinghast describes his
device thus: "Listen to me! The waves from that thing are waking a thousand sleeping
senses in us […] I have seen the truth, and I intend to show it to you" (62). He turns the
device on without waiting for the narrator's consent, and it works. The narrator cannot
speak as his sensory organs are amplified and as a series of novel sensations perceived,
through an expanded sensorium, begin to come. Notably, he describes his experience in
aesthetic terms, he frames it as experiencing a new type of music:

The picture was very vivid for a while, but gradually gave way to a more horrible
conception; that of utter, absolute solitude in infinite, sightless, soundless space.
[…] Then from the farthest regions of remoteness, the sound softly glided
into existence. It was infinitely faint, subtly vibrant, and unmistakably musical,
but held a quality of surpassing wildness which made its impact feel like a
delicate torture of my whole body. (63)

The narrator's aesthetic pleasure in this strange music is short-lived, however, for, after
struggling to describe its beauty to his demented friend, he is commanded forcefully,
"Don't move [...] for in these rays we are able to be seen as well as to see" (63). Though the scientism of modernism may create awesome works of art, it is nevertheless a transgression and brings consequences. Hearing the warning, the narrator is, of course, horrified. Unable to speak, his eyes bulge as Tillinghast increases the vibrations of the device that expand the sensorium. Thousands of dormant sensory organs continue to be activated by Tillinghast's machine, and the tortured narrator is unable to stop the demented artist-scientist. In Tillinghast's pleasure in subjecting his friend to the effects of his aesthetic device, we have a vision of the modernist artist as torturer, a recurrent motif taken up on many later Weird Tales stories. A provocative passage from Clark Ashton Smith's "The Isle of the Torturers," published in Weird Tales in March of 1933, demonstrates this. This is the story of the inhabitants of the island of Uccastrog, and of their king, Ildrac, all of whom have grown weary with ennui. They have taken torture as their "art" and have become "artists" of it, producing artistic productions designed to cause pain through every sensory organ of the protagonist who is tortured:

They racked his ears with cacophonous sounds; with evil flutes that chilled the blood and curdled it upon his heart; with deep drums that seemed to ache in all his tissues; and thin tabors that wrenched his very bones. Then they compelled him to breathe the mounting fumes of braziers wherein the dried gall of dragons and the adipocere of dead cannibals were burned together with a fetid wood. Then, when the fire had died down, they freshened it with the oil of vampire bats (Sorcerer 176-77)

Like the torturers who have adapted cacophonous music and various scents to torture their victim, Tillinghast continues to increase the horrible sensory-expanding vibrations
of the machine, to the extent the narrator, incapacitated the quantity of impressions, experiences a moment of absolute novelty and formlessness. Form dissolves:

Indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise were mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every known thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities. It likewise seemed that all the known things entered into the composition of other unknown things and vice versa. Foremost among the living objects were inky, jellyfish monstrosities which flabbily quivered in harmony with the vibrations from the machine. (64)

The narrator shudders convulsively at these perceptions of absolute novelty, and Tillinghast, perceiving his victim's horror, shouts, "Have I not succeeded in breaking down the barrier; have I not shown you worlds that no other living men have seen?" (65). On a thematic level Tillinghast expresses the technical triumph the "shadow modernists" who set out first to establish the literary effect of reality and then to violate it to transmit via an affect the occult truth of the ordinary. The veil has been lifted and the occult truth of the ordinary has been revealed.

After this outburst, the narrator notices a significant change has come over his friend: "His eyes were pits of flame, and they glared at me with what I now saw was overwhelming hatred. The machine droned detestably" (65). Tillinghast then makes his intentions known: "You tried to stop me; you discouraged me when I needed every drop of encouragement I could get; you were afraid of the cosmic truth, you damned coward, but now I've got you!" (65). Intending to murder the narrator because of his discouragement, Tillinghast then screams out a tirade, paraphrasing the occult truth of ordinary: "Do you fancy there are such things as form or matter? I tell you, I have struck
depths that your little brain can't picture. I have seen beyond the bounds of infinity and
drawn down demons from the stars... I have harnessed the shadows that stride from world
to world to sow death and madness [...] Space belongs to me, do you hear?" (65)
Almost driven insane by his former friend, the story ends tritely when the narrator
brandishes a revolver and shoots—not at Tillinghast, but at his machine. From
Lovecraft's perspective, Tillinghast is nothing less than a symbol for T.S. Eliot;
Tillinghast's machine is nothing less than his poem, *The Waste Land.*

Like a nervous child imagining a monster based upon a large, slanting shadow,
Lovecraft has here read the shadow cast by scientistic modernism and fashioned a
distorted vision of it: the artist and critic are madmen engaged together in cultivating
inhuman sensations through transgressively blending science and art in order to create art
devices that torturously expand the human sensorium to perverse, intolerable levels, to a
state where form recedes and the fundamental ephemerality of ordinary phenomena is
revealed. In their quest after novelty, the modernists are destroying the fragile conditions
that make the establishment of the ordinary possible.

I am less interested here in the degree of Lovecraft's distortion of modernism and
more interested in the possible insights into historical modernism his distorted vision may
point toward. What is the significance between the notable similarity between (1)
Lovecraft's Crawford Tillinghast "harnessing shadows and striding from world to world
to sow death and madness" and (2) Edmund Wilson's "Ideal of Axel," his famous
axiomatic archetype of the modernist artist in wide circulation in the age of modernist
reflection I am concerned with here, described by Wilson in this way: "Neurotic
nobleman who arranges for himself an existence which will completely insulate him from
the world and facilitate the cultivation of refined and bizarre sensations" (264). "Insulate him from the world." "Cultivation of bizarre sensations." For Lovecraft, these two ideas are incommensurate. The cultivation of bizarre sensations is equivalent to destroying ordinary reality.

**The Music of Erich Zann**

The family resemblance between Lovecraft's fictional modernists and the "Ideal of Axel" theorized by Wilson as the prototypical modernist artist becomes clearer, I think, in stories where Lovecraft portrays not scientists as artists (an indirect route) but rather artists as scientists engaged an enterprise that resembles less individual subjective expression and more collaborative research. Although many characters featured in earlier Lovecraft stories manifest the acute sensibilities of artists, or are directly portrayed as artists—e.g. Jervas Dudley of "The Tomb," Joe Slater of "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," Crawford Tillinghast of "From Beyond," Randolph Carter of the Dream Cycle, Iranon of "The Quest of Iranon" —none of them can be interpreted firmly as modernists until the strange violist of "The Music of Erich Zann." In this story, the narrator, lodging on the fifth story of a house on the strange "Rue d'Auseil," comes into contact with the a decrepit hermit, Erich Zann, who, like Wilson's Axel, seems to be completely insulated from the world and lives alone as a hermit in attic garret of the same house; however, his at stake in his artistic enterprise is all of reality.

Zann is described as a violist who is described as possessing "highly original genius" (*Complete Fiction* 175). Consider how Zann's music is described as being disconnected from all previous traditions of music familiar to the narrator: "I was haunted by the weirdness of his music. Knowing little of art myself, I was yet certain that none of
his harmonies had any relation to music I had heard before" (175). It is related that Zann's beautiful music has attracted the attention of a hostile force, an incorporeal essence or spirit manifested as a kind of horrible dissonance, a note of music, a force that can only be kept at bay by Zann's playing. And when it arrives, it threatens to drown out Zann's music. Whereas Zann's music is complex, this opposing non-musical dissonance is cruelly simple, is described as "a shriller, steadier note not from the viol; a calm, deliberate, purposeful, mocking note from away in the west" (179). At the end of the story, Zann fails in warding off the entity, and, as a result, something horrible happens: the narrator perceives the occult truth of the ordinary as a visual phenomenon beyond the attic window: "I saw no city spread below, and no friendly lights gleaming from remembered streets, but only the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance with anything on earth" (179).

This is the occult truth of the ordinary translated into a literary image. This is a less powerful technique than Lovecraft's later stories where rather than describe the occult truth of the ordinary as a coherent phenomena he formalizes it through the de-reification of the literary effect of reality.

Strangely, unlike Tillinghast's device, Zann's art does not bring about the dissolution of form but rather holds it firmly in play. Zann's genius is in how it can hold the forms of ordinary reality together. In this passage we have displayed in literary discourse a moral idea Lovecraft proposed elsewhere in a critical register: "There can be no such thing as value, purpose, direction, or meaning, or even interest, except in a strictly local and relative sense" ("Heritage" 191). In the virtual world of this story, Zann is both modernist who transgresses and also a traditional artist who keeps occult the
ephemerality of ordinary realities. This story is an important instance of Lovecraft's struggling with ambivalence toward modernism, of his struggling to establish a coherent idiom to express what he thinks about modernism. Zann is both the modernist artist who, striking out into new, original aesthetic realms *transgresses*. And through the transgression of his artistic enterprise Zann has brought upon himself and the narrator the stark reality of humanity's existence in a hostile universe, for which the terrible anti-musical entity stands as avatar. But Zann is also a more positive interpretation of modernism as well. In a thinly allegorical register, Lovecraft fictionalizes the Zann, the modernist musician, as a steward of human meaning in a cosmos hostile to it. From this perspective, the literary character of Erich Zann facing his antagonist, a hostile chaos, formalizes a tension central to modernism, one apotheosized on the occasion of T.S. Eliot's analysis of James Joyce in his 1923 "Ulysses, Order, Myth": (1) the vision of the artist as acutely aware of the chaos of modernity, and (2) the vision of the artist as shaping and ordering that chaos. Compare the description in "The Music of Erich Zann" of Zann as he plays in direct opposition to cosmic chaos with T.S. Eliot's famous analysis of Joyce's "mythical method" in *Ulysses*. Zann stands in agonizing opposition to the musical entity that heralds the occult truth of the ordinary: "It would be useless to describe the playing of Erich Zann on that dreadful night. It was more horrible than I had ever overheard, because I could now see the expression on his face, and could realise that this time the motive was stark fear" (*Complete Fiction* 179). Zann is keeping the occult truth of the ordinary as bay by virtue of his playing. And here is Eliot on Joyce's rhetoric of fiction in *Ulysses*: "It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary
history" (*Selected Prose* 176). We can see a resemblance in Zann and Joyce here. They are both artists facing the chaos of the cosmos as their enemy, attempting to preserve the ordinary against the erosions of accelerating change.

Many stories following "The Music of Erich Zann" feature modernist artists whose artistic enterprise takes them beyond established aesthetic traditions. Artists like the unnamed narrator of "Hypnos" (a sculptor) and his companion (who is transformed into a statue) instill intense subjective feeling into an kind of scientific project referred to as "impious exploration[s]" that are indescribable "for want of symbols or suggestions in any language" (207). The narrator of "The Hound" and his companion, St. John, construct grotesque art objects out of skeletons, play music on "nauseous musical instruments" that produce "dissonances of exquisite morbidity and cacaodamoniacal ghastliness," embark on "predatory excursions" to gather "tomb-loot," described as "artistically memorable events" (217). It significant that these transgressive activities are undertaken in response to their boredom with previously established aesthetic movements. Of course the figure of Randolph Carter can be brought up, and by slightly reframing his fictional theory of indescribability depicted in "The Unnameable," he can be seen as struggling the same exigencies as those frequently cited as those of the modernists: the challenges associated with the task of aestheticizing or even describing novelty as such in a disenchanted modern world pervaded by novelty.

**The "Modern Studies" of Richard Upton Pickman**

The last of Lovecraft's fictional modernists I treat here is Richard Upton Pickman. Pickman is directly represented as an experimental, modernist artist. The narrator, Thurber's, description of Pickman's work evokes a similar sensationalism to that that
waked modernism's first appearance: "There's no use trying to tell you what they were like, because the awful, the blasphemous horror, and the unbelievable loathsomeness and moral foetor came from simple touches quite beyond the power of words to classify" (*Complete Fiction* 385). Like Zann's music and many other examples of the fictional art depicted by Lovecraft, Pickman's work is unfamiliar to such a pitch that is cannot be exhibited to the public, a situation referred to by Thurber: "As you know, the club wouldn't exhibit it, and the Museum of Fine Arts wouldn't accept it as a gift; and I can add that nobody would buy it, and so Pickman had it right in his house till he went" (382).

What comes into sharp focus in this story, a point vaguely outlined in "The Call of Cthulhu," is the nature of the relationship of the modernist artist to the occult truth of the ordinary. This story dramatizes an intriguing theory of the temporal nature of the ordinary, the way the strangeness of the past can intrude into the ordinary spaces of the present. This relationship can be seen clearly in the narrator's exploration of Pickman's private art collection at Copp's Hill. After a nighttime walk across Boston to Pickman's North End studio, the demented modernist shows Thurber his paintings depicting the witch and ghoul-haunted New England past. After being stirred to his core by these depictions of dog-faced ghoul changelings haunting Puritan homes and hearths, Pickman asks if Thurber would like to see his "modern studies" (386). Thurber is affected by the alteration of historical context and describes his reaction in this way: "I'd just about recovered my wind and gotten used to those frightful pictures which turned colonial New England into a kind of annex of hell [...]. The other chamber had shewn a pack of ghouls and witches overrunning the world of our forefathers, but this one brought the horror
right into our own daily life!" (387). This suggests it that modernist art only appears to be a discrete "new" tradition. The bizarre, indescribable qualities of modernist art, in spite of their appearance as a new "tradition," a new style, are in fact not new styles, but rather forms that transcend history, that stand out of the process of the establishment of tradition. Historical contexts do not apply them, the way historical contexts do not apply to mathematical formulas. Hence, they tend to be described in terms of mathematical terms: as spheres, cones, cubes, and curves. Their novelty, their strangeness, is not intrinsic to there being indexes of a particular time. They are enduring forms of modernism fictionalized by the shadow modernists that transcend time, which is why they can function as indexes to throw into focus the ephemerality of the ordinary.

In the context of viewing Lovecraft's fictional artists, the modernist who deviates from established traditions of aesthetic production does not create something new at all. The novelty of their work is an illusion as novelty is a function of time and perception. Rather than create novelty, these artists turn away from what Clark Ashton Smith termed "the human aquarium" to face directly the totality of the cosmos. In bringing the ghoul-haunted New England past into the present day, Pickman (and perhaps even Lovecraft) reveal their structural resemblance, in terms of aesthetic strategies, to the very modernists they censure. They do so by manifesting acutely what T.S. Eliot famously termed "the historical sense" in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the
whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (92).

**The Inhumanity of the Modernist Artist**

Lovecraft's fictional modernist offers a vision of modernist art as a dangerous enterprise, a grotesque, scientific discourse of knowledge that threatens to take away one's humanity and expose the ordinary as an ephemeral configuration that staves off absolute strangeness. And yet, in spite of strangeness of its plot elements, on the level of allegory Lovecraft transformation of the modernist into a monster is no more cynical, I think, than certain canonical accounts of modernist genius, for example, Malcolm Cowley's interpretation of James Joyce's life:

He looks at people as if they did not exist. At night, when he retires, he is left alone with three realities: thought, sleeplessness and migraine. He suffers from incurable headaches.—And why, we asked ourselves […] does genius lead to this inhuman state in which suffering is the only reality? Why does it seem to exist in the atmosphere of a closed room, a sickroom, where the blinds are always drawn to exclude movement and sunlight of the streets and where there is nothing living, not even a red geranium in a pot? (131).

What clearer image of the "inhuman state in which suffering is the only reality" than the human form carved of obsidian, a look of ecstatic horror frozen eternally on the face, an image that ends another shadow-modernist text, Clark Ashton Smith's "The Devotee of Evil."

The stories of fictional modernists I have treated here can be seen as polemics critiquing scientistic modernism framed as an inhuman form of art. These stories convey
in a literary register what Ortega y Gasset argues in a philosophical one in *The Dehumanization of Art*, that the new art of his pre-fascist Spain reveals not a love but a hatred of art. The phenomenon of the new science of art, for Ortega y Gasset, does not signify, as we might be inclined to frame in other contexts as a worshipful gesture, a "purification" of art. Not so for the shadow modernists. To turn art into a science is to destroy it, to transform it from inherently human to something without human value at all, such as a drop of acid or a sliver of platinum: "What is behind this disgust at seeing art mixed up with life? Could it be disgust for the human sphere as such, for life, for reality? Or it is rather the opposite: respect for life and unwillingness to confuse it with art, so inferior a thing as art?" (29). For the shadow modernists, the modernists creation of enduring forms brings forth the question, "Why reveal the occult truth of the ordinary?" I can imagine Lovecraft asking, "Why destroy our reality by subjecting it to the darkness of star spaces?"

***

In an 1919 essay titled, "The Case for Classicism," published in a privately printed magazine, *The United Co-operative*, an exasperated H.P. Lovecraft lashes out at the modernist verse that disgusted him: "We moderns have overreached ourselves, and are blundering along with a dislocated sense of values amidst a bustle of heavy trivialities and false emotions which find reflection in the vague, hectic, hurried, impressionistic language of decadence" (213). Near the end of his life, in the age of modernist reflection, his anti-modernism, still evident, has nevertheless become comparatively subdued. For example, writing in a 1934 anti-modernist polemic titled, "Heritage or Modernism: Common Sense in Art Forms," he adopts the stance of a sensible sage: "Every age has
additions, subtractions, and modifications to make to its inherited art traditions. No one argues in behalf of a rigidly static art. [...] The point is that there is no need to destroy and replace accustomed aesthetic fundamentals when they can so much more advantageously be retained and developed as reason and conditions dictate. (197).

"Destroying and replacing accustomed aesthetic fundamentals." This is a strange sin to affix to a movement in the arts that many of its key figures, like Eliot and Mencken, present as an effort to purify and make scientific aesthetic technique.

Lovecraft got it wrong here. Yet, what he is ill-equipped to argue in a critical register, interpreting his and his disciples work as a distortion of modernism will allow him to argue in a literary one: the risk posed by modernism is not in destroying or replacing aesthetics fundamentals; it is the terrible possibility that, just perhaps, one of us might discover them; and in discovering aesthetic fundamentals--the truth about form and matter--the ordinariness of novelty and the strangeness of ordinariness becomes clear. Form becomes a matter of perspective. Matter becomes something we can shape together.
Conclusion: Lovecraft's Final Story, Or, Am I On This Planet?

It has become commonplace knowledge that a new type of mimetic writing in Western Europe, the novel, emerged in the early eighteenth century with the quasi-experimental and fictional yet nevertheless journalistic narratives of Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson in the Anglophone context. The mysterious formation of this undeniable generic crystallization has most often been domesticated from a sociological, biographical, or antiquarian perspective: the novel is explained as a symbolic outgrowth and epiphenomenon of developments in printing technology, the dissemination of hypotheses and worldviews deriving from the emerging positivistic sciences, and the individual innovating efforts of authors who found themselves socially functioning as journalist, cleric, poet, dramatist, philosopher, entertainer, propagandist, and theologian at the same time.

A less Marxian view of the novel and the reality effect it formalized--a multi-modal perspective that attempts to incorporate the materialistic, the discursive, and the hagiographic--is that the realism of the novel emerged as a symbolic space for narrativizing and ultimately reifying a historically "novel" bourgeois social experience and reality. In other words, in order to write the novel English writers needed first to experience the declamation or at least demotion of medieval mysticisms and the sacred and then collude in the widespread worship of a new secular idol occupying the sad hollow left by those now outmoded Medieval beliefs: an external, empirical material reality inhabited by individual blobs of quickened slime governed by consistent yet impersonal natural laws that had first a material rather than spiritual substance.
Few critics would deny that the early innovations of the novel were an outgrowth of what Max Weber refers to as the "disenchantment of the world," and fewer still that the nineteenth century stylistic irruption known as "high realism" and "naturalism," an intensification and emphasis of the "disenchanted," "positivistic," and "impersonal" premises conditioning novelistic discourse, is likewise associated to a parallel intensification of positivism and secularization. Darwin begot Zola. Marx begot Eliot. Freud begot Conrad. From the corpse of god burst Scott, Balzac, and Dreiser.

But with the rise of the novel--that de facto narrative rhetoric of the secular, "disenchanted" world--came also, quick on its heels, the rise of the gothic novel, a culturally degraded category of subliterary discourse expressing an undecided and downright skeptical relationship with the secular, "natural" world of science quite distinctive from that of the realistic novel. We can see in the radical agnosticism of shadow modernism a kindred resemblance between the gothic and Weird Tales.

Whereas the various realisms associated with the novel defined itself by its innovative and powerful techniques used to represent vividly concrete and empirically perceivable and measurable spaces and temporalities by reifying "reality" principles of history, biology, psychology and costume--in word, ordinary realities--rather than and "abstract" spiritual realities--such as the "good," "evil," "spirit"--the degraded gothic novel, on the other hand, distinguished itself not by its capacity to create new techniques but its capacity to use new techniques and to juxtapose them with other, older ones: it first engaged the new rhetoric of realism to produce the literary effect of reality pioneered by the early novelists and then, in the spirit of the ancient who first put human head and torso to horse body, grotesquely juxtaposed violations to that empirical reality by
introducing old literary images derived from myth and medieval lore deliberately constructed to evoke the other world, the "outside" of reality suggested by the symbols and allegories of medieval religious experience: the piping satyr, the scythe-wielding skeleton, the fires of hell, the curving goat horns of Satan. In the pages of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, Shelley, and Stoker, the corpse of god re-integrated itself and shambled around as zombie, vampire, and monster.

In this view, the formal rhetoric of the gothic novel and the effect it produces is literally "grotesque" in the primal sense of the term "grotesque" as signifying impure hybridity through its referencing of the ancient cave paintings depicting strange human-animal hybrids: the gothic combines the new technique with the old technique. Like Frankenstein in his laboratory and Lovecraft in \textit{Weird Tales}, the gothic writer threads together disparate parts incommensurate in the light of day in the shadows.

The gothic novel and shadow modernism leverage the innovations of secular and "disenchanted" novelistic discourse and folds into its symbolic structure the literary images evoking spiritual reality of a previous period (gothic) and period to come (shadow modernism). The gothic and shadow modernism are animated by a kind of historical spiral: a drag into the past and an acceleration into the future around a point of stability. In the gothic, the outward thrust of new technique is checked abruptly by a violent return of the old technique; in shadow modernism, the old technique is propelled into the future by the new technique. It is Sisyphus with his rock and his hill: the labor up the hill represents the efforts to innovate technique, and the rock's sad fall represents the violence of the drag of the old style or the propulsion of the new. If the rhetoric of realism and modernism represents literature's sometime alliance with the enlightenment, the
grotesque rhetoric of the gothic and shadow modernism expresses literature's subsequent
and even parallel alliance with the dark ages (those past and to come).

The gothic resembles the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* in its hybrid
structure but deviates from it in its temporal dynamics. Whereas the gothic sutures an old
technique to a new technique, the shadow modernist sutures a new technique
(modernism) to an old technique (realism). The occult truth of the ordinary is revealed in
the gothic by expressing the persistence of the medieval past; the occult truth of the
ordinary is revealed in shadow modernism as by augury, by expressing the radical
changes that are quickly approaching in the future. In both the gothic and shadow
modernism, we have the literary effect of reality violated, and the ephemerality of
experience is revealed.

To describe the rhetoric of gothic narratives as hybrid, as combing the innovation
of realism with the traditional literary imagery of western mysticism and myth, echoes
conventionalized formalistic accounts of novelistic discourse that, in their ahistorical and
strictly formalist approach, would not be theoretically fit to distinguish the gothic novel
from the realistic novel at all. For example, in the strictly formalist context of Bakhtin in
"Epic and Novel," the distinctiveness of novelistic discourse has nothing whatsoever to
do with the historically emergent empirical realities hypothesized by the positivistic
sciences; rather, the novel is, par excellence, defined by its essential generic hybridity, its
ability to absorb into its body, as in the concrete case of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*,
the diverse genres of the philosophical dialog, the spiritual memoir, the journalistic
account of colonial business proceedings, the captain's hearth-fire story, the monologue,
the sermon. Like the technologies of the stone millwheel and the computer
microprocessor, the technology of the novel always existed in theory; it only had to be "discovered." From the narrowly synchronic and formalist perspective of Bakhtin, the apparent "realism" of novelistic discourse is not a necessary and sufficient condition for its categorical distinctiveness. The realism of the novel is incidental to its generic formlessness. For Bakhtin, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Castle of Otranto* are equally novels; from the perspective of his theory, the only significant element that distinguishes the technique of Walpole from that of Defoe is that of historical emergence and differentiation, the incorporations of more genres into the insatiable genre of the novel. For Bakhtin, the novel will continue to develop steadily *ad infinitum*. It is effectively the horizon of literary innovation. It is a genre defined by its absolute generic promiscuity. The technology of the novel is like the absorbing chaos and the commensurate harmony of street art. The novel challenges the innovators to come up with something new, and then it swallows that innovation whole.

Bakhtin's theory of novelistic discourse reveals the horizon of synchronic theories of the novel. It would take an audacious and irresponsible reader to argue for the qualitative indistinguishability between, say, Marianne Dashwood getting caught in the rain, slipping, and hurting her ankle and the devil materializing and impaling Brother Ambrosio on a shelf of jagged rocks in retribution for his sins. Both are scenes from novels, but these narrative events are functioning differently, and to understand their difference will require a nod to the referential elements of literary language, not to the actual world but to virtual worlds. Bakhtin's theory fails to help us understand the subtle and no-so-subtle distinctiveness in terms of rhetoric of fiction of historically separated novel's like *Robinson Crusoe* to *Finnegan's Wake*, or even historically contemporary
ones, like *Frankenstein* and *Sense and Sensibility*. This is because of Bahkin's prejudiced "anti-representational" theory of literary language, a legacy of his modernism. To my mind, much of narrative theory also suffers from this blinding prejudice, this moratorium on the idea of the "referential nature" of literary language, the way it can and does create virtual worlds. To say something like a reality principle is operating in a scene depicting a tea party and to say a reality principle has been violated in a scene where dead organic matter is animated by a bolt of lightning is, from Bakhtin's analytic perspective, mere vagary. Both scenes are equally fictional, imaginary, unreal. This does not seem right.

For the surprisingly literal-minded Barthes, the novel calls "an effect of reality" through the cultivation of empirical concreteness and particularity, of space, of time, of character, and of idiomatic speech. Thus, the "incantatory" technique for summoning the magic of this effect of reality is, from Barthes's perspective, quite simplistic: we come to believe in--are conditioned to believe in--the virtual reality of characters and their stories in a realist novel by virtue of an approximate quantity of data and a sustained deployment of attention on the text at hand: sensory details about the phenomenal world of the novel, historical details about the characters, idiosyncrasies of these characters' speech, atmospheric touches of setting, depth of psychology, and so on. As we deploy our attention, the virtual context swells and the actual context recedes.

But this cannot be the entire truth. There is something intangible, "occult," about the dark heart of a novel, hence the famous non-theoretical nature of "fiction" admitted by the master of the novel, Henry James, in his essay "The Art of Fiction." Of the novel, he writes, "It had no air of having a theory behind it--of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison" (195). For James, the novelist experimentally
weaves together details, details, and more details taken from his experience into a consistent narrative pattern: "The only reason for the existence of the novel is that it does attempt to represent life" (197). Thus, the novel either comes to life, as Frankenstein's monster, or lays dormant, like a slumbering Count Dracula. Henry James writes: "It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being" (202). In spite of his hesitation, James tries to offer that recipe:

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it--this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. (203)

"The power to guess the unseen from the seen." "Feeling life in general so completely."

For James, the novelist emerges as a kind of initiate candidate into a mystery cult, a knower of occult secrets on par with the Magus initiate of Eliphas Levi's Transcendental Magic who possesses the first of the "seven least powers" of transcendental magus, "Samech:" "To know at a glance the deep things in the souls of men." To my mind, James's statements engage the same rhetoric as that famous chronicler of the "Doctrine and Ritual" of magic. How do writers create tangible, substantive, virtual worlds with ink and paper?

On August 26, 1928, Clark Ashton Smith wrote another Weird Tales writer, Donald Wandrei, about a story he was writing. Of his new story, "The Last Incantation," he writes that it "deals with an old sorcerer who tries to evoke the dead sweetheart of his
youth with disastrous results" (The End of the Story 259). This story was published in Weird Tales in June of 1930, alongside H.P. Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Wall" and Robert E. Howard's "The Moon of Skulls." This story allegorizes the technique of fiction as an occult science engaged in by the sorcerer Malygris. The story begins and the sorcerer is beset with a terrible ennui: "The thoughts of Malygris were dark with immitigable melancholy, and weariness filled his heart as ashes fill the hearth where a great fire has died" (18). Malygris's flame for life has burned out. To re-ignite it, he decides to use his necromancy to summon the love of his youth, Nylissa, who died long ago, "in the very semblance of all her youth and beauty" (19):

The pale unearthly glow still filled the chamber, and between Malygris and the door where hung the unicorn's head there stood the apparition of Nylissa, even as she had stood in the perished years, binging a little like a wind-blown flower, and smiling with the unmindful poignancy of youth. Fragile, pallid, and simply gowned, with anemone blossoms in her black hair, with eyes that held the new-born azure of vernal heavens, she was all that Malygris had remembered [...] (19)

Here is the writer as sorcerer, a possessor of an occult knowledge of creating an effect of reality. But Malygris's art fails him. The youth and beauty of Nylissa does not satisfy, becomes horrible; rather than bringing the sorcerer pleasure, it serves as a mirror, an index of his own corruption and decay. Her innocence and youth throws into stark focus the violence wrought by time on Malygris: "'Are you Nylissa?' he asked--'the Nylissa whom I loved in the myrtle shaded valley of Meros, in the golden-hearted days that have gone with all dead aeons to the timeless gulf" (20). She answers him: "Yes, I am Nylissa.' Her voice was the simple and rippling silver of the voice that echoed so long in
his memory. But somehow, as he gazed and listened, there grew a tiny doubt--a doubt no less absurd than intolerable" (20). Malygris can take no pleasure in his art: "He could believe no longer in love or youth or beauty; and even the memory of these things was a dubitable mirage, a thing of greyness and dust, nothing but the empty dark and cold, and a clutching weight of insufferable weariness, of immedicable anguish" (20).

Malygris's art fails to rejuvenate experience. His art is ultimately no match for the march of time that produces the automated habits of perception, a process of decay captured in Viktor Shklovsky's famous Art as Device (1929), published the same year this story was being written: "Life fades into nothingness. Automization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war" (5).

Shadow modernism, like the gothic, is acutely cognizant of the ephemerality of our experience, the way intensity of perception diminishes into habit, living bodies dissolve into dead earth, civilizations decay into ruins, and suns burn out. In triangulating the gothic and the shadow modernists with the innovations of realism and modernism, we see two incommensurate impulses: writing that attempts to preserve the ephemerality of experience, and writing that expresses the occult truth of the ordinary. Baudelaire summed up these impulses when he wrote in the "Painter of Modern Life," "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable."

The pervasive melancholy of shadow modernism and the gothic is linked to its acute sense of time, its apprehension of the occult truth of the ordinary, and the corollary sense that death is approaching. Its insight is expressed in its preoccupation with crypts and tombs, corpses and decay, fallen civilizations, and ruins, and it reminds us that we
are but base matter disintegrating, temporary configurations of the raw stuff of the cosmos. The other side of art—the modernism of Pound, the realism of James, reminds us that we endure. In Lovecraft's "The Outsider," published in *Weird Tales* in April of 1926, at the height of the story the unnamed protagonist turns a corner and it confronted by a putrid, shambling, decaying corpse running toward him. He raises his hand to ward off the horrible avatar of death. He has run into a mirror. Compare this identification of living human being with death to Yeats, "Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing." In the end, Lovecraft embraces carbon; Yeats embraces silicon.

In the gothic's awareness of time is also an awareness that the reality we know is disintegrating. And in the shadow modernism of *Weird Tales* awareness of time is also an awareness that that processes of modernity are speeding up that rate of change, and our ability to establish ordinary, quotidian realities that we can dwell in, take a deep breath in--a deep think in--is also flagging. Like the gothic, shadow modernism is aware that are we disintegrating; it is also aware that our cities are disintegrating, our ideologies, our visions of the cosmos and our place within it.

Let Eliot's praise of Joyce's "mythic method" stand in here at least temporarily for the "classicism" of modernism in whose shadow *Weird Tales* found itself, in both senses of "finding itself," symbolically and introspectively. Let Eliot's description of Joyce's method express modernism's pretensions to create enduring forms that transcend history, what Pound thought of as beautiful "small slabs of ivory" that serve no function: "It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the
immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (12). A single
day in Dublin frozen in amber.

Joyce's *Ulysses* compared to Lovecraft's final story before death expresses a
powerful articulation of the shadow modernists' embracing of carbon. Please compare the
classicism of modernism to the modernism of shadow modernism in Lovecraft's final
work of fiction, "The Haunter in the Dark," written in November of 1935. Seven months
later, Robert E. Howard would shoot himself. Just over a year later, Lovecraft would die
of stomach cancer. Clark Ashton Smith would stop writing. And Farnsworth Wright
would retire as *Weird Tales* editor, his Parkinson's disease killing him in 1940.

The protagonist, Blake, has discovered a "crazily angled stone," a geometric piece
of sculptural art that defies mathematical description entombed in the bell tower of a
Georgian steeple. It is called the "Shining Trapehzedron." Like many unfortunate
protagonists before him, Blake gazes into the enduring form and perceives the occult
truth of the ordinary everywhere concealed and everywhere the same, and then
Lovecraft's final story ends. A story hitherto written in a conventional realist style
becomes a modernist montage that captures the disintegration of reality, the eclipse of the
ordinary by universal weirdness:

My name is Blake—Robert Harrison Blake of 620 East Knapp Street, Milwaukee,
Wisconsin. . . . I am on this planet . . . Azathoth have mercy!--the lightning no
longer flashes--horrible--I can see everything with a monstrous sense that is not
sight--light is dark and dark is light . . . those people on the hill . . . guard . . .
candles and charms . . . their priests. . . . Sense of distance gone—far is near and
near is far. [...] I am Robert Blake, but I see the tower in the dark. There is a
monstrous odour . . . senses transfigured . . . boarding at that tower window

cracking and giving way. . . . Iä . . . ngai . . . ygg. . . . (1017)

The "Shining Trapehozedron," a fictionalized modernist art object, has here revealed the occult truth of the ordinary reality of Lovecraft's beloved hometown, the setting of the story, Providence, Rhode Island in 1936. At the end of this story, Lovecraft dramatizes via the de-reification of the literary effect of reality the central thesis of the shadow modernists of *Weird Tales*: everything is ephemeral; ordinary reality is but an ephemeral stabilization of an otherwise ceaseless and universal strangeness. Moreover, it is only by virtue of the enduring form of art--standing out from time and space--that this occult truth, everywhere the same and everywhere concealed, is revealed.
Works Cited


Saler, Michael. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual*


---. Selected Letters of Clark Ashton Smith. Eds. David E. Schultz and Scott

---. *Strange Shadows: The Uncollected Fiction and Essays of Clark Ashton Smith.* Eds.


