The Cthulhian Face of E.A.P.

Sean Moreland, ed. *The Lovecraftian Poe: Essays on Influence,
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*L*ike some hellish force inexplicably reawakening after eons of hateful, brooding sleep, heralded by blasphemous, nauseating tremors and the deranged, inhuman shrieks of his frenzied worshippers . . . H. P. Lovecraft has been having a moment. His tales of horror are now canonized as high literature in editions from Penguin Classics and the Library of America. Philosophers have weighed in on the significance of his "weird" fiction—with its anxious and loquacious narrators circling around the discovery of maddening realities from other dimensions, such as the ancient gods slumbering beneath the ocean in his most famous tale, "The Call of Cthulhu"—while critics have traced his impact from Steven King and H. R. Geiger to the TV series *True Detective, Stranger Things,* and *Game of Thrones,* the latter with its "Cthulhoid religion of the Drowned God."[1]

The new attention to Lovecraft makes his relationship to his most important and most often acknowledged precursor, Edgar Allan Poe, interesting in new ways. *The Lovecraftian Poe: Essays on Influence, Reception, Interpretation, and Transformation,* a collection edited by Sean Moreland in a series edited by Barbara Cantalupo, capitalizes on the Lovecraft revival to make clear the profound debts Lovecraft and his followers owed to Poe. Its contributors are critics and literary historians (including major interpreters of Lovecraft) as well as authors of horror fiction. The work dissects the many strange growths deriving from the cross-pollination of their influences and the combined (and gleefully unhealthy) cultural impact of the authors whom S. T. Joshi, Lovecraft's prolific biographer and defender, calls in the book's preface "the two leading writers of weird or supernatural fiction in American literature and perhaps in all literature" [ix].

The book is a valuable contribution; it is the first to concentrate on the relation between these two enormously influential authors. It will be immensely useful for scholars of horror, of decadent and speculative fiction and sci-fi, and of Lovecraft. For readers of Poe it efficiently introduces Lovecraft and many of the conversations around him, making clear the strong points of contact between the two—beyond the chance parallels of their brief, often unhappy

lives, a shared attitude of proud if fallen nobility, their curious domestic relations and cult followings, and their connections to the city of Providence, where Poe spent time in 1848 in tortured pursuit of Sarah Helen Whitman and where Lovecraft spent most of his life.

Poe's influence was early and lasting. Lovecraft distilled from him a writing that keeps the reader moving forward with breathless wonder and terror toward unthinkable revelations:

> When I was seven I encountered Poe—which fixed my taste for all time, so far as the subject matter and mood of fiction are concerned. Somehow I cannot become truly interested in anything which does not suggest incredible marvels just around the corner—glorious and ethereal cities of golden roofs and marble terraces beyond the sunset, or vague, dim cosmic presences clawing ominously at the thin rim where the known universe meets the outer and fathomless abyss. The world and all its inhabitants impress me as immeasurably insignificant, so that I always crave intimations of larger and subtler symmetries than these which concern mankind. [Lovecraft in Moreland, xix]

In these few lines Lovecraft skips across the wide and varied landscape of Poe's works: the sinuous journey of the voyager in "The Domain of Arnheim," the supernatural scratchings from a dark beyond of "The Black Cat" and "The Raven," the "many things in hell" heard by the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" [*Works*, 3:792]. He hints at the uncountable expanses and sublime symmetries of the universe in Poe's spirit colloquies and in *Eureka,* as well as the signature formula of cosmic intimation in Poe's breakthrough tale of nautical discovery and shipwreck, "MS. Found in a Bottle": "It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge—some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction" [*Works,* 2:145].

Moreland's collection makes the case that Lovecraft's work was thoroughly shaped by his attempts to channel, transform, and surpass Poe—and also, in a strange folding of time, that the influence flows in the other direction: "Lovecraft's intense identification with and evangelical elevation of Poe has, for better *and* for worse, indelibly shaped Poe's place in American—and international—literature and popular culture" [introduction, xvii]. Just as in the mid–nineteenth century Baudelaire's translations, introductions, and imitations instated Poe as high priest of the cults of symbolist poetry and modernist experimentation, in the twentieth century, according to Moreland, "Lovecraft became a conduit through which Poe passed into the modern genres of horror, science fiction, fantasy, and weird fiction, and Lovecraft did more than any

other writer to cement Poe's image as a messianic master of the weird and cosmic" [xvii].

Previous waves of Poe criticism have offered us the "French face" of Edgar Allan Poe, as crafted by Valéry, Mallarmé, and Verne; his "German face," flush with the spirits of Hoffmann's ghost stories, idealist philosophy from Kant to Schelling, and romantic criticism including the Schlegels; and, in a welcome historicist return to Poe's own life and times, his "American face."[2] The present collection invites us to consider the *Cthulhian* face of Poe: to examine how his image has been tinted with the sickly, wavering light cast by his follower Lovecraft.

The Poe-Lovecraft Conjunction

As novelist John Langan puts it, "There are instances in the study of influence when we suddenly see an older writer's work in a new and interesting way because of what a newer writer's work highlights about it" [240]. And if he and his fellow contributors are right to say that the two are now difficult to separate—that there "is a specter haunting Edgar Allan Poe" in the form of "a tall man, his spare frame draped in a brown, threadbare suit" [235]—we might see this as the disciple's late revenge on the master. Lovecraft wrote in 1927 of his fateful encounter with Poe's works as a boy: "Then I struck EDGAR ALLAN POE!! It was my downfall" [Lovecraft in Moreland, 238]. Lovecraft worshipped Poe as his "God of fiction" and only with difficulty found his way out from under that influence to establish his own idiom of horror; his early tales were direct imitations, and in 1929 he agonized, "There are my 'Poe' pieces and my 'Dunsany pieces'—but alas—where are any Lovecraft pieces?" [239]. Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" makes more than one appearance: Brian Johnson argues that Lovecraft's fraught indebtedness to Poe was not confined to juvenilia but ran—unconsciously or obliquely acknowledged—through his entire writing life. Poe's influence provided the very content of Lovecraft's tales, in the "genealogical revelations, malignant forefathers, and sinister books that preoccupy" his narrators [10]; these hauntings and revivifications of feared and worshipped ancestors were figures of Lovecraft's tortured relation to Poe and "the struggle of the apprentice writer to transcend his strong precursor" [16].

Certain of the essays in Moreland's volume make visible the mixed identity of Lovecraft and Poe by juxtaposing them with a third author who creatively inherited the two of them at once. The supernatural/weird/horror novelist Cathe. Kiernan, subject of a chapter by Moreland and author of

the book's afterword, acknowledges both as a source. Moreland examines the "spectral modernism" of Kiernan's book *The Drowning Girl* [212, adopting a phrase from Fred Botting], the way in which it stages a ~~dialogue~~ among earlier images, texts, and authors, showing a character's self-reflections and serving as a host to other minds. *The Drowning Girl* references and channels both Lovecraft and Poe; we see the world through the eyes of its female narrator, Imp, whose madness manifests as the speaking of inner voices, "intrusive thoughts" that, she asserts, "even sane men and women have" [Kiernan in Moreland, 229]. These "sirens" or "hauntings" recall polyvocal strategies of modernist fiction, even as they undermine the narrator's reliability and the story world's stability. The tale brings into it Emily Dickinson's poetry and Poe's "City in the Sea," re-gendering the character "death" as a woman—one of the ways, according to Moreland, in which *The Drowning Girl* "feminizes the weird" [225] and subverts the male-dominated list of horror artists. Kiernan closes the book with her own judgment of the focal authors: "Poe puts a human face on inhumanity, rarely glimpsed in Lovecraft" [242]. "But reading Lovecraft," she observes, "I felt a frisson I'd not felt in Poe's prose." For Kiernan, Lovecraft offers "a meatier dread, a dread of the cosmos, of deep time, and of the flesh, and the intersection of these elements"—a heady brew reawakened for her in the "body horror" of the New French Extremism, Ridley Scott's *Alien,* John Carpenter's *The Thing,* and David Cronenberg's *The Fly* [241, 242].

Another shining example of the double reception of Poe and Lovecraft is Stephen King, who gives these princes of American horror their due after claiming their throne. Alissa Burger explores how all three use unreliable narrators, requiring readers to undertake "complex negotiation" with such works as Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls," and King's "Jerusalem's Lot": "ascertaining the narrator's identity, evaluating whether that narrator's perceptions and representation of himself can be trusted, and, if dissonance is discovered between reality and the narrator's claims, parsing out the facts" [179]. King's channeling of Lovecraft-Poe manifests strongly in cinematic adaptations of his work, where the pathways of influence can be swiftly and subtly woven into the montage. A decidedly Lovecraftian New England landscape provides the setting for King's novel *The Dead Zone*, yet Poe's shadow looms long in the film Cronenberg made of it in 1980. The mournful remembrance of the lead character, played by Christopher Walken—of years that might have brought him happiness spent instead in the "dead zone" of a coma, which also grants him telepathic and prophetic powers—is underlined by his recitation midway through the film of "The Raven," while his eerie powers and haunted eyes echo the morphine-addled rambler, Augustus Bedlo, from Poe's "Tale of the Ragged Mountains." Cronenberg's adaptation, ~~in Burger's telling,~~

re-arranges King's influences into a constellation in which Poe's becomes the brightest star, though its rays bend through the gravitational field of Lovecraft.

Focused on cinematic adaptions, Murray Leeder's eye-opening study demonstrates the importance of the popular but critically underappreciated films of director Roger Corman in forging a Poe with Lovecraftian traits. Corman made several films based (increasingly loosely) on Poe's works, from 1960's *Fall of the House of Usher* to 1969's *Cry of the Banshee* ("using Poe's name on the poster and trailer but having nothing more to do with Poe than a tacked-on quotation from 'The Bells'") [173]. Leeder shows *The Haunted Palace* of 1963 to be a "palimpsestic thing" in which Poe, Poe-by-Corman, and Lovecraft all appear as sources [172]. Starting with a reading of Poe's titular poem, the film features Price playing what was fast becoming the archetype of the "Poe protagonist"—a cultivated, decadent, obsessive, torture-inclined inhabitant of a creaky ancestral home wearing a velvet smoking jacket—in a plot roughly lifted not from Poe but from Lovecraft's short novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward.* The film is set in Arkham, a familiar name from Lovecraft's universe; it makes repeated references to elements of the "Cthulhu Mythos" (Yog-Sothoth, the *Necronomicon,* the "Elder Gods"), which in fact do not appear in the original novel but were precipitated by Corman from a cloud of Lovecraftian recollections. For Leeder, "in many ways [the film's] key point of reference is more the Corman Poe series than any literary work" [173]. This dynamic was subsequently visible in the way Price came to stand in for the campy horror of the Corman mode rather than any specific Poe character, earning him a place of honor in later homages to horror—including Tim Burton's early short film *Vincent* and Price's Lovecraftian incantation ("the funk of forty thousand years") at the close of Michael Jackson's song "Thriller" and in its video by John Landis.[3]

Other essays in *The Lovecraftian Poe* undertake more linear investigations of Lovecraft's relation to his predecessor. Robert Waugh, author of several Lovecraft studies, sees the black cats of Poe and Lovecraft as figures of guilt, visitors from a nostalgic "pastoral world" [115] whose "fiery eyes" glare in judgment upon their corrupt human owners. Juan L. Pérez-de-Luque compares the imagery of vertical movement in the two authors: "texts by Lovecraft consider high spaces as source of conflict" [100], while Poe "identifies movements toward elevated positions with positive events, scientific progress, wonderful discoveries, or even a certain degree of redemptive values" [102]— although the heroine of "A Predicament," decapitated by the hand of a tower clock, might beg to differ. Sławomir Studniarz undertakes what he describes as a "new, unprejudiced look at Lovecraft's poems" [124] and reveals their allegiance to Poe's poetics as well as their capacity to "sustain the burthen of cosmic panic" [Lovecraft in Moreland, 125]; like Poe, Lovecraft sought to develop

the indefinite pleasures of beautiful sound, aiming at what he called "an effect of lyrical phantasy almost narcotic in essence—an opium pageant of dream in the language of dream, with every unnatural colour and grotesque image bodied forth in a symphony of corresponding sound" [125]. Studniarz concludes that Lovecraft is a better, or at least a more Poe-like, poet than critics have realized. Miles Tittle traces the central cosmic dream of Lovecraft's poem "The Poe-et's Nightmare" (published 1918) back not only to "Dreamland" and Poe's other oneiric rhymes or literary experiments but to the extremely popular early twentieth-century newspaper comic strips of Winsor McCay, creator of *Little Nemo in Slumberland* and *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend,* in which terrible and fantastic dreamscapes were revealed in the final frame of each installment to be the fumes of an excess of cheese pie.

Pinning down the Weird

Another point shared by Poe and Lovecraft is their rescue from the critical disdain of all but a devoted core of fanatics by an enthusiastic French reader who took them seriously on philosophical as well as aesthetic grounds. Baudelaire performed that job for Poe, while Lovecraft's recent appreciations were given a push by France's literary provocateur (and troll) Michel Houellebecq, whose 1991 study was translated into English in 2005 as *Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life,* with an introduction by Stephen King. A subsequent wave of Francophile philosophers has championed Lovecraft as the chief proponent of "the weird." Though Lovecraft made his name as a contributor to the magazine *Weird Tales*—whose fare combined fantastic and science-fictional scenarios with a good deal of schlock—the term has been given more shape and definition in Graham Harman's "weird realism." For Harman it is crucial that the monsters, colors, geometries, and the other entities Lovecraft describes move with a force, action, and reality of their own; unlike the objects addressed by constructivist, deconstructive, or "correlationalist" philosophers, these things are not projections or hallucinations, not texts or symbols. Yet despite their sensuous palpability, their being remains hidden, withdrawn—a quality of all objects, according to Harman, that Lovecraft makes vivid and dramatic: "In Lovecraft, the relation between a thing and its surface is perturbed by irregularities that resist immediate comprehension, as if the object suffered from a strange disease of the nervous system."[4] Things' weirdness, and their horror, derive both from this intrinsic elusiveness and from their indifference to human thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Lovecraft wrote:

> All my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form—and the local human passions and conditions and standards—are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. . . . [W]hen we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown—the shadow-haunted *Outside*—we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold.[5]

Mark Fisher proposed, in *The Weird and the Eerie*, that weird fiction makes it possible "to see the inside from the perspective of the outside," to sense the approach of something other, indifferent to human concepts and wishes.[6] Likewise, Eugene Thacker in his study of "the horror of philosophy" places Lovecraft (and occasionally Poe) within a long and submerged current of philosophy, literature, and cinema in which the mind is forced to encounter, with visceral intensity, its inability to make sense of or contain reality: "For writers like Lovecraft, the thought that comes to define horror is a concept with no content, an unknown in which it is thought itself which falters."[7] Unlike the Kantian sublime in its encounter with powers beyond the categories of the understanding, horror promises no redemptive restoration of ordinary reason, nor any intimation of a benevolent intention or providential plan.

According to the essay in Moreland's volume by Michael Cisco—author of *The Divinity Student,* chief example of what Thacker calls "monastery horror"[8]—Lovecraft's and Poe's cosmic horror derived from their tales' unresolved encounters with the supernatural: "following the implicit reasoning of both Poe and Lovecraft, we see that the supernatural presents itself not as it is usually understood—that is, as an alternative to madness, an aberration of mind, a mistake, a trick, or an independent transcendence of nature—but rather as the inability to distinguish between inner and outer, psychology and physics"[77]. Their tales show this very distinction to be "surprisingly elusive" [69]: "Isn't this the *cosmic horror* common to them both, the idea that, far from reflecting an orderly cosmos in orderly thoughts, the mind sees most clearly when disordered because order is an illusion in this cosmos?" [85]. Yet despite their frequent flirtation with an *acosmic* denial of order, both authors remain obsessively close to the sensuous details and dramas of empiricism; both repeatedly

depict quests for order, with detectives, scientists, and amateur scholars seeking explanations for troubling facts.

We might thus see "cosmic horror" as the result of taking empiricism and naturalism to their limits. In "Call of Cthulhu," Lovecraft wrote: "We live 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" [Lovecraft in Moreland, 202]. The distinctive move of weird fiction would be to present this limit not merely as an absence or abyss, but in the concrete, sensible form of unnamable, uncategorizable, essentially unstable phenomena.

Lovecraft's favored methods for preparing and delivering "cosmic horror" are repeated allusions to atmospheres of dread provoked by rumors and traditions, obscure and rare books, and late, shocking revelations. What is often revealed are vile enormous creatures with a lifespan beyond comprehension, gods fallen from other dimensions polluting and feeding upon our own. Their configurations make no aesthetic or functional sense to our perceptions: they may be fabricated of viscous, gelatinous materials that ooze and tremble, neither liquid nor solid, defying description, such as Yog-Sothoth, "a congeries of iridescent globes, yet stupendous in its malign suggestiveness."[9] Lovecraft's looming obelisks, quivering squids, amphibious mega-predators with multiple eyes, mouths, limbs, and tentacles approximate the indescribable. They re-vitalize, re-organize, and set into motion the "nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putrescence" into which Poe's M. Valdemar collapses at the end of his mesmeric treatment [*Works,* 3:1243]. Such beings are troubling—abject, out of place—because they defy familiar perceptual and even ontological categories: bodies with unthinkable organs. Precisely as the course of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" dramatizes, such unholy, essentially unstable quasi-matters are what one meets when human observation and experiment encounter both the limit of knowledge and the very things that surpass it.

Accordingly, Dan Clinton's outstanding essay, "The Call of Ligeia," traces links between the cosmic vision of each author and the historically specific fields of science with which they engaged. Poe's "hyperrationalism," which Clinton finds expressed most strongly in "The Philosophy of Composition," bears the marks of mechanics, physiology, and phrenology, while Lovecraft's tales pull from sections of the library that expanded after Poe's death. Lovecraft's fascination with ancient rituals and local legends, his interest in philological analyses of tomes of magic, myth, and comparative religion, resonate

with folklore studies; at the same time, the emphasis he lays on generational inheritance, degeneration, and racial difference borrows from strands of inquiry running through early twentieth-century anthropology—before the study of race, descent, and human origins was sectioned off from the study of beliefs, symbols, and the meanings of "culture." As a result of these differences in scientific sources (and the state of philosophical determinism and faith in an ordered universe at the moment in which each wrote),[10] "they pursue the same basic style with nearly opposite priorities": "Poe is the mechanical interpreter of culture, while Lovecraft is the cultural interpreter of brute mechanical nature." Clinton suggests, provocatively, that "for Lovecraft, the movement beyond culture into nature is a descent into chaos and terror, while for Poe this movement replaces arbitrary rules with certain laws, whether or not his characters are capable of understanding them" [28]. "The Philosophy of Composition" does indeed propose such "rules" for fiction, and in *Eureka* Poe assumes the pose of a super-scientist whose understanding of the mechanics of literary construction grants him insight into the motive springs of the great poem of the universe. In both cases, however, the author's position is notoriously contradictory, paradoxical, unstable; and the central (maddeningly difficult) question to raise against Clinton's formulation is whether Poe believes *any* human is capable of understanding the laws he impishly claims to intuit.

Into the Madding Mass

Lovecraft's awareness of Anglo-American thinking in biology and anthropology circa 1920 also informs his perceptions of human masses: Jeffrey Weinstock's chapter quotes from a notorious letter in which Lovecraft described crowds of non-"Aryan" immigrants he saw during the brief period he lived in New York, making him wish he had never left the hilltop in Providence: "The organic things—Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid—inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth's corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities."[11] Houellebecq argued that Lovecraft's hallucinatory dread of New York's crowds of immigrants inspired his 1925 tale "The Horror at Red Hook" about a sect of satanists operating below Brooklyn's streets. Houellebecq, whose own public statements often flirt with reactionary politics, claimed that Lovecraft's aesthetic power stems directly from his racism: "Racial

hatred provokes in Lovecraft the trance[.] poetic state in which he outdoes himself by the mad rhythmic pulse of cursed sentences; this is the source of the hideous and cataclysmic light that illuminates his final works" (Houellebecq in Moreland, 59–60).

Weinstock (seconding China Miéville) is disturbed by Houellebecq's claim and asks at his essay's close, "If the affective power of a text is derived from retrograde sociopolitical points of view, to what extent is the reader who enjoys the works implicated in approving of and disseminating those opinions? How, in short, should we read—and teach—racist texts?" [52, 64]. The question is important and timely, as the recent Lovecraft revival comes at a political moment when overt doctrines of white supremacy, ethnic nationalism, and fascism—and the twisted racial theories and myths that justify them—have returned, with grave geopolitical effects. Authors writing out of the same mix of occult folklore and racial prophecy as Lovecraft are being promoted by sinister frauds and tyrants.[12] One doesn't have to look far to find disturbing affinities and intellectual genealogies that connect Lovecraft's panicked xenophobia and anti-humanism to radical philosophical postures endorsing the end of critique and cosmic pessimism, predicting "the end of the world" or an acceleration of corporate capitalism to the point of mass collapse. The lines here are tangled and multidirectional, but at the very least they demand caution in choosing one's enthusiasms.[13] Weinstein is right, if hard to answer, in raising the question of readers' complicity with the "odious" underpinnings of texts they enjoy [64].

Specifically, Weinstock concentrates on "*the hybrid body as incomprehensible sign*" in both Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness,* whose protagonists follow in Pym's footsteps toward the South Pole [56]. The shifting status of the "half-breed" Dirk Peters in *Pym* troubles the narrative as does, in *Mountains,* the imitation of the ancient gods, the Old Ones, by their servant race, the "shoggoths," appearing in person as a "nightmare column of foetid black iridescence" [Lovecraft in Moreland, 58]. Both texts, Weinstock argues, are driven not simply by anxiety over racial difference but by the suspicion that distinctions between bodies and races are superficial and arbitrary, and that the racist's self-assurance of superiority (Pym's or Lovecraft's) is only possible through refusing to see a more fundamental identity: "As in Poe, Lovecraft's gothicized racial imaginary depends on—even as it keeps calling into question—the ability to discriminate among races and species. The true threat in Lovecraft, as in Poe, is the breakdown of those distinctions" [63].

Given the amount of work in recent decades on Poe and race, it may be worthwhile to try to pry apart the Lovecraft-Poe amalgamation at this point—if

only to recognize how *The Lovecraftian Poe*'s recurrent hermeneutic of reading Poe through Lovecraft exaggerates both admirable and unappealing traits of Poe. Weinstock summarizes the readings of Poe and "blackness" that have followed Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark,* by Joan Dayan, Terence Whalen, Dana Nelson, Teresa Goddu, J. Gerald Kennedy, and others, quoting Justin Edwards's argument that although *Pym* "contains racist discourses and bigoted expressions" it "also tries to make sense of antebellum racial conflicts, while it repeatedly deconstructs racial essentialism" [Edwards in Moreland, 55]. From this perspective (admittedly charitable to Poe and to those of us who would prefer to think that years spent studying him have not been in the service of the West's most rotten delusions and policies), we could well distinguish Lovecraft's "full-blown racist neurosis" [Houellebecq in Moreland, 59] from the moral indifference of Poe's "average racism" [Whalen in Moreland, 51]—far from heroic, intrinsic to his work and identity, but complicated by works such as *Pym* and "Hop-Frog," in which Poe reverses standard racial and political hierarchies.[14] There may well be something to the claim that both "*Pym* and *Mountains* are amazing works not *despite* their authors' racism but *because* of it" [64]—a variation of Morrison's central theme, powerfully applied by Betsy Erkkila to Poe's signature work, "The Raven."[15] Yet Poe's fluidity and complexity—his oscillations between self-assertion and dispersion—allow his texts' endless play of distinctions, judgments, and positions to bear more interesting, conflicted, and perhaps even redemptive views on politics, race, democracy, and metaphysics.

For example, a key passage near the end of *Eureka* begins with what appears to be Poe's confession of his own unshakeable sense of superiority: "The utter impossibility of any one's soul feeling itself inferior to another; the intense, overwhelming dissatisfaction and rebellion at the thought;—these, with the omniprevalent aspirations at perfection, are but the spiritual, coincident with the material, struggles towards the original Unity." Yet this very certainty, akin to contemporary "spiritualist" and "individualist" defenses of aristocracy, prepares a complete about-face. His sense of his own uniqueness suddenly becomes an argument on behalf of everyone, and thus proof of a fundamental equality: these feelings "are, to my mind at least, a species of proof far surpassing what Man terms demonstration, that no one soul *is* inferior to another—that nothing is, or can be, superior to any one soul." This new conviction then lays the ground for Poe's boldest metaphysical claim, which democratizes matter and brings spirit and God to the level of humanity while lifting humanity and matter into participation with the divine: it proves "that each soul is, in part, its own God—its own Creator:—in a word, that God—the material *and* spiritual God—*now* exists solely in the diffused Matter and Spirit

of the Universe."[16] Poe here reckons with an outside that is wholly other—the universe's spiraling circuits of electricity and matter, the unthinkable omnipotence of the divine godhead—then realizes that the call is coming from within the house: that he and It are the same. This culminating moment of cosmic horror and weird realism—implying an uncannily inclusive politics—suggests the possibility of comparing (and disentangling) Poe and Lovecraft on both metaphysical and political grounds.[17]

In the Moreland collection, such a prospect appears in Ben Woodard's essay "The Killing Crowd," which connects Poe's urban quasi-mystery "The Man of the Crowd" to Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook," both of which offer lurid views of a city's nightlife—London for Poe, and a hellish South Brooklyn for Lovecraft: "Satan here held his Babylonish court, and in the blood of stainless childhood the leprous limbs of phosphorescent Lilith were laved. Incubi and succubae howled praise to Hecate, and the headless moon-calves bleated to the Magna Mater. Goats leaped to the sound of thin accursed flutes, and aegipans chased endlessly after misshapen fauns over rocks twisted like swollen toads"—quite a night out on the F train [Lovecraft in Moreland, 201]. The story has, since Houellebecq, become a key to Lovecraft's attitudes, but Woodard generalizes Lovecraft's expressions of terror at the mixing of ethnicities and races to a more philosophical reaction against "the overproximity of life" [202] and the resurgence of the time of the ancients within the modern arrangements of the city. He then triangulates Poe and Lovecraft with the living horror author Thomas Ligotti, for whom "structures (whether metaphysical, urban, or organizational) depict the mute stupidity of existence in general." Poe, Lovecraft, and Ligotti all present the modern city as a medium, a site in which technologies of organization, knowledge, and visibility attempt to contain yet in fact expose and magnify ungovernable forms of monstrosity while burying the hidden truth of "deep crime," the secret which in Poe's tale cannot be read. Ligotti, Woodard argues, presents human consciousness as an insane eruption within "the nightmare of existence," while Lovecraft's grotesque pageant dwells on "the spatiotemporal excessiveness of life and its effects on the human" [206]. Poe, Woodard claims, is "more interested in the psychological ramifications of place" [203]. While arguably mistaken in portraying Poe's preoccupations as primarily psychological rather than ontological, the analysis of the city as medium is intriguing—if perhaps too speedy to land.

This rapidity suggests one regret about an otherwise exciting, solid, and wide-ranging collection. Woodard, a philosopher who has insightfully studied both Schelling and C. S. Peirce, could be perfectly placed to provide a fresh treatment of Poe's philosophy of nature, situated at the historical midpoint between the two.[18] Likewise, the editor, Sean Moreland, a philosophically

minded reader of Poe who has brought to light the importance of translations of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* for Poe's slippery ontology of matter, life, and technology, passes here on the chance to put Poe's own natural (and supernatural) philosophy, mythology, and other obsessions into sustained dialogue with Lovecraft's, as well as the diverse current philosophical receptions of his work.[19] For instance, Poe's willingness to test the limits of objectivity and materialism suggest there might be ways to reclaim him as a thinker in tune with the Anthropocene's apocalyptic dread, much as Donna Haraway has done for Lovecraft. In her hands, Lovecraft's god becomes a cosmo-ecological divinity presiding over "the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus," capable of exacting the dread, respect, and humility the earth's tangled matters require: "I am calling all this the Chthulucene—past, present, and to come. These real and possible timespaces are not named after SF writer H. P. Lovecraft's misogynist racial-nightmare monster Cthulhu (note spelling difference), but rather after the diverse earth-wide tentacular powers and forces and collected things with names like Naga, Gaia, Tangaroa (burst from water-full Papa), Terra, Haniyasu-hime, Spider Woman, Pachamama, Oya, Gorgo, Raven, A'akuluujjusi, and many many more."[20] Both Poe and Lovecraft invite philosophical scrutiny, but Lovecraft has recently received the greater share. The full majesty of Poe's philosophical weirdness—and, perhaps, of his capacity to generate and engage non-standard cosmologies and mythologies, from Aetna and Appalachia to Aidenn and Arnheim, to name just some stopping points—remains to be explored.

"I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul," Poe wrote in the introduction to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* [*Works,* 2:473]. Moreland's impressive collection reveals that for both Poe and Lovecraft, terror is also of New York, of Providence (and its absence), of mountains and oceans—and of the cosmos. It shows Lovecraft's tentacles spanning outward to form the major lineages of twentieth- and twenty-first century horror, while reaching back in time to enwrap and transform the genre's American founder. *The Lovecraftian Poe* casts new light on both; it provides ample materials for raising and answering the question of whether we should celebrate their gelatinous fusion or rather seek to sever the raven from the squid.

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John Tresch
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Notes

[1] Murray Leeder, "Poe/Lovecraft/Corman: The Case of *The Haunted Palace* (1963)," in Moreland, *Lovecraftian Poe,* 166. All subsequent references to the book under review will be cited parenthetically.

[2] Patrick Francis Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957); Thomas Hansen and Burton Pollin, *The German Face of Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of Literary References in His Works* (Columbia: Camden House, 1995); Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman, eds., *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995).

[3] See the dazzling readings of Jackson's technofunk gothic in Mark Fisher, ed., *The Resistible Demise of Michael Jackson* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

[4] Graham Harman, "On the Horror of Phenomenology: Lovecraft and Husserl," *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development* 4 (2010): 356; *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2012).

[5] H. P. Lovecraft to Farnsworth Wright, 5 July 1927, *Selected Letters, 1911–1937,* ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, 5 vols. (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1965–76), 2:150.

[6] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016).

[7] Eugene Thacker, *Tentacles Longer Than Night,* vol. 3 of *Horror of Philosophy* (Alresford, UK: Zero Books, 2015), 120.

[8] See Thacker, *Tentacles Longer Than Night,* 165–68, as well as Sean Moreland's interview with Cisco on his blog, *Postcripts to Darkness,* devoted to "dark speculative and weird fiction, poetry, film and art": https://pstdarkness.com/2013/11/22/an-interview-with-michael-cisco/.

[9] H. P. Lovecraft and Hazel Heald, "The Horror in the Museum," *Weird Tales,* July 1933, 49–68, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Horror_in_the_Museum.

[10] See Ian Hacking, "Nineteenth Century Cracks in the Concept of Determinism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1983): 455–75.

[11] Lovecraft to Frank Belknap Long, 21 March 1924, *Selected Letters,* 1:333–34.

[12] For example, Jason Horowitz, "Steve Bannon Cited Italian Thinker Who Inspired Fascists," *New York Times,* 2 February 2017.

[13] To pull on a few strands, try Mark Fisher, "Nick Land: Mind Games," *Dazed & Confused,* May 2011; Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011); N. Blincoe, "Nick Land: Alt-Writer," *Prospect Magazine,* 18 May 2017; Jason Barker, "Slow Down: On Benjamin Noys' Critique of Accelerationism," *Angelaki* 21, no. 2 (2016): 227–35; and Andrew Culp, *Dark Deleuze* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2016). Ben Woodard, in his review of Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie* (serving also as valediction for its author, who died just after the book's publication), affirms that, "for some, it may seem that the philosophical fascination with the weird has largely run its course," and he seeks to rescue a political resonance for the "eerie" instead; see *Textual Practice* 31, no. 6 (2017): 1181–83.

[14] Jonathan Taylor, "His 'Last Jest': On Edgar Allan Poe, 'Hop-Frog,' and Laughter," *Poe Studies* 48 (2015): 58–82.

[15] Betsy Erkkilä, "The Poetics of Whiteness: Poe and the Racial Imaginary," in *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 60–67.

[16] Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka,* in vol. 16 of *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James Harrison (Thomas Y. Crowell: New York, 1902), 312–13.

[17] For other political readings of *Eureka*, see Jennifer Rae Greeson, "Poe's 1848: *Eureka*, the Southern Margin, and the Expanding U[niverse] of S[tars]," in *Poe and the Remapping of Antebellum Print Culture*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Jerome McGann (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2012), 123–40; W. C. Harris, "Edgar Allan Poe's *Eureka* and the Poetics of Constitution," *American Literary History* 12, nos. 1–2 (2000): 1–40; and J. Gerald Kennedy, *Strange Nation: Literary Nationalism and Cultural Conflict in the Age of Poe* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016).

[18] Ben Woodard, *On an Ungrounded Earth: Towards a New Geophilosophy* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013).

[19] See Sean Moreland, "Ancestral Piles: Poe's Gothic Materials," in *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Scott Peeples (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2019), 520–41.

[20] Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 160.