

THE HORRORS OF LOVECRAFT: DISGUST AND REPULSION

СТИЛЬ ЖАХІВ ЛАВКРАФТА: ОГИДА ТА ВІДРАЗА

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The article explores the themes of disgust and repulsion in H.P. Lovecraft's horror fiction, focusing on «The Dunwich Horror», «The Colour Out of Space», and «The Shadow Over Innsmouth». It is based on Mary Douglas' theories from «Purity and Danger» and John Nevins's insights from «Horror Fiction in the 20th Century: Exploring Literature's Most Chilling Genre» to analyze how Lovecraft builds an atmosphere of dread and unease through detailed descriptions of decay, grotesque entities, and psychological corruption. The study examines the multifaceted role of disgust in Lovecraft's narratives, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing the emotional and psychological resonance of his stories.

The analysis reveals that Lovecraft's use of disgust serves to create a complex emotional landscape, engaging the senses and evoking visceral reactions. The article delves into physical repulsion through vivid depictions of monstrous entities, psychological revulsion through morally corrupt and deranged characters, and environmental disgust through decaying settings. These elements collectively contribute to a pervasive atmosphere of horror that immerses and maintains discomfort throughout the narrative.

By applying Douglas's concept of impurity and Nevins's exploration of horror's psychological aspects, this study emphasizes how Lovecraft's fiction disrupts traditional ideas of cleanliness, order, and sanity. Disgust and repulsion are crucial elements in Lovecraft's narratives, enriching his horror fiction with significant depth and complexity. His works provoke a visceral response, compelling readers to confront their deepest fears and anxieties, thus reinforcing the powerful impact of horror literature in probing the human psyche.

Key words: Horror style, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Purity and Danger Theory, The Dunwich Horror, The Colour Out of Space, The Shadow Over Innsmouth.

У статті досліджуються теми відрази та огиди у творчості Г. Ф. Лавкрафта, зосереджуючи увагу на «Жах Данвіча», «Колір з поза меж» і «Тінь над Іннсмутом». У ній використані теорії Мері Дуглас з праці «Purity and Danger» та ідеї Джона Невінса з книги «Horror Fiction in the 20th Century: Exploring Literature's Most Chilling Genre», щоб проаналізувати, як Лавкрафт створює атмосферу жаху і тривоги за допомогою детальних описів занепаду, гротескних сутностей і психічного занепаду. У дослідженні розглядається багатогранна роль відрази в оповіданнях Лавкрафта, демонструється її ефективність у посиленні емоційного та психологічного сприйняття його оповідань.

Аналіз показує, що Лавкрафт використовує огиду для створення складного емоційного стану, залучаючи почуття читачів і викликаючи вісцеральні реакції. У статті розглядається фізична відраза через яскраві зображення жахливих істот, психологічна відраза через морально зіпсованих і божевільних персонажів, а також відраза до навколишнього середовища через занепадаюче оточення. Всі ці елементи разом створюють всепроникну атмосферу жаху, яка занурює читачів і підтримує їхній дискомфорт протягом усієї оповіді.

Застосовуючи концепцію нечистоти Дуглас та дослідження психологічних аспектів жаху Невінса, це дослідження висвітлює, як художня література Лавкрафта руйнує традиційні уявлення про чистоту, порядок і здоровий глузд. Огида та відраза є ключовими елементами наративів Лавкрафта, які збагачують його творчість жахів значною глибиною та складністю. Його твори викликають вісцеральну реакцію, змушуючи читачів протистояти своїм найглибшим страхам і тривогам, тим самим посилюючи потужний вплив літератури жахів на людську психіку.

Ключові слова: стиль жахів, Говард Філіпс Лавкрафт, теорія Purity and Danger, Жах Данвіча, Колір з поза меж, Тінь над Іннсмутом.

Introduction. The study of horror literature, particularly the works of H.P. Lovecraft, requires an in-depth exploration of the themes of disgust and repulsion and their roles in evoking fear and unease [13]. While foundational analyses such as those by Mary Douglas [4] in «Purity and Danger» and John Nevins [12] in «Horror Fiction in the 20th Century:

Exploring Literature's Most Chilling Genre» have provided significant insights into the horror genre, further examination is necessary to understand how Lovecraft's specific use of these themes contributes to the genre's complexity and psychological impact.

This article aims to analyze H.P. Lovecraft's works «The Dunwich Horror», «The Colour Out

of Space» and «The Shadow Over Innsmouth» to explore how disgust and repulsion define horror. Unlike genres defined by specific themes, horror is distinguished by its emotional resonance. We aim to show how Lovecraft's grotesque imagery, moral corruption, and environmental decay create a pervasive atmosphere of dread and unease.

This study examines the versatility of horror, demonstrating its integration into various narratives and its timeless, boundary-crossing nature. We aim to highlight that horror's defining feature is its ability to evoke intense fear, disgust, and psychological unease. By analyzing Lovecraft's use of these elements, the article seeks to illustrate how horror literature reflects and amplifies emotional and psychological states, fostering tension and anxiety. This exploration aims to deepen understanding of the horror genre's unique qualities and its enduring significance.

Theoretical background. Horror fiction, a genre designed to evoke intense emotional responses such as fear and revulsion, employs diverse stylistic techniques to cultivate an atmosphere of dread. Noel Carroll's concept of «art-horror» [2] defines this genre by combining fear – a natural response to danger – with revulsion towards monstrous threats. According to Carroll [3], building suspense through vivid description is pivotal in horror fiction. By focusing on what remains unseen, horror narratives allow the reader's imagination to conjure scenarios potentially more terrifying than explicit descriptions could achieve. Engaging multiple senses beyond sight – such as the fetid odor of decay or a chilling gust of wind – further amplifies the unsettling experience, emphasizing Carroll's emphasis on repulsion and disgust to disrupt established norms and provoke deep emotional responses.

In Lovecraft's stories, elements of physical and psychological repulsion are meticulously crafted to elicit strong emotional reactions [5; 7]. However, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how these elements intertwine to create a pervasive sense of horror. The physical manifestations of disgust through grotesque descriptions, the psychological repulsion stemming from morally corrupt characters, and the environmental decay portrayed in his settings are crucial to understanding the full scope of his narrative techniques.

Furthermore, the symbolic and cultural significance of Lovecraft's monstrous entities, which blur the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, requires a deeper exploration [6; 11]. These entities not only embody primal fears but also reflect societal anxieties, challenging readers' perceptions of reality and morality. Despite their

importance, the implications of these monstrous depictions in relation to purity, impurity, and societal norms have not been exhaustively studied.

Moreover, Lovecraft's narratives often incorporate the theme of impurity, disrupting established categories and evoking a sense of formlessness and incompleteness that heightens the horror experience.

H.P. Lovecraft's horror works exemplify a complex evolution in thematic depth, exploring cosmic insignificance and existential dread that resonated with the anxieties of the modernist era, challenged by scientific advancements [1]. Lovecraft's narratives encompass various forms including cosmic, psychological, and environmental horror. However, his legacy is tainted by racism, evident in stories like «The Horror at Red Hook», which depict immigrants as monstrous figures, reflecting Lovecraft's prejudiced beliefs and contributing to negative stereotypes [14]. While acknowledging this troubling aspect, Lovecraft's ability to evoke chilling horror remains undeniable, particularly in works such as «The Dunwich Horror», «The Colour Out of Space» and «The Shadow Over Innsmouth».

Lovecraft's horror narratives unfold as intricate explorations of fear and revulsion, weaving together thematic complexities that resonate deeply within the genre. «The Dunwich Horror» depicts the unleashing of a monstrous entity through a forbidden book in rural Massachusetts, culminating in a harrowing clash of good versus unspeakable evil. This narrative not only underscores Lovecraft's skill in crafting suspense and terror but also delves into the decay of rural landscapes and the grotesque nature of the Whateley family, evoking a pervasive sense of dread and moral corruption.

In «The Colour Out of Space», Lovecraft introduces an alien presence unleashed by a meteorite, defying categorization and symbolizing fear of the unknown and the incomprehensible. This entity's influence distorts life into grotesque forms, threatening global annihilation and highlighting themes of environmental contamination and the fear of the alien other. Lovecraft intertwines fear and disgust as the alien presence evokes both physical revulsion and existential dread, showcasing his ability to evoke complex emotions through his storytelling.

«The Shadow Over Innsmouth» reveals a hidden society in a secretive New England town, where the discovery of monstrous, non-human inhabitants unravels unsettling truths beneath the waves. Lovecraft uses the setting of Innsmouth to create an atmosphere of claustrophobia and decay, exploring themes of racial and cultural degeneration through the townspeople's interbreeding with deep-

sea entities. This narrative challenges perceptions of normalcy and purity, evoking both fear and disgust as the hybrid nature of the townspeople blurs the lines between humanity and monstrosity.

Fear, recognized as one of the oldest and most fundamental emotions, has persisted throughout human history, deeply rooted in the human psyche. Horror, stemming from the Latin verb «horrere», meaning to tremble or shudder, taps into this primordial emotion that has manifested itself in different cultures and eras. From ancient times, fear has played a vital role in survival, alerting people to potential threats and facilitating adaptive responses to danger. Fear of predators, natural disasters, and hostile tribes stimulated the development of an instinctive fight-or-flight response that ensured the survival of individuals and communities alike.

Results and Discussion. Drawing on Mary Douglas's research [4] on purity and danger, Lovecraft's narratives endow ordinary objects and creatures with a sense of impurity, disturbing the audience with their categorical uncertainty and formlessness. The motif of the horrific, characterized by features such as formlessness and incompleteness, emphasizes the genre's thematic focus on the study of fear and the unknown. For instance, the amorphous, color-changing entity in «The Colour Out of Space» and the hybrid creatures in «The Shadow Over Innsmouth» evoke a visceral response of repulsion and fear.

Lovecraft's work often challenges established norms of categorization, confronting audiences with the unknown by exploiting concepts of the supernatural and the grotesque. His depiction of monstrous creatures blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead, the human and the inhuman, embodying primal fears and societal anxieties. The emotional resonance of Lovecraft's horror, combined with his depiction of monstrous entities, transcends cultural boundaries and evokes a universal sense of fear and disgust.

Lovecraft's fiction invites readers to confront their deepest fears and anxieties by presenting scenarios that disturb and unsettle. By doing so, his works not only evoke intense emotional responses but also reflect broader cultural and existential concerns. The grotesque and repulsive elements in Lovecraft's stories serve as a mirror to the audience's own fears and anxieties, making his horror both deeply personal and universally resonant. Lovecraft's horror fiction stands as a testament to the genre's ability to explore and evoke fundamental human emotions. Through his masterful use of themes such as environmental decay, moral corruption, and the fear of the unknown,

Lovecraft's works continue to captivate and disturb, highlighting the enduring power of horror literature to probe the depths of human fear and disgust.

The Dunwich Horror [9]. In this story, H.P. Lovecraft utilizes metaphorical imagery to evoke disgust and unease. The narrative employs descriptions of foul odors, animalistic features, and decaying landscapes to achieve this effect. Lovecraft introduces in the following sentence *The villagers held their breath as they hurried past, the faint, malign odour about the village street clinging to them like a shroud* a pervasive foul smell in the village, described as «a faint, malign odour about the village street, as of the massed mould and decay of centuries». This odor, symbolizing decay and corruption, not only contaminates Dunwich's atmosphere but also metaphorically reflects the degeneration of its inhabitants and surroundings. The stench is linked to locations like the Whateley house and tool-shed, reinforcing the themes of repulsiveness and decay. Lovecraft deepens this image by depicting villagers «holding their breath as they hurried past», suggesting the inescapable nature of the foulness.

Wilbur Whateley, a central character, is depicted – *Even as a baby, Wilbur Whateley possessed unsettling features – thick lips, large-pored skin, and oddly elongated ears that gave him a distinctly goatish look – with animalistic traits such as «thick lips, large-pored, yellowish skin, coarse crinkly hair, and oddly elongated ears»* giving him a «dark, goatish face». These details create a strong image of disgust and otherness, likening Wilbur to a repulsive creature and separating him from ordinary humans. Even as an infant, his unsettling features contribute to his primitive and grotesque aura.

The landscape and creatures surrounding Dunwich emphasize decay and disease – *A shiver ran down Walter's spine as he surveyed the landscape of Dunwich. The ruinous buildings stood like skeletal husks against the backdrop of withered trees, and the unsettling calls of the whippoorwills seemed to echo the village's diseased heart –*, with «ruinous» buildings, «withered trees», and eerie whippoorwills adding to the atmosphere. Lavinia Whateley's activity of examining «diseased fungi and timbers of the filthy barn» enhances the sense of a corrupted and unhealthy environment. This imagery paints Dunwich as neglected and fundamentally diseased, contributing to the overall atmosphere of dread and revulsion in the story.

Through these metaphorical images of foul odors, animalistic features, and diseased landscapes, Lovecraft effectively creates a pervasive sense of disgust in «The Dunwich Horror». Each element

serves to make the horror tangible and emotionally impactful.

The Colour Out of Space [8]. In the following sentence *A haze of restlessness and oppression hung over the blasted heath, permeating the landscape with an unsettling blend of the unreal and grotesque that evoked discomfort and unease.* The phrase «haze of restlessness and oppression» suggests palpable tension and discomfort lingering over the land, hinting at an unsettling presence that defies natural expectations. The term «blasted heath» furthers this atmosphere, likening the scenery to something devastated or cursed, where the ordinary laws of nature appear suspended or corrupted. The contrast of «bright sunlight» against this eerie backdrop intensifies, emphasizing the unnatural quality of the scene.

Lovecraft utilizes vivid imagery to convey decay and unnatural growth: *The grey and brittle vegetation struggled for life, its twisted branches clawing at the sky, while alien flowers in unchristian colours pushed themselves up from the crumbling earth, their sickly scent a further violation of nature.* The description of «grey and brittle vegetation» portrays plants fighting to survive in a harsh, inhospitable environment, with their «twisted branches» evoking contorted and tortured growth. The phrase «alien flowers in unchristian colors» adds to the unsettling tone, suggesting flora that is not just unfamiliar but also disturbingly unnatural in appearance and essence. The use of «unchristian» colors implies deviations from the norm, hinting at hues that are unsettling or even malevolent. The «sickly scent» emitted by these flowers further underscores their aberrant nature, suggesting an olfactory assault that reinforces the theme of violating the natural order.

In the sentence – *Old Ammi Pierce warned us away with wild tales of the forbidden woodcut in a tale of terror, a place where the laws of nature were broken and the very air withered the lungs* – old Ammi Pierce's warning with «wild tales of the forbidden woodcut» portrays a place steeped in alienation and danger, the reference to «wild tales» implies a narrative filled with dread and mystery, cautioning against venturing into a domain where the laws of nature have been transgressed. The concept of «a place where the laws of nature were broken» underscores a fundamental disruption in the natural order, where normalcy yields to something abnormal and potentially lethal. The imagery of «the very air withered the lungs» heightens the sense of peril, suggesting an environment so toxic or alien that even breathing

becomes hazardous, metaphorically emphasizing an inhospitable environment for life.

The following passage gives an image of decay and unnatural growth: *We pressed on, however, a morbid curiosity propelling us forward, until the full horror of the place unfolded before us. Monstrous growths, defying description with their colours that could not be put into any words, sprouted from the decaying earth, and the stench that filled the air was enough to turn a man's stomach.* Monstrous growths emerged from the decaying earth, defying description with colors beyond human comprehension, while a stench filled the air, inducing physical discomfort. This passage intensifies the atmosphere of dread and revulsion, portraying a fascination tinged with apprehension towards confronting the terrifying and unknown. The gradual unveiling of «monstrous growths» challenges conventional description, underscoring their grotesque and unnatural appearance. The mention of «colors that could not be put into any words» implies a deviation from the familiar and understandable, suggesting a profound departure from natural order. The pervasive «stench» heightens the sense of disgust, implying an odor so repugnant that it induces nausea, reinforcing themes of decay and corruption.

These metaphors construct an atmosphere of fear and revulsion towards the affected area in «The Colour Out of Space». Each element contributes to a narrative that is not only terrifying but also deeply unsettling, portraying a landscape where reality blurs, and the natural world distorts into something nightmarish and alien. Lovecraft's use of metaphorical imagery creates a chilling portrayal of a place where the laws of nature are twisted, and life itself is imperiled, leaving a lingering sense of unease and dread.

The Shadow Over Innsmouth [10]. In H.P. Lovecraft's story several metaphors are employed to evoke a profound sense of disgust and repulsion towards the town of Innsmouth and its inhabitants. Each metaphorical expression serves to deepen the unsettling atmosphere and underscore the town's ominous aura.

In the given sentence – *The epidemic of 1846 had left Innsmouth in awful shape, like a place plagued by a monstrous disease* – the metaphor compares Innsmouth to a person suffering from a terrible illness. By saying the town is «plagued,» it suggests the epidemic was not just a one-time event, but something that continues to affect the town.

Here – *The townspeople were rumored to be white trash, lawless and sly, full of secret doings and with doubtful blood* – the townspeople are likened

to “white trash,” a term used to describe poor white southerners considered to be degenerate and morally inferior. The phrase “doubtful blood” reinforces this metaphor and adds a suggestion of possible racial mixing, making them seem even more foreign and undesirable.

In the sentence – *The strange jewellery possessed an abhorrent grotesqueness and malignity, like something monstrous and evil* – the jewelry is not directly called a monster, but it is described using words that make it seem monstrous. “Grotesque” suggests something twisted and unnatural, while “malignity” implies an evil intent. By comparing the jewelry to a monster, the passage creates a sense of fear and disgust around anything associated with Innsmouth.

In the given sentence – *There was something unspeakable about the driver, Joe Sargent, his appearance and greasiness increasing the narrator's dislike* – the word “unspeakable” suggests that the narrator is so disgusted by Joe Sargent that he can't even describe it in words. “Greasiness” is a physical descriptor that adds to the sense of repulsion. By comparing Joe to something unpleasant to the touch, the metaphor increases the feeling that he is somehow abnormal.

Innsmouth itself was a metaphor for decay, a place filled with crumbling buildings, decadent wharfs, and an air of sagging defeat, with rottenness everywhere.

The entire description of Innsmouth uses decay as a metaphor. Words like “crumbling,” “decadent,” “sagging,” and “rottenness” all paint a picture of a place that is slowly falling apart. This not only creates a sense of neglect and abandonment, but also suggests a kind of moral decay within the town.

Conclusions. Lovecraft's horror fiction intricately weaves themes of disgust and repulsion into narratives that unsettle and disturb. Through works like «The Dunwich Horror», «The Colour Out of Space», and «The Shadow Over Innsmouth», Lovecraft explores

the grotesque and the abominable, challenging conventional notions of horror.

The portrayal of rural decay, unnatural practices, and monstrous entities in Lovecraft's stories serves to evoke profound feelings of revulsion and unease. His narratives often feature characters and entities that defy categorization, embodying a formlessness that elicits deep-seated fears of contamination and moral decay.

Drawing on Mary Douglas's theories of purity and danger [4], Lovecraft's depiction of formless and monstrous entities symbolizes existential dread and the fear of the unknown. These entities not only provoke physical revulsion but also challenge the sense of order and safety in the world.

In «The Dunwich Horror», the decay of the rural environment and the grotesque nature of the Whateley family serve as metaphors for the breakdown of societal norms and the fear of the unknown. «The Colour Out of Space» uses the metaphor of a color beyond human comprehension to represent the limits of human understanding and the terror of the incomprehensible. «The Shadow Over Innsmouth» employs the hybrid creatures as metaphors for the fear of racial and genetic contamination, exploring deep-seated anxieties about purity and identity.

Lovecraft's fiction remains significant due to its ability to tap into universal fears and anxieties about the incomprehensible and the monstrous. By presenting scenarios that blur the boundaries between human and inhuman, Lovecraft's horror literature invites contemplation of existential fears and societal anxieties surrounding purity and contamination. The metaphors in «The Dunwich Horror», «The Colour Out of Space», and «The Shadow Over Innsmouth» further enrich this exploration, adding layers of meaning to the themes of disgust and repulsion.

The further study will focus on the empirical research of metaphorical disgust and repulsion, taking readers' reactions into consideration.

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