A Light in the Darkness: Horror as Catharsis

by

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Abstract

Horror – despite the disapproval pervading its commonplace use, there is a clear asymmetry between humanity's general aversion to, and negative characterization of, horror in its "natural" sense, and our attraction to horror aesthetically represented.

In recent years, "horror" has evolved into a universally acknowledged cross-art, cross-media genre, distinguished by its concentrating predominantly on the emotion of fear, generally at the expense of other elements, feelings, or themes. Explaining our paradoxical fascination with horror as an aesthetic phenomenon is the primary purpose of this thesis.

Alexander "Al" Scott Baker contends that frightening representations please, both by transmuting a generally unpleasant sensation into something positive, and, perhaps more significantly, by encouraging reflection on matters of life and death. Existential reflection frequently quells apprehensions latent within us that, left unchecked, can cause significant psychological pain. This suggests that horror constitutes a particularly valuable, profound mode of entertainment.

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"Frankenstein's Nightmare" © Ceilidh Higgins

"My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires — for they amounted to desires — are common, I have since been assured."

– Edgar Allan Poe

"I gradually gathered the courage to undertake a bold venture. I decided to fix upon my dreams and discover their secret. I said to myself, armed with sufficient willpower, why should I not at last be able to force open these mystic gates and master my sensations instead of submitting to them? Is it not possible to tame the charms of this dread chimera, and to discipline these spirits of the night who make such a mockery of our reason?"

– Gérard de Nerval

"I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, And Mourners to and fro Kept treading – treading – till it seemed That Sense was breaking through…"

– Emily Dickinson

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"We have comraded long together, and it has been pleasant."

– Mark Twain

I.   An Ethereal Spell over Humankind

> "Thou, to whom the World unknown,
> With all its shadowy Shapes is shown…"
> - William Collins.[1]

Horror – a word that calls to mind a host of unpleasant images, entities, and ideas. In its most general sense, horror and its syntactic variants are used to describe either an unsettling affective state (e.g., "I am horrified") or a disapproving evaluation (e.g., "___ is horrible"). Monsters, threatening objects, and forbidden locales, as well as acts of depravity, wickedness, and violence, are all commonly designated as horrific. The term's very etymology, from the Latin *horrere*, for "hair-bristling" or "to shudder," betrays its negative connotation.[2] And yet, despite the disapproval pervading its commonplace use, there is an asymmetry between our aversion to, and negative characterization of, horror in its "natural" sense and our attraction to horror aesthetically represented.[3] Explaining our paradoxical fascination with horror as an aesthetic phenomenon is the primary purpose of this thesis. After advancing a potential explanation for horror's appeal, I shall investigate the possibility that being frightened can, in fact, be beneficial.

In his introduction to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), Wordsworth emphasizes that the "mind is capable of being excited *without* the application of gross and violent stimulants."[4] And yet, while he is certainly correct that the passions can be excited by commonplace experiences, it is

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[1] William Collins, "Ode to Fear," *Dreams of Fear: Poetry of Terror and the Supernatural*, Ed. S.T. Joshi and Stephen J. Mariconda (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2013), page 71.

[2] *Horrere* is connected to *horreō* ("to stand on end"). Horreō derives from the Proto-Indo-European *ǵʰer-, and has cognates in Sanskrit (hr̥ṣyati "to become stiff, glad," harṣayati- "to excite"), Welsh (*garw* "rough"), and Avestan (zarəšiiamna- "excited"). Noël Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990), page 24. William Smith and John Lockwood, "*horreō*," *Chambers/Murray Latin-English Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers 2000), page 313.

[3] For this paper, general use of the term "horror" will convey what Noël Carroll calls "art-horror," the artistic depiction of terrifying things, as opposed to "natural horror," which refers to terrifying real-life experiences. Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 12.

[4] William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton & Company, 2010), page 563.

undeniable that the imagination is also regularly inflamed by what the poet deems "gross"

stimulation. Wordsworth's vexation with the violent "German tragedies" of his day indicates that

people commonly desire experiences which, at least in theory, they ought to reject.[5]

Dostoyevsky, writing around a half-century later, contends that human beings derive a kind of

perverse "pleasure" from acquaintance with "suffering."[6] Supporting this hypothesis,

anthropologists have uncovered cave paintings, some nearly thirty-thousand years old, depicting

"people pierced with arrows."[7] Such ghastly discoveries suggest that, over the span of human

history, individuals have been curiously enthused by horrifying representations.[8] In recent years,

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[5] Consider Isabella and Catherine's delight in *Northanger Abbey* (1817) reading and discussing what they happily characterize as "horrid book[s]." Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, page 563. Jane Austen, "Chapter Six," *Northanger Abbey* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2010), pages 34-5.

[6] Shakespeare articulates a similar view: "one pain is lessen'd by another's anguish... [o]ne desperate grief cures with another's languish – take thou some new infection to thy eye, and the rank poison of the old will die." Fyodor Dostoyevsky, "Notes from the Underground." *The Best Short Stories of Fyodor Dostoyevsky*, Trans. David Magarshack (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), page 106. William Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet – Act 1, Scene 2," *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare* (London: Chancellor Press, 1982), page 704, lines 46-50.

[7] These paintings are "notable not only because they show that the violence occurred, but also that even our most ancient ancestors had a desire to record it." James Twitchell points out that the images cave people found most "frightening" were typically reposited "deep inside the cave, usually at the farthest point from the entrance." Some of these paintings, like the ones discovered in the Cave of the Trois-Frères in the Pyrenees (produced c. 13,000 BCE), clearly illustrate "monster forms." The so-called "Sorcerer," for example, depicts a disconcerting composite of wolf, bear, and human. These monsters "possibly excited" ancients "just as the werewolf, mummy, and vampire continue to upset us." Jana Pruden, "True Crime is Popular, but, is it Ethical?" *The Globe and Mail*. Mar. 15, 2019. James B. Twitchell, "Introduction," *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pages 4-6.

[8] Perhaps the first to recognize this was Plato, who in *Philebus* (c. fourth century BCE) comments that, for "those who watch tragedies," there is "pleasure mixed in with pain." Augustine, a few centuries later, observes that people regularly "wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events," which they themselves "would not wish to endure." For just a few other examples, consider a comment made during the first century CE by Metrodorus (paraphrased by Seneca): "there is a certain pleasure which is related to sadness." The gnostic text "Thunder" (c. second century CE): "many pleasures exist in many sins." As well as statements by Alcinous (a Middle Platonist writing around the second century CE): "he, who fears, is not entirely deprived of pleasure." Giordano Bruno (sixteenth century CE): "human nature is condemned to find disgust joined to delight." Moses Mendelssohn (eighteenth century CE): "[h]uman beings are so peculiar in their delights that often they take pleasure in what ought to arouse their sorrow." And Guy de Maupassant (nineteenth century CE): "Horror… cast[s] a strange and universal spell over human curiosity." Plato, "Philebus," *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Trans. Dorothea Frede (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), page 437, 48a. Augustine, "Book Three – Student at Carthage," *Confessions*, Trans. Henry Chadwick, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 35. Seneca, "XCIX. On Consolation to the Bereaved," *Moral letters to Lucilius*, Trans. Richard Mott Gummere (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1925). "Thunder," *The Gnostic Bible*, Trans. George W. MacRae (Boston: Shambhala, 2009), page 252. Alcinous, "The Introduction of Alcinous to the Doctrines of Plato – [31] What are the Affections, and on

the "gross" artistic stimulation that Wordsworth deprecates, and that Dostoyevsky recognizes as fundamentally human, has crystallized into an art-form. "Horror" is now a universally acknowledged cross-art, cross-media genre, distinguished by its concentrating predominantly on the emotion of fear, generally at the expense of other elements, feelings, or themes.

To appreciate horror's appeal, and, by extension, illustrate its potential benefits, it is advantageous to understand the genre's development. Precisely distinguishing how horror emerged helps refine our judgment of what qualifies a work as such, as opposed to one that touches on the genre's peripheral features. Equally important, determining the preconditions that facilitated horror's proper beginnings, and tracing its subsequent ascendance in popularity, helps make better sense of how the genre attracts. Therefore, prior to proposing a comprehensive theory concerning horror's appeal and significance, I will present a brief etiology, a reflection on some of horror's forerunners, in order to distinguish them from genuine horror, as well as an examination of horror's true beginnings, devoting particular attention to those factors that have contributed to the genre's rise in popularity, and the ways in which horror has developed over time to mirror anxieties endemic to particular ages and societies.

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their distinctions," *Works of Plato: A New and Literal Version, Chiefly from the Text of Stallbaum*, Vol. 6. Trans. George Burges (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), page 307. Giordano Bruno, "Cause Principle and Unity," *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, Ed. Richard J. Blackwell and Robert de Lucca, Trans. Robert de Lucca (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) page 19. Moses Mendelssohn, "On Sentiments," P*hilosophical Writings*, Trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), page 44. Guy de Maupassant, *Pierre and Jean*, Trans. Leonard Tancook (London: Penguin Books, 1984), page 71.

II.   Gathering Darkness: An Etiology of Horror

"…through the gloom more venerable shows,
Some ancient fabric, awful in repose…"
-     Anne Finch.[9]

Horror has a great many antecedents, works containing images, themes, characters, locales, and events that are commonly regarded as frightening. Critically, however, the fear aroused by such works is incidental rather than fundamental. When it comes to horror, fear is central, and, while it is certainly true that some of humanity's earliest aesthetic works incorporate elements commonly evoking the emotion, it is doubtful that generating fear is their primary purpose.

Take, for instance, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 1800 BCE), in which the scorpion monsters, "half-man and half-dragon," that the eponymous hero confronts, are described as "terrifying," capable of "strik[ing] death into men" with a mere glance.[10] The presence of such entities notwithstanding, no serious scholar would contend that *Gilgamesh* constitutes a work of horror fiction. To the contrary, it is most often regarded as an archetypal hero's journey, one that, through sophisticated allegory, explores and comments on a variety of distinctive elements related to Mesopotamian society in particular, and the human condition generally. The scorpion monsters that Gilgamesh encounters, although frightening, are mere peripheral actors.

Likewise, Homer's *Odyssey* (c. 800-700 BCE) prominently features a monstrous, one-eyed Giant, the Cyclops Polyphemus, who at one interval snatches two of Odysseus' crew and tears the hapless sailors "limb from limb to fix his meal."[11] This is without question horrific.

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[9] Anne Finch, "A Nocturnal Reverie," *Selected Poems*, Ed. Denys Thompson (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 2003), page 71, lines 20-30.
[10] "The Search for Everlasting Life," *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Trans. N.K. Sanders (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1972), page 98.
[11] Homer, "Book 9: The One-Eyed Giant's Cave," *The Odyssey*, Trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), page 220, line 228.

Thorough reflection, however, strongly suggests that the tale of a lost King's νόστος ("return home") is concerned with a great deal more than shocking viscera or blood-curdling monsters.[12] Scholars are particularly convinced that *The Odyssey* is an instructive saga, designed to emphasize the virtue of Ancient Greek social customs, chief among them proper ξενία ("hospitable reception").[13] Polyphemus infuses Homer's narrative with excitement and tension, yet, more significantly, reinforces its central homily by standing as a powerful example of what may greet an inhospitable host.

Medieval chivalric narratives also, with some regularity, detail scenarios often regarded as violent, odious, or otherwise distressing. Yet the central relevance of such events is again uncertain. It is true, for instance, that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1350-1400 CE) features an antagonist who is unnaturally large, boasts abnormally "brilliant green" skin, and is capable of surviving bodily decapitation, attributes that confirm he is an intimidating, supernatural figure.[14] However, most researchers agree that, similar to Polyphemus, the Green Knight's terrible features are supplementary, and that the Pearl Poet's tale is concerned with the nature of chivalry in the face of temptation. The Green Knight, while disquieting, more

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[12] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, "νόστος," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged: The Little Liddell* (Simon Wallenberg Press, 2007), page 467.

[13] Hospitality was a highly significant Greek cultural custom. As Theognis observes: "No man has ever cheated guest… without the immortals taking note." Consider how legends recount the hero Theseus defeating several highwaymen and robbers (e.g. Sinis, Sciron, Procrustes), thereby emphasizing that cruelty to strangers leads to inevitable downfall. Aristippus of Cyrene supposedly took advantage of this social taboo, identifying himself as a "stranger in all countries." Liddell et al., "ξενία," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 470. Theognis, "Fragment – 143-4," *Greek and Lyric Poetry*, Trans. M.L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), page 67. Xenophon, "Memoirs of Socrates 2.16 – 2.1.14," *Conversations of Socrates*, Ed. Robin Waterfield, Trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1990), page 103.

[14] "Part One," *Ser Gawain and the Green Knight: Middle English Text with Facing Translation*, Ed. James Winny, Trans. James Winny (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2017), page 13, line 192.

significantly serves as an allegory for the licentious desires that threaten to undermine the chivalric code.[15]

Religious scriptures commonly evoke awe and terror, but generally as a means, not an end. Countless illustrations can be cited, for as Ludwig Feuerbach reflects, "all pantheistic cosmogonies," to some extent, involve "horror[s]."[16] Recall, for example, that the spiritual codices of the Ancient Egyptians, such as the well-known *Book of the Dead* (c. 1550 BCE), include passages that detail nightmarish deities, including the funerary goddess Ammit, a hideous lion, hippopotamus, crocodile hybrid.[17] Such descriptions are disturbing, to be sure, and yet this monstrous deity was not said to have terrorized Egyptians *generally*. Rather, Ammit serves a clear purpose within the complex Egyptian pantheon, consuming the hearts of those who fail properly to follow Ma'at, the Ancient Egyptian notion of order, harmony, law, ethics, and justice.[18] Behind the dreadful figure lies a clear sermon: follow divine law, or face horrific consequences.

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[15] Green has long been associated with temptation, greed, and desire. Ovid describes Invidia, the divine personification of envy, as possessing skin of a "green" hue. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia passingly refers to "green-ey'd jealousy," and in *Othello*, Iago characterizes jealousy as a "green-ey'd monster." Ovid, "II. 743-77, The Envy of Aglauros," *Metamorphoses*, Trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 47. Shakespeare, "The Merchant of Venice – Act 3, Scene 2," and "Othello – Act 3, Scene 3," *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare*, pages 202 line 110, 877 line 167.

[16] Giambattista Vico points out that "in the early childhood of the world," adopting "fearful religions" was often "useful to humankind" as an impetus for survival and adaptation in a harsh environment. Ludwig Feuerbach, "Chapter X - The Mystery of Providence, and Creation out of Nothing," *The Essence of Christianity*, Trans. Marian Evans (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1890), page 107. Giambattista Vico, "Establishing Principles – The Golden Age: Greek age of the Gods," *New Science*, Trans. David Marsh (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2013), pages 51-2.

[17] Sometimes rendered as Ammut or Ahemait, this foul creature was said to be the "devourer" or "eater of the dead." "Texts Relating to the Judgement," *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Trans. E.A. Wallis Budge (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2008), page 25.

[18] In Ancient Egyptian mythology, Ma'at was the wife of Thoth, the god of wisdom, and daughter of Ra, the god of the sun. She assisted her father during the creation of the world, and her domain concerns "regularity and order," as well as "moral rectitude." "Hymn to Ra," *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Trans. E.A. Wallis Budge, page 4.

Buddhism advocates reincarnation, the notion that, after a corporeal lifeform expires, its inner life force survives, migrating to occupy some new corporeal form as part of a cyclical process of birth and rebirth. Nestled within this seemingly positive conception of life beyond the grave are a number of distressing possibilities, chief among them the prospect of reincarnation into one of the lower planes of existence, a "Naraka" (translated from Sanskrit as a "hell-realm").[19] According to Buddhist writings, transgressors against Karma are reincarnated in such areas, where they suffer torturous hardships. A particularly frightening example is the "Roruva" Naraka, where sufferers are said to be "constantly consumed by fierce fire."[20] Amplifying the horror, the very temporal nature of experiencing such places is said to be extended, a single second in a Naraka lasting far beyond a natural lifespan in the physical realm. Nevertheless, as with the monstrous Ammit, Naraka are clearly not horrific simply for the sake of it. Scholars generally accept that these planes emphasize the benefits of following, rather than flouting, the immutable laws of Karma. Clearly, although horrors are apparent in the annals of Buddhist literature, eliciting fear is ancillary to its spiritual meaning.

Christianity constitutes perhaps the best example of religious writings replete with horrific imagery that are, nevertheless, not commonly regarded as examples of horror. Setting aside the wide range of occasionally frightening works inspired by Christianity, such as Dante's *Inferno* (c. 1308-20 CE) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667 CE), *The Old Testament* (c. 745 BCE – 100 CE) details a wide variety of episodes commonly regarded as blood-curdling, such as God's commandment that the Israelites wipe out the Amalekites.[21] *The New Testament* (c. 45 – 120 CE)

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[19] "Glossary," *Buddhist Scriptures*, Ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2004).
[20] "The Realms of Rebirth," *Buddhist Scriptures*, Trans. Ann Appleby Hazlewood, page 6.
[21] "Thus says the lord of hosts... go and smite Am'alek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Refer also to "Ezekiel 9:6," wherein God encourages the faithful to "slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women." "Samuel

likewise describes all manner of images that are commonly regarded as disturbing, the

apocalypse in "Revelation" perhaps foremost among them. And yet, though most Biblical

scholars, such as Marcus J. Borg, concede that the "scenes of judgment and annihilation" in *The*

Old Testament are "horrific," they argue that such horror serves a distinct purpose. God's

violence against unbelievers conveys an eschatological message, namely, that "[b]eing Christian

means being ready" for Christ's return, and that only those possessing an "intensity of belief and

purity of behaviour" will be saved "when the end time arrives." Similarly, theologians such as

Roger Haight postulate that the esoteric passages throughout *The New Testament* serve as a

medium for readers to experience, beyond "knowledge of God," an "meeting or encountering

God."[22] Whether or not one agrees with Christian ideology, Christianity's apologetics go a long

way to illustrate that, implicit in the religion's horrific descriptions, are plainly discernible

spiritual messages.

Philosophers also, with surprising regularity, attempt to evoke fear. Long ago, Empedocles (c.

fifth century BCE), to inspire dreadful awe in the civilians of Akragas, declares himself an

"immortal god."[23] Descartes (1596 – 1650 CE), to illustrate methodological doubt more

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15:3," and "Ezekiel 9:6," *Holy Bible: Revised Standard Edition* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1974), pages 252, 735.

[22] Marcus J. Borg, "Jesus Today," *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), page 12. Roger Haight, "Jesus as Savior," *Jesus: Symbol of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), page 344.

[23] Peter Kingsley argues that although "modern scholarship has not wanted to take seriously" the supernatural components of Empedocles' literary fragments (e.g., Hermann Diels argues that they should be "interpreted metaphorically"), a non-mystical interpretation is decidedly untenable. According to Kingsley, the "outrageous claims" made by Empedocles (e.g., that he is immortal, that he "is able through his mystical or occult powers to free men and women from their mortal sufferings") instead must be taken seriously, as claims to magical powers, although strange to a modern perspective, for an Ancient Greek audience would have infused his ideas with "extra force." Contrast with legends concerning Pythagoras (c. 570 – 495 BCE). Porphyry, for example, tells us that Pythagoras had a "golden thigh," and could appear in multiple locations at once; some of his followers even accredited him as "the god Apollo in human form." William Godwin points out that such legends imbued Pythagoras' teachings with greater "authority and effect." Empedocles, "174 [F120]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies*, Vol 1, Ed. Daniel W. Graham, Trans. Daniel W. Graham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), page 405. Peter Kingsley, "The Magus," *Ancient*

arrestingly, introduces the notion of an "evil genius," a hypothetical, all-powerful being who, for whatever malign purpose, manipulates an individual's mind into mistakenly believing in an external reality. The delusions prompted by this demon include not only a false belief in "the heavens" and "earth" as they appear to the naked eye, but also fundamental concepts such as those of colors, shapes and numerical figures.[24] And Hobbes (1588 – 1679 CE), to alarm readers into recognising the need for society to be governed by an authoritarian force, a "leviathan," invokes the ghastly prospect of a state of nature, in which humans would endure an atavistic life that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[25] However, none of these ideas was introduced purely for fear's sake. Rather, πάθος ("affection") is simply an effective mode of rhetorical persuasion.[26] Fear is evoked by such thinkers in an effort either to assume an air of authority, to

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Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), pages 217-20. Charles H. Kahn, "Pythagoras and the Pythagorean Way of Life," *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History* (Chicago: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), page 5. William Godwin, "Pythagoras," *Lives of the Necromancers* (London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly, 1876), page 51.

[24] Refer as well to Giordano Bruno, who entertains (but ultimately rejects) the possibility that reality was created by the "malice of some wandering spirit, or by the wrath of some evil genius." René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy in which the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Mind and Body are Demonstrated – Meditation I," *The Essential Descartes*, Ed. Margaret D. Wilson, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1993), pages 169-70. Giordano Bruno, "A Philosophy of the Infinite Universe," *Treasury of Philosophy*, Ed. Dagobert D. Runes, Trans. Dagobert D. Runes et al. (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1955), page 189.

[25] An antecedent to Hobbes' political philosophy can be found in Heraclitus (c. 535 – 475 BCE), who "discovered" (from his perspective) "what is shared or common to all," and in so doing, "recognized within the city the unifying role," the νόμος ("law") which protects citizens just "as the city wall protects all the inhabitants of the city." Charles H. Kahn is right to comment that Heraclitus' belief that most people are bad, and that, consequently, "civilized life and communal survival depend upon loyalty" to the νόμος in which "all citizens have a share," but which can only "be realized in the leadership of a single outstanding man," is distinctly "Hobbesian." Thomas Hobbes, "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, As Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery," *Leviathan, with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668* (Chicago: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), page 76. Charles H. Kahn, "General Introduction – The Book," *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), page 3. Liddell et al., "νόμος," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 467.

[26] πάθος does not strictly mean "emotion." Rather, as Julia Annas points out, it is a more general term which can cover a wide range of what one "suffers" or "what is done to one" (παθεῖν). Liddell et al., "πάθος," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 511. Julia E. Annas, "The Emotions," *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), page 103.

alarm readers into recognizing the necessity of a proposition, or to convey more forcefully a non-frightening idea.

Perhaps the most significant forerunner to horror is the distinctly ancient art of classical tragedy. Aristotle, after all, defines tragedy's purpose as "arousing pity and fear" in an audience.[27] In Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (c. 458 BCE), the Ἐρινύς ("Furies") who stalk Orestes are described as "repulsive."[28] Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (c. 429 BCE) culminates in its eponymous protagonist, in despair at his situation, gouging out his eyes.[29] And in Seneca's *Thyestes* (c. 62 CE), the rivalry between brothers culminates in abject horror, with Atreus feeding the unwitting Thyestes the cooked remains of his own murdered children.[30]

These frightening scenes notwithstanding, it cannot be overlooked that tragedy, though concerned with fear, is also concerned with illustrating and exploring a broad range of emotions and social mores. *Oedipus* is ominous throughout, but it is foremost a didactic narrative, illustrating the dangers associated with the Greek social taboos against patricide and incest. Likewise, while Aeschylus' Furies are frightening, they also serve an allegorical function,

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[27] Scholars mostly agree that the word "tragedy" derives from the Greek words for "goat" and "song," but, as Adrian Poole remarks, nobody quite knows why. Perhaps the goat was originally a prize awarded, or a ritual sacrifice? Aristotle hypothesises in *Poetics* (1449a) that tragedy evolved out of improvisations within choral dithyrambs (hymns to the god Dionysus). "Whatever its origins," Poole quips, "Greek tragedy sports few conspicuous goats." Aristotle, "Poetics - 8," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Trans. I. Bywater (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), page 2323, 1452a. Adrian Poole, "Who Needs it?" *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), page 5.

[28] "Their heavy, rasping breathing," causes the Pythia to "cringe," and their "eyes ooze" a loathsome "discharge." Aeschylus, "The Eumenides," *The Oresteia: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides*, Trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), page 233, lines 55-7.

[29] Discovering the corpse of Jocasta, Oedipus "rips off her brooches, the long gold pins holding her robes – and lifting them high," proceeds to scrape "them down the sockets of his eyes… over and over" in a "black hail of blood." Classicist A.E. Taylor characterizes this violent finale as "a triumph of melodramatic horror." Sophocles, "Oedipus the King," *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, Trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), page 237, lines 1402-5. A.E. Taylor, "Practical Philosophy," *Aristotle* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1919), page 90.

[30] Atreus derives "savage joy" in slaughtering Thyestes' children, and watching Thyestes "impiously feast" on "his own flesh." Seneca, "Thyestes – Act IV," *The Tragedies of Seneca*, Trans. Frank Justus Miller (Project Gutenberg, 2018), lines 764, 778-9.

personifying an unsettling contrast with law and order, embodied by the goddess Athena. And *Thyestes* is recognized by most classicists as a condemnation of avarice. Atreus desires revenge in *excess*, greeting "crime with crime," and his disproportionate wrath yields consequences so dire that they reverberate through the lives of his descendants.[31] I will say more concerning the relationship between horror and tragedy, but, for now, it is enough to emphasize that, unlike tragedy, horror focuses *exclusively*, or at the very least *predominantly*, on fear. Its antecedents, although featuring elements that commonly provoke fear, are nevertheless typically broader in range.[32] The most significant lesson to draw from horror's antecedents is that, prior to the genre taking shape, a healthy interest prevailed in the aesthetic representation of fear.

As a formal genre, horror traces its origins back not to cave paintings, fables, religious texts, philosophy, or tragedy, but to an artistic movement of the late eighteenth-century, "Gothicism." The expression, referring to the Northern tribes that invaded Greco-Roman Europe during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, came to be associated with a thirteenth-century-style architecture thought to have originated with the occupying Goths.[33] As this style grew increasingly antiquated, so too did Gothicism's implications. By the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the first literary work classified as "Gothic," the term

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[31] Seneca, "Thyestes – Act V," *The Tragedies of Seneca*, lines 1100-1105.

[32] Werner Jaeger argues that tragedy focuses not on "external dramatic reality," but rather, "the effect of destiny upon the soul." Walter Kaufmann similarly stresses the importance of fate in tragedy, the inevitability of "situations in which one cannot act, nor abstain from action, without incurring guilt." Regarding horror, although sometimes a factor, μοῖρᾰ ("destiny, fate, one's lot") is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition. Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, "The Drama of Aeschylus," *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture – Archaic Greece, The Mind of Athens,* Vol 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), page 257. Walter Kaufmann, "Contra Fromm: Religion and Tragedy," *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958), pages 342. Liddell et al., "μοῖρᾰ," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 450.

[33] Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), page 19.

had assumed connotations suggestive of the uncouth, ugly, barbaric, or antiquated.[34] In no small part due to *Otranto*'s success, the ruins of Gothic cathedrals and castles rapidly grew synonymous with themes redolent of the "fearsome" and "fantastical."[35] In many respects, the novel established the blueprint for later Gothic works, assembling "an array of common devices," including gloomy dungeons, supernatural visitations, secret passageways, and "unexplainable happenings."[36] A plethora of similar stories, either consciously classified as Gothic, or appraised as such by critics, followed almost immediately in the wake of Walpole's success.

Gothicism's popularity planted the seeds for horror to take root and grow into a proper genre. Gradually, upon the groundwork laid, in particular, by seminal works such as William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), a genuine artistic movement began to materialize, focused not on castles, gargoyles, and graveyards, but on fear itself. In her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, Shelley clearly describes her intention: to "contrive" a tale "which would frighten my reader."[37]

Encouraged by the more unsettling psychological aspects of Gothicism, a variety of creators hastened the evolution of horror through determined efforts to refine the methods of their predecessors. Having helped pave the way for the public acceptance of horror, some of these

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[34] The "ways and beliefs" of the Goths, as Benjamin J. Fisher observes, "differed largely from those of Greco-Roman Classical civilization father south." To the southern outlook, "the Goths were wholly uncivilized and barbarous." Benjamin J. Fisher, "Poe and the Gothic Tradition," *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*, Ed. Kevin J. Hayes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), page 73.
[35] Thomas Ligotti, "Notes on the Writing of Horror: A Story," *Songs of a Dead Dreamer and Grimscribe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015) page 99.
[36] Michael Gamer, "Introduction," *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), page xiii.
[37] Mary Shelley, "1831 Introduction," *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (New York: Pocket Books, 2004), page 283.

pioneers are well worth bearing in mind, particularly those who articulate theories concerning the

burgeoning genre. The Romantic poet and essayist Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834), for

example, often deals in themes that are, as weird-fiction scholar S.T. Joshi observes, "replete

with horrific imagery."[38] Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) nicely captures the

dangerous yet thrilling sensation that is associated with the sublime, an aesthetic concept

intimately connected with horror. Moreover, his narrative ballad *Christabel* (c. 1797 – 1800)

constitutes one of the very first vampire stories.[39] Coleridge's introduction of stylistic hallmarks

establishes him as a fundamental precursor, whose insights are worth drawing on when it comes

to interpreting a theory of horror's appeal.[40]

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[38] S.T. Joshi, "Interregnum," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 1 (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2012, 2014), page 111.

[39] *Christabel*'s incomplete fragments were eventually published in 1816 at the behest of Coleridge's friend Lord Byron. Inspired by Coleridge, Byron published his own vampire tale, *The Giaour* (1813). This dialectic culminated in Byron's work inspiring his friend, the physician John William Polidori, to publish "The Vampyre" (1819), the first work to identify itself explicitly as vampire fiction. Nicholas Halmi et al., "Christabel (1816)," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* Ed. Nicholas Halmi, et al. (New York: Norton & Company, 2004), page 159. For additional information on the history of Vampire folklore, see: Nick Groom, "Dracula's Pre-History: the Advent of the Vampire," *The Cambridge Companion to Dracula*, Ed. Roger Luckhurst (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pages 11-25.

[40] Camile Paglia characterizes Coleridge's best work as transposing readers "far into the daemonic realm." Biographer Richard Holmes notes that Coleridge, who suffered from intense night terrors throughout his life, often (involuntarily) visited such realms himself. Coleridge's attempts to rationalize his nightmares produced "notebooks full of grotesque" imagery, which in turn provided bloodcurdling inspiration for his poetry and prose. His night terrors would likely be classified by modern psychologists and cognitive scientists as sleep paralysis induced hypnagogic hallucinations. Indeed, the very term "nightmare" is connected to sleep paralysis; it derives from the Old-English mære ("malevolent entity which rides the chest of a sleeper"), inherited from the Proto-Germanic *marōn, in turn from the Indo-European *mer- ("crush, oppress,") and possibly influenced by the Greek μόρος ("doom"). Predating the modern term, though, civilizations have long produced folklore to explain sleep paralysis and hypnagogic hallucinations. Mesopotamian tablets detail "exorcisms of evil demons," including the night "hag-demon" known as Labartu (sometimes rendered Lamashtu). The Akkadian terms for spirits lilû (male) and līlītu (female) are the ancestors of the Latin incubi and succubae respectively, nocturnal demons that the Roman era Augustine notes are reported "by many people" whose "reliability" he believes "there is no occasion to doubt." Even today, explaining hypnagogic visions through supernatural visitation remains widespread. Arabic cultures speak of *Ja-thoom* (that which "sits heavily on something"), the Chinese employ the Pinyin phrase guǐ yā shēn ("ghost pressing on body"), and, as Patrick McNamara observes (and this Atlantic Canada-born author can attest), residents of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia recount unique folklore concerning the "night hag," an evil presence who molests sleepers in order "to steal [their] soul." Humanity's fascination with horror is perhaps related to a subconscious desire to harness and control these involuntary demons of the night who so often vex us. Camille Paglia, "The Demon as Lesbian Vampire – Coleridge," *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickenson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pages 325-7. Richard Holmes, "Hamlet in Fleet Street," *Coleridge: Darker*

I will also intermittently refer to the American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849), whose influence on horror is perhaps best affirmed by the fact that his very name has become synonymous with the macabre. Daryl Jones argues that Poe contributed "more than any one figure to establish the horror story."[41] Joshi similarly lauds Poe as a pioneer, a visionary who "revolutionized and transformed" horror "in so profound and multifaceted a way that it could plausibly be maintained that the genre, as a serious contribution to literature, only began with him." The latter's estimation is so effusive that he speculates, "the entire Gothic movement could be considered a kind of anticipation" of Poe's "true commencement of the field."[42] Accordingly, as with Coleridge's work, I shall refer to Poe's fiction in order to illustrate fundamental horror concepts, and as a source of counterexamples. I shall also, in keeping with my hypothesis, more than occasionally invoke what Poe calls the "Imp of the Perverse," humanity's enigmatic propensity to experience precisely what "we feel we should not."[43]

Reflections (London: Flamingo, 1999), page 229. Brian A. Sharpless, "A Clinician's Guide to Recurrent Isolated Sleep Paralysis," *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, Vol. 12. Jul. 19, 2016. Liddell et al., "μόρος," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 452. Lynn Thorndike, "Introduction – Incantations against Sorcery and Demons," *History of Magic And Experimental Science*, Vol. 1. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), page 18. Augustine, "Book XV, Chapter 23," *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, Trans. Henry Bettenson (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), page 638. Patrick McNamara, "Nightmares and Popular Culture," *Nightmares: the Science and Solution of those Frightening Visions During Sleep* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2008), page 115. For additional information on sleep paralysis and the folklore surrounding it, see Shelley R. Adler's *Sleep Paralysis: Night-mares, Nocebos, and the Mind-Body Connection* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

[41] Daryl Jones, "Introduction," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) pages xx-xxi.

[42] H.P. Lovecraft likewise argues that it is largely to Poe to whom "we owe the modern horror-story." Joshi, "Edgar Allan Poe," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 1, page 143. H.P. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature – VII: Edgar Allan Poe," *Collected Essays, Volume Two: Literary Criticism*, Ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2004), page 100.

[43] According to Poe, a "thirst for self-torture" is near universal. As he enquires in "The Black Cat" (1843), "who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*?" Coleridge admits to having felt such a desire upon witnessing a thunderstorm: "a vivid flash passed across me, my nerves thrilled, and I earnestly wished… that it would pass through me!" In Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), Raskolnikov likewise feels an inexplicable desire to confess his murder to Zametov: "he knew what he was doing, but he could not restrain himself." And the Austrian polymath Robert Eisler recalls, upon visiting the top of the Eifel Tower, having felt an unaccountable desire to "throw [himself] down, head forward, into the abyss." Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Essays and Reviews* (New York: The Library of

Poe's "Imp" bears a striking resemblance to the Ancient Greek conception of ἀκρασία, an inability to maintain "command over oneself."[44] This is fitting, for, throughout this thesis, I will rely on classical concepts and thinkers to cast clearer light on horror and the grounds of its appeal.[45] As Schiller observes, the Greeks are often "our models" when it comes to articulating theories concerning art and the human condition. Matthew Arnold comparably remarks that the "best art and poetry of the Greeks" are of "surpassing… instructiveness."[46] In keeping with the spirit of such perspectives, I believe that explaining horror through Ancient Greek concepts is especially advantageous.

America, 1984), page 24. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Black Cat," *The Complete Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014), pages 216, 208. Coleridge, "Death," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, pages 588-9. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, "Chapter VI," *Crime and Punishment*, Trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2001), page 132. Robert Eisler, *Man into Wolf: An Anthropological Study of Sadism, Masochism, and Lycanthropy* (London: Routledge And Kegan Paul Limited, 1951), page 47.

[44] Aristotle characterizes ἀκρασία, usually translated as "incontinence," as a disposition in which "man is defeated by and cannot resist pleasures or pains." For Aristotle, ἐγκράτεια ("self-control") is simply the inverse of ἀκρασία, whereas for Xenophon, ἐγκράτεια is the very "foundation of moral goodness," which likely explains his extreme antipathy towards the possibility of deriving pleasure from our fears (see footnote 68). Liddell et al., "ἀκρασία," and "ἐγκράτεια" *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 27, 191. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII – 7," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, Trans. W.D. Ross and J.O. Urmson, page 1817, 1150b. Xenophon, "Memoirs of Socrates 1.5.1 – 1.6.5," *Conversations of Socrates*, page 94.

[45] Nietzsche argues that the Greeks intimately "knew and felt the terrors and horrors of existence," having a "unique gift" for expressing such phenomena via "resplendent, dream-born figures." Debbie Felton likewise makes a compelling case that the influence of classical supernaturalism on modern horror cannot be overstated. Lycanthropy (from the Greek λύκος "wolf" and ἄνθρωπος "man"), necromancy (from the Greek νεκρός "dead" and μαντεία "power of divination"), "the belief that ghosts haunt crossroads" or "usually appear at midnight," even the belief that certain animals, such as dogs, have a "heightened sensitivity to the supernatural," are all folk-intuitions traceable back (at least in part) to Ancient Greek mythology and legend. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Ed. Raymond Geuss, Trans. Ronald Speirs, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pages 23-4. Liddell et al., "λύκος," "ἄνθρωπος," "νεκρός," and "μαντεία," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 419, 63, 460, 424. Debbie Felton, "Introduction" and "The Folklore of Ghosts," *Haunted Greece and Rome: Ghost Stories from Classical Antiquity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), pages xvii, 5.

[46] See also Eduard Zeller, according to whom Ancient Greece was inimitably endowed with both a boundless "feeling for the beautiful," and a "deep and keen thirst for knowledge." Friedrich Schiller, "Sixth Letter," *On the Aesthetic Education of Man and Letters to Prince Frederick Christian von Augustenburg*, Trans. Keith Tribe (London: Penguin Books, 2016), page 17. Matthew Arnold, "From Culture and Anarchy, Chapter I. Sweetness and Light," The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism (New York: Norton & Company, 2010), page 721. Eduard Zeller, "Introduction," *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy* (London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914), page 22.

Emerging out of Gothicism, horror exploded in popularity during the Victorian period, to such an extent that nearly every major writer explored the genre.[47] Victorians especially became infatuated with *ghost stories* and their characteristic tropes: revenants weighed down by rattling chains, haunted houses, forbidden mysteries, and overgrown graveyards. It is important to recognize, with Jones, that the "supernatural tale," exemplified by the ghost story, set "itself in explicit opposition to the prevailing Victorian materialism."[48] For Victorians, immured within a world increasingly shaped by technological and scientific innovation, supernaturalism presented a mystifying, and therefore tantalizing, construal of a reality that was otherwise exhaustingly explained. As H.P. Lovecraft once remarked, the "strongest kind of fear is fear of the *unknown*," so it makes sense that people gravitate towards phenomena that stoke such an anxiety.[49] Although the appreciation of fear is not peculiar to a particular time-period, the exact object of fear evolves to accommodate changing social, cultural, and civil norms.[50]

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[47] M.R. James, writing in the late Victorian era, remarks that *everyone* has "an innate love of the supernatural." M.R. James, "Ghost Stories – I," *Count Magnus and Other Ghost Stories*, Ed. S.T. Joshi, (London: Penguin Books, 2005), page 243.

[48] Jones, "Introduction," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson*, page xxv.

[49] As Emil Cioran appropriately puts it, "man is much more vexed by the *absence* than by the profusion of events." With this in mind, Keats' concept of "negative capability," suggesting that implied uncertainties are more aesthetically compelling than philosophical certainties, seems particularly relevant regarding horror. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature – I: Introduction," *Collected Essays*, page 82. Emil Cioran, "Views on Tolerance," *A Short History of Decay*, Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), page 172. John Keats, "Letter to George and Tom Keats, January 5th, 1818," *John Keats's Poetry and Prose*, Ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (New York: Norton & Company, 2009), page 109.

[50] Mathias Clasen makes a relevant point, remarking that although human beings "are born to be fearsome," the things that we fear "are somewhat plastic," hence "vampires are popular at one time, in some cultures, and zombies are popular at other times." Sarah Iles Johnston argues that tales of the supernatural "reflect the values of the culture in which they developed." Consider, for example, how Greek φόβητρον ("object of terror") myths concerning supernatural females (e.g., λάμια, a "monster said to feed on a man's flesh," and μορμώ, a "hideous she-monster") emphasize the importance of motherhood and the taboos concerning failing to fulfill maternal obligations. Mathias Clasen, "Introduction – Horror, Fear, and Evolution," *Why Horror Seduces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), page 4. Sarah Iles Johnston, "Elpenor and Others," and "Childless Mothers and Blighted Virgins," *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pages 5, 174. Liddell, et al., "Φόβητρον," "λάμια," and "μορμώ," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 764, 406, 452.

Charles Dickens' "The Signal-Man" (1866) serves as a good example. In this classic ghost story, Dickens uses the concept of *descent*, best characterized by the Greek term κατάβασις ("to go down," either "a hill," or "into the underworld"), to express his concern that technology's ascendance was facilitating both an intellectual and moral decline in British society.[51] The narrator descends a dungeon-like fissure, through which a railway passes, hailing therein the eponymous worker. The worker, initially startled, then communicates to the narrator that a phantom haunts the railroad, who repeats the inexplicable, yet unsettling phrase: "below there!" The narrator, chilled, but unconvinced, resolves the next day to check on the signal-man's welfare. Upon doing so, however, he discovers that the signal-man is deceased, having been hit by a locomotive. This turn of events completely undermines the narrator's faith in rational explanation. For he notes that, prior to the signal-man's death, the warning of the locomotive's handler included, "not only the words" which the Signalman described "as haunting him," but also, even more inexplicably, the narrator's greeting *days before*, "below there!"[52] In effect, Dickens, through horror, discloses how a technology-driven society might, rather than enlighten, foster a descent into epistemic indeterminacy.[53] This is just one example of how horror can not just entertain, but also inspire valuable insights into society and the human condition.[54]

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[51] The term κατάβασις implies either a literal descent by a living person into the underworld, or a living person's spiritual decline. It is not to be confused with νέκυια, sometimes rendered νέκυα, the Ancient Greek practice of summoning and "conducting" ghosts of the dead. Liddell et al., "κατάβασις," and "νέκυ-," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 351, 460.

[52] Charles Dickens, "No. 1 Branch Line: The Signal-Man," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson*, page 151.

[53] Daniel Ogden observes that the "descent by the living into the underworld" involves a "dissolving" of "the boundaries between the lower world and the upper one," to such an extent that "hard and fast distinction[s]" concerning life and death become tenuous. Daniel Ogden, "Introduction," *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), page xxi.

[54] As Jones puts it, horror "directly reflects cultural preoccupations, fears, and anxieties," rendering them "obliquely in displaced and often highly metaphorical guises, as monsters, madmen, and ghosts." Jones, "Introduction," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson*, page xi.

Leading into the early twentieth century, several prolific practitioners, influenced by horror's antecedents and pioneers, helped consolidate the themes and devices with which the nascent genre would become most intimately associated. I will cite more than occasionally writers such as M.R. James (1862 – 1936), Arthur Machen (1862 – 1947), Algernon Blackwood (1869 – 1951), and Edward Plunkett, more commonly known as Lord Dunsany (1878 – 1957), for such visionaries, as their acolyte Lovecraft puts it, possess "a naturalness, convincingness, artistic smoothness, and skillful intensity of appeal quite beyond comparison with anything in the Gothic."[55]

I shall also have more to say concerning Lovecraft (1890 – 1937), whose conception of cosmic horror is remarkable for its total exclusion of Gothicism in favor of science-fiction and fantasy-inspired subject matter. Weird-fiction writer Lin Carter traces Lovecraft's success to his "innovation." Eschewing familiar themes of "ghosts, werewolves, vampires," and "hauntings," he "struck boldly into fresh new paths," evoking fear through methods that were, for their time, "shocking and new."[56] His rejection of Gothicism's trappings lays particularly bare the extent to which horror as a genre is fixated on fear. Lovecraft's notion of cosmic horror, like Dickens' "The Signal-Man," also serves as an excellent example of fear reflecting social anxieties, which in Lovecraft's case concerned an increasing understanding of astronomy that exposed humanity's negligible standing in the universe.

Another writer I shall occasionally refer to is Franz Kafka (1883 – 1924). A strong indication of his relation to horror is that, like Poe, his very name is used as a synonym for the unsettling, "Kafkaesque" having entered everyday language to convey situations that are "uncanny, weird,

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[55] Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature – X: The Modern Masters," *Collected Essays*, page 116.
[56] Lin Carter, "Introduction," *A Definitive Guide to the Universe of Unearthly Horrors – Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), page xiv.

and anxiety-ridden."[57] His stories, exploring the contradictory nature of what Kafka calls the "sweetness of sorrow," and regularly incorporating what Joshi calls "the imagery of nightmare," are thus worth citing as exemplary instances of horror.[58]

Horror became a cultural force during the mid-twentieth century, as increasing literacy among members of the working class, combined with innovative methods of cultural dissemination, made art focused on eliciting fear dramatically more accessible. The development of visual media, such as cinema and television, as well as the proliferation of cheap paper "pulps" and radio teleplays, especially helped accelerate this growth. Readily accessible, and often requiring little formal education, these media were able to break through barriers that had previously limited the appreciation of horror to the middle and upper classes. Emerging trends in early twenty-first century cinema and television, for example, demonstrate that the progressive acceptance of horror was strongly encouraged by the cumulative introduction of experimental films (e.g., 1920's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*), vampire cinema (e.g., 1922's *Nosferatu*), body-horror shockers (e.g., 1932's *Freaks*), monster pictures (e.g., 1954's *Creature from the Black Lagoon*), psychological horror films (e.g., 1959's *The Mummy*), pulp-anthology television (e.g., 1959-1964's *The Twilight Zone*), zombie cinema (e.g., 1968's *Night of the Living Dead*) and, ultimately, cinematic blockbusters (e.g., 1973's *The Exorcist*). This development is remarkable for demonstrating not only horror's increasing appeal, but also the expanding complexity of its

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[57] Gross, Ruth V. "Kafka's Short Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, Ed. Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), page 80.

[58] In his private writings, Kafka expresses a desire to "take advantage" of his fears. Walter Benjamin characterizes Kafka as an author who sought to "learn what fear was." Franz Kafka, "1913 – 22 October," *Diaries, 1910 – 1923*, Ed. Max Brod, Trans. Joseph Kresh (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), page 234. Kafka, "1922 – 18 January," *Diaries, 1910 – 1923*, Trans. Martin Greenberg with Hannah Arendt, page 400. Joshi, "Novelists, Satirists, and Poets," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 2, page 483. Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka – On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," *Illuminations*, Ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), page 118.

subject matter, from evoking fear through straightforward situations and entities to doing so by more intricate psychological means.[59]

It cannot be emphasized enough that horror does not appeal to everyone, and that many reject the genre as unwholesome or distasteful. Some are disconcerted by the viscera routinely associated with it, whereas others are more generally confounded by the notion that one should derive pleasure from frightening things.[60] Rather than suppose that such people are obstinate, or that they lack certain powers of discrimination, it is more reasonable to assume that they simply do not possess the idiosyncrasies in temperament which makes others more acquiescent to horror's furtive allure. As Horace says, "sportive words are for the playful, serious for the grave."[61] Nevertheless a great many, more finely attuned to thrill-seeking and the macabre, are

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[59] Mark Kermode, in his book on *The Exorcist*, nicely contextualizes the film's cultural impact. The early seventies were a tumultuous time for Americans, as many cultural norms were being upended or eroded. The National Guard was shooting Vietnam protestors, the hippy movement was floundering as figures like Charles Manson exposed its darker underbelly, and Nixon's increasing implication in a string of political scandals undermined faith in the United States government. Eschatological tensions heightened when, on November 14th, 1972, around a year before the film's theatrical release, Pope Paul VI declared that evil is "an effective agent, a living spiritual being, perverted and perverting." This climate of desperation, spiritual disillusion, and a heightened sensitivity to the supernatural among true-believers made audiences particularly susceptible to the terrors *The Exorcist* had to offer. In the words of Kermode, the film "presented a credible portrait of the modern urban world ripped apart... for the first time in a mainstream movie, audiences witnessed the graphic desecration of everything that was considered wholesome and good about the fading American dream – the home, the family, the church, and most shockingly, the child." Mark Kermode, "Prologue," *The Exorcist* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), pages 8-9.

[60] Germaine de Staël, for instance, argues that "detestable paintings of evil habits" are an aesthetic degradation, as the "main advantage" of art "is to gather everything in nature that might be useful" as a moral "lesson or model." On such a view, only works "producing sweet emotions" can do "useful work for humanity." Germaine de Staël, "From Essays on Fiction – III," and "From Essays on Fiction – Introduction," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Trans. Vivian Folkenflik, pages 508-9.

[61] Aristotle notes that "feelings such as pity and fear… exist very strongly in some souls," less so in others. See also observations made by Archilochus (c. seventh century BCE): "There is no single kind of human nature, but different things warm different people's hearts." Desiderius Erasmus: "affections of the soul," depending on the person, have varying "traffic." Giordano Bruno: "different people" have different "habits, purposes" and "inclinations." David Hume: "Though some objects… be naturally calculated to give pleasure, it is not to be expected that in every individual the pleasure will be equally felt." And G.W.F. Hegel: "there can be no universal laws of beauty and of taste." Horace, "The Art of Poetry," *Classical Literary Criticism*, Ed. D.A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom, Trans. D.A. Russell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) page 100. Aristotle, "Politics – Book VIII – 7," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, page 2128, 1342a. Archilochus, "Fragment – 25," *Greek and Lyric Poetry*, Trans. M.L. West, page 10. Desiderius Erasmus, "Praise of Folly," *Praise of Folly and Letter to Martin Dorp 1515*, Trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1982), page 204. Bruno, "A General Account of Bonding," *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, Trans. Richard J. Blackwell, page 145.

drawn to horror like Eros to Psyche. And to sate this curiosity, ample material has been

produced. The prominent status of horror writers Stephen King, Dean Koontz, and Clive Barker,

the financial success of cinematic horror "blockbusters" like Oren Peli's *Paranormal Activity*

(2009), James Wan's *The Conjuring* (2013), and Andrés Muschietti's *It* (2017), as well as the

prevalence of streaming shows such as *Stranger Things* (2016 - present), all strongly suggest that

horror's ascent continues, and that the genre is more popular now than ever before.[62]

David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," *Selected Essays*, Ed. Stephen Copley, and Andrew Edgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 140. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Chapter One: The Range of Aesthetic Defined, and Some Objections against the Philosophy of Art Refuted," *Introductory Lectures in Aesthetics*, Trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2004), page 8.

[62] Coltan Scrivner, "Why Horror Films Are More Popular Than Ever," *Nautilus Quarterly*. Jan. 13, 2021.

III.   Full Dark: Lack of Academic Attention

"Many of those who have learned much do not have understanding."
- Democritus.[63]

Despite having reached its zenith in popularity, or perhaps because of it, horror has received only

modest attention from the philosophic community. Since aesthetics is concerned with the nature

of human appreciation, it is a reasonably diverse sub-discipline. While there are countless

treatises devoted to customary aesthetic experiences, such as those associated with literature,

cinema, music, and sculpture, many others have addressed more commonplace experiences, such

as the consumption of food.[64] Specialization is hardly detrimental. To the contrary, it indicates

vigorous, concentrated discourse within a discipline. Given that aesthetics covers such widely

varied territory, it is a distinct advantage that individuals are inclined to concentrate on subjects

that not every thinker has time to analyze properly. Nevertheless, considering that philosophers

have time for particulars such as food, the relatively scant attention paid to horror, a widespread

aesthetic phenomenon, is somewhat perplexing.

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[63] Democritus (c. 460 – 370 BCE), characterized as the "laughing" philosopher due to his encouragement towards cheerfulness, is often contrasted with the misanthropic "weeping" philosopher, Heraclitus. Yet, concerning the frequent ignorance of supposedly learned men, they agree; according to Heraclitus, "much learning does not teach understanding." Democritus is best known for promulgating an atomic theory of the universe, the idea that matter is constituted of small indivisible particles ("atoms" from the Greek ἄτομον "uncuttable"). This theory, although revealed in the twentieth century by the discovery of subatomic particles as not *technically* correct, is nevertheless astonishingly accurate, and thus places Democritus, to quote Paul Cartledge, as "one of the most original of the great philosophers." The peripatetic philosopher Aristoxenus (c. fourth century BCE) supposedly recorded that Plato intensely disliked Democritus, and "wished to burn all the writings of Democritus that he was able to collect." Given Plato's considerable influence, such fiery disdain perhaps in part explains why, of the vast array of books (close to 200) that Democritus is purported to have written, on subjects as diverse as ethics, politics, natural philosophy, mathematics, and musical theory, only fragments survive. Democritus, "Ethics: H. Education – 334 [F203]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Vol 1, Trans. Daniel W. Graham, page 663. Heraclitus, "XVIII," *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Trans. Charles H. Kahn, page 37. Diogenes Laërtius, "Democritus," *The Lives And Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1915), page 393. Paul Cartledge, "Reception: Democritus' Last Laugh," *Democritus and Atomistic Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pages 45-7. Liddell et al., "ἄτομον," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 113.
[64] For just a few examples, see: David Kaplan et al., *The Philosophy of Food*, ed. David Kaplan (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012). Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Food: Food and Philosophy* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1999). Nicola Perullo, *Taste as Experience: The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Food* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

Then again, such relative lack of work accomplished on horror aesthetics is perhaps unsurprising. Academic philosophy, particularly western analytic philosophy, is a notoriously erudite discipline, at times disconnected from art that is traditionally perceived as lacking sophistication. Horror has regularly been overlooked by scholars who have consigned the genre to the category of mere entertainment. For instance, Stephen King has long been scorned by academics, his reputation as a serious writer increasing only after winning the National Book Award's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.[65] And Alfred Hitchcock, recognized as one of cinema's foremost auteurs of suspense, was similarly disregarded for most of his career, winning a solitary Academy Award, as a token honour, long after his classic material was produced.[66] All things considered, philosophy's general neglect of horror appears to be due to both a fixation on "high-art" as opposed to "mass art," as well as what Noël Carroll calls "a Kantian-inspired bias" in favor of art "not susceptible to a formula."[67]

Part of the problem is that horror is often equated with what is taboo, immoral, disgusting, or otherwise unpleasant. Such experiences are often judged "cheap," as lacking the sophistication associated with more traditional art forms. Some skeptics go even further, contending that fear is

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[65] In certain circles this criticism persists. S.T. Joshi regards King's winning the Medal as "grotesque," blasting King as a "schlockmeister" who churns out product "in the same manner as McDonald's or Budweiser." Harold Bloom is similarly scathing, remarking that King's winning the medal is "another low in the shocking process of dumbing down our cultural life." Joshi, "The Boom: The Blockbusters," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 2, pages 632, 626. Harold Bloom, "Dumbing Down American Readers," *The Boston Globe* (September 24th, 2003).

[66] Jonathan Freedman emphasizes that Hitchcock's "legacy can be found in just about every [modern] suspense and horror film," as they routinely "rely on such demonstrably Hitchcockian techniques as Kuleshov-effect-inflected point-of-view shots, sudden shocks," and "destabilizing narrative strategies." Think "how many leading ladies," he reminds readers, "have been killed off since *Psycho*." Jonathan Freedman, "The School of Hitchcock: Swimming in the Wake of the Master," *The Cambridge Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, Ed. Jonathan Freedman Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), page 231. For additional information on the "final girl" trope in horror, and its all too often sexist implications, see Carol J. Clover's "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations*, no. 20. 187–228 (1987), as well as her book, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[67] Carroll, "Introduction," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 9.

inherently beyond our capacity for pleasure.[68] The assumptions that horror can only count as a "low-brow" form of entertainment, and that fear is intrinsically unpleasant, however, are both quite tendentious. For the genre includes many critically acclaimed films, paintings, sculptures, musical compositions, television shows, and works of literature. Are they to be regarded as anomalies, acclaimed *despite* their frightening subject matter?

Insofar as such works concentrate on fear to the suppression or exclusion of other emotions, this view seems untenable. Certainly, any horror aficionado can point to a myriad of significant pieces in which fear, rather than being incidental, lies at the heart of the work. *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) is an especially notable example, as the film swept the Academy Awards' "big-five" categories, raking in Oscars for Best Picture, Director (Jonathan Demme), Lead Actor (Anthony Hopkins), Lead Actress (Jodie Foster) and Screenplay (Ted Tally).[69] Although the Academy is far from the absolute authority concerning cinematic achievement, this distinction can nevertheless be taken as safe indication that the film has been, and remains, highly-regarded by critics. Its box-office success likewise indicates that the work has had significant appeal for the general public. And undeniably, *Lambs* focuses on generating fear, following the gruesome exploits of two serial killers. Arguing that *Lambs* is significant despite its fearsome imagery places a critic on precarious footing, for the fear generated is an indispensable feature of its aesthetic appeal. Indeed, it is on those grounds that it is judged remarkable.

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[68] According to Xenophon, fear's "mere presence in the mind… haunts all our pleasures and spoils them." Spinoza characterizes fear as a "sadness" which "cannot [intrinsically] be good." And Hegel is emphatic that passions, including fear, naturally beget "violence" and "corruption." Xenophon, "Hiero the Tyrant," *Hiero the Tyrant and other Treatises*, Trans. Robin Waterfield (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1997) page 18. Baruch Spinoza, "Of Human Bondage – P47," *Ethics*, Ed. Edwin Curley, Trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996), page 141. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Introduction," *The Philosophy of History*, Trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2004), page 20.
[69] Joshi, "The Boom: The Blockbusters," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 2, pages 646-7. Deirdre Durkan, "Jaws to Get Out: The Only Six Horror Films Ever Nominated for Oscar's Best Picture," *The Hollywood Reporter*. March 1, 2018.

As regards painting, Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781), which excited "an uncommon degree of interest" when first exhibited, depicts a common subject of horror, a demon, and does so in an unambiguously terrible light. So terrible, in fact, that the painting almost certainly seized the imagination of a young Mary Shelley, inspiring a pivotal scene in *Frankenstein*.[70] William Blake's *Ghost of a Flea* (c. 1819-20), produced at the request of an acquaintance who desired an illustration of one of the spirits Blake claimed to regularly observe, is also commonly praised, the lurid grin of its devilish subject notwithstanding.[71] Ilya Repin's *Ivan the Terrible and His Son* (1885), Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893), and the charcoal sketches by New York City artist Anna Park (b. 1996), are all similarly acclaimed, not despite, but precisely because of, their horrifying subject matter.

Horror is also regularly manifested in sculpture, within which category, again, certain works are commonly recognized as significant. An early example may well be *Laocoön and His Sons* (c. 200 BCE), characterized by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing as evoking "the true pathos" of suffering, but which Pliny the Elder nevertheless praises as "preferable to any other production of the art of painting" or "statuary."[72] The Sedlec Ossuary, which incorporates tens of thousands

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[70] Midway through the novel, Victor leaves Elizabeth, his bride-to-be, unattended. Soon after, he hears a "shrill and dreadful scream." Rushing into Elizabeth's chamber, he discovers her "lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed," the monster forebodingly looming over the "bridal bier." Fuseli was a close friend of Shelley's parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. It is thus quite likely, as Gerhard Joseph first observed, that the striking similarities between Fuseli's painting and Shelley's passage are not incidental, but rather homage. John Knowles, "Chapter Five," *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, Vol. 1., (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831), page 64. Shelley, "Vol. III – Chapter VI," *Frankenstein*, pages 241-2. Gerhard Joseph, "Frankenstein's Dream: The Child is Father of the Monster," *Hartford Studies in Literature*, 7 (1975): pages 97-115.

[71] Late in his life, William Blake (1757 – 1827) became friends with many of his younger admirers, including John Varley (1778 – 1842), a painter and astrologer who "believed that Blake's visions were literal occurrences." Blake "would sit up in Varley's house all night," drawing "figures from the past who appeared before him," as well as "imaginary personages." As William Vaughn points out, it is likely that Blake "was humouring Varley in this case, treating images that emerged inside his own mind as though they were projected before him." William Vaughn, "The New Generation," *William Blake* (London: Tate Publishing, 1999), page 64.

[72] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry," *Classic Romantic and German Aesthetics*, Ed. J.M. Bernstein, Trans. W.A. Steel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), page 29. Pliny the Elder, "Book XXXVI: The Natural History of Stones – Chapter 4," *The Natural History of Pliny*, Vol. 6., Trans. by John Bostock and Henry T. Riley (Project Gutenberg, 2020).

of human bones in its architecture, is among the Czech Republic's most popular tourist attractions. And H.R. Giger's biomechanical designs, prominently utilized throughout Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), are regularly acclaimed as a "horror spectacle," the eponymous monster's "slobbering maw" notwithstanding.[73]

The same reasoning can be applied to music, television, literature, or virtually any other genre. Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* (1867) showcases a baleful arrangement to accompany its witches' Sabbath theme, the most iconic episodes of the British television series *Black Mirror* (2011-19) are characteristically appraised as frightening, and Robert W. Chambers' short story, "The Repairer of Reputations" (1895), although complex in its narrative structure, reveals itself as a tour-de-force in psychological horror, conveying the sense of an unsettling possible future that may or may not be the fevered imaginings of an insane asylum-resident.[74] These works, above all else, focus on evoking fear, and yet, tellingly, are popular among audiences and critics, who commonly regard them as aesthetically remarkable. This strongly suggests that their acclaim is a direct result of the fear that they provoke, rather than fear being some incidental feature that must be overcome.

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[73] Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Varieties of Aesthetic Disgust," *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), page 89.

[74] Lovecraft accurately predicted the future critical reception of Chambers' work, remarking in a 1927 letter to the writer and poet Clark Ashton Smith (1893 – 1961) that, although Chambers possesses "the right brains" for generating a "shuddering background of horror," his writings subsequent to the short story collection *The King in Yellow* (1895) fail to use them. Indeed, today Chambers' later work is largely ignored, whereas his early horror tales, heavily influenced by Ambrose Bierce's short story, "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" (1886), are increasingly applauded. The influence of Chambers on Lovecraft is obvious (e.g., Lovecraft's incorporation of the "yellow sign," the mythical realm "Carcosa," and the deity "Hastur" into his own mythos). For a more recent example of Chambers' influence on the horror genre, consider the critically acclaimed first season of the television series *True Detective* (2014), which makes recurrent allusions to concepts taken directly from *The King in Yellow*. H.P. Lovecraft, "June 24 [1927]," *Downward Spire, Lonely Hill: The Letters of H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith 1922-1931*, Vol. 1, Ed. David E. Schultz and S.T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2017), page 133. For further examples, readers are encouraged to consider the anthology *Under Twin Suns: Alternate Histories of the Yellow Sign*, Ed. James Chambers (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2021).

The popularity of horror demands serious attention. Those with an interest in aesthetics cannot simply ignore an entire facet of expression on the grounds that it appeals to the uncultured masses. This is especially true when one recognizes how wrongheaded it is to categorize horror as unsophisticated. Philosophers endeavour to better understand and explain natural, social, and psychological phenomena, motivated by a love of knowledge and a desire to see reality's characteristics properly revealed.[75] Since horror is as obvious a genre as any, its appeal as apparent as how we live and breathe, philosophers of aesthetics must account for that appeal, if they are to honour the proper range of their discipline.

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[75] August Comte points out that some philosophers attempt to explain the world through "supernatural" or "abstract" forces, and thereby attain "absolute knowledge," either in terms of the "theological," or the "metaphysical." Karl Popper characterizes this approach as "methodological essentialism," the belief that philosophy's mission is to "describe the true nature of things, i.e. their hidden reality or essence." In response to methodological essentialism, which so often overvalues intuition, Comte is quite right in proposing that philosophy's proper domain concerns not "obtaining absolute truth" and "final causes," but rather, "discover[ing], by a well-combined use of reasoning and [empirical] observation, the actual laws of phenomena," insofar as they *can* be known. Auguste Comte, "The Nature and Importance of Positive Philosophy," *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*, Ed. Frederick Ferré, Trans. Frederick Ferré (Chicago: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), page 2. Karl Popper, "Plato's Theory of Forms or Ideas," *The Open Society and Its Enemies – New One Volume Edition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), page 30.

IV.   Fear's Cerebral Element

> "…thought, heart of life and sensation."
> -   Philolaus.[76]

Before exploring its inner workings, it is helpful to clarify further what is meant by the emotion fear. Only after certain conceptual ambiguities have been thoroughly resolved, and alternative interpretations exposed as erroneous, can a workable account of horror's appeal, and perhaps even its utility, be properly demonstrated.

It is important to recognize that, as an aesthetic classification, horror is subjective, in the sense that different rational persons can disagree as to whether the same phenomena are frightening. For example, news of Harriet's illness may "alarm" Mr. Elton, yet the more composed Emma is "not really at all frightened herself." And Nelly astutely perceives Linton's prostrations as "folly to attempt humouring," whereas Cathy reacts to his paroxysms "in terror."[77] When it comes to fear, an evaluation is involved, and the standard of appraisal varies. Hence, I shall categorize certain works as horror due to their being *commonly* recognized as

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[76] Philolaus was a Pythagorean philosopher who flourished in Italy around the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE. According to Diogenes Laërtius, Philolaus and his disciple Eurytus met with Plato while he was visiting the West about 388 BCE (an anecdote which W.K.C. Guthrie remarks "rests on no good authority," but which "is not impossible"). If true, this places Philolaus, along with Archytas, as one of the primary figures who introduced Plato to Pythagorean ideas (e.g., transmigration of the soul, the supremacy of mathematics). At any rate, Plato was familiar with Philolaus' pupils, Simmias and Cebes, who appear in a few of his dialogues. In *Phaedo*, Plato attributes to Philolaus the belief that, although "it is not right to kill oneself," a genuine "philosopher will be willing to follow one who is dying." He may also have promulgated a psychology that heavily emphasized ἀκρασία, as according to Aristotle: "some thoughts and passions do not depend on us, nor the acts following such thoughts and reasonings, but, as Philolaus said, some arguments are too strong for us." Philolaus, "Texts 32-6 – 35 [F10]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies.* Vol 1., Trans. Daniel W. Graham, page 503. W.K.C. Guthrie, "IV – Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans," *A History of Greek Philosophy – Volume I: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), page 329. Plato, "Phaedo," *Complete Works*, Trans. G.A.M. Grube, page 53, 61d-e. Aristotle "Eudemian Ethics – Book II," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, Trans. J. Solomon, page 1940, 1225a.
[77] For an interesting example, consider Gregory Vlastos' essay "Socratic Irony," where he points out that "physical contact with an attractive youth" causes intense fear for Socrates as depicted by Xenophon, whereas Socrates as depicted by Plato "shows no terror of skin-contact." Jane Austen, "Chapter Thirteen," *Emma* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2014), page 96. Emily Brontë, "Volume II: Chapter Nine," *Wuthering Heights* (London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2014), page 196. Gregory Vlastos, "Socratic Irony," *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), page 38.

frightening, but this does not mean that such works will frighten *everyone*.[78] Just as a

professional athlete's nutritional requirements will differ substantially from a layperson's dietary

needs, different people, depending on factors such as temperament, beliefs, and material

conditions will come to different judgements regarding what is fearsome. Different individuals,

therefore, will or will not react frightfully to an object or phenomenon, depending on those

judgements. Nevertheless, there is a strong commonality concerning the things people are

frightened by. For example, while it is highly uncommon for a person to be afraid of ice-cream,

people commonly express a fear of sharks.[79]

When someone says, "I am frightened," they are expressing an affective disposition. This

means that the statement is non-displaceable (in the sense that it applies specifically to the

speaker) and not subject to truth-conditions or truth-conditional content. Expressive statements'

truth-value in effect depends on an individual's subjective appraisal. An individual who is

frightened by an object might refer to that object as "truly frightening," but other rational persons

might disagree, and this demonstrates that such an evaluative "truth" is very different than

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[78] Montaigne remarks that it is often a person's "opinion which confers value," noting that the same phenomena which Heraclitus perceived as cause for tears, Democritus regarded as cause for mirth. An especially humorous example is provided by Heinrich Heine, who argues that the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, when properly understood, ought to strike citizens of Königsberg with "far deeper horror" than the presence "of an executioner." Michel de Montaigne, "The Taste of Good and Evil Things Depends on our Opinion," and "On Democritus and Heraclitus," *The Complete Essays*, Trans. M.A. Screech (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), pages 66, 339. Heinrich Heine, "Book Three – Religion and Philosophy in Germany," *The Harz Journey and Selected Prose*, Ed. Ritchie Robertson, Trans. Ritchie Robertson (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006), page 269.

[79] Sharks are large carnivorous animals. They have a capacity to maim and devour humans, and fatal shark attacks have indeed been recorded, however, they are exceptionally uncommon. On average, sharks are responsible for about six human fatalities a year; contrast with hippos, said to cause about five hundred human fatalities per year. Galeophobia, an extreme fear of sharks, is arguably connected less to any genuine likelihood of danger than to the enduring legacy of the 1975 horror film *Jaws*. Spielberg's film is a powerful example of how aesthetic representations can dramatically change cultural attitudes toward phenomena, in this case, a wild animal. Jessica Learish, "The 20 Deadliest Animals on Earth, Ranked," *CBS News*. Aug. 29. 2018. For an interesting analysis of the (often unfortunate) ways that Spielberg's *Jaws* has shaped attitudes towards sharks, see Beryl Francis's "Before and After *Jaws*: Changing Representations of Shark Attacks," *The Great Circle*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2012), 44-64.

Herodotus saying it is true that Peisistratos "ruled Athens."[80] The latter, a historical claim, is a type of descriptive statement, such that its truth-value is not subject to debate. Peisistratos either was or was not the tyrant of Athens; rational persons, who have access to all the relevant evidence, cannot disagree.

Descriptive statements can attribute expressive attitudes as qualities, such as when Thucydides characterizes Peisistratos' son, Hippias, as being "more frightened" following the assassination of his brother Hipparchus. Here, too, this statement is not up for debate. Although modern historians in this case lack definitive evidence concerning what Hippias actually felt, supposing they managed to acquire all the relevant data, no subjectivity would be involved. The evidence would indicate definitively that either Hippias was or was not frightened. And of course, a description of this kind would be distinct from the attribution of a physical characteristic, such as Suetonius describing Vitellius as possessing "a limp, the result of a chariot race."[81] Descriptive statements of the latter variety correspond to empirically detectable properties, whereas descriptive statements that designate evaluative judgements do not. Affects often can be discerned empirically, but not always. Fear, ultimately, is not detectable in the same manner as colour, quantity, or shape.

This raises a concern regarding horror's somatic component. While it is true that a person's fright generally corresponds to a particular kind of physical response, this has generated a

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[80] Peisistratos (c. 600 – 527 BCE) was an Athenian faction leader who eventually seized control of Athens and became its tyrant. He was ousted from power twice, each time subsequently regaining control. Perhaps his most infamous accomplishment, according to Herodotus, involved disguising one Phye, a young, exceptionally tall woman, as the goddess Athena in order to win over credulous Athenians. This strange appeal to divinity, said to have been instrumental in Peisistratos' second rise to power, is perhaps worth contrasting with the awe-inspiring legends propagated by Pythagoras and his followers. Herodotus, "Book One [59]," *The Histories*, Trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) page 25.

[81] Thucydides, "Book Six – The Story of Harmodius and Aristogiton," *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Trans. Rex Warner (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1972), page 446. Suetonius, "Vitellius – 17.," *The Twelve Caesars*, Trans. Robert Graves (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2007), page 273

common misunderstanding. A variety of critics, academics, and creators misrepresent fear by conflating it with something related, but different – namely, somatic shock. Indeed, there are sometimes "jump scares" in horror, abrupt changes that are intended to evoke shock. However, few would disagree that, despite the common presence of shocking moments in horror, there is a discrepancy between being frightened and surprised. Supposing, then, that shock and fear are not the same, how are we to distinguish between the two?

First, we must concede that fear does entail a physical reaction. As previously mentioned, the very basis of the term "horror" connotes a bodily response, hair bristling or standing on end. Nevertheless, properly understood, fear encompasses not just a somatic response, but also, much more significantly, a cognitive component. As Wittgenstein once expressed, *belief* that fire will burn is of the same kind as the *fear* that it will burn.[82] Fear has an object; we are afraid *about* something, either an external object, person, phenomenon, event, or, in some cases, an unsettling thought.[83] The objects of our fears tends to be frightening due to certain beliefs and values that we hold as true (e.g., Alan is afraid of bears, because he *believes* that bears are capable of tearing him limb from limb, and because he *values* continued living). In the case of surprise, the element at play is less dynamic, relating to a simple incongruity between expectation and reality. We are

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[82] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "473.," *Philosophical Investigations: Revised Fourth Edition*, Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (West Sussex, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), page 142e.
[83] Hume makes an excellent point regarding unsettling thoughts: "We find that an evil, barely conceiv'd as possible, does sometimes produce fear; especially if the evil be very great… man cannot think of excessive pains and tortures without trembling, if he be in the least danger of suffering them." In the words of Herman Melville, "but the *rumor* of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city." David Hume, "Book Two: Of the Passions – Section IX. Of the Direct Passions," *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Ed. Ernest G. Mossner (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1985), page 491. Herman Melville, "Chapter VII: The Chapel," *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* (Bolton, ON: Cavalier Classics, 2015), page 34.

not shocked *about* anything, beyond the fact that the phenomenon eliciting the somatic response is unexpected.[84]

It is also important to recognize that fear does not generate an *automatic* physical response, such that everyone reacts frightfully the same way. Some reacting in horror, like Aeneas beholding the ghost of Creusa, become "paralyzed," their hair standing "on end," their words "stuck" in their throats. Others, horrified by similar phenomena, behave quite differently, such as Athenodorus, who, when confronted by a spirit, is said to have stoically continued writing.[85] Now and again, writes Montaigne, fear "puts wings on our heels," whereas, at other times, "it hobbles us and nails our feet to the ground."[86]

In fact, a dramatic physical reaction might not accompany fear at all. Consider veteran firefighters, who, hardened by years of experience, do not perceptively shake, tense up, or falter in the face of a frightening situation. Lucretius observes that people "differ from [one] another in temperament," such that some "give way a little sooner to fear."[87] Spinoza comments that even

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[84] Aristotle recognized this, observing that often, "upon an image arising" unexpectedly, "*without express mandate of the intellect*," bodily "parts are moved." Burke likewise comments that "when any organ of sense" is "suddenly affected… against expectance of the mind," there "ensues a convulsive motion." Aristotle, "Movement of Animals – 11," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, Trans. A.S.L. Farquharson, page 1095, 703b. Edmund Burke, "The Effects of Blackness," *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Ed. Paul Guyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), page 118.

[85] Virgil, "Book Two," *The Aeneid*, Trans. David West (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), page 47, lines 770-80. For information on Athenodorus and his encounter with a ghost, see: Pliny the Younger, "Letter to Lucius Licinius Sura," *The Penguin Book of the Undead: Fifteen Hundred Years of Supernatural Encounters*, Ed. Scott G. Bruce, Trans. Betty Radice (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), page 15.

[86] Montaigne, "On Fear," *The Complete Essays*, page 82.

[87] Plotinus, too, remarks that "not every person is moved or wills or acts in the same way in the same circumstances." Lucretius, "Book III – Life and Mind," *On the Nature of the Universe*, Trans. R.E. Latham (London: Penguin Books, 1951), page 105. Plotinus, "3.4 (15) On Our Allotted Daemon," *The Enneads*, Ed. Lloyd P. Gerson, Trans. George Boys-Stones, John M. Dillon, Lloyd P. Gerson, R.A.H. King, Andrew Smith and James Wilberding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), page 290.

the same individual, depending on her temperament and material conditions, might not react to the same phenomena at different times in precisely the same manner.[88]

Moreover, there are cases where fear does not involve any element of surprise. Shelley once enquired, "[w]hat is there so fearful as the *expectation* of evil tidings?"[89] Trepidation concerning future distasteful circumstances is, in fact, relatively common. Marx, who selects the frightful imagery of a spectre haunting Europe to open the *Communist Manifesto* (another sign of supernaturalism's popularity during the nineteenth century), argues that alienation from products of labor and from the "act of production within the labor process" generates considerable "suffering."[90] Many are familiar with the discomfort of knowing that the demand of a monotonous profession awaits them in the morning.[91] Rarely, in such cases, is any ambiguity involved, as the sufferer typically knows full well what it is she finds detestable.

More elaborate examples can be envisaged. The adulterer who fears discovery, the death-row inmate who fears execution, and the soldier who fears an impending charge out of the trenches are precisely aware of the object of their anxiety. Charles Beaumont's "Perchance to Dream" (1958) serves as a good example of a horror story in which nothing is left to suspense or shock. The narrator, haunted by a recurring nightmare in which he is about to fall from a great height,

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[88] "[T]he human body can be affected now in this way, now another. Consequently (by the same axiom) it can be affected differently at different times by one and the same object." See also Sextus Empiricus, who points out that "there are times when a cognitive impression occurs, but it is incredible *owing to the external circumstances*." Spinoza, "Of the Affects – P51," *Ethics*, page 96. Sextus Empiricus, "Against the Professors – 7.253-60," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1: Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), page 246.
[89] Shelley "The Evil Eye," *Tales and Stories* (Project Gutenberg, 2018).
[90] Karl Marx, "Estranged Labor," *The Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Ed. Dirk J. Struik, Trans. Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 2001), page 111.
[91] Kafka, for instance, felt constant guilt regarding the incongruity of his desires and his unfulfilling profession. "His job interfered with his writing ambitions," and reciprocally, "his devotion to writing interfered with professional obligations." Consequently, he felt neither at peace pursuing his natural creative inclination, nor when laboring for sustenance. Idris Parry, "Introduction," *The Trial* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2000), page xi.

attempts to stave off sleep, for when he does, he *knows* that "the dream will go on."[92] Predictably, but no less horrifyingly, this is his eventual fate.

Further suggesting that fear concerns more than just a physical response, the somatic reactions traditionally associated with fear also characterize responses entirely unconnected to that emotion. Hair standing on end, skin prickling or sweating, the stomach growling, rapid or shallow breathing, and the heartbeat fluctuating, while associated with fright, are often characteristic of sexual attraction, a very different sentiment. Consider the poet Sappho's choice of words to express desire: "Speech fails me, my tongue is paralysed… sweat pours down me, and I shake." Contrast with Richard III's frightened reaction to the ghosts of his victims, stammering in confusion, as "cold fearful drops" drip down his "trembling flesh."[93]

All of this is to say that there are, as Balzac once reflected, "two kinds of timidity," one of the "mind," the other "of the nerves."[94] The latter variety, surprise, concerns an involuntary physical reaction to the unexpected. It just so happens that many horrifying phenomena, provoking what Balzac calls "timidity of the mind," also happen to startle our nerves when presented unexpectedly. The appearance of a sudden and abrupt shadow can generate shock, regardless of the entity producing its tenebrous shape. So too can we be alarmed by an unanticipated tap on the shoulder, or raucous noise, irrespective of any genuine connection to danger. Surprise is evidently not synonymous with fear, for although the cause of fear is often shocking, many benign entities and occurrences can also, when unexpectedly presented, startle us.

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[92] Charles Beaumont, "Perchance to Dream," *Perchance to Dream: Selected Stories* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), page 8.

[93] Sappho, "Fragment 31," *Greek and Lyric Poetry*, Trans. M.L. West, pages 38-9. Shakespeare, "King Richard III – Act 5, Scene 3," *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare*, page 582 line 184.

[94] The "body can be afraid and tremble, whilst the mind remains calm and brave; the opposite is also true." Honoré de Balzac, "Flore Brazier," *The Black Sheep*, Trans. Donald Adamson (London: Penguin Books, 1977), page 171.

Fear involves not just a physical reaction, but a mental transformation, and understanding

horror's nature ultimately involves understanding the latter. Consider the etymology of

"emotion," a combination of the Latin for "move" and the prefix for "out."[95] This indicates that

emotions involve an inner psychological stirring, an unsettling or disruption of the mental state,

which in turn generates a moving outward, an affect upon our physiological state (i.e., a

manifestation of certain somatic characteristics). What is philosophically significant is not how

we physically react in horror. Rather, it is the mental process causing us to become frightened

that requires investigation.[96]

Aesthetics, from αἰσθητικός ("perception of the senses"), focuses on the nature of beauty and

creative value.[97] It is concerned with appraisal and evaluation, and with how such responses

affect our temperament and beliefs. Insofar as aesthetics concerns what occurs in the mind of an

appraiser, it is related to epistemology, that branch of philosophy focused on the nature of

knowledge and how we acquire it. Consideration of epistemology, from ἐπιστήμη

("understanding"), is appropriate, for, although moderns regularly conceive emotions as

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[95] "Emotion" entered the English language during the sixteenth century as a derivation of the French term "émouvoir" "move, rouse." The French "émouvoir" descends from the Latin *emovere*, a combination of the assimilated form ex- ("out") and movere ("move"), which traces back to the Proto-Indo-European *meuə- (contrast with cognates in Sanskrit, *kama-muta* "moved by love," and Lithuanian, *mauti* "push on"). Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 24. Rosalind Williams, "émouvoir," *Hippocrene Practical Dictionaries: French-English, English-French* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1993), page 270. Smith and Lockwood, "ēmoveō," *Chambers/Murray Latin-English Dictionary*, page 230.

[96] Worth noting, although fear involves a cognitive reaction, it is nevertheless, to quote Plotinus, "through the medium of corporeal organs that cognition occurs." Human anxieties are, not always, but quite often, informed by our status as vulnerable, corporeal beings (e.g., I am afraid I will damage my eyes, I am afraid I might lose a limb, I am afraid of getting older, and so on). Plotinus, "4.5 (29) On Problems of the Soul 3 – On Sight," *The Enneads*, page 469.

[97] Attic Greek lacks separate terms "distinguishing perception from mere sensation," instead employing αἴσθησις for both phenomena involving "conceptual appropriation" and phenomena lacking such an approbation. Aristotle uses this double meaning as a vehicle for distinguishing between "sense potential" and "sense actual." Liddell et al., "αἰσθητικός," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, page 21. Robert G. Turnbull, "Platonic and Aristotelian Science," *Science and Philosophy in Classical Greece*, Ed. Alan C. Bowen (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1991), page 48. Aristotle, "On the Soul – Book II," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, Trans. J.A. Smith, page 664, 417a-b.

springing from an "irrational side of the personality," it is more plausible and comprehensive to construe fear as an intentional state, a cognitive feeling directed at something.[98]

Martha Nussbaum characterizes the passions as intelligent and discriminating elements of the personality. Emotions, according to this cognitivist model, are best understood not as raw physical reactions, but as evaluative judgments, affective processes whereby living beings come to assess and understand phenomena. She helpfully illustrates the cognitive perspective, citing the case of fear. "What I fear," according to Nussbaum, "is connected with what I think is worth caring about."[99] Although detractors, such as Richard Rorty, argue that mental states "are not intentional," their criticisms tend to be confused regarding the nature of the affects.[100] And, in any case, a wide range of philosophers share Nussbaum's perspective that emotions are forms of intentional awareness that are "directed at or about an object."[101]

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[98] Theodor Lipps characterizes aesthetics as a "psychological discipline," in the sense that philosophers, in order to make objects "aesthetically understandable," apply "psychological insight to them," examining the mental processes behind the determination of value judgements. Liddell et al., "ἐπιστήμη," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, page 261. Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Emotions and Ethical Health," *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), page 79. Theodor Lipps, "The Science of Aesthetics," *Treasury of Philosophy*, Trans. Dagobert D. Runes et al., pages 720-1.

[99] Nussbaum, "Therapeutic Arguments," *Therapy of Desire*, page 38.

[100] Rorty argues that pains are "not *about* anything." This is clearly incorrect; rather, as Kripke points out, pain is characterized by "its immediate phenomenological quality." If I feel discomfort due to some phenomenon, then my discomfort is "about" that phenomenon, in the sense that my affective and somatic reactions are connected to a range of thoughts, sensations and beliefs pertaining to it. Rorty also argues that "beliefs don't *feel* like anything," and again, this is clearly not the case. If, for example, I believe that I will fail an upcoming assignment, then I may "feel" a range of physical and mental sensations connected to that belief. Rorty's criticism is rooted in far too narrow an interpretation of ordinary language (e.g., he quibbles that the term "state" is too "obscure" for a compelling distinction to be made between physical, spatial states and non-physical, non-spatial states, when in fact the terms "state of mind" and "mental state" are common enough for most laymen to understand). He is also too quick to assume that, because "a person's real beliefs are not always what they appear to be," emotions *lack* intentionality, when the notion that the subconscious sometimes underpins our conscious emotional states is, again, something most laymen have no problem understanding. Richard Rorty, "Our Glassy Essence – The Invention of the Mind," *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature: Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pages 21-2. Saul A. Kripke, "Lecture III: January 29, 1970," *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), page 152.

[101] Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Emotions and Ethical Health," *Therapy of Desire*, page 80.

Carolyn Korsmeyer, for instance, argues that emotions are "intentional," in the sense that they are directed at "some object or state of affairs."[102] If someone is "afraid," her fear has intentionality, which is to say, she "fears certain objects or occurrences." According to Korsmeyer, although the object of our fears may be directed inward, at a particular unsettling thought, fear is more commonly directed at external "things, persons, events," and "states of affairs." Whatever "its intentional object," though, the mechanisms of fear, Korsmeyer insists, ultimately "include beliefs of propositionally formed thoughts."[103]

Carroll similarly endorses a "cognitive" theory of the emotions, arguing that the particular object that elicits fear is a "thought," triggered by the appraisal of something external, or by contemplation.[104] An "occurrent emotional state," he says, is one in which "some physically abnormal state of felt agitation has been caused by the subject's cognitive construal and evaluation of his/her situation." He cites the example of a truck racing towards him: "If I am afraid of the approaching truck, then I form the desire to avoid its onslaught." He stresses that, although not "every emotion links up with a desire," the "core structure of emotions" involves deliberative "construals and evaluations."[105]

Cynthia Freeland also advocates a cognitive model. "An emotion like disgust," she argues, although it "may seem quite physical, uncontrolled, and not very intellectual at all," in fact involves thoughts, classifications, questions, and judgments. In the case of horror, the genre elicits fear, "and in doing so" encourages "thoughts about evil in its varieties and degrees."[106]

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[102] Korsmeyer, "What is Disgust?" *Savoring Disgust*, page 16.
[103] Korsmeyer, "What is Disgust?" *Savoring Disgust,* pages 16, 20.
[104] Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 29.
[105] Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 27.
[106] Cynthia Freeland, "Introduction: Evil in Horror Films - A Feminist Framework," *The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pages 7, 3.

Perhaps most significant, Aristotle sketches an account of the emotions that includes a belief-component. As a matter of fact, Freeland points out, the findings of modern cognitive science correspond remarkably to Aristotle's philosophy, for he too is ardent in his contention that emotions "include elements of physiology, judgment, and tendences towards action."[107] In the *Categories*, Aristotle is careful to distinguish affective conditions that are inherent in a person, such as "irascibility," from passing psychological affections, such as "fright," which involve a temporary change in disposition.[108] And in the *Rhetoric*, "the underlying assumption" concerning temporary affections is that "belief and argument are at the heart of the matter."[109] Aristotle's writings regarding fear in particular characterize it as an experience entailing "rich intentional awareness of its object," resting on cognitive judgments "both general and concrete."[110] His reflections prove invaluable not only regarding affective states generally, but also, as I will demonstrate momentarily, concerning horror specifically.

It is worth emphasizing that affective states do not have to correspond to external properties. The narrator of Henry James' "Turn of the Screw" (1898) is frightened when she discovers that "Flora's little bed was empty," and experiences "unutterable relief" when she realizes the child is safe. However, the narrator of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" (1807) is overcome

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[107] Annas, too, persuasively argues that "Aristotle's works are the ancestors" of not only the "philosophy of mind," but also "systematic psychology, the more purely scientific study of psychological and mental phenomena." Freeland, "Introduction," *The Naked and the Undead,* page 7. Annas, "Introduction," *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, page 1.

[108] Aristotle, "Categories," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol 1., Trans. J.L. Ackrill, pages 14-15, 8b-9b.

[109] Nussbaum points out that, although Aristotle occasionally describes fear as arising from φαντασία ("appearance"), inviting the possibility that fear is connected "with simple appearing, rather than with belief or judgment," passages in *Rhetoric* concerning fear in fact draw no major distinction between appearance, "the way things are seen by the agent," and δόξα ("belief"). Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Emotions and Ethical Health," *Therapy of Desire*, pages 83-6. Liddell et al., "φαντασία," and "δόξα" *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, pages 178, 751.

[110] Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Emotions and Ethical Health," *Therapy of Desire*, page 86.

by "fears and fancies," the origin of which he cannot properly name.[111] We can be frightened by

the content of our thoughts, which, regarding horror, crucially means that we can be frightened

by entertaining thought-content we know is fictional.[112]

[111] See also Catullus (c. 84 – 54 BCE), who is tormented by "hate," yet does "not know" why. Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw – 10," *The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw*, Ed. Anthony Curtis (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1988), page 197. William Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence," *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Nicolas Halmi (New York: Norton & Company, 2014), page 398, lines 25-30. Catullus, "85," *The Poems of Catullus*, Trans. Peter Whigham (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1966), page 197.

[112] Carroll cites Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) as an example. While "we know" what Lovecraft describes about the nightmarish "Great Ones" is "fictional," he says, "the propositional content of Lovecraft's fiction" nevertheless "constitutes the content of our thought about them, and we are horrified by the *idea* of them." Carroll reasons that "[i]f we can be horrified by thoughts," then "we can be horrified by thoughts engendered" by "horrifying descriptions." Carroll, "Metaphysics and Horror, or Relating to Fictions," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 82.

V.   Categories of Aversion

"Confusion of meaning... is indeed a commonplace in philosophy."
-    W.V. Quine.[113]

Another potential ambiguity emerges from many synonyms of horror. English-speakers do not simply talk of being horrified, but of being afraid, anxious, scared, frightened, terrified, apprehensive, appalled, freaked-out, distraught, troubled, spooked, tormented, haunted, traumatized, shaken, alarmed, petrified, disturbed, and so on. Should we regard horror as a distinct aesthetic category, compared to, say, terror or dread? Gothic horror novelist Ann Radcliffe thinks so. According to her, "[t]error and horror" are "far opposite," the first constituting a kind of "numinous, metaphysical dread," the latter a "shocking, often disgusting revelation." Another proponent of this view is Carroll, who differentiates horror, featuring monsters that are "threatening and impure," from "tales of terror," which achieve their "frightening effects" via elements that are non-supernatural.[114]

Radcliffe, as Jones unkindly puts it, "was no intellectual," and her reasoning for "distinguishing terror from horror seems confused."[115] Carroll, on the other hand, is one of the few prominent analytic philosophers to treat horror seriously, and his grounds for drawing such a distinction cannot simply be ignored. Instead, it must be convincingly demonstrated that horror's many linguistic alternatives are mere expressive variances. Although words can mean different things to different people, it is generally unwise for a philosopher to stray far from a term's commonly accepted meaning, and, unless something radically new necessitates adopting novel

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[113] Willard Van Orman Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*, Ed. Michael Huemer (New York, London: Routledge, 2002), page 177.
[114] Anne Radcliff, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook*, Eds. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester, 2000), page 168. Jones, "Introduction," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson*, page xvi. Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 42.
[115] Jones, "Introduction," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson*, page xvii.

terms, it is best to avoid an unusual word as if it were a rock, lest one stumble unnecessary.[116] To

understand horror properly, our best recourse involves, not assembling a category from thin air,

but practicing conceptual analysis, carefully considering examples related to horror, in order to

thereby establish a precise, all-encompassing meaning.[117]

For starters, Luke Russell is quite right in observing that, although dictionary definitions

"cannot settle sceptical disagreements," they can nevertheless prove valuable by shedding light

on the "common ways in which words are and have been used."[118] According to the *Oxford*

English Dictionary, "horror" is either a "painful emotion compounded [by] loathing and fear," a

"strong aversion mingled with dread," a "shuddering with terror and repugnance," or "the feeling

excited by something shocking or frightful." Revealingly, the same source defines "terror" in a

like manner, as most often conveying a feeling of "intense fear or dread."[119]

Next, consider cases of logical oddity. If you can exchange one word for another and thereby

generate incoherence, then the terms in question cannot be semantically equivalent. Carroll

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[116] While Aristotle is right that it is sometimes "necessary even to invent names," as Rudolf Carnap points out, "to introduce a term entirely different from one already in customary use… is not easy to do," nor often advisable. Rather, to quote the first century CE grammarian Erotianus, "[u]nfamiliar words" are generally "unsuited to the task, the accepted principle being to explain less known things by means of better known things." Aristotle, "Categories," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol 1., page 11, 7a. Rudolf Carnap, "Philosophical Foundations of Physics," *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*, page 201. Erotianus, "34, 10-20 (Usener 258)," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 99.

[117] Here it is perhaps worth considering the perspective of Karl Popper, according to whom knowledge is derived, in the main, from "critical discussion." The significance of our observations depend entirely upon "the question of whether or not they may be used to criticize theories." "Theories," he argues, "are themselves guesswork," and one theory is only better than another, either by "explain[ing] more," or by being "better test[able]." Karl Popper, "Back to the Presocratics," *The World of Parmenides: Essays on the Presocratic Enlightenment*, Ed. Anne E. Petersen, Jørgen Mejer. New York, London: Routledge, 1998), pages 23-4.

[118] Refer also to J.L. Austin, who points out that, in attempting to better understand a term, dictionaries, although far from authoritative, can nevertheless "suggest aids to the understanding of sentences" in which the term normally occurs. Austin makes a persuasive case that inquiring as to the *intrinsic* "meaning of a word" is spurious, and that words must be understood through syntax, that is, through their application. Luke Russell, "The Secular Moral Concept of Evil," *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), page 16. J.L. Austin, "The Meaning of a Word," *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), page 24, 43.

[119] "Horror - Noun," and "Terror - Noun," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2018.

suggests "horror" and "terror" are distinct, yet we can easily imagine a range of common scenarios that cast doubt on this claim. Consider questioning a layman, "do you find clowns terrifying?" Supposing that she comes to respond in the affirmative, it is highly unlikely that, if rephrased from "terrifying" to "horrifying," she would suddenly disagree.[120] In fact, it is likelier that she would find the rewording somewhat pedantic. This strongly suggests that, in ordinary conversation, there is no compelling difference between "horror" and "terror." This might seem a specious argument to some, but as Russell suggests, the safest way to understand a word is by closely adhering to the common ways in which it is used.[121]

Horror writers regularly employ "horror" and its synonyms interchangeably to describe either a frightening characteristic or troubled affective state. The narrator of William Hope Hodgson's "The Derelict" (1912), for instance, characterizes a shrill cry as the "sound of terror," then a few sentences later, as one which overwhelms him with "unmitigated horror."[122] The narrator of Poe's "Black Cat" speaks of the "terror *and* horror" that the animal inspires.[123] And Machen's

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[120] The earliest clowns are traceable back to the Fifth Dynasty of Egypt's Old Kingdom (c. 2400 BCE). The modern term comes from the old English "clowne," also "cloyne," (for "boorish, uncouth peasants"), likely inherited from North Germanic (although some scholars have suggested that the Latin colōnus for "farmer, settler" may have influenced its semantic development). Typically, clowns are associated with amusement, but as Michael Bala comments, it is, in fact, "too narrow in focus" to regard the clown as a purely comedic figure. Clowns also represent the "Trickster" archetype, an unsettling "shadow figure" who signals "that something out of the ordinary is at hand." Their costumes and makeup, in distorting human features, can also plausibly be considered fearsome. King's novel *It* (1986) and its adaptions, as well as the so-called "2016 clown sightings," a viral craze across North America and Europe where pranksters would deliberately dress as clowns to frighten strangers, are powerful testaments to the horror latent in such ostensibly amusing figures. Smith and Lockwood, "colōnus," *Chambers/Murray Latin-English Dictionary*, page 123. Michael Bala, "The Clown - An Archetypal Self-Journey," *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2010): pages 50-71. Danielle Hayden, "Creepy Clowns Craze: Professionals hit out at Pranksters," *BBC News*, Oct. 11, 2016.
[121] Austin argues that although "ordinary language breaks down in extraordinary cases," the "breakdown is semantical." It requires a person to imagine "all kinds of odd situations" to properly employ a word outside its ordinary use, such that a "new idiom" is probably demanded. Austin, "The Meaning of a Word," *Philosophical Papers*, pages 36-7.
[122] William Hope Hodgson, "The Derelict," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson*, page 459.
[123] Poe, "The Black Cat," *The Complete Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, page 211.

"Red Hand" (1895) concludes with the haunted figure of Selby being described as first

"terrible," then "horrible."[124]

More traditional literary figures also tend to use "horror" and its synonyms interchangeably.

Consider Voltaire, who vacillates between horror and terror while discussing execution:

> "If, when a robber is executed, his accomplice, who sees him suffer, has the
> liberty of not being frightened at the punishment; if his will determines of itself,
> he will go from the foot of the scaffold to assassinate on the high road; if struck
> with *horror*, he experiences an insurmountable *terror*, he will no longer
> thieve."[125]

Goethe's "Erlkönig" (1782), concerning a child bewitched by a malevolent faerie, similarly

concludes with a blend of horror synonyms:

> "The father now gallops, with *terror* half wild,
> He grasps in his arms the poor shuddering child;
> He reaches his courtyard with toil and with *dread*,
> The child in his arms he finds motionless, dead."[126]

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[124] Also consider Ambrose Bierce's essay "Visions of the Night" (1887), where he describes a dream, "strangely *dreadful*," which inspires "*horror*," and the ending to Blackwood's short story "Sand" (1912), where the protagonist is gripped, first by "*terror*," then moments later, by "the paralysis of *common fear*." Ambrose Bierce, "Visions of the Night," *The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce* (Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2008), page 324. Arthur Machen, "The Red Hand," *The White People and Other Weird Stories*, Ed. S.T. Joshi (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2011), pages 109-10. Blackwood, "Sand," *Ancient Sorceries and Other Weird Tales*, page 347.

[125] As in the English language, the French terms "horreur" and "terreur" are often employed interchangeably. Voltaire, "Free-Will," *A Philosophical Dictionary Volume 5 (of 10)*, Trans. William F. Fleming (Project Gutenberg, 2011). Williams, "horreur" and "terreur," *Hippocrene Practical Dictionaries: French-English, English-French*, pages 295, 374.

[126] In the first line of the final stanza, Goethe uses "grauset," the second-person plural subjunctive of "grausen," the German word for "horror" or "dread." In the final line, he uses "not," commonly translated into English as "misery, want, trouble," or "distress." Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, "The Erl-King," *Dreams of Fear: Poetry of Terror and the Supernatural*, Trans. Edgar Alfred Bowring, page 76. H.C. Sasse, J. Horne and Charlotte Dixon, "Graus" and "Not," *Cassell's Concise German-English English-German Dictionary* (London: Cassell Publishers, 1988), pages 95, 162.

And in Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) the murderous Pozdnyshev alternates between describing his victim and her music instructor's countenances as expressing "complete horror" and "terror."[127]

Theorists also tend to make little distinction, or advise altogether against drawing one. Freud, for example, classifies "frightening" phenomena as arousing "dread and horror." Darwin states that the term horror "implies terror," being "almost synonymous with it."[128] And Hume asserts that "terror, consternation, astonishment, anxiety, and other passions of that kind, are nothing but different species and degrees of fear," and neglects to discuss them at length in favor of "avoiding prolixity."[129]

Even Carroll on occasion abandons his distinction. For instance, while contemplating what he calls the "pretend theory of fictional response," he introduces a hypothetical movie-goer, Charles, whom he describes as reacting to a film "in terror," even though he explicitly states that the object of Charles' fear is a *monster*, a hideous "green slime."[130] According to Carroll's delineation, Charles ought to be *horrified*, not terrified. Later, he speaks of the "pleasure derived

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[127] The Russian noun ужас (uzhas) can be translated into English words such as horror, terror, dread, and consternation. Leo Tolstoy, "Chapter XXVII," *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Trans. Isai Kamen (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), pages 71-2. William Harrison and Svetlana Le Fleming, "Ужас," *Hippocrene Practical Dictionaries: English-Russian, Russian-English* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1983), page 217.

[128] Sigmund Freud, "From The Uncanny," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Trans. Alix Strachey, page 825. Charles Darwin, "Chapter XII – Surprise, Astonishment, Fear, Horror," *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (Project Gutenberg, 2019).

[129] See also Hegel, who contends that "fear, anxiety," and "terror, are no doubt of one and the same sort of feeling." David Hume, "Book Two: Of the Passions – Section IX. Of the Direct Passions," *A Treatise of Human Nature*, page 494. Hegel, "The Conception of Artistic Beauty: Part I – The Work of Art as Made and as Sensuous," *Introductory Lectures in Aesthetics*, page 37.

[130] Carroll, "Metaphysics and Horror, or Relating to Fictions," *The Philosophy of Horror,* page 69.

from *terror* fictions" that feature "monsters."[131] This demonstrates just how challenging it can be to maintain a theoretical distinction between words normally employed interchangeably.[132]

The notion that horror, as a genre, is distinct from tales of terror can also be dismissed in light of specific counterexamples. Carroll remarks that Bloch's *Psycho* (1959) and Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), despite being "eerie and unnerving," are not true works of horror.[133] This is dubious, considering that both are commonly recognized as such. Joshi, for instance, classifies *Psycho* as a particularly effective "tale of psychological horror" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" as a triumph of "non-supernatural psychological horror."[134] And King, a horror writer so widely recognized that Joshi identifies him as a pop-culture commodity, likewise categorizes Bloch and Poe as horror authors.[135] According to King, despite incorporating "nary a monster or supernatural occurrence," Bloch's *Psycho* is "very much [a] horror novel," on account of its frightening subject matter.[136] He characterizes Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" as "psychological" horror due to its unsettling themes.[137]

Terror and horror, then, are not as distinct from one another as Carroll supposes. Beyond that, though, his notion that horror requires "the presence of monsters" must also be taken to task. For although a common view among theorists and enthusiasts, it is, in fact, too narrow a foundation

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[131] Carroll, "Why Horror?" *The Philosophy of Horror,* page 180.
[132] Twitchell, although he desires to maintain a conceptual distinction between horror and terror, notes that, for the general public, the have terms have "slid back together" since the days of Gothic fiction. Worth remarking, Twitchell's own interpretation of horror, as something that is more "dreamlike… internal, and long lasting," relative to terror, which he considers something "external and short-lived," is quite at odds with Carroll's. This further suggests that a proper distinction between the terms is far from obvious. Twitchell, "The Dimensions and Evolution of Modern Horror Art," *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*, page 16.
[133] Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror,* page 15.
[134] Joshi, "American Pulpsmiths," and "Edgar Allan Poe," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol 1-2, pages 559, 166.
[135] Joshi, "The Boom: the Blockbusters," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, page 625.
[136] Stephen King, "Tales of the Tarot," *Danse Macabre* (New York: Berkley Books, 1983), pages 75-6.
[137] King, "Tales of the Tarot," *Danse Macabre*, page 63.

for any reasonable theory of horror. Consider the "slasher" genre, which, although a long way from representing horror's critical apex, most audiences regard as representative of the genre. According to Carroll's theory, well-known films such as *The Last House on the Left* (1972), *Black Christmas* (1974), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *Halloween* (1978), despite being commonly recognized as examples of horror, cannot, due to their unambiguously human antagonists, be properly considered as such. Likewise discounted, on his view, are psychological horror films, like Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) and Ingmar Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf* (1968), as well as terrifying paintings, such as Francisco Goya's *Fight with Cudgels* (c. 1820–3), J.M.W. Turner's *Slave Ship* (1840), Edwin Landseer's *Man Proposes, God Disposes* (1864), and August Friedrich Schenck's *Anguish* (1878).

Of course, monsters do frequently appear in horror. Boris Karloff's iconic performance in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), for just one example, has shaped interpretations of Shelley's tale so significantly that, today, as King observes, those unfamiliar with the novel often "don't realize that Frankenstein is the name of the monster's *creator*."[138] Monsters allow for horror to have a face, so to speak, which helps audiences transpose more complex, subtle fears onto a discrete, easily understood entity. Yet it would be a grave miscalculation to take the frequent appearance of monsters in horror as indicating a necessary condition. Certainly, horror is at times focused on specific characters, yet it can also be evoked in response to an idea, a particular event or sequence of events, or a situation.

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[138] As Mark Jancovich points out, the early Universal Pictures Frankenstein adaptations were a "phenomenal success," and "it was Karloff who played the monster, not Colin Clive who had played his creator," who "achieved stardom." Consider as well that Bela Lugosi's thick accent is often associated with the vampire Dracula, which is ironic when one considers that in Stoker's original novel it is not the title antagonist, but one of the protagonists, the German Professor Abraham Van Helsing, who is associated with a thick accent. King, "Tales of the Tarot," *Danse Macabre*, page 51. Mark Jancovich, "Frankenstein and Film," *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), page 193.

Take, for example, Matthew Lewis' novel *The Monk* (1796), which Carroll characterizes as "the real harbinger of the horror genre," given that its climax involves Satan, a supernatural monster.[139] While frightening, however, the demon arguably facilitates an even more horrifying *state of affairs*. Condemned for witchcraft, and desperate to escape the Inquisition's confinement, Ambrosio agrees to sell his soul. Yet, after resigning all claims to salvation, he realizes to his horror that he has been deceived. Satan *does* free Ambrosio from the confines of his dungeon, but, as their contract specified that he merely protect Ambrosio from the Inquisition, the demon neglects to preserve his life. Instead, anxious to claim the lecherous monk's soul, Satan transports Ambrosio to a tall mountain and flings him from the pinnacle. Ambrosio does not simply perish, but suffers a truly ghastly fate:

> "Headlong fell the monk through the airy waste; the sharp point of a rock received him; and he rolled from precipice to precipice, till, bruised and mangled, he rested on the river's banks. Life still existed in his miserable frame: he attempted in vain to raise himself; his broken and dislocated limbs refused to perform their office, nor was he able to quit the spot where he had first fallen. The sun now rose above the horizon; its scorching beams darted full upon the head of the expiring sinner. Myriads of insects were called forth by the warmth; they drank the blood which trickled from Ambrosio's wounds; he had no power to drive them from him, and they fastened upon his sores, darted their stings into his body, covered him with their multitudes, and inflicted on him tortures the most exquisite and insupportable. The eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks. A burning thirst tormented him… six miserable days did the villain languish."[140]

Lewis' novel features a monster, but the truly horrible aspect of its climax concerns an *unfolding of events* that recounts Ambrosio's agonizing death.

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[139] Carroll, "Introduction," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 4.
[140] Matthew Lewis, "Volume III – Chapter XII," *The Monk: A Romance*, Ed. Christopher MacLachlan (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pages 376-7.

Another story Carroll considers is William Peter Blatty's novel *The Exorcist* (1971), and its highly successful film adaptation. According to Carroll, *The Exorcist* stands as "the inaugural work of the present cycle of horror fiction," owing to its subject matter concerning the demonic possession of a young girl.[141] Yet, although the demon Pazuzu is indeed fearsome, Carroll overlooks, or perhaps chooses to ignore, other details concerning both Blatty's novel and its film adaptation that make them exceptionally horrific.[142] The film on a subtextual level is arguably an examination of the parental anxieties that attend raising a child with developmental abnormalities. *The Exorcist* also features many unsettling incidents, escalating in intensity, concerning mental deterioration, an obvious cause for anxiety.[143] More generally, it conveys a practically ineffable sensation of helplessness and encroaching doom, all without a monster's physical presence. The unaccountable demise of Burke Dennings, the desecration of the local church, and Regan's conversations through a Ouija board with the mysterious "Captain Howdy" are all occurrences where the intentional object of terror is not a tangible entity, but rather, an unsettling, threatening, or otherwise distressing situation.

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[141] Carroll, "Plotting Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 103.

[142] Blatty borrowed *The Exorcist*'s antagonist from Babylonian and Assyrian mythology. Pazuzu was a demon of the first millennium B.C.E., "considered to represent a violent wind that brought destruction to nature and humankind." Despite Pazuzu's sinister reputation, he was "exteme[ly]" popular among Mesopotamians owing to "his effectiveness as an expeller of other demons." Nils P. Heeßel, "Evil Against Evil: The Demon Pazuzu," *Demoni mesopotamici, Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, 77/2, Ed. L. Verderame, (Rome: 2011), pages 357, 359. For further information on a variety of oftentimes frightening Mesopotamian deities, demigods, and demons, readers are encouraged to see Thorkild Jacobsen's *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1978).

[143] Regan's degeneration is eventually revealed as supernatural, but for most of *The Exorcist*, a natural explanation remains plausible. Her more and more lurid behaviour is horrifying regardless of whether there is a monster possessing her. Consider Maupassant's "Lui?" sometimes rendered "The Terror" (1883), in which the narrator is frightened, not of the ghostly apparition that he occasionally perceives, and "in which [he] did not believe," but rather, at the very prospect "of being deceived" by "some fresh hallucination." Carroll, "Plotting Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 105. Guy de Maupassant, "The Terror," *The Entire Original Maupassant Short Stories*, Trans. Albert M. C. Mcmaster, A. E. Henderson, Mme. Quesada, et al. (Project Gutenberg, 2021).

As the aforementioned works feature a monster in addition to horrific states of affairs, it is

also worthwhile to consider horror stories *without* any horrific entities. King's *Misery* (1987) is a

"non-horror novel," according to Carroll, even though it is generally regarded as horror by critics

(for example, Joshi identifies it as a "*conte cruel*," a non-supernatural horror story).[144] The horror

lies in its *subject matter*, concerning an author, Paul Sheldon, who is held prisoner by a deranged

admirer, Annie Wilkes. It is a disturbing situation that any ordinary person would desire to avoid.

Being held against one's will by a mentally unstable individual is unsettling enough – having

your foot cut off, the unenviable prospect confronting Sheldon, is horrifying:

> "The axe came whistling down and buried itself in Paul Sheldon's left leg just
> above the ankle. Pain exploded up his body in a gigantic bolt. Dark-red blood
> splattered across her face like Indian war-paint. It splattered the wall. He heard
> the blade squeal against bone as she wrenched it free. He looked unbelievingly
> down at himself. The sheet was turning red. *He saw his toes wriggling*."[145]

Annie proceeds to cauterize his haemorrhaging limb clumsily with a blowtorch, a clear instance

of what is sometimes called *body-horror*, where fear is elicited by physical violation or

disfigurement. Horror writer Thomas Ligotti argues that "manifestations of the supernatural" are

"horrifying to us in concept, since we think ourselves to be living in a natural world."[146] If so,

then the depiction of physical trauma terrifies because of its real-life possibility. What chills

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[144] Joshi, "The Boom: The Blockbusters," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 2, page 630.
[145] Stephen King, *Misery* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), page 246.
[146] Also consider Derrida, according to whom "it is the essence of the ghost in general to be frightening" due to its transformation of "the familiar" into the "disquieting," Malcom Gaskill, who argues that witches are "liminal" entities who frighten us by straddling the "boundaries between life and death," and Johnston, who points out that werewolves, "categorically neither human nor animal," are "more frightening than either a normal wolf or normal man" because they suggest that humankind's understanding of nature is "liable to flux." Thomas Ligotti, "Introduction: Of Pessimism and Paradox," *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010), page 17. Jacques Derrida, "5. Apparition of the Inapparent – the Phenomenological Conjuring Trick," *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), page 181. Malcom Gaskill, "Fear – The Idea of Witchcraft," *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pages 2-3. Johnston, "Childless Mothers and Blighted Virgins," *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, page 171.

readers is not only Paul's dismemberment, but the thought that such mutilation could potentially happen to anyone. As Freud says, "[h]is destiny moves us," because "it might have been ours."[147]

Another well-known work of horror lacking a monster is *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). Although there is the *suggestion* of a witch menacing the lost documentary crew, no entity ever *appears* on screen, leaving the possibility of a non-supernatural explanation available to the imagination. The film's unsettling nature lies, not in an entity, but in its plot, concerning individuals becoming hopelessly astray in a hostile environment.[148] Again, this is a situation that ordinary people can relate to, in the sense that they would not want such a fate to befall them.

Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" (1919), Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" (1948), and Charlotte Perkins Gillman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) all exemplify the type of horror under consideration, since, although they concern unsettling states of affairs, and are commonly recognized as aesthetically significant, they do not contain even the *suggestion* of a monster. Kafka, in typical surrealist fashion, presents a nightmarish gulag setting, where, for mysterious reasons, an elaborate torture device is used to execute detainees. Jackson's "Lottery" describes a

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[147] Aristotle argues that we do "not fear things that we believe cannot happen to us." Regarding supernatural horror, it is precisely for this reason that Coleridge emphasizes the "suspension of disbelief." For whether or not we as observers truly believe in the supernatural, *some* people, "from whatever sort of delusion," nevertheless *have* believed themselves "under supernatural agency." The objective of supernatural fiction is thus to capture the "dramatic truth" concerning the emotions of such persons supposing or experiencing the supernatural as real: to imagine ourselves in the same situation and to entertain the same possibility of aberrant phenomena. Sigmund Freud, "From The Interpretation of Dreams," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Trans. James Strachey, page 816. Aristotle, "Rhetoric – Book II - 5," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol 2., Trans. W. Rhys Roberts, page 2203, 1382b. Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria (1817) – from Volume 2, Chapter XIV," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 490.

[148] As Blackwood notes, lovers of nature are often "stricken with a strange fever of the wilderness," and "when the seduction of the uninhabited wastes" lures a person too deep, ill-equipped explorers will find themselves wandering, "half-fascinated, half-deluded," towards their demise. Jack London's "To Build a Fire" (1908), which describes in detail a man succumbing to the effects of hypothermia, is a particularly frightening example of a tale in which a person is undone not by a monster, but by the very elements. Blackwood, "The Wendigo," *Ancient Sorceries and Other Weird Tales*, Ed. S.T. Joshi (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2002), page 157.

backward society, in which adherence to a strange tradition results in grim collective

punishment. And Gillman's "Wallpaper" details the progressive mental decline of a woman

removed from contact with the outside world by a controlling husband. These stories are

commonly included in horror anthologies, suggesting that they are classics of the genre, despite

the absence of monstrous entities. Perhaps, as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Golding's

Lord of the Flies (1954) suggest, more than any fiend or spirit can, that humanity's capacity for

cruelty is most frightening of all.[149]

Even Carroll acknowledges that an artistic work can qualify as horror due to an incident,

rather than an entity. For example, he considers Bloch's "The Feast in the Abbey" (1935) a

horror story. Yet the horrifying nature of Bloch's story relates not to a monster, but to how the

narrator is tricked into cannibalizing "the body of his brother."[150]

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[149] Plautus (c. 254 – 184 BCE) characterizes human nature as predatory and cruel: "Man is no man" to a stranger, he writes, "but a wolf." Galileo (1564 – 1642), who famously suffered persecution for his beliefs, bitterly echoes the same sentiment centuries later: "it is human nature to take up causes whereby a man may oppress his neighbor." Refer also to Paracelsus (c. 1493 – 1541): "man is the child of dogs... burdened with envy and disloyalty, with a violent disposition, and each man grudges the other everything." Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894 – 1961): "Men are the thing to be afraid of, always, men and nothing else." And Emil Cioran (1911 – 1995): "Ideologies… cover up the murderous tendencies common to all men." Plautus, "Asinaria, or the Comedy of Asses – Act II," *Plautus: An English Translation*, Vol. 1, Trans. Paul Nixon (Project Gutenberg, 2005). Galileo Galilei, "Letter to Madame Christina of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany – Concerning the Use of Biblical Quotations in Matters of Science [1615]," *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, Trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), page 177. Paracelsus, "Man and the Created World - Man and Woman," *Selected Writings*, Ed. Jolande Jacobi, Trans. Norbert Guterman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), page 34. Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*, Trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Alma Books, 2021), page 13. Cioran, "Faces of Decadence," *A Short History of Decay*, page 114.
[150] Carroll, "Plotting Horror," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 112.

VI.   Horror's Landscape

> "Numberless wonders, terrible wonders…."
>
> - Sophocles.[151]

Despite Carroll's claim, horror does not always involve monsters. In her analysis of horror, *The Naked and The Undead* (2002), Freeland agrees, arguing that Carroll's definition "is too restrictive."[152] If not monsters, though, what *does* distinguish a work of horror from one merely featuring a horrific event? For Freeland, horror is "centrally concerned with evil." Unfortunately, this is somewhat vague. By her own admission, in fact, she does not "feel confident" in developing a "general definition of horror," opting instead for a feminist investigation.[153] I am more confident, and propose that the aforementioned examples, considered as a whole, make a strong case that what establishes a work as an example of horror is *a high degree of fearsome events*, or its *focusing extensively on a single fearsome event, entity, idea, place, or situation*. Poe emphasizes the importance of a "unity of impression," such that each aspect of a tale contributes

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[151] It is difficult to put into words the literary significance of Sophocles (c. 496 – 406 BCE). Aristophanes (c. 446 – 386 BCE), in his comedy *The Frogs* (405 BCE), accredits Sophocles as "alone" worthy of challenging Aeschylus for the title best tragic poet. A.E. Taylor, not without good reason, argues that Aristotle's repeated references to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* suggest it was "the play he admired above all others." For just one example of what Virginia Woolf denotes his "genius" of the "extreme kind," consider Sophocles' introduction of a "third actor" to Greek tragedy. This stylistic innovation (attributed to Sophocles by Aristotle) radically expanded the tragedian's possible range of scenarios. This of course recalls another crucial difference between ancient tragedy, which incorporated a variety of formal restrictions (e.g., a chorus, special masks, "cothurni" footwear), and horror, which does not. Sophocles, "Antigone," *The Three Theban Plays*, Trans. Robert Fagles, page 76, lines 376-7. Aristophanes, *The Frogs – Translated into English Rhyming Verse*, Trans. Gilbert Murray (London: George Allen & Sons, 1908), page 107. Taylor, "Practical Philosophy," *Aristotle*, page 90. Virginia Woolf, "On Sophocles' Electra," *Sophocles; a Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pages 122-4. Aristotle, "Poetics – 4," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 2319, 1449a.

[152] Joshi likewise remarks that Carroll "errs… in maintaining that the crux of the horror tale is a monster," as this disqualifies "some of the most significant examples of supernatural and non-supernatural horror." Freeland, "Introduction," *The Naked and the Undead,* page 10. Joshi, "Introduction," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 1, page 8.

[153] Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), also associates horror with femininity, in her case, to quote Carroll, "metaphysical elements" connected to "the mother's body." Freeland, "Introduction," *The Naked and the Undead,* page 10. Carroll, "Notes," *The Philosophy of Horror*, page 221.

a singular impact on the reader.[154] We might say that horror's finest material generates the single impression of fear, whether through the appearance of monsters or otherwise.

It cannot be stressed enough, however, that for a work to qualify as horror, there must be either a heightened concentration on horrible events or an elevated concentration on a single horrible event, entity, idea, place, or situation. Many borderline cases exist, in which horrific incidents occur, but which, considered as part of the work's whole, are incidental. These works ultimately fall outside the genre.

Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), serves as an excellent example. Gaskell's depiction of a press-gang descending upon unsuspecting whalers to impress them into the Royal Navy's service, conjures a horrifying spectacle:

> "…the crowd came pressing up Bridge Street, past the windows of Foster's shop. It consisted of wild, half-amphibious boys, slowly moving backwards, as they were compelled by the pressure of the coming multitude to go on, and yet anxious to defy and annoy the gang by insults, and curses half choked with their indignant passion, doubling their fists in the very faces of the gang who came on with measured movement, armed to the teeth, their faces showing white with repressed and determined energy against the bronzed countenances of the half-dozen sailors, who were all they had thought it wise to pick out of the whaler's crew… One of the men was addressing to his townspeople, in a high-pitched voice, an exhortation which few could hear, for pressing around this nucleus of cruel wrong, were women crying aloud, throwing up their arms in imprecation, showering down abuse as hearty and rapid as if they had been a Greek chorus.

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[154] Poe draws upon Aristotle's principle of unity. However, rather than setting or temporal duration, he emphasizes a single emotional impression: "one [method] is suggested by an incident of the day… I prefer commencing with the consideration of *an effect*… I consider whether it can best be wrought by incident or tone — whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone — afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect." Lovecraft likewise considers horror a genre which expresses a "single mood or feeling," either through evocation of a frightening "condition or phenomenon," or the depiction of "some action of persons" connected to "a bizarre condition or phenomenon." Refer also to Clasen, who construes horror as an affective genre, which "encompasses those kinds of fiction that are designed to instill negative emotion such as anxiety and fear." Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Essays and Reviews*, page 13. Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," *Collected Essays*, page 177. Clasen, "An Evolutionary Theory of Horror," *Why Horror Seduces*, page 10.

Their wild, famished eyes were strained on faces they might not kiss, their cheeks were flushed to purple with anger… Some of them looked scarce human."[155]

And yet, *Sylvia's Lovers* is not a horror story, as it does not prominently incorporate other terrifying events or states of affairs into its narrative. Rather, it is better categorized as romance or sensation fiction, due to its plot focusing on a complex love triangle.

A myriad of additional cases can be cited. Thomas Hardy, for instance, regularly weaves horrible episodes into his narratives. Consider his novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895), in which the gloomy child of the protagonist, propelled by a Malthusian anxiety, murders his siblings, before committing suicide:

"At the back of the door were fixed two hooks for hanging garments, and from these the forms of the two youngest children were suspended, by a piece of box-cord round each of their necks, while from a nail a few yards off the body of little Jude was hanging in a similar manner."[156]

This is patently disturbing, but Hardy horrifies to emphasize social injustices (in the case of *Jude*, archaic marriage laws). The younger Jude commits a horrendous act, but he does so out of economic anxiety, and the narrative and philosophical thrust of the novel clearly couches his actions in this context.

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[155] Elizabeth Gaskell, "Buying a New Cloak," *Sylvia's Lovers* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pages 31-2.
[156] This leaves Jude "[h]alf paralyzed by the strange and consummate horror of the scene." The attendant doctor speculates that the younger Jude perpetrated his act out of perceiving life's "terrors before [being] old enough to have the staying power to resist them." Hardy's fictional episode reflects a grim economic reality of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kafka, for instance, recalls a news story concerning a woman who murdered her child "because of poverty and hunger," and grimly writes that such instances have become increasingly "routine." Popper emphasizes that Marx's political philosophy was his "reply to one of the most sinister periods of oppression and exploitation in modern history." Thomas Hardy, "Part Sixth: At Christminster Again – Vi. – ii.," *Jude the Obscure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pages 325-6. Kafka, "1913 – 2 July," *Diaries, 1910 – 1923*, Trans. Joseph Kresh, page 223. Popper, "Notes to Chapter One," *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, page 514.

Even authors of young-adult fiction, such as J.K. Rowling, use fear at times to excite readers. Consider *Goblet of Fire*'s rather disturbing prologue, "The Riddle House." A hapless muggle, Frank Bryce, encounters the Dark Lord Voldemort, and pays a terrible price:

> "And then the chair was facing Frank, and he saw what was sitting in it. His walking stick fell to the floor with a clatter. He opened his mouth and let out a scream. He was screaming so loudly that he never heard the words the thing in the chair spoke as it raised a wand. There was a flash of green light, a rushing sound, and Frank Bryce crumpled. He was dead before he hit the floor."[157]

Within the broader structure of Rowling's narrative, this incident, while frightening, is supplementary. Voldemort's callous act of murder enhances his villainy, in contrast to the pure-hearted protagonist.

As these widely differing works all illustrate, for something to qualify as horror, it must *focus exclusively or predominantly* on generating fear. Such frightening works may or may not feature monsters. It is for this reason that we can sensibly describe films that lack monsters, such as *The Wicker Man* (1973), *Friday the 13th* (1980), and *Se7en* (1995), as instances of horror, due to their subject matter accentuating the frightening nature of murder, whereas Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and Agatha Christie's *The Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), both of which concern the criminal investigation of a murder, do not qualify.

Before continuing under the operative principle that horror concerns a number of fearsome events, or the extensive focusing on a single fearsome event, entity, idea, place, or situation, it is worth entertaining potential objections. Certainly, one can express misgivings, but whether such criticisms are genuinely damaging to the principle is questionable. Detractors, for instance, might

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[157] J.K. Rowling, "The Riddle House," *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2000), page 15.

argue that some works of horror, such as Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950) or Roald Dahl's "Genesis and Catastrophe" (1960), do *not* present any event, entity, idea, place or situation that is terrifying, generating fear instead through understated direction or suggestion. Bradbury's "Soft Rains" does not describe any impending horror, implying, rather, that something previously horrible had occurred.[158] And Dahl's "Genesis" details a standard childbirth, complete with all its attendant anxieties. Childbirth has been recognized as potentially "frightful" since the Eleatics, but the true horror of "Genesis" lies in the subtle implication that something greater is amiss.[159]

However, the definition I have offered includes the specification that *an idea might be fearsome*, and these examples, I maintain, fall under that particular species. Although it is left to readers' imaginations to determine the horrible scenarios that are to occur, or have already occurred, these ideas are nevertheless educed by unmistakable facets of the stories themselves. And critically, these fearsome thoughts are not incidental, such that a particular object might cause an observer to recollect an idiosyncratic experience. Rather, they are generalized and purposeful, enthymemes that unfailingly direct an audience's attention to a frightening idea. A work that indirectly signifies a horrible notion, rather than directly conveying it, is sufficient for it to qualify as horror.

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[158] Bradbury presents a futuristic, automated suburban household, running just as intended, but with not a person to be found. Due to neglect, the house eventually ceases to function and burns down. This is curious, but not exactly horrific. The horror lies not in the "spark and smoke," but rather, it is implied, by the absence of occupants, which in turn suggests that some apocalyptic event has wiped out all of humanity. Ray Bradbury, "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains," *The Martian Chronicles* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1967), page 171.

[159] It is only near the story's close that the child's survival is revealed as having dire consequences, the attendant doctor addressing the mother as "Frau Hitler." The child who the mother agonized over potentially being deformed or dying in childbirth is alive and well, but we as readers know that this child, Adolf Hitler, will go on to wreak great havoc upon the human race. Roald Dahl, "Genesis and Catastrophe – A True Story," *Kiss Kiss* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1987), page 159. Parmenides, "26 [F12]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies*, Vol 1, Trans. Daniel W. Graham, page 223.

Another potential complaint relates to works that feature a considerable number of fearsome events, but also a considerable number of events and devices that do not count as such. Cases of this sort can be said to qualify as horror, but also as belonging to some other genre. Apocalypse fiction, for instance, often deals in suspense and exhilaration, common elements in horror. And yet, apocalypse fiction focuses on a specific type of *event*, whereas horror focuses on a specific type of *emotion*. It just so happens that, as Hobbes suggests, atavistic life is routinely fearful. A classic example is furnished in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), which depicts a lifeless post-extinction world, where cannibal marauders roam the countryside. As the novel dwells at length on the frightening nature of an apocalypse, it can be plausibly categorized as a work of both horror and apocalypse fiction. McCarthy's opus, *Blood Meridian* (1985), likewise can be categorized both as a western, due to the place and time-period in which it is set, but also, given its excessive violence and frightening imagery, as a work of horror.

Classifying art does not have to be a zero-sum game. Consider Harlan Ellison's novella, *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* (1967). Detailing a nightmarish future where a malevolent supercomputer known as "AM," after wiping out most of humanity, tortures the survivors out of spite, Ellison's novella clearly falls within the horror genre. Nevertheless, as it concerns a space-age setting and an advanced artificial intelligence, it also undoubtedly stands as a classic work of science fiction. Sci-fi films such as *The Thing* (1982), *Predator* (1987), and *Event Horizon* (1997), due to their reliance on futurist elements to evoke fear, can similarly be characterized as genre-hybrids.[160]

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[160] In addition to fusions of horror and some genre focused on narrative tropes (e.g., western, sci-fi, fantasy), we can also sensibly speak of genre hybrids involving a mix of fear and other emotions. Comedy-horror is perhaps the best example. Frightening imagery, when juxtaposed with levity, results in a curious blend sometimes referred to as *gallows humour*, in which our apprehensions are alleviated precisely by making light of them. In the development of

All of this is to say that, while it is perfectly sensible to talk of sci-fi horror, fantasy horror,

even sub-categories such as body-horror and psychological horror, classifications like "tales of

dread" and "tales of terror," involving horror synonyms, are considerably less practical. Dread

and terror can mean different things to different people, but to *most* people, the emotions are no

different than horror in any compelling sense. Classifications such as Freud's "uncanny," and

Todorov's "fantastic," straying radically from commonly held folk intuitions, are similarly

unconvincing.[161]

A final uncertainty concerns disgust, an emotion closely related to fear. Unlike surprise, but,

like fear, disgust is a cognitively rich, at times contradictory, emotion, in the sense that we are

occasionally enthused by its outwardly discomfiting features.[162] They are both visceral, powerful

emotions. Not insignificantly, fear and disgust share many somatic effects (e.g., variations in

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comedy-horror, Poe, as with so many other genres, played a leading role. Consider "Metzengerstein" (1832), a Gothic story with language so verbose (even for Poe) that it betrays its satirical nature, and "The Duc de L'Omelette" (1832), whose protagonist, "perished of an ortolan," wins his freedom from hell by defeating Satan at a game of cards. Lovecraft also forayed into horror-comedy; his novella "Herbert West – Reanimator" (1922), for example, is an unmistakable pastiche of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. "Herbert West" was latter adapted by the director Stuart Gordon into an even more comedic film, *Re-Animator* (1985), which has developed a considerable cult following. Perhaps the most successful comedy-horror film is Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996), in which the all too common tropes of slasher films are upended to frightening, but also comedic effect. Poe, "The Duc de L'Omelette," *The Complete Tales & Poems*, page 610.

[161] According to Freud, "the uncanny" is a particular "class of the frightening" that concerns the "secretly familiar," which, having "undergone repression," subsequently returns. He gives the example of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" (1816), in which the protagonist's anxiety concerns "the idea of being robbed of one's eyes," which Freud argues is in fact "a substitute for the dread of being castrated." According to Todorov, "the fantastic" concerns an ordinary setting, in which "there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world," thereby producing either "fear, or horror, or simply curiosity." I contend that both these "genres," not only overlap with each other and horror as I have defined it, but also stray much too far from the common ways in which the terms "uncanny" and "fantastic" are used by laymen. Mark Fisher's distinction of "eerie" and "weird" fiction from horror is unhelpful for the same reason. Freud, "From The Uncanny," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, pages 825, 836, 831. Tzvetan Todorov, "Definition of the Fantastic," and "Themes of the Fantastic: Introduction," *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), pages 25, 92. Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016).

[162] On disgust's paradoxical allure, consider the perspective of philosopher and political theorist Aurel Kolnai: "There is without a doubt a certain invitation hidden in disgust as a partial element, I might say, a certain macabre allure… not only is an aversion to its object characteristic of disgust, but also a superimposed attractedness of the subject towards that object." Aurel Kolnai, "Disgust," *On Disgust*, Ed. Barry Smith and Carolyn Korsmeyer, Trans. Elizabeth Kolnai et al. (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 200), page 42.

heart rate, skin irritations). Further complicating the matter, objects that horrify us often disgust us, and vice versa.[163] How, if at all, ought these emotions be distinguished?

Fortunately, disgust, unlike horror, has received a fair measure of scholarly attention, which suggests that, although related, disgust and fear are in fact distinct. Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt, and Clark R. McCauley, for example, characterize disgust as a "guardian of the borders of both the bodily self and the social self," having evolved out of a "food rejection system" to gradually encompass more complex revulsions, such as reminders of our animal nature (e.g., bodily secretions, like feces, phlegm, and blood), as well as certain types of interpersonal contact and moral violations.[164] Korsmeyer comparably describes disgust as "responsive to foul and contaminated objects," as well as "objects, persons or behaviors that transgress social norms."[165] Although fear certainly can be generated by corpses and acts of depravity, it is not exclusively associated with bodily dismemberment or the violation of social mores.

And although they share some characteristics connected with bodily responses, fear and disgust are ultimately incongruous. For instance, fear generally *accelerates* heart palpitations, whereas disgust is associated with a lowered heart rate.[166] More significantly, disgust is commonly understood as tethered to a specific physiological state, namely, *nausea*.[167] Associated with physical discomfort, disgust, Korsmeyer points out, "virtually requires sensory input."

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[163] Lessing, for example, observes that "long nails" are "disgusting," but "at the same time terrible," for they have the capacity to "lacerate." Lessing, "Laocoön," *Classic Romantic and German Aesthetics*, page 125.

[164] Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt, and Clark R. McCauley, "Disgust," *Handbook of Emotions*, Ed. M. Lewis, J. M. Haviland-Jones and L. F. Barrett (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), page 759.

[165] Korsmeyer, "Introduction" *Savoring Disgust*, page 4.

[166] Some theorists suggest that disgust generates "increased salivation," another characteristic not commonly associated with fear. Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley, "Disgust," *Handbook of Emotions*, page 758.

[167] Korsmeyer characterizes nausea as the "signature marker" of disgust's somatic dimension. Sartre describes this uncomfortable physical state as involving a sense of "filth," which at its height includes dizziness, blurred vision, and a desire "to vomit." Korsmeyer, "Introduction" *Savoring Disgust*, page 3. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Friday," *Nausea*, Trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2007), pages 18-9.

Affective responses to disgust are "relatively invariant across cultures," manifesting themselves as postures and facial expressions tied to reactions to foul or polluting objects and to triggering basic sensory experiences like smell, taste, and touch.[168] Fear, by contrast, is not bound to any particular sensory state, and, although it can be generated in response to a disgusting sensation, it can also be generated by markedly more subtle phenomena.[169] Even body-horror, a sub-genre in which horror is commonly associated with disgusting imagery, can be said to convey more complex apprehensions. Consider David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), where the horror superficially concerns a hideous fly-human hybrid, but, as Iris Bruce argues, in fact addresses "deeply rooted anxieties," including "fear of losing control over one's body" and "succumbing to irrational animalistic impulses."[170]

Disgust and fear are distinct affective states. Disgust is philosophically interesting, and some aspects of its paradoxical allure can be considered intimately related to horror. However, a full exploration of that emotion lies beyond this paper's purview. Horror sub-genres such as body-horror and Italian "Mondo" cinema tend more to disgust, but the assessment of popular works generally regarded as horror nevertheless strongly suggests that the unfolding of terrible events and the existence of horrible states of affairs are the true mark of the genre.[171] Having come to

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[168] Korsmeyer, "What is Disgust?" and "Introduction," *Savoring Disgust*, pages 30, 10.

[169] The narrator of Lovecraft's "Dagon" (1917) is frightened by a monster that is "[v]ast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome." Rousseau, however, recalls being "frighten[ed]," by the "insults" and "mockery" of his political opponents, an apprehension involving no sensation of disgust. H.P. Lovecraft, "Dagon," *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014), page 28. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "First Walk," *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Ed. Russell Goulbourne, Trans. Russell Goulbourne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pages 4-5.

[170] Iris Bruce, "Kafka and Popular Culture," *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, page 243.

[171] "Mondo" is Italian for "world." The term's association with violent exploitation films began after the popularity of the documentary *Mondo Cane* (1962). Perhaps the most notorious Mondo film is *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), which boasted such realistic special effects that its director, Ruggero Deodato, was forced to present multiple actors to the Italian authorities in order to authenticate that they were, in fact, still alive. Raising concerns over animal cruelty, several animals are killed on-screen by the film's actors. Steve Rose, "Cannibal Holocaust: Keep filming! Kill more people!" *The Guardian*. Sep. 15, 2001.

conceptualize horror as predominantly focused on generating fear, to the exclusion, or at least the

downplaying, of other emotions, it is time to lay out a theory accounting for its appeal. To do so,

I must briefly acknowledge the major theorists that I intend to draw upon.

VII. Dark Muses

> "…a shadow came to me… the *lightest* of all things…."
> - Friedrich Nietzsche.[172]

Illuminating the obscurities of horror involves looking backward, drawing upon persuasive accounts of the past, in order to construct a convincing theory. I am chiefly indebted to two philosophers, far removed from each other chronologically, yet whose theories regarding fear are uncannily similar.

The first thinker is Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE), whose views, given that horror emerged as a genre long after his lifetime, are surprisingly congenial when it comes to explaining its appeal. For, as Walter Kaufmann notes, Aristotle "was the first to map out [a philosophy] with systematic vision," so that, to this day, pursuing philosophical insight and clarifying argument often involve either agreeing or disagreeing with one of his many conjectures. Karl Jaspers, a strict anti-Aristotelian, is even more trenchant, arguing that Aristotle determines the very language of philosophizing, "whether one thinks with him or against him."[173] I join those who regard Aristotle's perspective as pertinent, albeit in need of modification. Recalling Bacon's

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[172] The Ancient Greek word for "shadow" is σκιά, which can also be translated as the "spirit of someone dead." The Ancient Greek word λευκός can be translated as "light," but can also be employed metaphorically, to convey "make clear" in either a literary or philosophical sense. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Part Two: On the Blissful Islands," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003) pages 111-2. Liddell et al., "σκιά" and "λευκός," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 639, 411.

[173] George Grote praises Aristotle for the "grandeur of his intelligence, in respect of speculative force, positive as well as negative, systematizing patience, comprehensive curiosity as to matters of fact, and diversified applications of detail." See also J.G. Hamann, who remarks on Aristotle's "encyclical" breadth of thought, A.E. Taylor, who emphasizes Aristotle's literary influence (suggesting that without a knowledge of Aristotle figures such as Shakespeare, Dante, Chaucer, and Milton cannot be fully understood) and A.C. Grayling, who characterizes Aristotle (alongside Plato and Kant), as "one of the greatest figures in the history of Western philosophy." Kaufmann, "The Philosophic Flight," and "Existentialism," *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, pages 8, 28. Johann Georg Hamann, "Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters - Second Letter March 1, 1760," *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, Ed. Kenneth Haynes, Trans. Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), page 44. George Grote, "Categories," *Aristotle*. Vol. 1. Ed. Alexander Bain and G. Groom Robertson (London: John Murray, 1872), page 76. Taylor, "Life and Works," *Aristotle*, pages 7-8. A.C. Grayling, "Part III: Modern Philosophy – The Rise of Modern Thought: Kant," *The History of Philosophy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), page 256.

analogy of the bee, I plan to rely on Aristotle's philosophy of emotion and artistic expression as a foundation, but to adapt his thought, drawing upon his most relevant insights in order to construct a theory that is new and inspired.[174]

Aristotle's *Poetics* is concerned with the nature of tragedy, yet there are unmistakable parallels between horror, centered on arousing fear, and tragedy, centered on "arousing pity and fear."[175] According to Aristotle, tragedy arouses unsavory emotions precisely in order to accomplish their κάθαρσις ("catharsis"). He appropriates the term used by Ancient Greeks for the secretion of undesirable bodily fluids, suggesting through analogy that, in order to expunge unpleasant emotions that develop within us, we must simulate them through art.[176] Art provides an outlet for exercising emotions (e.g. anger, sadness, fear) that are intrinsic to the human experience, but that, in our day to day lives, we don't always have an appropriate outlet for. These volatile passions can accumulate within us, and thereby manifest in all kinds of psychologically negative ways. Considering that what is lacking is a proper outlet for such volatile passions, Aristotle proposes that purging or releasing them in the right context can be construed as a positive exercise. Just as a person is a better doctor for having a general

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[174] "Those who have handled sciences have been either men of experiment or men of dogmas. The men of experiment are like the ant; they only collect and use. The reasoners resemble spiders who make cobwebs out of their own substance. But the bee takes a middle course. It gathers its material from the flowers of the garden and of the field, but transforms and digests it by a power of its own." Francis Bacon, "The New Organon – Book One – 95," *Selected Philosophical Works*, Ed. Rose-Mary Sargent (Chicago: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), page 128.

[175] Aristotle, "Poetics - 8," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 2323, 1452a.

[176] The term κάθαρσις is typically translated as "cleansing" or "purification." According to John Burnet, "it is abundantly clear" that Aristotle's theory is "derived from Pythagorean sources." Aristoxenus, for example, reports that "the Pythagoreans employed music to purge the soul as they used medicine to purge the body." Aristotle's direct influence can be traced through Plato, who in *Laws* adduces that "Corybantic" (derived from the name given to worshippers of Dionysus) manic states can be cured homeopathically, through the disciplined music and dancing of Corybantic ritual. Aristotle "Poetics - 6," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 2320, 1449b. Liddell et al., "κάθαρσις" *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 338. John Burnet, "Science and Religion," *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), page 107. Plato, "Laws – VII," *Complete Works*, Trans. Trevor J. Saunders, page 1460, 790d.

acquaintance with natural sciences, or a better statesman for possessing an understanding of common customs and mores, an individual acquainted with the general nature of the passions can be said to be more psychologically healthy.[177] As the modern horror genre involves stimulating, and deriving satisfaction from, fear, it makes sense to treat Aristotle's concept of emotional catharsis as a starting point for an explanation of horror's appeal.

Aristotle's theory of catharsis is particularly useful in helping to explain why people do not commonly seek out frightening things that pose real harm. Fear, to be pleasurable, generally requires a nonthreatening context. Frightening, dangerous situations certainly *can* bring about pleasure, and catharsis. Consider the pleasurable sensation that is sometimes said to occur in individuals who have survived a near-death experience.[178] However, due to the likelihood of harm, these situations are less commonly sought out. For every climber who ascends treacherous heights without the assistance of rope, there are thousands who take more ample precautions. Likewise, people do not commonly desire to be confronted by axe-murderers, and yet frequently delight in art that *depicts* axe-murderers. This is because the latter simulates the same kind of emotion associated with the former, which, since viewers are separated from actual harm, can be appreciated by the viewer for a longer duration and with a greater degree of introspection. Aristotle asserts that, "though the objects themselves may be painful," we cherish "the most

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[177] Aristotle argues that "the brave man" is praiseworthy, not because he *lacks* a capacity to fear, but precisely *because* he possesses both the capacity for fear and confidence as "reason bids." A person who knows when it is appropriate to be afraid possesses a "condition analogous to that of the strong or healthy." Aristotle "Eudemian Ethics – Book III," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, pages 1946-7, 1228b-1229a.
[178] The rock band Radiohead devotes a song to this subject. Thom Yorke's surviving a near-fatal car wreck directly inspired him to write "Airbag," highlighting the "wonderful, powerful emotion you feel when you've just failed to have an accident." Martin Clarke, "Chapter Eight," *Radiohead: Hysterical & Useless* (London: Plexus Publishing, 2000), page 118.

realistic representations" of terrible things, such as "dead bodies," because, through their μίμησις ("imitation"), we are able to, free from harm, ascertain their "meaning."[179]

I also turn to Aristotle because I share his conviction that artistic representation, which conveys καθόλου ("the general"), is "more philosophic and of graver import than history," which expresses "singulars."[180] Contrary to those who suggest that artistic representation, because it deals with imaginary scenarios and personas, has nothing insightful to offer, Aristotle demonstrates that *we can learn through art*, in the sense that exemplary representations elevate and rarify human emotions, illuminating for audiences their fundamental character.[181] The

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[179] According to Aristotle, every ἔργον ("function") has an ἀρετή ("virtue"), to perform its function well. In the case of humans, our function is rational activity: "all men by nature desire to know." Thus, the path to εὐδαιμονία ("happiness") involves reasoning well. He argues that imitation is "natural" to human beings "from childhood," and, as a process that facilitates learning, fundamentally attuned to our rational character. Aristotle "Metaphysics – Book 1," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Trans. W.D. Ross, page 1552, 980a. Aristotle "Poetics - 6," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol 2., page 2318, 1448b. Liddell et al., "μίμησις," "ἔργον," "ἀρετή," "εὐδαιμονία," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 447, 269, 100, 280.

[180] For Aristotle, a "definitional account" must include not only "mere fact," but also "the cause." Artists are "wiser than men of experience" according to Aristotle precisely because they "know the *causes* of things that are done." The man of experience may accomplish something accidentally, without knowing its nature, whereas the artist's function qua artist is to depict the very causes of things in a general sense, which requires knowledge of their mechanics. Aristotle uses Alcibiades as an example. History tells us what Alcibiades "did or had done to him," whereas the finest art illustrates what people, in a general sense, "will probably or necessarily say or do" given particular circumstances. Aristotle, "On the Soul – Book II," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 658, 413a. Aristotle "Metaphysics – Book 1," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, pages 1552-3. Aristotle "Poetics - 6," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 2323, 1451b. Liddell et al., "καθόλου" *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 340.

[181] Erich Auerbach similarly argues that "it does not matter whether we know" Homer's poems are "only legend," as "the heroes in their ordinary life" reflect the "roots" of human manners such that "we live with them in the reality of their lives." See also Samuel Johnson, according to whom the "business of the poet" is "to examine, not the individual, but the species… to remark on general properties," as to recall "the original to every mind," and Friedrich Schlegel, according to whom "teachings that a novel hopes to instill must be of the sort that can be communicated only as wholes, not demonstrated singly." Erich Auerbach, "From Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature – Chapter One," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Trans. Willard R. Trask, page 1038. Samuel Johnson, "Chapter X," *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, Ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University, 2009) page 28. Friedrich Schlegel, "From Athenian Fragments – Fragment 111," *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Trans. P. Firchow, pages 248-9.

superlative works of horror illustrate the nature of fear, and, critically, by isolating the experience from any threat of danger, such works allow for pleasure.[182]

The second theorist I will draw on significantly is the Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797). It is particularly appropriate to cite Burke, as his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) makes explicit, recurrent references to the aesthetics of fear.[183] And not only are his views regarding fear astute, but they also correspond rather seamlessly with Aristotle's. For Burke, anything that excites "ideas of pain" and "danger," that is "terrible" or that "operates in a manner analogous to terror," can serve as a source of the sublime. Suggesting that horror and sublimity are linked, he classifies "terror" as the sublime's "ruling principle."[184] Like Aristotle, he contends that we appreciate frightening things represented because "representation" of "grievous calamity" does not threaten "imminent hazard," and thus, "prompt[s] us to relieve ourselves" of the anxieties associated with such fears.[185] He therefore suggests that, although they "fill the mind with strong emotions of horror," representations of "pain, sickness and death" are in fact psychologically

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[182] According to Aristotle, fear and pity are aroused in tragedy to purge negative emotions, and it is catharsis, not the emotions aroused, which causes pleasure. Yet while Aristotle's theory of deriving catharsis from representation is sensible, his conviction that the fear aroused is *not* pleasurable is considerably less so. Horror is judged as pleasurable based on *how effective it is at frightening*, and as Marcia Eaton points out, just like with rollercoasters, "removal of the fear… spoil[s] the fun." Elsewhere Aristotle acknowledges that "[s]ome pleasant feeling is associated with most of our appetites," and that "there is an element of pleasure even in mourning and lamentation." Marcia Eaton, "A Strange Kind of Sadness," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 41 No. 1 (1982), page 54. Aristotle, "Rhetoric – Book I - 11," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 2182, 1370b.
[183] Burke also played a significant role in the *development* of horror, as his "aesthetic musings" made the Gothic novel more "respectable" in the eyes of many of his contemporaries. Burke not only knew what he liked, he could also crucially "explain *why* it should be liked," thereby encouraging subsequent critics and creators to adopt a more welcoming attitude toward frightening aesthetics. Twitchell, "The Dimensions and Evolution of Modern Horror Art," *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*, page 39.
[184] Burke, "Terror," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 48.
[185] Burke, "Terror," and "Of the effects of Tragedy," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pages 48, 40-1.

beneficial, because, in demonstrating health's undesirable opposite, they acutely call to mind the relief prompted by "self-preservation."[186]

Aristotle argues that the mimetic evocation of fear can identify and help resolve psychological anguish. Burke classifies fear as a provocation that encourages recognition of death, while at the same time, through this comprehension, fostering an appreciation of life. Synthesizing these views yields an elegant, all-encompassing explanation of horror's appeal. Generally uncomfortable, fear, when contextualized in a manner in which it can be safely regarded, has the potential to be satisfying. The satisfaction comes not only from the emotion itself, but also from catharsis, the opportunity that frightful imagery affords to reflect on pain, and by extension death. For Aristotle, reflection involves a cleansing of insalubrious passions. However, as I shall argue, catharsis is manifested in a variety of ways.

Aristotle and Burke are not the only theorists whose views I rely on to explain horror's nature and utility. This section would be incomplete without calling special attention to a contemporary philosopher whose work has played a strong role in influencing the development of my views on horror. I shall frequently refer to Martha Nussbaum's investigation into Hellenistic philosophy, *The Therapy of Desire* (1994), for her characterization of the emotions is not only convincing, but corresponds to the theory of emotions that I endorse.

Nussbaum makes an impassioned case that engaging with sound philosophical arguments causes us to live more fulfilled, psychologically harmonious lives. She maintains that philosophical argument is analogous to medicine for the soul, in the sense that, by helping to identify and remove false beliefs, it helps disperse subconscious anxieties generated by these

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[186] Burke, "Of the passions which belong to self-preservation," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 33.

false beliefs.[187] Passions may be "irrational," not in the sense that they have "nothing to do with argument and reasoning," but rather, "in the sense that the beliefs on which they rest may be false."[188] Her perspective conforms nicely with the thesis I develop here. Horror presents an "argument" of sorts, casting an emotion (fear), and phenomena (pain and death) commonly regarded as undesirable, in a positive light, which in turn can help an individual overcome unhealthy thoughts, concerns, and beliefs.

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[187] Nussbaum draws upon a common analogy in ancient philosophy. B.A.G. Fuller rightly emphasizes the "affinity between medicine and philosophy" in the thought of Empedocles, and Jaeger praises Plato's deep "respect for medicine" and frequent use of medical analogy (e.g., *Gorgias* 464a-d, *Republic* 444c, *Crito* 47b-48a, *Charmides* 156b-157a). For a few other examples, consider remarks made by Democritus: "Medicine… heals illnesses of the body, *wisdom removes passions from the soul*." As well as Lucretius: "The mind, like a sick body, can be healed and directed by medicine." And Porphyry (paraphrasing Epicurus): "Just as there is no use in medical expertise if it does not give therapy for bodily diseases, so too is there no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul." B.A.G. Fuller, "The Pluralists," *History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 1. (New York: H. Holt, 1923), page 198. Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, "Socrates the Teacher," *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture – In Search of the Divine Centre*, Vol 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pages 32-3. Democritus, "Ethics: A. General – 192 [F66]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Vol 1, page 633. Lucretius, "Book III – Life and Mind," *On the Nature of the Universe*, page 111. Porphyry, "To Marcella 31 (Usener 221)," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 155.

[188] Nussbaum, "Therapeutic Arguments," *Therapy of Desire*, 38.

VIII.   The Catharsis Theory of Horror

> "…o'er the bed of death,
> The gloom of horror pours."
> -   Nathan Drake.[189]

I have defined horror as an art form showcasing a high degree of fearsome events, or focusing extensively on a single fearsome event, entity, idea, place, or situation, and I have endeavored to demonstrate that its appreciation is a cognitive affair, involving a beholder's construal and appraisal of a horrifying conception. What unifying thought, as Aristotle would say, "absolutely frightening," lies at the heart of fear more generally? The answer to this question, *prima facie*, is woefully indeterminate. People, after all, are frightened by a great assortment of different ideas, things, events, persons, and places. Given proper context, even a "handful of dust" can evoke fear.[190]

Burke offers a rather sensible answer, arguing that fear is a preservation instinct, and, as previously noted, fundamentally involves a reflexive "apprehension of [potential] pain."[191] This view is not unique to him.[192] He does elaborate, however, the implications of this observation.

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[189] Nathan Drake, "Ode to Superstition," *Dreams of Fear*, page 98.

[190] Aristotle points out that a "coward" as such "fears even what he ought not." However, there are also fears which are rational, "frightening to the majority," and thus reflect an aspect of "human nature." Aristotle's perspective was likely influenced by Plato, who argues in *Protagoras* that "cowardice is ignorance of what is and is not to be feared," and that courage is precisely "wisdom about what is and is not to be feared." The same perspective can be found in Thucydides: "the man who can most truly be accounted brave is he who best knows the meaning of what is sweet in life and of what is terrible." Aristotle, "Eudemian Ethics – Book III," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, page 1946, 1228b. T.S. Eliot, "The Wasteland: I. The Burial of the Dead," *Selected Poems* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1936) page 52, line 30. Plato, "Protagoras," *Complete Works*, Trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, page 789, 360c-e. Thucydides, "Book Two – Perciles' Funeral Oration," *History of the Peloponnesian War*, page 147.

[191] Burke, "Terror," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 47.

[192] Aristotle defines φόβος ("fear, terror, fright") as "a pain or disturbance due to imagining some destructive or painful evil in the future." Plato similarly construes fear as the "expectation of a future evil," as does Plotinus, who characterizes fear as a desire "to avoid suffering some unpleasantness." Later thinkers tend to agree; consider Aquinas, who asserts that "fear regards future evil," and Locke, who defines fear as "an uneasiness of the mind… upon the thought of future evil." Aristotle, "Rhetoric – Book II – 5," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, page 2202, 1382a. Liddell et al., "φόβος" *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 764. Plato, "Laches," *Complete Works*, Trans. Rosamond Kent Sprague, page 683 198b. Plotinus, "4.4 (28) On Problems of the

As death "is in general a much more affecting idea than pain," and pain is death's portentous "emissary," fear, he reasons, *constitutes an apprehension of death*. As evidence, he observes that death is preferable to "very few pains, however exquisite."[193]

Plato relates a parable in the *Symposium* (c. 385-370 BCE) that is particularly germane. According to Diotima of Mantinea, "mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal." She argues that this desire, like the rungs of a ladder, manifests itself in increasing degrees of intensity, which are analogous to the different parts of the soul. At its lowest, concupiscent level, this yearning expresses itself as a desire for biological "reproduction," as it is a process that "goes on forever" down the generations. Leaving behind a young one to replace the old is, for all practical purposes, "what mortals have in place of immortality." It is for this reason, above all others, says Diotima, that "everything naturally values its own offspring."[194]

Humans also frequently desire great accomplishment, to create laws or beautiful works that will endure after them. According to Diotima, fear of social failure and lack of accomplishment relate to the spirited soul's desire to live forever. As she tells Socrates, "anyone will do anything for the sake of immortal virtue and the glorious fame that follows," for they "are all in love with

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Soul 2," *The Enneads*, page 465. Thomas Aquinas, "First Part of the Second Part - Question 41. Fear, in itself," *The Summa Theologiae*, Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New Advent LLC, 2021). John Locke, "Chapter XX: Of Modes of Pleasure and Pain," *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol 1 (Project Gutenberg, 2017).

[193] Augustine argues that "mere existence is desirable in virtue of a kind of natural property," and that "even those who are wretched are for this very reason unwilling to die." According to the Dominican friar Tommaso Campanella (1568 – 1639), "to be preserved in life and existence is the greatest good for all beings," and consequently, "each moves to its own place where it can best survive." And in the words of Poe, "[t]here are few conditions into which man can possibly fall where he will not feel a deep interest in the preservation of his existence." Burke, "Of the Sublime," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 34. Augustine, "Book XI, Chapter 27," *City of God*, page 460. Tommaso Campanella, "On Sense and Magic 2.26," *The Book of Magic: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, Trans. Brian Copenhaver (London: Penguin Books, 2016), page 529. Poe, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket – Chapter XII," *The Complete Tales & Poems*, page 716.

[194] Plato, "Symposium," *Complete Works*, Trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, page 490, 207a-d.

immortality."[195] Indeed, the conviction that, through creating something magnificent, beautiful, or beneficial, we can survive our death, in the memory of others, is not uncommon. Heraclitus expresses such a view, when he states that "greater deaths are allotted greater destinies," and that consequently, "[t]he best choose one thing," an "everflowing fame among mortals," as does Ralph Waldo Emerson, when he declares that "the melodies of the poet ascend and leap and pierce into the deeps of infinite time."[196]

Diotima argues that, at its highest level, longing for immortality manifests itself as the rational soul's desire to possess knowledge. Following a Platonic schema, acquaintance with the beautiful itself entails knowledge of what is "absolute, pure," unchanging and "unmixed," and is thus equivalent to participation in an eternal constituent of reality, beyond space and time.[197]

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[195] Nietzsche articulates roughly the same notion: "A soldier wishes he could fall on the battlefield for his victorious fatherland… A mother gives to her child that of which she deprives herself… But are these all unegotistic states?" Is it "not clear," he asks, "that in all these instances man loves something of himself, an idea, a desire, an offspring, more than something else of himself, that he thus divides his nature and sacrifices one part of it to the other?" Plato, "Symposium," *Complete Works*, page 491, 208c-e. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the History of the Moral Sensations – 57. Morality as the self-division of Man," *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), page 42.

[196] In Homer's *Iliad* (c. 800 BCE), Achilles chooses "glory [that] never dies" over an obscure but long-lasting life. According to the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus (c. seventh century BCE), an honourable man's death "is mourned alike by young and old," and consequently, "[h]is name and glorious reputation never die." Aristotle's "Ode to Excellence," written in honour of his deceased friend Hermias, similarly speaks of a person who is "celebrated for his deeds," being, in a sense, "immortal." Heraclitus, "XCVI," and "XCVII," *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, page 73. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), page 297. Homer, "Book 9: The Embassy to Achilles," *The Iliad*, Trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) page 265, line 501. Tyrtaeus, "Fragment – 12," *Greek and Lyric Poetry*, Trans. M.L. West, page 26. Aristotle, "Poems," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, Trans. Jonathan Barnes and Gavin Lawrence, page 2463. For additional information on the Aristotelian concept ἀθανατίζειν (to "act as an immortal") and its possible interpretations, see "Immortality and the Echoes of a Finite Lifespan: Aristotle, Early Stoics and Epicureanism" in A.G. Long's *Death and Immortality in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[197] Maximus of Tyre (c. second century CE) draws an interesting parallel between the Diotima-inspired Socratic approach to love and that of the poet Sappho (c. 630 – 570 BCE). Both Socrates and Sappho "acknowledge they are lovers of many," and both employ "ironical language" and physical attraction as a starting point for encouraging their lovers to grow as individuals. A surviving epigram attributed to Plato, assuming it is genuine, demonstrates his deep respect for Sappho, characterizing her as the "tenth" muse. Plato, "Symposium," *Complete Works*, page 494, 212e-b. Maximus of Tyre, "Dissertation VIII - In What the Amatory of Socrates Consisted," *The Dissertations of Maximus Tyrius*, Vol. 1, Trans. Thomas Taylor (London: C. Whittingham, 1804), pages 92-4. Plato, "Epigram 16 – Greek Anthology xvi 162," *Complete Works*, Trans. J.M. Edmonds and John M. Cooper, page 1745.

People desire attaining true justified belief because it allows them to partake in something that will last beyond them. If we were to divorce this conception from a cumbersome Theory of Forms, and, following Diotima's ladder analogy more generally (or, to borrow a Wittgenstein image, to use Diotima's analogy as a basis, then dispense with the ladder), we might conclude, as regards this third kind of desire, that to overcome the fear of death, or at the very least, come to better terms with the phenomenon, *we desire to better understand it*.[198]

A variety of religions purport to know what lies beyond, offering salvation in the form of "eternal life."[199] That so many religions promise deliverance from death is in itself strong evidence that the phenomenon has haunted humanity for a very long time. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of our earliest fables, concludes with the dismal acknowledgment that immortality is futile: "when the gods created man, they allotted him to death."[200] *Gilgamesh* especially demonstrates that apprehension regarding the approaching necessity of death has dominated the imagination since the emergence of civilization.[201] After all, as Nabokov soberly

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[198] In fear, Max Stirner reminds us, "there always remains the attempt to liberate oneself from what is feared." Machiavelli, too, observes that "fear cause[s]" people, as a natural recourse, to "seek remedies." Max Stirner, "Men of the Old Time and the New," *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*, Ed. James J. Martin. Transl. Steven T. Byington. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2005) page 73. Niccolò Machiavelli, "Discourses on Livy (Abridged)," *The Portable Machiavelli*, Ed. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa, Trans. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985), page 242.

[199] "John 3:16," *Holy Bible: Revised Standard Edition*, page 89.

[200] Lucian of Samosata (c. 125 – 180 CE) characterizes the "life of men" as like "bubbles caused by a spring of water crashing down… they are all inflated with the breath of life, some bigger, others smaller… but they must all burst in the end." Consider also the pessimistic perspectives offered by thinkers such as Callinus (c. seventh century BCE): "Man has no escape from his appointed death." Plato: "None of us can avoid death." Gorgias the Sophist (483 – 375 BCE): "[B]y an open vote nature condemns to death all mortal creatures on the day they are born." And Lucretius: "A fixed term is set to the life of mortals, and there is no way of dodging death." "The Search for Everlasting Life," *Epic of Gilgamesh*, page 102. Lucian, "Charon, or the Observers," *Selected Dialogues*, Trans. C.D.N. Costa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), page 23. Callinus, "Fragment - 1," *Greek and Lyric Poetry*, Trans. M.L. West, page 21. Plato, "Seventh Letter," *Complete Works*, Trans. Glenn R. Morrow, page 1654, 334e. Gorgias the Sophist, "G. Defense of Palamedes," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Vol 2, Trans. Daniel W. Graham, page 763. Lucretius, "Book III – Life and Mind," *On the Nature of the Universe*, page 129.

[201] "We are all the fools of time and terror," Byron once mused. Schopenhauer emphatically argues that "*horror mortis*," an "excessive fear of death," is "inherent in every living thing." Ernest Becker maintains that "death, the fear of it," is the wellspring for all "human activity," as does Miguel de Unamuno, according to whom "fear of

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observes, "common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness."[202]

Kierkegaard fittingly characterizes the unpleasant anxiety that attends the fear of death. If it were indeed the case that non-existence lies beyond the grave, he says, "an eternal oblivion always lurk[ing] hungrily for its prey," then life would be completely "devoid of comfort."[203] Similarly, Tolstoy expresses, in arresting fashion, an intense apprehension concerning the prospect of oblivion through death: "Today or tomorrow, sickness and death will come…. my affairs, whatever they may be, will be forgotten, and I shall not exist."[204] All other fears, as such accounts colorfully suggest, pale in comparison to what Burke characterizes as the "king of terrors."[205]

As Kierkegaard and Tolstoy recommend, many people, through contemplation and prayer, reconcile themselves to the prospect of death.[206] That said, some non-believers are also less affected by the prospect of death, or have refined techniques aside from horror to reconcile themselves to it.[207] Stoics, such as Epictetus, maintain that "the source of all human evil" is not

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death" is "source of all movement." Lord Byron, "Manfred – Act II," *The Major Works: Including Don Juan and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Ed. J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 293, lines 160-70. Arthur Schopenhauer, "Chapter XIX: On the Primacy of the Will in Self-Consciousness," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, Trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969), page 240. Ernest Becker, "Preface," *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1997) page xvii. Miguel de Unamuno, "VI: In the Depths of the Abyss," *Tragic Sense of Life*, Trans. J.E. Crawford Flitch (Project Gutenberg, 2005).

[202] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography*, *Revisited* (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Publishers, 1999), page 9.

[203] Søren Kierkegaard, "Speech in Praise of Abraham," *Fear and Trembling*, Trans. Alastair Hannay, Ed. Alastair Hannay, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), page 49.

[204] Leo Tolstoy, "From – *A Confession*," *Echoes from the Cave: Philosophical Conversations since Plato*, Ed. Lisa Gannett, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), page 574.

[205] Burke, "Of the Sublime," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 34.

[206] As Nussbaum harshly puts it, "fear of death" regularly renders individuals the "grovelling slaves of corrupt religious teachers." Nussbaum, "Epicurean Surgery: Argument and Empty Desire," *Therapy of Desire*, page 103.

[207] For a few examples, consider the Byzantine historian Agathias (c. 536 – 582), who likens death as the "mother of rest," a desired liberation from the turmoil's of the body. Lord Dunsany, too, characterizes death as "a gift." And Jonathan Swift sharply satirizes desires for immortality in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) via the Struldbruggs, beings

death, but rather, "the fear of death."[208] Bernard Williams suggests that an immortal human would eventually *desire* death, due to excessive ennui.[209] However, other non-believers, unable to accept mortality with grey determination, seek alternate remedies.

And one of those happens to be horror, as the genre renders thoughts concerning loss and death tolerable, even compelling, fascinating, or exciting. Montaigne once said that to philosophize is to learn how to die, and that, in order to deprive death of its "greatest advantage," we must "frequent it… have nothing more often in mind."[210] And as Burke hypothesizes, felicities do not rouse the mind toward self-preservation in the same manner as representations of distress and danger.[211] Horror, by contrast, offers a more direct and efficacious path toward meditation of existence. The "dread and darkness of the mind cannot be dispelled" by "sunbeams," Lucretius reminds us, but only through confronting their "inner workings."[212]

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that, although immortal, continue to *physically age*, and thus live increasingly miserable lives. Agathias, "Book X – 69," *The Greek Anthology*, Vol. 4. Ed. E. Capps, T.E. Page, and W.H.D. Rouse, Trans. W.R. Paton (London and New York, W. Heinemann, and G.P. Putnam's sons, 1916), page 39. Lord Dunsany, "The Gods of Pegāna," *In the Land of Time and Other Fantasy Tales*, Ed. S.T. Joshi, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), page 31. Johnathan Swift, "A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbdubdrib and Japan - Chapter 10," *Gulliver's Travels*, Ed. Claude Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) page 198.

[208] Epicureans similarly maintain that "death is nothing" a person should regard as "fearful," for "all good and evil lie in sensation, whereas death is the absence of sensation." This is meant to be a comfort, and yet for many, the very prospect of death as an absence of sensation is frightening! Epictetus, "Book II – Chapter 26," *The Discourses of Epictetus*, Ed. Christopher Gill, Trans. Robin Hard (London: Orion Publishing, 2000), page 223. Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus 124-7," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 149.

[209] "Immortality," he argues, "would be meaningless… so, in a sense, death gives the meaning to life." Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality," *Echoes from the Cave: Philosophical Conversations since Plato*, page 591.

[210] An allusion to Plato's *Phaedo*: "the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death." And to Seneca: "It is a wonderful thing to learn thoroughly how to die." Montaigne, "To Philosophize is to Learn how to Die," *The Complete Essays*, page 96. Plato, "Phaedo," *Complete Works*, page 55, 64a. Seneca, "XXVI. On Old Age and Death," *Moral letters to Lucilius*.

[211] "The passions which concern self-preservation, turn mostly on *pain* or *danger*. The ideas of *pain*, *sickness* and *death*, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror; but *life* and *health*, though they put us in a capacity of being affected with pleasure… make no such impression." Burke, "Of the Passions which belong to Self-Preservation," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 33.

[212] Keats similarly speaks of "axioms in philosophy" needing to be "proved upon our pulses… [u]ntil we are sick, we understand not" the nature of sickness. Lucretius, "Book II – Movements and Shapes of Atoms," *On the Nature of the Universe*, pages 61-2. Keats, "Letter to J.H. Reynolds, May 3, 1818," *John Keats's Poetry and Prose*, page 244.

Burke argues that, when ideas of "danger" directly affect us, they are "simply painful."[213] Only after avoiding a flash of lightning can we appreciate its majesty, revel in the exhilaration generated by our escape, and ponder life's significance. The instant before, all that preoccupies the mind is survival. Alternatively, says Burke, contemplating "pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances," is commonly "delightful," precisely because it affords the opportunity to revel safely in fear's exciting character and contemplate matters of life and death.[214] Long past are the days when people banded together to stave off tigers and prey on mammoths, and yet humans still tend to delight in confronting terrible things. Horror taps into this existential thrill, offering the lightning without the hazard.

Nussbaum's theory that false beliefs cause painful emotions, and that these beliefs can be identified and removed through sound argument, suggests a formal explanation of the dynamic of horror. As previously mentioned, horror presents an argument of sorts, albeit a relatively concise one. The common underlying belief-component of fear is that pain, and by extension death, are unpleasant. In the case of horror, this is exposed as incorrect. When an audience experiences fear in the right context, they are able to not only appreciate the emotion's exciting qualia, but also recontextualize their attitudes towards pain, loss, and death. Through contemplation of perceived dangerous phenomena, frightening possibilities, and the nature of death, *they experience catharsis*, a coming to be at peace with their fears, and with their mortality, one way or the other.[215]

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[213] See also Hume: "It is certain that the same object of distress, which pleases in a tragedy, were it really set before us, would give the most unfeigned uneasiness." Burke, "The Recapitulation," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 43. Hume, "Of Tragedy," *Selected Essays*, page 127.
[214] Burke, "The Recapitulation," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 43.
[215] Nussbaum's medical analogy resonates particularly well regarding argument conveyed through art. Jean-François Lyotard, for just one example, makes a strong case that "[j]ust as the [psychiatry] patient elaborates his present

Although Aristotle conceives catharsis as an expulsion, the phenomenon can manifest itself in a variety of ways. The beholder may, through experiencing fear, come to reflect on her ability to withstand hazardous forces. Alternatively, fear can encourage the liberating realization that we are all connected to the same fabric of reality. More simply, but no less profoundly, catharsis may take the form of a realization that fear, to the extent that it can inspire flights of imagination, might not be such a bad thing.

Whatever form catharsis takes, Burke correctly stresses that the removal of a great pain does not resemble positive pleasure.[216] It is not the case that horror allows for satisfaction due to first eliciting, then dissipating fear. Rather, as Augustine affirms, "agonies," are in themselves potential "objects of love." People seek out terrible representations precisely *in order* "to suffer the pain given by being a spectator," and it is "the pain itself" which provides "pleasure."[217] This is in fact unsurprising, when one considers that fear occasions many potentially exhilarating somatic and psychological effects: the heart pumps, skin galvanizes, hairs stand on end, and distinct sections of the brain become flooded with increased electrochemical activity.[218] Consider

trouble by freely associating the more imaginary, immaterial, irrelevant bits with past situations, so discovering hidden meanings in his life," contemplating art encompasses a psychological "working through" that can facilitate self-discovery and insight. Jean-François Lyotard, "Defining the Postmodern," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, page 1468.

[216] Burke, "The Difference between the removal of pain and positive pleasure," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pages 29-30.

[217] He notes that, the "greater [the] pain" generated by the representation, "the greater [the] approval," whereas if the representation does *not* cause pain, people leave "disgusted and highly critical." Hume makes a similar observation, remarking that those who watch tragedies "are pleased in proportion as they are afflicted." For a recent example of this phenomenon, consider the 2009 trailer for the highly successful film *Paranormal Activity*, which interspersed scenes of audiences reacting in terror with quotes from critics, who emphasize that the film is "one of the scariest" ever, "genuinely horrifying." Presumably, audiences were drawn to *Paranormal Activity* (one of the most profitable movies of all time, earning almost 200 million USD at the box office on a budget of just over 200,000 USD) precisely owing to its frightening reputation. Augustine, "Book Three – Student at Carthage," *Confessions*, pages 35-6. Hume, "Of Tragedy," *Selected Essays*, page 126. Clasen, "An Evolutionary Theory of Horror," *Why Horror Seduces*, pages 11-2.

[218] Although sometimes considered wholly negative, it is important to recognize, as Michele Averchi does, that "humans are able to have goosebumps in positive experiences." Michele Averchi, "Goosebumps and Self-Forgetfulness: Awe as a Hybrid Emotion," *Emotional Experiences: Ethical and Social Significance*, Ed. John J. Drummond and Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), page 177.

the narrator of Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872), who, due to a "sense of fear," experiences "tumultuous excitement," or the narrator of Blackwood's "The Willows" (1907), whose "fear" awakens "a sense of awe and wonder" that "counteract[s] its worst effects."[219]

Horror, modifying our attitudes toward fear, can render a commonly uncomfortable emotion pleasurable, and this makes the genre especially appealing. By converting into a pleasurable sensation something commonly thought unwholesome, horror provides a dynamic approach for those regularly distraught by life's woes to exorcise such torments. Horror is thus attractive, not only because it offers people a vehicle for an emotion that is inexorably part of being human, but also because this allows them to reassess deeply held fears, and, thereby, live more psychologically harmonious lives. Characterized by many as lacking artistic depth, the genre can in fact play a vital role in society, calming the psyche of those unable otherwise to properly articulate and confront existential anxieties. The satisfying introspection that attends our experience of horror is best characterized as catharsis. Although representation is far from the sole recourse available for catharsis, "arguments from philosophy," as Plutarch once said, when combined "with an element of fable," tend to make "learning easy and agreeable."[220]

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[219] Art theorist Karl Huysmans characterizes fear as the "most efficacious of excitants." See also "The Lake" (1827) by Poe, whose narrator is emphatic that the "terror" he experiences is "not fright, [b]ut a tremulous delight," and Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922), whose title protagonist experiences "fear" in gambling which "he loved and sought to always renew." Sheridan Le Fanu, "Carmilla," *In a Glass Darkly*, Ed. Robert Tracey, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 264. Algernon Blackwood, "The Willows," *Ancient Sorceries and Other Weird Tales*, page 36. Joris-Karl Huysmans, "Chapter Nine," *Against The Grain*, Trans. John Howard (Project Gutenberg, 2010). Poe, "The Lake – To ---," *The Complete Tales & Poems*, page 847. Hermann Hesse, "Second Part – Sansara," *Siddhartha: An Indian Tale*, Trans. Gunther Olesch, Anke Dreher, Amy Coulter, Stefan Langer and Semyon Chaichenets (Project Gutenberg, 2021).

[220] Kierkegaard argues that "direct" philosophic argument quite often "embitters" an interlocutor, which in turn "prompts the prospective captive to set his will in opposition." Since most people "live in the aesthetic," he recommends an "indirect" method, which utilizes "aesthetic achievement" to "get into touch with men." Plutarch, "On the Study of Poetry," *Classical Literary Criticism*, Trans. D.A. Russell, page 194. Søren Kierkegaard, "The Point of View for my Work as an Author," *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, Ed. Robert Bretall, Trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), page 332.

I propose to designate this theory, which draws heavily on Aristotle's conception of catharsis through representation, the *catharsis theory of horror* (CT). It can be represented as the following:

P1 – Fear entails apprehension of pain, which entails thoughts of loss and death.

P2 – Horror can render fear pleasurable or otherwise agreeable.

C – Horror can render thoughts of loss and death pleasurable or otherwise agreeable.

A variety of thinkers lend credence to CT. Plato, for instance, recounts an interesting episode in the *Republic* (c. 375 BCE):

> Leontius, the son of Aglaion, was going up the Piraeus along the outside of the North Wall when he saw some corpses lying at the executioner's feet. He had an appetite to look at them but at the same time he was disgusted and turned away. For a time he struggled with himself and covered his face, but, finally, overpowered by the appetite, he pushed his eyes wide open and rushed toward the corpses, saying, "Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight!"[221]

Humans can come to understand death by significantly less grisly means. And yet, Leontius cannot help but gaze, for he has an "appetite." Like the young Augustine, who sought "satisfaction in hellish pleasures," some curious compulsion drives Leontius to observe the mutilated bodies.[222] Although, for Plato, this demonstrates that the appetitive soul (ἐπιθυμητικόν) compels individuals to act "contrary to rational calculation," the tale of Leontius can be

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[221] There is an interesting connection between this episode recounted by Plato, and the popular fable by Aesop, "The Thrush," which admonishes those lost in material pleasure. A thrush, while pecking berries, becomes overpoweringly "infatuated by their sweetness," and unable to leave them, is consequently trapped by an approaching fowler. Mirroring Leontius' critical self-regard, the thrush curses itself as a "wretch." Plato tells us that Socrates was intimately familiar with the stories of Aesop (*Phaedo* 61b), and that, in response to a prophetic dream "to make music," he began to record Aesop's fables during his final days. Aesop, "The Thrush," *The Complete Fables*, Trans. Olivia Temple and Robert Temple (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1998), page 116. W.K.C. Guthrie, "Phaedo, Symposium, Phaedrus," *A History of Greek Philosophy – Volume IV: Plato: The Man and his Dialogues, Earlier* Period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), page 327.
Plato, "Republic – Book IV," *Complete Works*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube, C.D.C. Reeve, page 1071,439e-440a.
[222] Augustine, "Book Two – Adolescence," *Confessions*, page 24.

construed altogether differently.[223] He is fascinated by the cadavers because they horrify him. As Julia Kristeva suggests, "the corpse" quite literally signifies "death."[224] Yet, as corpses are inanimate, Leontius can appreciate death as a phenomenon, rather than having to flee it. The Athenian enjoys the awful scene because fear, sufficiently contextualized, not only thrills, but also imparts a unique consciousness concerning human impermanence.[225]

This leads to an important lesson concerning fear and our appreciation of it. Although people are often fascinated by corpses, car crashes, and other after-the-fact calamities, seeking out these "genuine" horrors is atypical. Witnessing authentic suffering, such as on a battlefield, is an altogether different experience than playing *Call of Duty*. Consider the reminiscences of General Robert Wilson, following the Battle of Heilsberg (1807):

> The ground between the wood and the Russian batteries, about a quarter of a mile, was a sheet of naked human bodies, which friends and foes had during the night mutually stripped, although numbers of these bodies still retained consciousness of their situation. *It was a sight that the eye loathed, but from which it could not remove*.[226]

This recollection, mirroring Leontius' fascination so strikingly, suggests that, although curiosity attracts us to death, destruction, and terrible things, genuine cases of such phenomena are

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[223] As Korsmeyer remarks, "Plato might have ennobled" the anecdote "with the implication that Leontius was curious about mysterious profundities: life and death, man's inhumanity, or some other lofty interest." Instead, he characterizes the plight of Leontius as the "symptom of a disunified mind at war with itself." Plato, "Republic – Book IV," *Complete Works*, page 1071, 440a-440b. Korsmeyer, "Attractive Aversions," *Savoring Disgust*, pages 42, 40.

[224] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, along the same lines, argue that a "body without organs," that is, a body that has been desecrated, "is the model of death." They point out that this trope is something "authors of horror stories have understood so well." Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), page 3. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "The First Positive Task of Schizoanalysis," *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2009), page 329.

[225] Marcia Eaton argues that we derive "aesthetic delight" from melancholy and frightening representations precisely because, in appreciating their "formal or abstract qualities," we "feel in control" relative to "practical" instances of fear or sadness. Eaton, "A Strange Kind of Sadness," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, page 62.

[226] Robert Wilson, *Brief Remarks on the Character and Composition of the Russian Army and a Sketch of the Campaigns in Poland in the Years 1806 and 1807* (London: C. Roworth, Bell-yard, Temple-Bar, 1810), page 147.

"loathed" when compared to their aesthetic representation. Korsmeyer elegantly spells out the difference, remarking that, although "we are truly disgusted" by representations, cases of mimetic "disgust [are] more tolerable" than battlefields, because, in the former cases, "the immediate, primary sensations that trigger disgust are absent."[227] Representation satisfies curiosity and excites, while offering a means to contemplate death, without so viscerally offending the senses, or the mind.[228]

It is worth noting that some art does entail authentic suffering, either as an intentional statement or as a by-product of production. In former cases like performance art, for instance Amanda Feilding's "Heartbeat in the Brain" (1970), a short film that records her performing voluntary trepanation (drilling a hole into her forehead), the suffering, intentionally self-inflicted, tends to be appraised differently than those instances in which the sufferer has no say. In such cases, such as Angkor Wat (c. twelfth century), produced by countless slaves, it is arguable that knowledge of the suffering involved tempers otherwise pleasurable sensations. Similarly, representations of historical events where individuals genuinely did suffer, such as those depicted in the prison camp illustrations by North Korean defector Kim Kwang-Il, tend to be regarded with more solemnity.[229]

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[227] Korsmeyer, "Varieties of Aesthetic Disgust," *Savoring Disgust*, page 110.
[228] According to Burke, "affections of the smell and taste, when they are in their full force, and lean directly upon the sensory, are simply painful," whereas "when they are moderated, as in a description or narrative, they become sources of the sublime as genuine as any other." Burke, "Smell and Taste – Bitters and Stenches," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 70.
[229] Matt Ford, "North Korea's Horrors, as Shown by One Defector's Drawings," *The Atlantic*. Feb. 18th, 2014.

IX.   Adumbrations: Evidence for the Catharsis Theory

> "…by the example of these there may be a way opened for the consideration of the whole subject."
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> - Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa.[230]

Abstract principles are best explained through examples. It is therefore worthwhile examining the considerable body of evidence in favor of CT. The annals of philosophy reveal that, in fact, a remarkably wide range of thinkers have articulated points of view akin to CT, suggesting that horror involves not only the enjoyment of fear, but also an introspection, and consequent cathartic reassessment, of existential concerns relating to life and death.

It is especially advantageous to analyze the writings of thinkers who focus on the sublime, since it is so closely related to fear. Like horror, the sublime prompts a powerful emotional reaction, and is regularly associated with danger, pain, and death. For instance, the Roman-era theorist Pseudo-Longinus (c. first century CE) describes the sublime in a manner highly reminiscent of horror. According to him, sublimity suggests a "combination of wonder and astonishment" that, akin to fear, excites "strong and inspired emotion."[231] Echoing Aristotelian catharsis, Longinus contends that exposure to the sublime is beneficial, as the rousing of intense, exhilarating emotions "raises" human beings toward "spiritual greatness."[232]

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[230] Agrippa (1486 – 1535) was a German soldier, polymath, and occult philosopher. Not unlike Empedocles and Pythagoras long before him, he cultivated a mystical reputation; his association with black magic generated many fearsome rumours (e.g., Augustin Calmet reports that "Agrippa had a demon who waited upon him in the shape of a dog"). Agrippa's writings on Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and Neo-Platonism had a profound influence on subsequent alchemists and occult practitioners of the early modern period. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, "Book I – Chap. XLII. Of the wonderful vertues of some kinds of Sorceries," *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Digital edition by Joseph H. Peterson, 2021). Augustin Calmet, "XXIX - Of Familiar Spirits," *The Phantom World; or, The Philosophy of Spirits*, Vol 1. (London: Richard Bentley, 1850), page 198. For information on the history of alchemy, see Lawrence M. Principe's *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[231] Longinus, "On Sublimity," *Classical Literary Criticism*, Trans. D.A. Russell, pages 143, 149.

[232] Longinus, "On Sublimity," *Classical Literary Criticism*, page 178.

Kristeva characterizes horror as "edged with the sublime." Similar to Poe, she argues that the genre is "related to perversion," in the sense that its appreciation "lives at the behest of death."[233] Kristeva reasons that we welcome representations of suffering precisely as a means to purify our latent animalistic instincts and anxieties. For her, catharsis is not only "intrinsic to philosophy," but representation, in a way distinctly aligned with CT, offers a path towards "catharsis par excellence."[234]

Kant's reflections on the sublime are especially fitting. If human understanding, for Kant, is like an island surrounded by a raging sea, then experiencing the sublime constitutes the mind's attempt to cogitate "nature beyond our reach," thereby inviting a confrontation with the crashing waves surrounding this island.[235] However, in the same way that Dostoyevsky believes that humans delight in suffering, Kant argues that the sublime, though an assault on our own imagination, is nevertheless pleasurable. Acknowledging the link between fear and pleasure, he remarks that, "provided our own position is secure," the more "fearful" the phenomenon, the "more attractive" it becomes. He characterizes the sublime as involving a powerful outpouring of "vital forces," which, since "the mind is not simply attracted," but also "alternately repelled," functions as a kind of "negative pleasure."[236] His observation strikingly corresponds with Plato's

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[233] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," *Powers of Horror*, pages 11, 15.
[234] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," *Powers of Horror*, pages 28, 17.
[235] The "region of pure understanding… is an island… surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean." Kant characterizes this ocean as a "region of illusion," because its constituent parts can only be cognized as "phenomena," that is, as objects of sensory "experience," as opposed to noumena, things in-themselves. Though exploration of this region is at times "dangerous," due to the many "iceberg[s]" and "fog-bank[s]" that mystify comprehension, Kant maintains that enlightenment demands an "exit from" our island abode, as only through attempting to cognize hazardous phenomena can we harness, and overcome, irrational fears, such as the "fear [of] spectres." Immanuel Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment*, Ed. Nicholas Walker, Trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 98. Immanuel Kant, "First Division, Chapter Three: Of the Grounds of the Division of All Objects into Phenomena and Noumena," *Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. J.D. Meiklejohn (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003), pages 156-8. Immanuel Kant, "Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment?" *Basic Writings of Kant*, Ed. Allen W. Wood, Trans. Thomas K. Abbott (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), page 135, 141.
[236] Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment*, pages 91, 76.

account of Leontius, who, disgusted by corpses, nevertheless seeks them out, as well as Poe's "imp of perverse," according to which we are paradoxically attracted to phenomena that the rational part of our nature implores us to avoid.

It is significant that the sublime, which Kant links to fear, gratifies in a way markedly akin to catharsis. According to Kant, when exposed to horrors that pose no danger to us, we are able to ponder their nature, as well as our connection to them, at length. He argues that we seek out such frightful aesthetic experiences "because they raise the forces of the soul above the vulgar commonplace."[237] Sublimity imparts a pleasurable realization that, in being able to tolerate, and appreciate, the world's boundless terrors, there must be something powerful within ourselves.[238]

Kant's aesthetics also patently contravene Carroll's monster-centric interpretation of horror. Kant understands beautiful phenomena as singular, concentrated on "the form of [an] object."[239] Beautiful phenomena are spatially finite, defined by their limitation and appreciated owing to their purity of essence. A flower delights owing to its individual qualities, which can be wholly cognized and reflected upon (e.g., the intricacy of its petals, the vibrancy of its colors). Kant associates the sublime, meanwhile, with *quantity*, either mathematically, in terms of limitless magnitude, or dynamically, in terms of limitless powers that challenge cognition and mystify the imagination. Natural forces that threaten our survival, as well as particularly profound concepts that challenge attempts at rational comprehension, are all, for Kant, quintessentially sublime.

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[237] Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment*, page 91.
[238] Beautiful objects, according to Kant, are pleasurable due to the mind's "free play," in which the mental faculties harmonize and operate without constraint. Sublime phenomena, generating "astonishment amounting" to "terror," are pleasurable because "attempt[s] to gain access through imagination" to them arouse the mind to recognize itself as "superior" to "external nature." Kant construes "imagination" as "an instrument of reason," and argues that "in this capacity it is a might enabling us to assert our independence as against the influences of nature, to degrade what is great in respect of the latter to the level of what is little, and thus to locate the absolutely great only in the proper vocation of the subject." Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment*, page 99.
[239] Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment*, page 75.

Significantly, since most horror monsters are sensible, spatially limited entities, they would *not* count on a Kantian model as sublime. Thomas Hardy stirringly articulates the Kantian perspective on horror when he observes "there are things much more terrible than monsters of shape, namely, *monsters of magnitude without known shape*."[240]

Kant's aesthetics aligns neatly with CT, for both hinge on fear of pain and death. These are quintessentially sublime topics for Kant, as the former concerns the rugged and dangerous, while the latter is characteristically incalculable and unknowable.[241] He hails Burke as "the foremost author" regarding inquiry into the sublime, conceding that "all representations within us" are "associable with gratification or pain," the latter being "always in the last resort corporeal." The mind, though it "is all life," requires continuance of the body in order to preserve itself, such that "hindrance or furtherance" of the mind's "life-principle" is inextricably entwined with the continuance of our physical selves.[242] He emphasizes the claim that, when reflecting on pain and death, we come to recognize humanity's connection to them.[243] Although it does not entail the emotional discharge that Aristotle conceived, this recognition, involving a reframing of pain and death, can nevertheless be construed as a type of catharsis.

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[240] Thomas Hardy, "Part IV," *Two on a Tower* (Project Gutenberg, 2011).

[241] As Horace once wrote, "death is the ultimate boundary of human matters." Consider, too, an observation made by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*: "Death is not an event in life… we do not live to experience death." Horace, "Epistle XVI - To Quinctius," *The Works of Horace: A New Edition*, Ed. Theodore Alois Buckley, Trans. Christopher Smart (Project Gutenberg, 2004). Wittgenstein, "6.4311," *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), page 87.

[242] Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment*, pages 107-8.

[243] Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (1816) epitomizes the Kantian perspective on the sublime. The narrator, encountering a mountain "piercing the infinite sky," is at first intimidated, yet ultimately enlivened, coming to recognize humanity's power alone to cogitate such expansive phenomena: "what were thou," he asks the mountain, "[i]f to the human mind's imaginings, [s]ilence and solitude were vacancy?" Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mont Blanc (Version A)," *The Major Works, Including Poetry, Prose and Drama*, Ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pages 120-4.

Coleridge's views on the sublime, exemplified in *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, also convincingly support CT. He concurs with Burke and Kant that sublimity is linked with fear, and that "true [t]error" involves the "apprehension of danger."[244] For Coleridge, the "transcendental" element that encourages a sublime perspective involves diametric forces, one limited, the other expansive, coinciding and thereby "counteract[ing] each other by their essential nature."[245] "[S]ublime ideas," he maintains, awaken "the soul," through the "reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities," a process which in turn facilitates contemplation of fundamental "principles" and "ideas."[246] To conjure this mood, *Rime* deals specifically with "two contrary forces," one supernatural, expanding "infinitely," the other corporeal and limited, striving "to apprehend or find itself in this infinity."[247]

His ballad relates the "emotions of someone who believed himself affected by supernatural events," detailing the testimony of a ghostly mariner, who, intruding upon a mundane setting, transports a "wedding guest" into a flight of imagination. [248] As a result of the horrors that the supernatural mariner suggests, the wedding guest becomes "sadder," but also "wiser."[249] Contemplating the "bad passions," Coleridge argues, "throw[s] light," and "shew[s] proof upon,"

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[244] Coleridge, "Miscellaneous Prose – Dreams and Sleep – 3," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 590.

[245] Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria (1917) – from Volume 1, Chapter XIII," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 484.

[246] Coleridge, "Lay Sermons (1816-17) – The Statesman's Manual," and "Biographia Literaria (1917) – from Volume 2, Chapter XIV," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, pages 357, 495.

[247] Coleridge's perspective is similar to that of Alexander Von Humboldt, who argues that the "feeling of the sublime… reflects itself in the feeling of the infinite." Like Coleridge, Humboldt argues that "contemplation of the eternal" is "clouded" by "a touch of sadness." Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria (1917) – from Volume 1, Chapter XIII," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, pages 482-3. Alexander Von Humboldt, *Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe, Vol. 1*. Translated by E.C. Otte. (Project Gutenberg, 2005).

[248] Nicholas Halmi et al., "From Lyrical Ballads – Editors Introduction," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 55.

[249] Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1834)," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 99, lines 623-4.

human consciousness, the "source and principle" of all "possible knowledge." Meditation in turn fosters a "more than usual state of emotion," characterized by a sense of the "profound."[250]

Significantly, *Mariner*'s central image, the albatross, symbolizes death, an especially "horrid" phenomenon according to Coleridge, due to its "hidden" nature.[251] Reflecting Coleridge's understanding of the sublime, the albatross has been interpreted as potentially representing a wide range of ideal notions, and is thus, as a literary symbol, potentially "limitless," yet, within *Rime*'s literal narrative, it is a constrained, corporeal being.[252] And, although killing the albatross is *determinately* the cause of the mariner's misfortunes, the *reason* for the killing is left entirely *indeterminate*, as are its full ramifications. These tensions and ambiguities tantalize the imagination and invite thoughts regarding the nature of life and death.

Like Kant's aesthetics, Coleridge's account also directly contravenes Carroll's monster theory, suggesting that what frightens us most often is *that which we cannot wholly perceive or cogitate*. "Phantoms of sublimity," according to Coleridge, are "shapeless."[253] His appropriately named "Phantom," for example, generates horror via the very *absence* of tangible features:

> "All look and likeness caught from earth
> All accident of kin and birth,
> Had pass'd away. *There was no trace
> Of aught on that illumined face*."[254]

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[250] Coleridge, "Miscellaneous Prose – Evil," "Biographia Literaria (1917) – from Volume 1, Chapter XII, Thesis X," and "Biographia Literaria (1917) – from Volume 2, Chapter XIV," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, pages 592, 478, 495.

[251] Coleridge, "Notebook Fragments, 1811,"and "Biographia Literaria (1917) – from Volume 2, Chapter XXXII," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 235 lines 71-4, page 535.

[252] Coleridge, "Miscellaneous Prose – Symbol," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 608.

[253] Coleridge, "[Apologia pro vita sui]," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 228.

[254] Coleridge, "Phantom," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 221.

Likewise, in the fragment "Dreams and Sleep," Coleridge relates a recurring nightmare of "great fright," in which he is haunted by a protean figure, "indefinite [and] smokelike," that repeatedly changes its form.[255]

Aesthetic theories expounded by philosophers as diverse as Hegel, Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Bertrand Russell can likewise be interpreted as promoting CT. Hegel, for instance, regards the purpose of art as "bring[ing] to consciousness the highest interests of the mind."[256] Influenced by Kant, he contends that we appreciate artistic representation because, in contemplating the aesthetic, our cognizing becomes "free" from association with either ends or means.[257] In accordance with CT, Hegel argues that the "essential nature of freedom" involves "coming to consciousness" of one's "existence."[258] For Hegel, this entails the mind recognizing itself as Spirit.[259] However, as dialectical materialists have long demonstrated, Hegel's

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[255] This calls to mind Aristotle's passing comment in the *Parva Naturalia* concerning how one can misperceive "phantom figures" out of shadows, and how this can consequently generate "terror." The widely reported phenomenon of witnessing "shadow people" can be explained, as Aristotle suggests, through an appeal to psychology and faulty sense perception (e.g., a person transitioning from restfulness to wakefulness, subconsciously aware of her vulnerable state, is likelier to mistake light gradations as a moving, potentially threatening, figure). Coleridge suffered from lingering opium addiction, and it is also worth noting that the perception of shadowy figures is associated with poor health (e.g., lack of sleep, drug addiction). Methamphetamine users, as Herbert C. Covey observes, often experience "profoundly disturbing hallucinations," including but not limited to witnessing "shadow people." The phenomenon is also sometimes brought on, as Clare Oakley and Amit Malik point out, by experiencing "heightened emotion." Ficino relates that one of his pupils, while in a "morbid state of melancholy," perceived "black phantoms by day and night." Despite the existence of plausible scientific explanations, though, people still gravitate towards the supernatural in order to explain such shadowy visions. Coleridge, "Miscellaneous Prose – Dreams and Sleep – 1," *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, page 589. Aristotle, "On Dreams," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 1, Trans. J.I. Beare, page 734, 462a. Herbert C. Covey, "What is Methamphetamine and How and Why is it Used?" *The Methamphetamine Crisis: Strategies to Save Addicts, Families, and Communities* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), page 17. Clare Oakley and Amit Malik, "Illusions - Affect," *Rapid Psychiatry* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), page 6. Marsilio Ficino, "Men Should not be Admitted Indiscriminately to Holy Orders," *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, Trans. Language Department of the School of Economic Science (London: Shepheard-Walwyn Ltd., 1975), page 202.

[256] Hegel, "The Range of Aesthetic Defined," *Introductory Lectures in Aesthetics*, page 15.

[257] Hegel, "The Range of Aesthetic Defined," *Introductory Lectures in Aesthetics*, pages 7, 9.

[258] Hegel, "Introduction," *The Philosophy of History*, page 19.

[259] Hegel argues that the mind is spiritual, and that art reflects the mind's spiritual nature. As he puts the matter in his *Philosophy of History*, "spirit recognizes spirit." Engaging with art involves the beholder "recogni[zing] itself" in the "shape of feeling and the sensuous," and thereby "transmuting" the artist's "metamorphosized thought back into definite thoughts." Phrased another way, Hegel construes art as reflecting "free, concrete intellectual being," and its

philosophy can be fruitfully interpreted in a secular light as well. For, whether humans are constituted by spirit or otherwise, contemplating death, particularly through art, is as I have endeavored to illustrate, a potentially powerful, profoundly philosophic experience. At its foundation, Hegel's aesthetics proposes that the most moving experiences involve contemplating existence, in which horrific representation is an especially advantageous recourse.

Schopenhauer regards existence as sorrowful, because in our day-to-day lives we are inundated with desires that are unceasing and ultimately unfulfillable. He therefore regards "aesthetic pleasure" as involving a "state of pure contemplation," in which "we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares," in effect, "rid of ourselves."[260] His perspective, again, can be construed as confirming CT, for he suggests that, in moments of artistic contemplation, we are liberated from, among other anxieties, our *fear of death*. Also lending support to CT is Schopenhauer's conviction that a "[b]elief in ghosts is innate in human beings." This claim, while overstated, reflects the general truth that a great *many* people are captivated by frightening and mysterious phenomena.[261] It stands to reason that representations

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"function" is to "reveal" itself "as spiritual existence," which in turn causes an observer to recognize "the inward nature of spirit." Hegel, "The Roman World," *The Philosophy of History*, page 326. Hegel, "The Range of Aesthetic Defined," and "Division of the Subject," *Introductory Lectures in Aesthetics*, pages 15, 87.

[260] Schopenhauer, "Fourth Book: The World as Will, Second Aspect – §68," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, page 390.

[261] As mentioned, perceiving shadowy figures is not uncommon, and although the phenomenon can be explained through non-supernatural means, it has long inspired belief in supernatural entities. Hence Lovecraft characterizes our forebears as "shadow-haunted." Consider the Pythagoreans (particularly the mystical leaning ἀκουσματικοί "eager to listen" branch), who believed that the world was populated by δαίμων ("demons"), spirits and lesser divines occupying corporeal bodies and "floating about in the air." Pythagoras' doctrine was likely inherited from Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian religions, and his incorporation of spirits into philosophy influenced many subsequent philosophers (indeed, according to Diogenes Laërtius, it was Pythagoras "who invented the term Philosophy"). It is not unremarkable that, in his late dialogue *Laws*, Plato states that "after death" souls "enjoy certain powers which they use to take an interest in human affairs." In any case, as Johnston points out, by the late-Classical period, "a belief in ghosts was widespread." H.P. Lovecraft, "Novr. 10 [1932]," A *Means to Freedom: The Letters of H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard, 1930-1932*, Ed. David E. Schultz, Rusty Burke, and S.T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2017), page 478. Arthur Schopenhauer, "Essay on Spirit Seeing and Related Issues," *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, Vol. 1, Ed. Adrian Del Caro. Trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), page 243. Zeller, "Pre-Socratic Philosophy – Religious and

of supernatural phenomena, and evocations of death generally, can, as Schopenhauer suggests, draw individuals away from their personal concerns.

Nietzsche's aesthetic theories also lend credence to CT.[262] According to Nietzsche, humans exhibit two primary imaginative instincts, the "Apollonian," named after the god of dreams, knowledge, and light, who is associated with moral virtue, rationality, and individuality, and the "Dionysian," named after the god of wine, intoxication, dance, and ritual fornication, who is associated with disorder, violence, and communal mania.[263] For Nietzsche, the essence of the Dionysian involves an existential "horror," which he says facilitates a realization that the

Ethical Practices of the Pythagoreans," *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, page 55. Diogenes Laërtius 9. Plato, "Laws – XI," *Complete Works*, page 1580, 927a-b. Johnston, "Elpenor and Others," *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, page 28. For additional information concerning Plato's views on the supernatural, see Matthew W. Dickie's "The fourth century BC: Plato's conception of magic" in his *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pages 43-5. For additional information on classical ghost folklore, see Daniel Ogden's *Night's Black Agents: Witches, Wizards and the Dead in the Ancient World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008).

[262] He also anticipates a cognitive theory of the emotions in *Daybreak*: "behind feelings," argues Nietzsche, "stand judgments and evaluations." Friedrich Nietzsche, "35 – Feelings and their Origination in Judgements," *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, Ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), page 25.

[263] The origins of the god Dionysus are uncertain. It has been at times speculated that he was originally a Thracian deity, only later incorporated into the Greek pantheon. However discoveries at Pylos apparently referencing him suggest that he was familiar to the Myceneans, although whether or not as a deity is unclear (one such fragment, c. thirteenth century BCE, even has scrawled on the reverse an "obscure word," possibly a compound of the Linear B word for "wine"). It is likely that worship of Orpheus, a legendary Thracian bard who famously descended into the underworld (κατάβασις) to rescue his deceased lover, emerged as an offshoot of the ritual practices known as the Dionysian mysteries (see Guthrie, who characterizes Orphism as "a species of the bacchic," Orpheus as a "religious founder," and the god Dionysus as the cult's patron deity). The evolution can be traced further, for according to B.A.G. Fuller, "just as the Orphics reformed and purified the older cult of Dionysus out of which they sprang," Pythagorean philosophy emerged as an "essentially a reformed branch of Orphism." Supporting this interpretation, Ion of Chios (c. 490 – 422 BCE), in the lost *Triagmoi*, is purported to have written "that Pythagoras had produced some writings under the name Orpheus." The influence of Pythagoreanism on Plato has already been touched on, but it is also worth remarking on his debt to Orphism as well (e.g., in *Phaedo* he borrows concepts from the Orphic τελεταί "mystic rites," including "lying in the mud," and the "notion of the body as the prison of the soul"). Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, page 14. John Chadwick, "Religion," *The Mycenean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), page 100. Fuller, "Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans," *History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 1., page 104. W.K.C. Guthrie, "Chapter III – Orpheus and His Story," *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), page 41. Guthrie, "IV – Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans," *A History of Greek Philosophy – Volume I: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*, page 158. Guthrie, "Phaedo, Symposium, Phaedrus," *A History of Greek Philosophy – Volume IV: Plato: The Man and his Dialogues, Earlier* Period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), page 338. For additional information on the origins of Dionysus, see Walter Friedrich Otto's *Dionysus, Myth and Cult* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).

primordial is "not so foreign to [humanity] after all," and that, in fact, "Apolline consciousness" obscures the world's true "Dionysiac" character.[264] We take pleasure in the negation and destruction of individual life, because this reminds us that life, as a greater phenomenon, goes "on eternally and despite all destruction."[265] Beholding life's sufferings, "subjectivity disappears," and the mind devolves into an egoless state, a "one-ness" with "nature."[266] "In the Dionysian state," an individual's "entire emotional system is altered and intensified," indeed, "transform[ed]," by this recognition.[267] Within this realization comes the liberating understanding that death, involving a return to the primordial, isn't something to be abhorred, but rather celebrated.[268] "The certain prospect of death," recognized in a Dionysian light, "introduce[s] into every life a precious, sweet-smelling drop of levity."[269]

Nietzsche argues that Dionysian stirrings involve not purification "of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge," as Aristotle supposes, but rather, "pain awaken[ing]

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[264] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, page 21.

[265] "We are to recognize that everything which comes into being must be prepared for painful destruction; we are forced to gaze into the terrors of individual existence – and yet we are not to freeze in horror: its metaphysical solace tears us momentarily out of the turmoil of changing figures. For a few brief moments we are truly the primordial being itself… despite fear and pity, we are happily alive." Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, pages 80-1.

[266] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, pages 17, 120, 138.

[267] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols: or How to Philosophize with a Hammer – Expeditions of an Untimely Man – 10," *Twilight of the Idols and Antichrist*, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), page 84.

[268] The German poet Novalis (1772 – 1801) espouses a like sentiment, remarking that "Death is an overcoming of the self," a transitioning to a new and lighter existence. "Life," he argues, "is the beginning of death," and "exists" for its "sake." Death, part of a continual chain of fecundity, is "at once end and beginning." This perspective can be maintained in a secular, but also a spiritual light, through belief in a ψυχὴ κόσμου ("world soul"). Aristotle characterizes Thales (c. sixth century BCE) as believing in such a doctrine, telling us that, according to the first Milesian philosopher, "soul is intermingled in the whole universe." Consider also Marsilio Ficino, who argues that "the world is wholly alive and breathes," and that human beings are constituent parts which "conform to the world spirit," and Hölderlin, who argues that "the soul of the world sends out its life into the myriad pulses of nature to which the issuing forces, at the end of their immense cycle, return." Novalis, "From – Miscellaneous Remarks," *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Trans. Joyce P. Crick, pages 204-5. Aristotle, "On the Soul – Book I," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 655, 411a. Marsilio Ficino, "On Life, 3.3-4." *The Book of Magic: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, Trans. Brian Copenhaver, page 350. Friedrich Hölderlin, "10 – To Christian Ludwig Neuffer," *Essays and Letters*, Ed. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth, Trans. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2009), page 15.

[269] Nietzsche, "The Wanderer and his Shadow: 322 – Death," *Human, All too Human*, page 390.

pleasure."[270] And yet, it is no great stretch to interpret such invigoration as a kind of catharsis, for it entails a pleasurable recognition, brought on by fear.

To the extent that Nietzsche's later work belies a deep-rooted anxiety concerning ethics, his views can also be said to lend support to CT. Convinced that there is "no such thing as sin" or "virtue," in "a metaphysical sense," and fearing that, when this becomes widely acknowledged, European civilization would lapse into nihilism, Nietzsche devoted his efforts to a "revaluation" of all values.[271] As a potential answer to the problem of nihilism, he introduces the notion of eternal recurrence, a life-affirming outlook that allows for survival beyond death. Supposing space and time are infinite, Nietzsche speculates that the probability of everything repeating itself exactly the same is greater than zero.[272] As a consequence, every waking moment, we will eventually have to live again. In another striking example of horror accentuating a philosophical point, he introduces this concept in the voice of a demon:

> "The heaviest weight – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees,

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[270] Nietzsche, "Twilight of the Idols – What I Owe to the Ancients – 5," *Twilight of the Idols and Antichrist*, page 121. Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, page 21.

[271] "With [Nietzsche]," Camus writes in his essay *The Rebel*, "nihilism becomes conscious for the first time." He thought in terms of "an apocalypse to come, not in order to extol it… but in order to avoid it and to transform it." Nietzsche, "On the History of the Moral Sensations: 56 – Victory of Knowledge over Radical Evil," *Human, All too Human*, page 41. Albert Camus, "Metaphysical Rebellion – Nietzsche and Nihilism," *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pages 65-6.

[272] The idea that reality's constituent parts continually collect together, only to then disperse, dates back to antiquity. For just a few examples, consider Plato's references to recurrent disasters and the subsequent painful recovery of human civilization in *Statesman* (268e-274c), *Laws* (book III), *Critias* (109d-e) and *Timaeus* (22c-e), as well as the Stoic belief (perhaps inherited from Heraclitus) that "[a]t certain fated times, the entire world is subject to conflagration, and then is reconstituted afresh." Radical scientific discoveries made during the nineteenth century especially captured imaginations, however. Aside from Nietzsche, consider Poe's "Eureka" (1848) in which he characterizes the universe as eternally "swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness." Aristocles of Messene, "From Eusebius' Evangelical Preparation 15.14.2; SVF 1.98," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 276. Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka: A Prose Poem* (Project Gutenberg, 2010).

and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over and over again, and you with it, speck of dust!"[273]

Eternal recurrence not only serves as a further dramatic example of the experience of anxiety concerning death, but also constitutes another clear effort on Nietzsche's part to generate philosophical insight through fear.

Bertrand Russell, well known for the breadth of his interests and willingness to publicly defend his beliefs, also expresses views on the aesthetic appreciation of death and danger that support CT. In particular, his evaluation of Greek tragedy echoes Schopenhauer's suggestion that art encourages a "loss of self," and in that sense can be interpreted as being in the spirit of my own views:

> "In the spectacle of Death… there is a sacredness, an overpowering awe, a feeling of the vastness, the depth, the inexhaustible mystery of existence, in which, as by some strange marriage of pain, the sufferer is bound to the world by bonds of sorrow. In these moments of insight, we lose all eagerness of temporary desire, all struggling and striving for petty ends, all care for the little trivial things that, to a superficial view, make up the common life of day by day; we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose rolling waves we toss for a brief hour; from the great night without, a chill blast breaks in upon our refuge; all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul, which must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears."[274]

In this remarkable passage, Russell, in effect, advocates CT's central message, namely, that contemplating death, through art, can encourage a revitalizing self-discovery. Elsewhere, he

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[273] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Book Four: St. Januarius, Aphorism 431," *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Ed. Bernard Williams, Trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), page 194.
[274] Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1954), pages 57-8.

emphasizes that profound "sorrow," when accompanied by "reflection on the universe," can generate compelling "metaphysical theories."[275]

Beyond theorists, creators also tend to confirm CT. Works produced by the literary "titans" mentioned in section two, James, Machen, Blackwood, and Dunsany, all commonly play upon the fear of loss and death, demonstrating that, when fear is suitably contextualized, it can foster both pleasure and insight. Consider M.R. James' "Count Magnus" (1904). In this narrative, an English traveller, sojourning in Sweden, comes across the tomb of the long-deceased Magnus, a nobleman who supposedly dabbled in black magic. The role that the story's hapless protagonist plays in reviving the eponymous count, and the reason why the revenant sucks "the flesh off the bones" of his victims, is never made clear.[276] Regardless, James' "Count" generates fear through reflecting on mortality. The English traveller meets a ghastly, supernatural end, and yet readers, in no such peril, can contemplate his demise, and the nature of loss and death more generally.

Similarly, in Machen's "Great God Pan" (1894), Blackwood's "The Wendigo" (1910), and Dunsany's "The Two Bottles of Relish" (1932), apprehensiveness concerning death plays a central role. In Machen's novella, Helen Vaughan, as the result of an occult experiment gone awry, inadvertently becomes a vessel for the malevolent spirit Pan. Over the course of the story, Vaughan murders several characters and thus plausibly symbolizes a harbinger of corporeal death. And yet, she also embodies metaphysical death, her status as an incarnation of perversity

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[275] Russell comments that in the face of the world's terrors, a person may choose to become "a cheerful pessimist or a melancholy optimist." Here, Popper raises a relevant point, in observing that the "terrifying" doctrine of πάντα ῥεῖ ("constant flux") expounded by Heraclitus was likely impressed upon him "by terrifying personal experiences suffered as a result of the social and political disturbances of his day." Bertrand Russell, "Plotinus," *History of Western Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), page 271. Popper, "Heraclitus," *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, page 11.

[276] M.R. James, "Count Magnus," *Count Magnus and Other Ghost Stories*, Ed. S.T. Joshi, (London: Penguin Books, 2005), page 75.

inviting readers to contemplate society's moral decline. Blackwood's "Wendigo" generates fear of death through suggestions of the malevolent spirit of Native American legend, stalking his moose-hunting protagonists in an ironic role-reversal. And Dunsany's "Two Bottles of Relish," which concludes with the revelation that the murderer chopped down trees "to get an appetite," so that he might better cannibalize his victim, is undeniably jarring.[277] As with all representations of death, such a ghastly tableau allows us, without the threat of harm, to reconsider our own mortality, so that, in so doing, we can better understand the phenomenon, thereby putting our minds at ease.

Notably, given his influence, Poe's aesthetic philosophy also supports CT, suggesting that, within fear generally, lies a fear of death specifically, and that by contemplating death we can derive philosophic insights. While considering a theme for "The Raven" (1845), Poe asks himself:

> "Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy? *Death — was the obvious reply.*"[278]

To Poe, it is evident that death, especially "of a beautiful woman," is "the most poetical topic in the world."[279] In keeping with CT, he focuses on "survival after death," regularly memorializing the many dead figures in his past and conceiving analogical possibilities of reshaping death into a more acceptable form. [280]

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[277] Lord Dunsany, "The Two Bottles of Relish," *In the Land of Time and Other Fantasy Tales*, page 349.
[278] Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Essays and Reviews*, pages 18-9.
[279] Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Essays and Reviews*, page 19.
[280] Kenneth Silverman, "August 1831 – January 1834," and "February 1837 – May 1839," *Edgar Allan Poe, A Biography – Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) pages 89, 135.

This preoccupation is on full display in "Masque of the Red Death" (1842), in which the eponymous plague produces "sharp pains," "sudden dizziness," profuse "bleeding at the pores," "scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face," and, ultimately, death.[281] Unperturbed by the commoners' suffering, the greedy Prince Prospero and his nobles barricade themselves in a castellated abbey. On the night of Prospero's masquerade ball, however, an uninvited visitor, clad as the Red Death, surreptitiously arrives. It is eventually revealed that this intruder is not wearing a masque, and that his outfit, "dabbled in blood," and his countenance, "besprinkled with the scarlet horror," are genuine. Death personified, "like a thief in the night," arrives to claim Prospero and his friends, despite their desperate efforts to escape its clutches. Poe reminds us that death, even behind castle ramparts, cannot be averted, but that such an acknowledgement can nevertheless be pleasurable, when one considers, as "Masque" encourages, that death greets both the righteous and the wicked alike.[282]

Baudelaire is right to emphasize how Poe begins "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) with its narrator, previously "ill in health," but now "in one of those happy moods… precisely the converse of ennui."[283] Poe's narrator, "only recently come back from the shades of death," breathes in with rapturous "delight all the spores and odours of life."[284] This is a virtual analogue for Poe's aesthetic philosophy: contemplation of death enlivens the spirit. Consider how the

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[281] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Masque of the Red Death," *The Complete Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014): page 252.

[282] In the words of the Elizabethan playwright Thomas Nashe: "Rich men, trust not in wealth; Gold cannot buy you health." Poe, "The Masque of the Red Death," *The Complete Tales & Poems*, page 255-6. Thomas Nashe, "Summer's Last Will and Testament," *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, Vol. VIII, Fourth Edition, Ed. Robert Dodsley (Project Gutenberg, 2003).

[283] Poe, "The Man of the Crowd," *The Complete Tales & Poems*, page 414.

[284] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, Trans. P.E. Charvet (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006) page 397.

protagonist of "The Premature Burial" (1844), directly after having confronted his fear of being buried alive, is rendered curiously at comfort:

> "[O]ut of Evil proceeded Good… My soul acquired tone -- acquired temper. I went abroad. I took vigorous exercise. I breathed the free air of Heaven. *I thought upon other subjects than Death*."[285]

Not only does Poe's fiction bear powerful testament to how integral death is to the human condition, it also strongly supports the notion that fear can be a means through which mortal anxieties are conquered, reframed, or otherwise rendered tolerable.

Lovecraft's aesthetic philosophy further strengthens the notion that fears concern uneasiness with loss and death, and that, through meditation upon death, we can reach philosophic insight. His fiction suggests unknowable creatures, entities, even stretches of time, to dredge up fears concerning humanity's precarious existence.[286] For just one example, consider his story "Memory" (1923), in which two mysterious entities, "the Genie that haunts the moonbeams" and "the Daemon of the Valley," discuss an extinct race who long ago populated a desolate ruin near the river Than. The two recall (due to the name "man" rhyming with the name of the river) that the long-vanished ape-like creatures were called *man*. Diotima reminds us that people worry whether they will be remembered after death; Lovecraft evokes this anxiety on a grander scale, suggesting that, through the deep and impenetrable darkness of time, humanity as a species will

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[285] The narrator of "M.S. Found in a Bottle" (1833) is similarly brought to catharsis by contemplating death: "To conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, utterly impossible; yet a curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions, predominates even over my despair, and *will reconcile me to the most hideous aspect of death*." Poe, "The Premature Burial," and "M.S. Found in a Bottle," *The Complete Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, pages 228, 58.
[286] According to Lovecraft, the passage of time is "the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe." Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," *Collected Essays*, page 176.

be forgotten.[287] Likewise, his popular tales "The Whisperer in the Darkness" (1931), "At the Mountains of Madness" (1936), and "The Shadow Out of Time" (1936), in suggesting that alien races exist on a timescale far beyond human comprehension, generate considerable anxiety, and thereby encourage introspection regarding humanity's place in the cosmos.

Lovecraft argues that what horrifies us most is what we do not understand. Acknowledging death as the ultimate unknown, his maxim can be reinterpreted, in such a way as to support CT, as, the oldest and strongest fear is fear of death. No one who has risen from the dead walks among the living to tell us what lies beyond, as Er from Plato's *Republic* is said to have done. Rather, as the poet Barnitz, who Lovecraft greatly admired, puts it, we "know not" if death's face is truly "fair."[288] We do not possess knowledge of death, as Rochefoucauld once said, we only "endure it," and it is precisely for this reason that the phenomenon is so frightening to our rational nature.[289] Yet, as Lovecraft's resourceful alter-ego, Randolph Carter, demonstrates, by facing the unknown directly, our "curiosity" is able to "conquer," or otherwise transform, our apprehensions.[290]

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[287] Lord Dunsany's poem "The Watchers" (1929) plays upon a similar anxiety: "two Spirits," observing Earth "in its orbit rolling," watch a procession of races gradually "win dominion," only to then decline over time. Eventually humanity arrives, and the spirits agree that while humankind "surely has power," they wryly jest "come again in a million years!" Lovecraft, "Memory," *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft*, page 49. Lord Dunsany, "The Watchers," *Dreams of Fear: Poetry of Terror and the Supernatural*, pages 284-5.

[288] David Park Barnitz, "Truth," *The Book of Jade* (New York: Doxey's At the Sign of the Lark, 1901), page 86.

[289] See also Plato: "[N]o one knows which death and dissolution of the body brings about destruction of the soul, since not one of us can be aware of this." *Ecclesiastes* 9:5: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing." J.G. Fichte: "death" is "the end of a particular series of appearances," and we do "not know what will come after." And Schopenhauer: "When life draws to a close, we do not know where it has gone." François de La Rochefoucauld, "Maxim – V:23," *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections*, Trans. E.H. Blackmore, A.M. Blackmore, and Francine Giguère (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 11. Plato, "Phaedo," *Complete Works*, page 76, 88b. "Ecclesiastes 9:5," *Holy Bible: Revised Standard Edition*, page 592. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Concerning the Difference between the Spirit and the Letter within Philosophy," *Fichte, Early Philosophical Writings*, Ed. Daniel Breazeale, Trans. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), page 207. Schopenhauer, "Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life – Chapter Six: On the Different Stages of Life," *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, Vol. 1, page 425.

[290] Lovecraft, "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath," *The Complete Fiction of H.P. Lovecraft*, page 498.

Kafka also regularly encourages reflection upon death, lending further credibility to CT. "The Burrow" (1931), for instance, details the terrors of an unidentified molelike entity, its existential anxieties unmistakably corresponding to, and thereby accentuating, the terror and impermanence of the human condition. Gregor Samsa's transformation into a monstrous insect-like creature, and his ensuing demise, similarly invites thoughts about the frailty of human existence. And yet, as the title suggests, *The Metamorphosis* (1915) also grasps at the possibility of continued life, in the form of the Samsa's family's optimism concerning the prospects of Gregor's sister, Grete.[291] In a like manner, Kafka's novel *The Trial* (c. 1914-5) culminates in Josef K.'s death, but also hints at a kind of survival, the doomed protagonist reflecting on how his "shame" will "outlive him."[292] And "The Hunter Gracchus" (1931) reframes death as an ominous metaphor. The eponymous hunter is an interstitial figure, trapped between life and death, "to a certain extent" deceased, but nevertheless "alive." Like Coleridge's mariner, he "travel[s] on after" his "death through all the countries of the earth," affirming a profound yearning on Kafka's part not only to grapple with our fear of death, but to transform it.[293]

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[291] The story concludes with Gregor's parents, not greatly perturbed by their son's demise, "canvass[ing] their prospects for the future," chief among them their "daughter's *increasing vivacity*." Also remarkable, as Todorov observes, Gregor's physical transformation brings about an existential one, his new form reconciling "[Gregor] to the notion of his own death." Readers are encouraged to contrast Kafka's "Metamorphosis" with the horror story "Father's Last Escape" (1937) by Bruno Schulz. The narrator of Schulz' tale recounts how his father transforms into an entity not unlike a "crab or a large scorpion," and, like Kafka's "Metamorphosis," Schulz' tale emphasizes a blurring between life and death: "my father was definitely dead," the narrator states, then, contradicting himself, clarifies that his father in fact was "dying a number of times, always with some reservations that forced us to revise our attitude toward the fact of his death." Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," *The Complete Stories*, Ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, Trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), page 139. Todorov, "Literature and the Fantastic," *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, page 170. Bruno Schulz, "Father's Last Escape," *The Complete Fiction of Bruno Schulz*, Trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York: Walker and Company, 1989), pages 311-2.

[292] Franz Kafka, "End," *The Trial*, Trans. Idris Parry (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2000), page 178.

[293] See also Benjamin, who rightly points out that Kafka's unfinished novel *Amerika* (c. 1911-4) employs a (from Kafka's European perspective) "new continent" as a vehicle for exploring themes of "rebirth." Kafka, "The Hunter Gracchus," *The Complete Stories*, page 228. Benjamin, "Franz Kafka – On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," *Illuminations*, page 119.

Modern works of horror also lend support to CT. Arguably the most fruitful, dynamic mode through which horror is currently presented is cinema, and, within this medium, the independent entertainment company A24 is commonly hailed as the leading force. Consider Ari Aster's critically acclaimed horror films, *Hereditary* (2018) and *Midsommar* (2019). As its title implies, the former concerns inherited evils, including hereditary madness, as well as occult familial legacies, while the latter concerns a murderous neo-pagan cult. Both films culminate in death and violence, yet audiences, in no danger themselves, are thus welcomed to relish the pain evoked and contemplate the nature of death as a phenomenon.

Another rising star among A24's roster of creative minds is Robert Eggers, whose films *The Witch* (2015) and *The Lighthouse* (2019) can easily be interpreted as according with CT. The former focuses on increasing paranoia among the members of a family of early Christian settlers living in an isolated rural setting. The film's most horrendous scene concerns a *literal* transformation of life and death, in which the family's youngest child, snatched from the cradle by the eponymous witch, is murdered as part of an occult ritual to revive the witch's physical youth.[294] Eggers' *Lighthouse*, a tale of claustrophobia, madness, and repressed sexuality, is even

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[294] Witchcraft has long fascinated humanity (e.g., Circe appears as an antagonist in Homer's *Odyssey*, Morgan Le Fay features as a villainess in Arthurian tales produced by the likes of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, and Thomas Mallory). Arguably, Eggers' film received widespread critical acclaim in part because it unflinchingly portrays the practice, often sanitized for a modern audience, as genuinely menacing, which is in keeping with medieval Christian folklore. Witches were a common bugbear in Europe for centuries, evoked specifically to frighten, and unfortunately, frequently used as an excuse to persecute (signs of this persecution linger to this day – consider the common phrase "witch hunt"). The term "witch" derives from the Old English nouns wiċċa ("male warlock") and wiċċe ("female witch"), however the history of magic long predates this term. In Ancient Greece, γόης ("one who howls out enchantments") and μάγος ("wise man") were employed to describe sorcerers and wizards. In Latin, practitioners of magic were termed *maleficus* ("doer of evil"); the pejorative meaning is not to be overlooked. However despite, or perhaps because of, the fear generated by such taboo practices, they were widespread through the classical era. A striking example is necromancy, which as Ogden notes, "reached far back into Greek myth" (e.g., Polyidus' resurrection of the deceased Cretan prince Glaucus, Odysseus' νέκυια "summoning" of the spirit Tiresias in book eleven of the *Odyssey*) and flourished well into the Roman period (e.g., Jesus is said to have ressurected Lazarus, and Philostratus tells us that the first century CE Neopythagorean, Apollonius of Tyana, "woke up" a maiden from "seeming death," and on another occasion, called up the ghost of Achilles and "talk[ed]" to him "pleasantly"). Liddell et al., "γόης," and "μάγος" Liddell and Scott's Greek-English

more unmistakable in its affirmation of CT. The film's protagonist, Winslow (Robert Pattinson),

maddened by the allure of a searchlight his superior (Willem Dafoe) refuses to let him operate or

even stand in the vicinity of, ultimately murders his senior crewmate in order to access the

denied treasure. Echoing the tale of Prometheus and the theme of forbidden knowledge,

Winslow, upon beholding the mysterious searchlight, awakens from a fever-dream, pecked by

gulls as he lays dying on a desolate shore.[295] He passes in agony, whereas audiences, mystified

and disturbed, yet safe, are able to contemplate the film's allegorical ending.

If CT is correct, then Jonathan Harker, protagonist of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897),

expresses horror's potential utility. Harker, chilled by the sonorous call of wolves, soberly

reflects that "only when a man" is exposed to "such horrors" can he properly appreciate life's

"import."[296] Horror is cherished, not only because fear excites, but because it affords a harmless

method for confronting and reassessing anxieties concerning pain, suffering, and death. For this

reason, horror should not be disparaged, but celebrated, not only as an art form that arouses a

curious form of beauty, but also because of its practical value.

Lexicon Abridged, pages 144, 422. Smith and Lockwood, "*maleficus*," *Chambers/Murray Latin-English Dictionary*, page 418. Ogden, "Reanimation and Talking Heads," *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, page 205. Philostratus, "The Life of Apollonius of Tyana – Book IV," *The life of Apollonius of Tyana, the Epistles of Apollonius and the Treatise of Eusebius*, Vol 1. Trans. F.C. Conybeare (London: William Heinemann; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912), pages 459, 369. For a general introduction to witch folklore, see *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, Ed. Owen Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For further information on classical witchcraft, see *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, Ed. Kimberly B. Stratton, Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Daniel Ogden's *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[295] Prometheus and the concept of punishment for the discovery of forbidden knowledge has frequently been played upon by horror creators (consider *Frankenstein*'s subtitle). This same theme of overreaching and suffering disastrous consequences can be seen in the legends surrounding Faust. Also worth noting, Winslow kills a (possibly supernatural) seagull, which echoes yet another classic horror trope: the death of a vulnerable animal precipitating ill-fortune, as seen in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Poe's "Black Cat," and Baudelaire's "L'albatros" (1859).

[296] Bram Stoker, "Chapter I - Jonathan Harker's Journal," *Dracula*, Ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), page 16.

And yet, while compelling, CT cannot be accepted on these grounds alone. Although I have demonstrated that alternative theories of horror are logically deficient, and I have established a provisional model for explaining horror's appeal, the plausibility of CT must be rigorously tested in light of a range of counterexamples and criticisms. Only after these potential concerns have been rebutted, can CT be acknowledged as sound.

X.   Evaluating the Catharsis Theory

> "Let's develop theories, patiently and honestly thinking them out, in order to promptly act against them."
>   -   Fernando Pessoa.[297]

Recall the methods used to discredit Carroll's horror-terror distinction and his belief that horror requires monsters. Just as critical methods can disprove a contentious theory, so too can a theory able to withstand the rigors of conceptual analysis be recognized as more robust.[298] I maintain that conceptual analysis demonstrates that CT adequately withstands criticism.

Let us re-evaluate CT's premises. If either P1 or P2 can be exposed as false, then the argument to C is unsound. CT's first premise specifies that *fear entails apprehension of pain*, and that *apprehension of pain entails thoughts of loss and death*. This conjunctive premise can be divided in two: P1.1, that fear entails the apprehension of pain, and P1.2, that apprehension of pain entails an apprehension of death. I will deal with each separately.

P1.1 appears plausible. Santayana argues that a "desire to escape pain is certain," and that in light of such a desire, by its "very definition," a person "can hardly go beyond the statement that pain is that element of feeling which we seek to abolish on account of its intrinsic quality."[299] Nevertheless, it is worth putting this commonly held assumption to the test. For, as R.G. Collingwood notes, mere "intuiting," that is, expressing what one thinks about a subject "without

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[297] Fernando Pessoa, "Absurdity," *The Book of Disquiet*, Trans. Richard Zenith (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2002), page 23.

[298] According to Aristotle, proper philosophy involves not only explaining "the phenomena before us," but also "discussing the difficulties" that arise in conflict with "reputable opinions." In the words of Philodemus of Gadara, concerning philosophy, "it is necessary to show" not only convincing evidence in *support* of an argument, but also that "nothing" that is "self-evident *conflicts* with the thesis." Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics, Book VII – 1," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, page 1809, 1145b. Philodemus of Gadara, "On Signs 34.29 – 36.17," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 94.

[299] See also Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (better known by his literary pseudonym Lewis Carroll), who argues that "no pain is eagerly wished for." George Santayana, "Chapter IX – How Thought is Practical: Apparent Utility of Pain," *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress Volumes One Through Five* (Project Gutenberg, 2005). Lewis Carroll, "Chapter IV: Hit or Miss," *The Game of Logic* (Project Gutenberg, 2011).

noticeable effort," is inadequate for proper philosophical inquiry, which demands strenuous, properly directed investigation.[300]

Testing P1.1 will require determining whether any plausible scenarios can be envisaged where fear does *not* involve an apprehension of pain. And the singular recourse for discrediting P1.1 involves resorting to a particularly narrow interpretation of the term "pain." For, although people fear physical harm, they also fear the loss of more abstract things. For instance, a patriot might fear that his homeland is being undermined by a foreign power. In such a scenario, he is obviously not concerned about any kind of physical pain, but about the harm done to an abstract concept. To the obdurate detractor of P1.1, this invalidates the notion that all fears relate to pain. Recall, though, what we have established about defining terms. Narrow definitions are unhelpful, particularly when they contravene deeply held folk intuitions. Assessment of ordinary language reveals that "pain" refers to more than just tangible, bodily pain.[301] In the case of the patriot, his distress over the state of his nation amounts to a kind of *psychic pain*, a mental disturbance which deposes his equanimity and leaves him unhappy.

Many psychic pains exist. The fear of missing a transit connection, for instance, relates to boredom, "an acute awareness of time's passing."[302] Time spent waiting in queues, in traffic, in

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[300] A.J. Ayer rightly points out that words like "intuition" are employed by philosophers "to disguise the fact that no explanation has been found." R.G. Collingwood, "The Science of Absolute Presuppositions," *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company Press, 1972), page 37. A.J. Ayer, "Knowing as Having the Right to be Sure," *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*, page 441.

[301] Mythological interpretations, such as Hesiod's Ἄλγεα ("Tearful Pain"), construe psychological and corporeal anguish as linked. The Greek term "λύπη" likewise conveys both mental and physical pain. Hesiod, "Theogony," *Theogony and Works of Days*, Trans. M.L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 10, lines 226-60. Liddell et al., "λύπη," Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged, page 419.

[302] Mark Kingwell, "The Condition," *Wish I Were Here: Boredom and the Interface* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019) page 13.

elevators, and so forth often makes us feel restless, even deeply unsettled.[303] Hence, people seek out stimulus to stave off the pain of ennui, even though the stimulations are often ephemeral. Lucretius observes that we commonly ache "for what is not," and are "unappreciative of the things at hand."[304] "Against boredom," Nietzsche pithily remarks, even "the gods themselves fight in vain."[305]

Likewise, fear that a romantic partner is unfaithful relates to "the pain of love," and its accompanying sorrows, including feelings of rejection and loneliness.[306] "Never give the heart outright," Yeats implores, for romantic loss is too great a "cost." Auden similarly bemoans the fact that, once romantic love is extinguished, nothing "can ever come to any good."[307] Common terms such as "lovesick" and "heartbroken," in alluding to bodily injury, point toward the deeply painful sensation that attends romantic loss. Recall Poe's conviction that the death of a woman is most poetic of all, then bear in mind that such women are often depicted, in works such as "Morella" (1835), "Ligeia" (1838), and "Annabel Lee" (1849), as *lovers*, suggesting that amorous bonds intensify sorrow.

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[303] According to Hume, the "mind, when left to itself, immediately languishes," and thus to "preserve its ardour," every moment must be "supported by a new flow of passion." Sidgwick, along the same lines, argues that "the tedium of security makes us imagine the mingled excitement of past danger as almost purely pleasurable." Hume, "Book Two: Of the Passions – Section IV. Of the Causes of the Violent Passions," *A Treatise of Human Nature*, page 469. Henry Sidgwick, "Chapter III. Empirical Hedonism – Continued," *The Methods of Ethics* (Project Gutenberg, 2014), page 145.

[304] See also Montaigne, who argues "our willing of anything is never free, final or constant," Bacon, who argues that "human understanding… cannot stop or rest," and Spinoza, who characterizes "appetite" as "the very essence of man." Lucretius, "Book III – Life and Mind," *On the Nature of the Universe*, page 125. Montaigne, "On the Inconstancy of our Actions," *The Complete Essays*, page 375. Bacon, "The New Organon – Book One – 48," *Selected Philosophical Works*, page 98. Spinoza, "Of the Affects – P51," *Ethics*, page 76.

[305] Nietzsche, "Antichrist – 48," *Twilight of the Idols and Antichrist*, page 176

[306] Consider, too, Macedonius of Thessalonica (c. 500 – 560), who laments "the pain of passion" (παθέων). Propertius, "Love's Contract," *The Poems of Propertius*, Trans. A.E. Watts (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1966), page 156, line 31. Macedonius of Thessalonica, "Book V – 229," *The Greek Anthology*, Vol. 1. Trans. W.R. Paton, page 243.

[307] W.B. Yeats, "Never Give All the Heart," *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats: Revised Second Edition*, Ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1996), page 79. W.H. Auden, "Funeral Blues," *Auden: Poems*, Ed. Edward Mendelson, (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Publishers, 1995), page 50.

According to Poe, however, although a loved one's demise is most painful, anguish can be found in any source. "Misery," he says in "Berenice" (1835), "is manifold... overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow, its hues… as various as the hues of that arch."[308] In light of the wide assortment of psychic pains, it seems that "present fears" are indeed "less than horrible imaginings," and that Seneca is correct in suggesting that "we suffer more from imagination than from reality."[309]

Bearing in mind the fact of psychic pains, P1.1 can withstand even the most lurid counterexamples. Consider the masochist, who, rather than abhorring physical harm, craves it, and fears the prospect of *not* being physically harmed. At first glance, this seems an obvious case where fear takes as its object not harm, but its opposite. And yet, although the masochist is afraid that she will not be *physically* harmed, she presumably derives pleasure from the physical harm she endures, and that, presumably, if she is afraid, *not* being physically harmed is the source of anxiety for her. The masochist's anxiety is a clear form of psychic pain. Yet this naturally leads to a concern about minor psychic "pains." Can it truly be said that a trivial fear, like that of spilling your beverage, is related to a fear of pain, and by extension, death? I maintain that they are, in the sense that people use terms such as "pain" to express displeasure and "death" to

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[308] Semonides (c. seventh century BCE) once wrote that mortals "are spared no evil," instead having to endure "numberless dangers and hurts for which we cannot plan." Sophocles in a like manner comments that "the long, looming days lay up a thousand things closer to pain than pleasure, and the pleasures disappear," and according to Menander (c. 342 – 292 BCE), "there's no good in the world… to which there's not some bad attached." Poe, "Berenice," *The Complete Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, page 573. Semonides, "Fragment - 1," *Greek and Lyric Poetry*, Trans. M.L. West, page 16. Sophocles, "Oedipus at Colonus," *The Three Theban Plays*, Trans. Robert Fagles, page 358, lines 1381-2. Menander, "The Misogynist – Fragment 12," *The Plays and Fragments* Trans. Maurice Balme (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 268.

[309] To quote Burton: "what will not a fearful man conceive in the dark? What strange forms of bugbears, devils, witches, goblins?" Shakespeare, "Macbeth – Act 1, Scene 3," *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare*, page 779 lines 137-8. Seneca, "XIII. On Groundless Fears," *Moral Letters to Lucilius*. Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, "Subsect II — Of the Force of Imagination."

convey loss. Following common language, fear of spilling your drink constitutes a minor

misfortune connected to the loss of a desired object.

It is not necessary, however, to make this serious assertion in order to maintain P1.1. Recall

Burke's position regarding the "diminution or ceasing of pleasure." He emphatically, and quite

convincingly, argues that the cessation of a positive pleasure does not operate like positive

pain.[310] Spilling a beverage does not generate the same kind of sensation as stepping on a nail,

nor even the emotional pain of romantic loss. I suggest that people do not ordinarily *fear*

dropping their beverage at all. Rather, unless suffering from a more generalized anxiety disorder,

they evince a *positive desire* for a beverage, attended by minor apprehension, a form of

displeasure, not genuine fear, concerning the possibility that their drink will be spilled. Trivial

"pains" amount to mild discomforts which do not have to be linked, as a matter of necessity, to

physical discomfort.

Fear appears always to concern pain, bodily or otherwise, but does fear of pain always entail

thoughts of death, loss, or non-existence? Admittedly, P1.2 is more difficult to substantiate,

although I am nevertheless strongly inclined to defend it. And I am far from alone. Indeed, this

belief is commonly held, not only among theorists, but also among laymen.

Consideration of the aforementioned examples of boredom and rejection reveals that they are

grounded in anxiety regarding abstract loss and physical impermanence. Schopenhauer makes a

compelling case concerning the former, arguing that boredom is "fearful" and "life-destroying,"

since it reminds us that life lacks inherent purpose.[311] He reasons that, if a desire-less condition

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[310] Burke, "The Difference between the removal of pain and positive pleasure," *A Philosophical Enquiry*, page 29.
[311] According to Schopenhauer, although every individual act "has a purpose or end… willing as a whole has no end
in view." He emphasizes that "every individual phenomenon of nature is determined by a sufficient cause as regards

were enjoyable, this would suggest that life had intrinsic value, but in fact the reverse is true.

Boredom is an unpleasant sensation, a deadening languor.[312] In the absence of a desire, we

become acutely aware of time and its constraints. And, as Don DeLillo grimly asserts, tedium

involves "an endless counting down," such that when "you strip away all the surfaces, *when you*

see into it, what's left is terror."[313] According to this perspective, in fearing boredom, we dread

time's slow crawl towards our inevitable demise.[314]

    Laymen also frequently associate boredom with death. Popular colloquialisms, such as "bored

to death" and "bored stiff," point to the fact that excessive waiting culminates in death. Similarly,

recognition that activities are pursued as a recourse to "kill time" implies that time, stretching on

forever, leads to the grave. More generally, the phrase "wasted time" alludes to lost opportunity.

If torpor is genuinely linked to loss, absence, and death, then Kierkegaard's ironic principle, that

"boredom is a root of all evil," may well be true. And, not to be discounted, Kierkegaard also

connects death with boredom, arguing that "when boredom reaches its zenith," one either dies

passively, or takes the "active" approach, "shooting themselves" in order to relieve

despondency.[315]

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its appearance in such a place and at such a time, but the force manifesting itself in this phenomenon has in general no cause." Schopenhauer, "Second Book: The World as Will, First Aspect – §29," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, pages 164-5.

[312] Schopenhauer, "Second Book: The World as Will, First Aspect – §29," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, page 164.

[313] Don DeLillo, *Point Omega: A Novel* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 2010), page 45.

[314] Heidegger similarly speaks of boredom's most intense manifestation being experienced as an entity's "awareness of its own existence." In this state of ennui, where there is nothing to do but wait, consciousness fixates on time, naturally drawing "ahead of itself," toward thoughts of the future. Essential to Heidegger's ontology, awareness of the future entails awareness of finitude, since "what the future holds for any and every" human being "is death." Thus in effect, Heidegger argues that, in becoming bored, "[w]e recognize and accept our mortality." Mark Kingwell, "The Condition," *Wish I Were* Here, page 17. Robert J. Dostal, "Time and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger," *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) pages 156-7.

[315] Søren Kierkegaard, "Crop Rotation: An Attempt at a Theory of Social Prejudice," *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life,* Ed. Alastair Hannay, Trans. Alastair Hannay (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1992), pages 227, 230.

Romantic rejection and loss can also be connected to thoughts of death. "Eroticism," as

Camille Paglia observes, "is a realm stalked by ghosts."[316] Consider that a common expression

associated with apprehensions of romance is a fear of dying alone, suggesting that, beneath

romantic failure, dread of the grave looms larger. Another common anxiety is that, as one grows

older, one's prospects for romance diminish. It is debatable whether what is truly abhorred is

diminishing romantic prospects, or diminishing years. Indeed, although not commonly

acknowledged, there is a terrible finality to romance, for, in seeking a partner to "pass the time"

and spend a life with, "till death do us part," it is implied that we are just turning another page,

ticking off another box, and in a sense, preparing ourselves for life's departure. David Foster

Wallace perhaps best articulates the matter: "every love story," in the long run, is "a ghost

story."[317]

Recall also Diotima's argument, that many seek amorous bonds to procreate, and, through

their offspring, live beyond themselves. Arguably, such persons are striving to conserve at least

some part of themselves beyond death.[318] Genetic or otherwise, muses Hardy, "all the little ones

of our time are collectively the children of us adults."[319] Adopting, mentoring, or otherwise

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[316] David Farrell Krell argues that love has a "shadow side," in the sense that, in becoming attached to another, we accept the possibility of "mourning" and "grief." Consider Lucretius, who argues that "clinging" to "love" guarantees "heart-sickness and pain," Burton, who (paraphrasing Cicero) proclaims that love is both a "madness" and a "hell," and Rochefoucauld, who argues that "the final stage of love" necessarily involves "pain." Paglia, "Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art," *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickenson*, page 3. David Farrell Krell, "General Introduction," *The Death of Empedocles: A Mourning Play* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008) page 17. Lucretius, "Book IV – Sensation and Sex," *On the Nature of the Universe*, page 163. Robert Burton, "Democritus Junior to the Reader," *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Project Gutenberg, 2004). Rochefoucauld, "Maxim – V:430," *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections*, page 117.
[317] David Foster Wallace, "§25," *The Pale King* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012), page 314.
[318] Cicero, for instance, places "special responsibility" on his son, entwining the latter's destiny with his own. He reminds him in a letter that people "have high expectations that you work hard, *as I have*," that "you will have a career *like mine*," and that, "perhaps," people "will look to you to win the same sort of reputation." Cicero, "On Duties – I: A Personal Statement to Cicero's Son," *Selected Works*, Trans. Michael Grant (Suffolk, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1984), page 161.
[319] Consider Kierkegaard's preference to talk with children, since "with them one can still hope they may become rational beings." Hardy, "Part Fifth: At Aldbrickham and Elsewhere V. – ii.," *Jude the Obscure*, page 264. Kierkegaard, "Diapsalmata: Ad se ipsum," *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life,* page 43.

nurturing the development of non-biological offspring can likewise be linked to the nurturer's desire to live vicariously through another, and, in so doing, escape death. "Living is like a day's watch," according to Antiphon the Sophist, for "as we look up at the light, we hand over our duties to others who come after us."[320]

Many theorists also suggest that sexual attraction is accounted for, in part, by the youth and health of the beloved, further demonstrating that, in desiring a partner, we are subconsciously lusting after life itself, and, inversely, fleeing its opposite.[321] Contrariwise, Virgil's Dido, Shakespeare's Juliet, and Goethe's Werther all kill themselves out of romantic denial, suggesting that, when love is forbidden, existence can be intolerable. Romantic suicide is thus a powerful example of anxiety concerning abstract loss superseding anxiety concerning corporeal death.[322] Even those who seek amorous trysts, as opposed to long-term partnership, can be said to do so in order to maximize pleasures *while they have the time*. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," warns Herrick, "Old Time is still a-flying."[323] Following the model of boredom illustrated here, any

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[320] Goethe argues that seeing "ourselves reappear in someone else," biological or otherwise, is the "most attractive form of metempsychosis." Antiphon the Sophist, "69 – [F52]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Vol 2, Trans. Daniel W. Graham, page 821. Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, "403," *Maxims and Reflections*, Ed. Peter Hutchinson, Trans. Elisabeth Stopp (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1998), page 50.

[321] Schopenhauer argues precisely this. According to him, what makes itself known to the individual consciousness as "sexual impulse" directed at a specific person, in fact, constitutes a generalized "will-to-live." Schopenhauer, "Chapter XLIV: The Metaphysics of Sexual Love," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, page 535.

[322] According to Schopenhauer, for love's "satisfaction," life "is risked without hesitation," and when love "is denied, life is given as the price." As Foucault less romantically puts it, "[s]ex is worth dying for." A famous historical example is offered by Menander, who tells us that the poet Sappho, upon being rejected by a lover, "cast herself down" from a high pinnacle. Schopenhauer, "Chapter XLIV: The Metaphysics of Sexual Love," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, page 532. Michel Foucault, "Part Five: Right of Death and Power over Life," *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990) page 156. Menander, "The Girl from Leukas," *The Plays and Fragments*, page 247.

[323] As Palladas once wrote: "To-day let me live well; none knows what may be to-morrow." See also Catullus: "rose is beauty's paragon for man or woman's pleasure, but once the bud has blown… no paragon remains." And "De Rosis Nascentibus," a popular fourth century CE poem of unknown authorship: "gather rosebuds while both the rose and you are young, for life too soon ends." Robert Herrick, "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume B – The Sixteenth Century and Early Seventeenth Century*, Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: Norton & Company, 2012), page 1762. Palladas of Alexandria, "Book V – 72," T*he Greek Anthology*, Vol. 1, Trans. W.R. Paton, page 163. Catullus, "62," *The Poems of Catullus*, page 133. "De Rosis Nascentibus," *The Last Poets of Imperial Rome*, Trans. Harold Isbell (London: Penguin Books, 1971), page 71.

pleasurable undertaking can be said to function as a means of staving off ennui and its attendant

existential burdens.

Sexual intercourse itself has a profound Dionysian aspect.[324] In the throes of passion, we

succumb to physical desires, suppressing our rational selves. In a furor of biting and groping,

lovers act as one; the individual ego, and its associated troubles, melt away.[325] Time momentarily

fades from view, as lovers gaze into a ray of the eternal. The phrase *la petite morte*, the "little

death" following climax, alludes to this loss of self.[326] Sexual release, through sublimation of

conscious anxieties, offers an escape from the cognitive burden of mortality.[327] Anxieties

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[324] Nietzsche characterizes the Dionysian as pain awakening pleasure, and, for many, sexual intercourse involves some measure of pain (e.g., biting, scratching, choking, groping). Plato characterizes sexual love as a mix of "pain and joy," Shakespeare talks of the "lover's pinch, which hurts, and is desir'd," and Spenser references "painefull pleasure" and "pleasing paine." De Sade likewise writes at length of physical "anguish" that is "sweet." Plato, "Phaedrus," *Complete Works*, Trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, pages 259, 251d. Shakespeare, "*Antony and Cleopatra* – Act 5, Scene 2," *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare*, page 922 lines 350-1. Edmund Spenser, "Book III – Canto X," *The Faerie Queen*, Ed. R.S. Bear (University of Oregon, 1995), page 464. Marquis de Sade, "Part Two," *Juliette*, Trans. Austryn Waterhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1968), page 336.

[325] According to Cioran, "love is a form of intimate communion," for which "nothing expresses it better than the subjective impression of *melting*, the falling away of all barriers of individuation." For just a few examples, consider Quintus Maecius, who proclaims that love "melts" (θερμαίνει), Apuleius, who describes embracing lovers as "melted," and D.H. Lawrence, who characterizes the moment of climax as "melting." Emil Cioran, "On the Transubstantiation of Love," *On the Heights of Despair*, Trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), page 84. Quintus Marcius, "Book V – 117," *The Greek Anthology Vol. 1*, Trans. W.R. Paton, page 185. Apuleius, "Book 3 – 14," *The Golden Ass, or, Metamorphosis*, Trans. E.J. Kenney (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1998), page 47. D.H. Lawrence, "Chapter X," *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Project Gutenberg Australia, 2011).

[326] Since antiquity, the orgasm has been commonly associated with either "dullness of intellectual power" or complete ego-death. Democritus, for example, speaks of sexual intercourse as a "minor seizure," wherein "man bursts out from man and is torn away." Plato characterizes the lover's soul as consumed by "madness." Also consider Donne's "Canonization," where he states, "we two being one… *die and rise the same*," and Benedick's remark in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "I will live in thy heart, *die in thy lap*." Hans Licht, "Part II - Chapter I. The Love of the Man for the Woman," *Sexual Life In Ancient Greece* (London: Lund Humphries, 1942), page 307. Democritus, "Ethics: G. Friendship and Family Relations – 319 [F188]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Vol 1, page 659. Plato, "Phaedrus," *Complete Works*, pages 258-9, 251a-e. John Donne, "The Canonization," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume B*, page 1378. Shakespeare, "*Much Ado About Nothing* – Act 5, Scene 2," *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare*, page 142, line 101.

[327] Recall a passage attributed to Philodemus (but possibly written by Meleager), where the speaker proclaims that his heart, led by "love," knows "not at all even the shadow of fear," or a passage by Swinburne, who professes that "feeling" his lover "clinging as a fire that clings," causes him to "forgot fear and all weary things." Philodemus of Gadara (possibly Meleager), "24," *The Greek Anthology Vol. 1*, Trans. W.R. Paton, page 141. Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Laus Veneris" (*The Poetry Foundation*, 2022).

concerning the withholding of love, can thus be interpreted, if only indirectly, as yet another manifestation of that larger anxiety, fear of death.

A few other counterexamples are worth bearing in mind. Religion's phantom again creeps into the light. Many faiths promise eternal life, reincarnation, or a life-purpose that validates human existence, so, at least theoretically, true believers ought not fear death. Christianity, for instance, proposes that, though we "walk through the valley of the shadow of death," we should "fear no evil."[328] Yet cynical counter-arguments have been forwarded, and it seems plausible that these critiques, in a way that is consistent with P1.2, have considerable merit.

Augustine characterizes himself as being "weighed down by nagging anxieties about the fear of dying," before finding faith in Christ.[329] And, as Joshi notes, Samuel Johnson "longed to believe in an afterlife that would mitigate his terrors of death." According to detractors, such anxieties constitute *evidence* that a fear of death is endemic to the religious experience, as it indicates that individuals gravitate to religion precisely owing to mortal fear. [330] In the case of Christianity, it is hard to challenge this point, given that mortal fear is embedded within its very teachings. Judgment is allotted to the wicked in the form of "eternal punishment," and, born with

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[328] "Psalm 23:4," *Holy Bible: Revised Standard Edition* page, 486.
[329] Augustine, "Book Seven – A Neoplatonic Quest," *Confessions*, page 116.
[330] Hölderlin similarly confesses that, despite the fact that "cold reason untouched by the heart" suggests otherwise, he remains "left with… the longing for eternity, for God." Gérard de Nerval, too, rejects "cold reflection," offering "bitter doubts," in favor of "religious belief." Refer as well to Evelyn Underhill, who argues that "the physical world" offers nothing but the "horrors of decay, the ceaseless cycle of growth and death," and that in the face of such horrors, a person must "surrender to the supernatural" to find inner-peace. In so far "as a person is a creature of time, it suffers," whereas in so far as a person "partakes of eternity," says Underhill, "it knows the enfolding presence of an infinite and unbreakable joy." Joshi, "Anticipations," *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, vol. 1, page 48. Hölderlin, "5 – To Johanna Christiana Gok," *Essays and Letters*, page 8. Gérard de Nerval, *Selected Writings*, "Aurélia or, Dream and Life," Trans. Richard Sieburth (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1999), page 290. Evelyn Underhill, "The Supernatural in Human Life," *Man and the Supernatural* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1927), pages 264-5.

sin, anyone is susceptible to the destructive temptations leading to damnation.[331] "We will stand *in fear* before the tribunal of the Lord," according to the sixth-century Evangelist Columba, who is quick to remind us that a "raging fury of fire will consume" unbelievers.[332] Christian texts do not exclusively speak in terms of deliverance from "the terrors of death." Generally, in fact, they advise that "*when*" a person becomes "afraid," to place "trust in" God.[333]

Simone Weil similarly argues that Christianity *entails* acknowledgement of death as an unknown. "To love truth," according to such a perspective, "means to endure the void and, as a result, to accept death." Although "God fills the void," moments of absolute grace, where existential concerns recede, are rare. People escape from "the laws of this world" through faith solely "in lightning flashes."[334]

This naturally prompts consideration of other religions. Buddhism, like Christianity, can be said to necessitate, rather than negate, thoughts of loss and death. Death is one of Buddhism's great fears, just as one of its four noble truths is that life entails suffering.[335] Implicit in this

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[331] See also Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, where he emphasizes that unbelievers will "suffer the punishment of eternal destruction," Augustine's *City of God*, where he argues that unbelievers will be "subjected to eternal torments," and Jakob Böhme's repeated references to the "abyss of hell," a gloomy place where unbelievers endure "eternal fire" and unabating "torment." "Matthew 25:46," and "The Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians 1:9," *Holy Bible: Revised Standard Edition*, pages 28, 193. Augustine, "Book XIX, Chapter 28," *City of God*, page 894. Jakob Böhme, "Man and Nature," and "God and Creation," *Jacob Boehme: Essential Readings*, Ed. Robin Waterfield (Wellingborough, England: Crucible, 1989), pages 121, 126, 95.

[332] Columba, "In Praise of the Father," *The Last Poets of Imperial Rome*, Trans. Harold Isbell, pages 276-7.

[333] *Revelation* 14:7 commands true believers to "fear God." Alcuin of York (an associate and teacher of Charlemagne) equates "fear of God" to "worship of God," implying the two are inextricably connected. Martin Luther, father of the reformation, suggests that abandoning "fear of God" is inherently "dangerous." And according to the Christian mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, hell and "fear of punishment" are necessary, as such terrors are "the only means of controlling evil things." "Psalm 55:4," "Psalm 56:3," and "Revelation 14:7," *Holy Bible: Revised Standard Edition*, pages 504-5, 236. Alcuin of York, "Dialogue on the Virtues." *Treasury of Philosophy*, Trans. Dagobert D. Runes et al., page 26. Martin Luther, "Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation," *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, Ed. John Dillenberger, Trans. Karlfried Froehlich (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), page 501. Emmanuel Swedenborg, "Man's Second Condition After Death," *Heaven and Hell*, Trans. George F. Dole (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1976), page 351.

[334] Simone Weil, "To Accept the Void" and "Detachment," *Gravity and Grace*, Trans. Emma Crawford, and Mario von der Ruhr (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pages 11-5.

[335] "The Four Noble Truths – Adapted from the Saṃyutta Nikāya," *Teachings of the Buddha*, Ed. Jack Kornfield, Trans. Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahathera (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2012), page 28.

understanding is that, although every life ends in a new rebirth, any new life will contain future, potentially quite horrible sorrows. Any religion that threatens a possible unpleasant reincarnation, such as Hinduism, or Pythagorean μετεμψύχωσις ("transmigration of the soul"), or an afterlife of nightmarish torture, such as Islam's Jahannam, or Chinese mythology's Diyu, can likewise be construed as exploiting, as opposed to properly dissipating, our mortal fears.[336]

Rather than invalidating fears of loss and death, religions provides solace. Lacking definite empirical proof, they do not, in providing an "answer," negate the validity of the question. Consequently, for those dissatisfied with the solutions religion offers, CT ought to prove especially compelling. This is not to say, however, that religion precludes the enjoyment of horror. The genre excites due to its safe contextualizing of fear, and it is possible that fear can be appreciated by followers of most doctrines.[337] Moreover, since faith does not preclude mortal

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[336] The term μετεμψύχωσις comes from μετά ("after") and ἔμψυχος ("having life in one, alive, living"). Its origins among Greek thought are obscure; it is possibly an Orphic doctrine. What is known is that Pythagoras became transmigration of the soul's most famous Greek advocate. His ideas influenced a number of subsequent Greek thinkers, perhaps most notably Plato, upon whom "Pythagoreanism was so obviously a major formative influence." Liddell et al., "μετά," and "ἔμψυχος," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 436, 221. Guthrie, "IV – Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans," *A History of Greek Philosophy – Volume I: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans,* page 147. For information on different hell-like locations said to exist across different cultures and religions, see Miriam Van Scott's *Encyclopedia of Hell* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

[337] Stoicism, which recommends ἀπάθεια ("apathy"), and Pyrrhonism, which recommends ἀταραξία ("freedom from passion"), are notable exceptions. Cicero tells us that the Stoics regard passions, including fear, as "frivolous judgments" that cause mental suffering. According to this view, fear, to quote Stobaeus, is something "contrary to nature," an "irrational" belief. Pyrrhonism likewise construes fear as an unhealthy symptom of attachment to external contingencies. Believing, as Andronicus of Rhodes reports, that "there is no firm basis for cognition," advocates of Pyrrho recommend ἐποχή ("suspension of belief," from ἐπέχω "to hold") in regard to all things, upon which, according to Diogenes Laërtius, "freedom from disturbance follows like a shadow." As has been lengthily illustrated, however, passions are in fact evaluative judgments, and thus are not objectively truth conditional in the way that these ancient schools suppose. The seventeenth century Flemish philosopher Arnold Geulincx, although perhaps too critical when he characterizes endeavors to "extinguish all passions" as "madness," is nevertheless quite right that the passions "cannot be eliminated" because they are a "constituent part" of the human condition. We have evolved to experience emotions, in order to evaluate and better understand phenomena. They "are not bad," rather, at worst they are "neutral," always having the potential to be experienced in a positive light. Liddell et al., "ἀπάθεια," "ἀταραξία," and "ἐπέχω," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 76, 112, 247. Cicero, "Book III," *On Moral Ends*, Ed. Julia Annas. Trans. Raphael Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) page 76. Stobaeus, "2.88,8 – 90,6," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 410. Andronicus, "On Passions I," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 411. Photius, "Library 169b18-170b3," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and

anxiety, it follows that religious, no less than secular, people can achieve philosophic experiences from horror. Consider *The Omen* (1976), in which fear, centered on the prophesized arrival of the Antichrist, is distinctly religious in tone, and thereby likely to prompt eschatological meditation.

Another interesting argument against P1.2 concerns anti-natalism, the doctrine that humans should abstain from procreation on the grounds that the creation of new life is unethical. In the lost dialogue "Eudemos," Aristotle introduces a disquieting proposition through the satyr Silenus, who confidently, due to life's many sorrows, asserts that "never to have been is the best state of all."[338] This is often cited as the basis of anti-natalism, which is perhaps ironic, since I have argued that Aristotle's aesthetics validate CT. However, it is debatable whether Silenus's "wisdom," or the more concrete philosophy of anti-natalism it has inspired, truly contravene P1.2.

In suggesting that it is best never to have been, Silenus maintains that, for humans, who have been deprived of such a luxury by birth, the "second best thing" is to "die soon."[339] In response to Silenus' proposal, "it is good," occasionally, as Empedocles once asserted, "to utter what must

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D.N. Sedley, page 468. Diogenes Laërtius, "9.78," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, Trans. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, page 468. Arnold Geulincx, "The Philosopher's View on Passion," *Treasury of Philosophy*. Trans. Dagobert D. Runes et al., page 426.

[338] This idea evinces, as Guthrie observes, "a pessimism typically Greek." Sophocles for example argues that "not to be born is best when all is reckoned in," but that, "once a man *has* seen the light," the "next best thing" is to go "back where he came from, as quickly as he can." So does Menander, who contends that a person is "most happy" who "goes quickly back to whence he came." Nevertheless, Guthrie is right in emphasizing that "whereas the poets sought only oblivion as an end to the sufferings of human life," Aristotle's Silenus provides a distinctly philosophical argument in favor of such an outlook. Life without a body is natural to the soul, analogous to health, whereas life within a corporeal body is unnatural, comparable to a sickness. Thus in essence, "there is a better way of life in death than in our living." Raymond Geuss, "Introduction," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, page xvii. W.K.C. Guthrie, "IV – Eudemos, Protrepticus and De Philosophia," *A History of Greek Philosophy – Volume VI: Aristotle, an Encounter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pages 67-8. Sophocles, "Oedipus at Colonus," *The Three Theban Plays*, page 358, lines 1388-91. Menander, "The Changeling – Fragment 23," *The Plays and Fragments*, page 273.

[339] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, page 23.

be said even twice."[340] That is, even supposing that the bitter fruit of the satyr's "wisdom" were true, suicide does not contradict P1.2. Rather, as previously indicated, it embodies the ultimate recourse of a person whose anxieties concerning pain and abstract loss supersede those concerning corporeal death.[341] Consider Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he argues that "suicide," determining whether or not life is worth continuing at all, is the "one truly serious philosophical problem."[342] This famous example powerfully demonstrates that, for some, concerns about the inherent pointlessness of existence are more terrifying than physical death.

Although Silenus' "wisdom" does not contravene CT, the more concrete philosophy, anti-natalism, does seemingly to challenge P1.2 directly. Emil Cioran, for instance, a philosophical pessimist, argues that existence is replete with suffering, to such a degree that "all is nightmare." From his perspective, "birth" is thus a "calamity," a "disastrous or at least an inopportune event." David Benatar, too, argues that life is overloaded with pain, and that, as a consequence, "coming

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[340] Empedocles, "49 [F26]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Vol 1, page 359.

[341] Ancient Greeks held "that in certain circumstances suicide is an appropriate and indeed desirable response" (e.g., Telamonian Ajax, said to have died by suicide to remove his αἰδώς "sense of shame," or Empedocles, said to have leapt into the fires of Etna to achieve ἀποθέωσις "deification"). Romans typically maintained "that the wise man will commit a well-reasoned suicide," for the sake of either a noble ideal, or "if he falls victim to unduly severe pain or mutilation or incurable illness" (e.g., Cato the Younger, who chose death over ignoble clemency from the victorious Caesar). And the feudal-era Montaigne acknowledges that "death" is an apt "prescription for all our ills," and that some people have good reason "to fly from the ills of this life." Robert Garland, "The Special Dead," *The Greek Way of Death* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), page 96. Diogenes Laërtius, "7.130 (SVF 3.757)," *The Hellenistic Philosophers Volume 1*, page 425. Montaigne, "A Custom of the Isle of Cea," and "The Taste of Good and Evil Things Depends on our Opinion," *The Complete Essays*, pages 393, 57. Liddell et al., "αἰδώς," and "ἀποθεόω," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 18, 85.

[342] As Ortega once wrote, "man must earn for his life, not only economically, but *metaphysically*." And according to Will Durant, "looming death" is the very "mother of metaphysics," one of the principle concerns that draws individuals towards philosophy. Albert Camus, "Absurdity and Suicide," *The Myth of Sisyphus* Trans. James Wood (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2000), page 11. José Ortega y Gasset, "Man Has No Nature," *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre: Revised and Expanded*, Ed. Walter Kaufmann, Trans. Helene Weyl (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), page 154. Will Durant, "Plato: Philosophy as Politics," *Philosophy and the Social Problem* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), page 37. Will Durant, "Introduction – On the Uses of Philosophy," *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of the Greater Philosophers* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1961), page xxv.

into existence" always constitutes "a serious harm."[343] Norwegian philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe articulates the anti-natalist solution to the "problem" of being born in gravely poetic form: "there is one conquest and one crown, one redemption and one solution... be *infertile and let the earth be silent after ye*!"[344] An anti-natalist critic might therefore wonder, if existence is so intolerable that we should abstain from procreation, then surely loss and death are not things to be feared?

Properly understood, however, anti-natalism does not amount to a wholesale rejection of P1.2. Rather, philosophical pessimists, such as Cioran, Benatar, and Zapffe, all construe life as inherently unpleasant precisely *because* human existence entails both enduring pain and a heightened awareness of impermanence. Regarding the latter, many anti-natalists contend that it is precisely the apprehension of death that generates the most acute suffering.[345] And notably, most philosophical pessimists do not advocate suicide, as Silenus does.[346] In fact, Cioran argues the reverse, that when we come to recognize life's inherent absurdity, "we do not rush toward

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[343] Emil Cioran, "Part One," and "Part Six," *The Trouble With Being Born*, Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), pages 14-5, 98. David Benatar, "Introduction," *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), page 8.

[344] Philip Larkin is more crude: "Man hands misery on to man, it deepens like a coastal shelf… get out as early as you can, and *don't have any kids yourself*." Peter Wessel Zapffe, "The Last Messiah – V.," *Philosophy Now*, Trans. Gisle R. Tangenes (1933). Philip Larkin, "This be the Verse," *High Windows* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015) page 25.

[345] Ligotti, for instance, argues that "fear of death" is one of the "unnecessary" sufferings that makes human consciousness, in the main, a "great disadvantage." Cioran also characterizes the "fear of death" as "suffocating," the primary "terror" that "obsesses man." This notion is traceable back a long ways – consider Palladas (4th century CE), according to whom the "expectation of death is a trouble full of pain," and Euripides (5th century BCE), who comments on the nigh unbearable "terror of death." Ligotti, "The Cult of Grinning Martyrs," *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, page 169. Cioran, "The Premonition of Madness," *On the Heights of Despair*, page 20. Palladas, "Book X – 59," *The Greek Anthology*, Vol. 4, page 33. Euripides, "Orestes," *The Complete Euripides, Vol II: Iphigenia in Tauris and Other Plays*, Ed. Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro, Trans. John Peck and Frank Nisetich (Oxford University Press, 2010), page 222, lines 860-70.

[346] The philosophers Philipp Mainländer (1841 – 1876) and Carlo Michelstaedter (1887 – 1910) are perhaps notable exceptions. Mainländer largely agreed with Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy, a key emendation being that he construed the fundamental will underlying reality not as a will-to-live, but as the inverse, a will-to-death. Fulfilling this grim outlook, Mainländer hanged himself in 1876. Michelstaedter's "suicide by gunshot" likewise has been speculated by biographers and critics as being provoked by his profoundly negative estimation of the human race. Ligotti, "The Nightmare of Being," *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, pages 33, 35.

death." Rather, "we flee the catastrophe of birth," conceiving ways to reconcile ourselves to an undesirable existence.[347]

In truth, reflection strongly suggests that the pessimist's perspective supports CT. Rejecting suicide, Cioran justifies continuing to exist by *drawing pleasure from suffering*. "Why not wrench from suffering all that it can yield," he asks, and "tend a smile until we have reached all the way back to [life's] vital springs?"[348] He characterizes "lucidity," cognition, as a "vice," in the sense that it necessitates suffering, while also offering a path towards temporary respite, as it is our cognition that allows us to derive pleasure through observation and appreciation of suffering.[349] Echoing Poe's "Imp," Cioran argues that humans have a curious "need for torment," such that the "horrible… attracts us."[350] He provides the example of disturbing a flock of gulls: driving "them off with stones" and "hearing their supernatural shrieks" causes him to realize that "*only the sinister could sooth*."[351] It is, in other words, precisely suffering that establishes the parameters for aesthetic value.

Ligotti, a horror writer and philosophical pessimist, likewise argues that "to be alive is to inhabit a nightmare without hope of awakening," and that, consequently, "[w]e may hide from horror only in the heart of horror."[352] Human consciousness, he argues, is "parent of all horrors,"

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[347] Benatar, too, emphasizes that although "coming into existence is always a harm," this does "*not* imply that death is better than continuing to exist, and *a fortiori* that suicide is (always) desirable." Ligotti, for his own part, admits that although he has a profoundly negative estimation of the human race "in principle," he is also "a sucker just like everyone else," deeply attached to "the trap of human existence." Cioran, "Part One," *The Trouble With Being Born*, page 4. Benatar, "Conclusion," *Better Never to Have Been*, page 212. Thomas Ligotti, "Disillusionment Can Be Glamorous: An Interview with Thomas Ligotti," *The Thomas Ligotti Reader: Essays and Explorations*, Ed. Daniel Schweitzer (PA: Wildside Press, 2003), page 64.
[348] Cioran, "Transfiguration of Banality," *On the Heights of Despair*, page 101.
[349] Cioran, "Part One," *The Trouble With Being Born*, pages 9, 12.
[350] Cioran, "Part Nine," and "Part Seven," *The Trouble With Being Born*, page 147, 104
[351] Cioran, "Part One," *The Trouble With Being Born*, page 9.
[352] Ligotti, "The Nightmare of Being," *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, page 21. Thomas Ligotti, "The Medusa," *Noctuary* (Burton, Michigan: Subterranean Press, 2012), page 17.

as it all too regularly makes us "susceptible to startling and dreadful thoughts."[353] Drawing on

Zapffe's recommendation that, in order to manage mental suffering on a day-to-day basis, we

should "minimize our consciousness," Ligotti proposes "conspiring" a variety of remedies for

assuaging psychological anguish. In keeping with CT's conclusion that contemplating death

through art educes catharsis, he argues that the most expedient recourse involves "sublimation"

of our dread through the horror genre, commenting that we "sublimate our fears by making an

open display of them" in art.[354] He characterizes such an approach as a form of "confrontational

escapism."[355]

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[353] Ligotti, "The Nightmare of Being," *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, pages.
[354] Ligotti, "The Nightmare of Being," *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, pages 27-8, 30-1.
[355] Thomas Ligotti, "Weird Tales Talks with Thomas Ligotti," *The Thomas Ligotti Reader: Essays and Explorations*, page 24.

XI.   Nightmare's Transmutation

> "…when man is overcome by the horror… it occurs to
> him that *something might be done*."
>   -   Martin Buber.[356]

Next, it is worth considering the merit of P2, specifying that horror renders fear pleasurable, or

otherwise agreeable. A great deal of the work in defending this premise has already been

accomplished. As previously established, horror does not render fear pleasurable or agreeable for

everyone, or even the same person, in all moods and circumstances.[357] And yet, it is undeniable

that horror pleases a great many, due not to the rousing and subsequent quelling of fear, like a

magician's trick, but through experiencing fear itself. And we have already discussed a great

many ways in which horror renders fear pleasurable.

In essence, horror presents frightening conceptions, the possibility of which it invites

audiences to entertain. Together with this experience comes a realization or acknowledgement

(ἐπιφανής).[358] More often than not, fear is construed as inherently unpleasant. Horror allows fear

to be experienced bereft of genuine danger, which allows for its exhilarating effects to be

appreciated, critically, in a controlled manner, as opposed to most "natural" horrible occurrences.

We shudder, for instance, at Vathek's hubristic descent into an eternity of unabated anguish.

However, as the thought-content we entertain is fictitious, we are in no way concerned for our

own wellbeing, and thus can, to quote Blake, walk "among the fires of hell, delighted with the

enjoyments," in a manner of which Vathek is deprived.[359] Likewise, although we know that the

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[356] Martin Buber, "Second Part," *I and Thou*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), page 120.

[357] It is hard to imagine, for example, enjoying *The Descent* (2005), a horror film concerning claustrophobic caving, if you were about to go spelunking the very next day!

[358] Often translated as a "coming to light." Liddell et al., "ἐπιφανής," Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged, page 264.

[359] William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell – A Memorable Fancy," *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake: Newly Revised Edition*, Ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), page 35.

cursed Monkey's Paw is fictitious, the frightening possibility of its reality, suggested by W.W.

Jacobs' short story of the same name (1902), excites us, and naturally leads us to consider its

philosophical ramifications, in a manner denied to the tale's protagonists.

Horror can also transform fear into something, not pleasurable per se, but tolerable or

otherwise agreeable. The German word *schadenfreude* is commonly employed by English-

speakers to convey gratification derived from the suffering of another.[360] The cheers that erupt in

theatres when zombies devour the nomadic biker gang in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), or when a

victim fails to escape one of Jigsaw's traps in *Saw* (2004), might be connected to this

satisfaction. For some, it is not so much that fear is enjoyable, as it is encouraging to witness the

fear and suffering of another. Umberto Eco recognized this when he wrote, "[n]othing gives a

fearful man more courage than another's fear."[361] Schopenhauer similarly acknowledges that

"the sight of another's sufferings" regularly "alleviates our own."[362] The simple recognition that

one is not alone in the struggle with mortality can be satisfying, and this is a property horror

amply provides.

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[360] The Ancient Greeks likewise used the term ἐπιχαιρεκακία ("joy in another's misfortune" from ἐπιχαίρω for 'to rejoice over" and κακός for "bad" or "ugly"). Liddell et al., "ἐπιχαίρω," and "κακός," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, pages 264-5, 343.

[361] Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (New York: Warner Books, 1986), page 288.

[362] As does Ovid: "Nothing pleases but what is base; his own gratification is the object of each. This, too, becomes pleasant from the sorrow of another." William Blake: "Love seeketh only Self to please… Joys in another's loss of ease." And Nietzsche: "Will there be many honest men prepared to admit that *causing pain gives pleasure*? That one not seldom entertains oneself – and entertains oneself well – by mortifying other people, at least in one's own mind?" Schopenhauer, "Fourth Book: The World as Will, Second Aspect – §65," *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, page 364. Ovid, "Book the First," *Ars Amatoria, or The Art Of Love: Literally Translated into English Prose, with Copious Notes*, Trans. Henry T. Riley (Project Gutenberg, 2014). Blake, "Songs of Experience – The Clod and the Pebble," *The Complete Poetry & Prose*, page 19. Nietzsche, "On the History of the Moral Sensations: 50 – The Desire to Excite Pity," *Human, All too Human*, page 39.

Contrariwise, Pindar reminds us that "the heart is soon quit of sorrow that careth but for another's care."[363] In addition to allowing for gratification in the form of witnessing another's fears, sometimes horror pleases owing to the reverse. Artistic depictions commonly encourage empathetic attachment to protagonists, such that depictions of them overcoming their fears can be heartening. Representation of bravery and triumph in the face of malevolent agents or imposing natural forces can function as a vehicle for inspiring moral lessons. Relating "good deeds," Horace argues, "gives shape to the pliant," equipping audiences with "familiar instances" to help ward off "fearful dangers."[364]

The rendering of fear into a tolerable or otherwise agreeable form is an attendant feature to horror, but, since it accompanies catharsis less often, it is of less philosophic interest. Notably, too, these satisfactions can be derived through other artistic modes.[365] As I have endeavored to illustrate, however, horror can be uniquely pleasurable, and function as a wellspring for reflections not readily obtained by other means. For this reason, the genre has distinctive philosophic value.

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[363] See also David Hume, who argues that "the misfortunes of our fellows often cause pity, which has in it a strong mixture of good-will." Pindar, "The Nemean Odes - I. For Chromios of Aitna, Winner in the Chariot-Race," *The Extant Odes of Pindar* (Trans. Ernest Myers. Project Gutenberg, 2004). David Hume, "Of Qualities Useful to Ourselves," *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Ed. J.B. Schneewind (Chicago: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), page 60.

[364] According to Northrop Frye, the archetypal "hero," by triumphing in the face of "tyranny or anarchy," gratifies "the wish-fulfillment of the reader." Kierkegaard, along the same lines, argues that "the proper relation between the admirer and the object of admiration is one in which the admirer is edified by the thought that he is a man like the hero, humbled by the thought that he is incapable of such great actions, yet morally encouraged to emulate him according to his powers." Horace, "A Letter to Augustus," *Classical Literary Criticism*, Trans. Michael Winterbottom, page 94. Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, page 1314. Søren Kierkegaard, "The Present Age," *The Present Age: On the Death of Rebellion*, Trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2010), page 9.

[365] Audiences can be inspired by Wendy and Danny's triumph against the frightful Jack Torrance in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), however they can also be inspired by David Copperfield's triumph against the duplicitous Uriah Heep, which involves no sensation of fear. Comedy also offers a path to schadenfreude. Consider the television series *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000 – present), where characters enduring uncomfortable social situations is the locus of the comedy.

Related to fear's potential pleasure, it is worth directly addressing the relationship between pain and pleasure. I have characterized fear as a kind of psychic pain, and have emphasized that fear can be pleasurable.[366] Contrary to this perspective, some people instinctively assume that pain and pleasure are barometric opposites, a perspective in large part the legacy of nineteenth century philosopher Jeremy Bentham's principle of utility.[367] An adherent to Bentham's felicific calculus might argue that CT's premises, "fear is painful" and "horror can render fear pleasurable," imply a contradiction.

However, evidence raised over the course of this thesis strongly suggests that Bentham is mistaken, and that pleasure can in fact be derived from experiencing pain. The case of the masochist, an individual who derives intense satisfaction from physical pain, has already been touched on, as have instances where sexual pleasure involves some measure of physical pain. We might also sensibly talk of scratching an itch as a kind of painful pleasure. After all, actions such as grinding teeth, popping pimples, plucking hairs, and scratching or raking of the skin, all cause deliberate physical irritation, but they are nevertheless pleasurable for some, owing to specific contextual considerations. And in the case of horror, as has been repeatedly emphasised, it is not the case that some factor associated with *fear's dispersal* pleases us; rather, it is the unsettling emotion, the fear itself, which becomes pleasurable. I contend that even concerning instances

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[366] Here I am influenced by Korsmeyer, who argues that there "are good reasons for recognizing that pleasure and pain are not opposites." Following Aristotle's sensible account, Korsmeyer emphasizes that "pleasure is not always experientially the same," that different kinds of pleasure (e.g., from a "chamber music concert" versus from a "suspenseful movie") provoke different kinds of responses. Sometimes pleasure is a side-effect of an undertaking, sometimes it is the deliberate cause of our undertakings. Pleasure, in short, is "not a unitary psychological event." Korsmeyer, "The Foul and the Fair" and "The Magnetism of Disgust," *Savoring Disgust*, pages 172, 115-7.
[367] According to Bentham "nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure," and that these two sensations are natural opposites. Jeremy Bentham, "Of The Principle of Utility," *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: T. Payne and Sons, 1780), pages 1-6.

where fear has been appropriately contextualized, such that it is pleasurable, it is still ultimately a kind of psychic pain.

To illustrate my perspective on the matter, consider *astraphobia*, a fear of aliens and alien abduction. Now, a person might like or dislike M. Night Shyamalan's film *Signs* (2002) for a variety of reasons (e.g., the film's perceived plot inconsistences, its encouragement toward Christian values). Suppose, however, that a person especially enjoys the film because of its frightening portrayal of aliens. A critic might push back against CT, and argue that, in the case of such a person, while her current fear that aliens have the capacity to harm her is pleasant, the thoughts of loss or death involved in it are unpleasant. In response, I contend that, while her belief that aliens have a capacity to harm might remain unpleasant, assuming that the fear she experiences happens to be pleasurable, then *some* attitude towards loss and death attendant to the fear must also be pleasurable. Humans fear loss and death. To enjoy fright, is thus, in effect, to enjoy certain thoughts related to loss and death, even if we do not enjoy thoughts of loss and death *directly associated* with the object that is provoking fear.

XII.   Cobwebs: Addressing Uncertainties

> "The gods grant no noble or good gift to man without toil and care…"
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> -   Prodicus.[368]

A few other concerns related to CT should be addressed. A potential objection, for instance, is raised by Pascal: why entertain thoughts of death when alternatives are available? According to him, "it is easier to put up with death without thinking about it, than with the idea of death when there is no danger of it."[369] Perhaps Pascal is right, yet his method is more easily stated than accomplished. Here, Meno's paradox might be said to work in reverse. That is, once you have become consumed by a particular thought, how can you simply forget it? As Poe's "Imp" suggests, a dreadful idea, after becoming entrenched in our consciousness, can be difficult to escape.[370] By modifying typically distressing associations with fear, horror can prove beneficial for those unable otherwise to exorcise thoughts of death.

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[368] Plato jokingly characterizes Prodicus, a Sophist who lived during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, as like the mythological figure Tantalus, perhaps an allusion to Prodicus' striving towards "universal knowledge" being hindered on account of his "deep" voice "blurr[ing] what was being said." In the spurious Platonic dialogue *Axiochus* (likely written by a Platonist between 100 BCE to 50 CE) Prodicus is attributed with a view on life remarkably akin to the argument forwarded by Aristotle in the *Eudemos*: "each of us is a soul, an immortal being locked up in a mortal prison; and Nature has fashioned this tent for suffering – its pleasures are superficial, fleeting, and mixed with many pains… Thus being released from life is a transition from something bad to something good." Prodicus, "A. The Seasons – Text 23 (29)," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies*, Vol 2, Trans. Daniel W. Graham, page 853. Plato, "Protagoras," *Complete Works*, page 752-3, 315d-316a. Plato, "Axiochus," *Complete Works*, Trans. Jackson P. Hershbell, page 1736, 366a-b.

[369] Or as Goethe once wrote: "If there's some matter which displeases me, I just leave it alone." Blaise Pascal, "Pensées – 170. Distraction," *Pensées and other Writings*, Trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), page 49. Goethe, "934," *Maxims and Reflections*, page 122.

[370] Spinoza argues that "it is not in the free power of the mind to either recollect a thing or forget it." Consider the narrator of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," who proclaims that, "once conceived," the notion of murdering the old man under his care "haunted" him "day and night." Likewise, in Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" (1843), Aylmer is maddened by "unaccountable impulse[s]" concerning his wife's eponymous blemish, in Gustav Meyrink's *The Golem* (1915), Pernath characterizes his obsession as like "a barbed arrow," and the protagonist of Kafka's "First Sorrow" (1922) frets that the "ideas" tormenting him will "threaten his very existence." Spinoza, "Of the Affects – P2," *Ethics*, pages 73-4. Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," *The Complete Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, page 203. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birth-Mark," *Horror Stories: Classic Tales from Hoffman to Hodgson*, page 112. Gustav Meyrink, "Moon," *The Golem*. Trans. Mike Mitchell (St. Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs: Dedalus Ltd., 2013), page 239. Kafka, "First Sorrow," The Complete Stories, Trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir, page 448.

A more serious concern relates to horror's potential harm. For I have argued that horror is a worthwhile enterprise, and that facing our fears through art can be psychologically beneficial. A detractor could challenge this cheerful interpretation, however. It has commonly been suggested that, by depicting distasteful subject matter, horror does *not* improve our lives. To the contrary, according to certain critics, horror is a dangerous influence, an art-form that fosters emotions that undermine proper value commitments. Recall Wordsworth's complaint concerning "gross" stimulation. Is it possible that horror is the mark of an increasingly vulgar society? Perhaps, when engaging with horror, the abyss confronts us also, corrupting our ethical perspective by normalizing and celebrating immoral behavior. Democritus argues that "continual bad association increases the hold of vice," and that, consequently, "one must avoid even speaking of evil deeds."[371] Augustine characterizes exposure to "imaginary sufferings" as corruptive to the soul, much like "the scratches of fingernails" produce "repulsive sores" upon the body.[372] And Plato contends that poetry involves not τέχνη ("skill"), but a "divine gift," akin to possession.[373] On this view, mimesis inflames θυμοειδές (the "spirited soul"), exciting violent, potentially dangerous passions.[374] Drawing upon imperfect particulars as inspiration, it leads away from knowledge, and thus, in an ideal polis, should be discouraged.[375]

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[371] Democritus, "Ethics: H. Education – 339 [F208]," and "Ethics: M. Speech, Communication, and Thought – 401 [F270]," *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Vol 1, pages 665, 677.

[372] Augustine, "Book Three – Student at Carthage," *Confessions*, page 37.

[373] Refer also to *Apology*: "poets do not compose their poems with knowledge." And *Meno*: "all the poets… have no knowledge." Liddell et al., "τέχνη," *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon Abridged*, page 702. Plato, "Ion," *Complete Works*, Trans. Paul Woodruff, page 941, 533d. Plato, "Apology," *Complete Works*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube, page 22, 22c. Plato, "Meno," *Complete Works*, Trans G.M.A. Grube, page 897, 99d

[374] Not all, but a considerable number of Neo-Platonists agree. Iamblichus, for just one example, argues that artistic representations are but "phantoms of truth… [f]or their maker is no god but human," whose inspiration is drawn "not from the unitary and intellectual essences, but from the matter he has selected." Iamblichus, "On the Mysteries, 3.28-31," *The Book of Magic: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, Trans. Brian Copenhaver, page 200.

[375] While Plato concedes that frightening representations can be pleasing, he argues that they are ultimately harmful because they encourage improper desires, conduct, and beliefs. As Plotinus puts the matter, "it is the non-rational form of the soul" that is "receptive to evil," and consequently, "it is not the inner soul but the *outer shadow* of a

Yet such criticisms have been levelled against a wide assortment of genres and aesthetic modes, not just horror, and the merit of such criticisms are doubtful. Certainly, depraved individuals have indulged in frightening art as a vehicle for exploring and gratifying their impure desires. The Columbine shooters, to cite a particularly notorious example, were said to have enjoyed the violence expressed in the music of Marilyn Manson, the film *Natural Born Killers* (1994), and the video game *Doom* (1993). Yet, significantly, the vast majority who engage with horror, and violent media generally, have no such predilections, and studies are mixed as to whether the influence of mimetic violence has a negative effect on the psyche.[376]

According to Philip Sidney, it is not so much "that poetry" fundamentally "abuseth man's wit," as humanity's "wit" has the *potential* to "abuseth poetry." Art has the power to "lift up the mind," and yet, in the same manner, when a mind descends into darkness, representations can serve as an inspiration for destructive conduct.[377] Although certain biological and social circumstances are beyond our control, human beings are, within those confines, their own molder and maker.[378] I posit that horror does not inherently contribute to worsening mental health.

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human being that wails and laments." Plato, "Republic – Book III," *Complete Works*, pages 1022-30, 386a-392e. Plotinus, "1.8 (51) On What Evils Are and Where they Come From," and "3.2 (47) On Providence I," *The Enneads*, pages 113, 268.

[376] Karen L. Tonso makes a compelling case that construing violent art as a primary motivation of the Columbine massacre is misguided. She points out that "recreational pursuits" traditionally "thought of as violent," such as movies and video games, are arguably *less* violent relative to recreational activities traditionally regarded as non-violent, such as football. According to Tonso, there was no single contributing factor behind the massacre. Rather, Columbine was the unfortunate result of a "confluence of racist, sexist, classist, heterosexist, evangelistic ideologies prevalent in U.S. society today." Karen Tonso, "Reflecting on Columbine High: Ideologies of Privilege in Standardized Schools," *Educational Studies*, 33(4), (2003) pages 392, 389.

[377] Philip Sidney, "From The Defense of Poesy," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, page 272.

[378] Milton once observed that "[t]he mind… can make a Heav'n of Hell," and reciprocally, "a Hell of Heav'n." Menander comparably remarks that "everything is rotted by its own peculiar vice, and that which does the harm lies all within." In the words of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, humans have "every sort of seed" latent within them, and it is the "seeds that each man cultivates" which "grow and bear their fruit." All of this is to say that, as Bruno eloquently puts the matter, concerning those who fail to properly understand "shining concepts," it is "not the fault of the light, but of their sight." John Milton, "Paradise Lost – Book One," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume B – The Sixteenth Century and Early Seventeenth Century*, page 1952 lines 254-5. Menander, "Fragments from Unnamed Plays Attributed to Menander – I," *The Plays and Fragments*, page 275. Giovanni Pico

Rather, like numerous other practices and forms of entertainment, it can *potentially* serve as a negative motivation for already troubled people. Are we to condemn J.D. Salinger for John Lennon's murder? Certainly not. To suggest that horror inevitably, or even regularly, engenders vile temperament, is not only inconsistent with the evidence, but also undermines the notions of epistemic and moral responsibility.

It is problematic to categorize particular subject matter as artistically off-limits. "No artist is ever morbid," according to Oscar Wilde. To the contrary, he argues, "the artist can express everything."[379] Although we might concede that certain works of horror are poorly executed, or even in bad taste, the genre cannot be dismissed wholesale on the grounds that it is destructive or immoral.[380] And it would be naïve to imagine that audiences are drawn to horror because of any moral affinity. After all, there is an obvious distinction between the *depicting* and *approving of* horrible acts. Typically, horrible representations do not glorify what they portray – horrors are suggested, not to be celebrated, but to prompt excitement, flights of imagination, and philosophic introspection. In the words of Lovecraft, who intimately felt horror's call, "there will always be a small percentage of persons who feel a burning curiosity," a "desire to escape from the prison-

della Mirandola, "On the Dignity of Man," *On the Dignity of Man*, Trans. Charles Glenn Wallis (Chicago: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998) page 5. Bruno, "Cause Principle and Unity," *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, page 15.

[379] Oscar Wilde, "Preface," *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Ed. Robert Mighall (London: Penguin Books, 2003), page 3.

[380] Hume argues that pleasure derived from the representation of distressing circumstances depends in large part on "that very eloquence with which the melancholy scene is represented." Skilled artistry is essential for distressing emotions to be transmuted into pleasurable ones, for "uneasy passion" unaccompanied "with any spirit, genius, or eloquence," either "conveys a pure uneasiness," or otherwise lacks "satisfaction." Hölderlin, too, argues that the "highest poetry" involves incorporating "unpoetic" elements at "the right time and in the right place," such that they *become* poetic. Consider how some frightening works are considered wholly repugnant and lacking in aesthetic merit, whereas others are commonly regarded as laughable, not frightening, due to poor execution of plot, special effects etc. It is perhaps not irrelevant to consider a theoretical point made in Plato's *Hippias Minor*, where Socrates (to his own consternation) concludes that it is "up to the good man to do injustice voluntarily, and the bad man to do it involuntarily." Hume, "Of Tragedy," *Selected Essays*, pages 128-9, 133. Hölderlin, "Seven Maxims," *Essays and Letters*, page 242. Plato, "Lesser Hippias," *Complete Works*, Trans. Nicholas D. Smith, page 936, 376b.

house of the known," and to revel within the mind's "deep woods."[381] Not everyone desires to

venture into such a realm, but some do, and it does not seem that they are necessarily made the

worse for it.

Challenging the notion that horror is by nature a negative influence, countless writers,

theorists, and enthusiasts suggest that engaging with horror has its advantages. For one example,

the prolific horror writer, Clive Barker, argues that the primary "joy of horror" lies in its

"pushing the boundaries of the imagination."[382] Enthusiasts Ray Bradbury and Guillermo del

Toro both agree, the former commenting that horror creators convey notions and fancies that are

"cosmic" in their scope, the latter that they possess a unique capacity to "transcribe" a "reality

invisible to most of us."[383] According to such perspectives, horror encourages consideration of

scenarios that, in our day-to-day lives, we might not otherwise, but that which, although

frightening, are ultimately *worth* considering, due to their prompting of profound soul-searching.

King, too, makes a compelling case that engaging with horror is a "rewarding and magical"

experience, precisely owing to the introspection it prompts. Evoking the spirit of CT, he argues

that, in large part, we "make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones." Explicitly suggesting

the notion of catharsis, King characterizes horror as therapy, "an out-letting and a lancing."[384]

Rather than debasing our morals, or dulling our sensitivity to the suffering of others, horror

allows us, by confronting our experiencing fears, to *better understand* and, consequently, *refine*

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[381] Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," *Collected Essays*, page 176.
[382] Douglas Winter, "Clive Barker," *Faces of Fear: Encounters With the Creators of Modern Horror* (New York: Berkley Books, 1985), pages 213-4.
[383] Guillermo del Toro, "Foreword – The Ecstasy of St. Arthur," *The White People and Other Weird Stories*, page vii. Ray Bradbury, "Foreword," *Perchance to Dream: Selected Stories*, page viii.
[384] King, "October 4, 1957, and An Invitation to the Dance," *Danse Macabre*, pages 12-13.

our value judgements relating to suffering and mortality, both in an abstract sense, and in direct relation to ourselves.

Philip K. Dick, primarily known as a sci-fi writer, yet whose work often recalls the macabre, offers perhaps the most striking argument. Recalling Aristotle's *Poetics*, he argues that beauty, in its most rarified form, resides in the imperishable aspects of the human condition, not the mutable aspects that manifest in any particular person. The appeal of witnessing "the suffering of individual, perishable creatures," who "themselves are not beautiful," is thus to behold their very *transmutation* into a "template from which the beautiful" can be appreciated. Horror recalls "the suffering of the individual" in order to arouse an "ultimate and absolute" awareness of suffering's very nature.[385]

Some are less frightened by the prospect of death, but for those who are absorbed by existential anxieties, haunted by loss, or otherwise drawn towards the macabre and uncanny, horror offers an appropriate outlet. For those neither able nor inclined to engage with Aurelius' *Mediations*, or Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, the genre can serve as an ameliorative prompt, a touchstone for the consideration of life and death. Those who are more academically inclined can likewise derive pleasure and consolation from horror. But, more importantly, horror can serve as a source of valuable insight. Philosophy is commonly said to spring from a sense of wonder.[386] Beyond providing "reason to be fond of grief," horror allows us to frame a commonly frightful wonder in considerably more tolerable light.[387]

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[385] Philip K. Dick, "[49:1099]," *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, Ed. Pamela Jackson, and Jonathan Lethem (London: Gollancz, 2011).

[386] See Plato: "Wondering… is where philosophy begins." And Aristotle: "it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize." Plato, "Theaetetus," *Complete Works*, Trans. M.J. Levett and Myles Burnyeat, page 173, 155c-d. Aristotle "Metaphysics – Book 1," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, page 982b, 1554.

[387] Shakespeare, "King John – Act 3, Scene 4," *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare*, page 352 line 98.

XIII.   Closing the Circle

> "O incontestable Abyss,
> What light in thine embrace of darkness sleeps."
> -Clark Ashton Smith.[388]

I have endeavored to illustrate that horror, understood as an art form focused exclusively or

predominantly on fear, pleases both by transmuting a generally unpleasant sensation into

something positive, and, perhaps more significantly, encouraging reflection on matters of life

and death. The latter frequently quells apprehensions latent within us that, left unchecked, can

cause significant psychological pain. This suggests that horror constitutes a particularly

significant mode of entertainment.

   In his novel *White Noise* (1985), Don DeLillo meditates at length on humanity's fear of death

and its social ramifications. At one point, the character Winnie Richards articulates a theory

concerning the nature of fear that well captures the spirit of CT:

> "Picture yourself… in a deep wood. You spot something out of the corner of your
> eye. Before you know anything else, you know that this thing is very large and
> that it has no place in your ordinary frame of reference. A flaw in the world
> picture. Either it shouldn't be here or you shouldn't. Now the thing comes into
> full view. It is a grizzly bear, enormous, shiny brown, swaggering, dripping slime
> from its bared fangs… The sight of this grizzer is so electrifyingly strange that it
> gives you a renewed 101 sense of yourself, a fresh awareness of the self – the self
> in terms of a unique and horrific situation. You see yourself in a new and intense
> way. You rediscover yourself."[389]

Fear can occasion such psychological discovery, reframing our connection to the wider fabric of

existence. The bear that Winnie describes, threatening "imminent dismemberment," demands an

immediate response, such that fear's electrifying nature cannot be indulged at length. For this

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[388] Clark Ashton Smith, "Ode to the Abyss," *The Dark Eidolon and Other Fantasies*, Ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), page 284.
[389] Don DeLillo, "II. The Airborne Toxic Event: Chapter 30," *White Noise* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), page 229.

reason, enthusiasts such as Timothy Treadwell, whose fatal encounter with a bear was documented in Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2005), are uncommon. In the case of horror, fear is no less visceral, but the bared fangs lack genuine bite. The psychological and somatic effects brought on by fear can thus be more fully appreciated, enabling us, through reflection, to come to terms with mortality.

Susan Haack perhaps understates the matter when she characterizes philosophical inquiry as often "messy," its findings "inconclusive."[390] While I hope to have made progress in my effort both to understand the nature of horror and to defend its utility, there nevertheless remains a great deal of ground to be covered. Although conceiving horror exclusively in terms of monsters, as Carroll does, is unhelpful, analyzing horror from different perspectives is likely to prove worthwhile. For example, I have mentioned video games only briefly. Yet there is a great deal that can be said regarding this relatively new art form. Like horror, videogaming has received comparatively little attention from the philosophical community. When it comes specifically to horror, video games such as *Resident Evil* (1996) and *Silent Hill* (1999) are philosophically interesting, given that they *demand* participation, challenging audiences to take the reins and face their fears directly. It is likely that edifying insights can be gleaned from future material written on this subject.[391]

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[390] According to G.E. Moore, a genuinely conclusive philosophical argument allows us, beyond all possible doubt, to "*really know* that its conclusion is true." This is easier stated than accomplished in the realm of aesthetics, however, where subjective evaluation plays a significant role in our understanding and appreciation of phenomena. Regarding the proofs that I have offered in favor of CT, while determined skeptics may not be persuaded, as Haack comments, "determined skeptics never are." W.B. Gallie points out that philosophical inquiry concerning near any subject "is liable to be contested for reasons better or worse." Susan Haack, "A Foundationalist Theory of Empirical Justification," *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*, pages 417, 429. G.E. Moore, "Hume's Theory Examined," *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*, page 606. W.B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series* (Vol. 56. 1955 - 1956), page 167.

[391] For just one example of an ethical problem raised by horror video games, consider what Morgan Luck refers to as the "gamer's dilemma." Morgan Luck, "The gamer's Dilemma: An Analysis of the Arguments for the Moral distinction between Virtual Murder and Virtual Paedophilia," *Ethics and Information Technology* 11, 31–36 (2009).

Researchers have already demonstrated to some degree that both feminist and class evaluations can yield interesting conclusions. However, another productive lens through which horror can be analyzed is ethnicity. "Race-horror" is a relatively new sub-genre, but as films such as Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) demonstrate, expressing social alienation and racial discrimination through art can be uniquely captivating, as well as especially effective at encouraging sympathy for marginalized groups. Particular cultures also tend to produce horrors that resonate especially to their society, which is also worth studying. Much can be written concerning Japanese horror (sometimes called "j-horror"), for instance, since Japan is connected to folklore (e.g., Yūrei, the equivalent of ghosts in Japanese culture, and Yōkai, supernatural spirits) that, as films such as *Ringu* ("the Ring" 1998) and *Ju-On* ("the Grudge" 2000) demonstrate, are exceptionally alluring.[392]

An urge to escape death will likely remain an inescapable aspect of the human condition. The ways that this urge manifests itself will continue to evolve as society changes, but, at its core, horror involves a unique transformation, born of fear. Terror becomes pleasurable, we find charms in the most repugnant objects, and, through contemplation of darkness, truths concerning the human condition come to light. Rilke once said that "we look for a mirror" to show us what is truly "real." In that case, horror, like Dorian Gray's haunted painting, is the "most magical of mirrors," since, by confronting us with our fears, it reveals inimitable depths of the soul.[393]

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[392] For information on Japanese horror cinema, see Colette Bailman's *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). For information on Japanese supernatural folklore, see Michael Dylan Foster's *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yokai* (California: University of California Press, 2008).

[393] Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Notes of Malte Laurids Brigge," *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre: Revised and Expanded*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann, page 141. Wilde, "Chapter VIII," *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 103.

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