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*An Approach to the Shadows of Colonialism in  
American Pulp Fiction: H.P. Lovecraft, Clark  
Ashton Smith, and E. Hoffmann Price*

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
THE SUBLIME .....	7
ORIENTALISM.....	8
SELF AND SOCIETY.....	13
WOMEN.....	19
LAND.....	22
CONCLUSION.....	24
WORKS CITED.....	27

## INTRODUCTION

Cynical, tough, hard-boiled detectives; brave, mightily muscular sword and sorcery heroes; man-eater femme fatales, the living-dead, mummies, devil sects, preternatural horrors lurking from the depths of the Earth... All of them are classic elements of current popular culture's imaginary, and were recurring motifs in "the pulps," to which popular fiction is much indebted. "The pulps" served as a breeding ground for popular fiction genres, such as fantasy, horror or detective fiction; helping them to develop and consolidate them as genres, and to approach them to the masses. Despite the strict limitations of the format imposed by the editors, and the countless amount of mediocre fiction, probably as a result of loose screening and a greater interest in selling than in quality, some part of the greatest popular fiction was conceived there. "The pulps" were means to promote writers and approach fiction to the masses. Means that had as regular contributors writers as renowned as Raymond Chandler, H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert Bloch, Isaac Asimov or Robert E. Howard.

But, what exactly were "the pulps"? Pulp magazines or pulp fiction, a term popularized after the release of Quentin Tarantino's movie bearing the same title, is a mainly American phenomenon. It refers to a type of popular fiction magazines "produced on inexpensive pulpy paper (hence the name)," which dated from late 19<sup>th</sup> century, being the dime novel their predecessor, and "faded away" after the 1950s (DeForest, 11). In the 1920s and 1930s pulps experienced their Golden Age, reaching their highest peak in sells, and producing a vast range of stories. They offered lurid stories for the time, most of them of explicit erotic content, being violence almost a must; but they also showed vivid sensational cover art that immediately targeted possible readers. Pulp magazines dealt with such different genres as love stories and sci-fi or westerns and horror. *Argosy* was one of the pioneers to include all kind of fiction in a single magazine. Nevertheless,

there were magazines specialized in specific genres, such as Westerns (*Western Story Magazine*), adventures, (*Short Stories*), horror, fantasy and dark fantasy (*Weird Tales*) or Science Fiction (*Astounding Stories* ). Though some of them still remain, for instance, *ANALOG* (*Astounding Stories*), the great majority disappeared progressively after WWII, and by the late 1950s, the marketplace was considered obsolete; those which remained changed or evolved into comic format.

The corpus analyzed in this dissertation consists of three short stories and a novella, all dated by the end of the Golden Era of the horror “pulp,” the mid-30s. Two of the stories and the novella were written individually by Clark Ashton Smith, E. Hoffmann Price and H.P. Lovecraft, respectively, whereas “Through the Gates of the Silver Key” (1934) was coauthored by Lovecraft and Hoffmann. All these writers were contributors to *Weird Tales*. Moreover, Smith contributed greatly to the Cthulhu Mythos, creating mythic figures such as “Tsathoggua,” which would then appear in Lovecraft’s stories. The four works analyzed here belong to the genre of dark fantasy and deal with the theme of the quest which, however, seems to hide anxieties concerning the role of the United States as the new colonial power in the world. “Through the Gates of the Silver Key” deals with the theme of the quest to the unknown self, allegorized as an inter-dimensional journey, in which the protagonist, Carter will face supernatural entities that will reveal him the final truth. Set in the 30s, the story develops in a room of the estate of a renowned Orientalist and mystic character who acts as a mediator in the solution of the inheritance of a disappeared Carter. He is accompanied by three men, of whom two have something to say about Carter’s vanishing. *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), written by Lovecraft, deals with the quest to an unknown land, the Antarctic, in whose depths a scientific expedition will face archaic horrors still alive that could represent a

menace for humanity, revealing its dark side. Hoffmann's story, "Satan's Daughter" is of a different kind. It tells the story of an archeologist somewhere in Arabia, who starts a quest to find Bint el Hareth, the daughter of Satan, and the key to unlock her girdle. As he advances in his search he will face a hostile territory in which the instincts rule over the mind. The final quest-story is "Necromancy in "Naat"" (1936) by Smith. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic planet Earth, in which only one continent remains, Zotique, while the land is agonizing. Humanity has gone back to primitivism, to medieval or ancient times, where sword and sorcery prevails, and technology seems extinct. Dealing with the theme of the undead, to which Smith calls dead or living dead, the story focuses on the quest of Yadar, the protagonist, who desperately tries to find his beloved Dalili, and finds her at last as an undead, in an evil isle close to the rim of earth, ruled by necromancers. He is rescued by a group of them (father and sons), and remains in the isle as their host.

All stories present some of the main concerns dealt in the horror and terror pulps of the time, being the image of women as other and The Orient as other, two of the most frequent themes. However, Smith's portrayal of these themes in his story is unusual for the genre, whereas Lovecraft's and Hoffmann's depiction of the Orient as other was a trend.

I chose Hoffman since he represents the pulp writer per se, with his action heroes, plain characters, full of stereotypes narratives, and the exotic, violent savage-other as background. Lovecraft's type of narrative and themes of the alien nature of our human world open a trend known as cosmic horror that has influenced many authors since.

The reason why I chose Smith's story has to do with the use of undead, as well as the introduction of the theme of the commodification of the body, at the time not so usual.

The analysis will use the notions of the Sublime and the other, considering the latter to be one of the principal devices for the production of terror and horror, and, thus, as a possible relevant source of the sublime in fiction. Since terror is “the ruling principle of the sublime” (Burke, 54). I have followed Burke’s notion of terror and the allusions that can be deduced from his use of the term. I have also followed Stephen King’s clearer distinction of terror and horror to help me shape the criteria used for the analysis.

For Burke terror is the speculation, the notions bred in the mind as a result of contemplating, listening, or sensing menacing elements that are somehow close to us, providing a fragmented concept on the mind of what they imply. Horror is the result of terrors carried out, such as a massacre or slavery. Agency, terror, cannot be disclosed since disclosure would remove all the obscurity from it, therefore all its sublimity (Burke, 59-65). King agrees with Burke’s notion of terror, which he associates to “the unpleasant speculation called to mind” (36). However, King differs from Burke in what horror implies. For King, horror is the physicality of the dreaded terror, including the massacre and the agency. It is “that emotion of fear that underlies terror, an emotion which is slightly less fine, because it is not entirely of the mind. Horror also invites a physical reaction by showing us something which is physically wrong” (36) Moreover, he introduces into it the level of repulsion (36) In King’s horror conception, despite the fact that agency is revealed as well, there is still obscurity surrounding the figure, since the true nature of the “thing” has not yet disclosed though it is seen. Its nature is still veiled in our mind, producing an initial feeling of horror and a reaction of rejection to the possibility of a revelation. Agency may start being an element in terror, but once disclosed physically it produces horror. As long as there is still some obscurity—though it may not be physical—surrounding agency, there is horror.

I have used, as core framework for the analysis, Edward Said's theories on *Orientalism*, while also resorting to Lacan's theories on the other and the self. The work has been divided into a brief theoretical introduction on the Sublime, and a textual analysis divided in four parts: Orientalism, Self and Society, Women, and Land.

## **THE SUBLIME**

Sublime, used interchangeably with "the great" by Burke, refers to an overwhelming feeling of magnificence caused by a detached sense of danger or pain. The ideas of menace and danger evoked in the mind, when experienced from a detached position, excite the feelings of the sublime. Thus, "fear or terror, which is an apprehension of pain or death," (119) which is related to the idea of danger, is "the ruling principle of the sublime,"(54) being both sustained in pain. Therefore, it can be said that "the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation."(79). It causes distress in the individual, and in its highest degree, astonishment; which is defined by Burke as "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it"(53). The sublime can be originated from the contemplation or experiencing of several elements that arise the feeling of terror in the individual. Burke provides several features that an object must have to arise the feeling of the sublime. These are the concepts of obscurity, or veiled knowledge of a notion, object or entity; power, if it is vast, fierce and superior in strength, or divine; privations, such as "Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence"; vastness of dimension, extension (length, height or depth); extreme smallness that "escape the nicest inquisition of the sense"; infinity, as well as repetition, constant division or addition, uniformity or succession; "dark and gloomy" or "sad and fuscous"

colors, such as deep purple, wine or black; strong and loud noises, as well as sudden or intermitting sounds or visions; magnificence, recalling chaos and infinity; difficult situations, extreme smells and tastes, and eloquent words that evoke magnificent ideas in the mind (Burke 53-160)

One of the most important sources of terror in literature of the sublime is the figure of the other. Nature and the land are also other important sources in this literature, which in these texts also become the other.

## **ORIENTALISM**

The Orient has been a recurrent other for Western civilization, fascinating as well as repelling. Representing the cradle of civilization, and containing the sacred places of Christianity, the Orient has exerted a fatal attraction to Westerners who sought in its lands the remains of Occident's origins. As Edward Said points out, the Orient was idealized, imagined and reshaped into Western mentality by travelers and scholars, serving as escapism for the rational principles that ruled Western motherland. It became an object of study, a text to decipher; desire and perversion for the West (Said, 190-1). Such idealization, based on Western projections of an idyllic paradisiacal past, being contrasted with the actual reality of the Orient, provoked in the European mind a disenchantment, characteristic of the Romantic nostalgic mind. Thus, for them, "the modern Orientals were degraded remnants of a former greatness; the ancient, or 'classical', civilizations of the Orient were perceivable through the disorders of present decadence," (233) and their land was a dead land in need of Western care to rehabilitate it into a fertile womb again. Therefore, in Orientalist texts, the Orient is normally regarded as inferior to the Occident, ultimately subordinated to Western supremacy, and

seen through imperialist views. Along with these themes, Said presents an unmeasured amount of stereotypes that have been attributed to Asians, and which are examined in the texts analyzed.

In the four stories the Orient appears as other and, with the exception of “Naat,” all portray the Orient as the dark and savage side of humanity or of its desires. In “Naat” the Orient serves as an excuse to explore Western economic and social systems, and it is portrayed as being diverse: there is evil and goodness; they worship false gods, as in every society. The Orient is presented through the Oriental-like naming of characters and places, such as Dalili, meaning omen, in Swahili; or the evil “Naat,” meaning poetry of exaltation of Muhammad, in Arabic. The relation of the evil land of necromancers with sacred Islamic poetry is by no means accidental. As Said points out in *Orientalism*: “Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians” (59). This was protagonist Smith’s coeval view, which he subverts by showing that the evil of “Naat” lies in the slavery system, which can be related to colonialism through the naming association. In “Naat,” there are those in power who come to symbolize the real evil, there are the undead-slaves of the system, dangerous as a result of their lack of will, which used wrongly can be destructive, but without master, the undead live in a “garden,” an utopia, which comes to symbolize that the ruin of the land is brought by Imperialism; and there are those who are savages, dark, because they are cannibals. Thus, the subaltern is dehumanized, a technique along the demonical classification of the Orient, frequently used by orientalists. What Smith suggests is that Western capitalist imperial system is cannibalistic. Westerners are savages as well, for treating humans as bodies to exploit. Indeed, they are worse, since cannibal tribes eat human meat to survive, and Westerners in exploiting humans, seek profit to increase their power, not for survival reasons.

On the contrary, in “Satan,” the only story specifically set in the Orient, Islam is seen in the line of Orientalism, as an imitation of Christianity. Though it is not seen as evil, some of their followers are portrayed in that way, emphasizing their fanaticism. In addition, Reed, the white protagonist, incarnates Said’s archetype of the White Man scholar who, so as to unveil the Orient, mimics orientals, “acquiring” their faith in Islam: when dealing with Habeeb, Reed even states that “Mohammad made the world safe for the one true God” (2). He disguises as a “native” in order to be able to penetrate the Orient, and thus, disclose its secrets—in this case, the key to unlock Bint el Hareth’s girdle. But actually, remaining white and subverting and mocking that set of customs and beliefs, Reed’s whiteness is revealed to have prevailed at the end of the story when he triumphed over Bint el Hareth: “Doubtless – though Allah is the knower – he utterly destroyed her for trying to seduce him” (12).

White supremacy is also observable in the system of relations portrayed in the story. The master-servant relationship of Reed and Habeeb or Reed and the natives in Koyunji, the first setting of the story, encapsulates the archetype of the scholar unveiling the Orient, helped by superstitious and incompetent natives. He treats them with disdain, for instance, when he is observing them digging a statue: “He smiled ironically, rested in the crook of his arm a small parcel wrapped in a grimy turban cloth, spat contemptuously, and turned his back on the diggers” (1) or when Habeeb is abused verbally by Reed, just after he notices that Bint el Hareth has been in the tent and prays aloud: “‘Shut up!’ snapped Reed. ‘Or you’ll be taking refuge from my boot’” (5). This attitude is justified in the text since Arabs are simple, primitive, ignorant, superstitious, and in need of a father-white figure who lectured them; attitude also examined in Said’s *Orientalism*.

Besides “Satan” and “Naat,” Lovecraft’s story also presents an analogous version of the master-servant relation. In *At the Mountains of Madness* there are two others. First, the Old Ones, who come to represent the Origins of Occidental civilization, which, in fact, are the same as those of the Oriental one. Thus, the Old Ones are the barbaric but civilized human, barbaric because of the massacre at Lake’s camp, justified by the narrator as being logic since humans in their place would do the same, and civilized since though alien, they were an archaic species that were, in a remote past, the equivalent to humans, equating, consequently, the West with the Ancient East. Another related interpretation points to the decadent Old Ones as symbolic of the decline of Imperialisms, especially the British. Whereas their former machine-like slaves—creations, the Shoggoths, are the second other. Unlike the Old Ones, they are the only entities present in the story which are related to the Orient through Asian-like naming; they symbolize the possible menace of losing the colonies in a time when new movements of opposition were arising, and some territories had already been lost, such as Ireland and the States, both alluded in the story. What is more, the quest that the Old Ones carried on the earth strongly resembles the process of colonization.

The Shoggoths are depicted as monstrous imitations of the colonizers—Old Ones—Westerners, as compiled in Said’s *Orientalism*. Incapable of creating or feeling, they are living nightmares who have “a constantly shifting shape and volume, though out of temporary developments or forming apparent organs of sight, hearing, and speech in imitation of their masters, either spontaneously or according to suggestion” (473); and they resemble machines. As happened in the colonies, the pillars of the empire were built in the enslavement of these creatures. On the contrary, the Old Ones are depicted as magnificent in stature and intelligence, capable of feelings but extremely cruel. The odor of both species is extremely pungent, but it is that of the Shoggoth which is the

most sublime. Both species are sublime in their strength, odor, color, and bulk, but what makes the Shoggoths much more horrific is their similitude with machines, which suggests their lack of feelings.

Supporting this allegory, there is a warning: the end of the Old Ones mirrors the end of the West if Westerners continue to rely on colonialism. The future may end in subversion, with the East exterminating the West. This apprehension was recurrently portrayed in the pulps of the time. Oriental villains crowded their pages, representing American anxieties, by being described as “part of the Yellow peril, involved in a secret plot to undermine or conquer white civilization.” (DeForest, 89)

This theme is also a motif in “Through the Gates of the Silver Key”, in which the possible mixture of the East and West in America is portrayed as a threat which can destroy white civilization. Carter becomes alien after having undertaken an internal quest to know his self, becoming divided in the process since he does not accept that his other selves are part of him. He is both Carter and the alien Zkauba. Though he tries to conceal his otherness to society, he fails since his appearance is that of a Brahmin, thus of the other. There are a lot of Oriental comparisons that may mean a rejection of a mixed East–West society, regarded as inferior, menacing and dangerous. The alien is associated with Oriental-like names, and Indian culture.

There are several approaches to the blending of boundaries in the story. First, that of Aspinwall, who would represent the WASP, and whose attitude is that of total rejection, racism and hostility towards the other, observable in his behavior treating the Brahmin-Carter: ““It’s up to this foreigner—this damned nigger—to explain how he got it!”” (p. 17). Whereas Carter’s mixed self represents mixture with separate features, without assimilation, the attitude of the mystics reflects that of Orientalists’: praise and

admiration and examination of the culture and its exoticism but from the scholarly distance, without mixing with it.

It is clear that both Aspinwall's and Carter's attitudes are condemned. One 'disappears' and becomes dead to society and the other dies. All this confrontation with the other may refer to the migrations of Easterners, who in search of better opportunities came to the United States. What is rejected is the resulting mixture if the migrations go on: Western culture would disappear being replaced by the Eastern, incarnated in Carter. Aspinwall rejects the other aggressively, since he cannot conceive the idea of mixture, being, thus, vulnerable in its intolerance. It is too scary for him and he dies. The conflict cannot be resolved with hostility but with a friendly Orientalist attitude that would ultimately negotiate borders. Carter, if he would have become again his former self, would have been accepted again as part of society; in other words, if the outsider from the East adapts to the West, assimilating it, he would be welcomed. This is not possible after being revealed his otherness (no assimilation of the culture), then, the other takes the control, and Carter/the East becomes latent in the Western society, outside, menacing.

The search of self and society through the Orient, and the themes of Oriental women and land, are also recurrent themes both in Said's study of Orientalism and in the pulp fiction works selected as corpus for this analysis.

## **SELF AND SOCIETY**

In the four stories there is a quest for the self. In "Satan's," the quest is for unearthing Reed's latent obscure desires represented by Bint-el Hareth and the bandits. That quest,

following Lacan's notions on the self, is that of finding the other's object of desire, the key, which, in fact, is his desire since: "the desire of the human child becomes the desire of another, of an alter ego who dominates him and whose object of desire is henceforth his own affliction" (Lacan, *Ecrits*, 262). Reed displaces his own desires to release his instincts, repressed by the moral standards imposed by his whiteness, into the desires of the other, whom he wants to please. Thus, he makes his desire Bint el- Hareth's desire by subduing to her whims. Opposing the quest is Habeeb, who stands for his superego—

"the super-ego is essentially located within the symbolic plane of speech [...] The super-ego is an imperative [I]t is consonant with the register and the idea of the law, that is to say with the totality of the system of language, in so far it defines the situation of man as such [...] On the other hand, one should also emphasise, as a counter to this, its senseless, blind character, of pure imperativeness and simple tyranny" (Lacan, "The Wolf! The Wolf!" 102)

For Lacan the superego appears when the ego enters into the social realm, hence into the symbolic realm of language. Habeeb is the one that warns Reed to repress his desires (Bint el Hareth); or tricks Reed by telling him a lie: "What I meant was there is a way to avoid destruction. Only no Arab has ever been able to use that method' [...] 'She is insanely jealous. Therefore avoid all other women'," so as to impose his criteria on him (5). The servant uses stereotypes: they cannot be civilized since they cannot control their lust; due to Reed's whiteness, he must control them. The result is an extreme repression of Reed's instincts. Habeeb abandons him, when despite his warnings he decides to go on. Once in the hostile lands of the other, he suffers the bandit's raid, which may symbolize Reed's inner struggle to resist or yield to desire. His struggle may be interpreted as a result of his resistance to know, in this case the knowledge of Bint el-Hareth's nature, the nature of the other: "For resistance, [...] embodied in the system of

the ego and the other [...] emanates from somewhere else, namely from the subject's impotence to end up in the domain in which his truth is realised" (Lacan, "The Ego and the Other"<sup>50</sup>)

The last element, the white girl would stand for his ego-ideal, which is the model followed by the Ich. She is the ideal angel of the house for Occidentals. Hence, for Reed, she embodies the epitome of the white society, being a reminder of what he, as a white man, aspires to be in his own male archetype. Despite being his ego-ideal, she cannot prevent him from "sin," since she is first a woman, hence, an object of desire. Thence, instead of preventing him from it, she helps, unconsciously, the alter-ego in their battle for power over the self, which actually is the battle to disclose that the other's desire is his own displaced into the other, who indeed is the displaced image of himself, which he attributes to others. Therefore, following Lacan and Said, the Orient in Orientalism is just a projection of the Occident's desires and repressions that society depreciates or judges to be wrong, which, likewise, the West desires. Language is the means to demarcate the boundaries of Ich and Other, and to objectify that illusory other, opposing it to the Ich.

Another story dealing with the theme of language as mean of unveiling the self, is "Through the Gates of the Silver Key". Carter's quest starts as a result of an exhaustive examination of texts and a "silver key" that leads him to the realm of the imaginary, a pre-symbolic realm. This quest is allegorized as the supernatural experience of the divine, which discloses for him the final truth. Firstly, what he seeks is the "lost childhood" from which he was deprived at an early age, which comes to represent the pre-Oedipal stage of union with the mother. However, in that stage of pre-

consciousness, he forgets his past, which leads him to naturally evolve within the mirror-stage. He reenters the symbolic when facing Yog- Sothoth, or the BEING, a timeless alien god, which plays the role of the father by revealing Carter's multiplicity, which results of coming into knowledge of the self and the other. Before it discloses the truth to him, Carter perceives language latent in him. He perceives concepts, projected by the BEING, which he shapes into words. He is revealed that,

“All descended lines of beings of the finite dimensions [...] and all stages of growth in each one of these beings, are merely manifestations of one archetypal and eternal being in the space outside dimensions. Each local being [...] and each stage of individual being [...] is merely one of the infinite phases of that same archetypal and eternal being, caused by a variation in the angle of the consciousness-plane which cuts it.” (Lovecraft, and Hoffmann, 410)

What comes to mean that all Carter's facets are part of the self, and that each of them represents a phase of the self's realization, which is defined following the ego-ideal and the superego incarnated in the BEING.

Carter decides to “get inside” the most alien of his facets, curious to know how “his other” is. He does not entirely grasp what the BEING revealed to him. He is reminded by Yog- Sothoth to remember his symbols so as to get back. He travels to the realm of the other, into Zkauba, which is alien to him since he cannot acknowledge it as part of him, becoming therefore dual, when neglecting it. Zkauba's logic response is that of opposition, since language implies a binary opposition of subject/object. This opposition does not have to be hostile, but, culture makes it, being subjected to power relations. Zkauba's logic response is that of rejection, since it questions his integrity as self and his rule. Carter achieves to suppress the other and take hold of “his body,” using it to return to his former condition. He thinks that by traveling back to earth and

finding the parchment, he would finally success in getting back to his former social condition. In order to do so, he disguises as human and travels back home. He tries to get into possession of his estate, which he needs to find his parchment, so he meets with the mystics and Aspinwall, who think him disappeared or dead. He narrates his story, being believed by the mystics, who would accept him back into society once he gets back into his former state. However, Aspinwall does not accept his version. Carter is the other, outside Western society, since, though he conceals the other, he seems Indian, is being dark, and speaks alien-like, as if he was a machine. He is unmasked by Aspinwall, who dies of pure horror when seeing the other directly. After this event, Carter's dangerous condition is revealed. The mystics avoid helping him, fearing share in Aspinwall's fate. After being unmasked, Carter is subjugated by Zkauba, since he has been negated his place in society by Aspinwall's revelation of his otherness, and he fuses with the other in otherness. In fact, he loses the faculty of language, leaving in that way, the symbolic: "The hoarse, oddly alien voice of the Swami held a tone beyond all mere earthly fright" (419). He is now other for society. He enters the unconscious realm, because it "is the discourse of the other" (Lacan, "The Wolf! The Wolf!", 85), through the alien-like ancient clock of de Marigny, remaining, thus, latent in society: "de Marigny often sits listening with vague sensations to the abnormal rhythm of that hieroglyphed, coffin shaped clock" (421). Notwithstanding Carter would have not been unmasked and would have achieved the parchment, he could not have returned to the imaginary since he could not have grasped the significance of what he was told.

In *Mountains*, Lacan's theory on the mirror stage may throw some light when exploring the relationship between the Old Ones and the Shoggoths. The Shoggoths, created by the Old Ones, were controlled hypnotically by them, in a pre-symbolic stage. After "the war of resubjugation," the Shoggoths are revealed also as intelligent beings, capable to

imitate the Old One's language, hence, entering the symbolic. The war may symbolize the first attempt to replace the father as a "phallus" (power) of the mother (the land). It is suggested that the Oedipal theme of the parricide is achieved, when it is disclosed that the Shoggoths are the ones ruling the core of the old megalithic metropolis, in the underground (mother earth's womb); and the corpses of the Old Ones are found by Dyer and Danforth, members of the expedition.

What it is more, the story between the Old Ones and the Shoggoths serves as a mirror in which humans can look at themselves. The expedition, by penetrating the dead waste of the Antarctic, starts a quest to know the origins and limits of human nature and reality (traces of the other: pungent smell, the marks of an extinct species, the piping intermittent, the corpses...; all related to death, corruption and danger). The other is always elusive, hence sublime, till the end, when they look back and see the real other, the Shoggoth. However, the story does not lose sublimity since the conception of the entity escapes human comprehension, supplying the mind with a poor image of the other.

In "Naat" the law of the father also prevails. The quest starts with Yadar, the tragic hero, the aristos of tragedy: he is a nomad prince, in search of his lost beloved, Dalili, who stands as the mother land. He travels across the dark ocean and reaches the evil land of "Naat." Because of a storm, his ship sinks. He is saved from the depths by an undead girl, who lately is revealed to be Dalili, who acted following the orders of the necromancers. The necromancers, who take Yadar as their host, are a trinity, and are constantly associated to religious motifs, such as their number or their powers—clairvoyance, resurrection—an association which can be interpreted as the tyrannical law of the father. The Biblical imagery is constant; there are even allusions to the last supper when Yadar is offered a first supper with the necromancers, relating his fate with

that of Christ. Yadar ends being a figure to be sacrificed for the sake of the continuity of the system, allegorized as an oblation to the demon Esrit. He comes to symbolize the child who was separated from his mother, who is rotting, dead, powerless, and a slave; and that represents a menace for the power of the father. The phallus is the power over Dalili-land, who she lacks since as an undead she has no will. It is a slavery-capitalist-imperialist system, which may stand for the alienation of working people; for the emptying of their brains or consciousness, symbolized in their condition as zombies. This master-slave relation is explained by Lacan as follows:

“Here the natural individual is regarded as nil, since the human subject is nothing, in effect, before the absolute Master that death is for him. The satisfaction of human desire is possible only when mediated by the other's desire and labor. While it is the recognition of man by man that is at stake in the conflict between Master and Slave, this recognition is based on a radical negation of natural values, whether expressed in the master's sterile tyranny or in work's productive tyranny” (Lacan, *Ecrits*, 102).

The master's death does not retrieve the slaves from their “zombie condition” since they are part of a subjected land. There are still necromancers in “Naat,” and slaves in Zotique. Nevertheless they live in freedom being exploited only by and for themselves. Vacharn's death comes as a result of a planned parricide on the part of his sons in the trinity. They convince Yadar to help them to accomplish their purposes. They offer him Dalili in exchange. This fight for power is in their nature, since as Lacan points out, “The super-ego is at one and the same time the law and its destruction” (Lacan, “The Wolf! The Wolf!, 102)

## **WOMEN**

Women have been a traditional other in literature, representing men's fears of

castration. Kristeva maintains that women, in a patriarchal society, are regarded as the abject. The abject stands for that which has been rejected from the self, but in a pre-Oedipal stage was part of it. Kristeva speaking of religions, which traditionally have served as censorship to the social ego, claims that in them:

[W]e encounter the rituals of defilement and their derivatives, which, based on the feeling of abjection and all converging on the maternal, attempt to symbolize the other threat to the subject: that of being swamped by the dual relationship, thereby risking the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being. The function of these religious rituals is to ward off the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother. (64).

Women as mothers constitute a predominant association in Western literature, which presents two “opposite” models of women, both menacing. This distinction is that of the angel of the house, the mother; and that of the fallen woman or red rose who asserts her sexuality regardless of procreation. Such binary is found in “Satan,” where two female figures tempt Reed into sin: Bint el-Hareth and the white woman. Bint el-Hareth, a supernatural entity, is presented as an exotic red rose, dark and sensuous, an enchantress, confident of her sexuality, which she exerts freely. She represents danger, since, by asserting her sexuality in a patriarchal society which represses women, she challenges the values of the status quo, hence, male supremacy. She threatens Reed to seize from him the Lacanian phallus, she incarnates his fear of castration. Nevertheless, the end of the story reveals that male supremacy always prevails, since he achieves the impossible, to make Bint el-Hareth subjected to him, as I have already shown above. The white woman’s portrayal in the story is not positive either. She stands for the angel of the house, and makes Reed to long for making her his wife, a mother, but once she

loses her virginity she becomes contaminated, and she is portrayed as a witch, thence, she is associated to Bint el-Hareth: “the witchery in her dark eyes convinced him of the exceeding folly of persisting in his pursuit of a phantom of the night” (9). So, women are demons of the night to be avoided; they lure men into rethinking power relations, as well as identity.

“Naat” openly presents a female figure who challenges social and life boundaries. Dalili, Yadar’s beloved is a symbol for the land, the bodily representation of its situation. Both are dead and exploited up to the last, considered as inferior and evil at times, and they cannot react towards what it is inflicted upon them. Dalili is not fertile, since she is a corpse; like the land, she menaces the patriarchal role imposed on women, being unable to fulfill her role as a mother; she cannot be the motherland. She becomes an object of sexual necrophiliac desire, a source of degeneration; a mirror in which the flaws of the system/patriarchy are exposed. As a result of this deviation she is twice the other. First she is a female, the terrifying absorbing womb which castrates men, and secondly she is an undead, challenging not only human conceptions of life and death, but also female’s role in society, by presenting a castrated womb. She is doubly alienated from society due to the standards imposed on her. She is passive and submissive, has no will of her own, the perfect petrified woman to rape.

Being the other, Dalili is associated with danger and evil, to which she is related by visual imagery:

High leaped the fire, with a writhing of tongues like blue and green serpents coiling amid serpents of yellow. And the light flickered brightly on the face and breasts of that woman who had saved Yadar from the Black River; and he, beholding her closely, knew why she had stirred within him a dim remembrance: for she was none other than his lost love, Dalili! (43).

Besides, her supernatural condition is constantly emphasized, such as her strength, which is even greater than Yadar's, challenging male physical supremacy, which is shown when she penetrates the wild water to dive for pearls or to save Yadar.

Another feature of her sublimity is her explicit association with the land. She is always related to the elements, forces of nature. The strongest of these relations is that of the ocean. Both are powerful, dangerous, dark, magnificent, dead and rotten, like the Orient was for the West. She is an omen, as her name suggests, of what would happen if humans continue to exploit the land and with their consumerist, capitalist, imperialist system, which kills instead of creating.

## **LAND**

In "Naat," the most important source of the sublime is the land and its symbol, Dalili. The land is dying, agonizing, probably because of human intervention. Through the entire story there are descriptions of a festering land, which mirrors in Dalili. The land is dead, enslaved by the system. However, it is also threatening, as other, by portraying menacing seas, turbulent winds which cause Yadar's ship sinking. At first it is controlled by the system, which makes nature hostile and mortal for humans, being therefore sublime in essence. At the end, when the system is collapsing, the land rebels and the sea and winds, sublime as they are, send the ashes of the victims of the parricide to Yadar and Uldulla as revenge, to make them remember. The dying land is sublime in itself, being, as well, uncanny for humans. Smith shows us how humans can destroy their environment and, hence, themselves.

Less than a fortnight later we left the last hint of polar land behind us and thanked heaven that we were clear of a haunted, accursed realm where life and death, space and time, have made black and blasphemous alliances in the unknown epoch since matter first writhed and swam on the planet's scarce-cooled crest. (448-9)

*Mountains* offers the same view of the land as a theatre stage in which a post-apocalyptic future can be watched, as a result of the fight for power over the land. However, unlike "Naat," the Antarctic land's essence is pure evil. It is a hostile house of horrors, an aeon-long dead land, which as well as "Naat," is made dead by human intervention. Its winds and blasts, and its extremely high mountains and vast plateaus, are said to be hellish and abhorrent. It is the opposite of the promise land. It is associated with the land of dreams (unconscious), but within them with the atrocious Leng, and Kadath, of which it is said to be their earthly location. It is a sublime land in all its terrible nature, which hides latently, the alien other.

Revealed on the ultimate white horizon behind the grotesque city, a dim elfin line of pinnacled violet whose needle pointed heights loomed dreamlike against the [...] western sky up toward this shimmering rim sloped the ancient tableland, the depressed course of the bygone river traversing it as an irregular ribbon of shadow [...] this far violet line could be nothing else than the terrible mountains of forbidden land-highest of earth's peaks and focus of earth's evil; harborers of nameless horrors and Archean secrets [...] untrodden by any living thing on earth, but visited by sinister lightings and sending strange beams across the plains in the polar night. (500)

The shadows, the lighting, the vastness and height, the color, the steam, the silence and secrecy of its nature imply a latent danger, that of the sublime.

In "Key", unlike the rest, the land of the setting is America, and the land to fight for is the West, which is portrayed as having a mystic past, which is a source of attraction.

America, as well as the East, was regarded as the promise land by Europeans. On the contrary, “Satan” is set in the Orient. The land is regarded as female, hostile, and a realm of barbarousness; the Orientalist archetype of the Oriental land.

## CONCLUSION

The stories analyzed here reflect some of the main Orientalist views of the Orient examined by Said. The Orient is mainly alluded to in the stories by Asian-like naming association, but for “Satan,” which uses the Orient as setting. They encapsulate the themes of the dead land: post-apocalyptic “Naat,” and petrified *Mountains*; Islam as a barbaric religion (“Satan”), a stereotype refuted by Smith by revealing in his story that it is the West who made it evil. There is also mimicry in “Satan”: Reed imitates Orientals; and in *Mountains*: Shoggoths’ imitation of the Old Ones. As well as dehumanized or archetypal Orientals, white supremacy, which is defended in all but in “Naat”; the master (West) – slave (East) relation, accompanied by the menace of invasion of the West (“Key”), or uprising of the East over the Oriental lands controlled by the West (*Mountains*), and the feminization of the Orient (“Naat” and “Satan”). The stories were written in the times of American colonialism and of a persistent segregation in its own land, so the Orient portrayed in these stories reflects somehow the colonial and racial anxieties of the time. With the exception of “Naat,” the Orient is depicted as the dark side of humanity, menacing the West from afar, or in the case of “Key”, it is always there lurking, trying to invade the West. In “Naat,” the East is the stage in which the flaws of the Western system are exposed. Not only the colonial system is criticized, but that of capitalist America, since the 1930s were also the times of the Great Depression, when the masses were treated like meat loaf by the status quo. Thus, this dissertation somehow contradicts Said’s statement that American participation in Orientalism was

almost absent before WWII, since, at least from the 1920s, the Orient has been present in these pulps fictions, which fed the American public with their representations of the Orient as the Other.

All are quest stories which deal with the theme of the other, which may be the obscure side of Western mentality, such as Smith's vampirism. Similarly, *Mountains* criticizes human nature, its cruelty, and its long-concealed dark side. Humans are despicable there, as well as magnificent. The use of slavery and technology is also criticized because of the consequences their use implies: the overuse of technology or slavery in the story may lead to an uprising. The dependence on such a system can have terrible consequences and make humans decline as a species. The decline of the human race is also examined by Smith by presenting Zothique as a post-apocalyptic land, peopled by primitive and corrupted men. Human decline in Lovecraft's fiction may be also related to the decline of the Imperial system, an ode to it. These stories examine the theme of the other versus the self, and easily respond to psychoanalytic theories of the self. From a Lacanian perspective, it is also interesting to point out that these stories present a common defense of language as a social means: prior to language, the individual is not social; it is as a power indicator: those who are in power control the language.

Regarding women, neither of Lovecraft's stories mentions any. The absence of women in his fiction is significant; their absence is the negation of the other. However, if we consider the underground lands in *Mountains*, a kind of womb, female sexuality and fertility is present latently in the story, as a menace: it engenders monsters. As regards Smith and Hoffmann, in both stories women appear as the other. In the case of Smith, the stereotype of the other-woman is complex. She is the symbol for the motherland.

She is inhuman regarding Yadar's feelings but that was imposed on her, she was made (un)dead. She died, thus, being unable of accomplish what society expects of her as a woman: being a mother. Instead she is dead, infertile, indolent as the land, menacing patriarchal sexual-power relations. She is other because she is even sometimes more powerful than Yadar. At the end, when Yadar becomes equal to her, she is still the other, since she is the woman who threatens to get from him the phallus (the power over herself) by defying patriarchally-imposed women sexuality. It is society which made them other and enslaved them. She is just a body due to society. In the case of Hoffmann, women are devil, whether they are the angel of the house or fallen women. Both types bring despair to men and take him to the abyss and perdition. In both cases supernatural qualities are used to emphasize their otherness: Dalili: undead, Bint: demon; even the red-haired woman, after fallen, is a witch.

The sublime is a characteristic that is not often found in the pulps since most of them dealt with horror and violence, but there is still an important faction of pulps that dealt with cosmic and mystic themes, supernatural and divine, which challenge human conceptions of reality, in which the sublime can be experienced. In three of the stories analyzed, a sense of the sublime can be experienced in more or less magnitude. The fourth, Hoffmann's, was chosen because of his almost lack of sublime descriptions, since it is a story more focused on horror and the physical. The sublime in this story is only experienced when facing the supernatural alter ego. It helps to characterize her as other. The story with most sublime in it is "Naat" because of its style, biblical-like but with romantic tones that allows to a narration of tragic magnitudes. The sublime in this story is associated with the dark system, and the undead. The concept is enhanced by the shadows, the lack of knowledge of the other and its menacing nature. The most

important source of the sublime is the land made other, its decay, echoed by Dalili. Regarding Lovecraft, the sublime is something complex. The scientific tone of the narration avoids somehow it. However, the use of elusion in the narration, and of an elusive other, in *Mountains*, allows for the presence of the sublime. The fragmentary account of the story, full of silences, may produce a fragmentary impression on the reader, who is more detached from the narration and experiences a sense of constant awe. In the case of the “Key”, all sublimity is found in the latent other, embodied in the fumes and the clock, in some descriptions of the self, and in the alien-other, especially when it is latent or partially revealed.

To conclude, the sublime helps to characterize the other and surround it with terror and dangerousness, therefore functioning to create the political and social anxieties these stories hide. In *Mountains* and “Naat” there is an even use of horror and terror, to show both the insignificance and cruelty of humans. “Key” includes little horror, unlike “Satan,” where only a few terror scenes are narrated, horror being dominant. The play of horror and terror thus, becomes an essential device in these narratives to convey and shape the other and the anxieties it stirs.

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