

Secrecy of Salvation: *Mysterium Tremendum* of the Cosmic Horror

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The subgenre of Cosmic Horror has inspired many authors in the course of the past century, eventually establishing itself firmly in pop culture and our collective literary imagination. Within this narrative, humanity is confronted with the vastness of an unfeeling and empty cosmos. Ancient gods and sinister beings lurk in the darkness caring nothing about our existence and carrying ontological truths which shatter rationality and mental sanity. Those who try to unveil these secrets are met with madness and despair with an understanding that certain forms of knowledge are best kept a mystery¹. In this paper I will explore the category of Cosmic Horror in its various expressions highlighting its similarities with the mystical experience of the *Mysterium Tremendum*. The latter being a description coined by Rudolph Otto to express interaction with the numinous which can be voluntarily achieved albeit of the horrifying kind. The question will be whether some secrets naturally protect themselves due to the intensity of their revelation.

Keywords: Lovecraft, Numinous, *Mysterium Tremendum*, Rudolph Otto, Mystery, Secrecy, Non-Euclidean geometry, Terror, Transcendence.

Introduction

“The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age”. (Lovecraft, *Tales*)

The previous quote condenses much of the themes that are encountered in the genre of cosmic horror. Although not defined as such by Lovecraft, the author who initiated the genre, it has in the course of time become a widely acknowledged narrative style. The elements of this genre have survived beyond Lovecraft which in time has become an effective pop cultural icon with his themes

¹ (Leavenworth, *Storyworlds*, 332-333)

transcending into, comic books, videogames, cinema, memes and also contemporary occult movements².

The term “cosmic horror” defines a particular kind of storytelling which includes weirdness, the bizarre and the incomprehensible which in turn generates a sense of terror, fear and hopelessness³. From Lovecraft’s perspective there are forms of knowledge and understanding that are simply outside the realm of human capacity. These are mysteries too great or too fearsome for the fragile human mind to even partially grasp and even so at the cost of one’s mental sanity⁴. Only what Lovecraft describes as deranged human beings, purveyors of ancient traditions and gruesome rituals shrouded in mystery have access to this knowledge are able to handle it due to their status of bestiality and can afford to celebrate a similar destructive vision of the cosmos⁵. Those who wish to venture into the unknown ushered by a spirit of enquiry are often warned against the attempts by both individuals in the know and also by the general lingering feeling of dread that arises when coming into contact with the glimpse and signs of hauntings, horrors and curses.

Human life is depicted as being confronted with an unfeeling and empty mechanistic cosmos⁶. The consequential feeling of existential dread is manifested through the encountering of the shapeless the formless and the undefinable, the bestial and the irrational, the overwhelmingly chaotic and destructive. These are in turn represented in Lovecraft’s talks through monstrous alien beings, time and space deformation and dreams⁷.

This kind of overwhelming terrifying emotion is however not exclusive to Lovecraftian narrative. Rudolph Otto has in his *Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Revelation to the Rational*. In it he proposes a concept which he defines the “Numinous” a term which he popularized and means “arousing spiritual emotion; mysterious or awe inspiring⁸. It is a “non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling whose primary and immediate object is outside the self” he uses the Latin term *mysterium* to describe it and attributes to it qualities of *tremendum* (terrifying) and *fascinans* (fascinating) which expresses a feeling of awe and terror which cannot be achieved through rational means. Although stemming from different assumptions, Lovecraft, being a staunch atheist and mechanist⁹ and Otto dedicated to

² (Hull, *Dimensions.*, 10) (Sederholm, Weinstock., *Now.*,446-9) (Matthews, *Abnormalities.*, p.165-6) (Engle, *Mystery.*, 85) (Leavenworth *Storyworlds.*, 332)

³ (Hull, *Dimensions.*, 10)

⁴ (ibid p.11)

⁵ (Engle, *Cults.*,95)

⁶ (Poole, *Lovecraft.*, 223)

⁷ (Matthews, *Abnormalities.*,169-175) (Pedersen, *Wonder.*, p.29-32)

⁸ (Collins English Dictionary -7th ed. – 2005)

⁹ (Poole, *Lovecraft.*,222)

theology, both authors share similar attraction or awareness towards non-rational fields of understanding which transcend the human capacity for comprehension. Moreover, they address the dangers and terrifying awe-inspiring emotions connected to them. Through this view it emerges how the experiences they depict are by their own nature, marked by a hostile component.

Mystery and Secrecy

Knowledge is power- Francis Bacon

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary a mystery is something not understood or beyond understanding, something profound, inexplicable, or secretive in quality or character. It can also represent a religious truth that one can understand by intellectual revelation alone and cannot fully understand such as secret religious rites that can impart enduring bliss to the initiate. Such a case is the term ‘mysterion’ for the Greeks who associated the unveiling of the unknown not just to Nature but also to the divine¹⁰.

The existence of mystery has been addressed from multiple angles. Secret information is mystified be in place for protection such as military intelligence. The clearance is provided only to those worthy of trust or who have demonstrated the relevant skills and responsibility meaning the capacity to handle that information and respect it¹¹. Similar manifestations occur in ancient mystery cults. On a more profane level companies maintain secrecy in their business in order not to reveal themselves to competitors. Today's current trends in secrecy appear to support transparency over opacity. The former is applied in many venues. Political, technological, economics and social. Considered to go hand in hand with Democratic systems of government, transparency is becoming an increasing trend synonymous with reliability and consequently desirable. In many cases, however information needs to be withheld and as much as technology can help us unveil truths, it serves to hide them as well¹².

To frame and define the mystery that both Lovecraft and Otto address is however of an entirely different quality and although the former was a staunch atheist and the latter a theologian, they both addressed a form of experience which defied reason and transcended rationality. Boyer classifies this difference of mystery quality as investigative and revelational mystery¹³. While the first is attributed to an investigation dedicated to finding an answer to an unknown question as is the case of the perpetrator of a murder the second relates to religious contexts¹⁴. The term in this case relates

¹⁰ (Boyer, *Mystery*. p.90-1)

¹¹ (Scott, *Interpretations*.,307-311, 314)

¹² (Florini, *Secrecy*., 50-1)

¹³ (Boyer, *Mystery*., 89-90)

¹⁴ (ibid. p.90-91)

to 'mysterion' in the way the ancient Greeks understood it as associated not exclusively with understanding of the natural world but also about divine topics¹⁵. This could be obtained through intellectual contemplation or esoteric devotion. These were secrets that were known only by initiates. The early Christian church would also employ it as a means to define the incomprehensible plans of God manifested on earth. The characterization of this form of mystery is complex. The information is known only to the insiders. Outsiders might become aware of the information but still be unaware of its meaning or at least to grasp the totality of it. Further even the insiders could find the mysteries to be incomprehensible even when witnessed. A case can be the mystery of faith in the revelation of the New Testament. Even though it is acknowledged as the full revelation of God's word it still maintains many obscure passages which need to be interpreted and understood. This form of knowledge although obtaining some form of transparency will always be aware of the fact that it remains a mystery even after revelation. The quality that makes the mystery its intrinsic mysteriousness¹⁶. However, what are the characteristics of revelational mystery that make it complex to grasp? Boyer continues with his explanation by introducing three new considerations. These are termed extensive, facultative, and dimensional¹⁷. The first relates to a mystery which is simply too vast in its extension to be accepted by the mind or at least not in its totality. This is related to the intrinsic vastness of the cosmos or to grasp the whole set of numbers. The mystery is revealed but the mind cannot process it all at the same time¹⁸. The second one, facultative describes a mystery that can only be solved by non-rational means. Intellect is simply an inappropriate tool for exploration. One cannot imagine the scent of a rose if there has been no prior experience of this sensorial stimulation. Similarly, this is attributed to the mystery of love or suffering. We are aware of its meaning but are not able to explain it if not through the acknowledgement of the shared experience included in this is also a sense of a sense of awe is related to the feeling generated by the admiration of a starry sky, the awareness of overwhelming size such as what is felt when one looks at an incredibly tall skyscraper¹⁹. Finally, the dimensional mystery, which represents something impossible to approach or even understand. A hypothetical scientist who perceives the world in two dimensions will not be able to understand a cylinder. Certainly, it will be able to understand the height and the width but never the depth. This form of mystery can be revealed but never fully grasped as it transcends the capacity to understand or even conceptualize it²⁰. Boyer concludes in this sense that when religious people talk about mystery they

¹⁵ (Pedersen, *Wonder.*, p.25-6)

¹⁶ (Boyer, *Mystery.*,92)

¹⁷ (ibid. p.93-94)

¹⁸ (ibid. p.94)

¹⁹ (ibid. p.94-5)

²⁰ (ibid. p.95-9)

refer to something that requires both the rational and something beyond the rational a dichotomy of intellectual honesty which acknowledges the revelation of mystery while realizing that it is incomprehensible²¹.

Lovecraftian Mystery

The weirdness, the dreaded mystery that incarnates Lovecraft's stories comes from a combination of elements. This sense of disillusion derives from the particular perspective that he maintained. Lovecraft was a staunch atheist and as a result of his explorations into science and mathematics he developed a sense of existential dread²². This however did not prevent him from achieving states of awe and consequential terror. Possibly his upbringing created the foundations for a similar perspective, through a conflictual relationship between his passions and inclinations²³.

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown”²⁴. This quote is a result of one of Lovecraft's deep sense of unsettlement. The fear of the unknown is a kind of inevitability which can never be overcome²⁵. In his perspective, although mankind can rely on scientific exploration rationality and calculation it will never be sufficient to have a complete understanding of reality. It is exactly through the advancement of the sciences that Lovecraft envisioned this sense of hopeless despair and the limitedness of the human mind²⁶.

His passion for the study of non-Euclidean geometries, mathematics and the relativity of time, topics which appear in many of his tales²⁷, provided him with the realization that there are forms of knowledge which cannot be directly grasped by human capacity²⁸. “I have had many severe criticism because of the concrete and tangible nature of some of my cosmic horrors. Variants of the general theme include defeats of the visible laws of time and transcensions of the boundary lines of Euclidean space”. (Lovecraft)

Lovecraft describes cities that are structured on bizarre angles which behave counter intuitively to the laws of physics that we are familiar with:

²¹ (ibid. p.100)

²² (Hull, *Dimensions.*, 11)

²³ (ibid p.10) (Pedersen p.24, 26-28)

²⁴ (Lovecraft, *Tales*)

²⁵ (MacCormac, *Ethics.*, 200)

²⁶ (Hull, *Dimensions.*, 12) (Elferen p.87-8)

²⁷ (Matthews., *Abnormalities.*, 174, 177)

²⁸ (Elferen p.91)

“.. he dwells only on broad impressions of vast angles and stone surfaces-surfaces too great to belong to anything right or proper for this earth... I mention this talk about angles because it suggests something Wilcox had told me of his awful dreams. He said that the geometry of the dreamplace he saw as abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours. Now an unlettered seaman felt the same thing whilst gazing at the terrible reality”. (Call of Cthulhu)

The feelings that he wishes to transmit are those of weirdness which in turn evoke a sense of horror, fear, disgust, hopelessness, and savagery manifesting in the collision between the rational and non-rational²⁹.

Although Lovecraft's stories appear to be replete with rituals which summon alien forces or manifestation of portals able to move people across the cosmos, together with what appear to be manifestations of paranormal powers such as telepathy, within the narration these only manifest as being magical or occult in reality being a form of understanding so advanced that it appears incomprehensible to human eyes for the pure incapacity of our intelligence to understand certain principles of the cosmos³⁰. Employing the terms used by Boyer, Lovecraft's characters undergo revelational mystery experiences. Certainly, the mystery does not have a strict religious or connotation but they certainly manifest with the same intensity if we consider the subdivisions that are presented as part of revelational mystery the confrontation with cities constructed on non-Euclidean geometry the sensation of dreaminess and consequential terror connected to this alien feeling correspond to the dimensional mystery meaning something that cannot be understood in its entirety due to the intrinsic perceptual inability³¹. In this particular case we see researchers living in a three-dimensional reality confronting something that exists in a four-dimensional reality. These emotions are moreover not transmissible to anyone who has not experienced them as in the case of the facultative mystery and due to the cyclopean size the extensive mystery making it impossible to measure also finds its place in the cosmic horror.

Rudolph Otto: *Mysterium Tremendum*

Rudolph Otto was a German Lutheran theologian, scholar of comparative religions³². His work was mostly dedicated to the defense of religions against naturalist critique³³. In chapter 4 his book *on the*

²⁹ (Poole, *Lovecraft.*, 226-8) (Elferen p.88, 91-92)

³⁰ (Poole, *Lovecraft.*, 223)

³¹ (Matthews, *Abnormalities.*,175) (Poole, *Lovecraft.*, 215)

³² Adler, Joseph. "[Rudolf Otto's Concept of the Numinous](#)". *Gambier, Ohio: Kenyon College.*

³³ Alles, Gregory D. (2005). "[Otto, Rudolf](#)". *Encyclopedia of Religion. Farmington Hills, Michigan: Thomson Gale.*

Holy Rudolph Otto expands on the description of the Numinous, a profound non-rational experience at the heart of all religions through the concept of the *Mysterium Tremendum*. The latter describes feelings located between tremors of fear and awe in association to the divine. These descriptions are not unlike what are transmitted by Lovecraft in his stories and by Boyer in his analysis of the concept of mystery. Through this I will underline how the effects of revelational mystery transcend categories and are not relegated exclusively to one context. Otto begins by explaining the first concept of the *Mysterium Tremendum* by suggesting how in contrast to the ordinary pious and loving religious emotion there is one of a different kind which can be found in the practice of liturgies, rituals and in churches, he then continues:

“If we do so we shall find we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, *mysterium tremendum*. The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profane non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of-whom or what? In the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures”.

In this first passage we can observe similarities to definitions and feelings expressed by both Boyer and Lovecraft. There something frightening and outside the realm of ordinary understanding although it derives from the perception of something immense. It comes and leaves however maintaining a lasting impression not unlike the effects of terror that Lovecraft's main characters experience when they are confronted with the non-Euclidean architectures of the sunken city of R'leth in the *Call of Chtulhu*. Although Otto does explain that there is a core of goodness in the negative feelings that derive from the *Mysterium Tremendum*³⁴ the framing is rather ambiguous as “‘Religious dread' (or 'awe') would perhaps be a better designation. Its antecedent stage is 'daemonic dread' (cf. the horror of Pan) with its queer perversion, a sort of abortive off-shoot, the 'dread of ghosts'. It first begins to stir in the feeling of 'something uncanny', 'eerie' or 'weird'. It is

³⁴ (Otto, *Holy*,12-13)

this feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting-point for the entire religious development in history.³⁵

And moreover: “‘Daemons’ and ‘gods’ alike spring from this root, and all the products of ‘mythological apperception’ or ‘fantasy’ are nothing but different modes in which it has been objectified. And all ostensible explanations of the origin of religion in terms of animism or magic or folk psychology are doomed from the outset to wander astray and miss the real goal of their inquiry, unless they recognize this fact of our nature—primary, unique, underivable from anything else—to be the basic factor and the basic impulse underlying the entire process of religious evolution.”³⁶

The above reference underlines moreover the incapacity to understand the authenticity magical or folkloric practices with the use of scientific methods or to comprehend it. The similarities with the revelational mystery of the facultative kind are present. This description pervades the Lovecraftian cosmology through perceived magical practices which are in reality incomprehensible technologies outside of our realm of understanding.

The effects of the tremendum are moreover explained through its evolution from a primitive form which would have the emotions relate to blood running cold, creeping flesh a form of natural or instinctive terror towards ‘numinous dread’ which derives from primary instincts:

Before going on to consider the elements which unfold as the ‘tremendum’ develops, let us give a little further consideration to the first crude, primitive forms in which this ‘numinous dread’ or awe shows itself. It is the mark which really characterizes the so-called ‘Religion of Primitive Man’, and there it appears as ‘daemonic dread’ This crudely naive and primordial emotional disturbance, and the fantastic images to which it gives rise, are later overborne and ousted by more highly developed

forms of the numinous emotion, with all its mysteriously impelling power. But even when this has long attained its higher and purer mode of expression it is possible for the primitive types of excitation that were formerly a part of it to break out in the soul in all their original naivete and so to be experienced afresh. That this is so is shown by the potent attraction again and again exercised by the element

of horror and ‘shudder’ in ghost stories, even among persons of high all-round education. It is a remarkable fact that the physical reaction to which this unique ‘dread’ of the uncanny gives rise is also unique, and is not found in the case of any ‘natural’ fear or terror. We say: ‘my blood

³⁵ (ibid.,14)

³⁶ (ibid.,14)

ran icy cold and ' my flesh crept'. The ' cold blood ' feeling may be a symptom of ordinary, natural fear, but there is something non-natural or supernatural about the symptom of ' creeping flesh '. And anyone who is capable of more precise introspection must recognize that the distinction between such a ' dreads and natural fear is not simply one of degree and intensity. The awe or ' dread ' may indeed be so overwhelmingly great that it seems to penetrate to the very marrow, making the man ' s hair bristle and his limbs quake. But it may also steal upon him almost unobserved as the gentlest of agitations, a mere fleeting shadow passing across his mood. It has therefore nothing to do with intensity, and no natural fear passes over into it merely by being intensified. I may be beyond all measure afraid and terrified without there being even a trace of the feeling of uncanniness in my emotion.³⁷

This further description of fear and its association with the primitive is not unlike the reference that Lovecraft makes to fear being the most primal emotion of man which can be generated not only in people in specific contexts but also in those who have experience with rationality³⁸. It describes his conflict between the rational and non-rational. It is moreover something which survives the test of time:

Though the numinous emotion in its completest development shows a world of difference from the mere ' daemonic dread ', yet not even at the highest level does it belie its pedigree or kindred. Even when the worship of ' daemons ' has long since reached the higher level of worship of ' gods ', these gods still retain as ' numina ' something of the ' ghost' in the impress they make on the feelings of the worshipper, viz. the peculiar quality of the 'uncanny ' and ' awful ' , which survives with the quality of

exaltedness and sublimity or is symbolized by means of it. And this element, softened though it is, does not disappear even on the highest level of all, where the worship of God is at its purest. Its disappearance would be indeed an essential loss.³⁹

There is a sense of inherited fear that has an atavistic quality. This emerges in the buildings that where Lovecraft sets his stories. In the case of the rats in the walls there is a stratification of ritual sites which have however transported the sense of evil from the most ancient times through

³⁷ (Otto, *Holy*, 15)

³⁸ (Leavenworth, *Storyworld.*, 335)

³⁹ (Otto, *Holy*, 16)

centuries and millennia however carrying the feeling of horror which originated there. Further Otto describes an element of incomprehension of divine behavior in the following two citations:

But as regards the 'Wrath of Yahweh'. the strange features about it have for long been a matter for constant remark. In the first place, it is patent from many passages of the Old Testament that this 'Wrath' has no concern whatever with moral qualities. There is something very baffling in the way in which it 'is kindled' and manifested. It is, as has been well said, 'like a hidden force of nature', like stored-up electricity, discharging itself upon any one who comes too near. It is 'incalculable' and 'arbitrary.' Anyone who is accustomed to think of deity only by its rational attributes must see in this 'Wrath' mere caprice and willful passion. But such a view would have been emphatically rejected by the religious men of the Old Covenant, for to them the Wrath of God, so far from being a diminution of His Godhead, appears as a natural expression of it, an element of 'holiness' itself, and a quite indispensable one. And in this they are entirely right. This *opy* is nothing but the 'tremendum' itself, apprehended and expressed by the aid of a naive analogy from the domain of natural experience, in this case from the ordinary passional life of men. But naive as it may be, the analogy is most disconcertingly apt and striking; so much so that it will always retain its value, and for us no less than for the men of old be an inevitable way of expressing one element in the religious emotion. It cannot be doubted that, despite the protest of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, Christianity also has something to teach of the 'Wrath of God'.⁴⁰

It will be again at once apparent that in the use of this word we are not concerned with a genuine intellectual 'concept but only with a sort of illustrative substitute for a concept. 'Wrath' here is the 'ideogram' of a unique emotional moment in religious experience, a moment whose singularly daunting and awe-inspiring character must be gravely disturbing to those persons who will recognize nothing in the divine nature but goodness, gentleness, love, and a sort of confidential intimacy, in a word, only those aspects of God which turn towards the world of men.⁴¹

In this passage we see the conflict of the understanding of the with the wrath of god, where people who have a genuine intellectual understanding of god are violently confronted with manifestations of violence from the natural world interpreted as a sense of anger. Similarly the pantheon of deities that Lovecraft created follow similar principles of having incomprehensible motivations and are

⁴⁰ (ibid,16-17)

⁴¹ (Otto, *Holy*, 17)

unstoppable forces of nature which defy logic and are completely uncaring towards human existence:

This *opus* is thus quite wrongly spoken of as 'natural' wrath: rather it is an entirely non- or super-natural, i.e. numinous, quality. The rationalization process takes place when it begins to be filled in with elements derived from the moral reason: -righteousness in requital, and punishment for moral transgression. But it should be noted that the idea of the Wrath of God in the Bible is always a synthesis, in which the original is combined with the later meaning that has come to fill it in. Something supra-rational throbs and gleams, palpable and visible, in the 'Wrath of God', prompting to a sense of 'terror' that no 'natural' anger can arouse. Beside the Wrath or Anger of Yahweh stands the related expression 'Jealousy of Yahweh.' The state of mind denoted by the phrase 'being jealous for Yahweh' is also a numinous state of mind, in which features of the 'tremendum' pass over into the man who has experience of it.⁴²

It is not unlike the turning from love to fear in this rapid exchange of feelings between safety and indiscriminate sense of terror but also incomprehension by part of the followers. Even here Lovecraft would have seen much of his own ideas emerging. The fear of the unknown that he describes is effectively primitive (insert note on the fear of stuff by Lovecraft)

We have been attempting to unfold the implications of that aspect of the 'mysterium tremendum' indicated by the adjective, and the result so far may be summarized in two words, constituting, as before, what may be called an 'ideogram', rather than a concept proper, viz. 'absolute Unapproachability'. It will be felt at once that there is yet a further element which must be added, that, namely, of 'might', 'power', 'absolute overpoweringness'. We will take to represent this the term 'majestas', majesty - the more readily because any one with a feeling for language must detect a last faint trace of the numinous still clinging to the word. The 'tremendum' may then be rendered more adequately *tremenda majestas* or 'aweful majesty'. This second element of majesty may continue to be vividly preserved, where the first, that of unapproachability, recedes and dies away, as may be seen, for example, in Mysticism. It is especially in relation to this element of majesty or absolute overpoweringness that the creature consciousness, of which we have already spoken, comes upon the scene, as a sort of shadow or subjective reflection of it. Thus, in contrast to 'the overpowering' of which we are conscious as an object over against the self, there is the feeling of one's own

⁴² (ibid.,17)

abasement, of being but ' dust and ashes ' and nothingness. And this forms the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility.⁴³

Finally we are confronted with the concept of overpoweringness or being overwhelmed by something which has terrifying qualities, the *tremenda majestas* is a description of a feeling of incapacity before an imposing and unmeasurable force. In Lovecraft this is expressed plentifully in almost all of his narratives. Chtulhu is one prime example. It is further described in the next passage:

These are the characteristic notes of Mysticism in all its forms, however otherwise various in content. For one of the chiefest and most general features of Mysticism is just this self-depreciation (so plainly parallel to the case of Abraham) the estimation of the self, of the personal 'I', as something not perfectly or essentially real, or even as mere nullity, a self-depreciation which comes to demand its own fulfilment in practice in rejecting the delusion of selfhood, and so makes for the annihilation of the self. And on the other hand Mysticism leads to a valuation of the transcendent object of its reverence as that which through plenitude of being stands supreme and absolute, so that the finite self, contrasted with it becomes conscious even in its nullity that 'I am nought, Thou art all'. There is no thought in this of any causal relation between God, the creator, and the self, the creature. The point from which speculation starts is not a 'consciousness of absolute dependence' - of myself as result and effect of a divine cause for that would in point of fact lead to insistence upon the reality of the self; it starts from a consciousness of the absolute superiority or supremacy of a power other than myself, and it is only as it falls back upon ontological terms to achieve its end-terms generally borrowed from natural science - that that element of the *tremendum* originally apprehended as 'plenitude of power becomes transmuted into 'plenitude of being'.⁴⁴ This leads again to the mention of Mysticism. No mere inquiry into the genesis of a thing can throw any light upon its essential nature, and it is hence immaterial to us how Mysticism historically arose. But essentially Mysticism is the stressing to a very high degree, indeed the overstressing, of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion; and it is only intelligible when so understood. The various phases and factors of the non-rational may receive varying emphasis, and the type of Mysticism will differ according as some or others fall into the background. What we have been analysing, however, is a feature that recurs in all forms of Mysticism everywhere, and it is nothing but the 'creature-consciousness' stressed to the utmost and to excess, the expression meaning, if we may repeat the contrast already made, not 'feeling of our createdness' but 'feeling of our

⁴³ (ibid.,18)

⁴⁴ (Otto, *Holy*,19)

creaturehood that is, the consciousness of the littleness of every creature in face of that which is above all creatures. A characteristic common to all types of Mysticism is the Identification, in different degrees of completeness, of the personal self with the transcendent Reality. This identification has a source of its own, with which we are not here concerned, and springs from 'moments' of religious experience which would require separate treatment. 'Identification' alone, however, is not enough for Mysticism; it must be Identification with the Something that is at once absolutely supreme in power and reality and wholly non-rational. And it is among the mystics that we most encounter this element of religious consciousness.⁴⁵

The mysticism that acknowledges the non-rational element as Boyer puts it in the revelatory mysticism subcategory mystery are present in Otto's descriptions of the *mysterium tremendum* as well.

There is a considerable overlap and consensus between Boyer, Lovecraft and Otto in the understanding and classification of mystery. The acknowledgement of the existence of particular forms of knowledge that cannot be transmitted by conventional forms of measurements or by logical verbal communication and is relegated exclusively to specific contexts. The form of knowledge is overall outside of the realm of conventionality and it is moreover of a temporary realization which however lingers at the back of the mind. Although we do live in a world where transparency is becoming desirable, it does not imply the complete annihilation of mystery. This is not because information security and privacy are also contemplated in our understanding of knowledge exchange but also due to the inherent inability to share some forms of understanding if not through direct experience. The characters in Lovecraft's stories are constantly confronted with the incapacity to transmit what they see and perceive. Similarly, Otto describes the capacity of understanding experiences of the numinous or transcendental only in forms which are non-rational however generally understood by all those who have shared the same encounter. Boyer does include this possibility in his classification of mystery only to those who participate in the mystical and the religious participation required to perceive the *mysterium* that he describes.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would state that some mysteries protect themselves exactly due to their exclusivity and special qualities. Only very few people would be able to run the risk, have the necessary skills and qualities to confront something such as the *mysterium tremendum* or cosmic fear. This

⁴⁵ (ibid.,19-20)

moreover comes at a great cost for the sake of knowledge due to its mind shattering qualities and exploitation of primordial fear. As Boyer once more puts it some forms of knowledge do remain such as they are a mystery in themselves as an essential quality. None of the people who share the experience of the mysterium are effectively able to convey its meaning, especially if their effects are going to be mentally harmful. In the discussion of the Numinous, it is the mysterious wrath of god that terrorized the religious faithful who had an ethical impression of god. Within the world of Lovecraft mysteries are exactly able to protect themselves due to the inherent destructive nature which they hold and issue warnings to those who decide to wander too far.

Although different in their perspectives of reality, the sense of awe that was described by Otto as existing in a theological perspective has survived into a perhaps counter intuitive strong mechanistic viewpoint held by Lovecraft. This however did not weaken its power in the capacity to shake humanity to its foundations.

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