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Existential Reactions to Modernity: An Analysis of Lovecraft's Nihilistic Cosmicism & Dostoevsky's Christian Existentialism

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EXISTENTIAL REACTIONS TO MODERNITY: AN ANALYSIS OF LOVECRAFT'S NIHILISTIC COSMICISM &

DOSTOEVSKY'S CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISM

By Olivia Maikisch

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ABSTRACT

Literary representations of existentialism demonstrate the movement's efficacy as a tool for ideological and personal exploration, particularly as it pertains to issues of identity-formation, the Other, and rising concerns about modernized life. Despite their differences in genre, location, and time period, both H.P. Lovecraft and Fyodor Dostoevsky in their fiction greatly emphasize facets of existentialism as a response to their cultural concerns about modernity. They highlight complex relationships between socio-political concerns, philosophy, and literature in their different uses of existentialist themes. This study places both Dostoevsky's Christian existentialism and Lovecraft's nihilistic cosmicism within the existing spectrum of existential thought. The first chapter considers three of Lovecraft's novellas from The Cthulhu Mythos to argue that Lovecraft's deep concerns about Otherness demonstrate the overlap between his nihilistic cosmicism, and the notion of existential anxiety as described by Heidegger. The second chapter explores the Christian existentialism in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* as the intersection of an ascetic Christian tradition, and the Russian philosophical concept of *sobornost*—which emphasizes ideas similar to Kierkegaard's views. The final chapter places both authors and their individual concerns about modernity in conversation with one another, to highlight the fluidity of the philosophical movement as a response to modernity.

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INTRODUCTION

Rooted in different literary genres, H.P. Lovecraft and Fyodor Dostoevsky are two writers not often paired within critical conversation. As a mid-19th century novelist, Dostoevsky utilizes his literature to grapple with theological, philosophical, and political problems as a result of his own harrowing encounters with the Russian legal system and revolutionary culture. As an early 20th century American author, Lovecraft's serialized weird horror bridges the gap between the fictitious and the real, inspiring readers to confront the unsettling question of just what lies beyond the stars (or, perhaps, what lies in waiting, shadowed in the mundanity of day-to-day existence). Despite vast differences in time periods, hemispheres, genres, and the underlying intentions of their works, Lovecraft and Dostoevsky have two fundamental elements in common: first, their works both intrinsically confront major existential questions; and second, both utilize their works as an attempt to resist modernity through unique deferments toward existentialism. With novels that center on conflicts between both physically and ideologically opposing forces—as well as the despair inherent to truly understanding one's own existence—both Lovecraft and Dostoevsky's literature contributes significantly to an already-established continuum of existentialist thinkers.

Before engaging in a discussion of both authors, it is important to acknowledge the historical context of existentialism, as well as understand the thematic overtones of the philosophy itself. Emerging mostly from European thinkers during the 19th and 20th century, existentialism, at its core, developed as a reaction to the Enlightenment and the rise of industrialization, as well as the problems of alienation that modern life produced. Because of this, existentialism stresses viewing philosophy as "a way of life" (Burnham), rather than the antiquated, Enlightenment understanding of philosophy as evaluating life and the world from an

outside, removed perspective. The emphasis on individual, lived, emotional experience carries into the general thematic outline of existentialism in its various emphases, addressing topics such as authenticity, alienation, despair, freedom, and the absurdity of existence, to name a select few. In direct opposition to the significance of reason inherent to Enlightenment ideals, existentialism asserts an intrinsic absurdity to existence, where an individual's "freedom will not only be undetermined by knowledge or reason, but from the point of view of the latter [their] freedom will even appear absurd" (Burnham), an idea we see explicitly expressed in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. As a general philosophical movement, existentialism exists in response to modernity and the problem of existence in rapidly changing intellectual and industrial spheres. Due to these social, political, economic, and philosophical changes, existentialism begins the process of determining how to generate meaning in the vacuum of modernity. In a similar vein, both Lovecraft and Dostoevsky grapple with the same issues of despair and alienation that appear inherent to modernity, illustrating the degree to which their literature performs a similar function in the way that existentialism performs a philosophically reactionary purpose.

In the same way that almost all literature facilitates the transfer of knowledge, ideas, and ideologies, so too do the works of both authors inflect on the larger philosophical conversation surrounding existentialism. In my analysis of the existentialist qualities inherent to both author's works, I rely on my own constructed definition of existentialism as an anchoring point, viewing existentialism as a philosophy that seeks to understand human existence through the experiential subjectivity of each individual, often emphasizing authenticity as a measure of the human experience. This definition emerges as a result of comparing various tenets of existentialism,

primarily as described by Heidegger[1] and Sartre[2] in their numerous discussions on the nature of

Being. For my textual analysis of both authors, I also rely heavily on the concept of alienation[3] as

a measure of the degree of existential representation in either author's works. Ultimately,

alienation from both oneself and the world functions at the core of existentialism, with this

estrangement producing the sensation of anxiety or nausea as noted by Heidegger and Sartre.

Both Lovecraft and Dostoevsky demonstrate characters that are confronted with the "true" nature

of their reality or existence, and both describe the distinct alienation from themselves and the

world that their characters experience as a result. In the first two chapters, I explore the degrees

to which this alienation is represented within either author's works, beginning more broadly

with the concept of alienation from the world at large—comparable to Freud's notion of the

uncanny or *unheimlich*—and then I eventually hone in on alienation from the self to illustrate the

all-encompassing, unsettling sensation produced by personal existential realization.

Unique to the chapter analyzing Dostoevsky, however, is my incorporation of

Kierkegaard alongside Heidegger and Sartre's ideas. More precisely, I utilize Kierkegaard's

notion of despair[4] to illustrate exactly where Dostoevsky's literature transforms from

existentialist to *Christian* existentialist. In the chapter, "Despair is a Sickness Unto

Death,"—which I rely heavily on for my analysis of *Notes from Underground*—Kierkegaard

discusses three main 'types' of despair: "In despair not to be conscious of having a self (not

despair in the strict sense); In despair not to will to be oneself; In despair to will to be oneself"

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[1]Guignon, Charles B. and Derek Pereboom "Authenticity." *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, vol. 2, Hackett Publishing Company, 2001, pp. 203–210.

[2] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, 1993.

[3] Crowell, Steven, "Existentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/existentialism/>.

[4] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XIX, Volume 19: Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, 1980. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hrkd. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.

(13). While I loosely incorporate the first two in my analysis, the third type of despair is what I most readily use to illustrate the Underground Man as a figure trapped within his own existential nightmare. By being unable to fully actualize his own existence due to the overexertion of his free will in an effort to justify his autonomy, the underground man serves as an example for the despair generated by living a life void of existential fulfillment. While Dostoevsky does incorporate other Christian existential themes similar to those espoused by Kierkegaard, I primarily focus on Kierkegaard's notion of despair, mainly due to its relative similarity to Heidegger's discussion of the inherent problems of existence as it pertains to consciousness and existential awareness.

Analyzing both authors as contributors to existentialism requires an acknowledgement of the vastly different ways that both writers are perceived and understood. Within the realm of both literary criticism and philosophy at large, Dostoevsky's literature is already recognized as existentialist in nature—with *Notes from Underground* considered to be one of the first existentialist novels. His literary synthesis of theological and existential inquiries more precisely solidifies him as a Christian existentialist, with a perspective greatly similar to Kierkegaard's—namely, in Dostoevsky's repeated insistence of a unity between temporal existence and a transcendent spirituality as a more fulfilling path for one's life. It is within Part I, Chapter II, of *Notes*, that the underground man affirms that "to be too conscious is an illness—a real, thoroughgoing illness" (4), describing his own burdensome consciousness and the inertia that it produces within him. This affirms Dostoevsky's understanding of the inherent suffering of human existence (and the need for spirituality) early-on in his 1864 novel, and he infuses the work with a profound philosophical and political argument about the individual, society, and the ongoing effort to ascribe meaning to one's life. As one of the early existentialist novels, *Notes*

engages with many larger themes, with the most prominent perhaps being the relationship between an individual and their respective society, and the novel explores how the corruption of society produces negative psychological ramifications for the individual. And yet, the novel also more broadly engages with the complicated effort of the individual to actualize their own existence, as well as navigate a society that seeks to impose social roles upon the individual. Even more pertinent to existentialism as a whole, *Notes from Underground* explores the struggle of attempting to define the human condition, and demonstrates (in the novel's refutation of rationalism) that human beings are inherently irrational creatures that will act against their own self-interest in order to prove their capacity for free will. Through the exploration of these themes, Dostoevsky describes the complexities that an individual faces in the effort to define themselves and their function within the more encompassing machine of society.

However, as it pertains to existentialist discourse, Lovecraft's works seem largely unrecognized. Perhaps this gap is a result of the lack of overt philosophical intentionality behind Lovecraft's literature—this makes sense, considering his works lack an open political or philosophical overtone in the same way that Dostoevsky's works do. For Dostoevsky, nearly all of his works possess either a significant philosophical, theological, or polemical agenda. However, this is not to say that Lovecraft performed a total excision of philosophy from his works when he wrote them. As Michel Houellebecq notes, "there is something not really literary about Lovecraft's work" (44). Rather, his works seem to explore a philosophically "gray" area—not fully nihilistic, but also not fully existentialist in the traditional sense. Whereas Nietzsche's nihilism[5] interrogates and dismantles concepts of morality, values, rules, and certainties motivating human existence, Lovecraft's narratives seem to avoid a conclusive stance

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[5] Anderson, R. Lanier, "Friedrich Nietzsche", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/nietzsche/>.

on any of the aforementioned issues. Instead, he focuses mainly on two components of existence: 1. the non-existence of a divine presence, 2. the utter insignificance of human beings when confronted with the cosmos-at-large. By avoiding direct mention of anything else, Lovecraft's literary philosophy of cosmicism[6] seems highly fluid in its interrogation of the nature of human existence—mainly, that humanity simply does not matter when juxtaposed against the larger vision of the universe. Naturally, this leaves significant room to explore how both nihilism and existentialism are differently represented in Lovecraft's literature, as well as how the varied weird horror elements in his stories represent both in diverse ways. In terms of criticism dealing with such concerns, there seems to be a partial void when it comes to critical analysis of Lovecraftian literature, and a near total lack as his works pertain to established philosophy. While S.T. Joshi has emerged as the foremost contributor to Lovecraft research with his biographical accounts, extensive narrative revisions, and analysis of Lovecraft's cosmicism, more generalized Lovecraftian scholarship possesses a significant deficiency in elevating Lovecraft's weird fiction to the realm of critical, academic study. This leaves much to be desired in the way of understanding how we can engage with the ideological implications of Lovecraft's literature and its vast influence in popular culture.

Initially, my intention was to analyze numerous works from both authors in an effort to more comprehensively understand the existential influences in their literature. However, for the sake of brevity, I have chosen to focus on a much smaller set of works. For my analysis of Lovecraft, I emphasize three important stories within The Cthulhu Mythos: "The Shadow over Innsmouth," "At the Mountains of Madness," and "The Shadow Out of Time." These works

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[6] The given definition among nearly all sources is that cosmicism affirms that "there is no recognizable divine presence, such as God, in the universe, and that humans are particularly insignificant in the larger scheme of intergalactic existence." There is also an implied cosmic indifference underscoring all of Lovecraft's works and cosmicism as a whole.

seem to best represent the ideas I discuss regarding Otherness, alienation, and the insidious influence of racism and xenophobia on Lovecraft's literature as a whole. For my analysis of Dostoevsky and his Christian existentialism, I have decided to exclusively analyze *Notes from Underground*, with passing mentions of *Crime and Punishment* and *Brothers Karamazov* as they apply to Dostoevsky's belief in the necessity of a transcendent spirituality in one's life. This allows for a more textual-based analysis of both authors, rather than relying solely on a thematic analysis of their large number of works, which potentially would have prevented more fruitful close-readings. That being said, I am aware of the large body of literature produced by both authors, but I believe that the works I have chosen best represent the existential influences expressed within a majority of both authors' writings.

As an additional qualifier, my analysis of both authors is not rooted in singularly analyzing either author, but in placing them in conversation through a comparison of both authors as different existentialist thinkers. While Lovecraft's works seem to present human existence as an insignificant speck of meaninglessness, Dostoevsky's works assert a connection with spirituality as an avenue to generate meaning. Despite these vast differences in thought, they are ultimately united by their reactionary ideologies. It is only through the existentialist elements present in their works that they are able to express deeply-rooted concerns about the looming threat of modernity on what they believed to be a fleeting past. For Dostoevsky, he perceived the rise of Western influence on Russian culture as a type of cultural colonialism that promoted nihilism, and his continued idealism as it pertained to civil liberties demonstrates his grievances with the Russian legal system[7], as well as the trauma that he endured as a result. For Lovecraft, modernity remained akin to a type of poison that threatened all of the economic,

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[7] This is expressed most readily in *Brothers Karamazov* with Dmitiri's trial, as the novel is inlaid with a critique of the modernized, reformed legal system that was perceived as being less relational than the previous one.

social, and racial boundaries characteristic of his Providence childhood. As a result of the period

of time he spent living in New York, Lovecraft's hatred of minorities became a festering wound,

and permeated into the core of his most popular stories—from the construction of alien figures,

to the language used to describe the existential horrors unfolding in his novels, his aversion to

modernity and anyone perceived as Other became one of the main influences underscoring his

writings (Houellebecq 125). However, as noted at the conclusion of "The Shadow Over

Innsmouth,"—Lovecraft's short story in which the WASP-ish narrator realizes his shared

ancestry with the monstrous alien race from the sea—suggests a deeper angst about modernity, in

which Lovecraft's despair extends far beyond his racist, xenophobic politics. Within my third

chapter, I discuss the two authors' shared aversion for modernity and the existentialist

implications of their writings, particularly as their novels serve as platforms for ideology. It is

only through understanding and comparing both authors' deferments toward existentialism as a

coping mechanism that we can recognize the inherent philosophical implications of their works,

as well as how existentialism can be creatively utilized as a way to understand the human

experience and all of the fears that accompany it.

CHAPTER I: ALIENATION OF WORLD AND SELF IN THE CTHULHU MYTHOS

Environmental Production of Alienation

Throughout nearly all of Lovecraft's stories, whether hinted at subtly or brought to the forefront, is the notion that the boundaries between the external world and the internal human experience of subjectivity are significantly blurred. In "The Call of Cthulhu," the protagonist notes, "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" (355). Through this idea, Lovecraft asserts the universe as a space where humans can come to understand the nature of their existence, with this serving as a key point from which the horror of his weird fiction emerges. This aligns significantly with existentialism's revolt against the traditional subject-object split, which would assert firm boundaries between the internal world of human subjectivity and that of the external world. For the sake of my analysis, I am utilizing Heidegger's collective discussion of *Umwelt*[8] as an existential basis for Lovecraft's usage of the environment as a potential source of alienation. In this sense, Lovecraft uses both the ontical and ontological components of the environment in which characters and human figures interact. We see this in the form of either interactions between the protagonist and other characters/cosmic figures, or through interactions between the protagonist and their environment—either a familiar environment, such as a mysterious New England town, or an unfamiliar environment, like the discovery of ancient ruins built by a lost civilization, as seen within "At the Mountains of Madness".

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[8] "The Worldhood of the World," Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Blackwell Publishers, 1962, pp. 91-148.

Within cosmicism, Lovecraft attributes total insignificance to humanity, especially highlighted when juxtaposed with the larger universe. In a 1927 letter to Farnsworth Wright, the editor of *Weird Tales*, Lovecraft speaks of this, noting that all of his narratives,

> are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large… [and that] to achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all (2.284).

Although this refers to the process of creating his literature, these ideas that underpin his literary philosophy are a major source informing how Lovecraft viewed and interacted with the larger world. As a result of his interest in astronomy at a young age, Lovecraft came to understand that humanity, morality, and collective truths are insignificant—with this notion becoming a varied source of comfort, fear, and inspiration at numerous points throughout his life. However, it is not the vastness of the cosmos that itself generates the contingency of humanity's concepts of meaning and value. Instead, Lovecraft asserts that such meaninglessness has *always* existed, but that it often becomes clearer to us once we perceive the vastness of the universe, as well as its indifference toward us—an idea that mimics the notion of existential absurdity.[9]

It is through Lovecraft's exploration of the dynamic between the environment and our perception of existence that he generates alienation in both his protagonists and readers alike. This analysis assumes that through the experience of reading Lovecraft's fiction, readers experience a similar alienating sensation as the fictional characters, with this inhering on the

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[9] Nagel, Thomas. "The Absurd." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 68, no. 20, 1971, pp. 716–727. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2024942.

premise that Lovecraft's fiction-writing generates the intended unsettling reaction characteristic of weird-horror, thereby forging a connection between the reader and the character. As a result, the reader may begin to see their world through a temporarily-modified lens, forcing them to confront the potential existential horror of their own existence. In many ways, Lovecraft's fiction serves the same function as Heidegger's *Angst*, in that it potentially pulls readers out of the "falling"[10] they might be experiencing, and into a recognition of the insignificance of their own existence. They, too, become akin to a character in a weird-horror novel, forced to confront the meaninglessness of their life and the replicability of their socially-accepted roles.

The alienation of Lovecraft's characters from their fictitious world is a direct result of his stories often forcing the fantastic or weird into the normalcy of mundane life—a process that destroys traditional conceptions of reality, proving what they know to be nothing more than the illusion of complete knowledge. Mark Fisher, in talking about the weird and how it functions as a source of estrangement in Lovecraft, notes that the alienation of a character from their environment emerges from "a catastrophic integration of the outside into an interior that is retrospectively revealed to be a delusive envelope, a sham" (Fisher 16). It is within that process of revealing—where long-held conceptions of truth are challenged—and the blurring between the boundaries of internal and external, that the true horror of Lovecraft's narratives emerge. In this sense, Lovecraft's use of the environment as a source of alienation performs similarly to existentialism's "alienated" self, though the issue of alienation is far more multifaceted under existentialism than how it is represented within Lovecraft. Whether from the perspective of existential psychoanalysis—which asserts that we are alienated from our own subconscious—or,

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[10] Heidegger describes the condition of 'falling' as getting lost in the mundanity of day-to-day existence, as a result of our continued absorption into the social practices and spheres around us. We get lost in mundane chores and the everyday rituals approved by the 'they', in which our choices and actions become nothing more than 'what one does' and we lack a focused stance to our lives.

more largely, in coming to understand that we not only make meaning of the world, but are thus made to mean by others through their own process of meaning-making, existentialism adopts numerous angles from which alienation of the self can occur.

For Lovecraft, what could be considered the "alienated" self is more singularly the direct result of truths being dismantled through reflection on and perpetual interaction with the external world. Within these encounters, characters are often forced into mental ruin, illustrating the consequences of cosmicism and its psychological incompatibility with humanity. We are incapable of processing just how insignificant we are, especially as we evaluate the absurdity and contingency of our notions of meaning and value—that they are not rooted in any eternal or objective truth. This feeling is then exacerbated once we understand the indifference of the universe to us, and suddenly we understand the true extent to which our lives are void of objective meaning or purpose. Echoing this, the very opening lines of "The Call of Cthulhu" state that "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" (355). For Lovecraft, the inevitability of us discovering our own insignificance is a sort of looming ruin on the horizon—particularly as the sciences advance toward attempting to understand the rest of the universe, which demonstrates how the encounters that we have with the externality of the universe inexorably leads us to becoming alienated from our environments.

A significant example of the external world serving as a source of realization and alienation within Lovecraft's stories occurs in "The Shadow over Innsmouth," where the narrator, a student studying antiquarian architecture and artifacts, visits Innsmouth, Massachusetts, only to come to realize that the New England seaport is home to something

distinctly otherworldly. While this story will be discussed at greater length within my section analyzing Otherness, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" utilizes the environment to invoke alienation in the main character. From the very beginning of the narrative, in taking a bus to "rumor-shadowed Innsmouth" (817), the narrator immediately notes that "the smell of the sea took on ominous implications" (817) and that the dilapidation of the town "conveyed with offensive clearness the idea of wormy decay" (817). Just in his first glance of Innsmouth, the town serves the purpose of becoming a foreign, alienating place. The surrounding areas, in being traditional New England spaces, provide a distinct contrast to Innsmouth, casting the seaport as a space that is 'unfamiliar among the familiar.' Within that interplay of the familiar/unfamiliar, the narrator comments on the utter foreignness of a town "dearth of visible life" (817). Innsmouth—even prior to the reveal that it remains inhabited by amphibian hybrids—serves as an external space in complete opposition to the traditional New England areas surrounding it. The story begins in Newburyport, with the narrator seeking to travel to Arkham (a fictional town created by Lovecraft), and Innsmouth is nothing more than a location between the two, accessible only by an old bus that "looks like a terrible rattletrap" (809). Through the juxtaposition of Innsmouth alongside these two towns, as well as mentioning others—both real and fictional, such as Manuxet and Ispwich—Lovecraft creates a topological map of the familiar, that of which certainly doesn't include Innsmouth. This asserts the seaport as a separate, foreign space, forcing the narrator to confront a sort of unknown, alienating place upon his arrival.

It is within the integration of the unfamiliar into the familiar that Lovecraft achieves the distinct result of alienating his characters, as well as inspiring alienation in his readers. To refer back to Mark Fisher's analysis of the weird, Lovecraft's insertion of the unfamiliar among the familiar promotes "an interplay, an exchange, a confrontation and indeed a conflict between this

world and others" (Fisher 19). That interplay functions on numerous levels within Lovecraft's narratives, and demonstrates how it is through the continued interaction between a character and the externality of their environment that alienation can be produced. Take, for instance, the reaction provided by the narrator in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" when he sees a piece of jewelry on display that is associated with Innsmouth: "I soon saw that my uneasiness had a second and perhaps equally potent source residing in the pictorial and mathematical suggestions of the strange designs. The patterns all hinted of remote secrets and unimaginable abysses in time and space, and the monotonously aquatic nature of the reliefs became almost sinister" (814). Although he is describing a tiara, the descriptions provided demonstrate that the jewelry somehow retains a distinct foreignness and otherworldliness that contrasts with the positioning of the narrator. This difference of the unfamiliar (the jewelry) invading the interior of the familiar (the environment, being that the tiara is actively displayed in a historical society in Newburyport) generates an alienation as a result of that 'invasion.'

Furthermore, it is the actual townspeople of Innsmouth that provides the narrator with the experience of alienation as a result of the environment. While this does coincide with my eventual discussion of the Otherness of the townspeople, I want to briefly discuss how the people function as a sort of physical, living element of the town itself. Considering that Innsmouth as a whole is a sequestered, near-vacant town, the people that the narrator interacts with at the beginning of his trip to Innsmouth serve as a means of making the narrator feel uncomfortable and alienated from his environment. For the few people he does see, they walk as "lone individuals, and silent knots of two or three" (819), never speaking with him. The narrator eventually finds solace in asking a manager at a local grocery store about the town, being sure to note that the boy was *not* from Innsmouth. Sharing in the narrator's feelings of unease, the clerk

describes the people as "furtive and seldom seen as animals that live in burrows, and one could hardly imagine how they passed the time apart from their desultory fishing" (821). Through the comparison of these people to animals, Lovecraft establishes an immediate sub-human quality to them, often writing them as nothing more than elements of the background as the narrator travels through Innsmouth, generating an even greater sense of perturbation for narrator and reader alike. Even further, Lovecraft additionally uses the absence of the townspeople as a means of inspiring an even deeper sense of anxiety. At one point, when touring the town during the day, the narrator notes that "the sight of such endless avenues of fishy-eyed vacancy and death, and the thought of such linked infinities of black, brooding compartments given over to cobwebs and memories and the conqueror worm, start up vestigial fears and aversions that not even the stoutest philosophy can disperse" (824). The empty houses and streets, void of the same people that produce unease for the narrator, stirs even more apprehension. It is through the consistency of this apprehension—generated by both the town itself and the people within it—that demonstrate how Lovecraft utilizes the external world as a source of alienation.

While "The Shadow over Innsmouth" demonstrates how Lovecraft uses the externality of a protagonist encountering other creatures as a means of generating alienation, "At the Mountains of Madness" demonstrates this through an encounter with the world itself. Featuring a group of scientists on an expedition to the Antarctic, the protagonist, William Dyer, recounts the horrific creatures and alien city that they find—ultimately concluding with a warning to another group of scientists, hoping to deter their own exploration of the area. In this novella, the first glimpse of the "jagged line of witch-like cones and pinnacles" (744-745) constituting only a portion of what would eventually become the "Cyclopean city of no architecture known to man or human imagination" (746) forces the rescue crew to face something of the utterly beyond.

Through this encounter, Lovecraft asserts that the Earth itself can become a site of cosmic horror and alienation. Further embedding the narrative with that notion, Dyer notes: "That seething, half luminous cloud-background held ineffable suggestions of a vague, ethereal *beyondness* far more than terrestrially spatial; and gave appalling reminders of the utter remoteness, separateness, desolation, and aeon-long death of this untrodden and unfathomed austral world" (745). Dually, Lovecraft not only creates a connection with the land as invoking a sense of non-belonging, but he infuses Earth's landscape—something of a relatively familiar nature—with the same foreignness eventually found in the exploration of the Cyclopean city in order to deconstruct the illusion of familiarity itself. In many ways, the assertion of the instability of what is familiar echoes many of the ideas expressed within existentialist discourse, precisely in how we can step back from the familiar and the everyday conditions of existence to find that the things around us are inevitably uncanny—where we feel a sense of separation from what was once decidedly familiar.

Through the setting alone, Lovecraft forces readers to confront preconceptions about human reality, showing instead the Earth (and, more widely, the universe) as a foreign, alienating body. While just the glimpse of the city's spires produces this type of alienation, it is the actual impromptu exploration into the depths of the Cyclopean city—and the frantic fleeing out of it—that produces the true breakdown of reality for both Dyer and Danforth. At the height of their escape from not only the archaic city, but what they come to identify as one of the "daemoniac shoggoths" (802), Dyer recollects the experience as occurring only in "dream-fragments involving no memory of volition, details, or physical exertion," going on to note that "it was as if we floated in a nebulous world or dimension without time, causation, [or] orientation" (802). This filters into what Lovecraft affirms as the alienation of the self from reality. Acknowledging

the damage of this alienation process, toward the end of the narrative, Dyer expresses the belief that "it is absolutely necessary, for the peace and safety of mankind, that some of earth's dark, dead corners and unplumbed depths be let alone" (805). While this is in reference to a fear of rousing nightmarish creatures that may begin their conquests of Earth, it certainly hints at the larger themes of how perceiving and understanding the weight of one's ontological responsibility—one's responsibility for oneself and the world—serves as an almost psychologically-destructive space for self-reflection.

In fully comprehending the importance of Lovecraft's use of externality and how it contributes more largely to his cosmicism, it remains critical to engage with some of the biographical factors that influenced the development of his existential perspective. His narratives were inspired primarily through a series of night terrors he experienced at a young age, as well as his love for the antiquity of the 18th century, and the "philosophical dread regarding the starry voids overhead" (Franch and Macrobert 35). Among other factors, including his love of astronomy and a series of traumatic incidents related to mental illness within his mother and father, it was within his childhood nightmares that Lovecraft experienced an intense terror that directly became the type of terror he infused into his narratives. In a 1916 letter to an early correspondent of his, he noted that at the age of six,

> I began to have nightmares of the most hideous description, peopled with things which I called "night-gaunts"--a compound word of my own coinage (perhaps the idea of these figures came from an edition de luxe of *Paradise Lost* with illustrations by Dore, which I discovered one day in the east parlour). In dreams they were wont to whirl me through space at a sickening rate of speed, the while fretting & impelling me with their detestable tridents. (1.019)

Having been effectively haunted by the intensity of these dreams in his childhood, Lovecraft's early life was, in part, characterized by a marked terror, as well as a sort of emotional paralysis that prevented him from engaging in what was to be deemed a 'normal' life. In 1908, at the age of 18, Lovecraft experienced an episode of debilitating depression, where he was "so exhausted by the sheer burden of consciousness & mental & physical activity that [he] had to drop out of school for a greater or lesser period & take a complete rest from all responsibilities" (4.698). Although his mental health issues began far earlier into his life—he regularly contemplated suicide in his early teens and often biked to visit the location where he intended to drown himself (Franch and Macrobert)—it is within the turmoil of his thoughts that we see the role that the cosmos played in his life. The darkness that seemed a persistent shadow over his consciousness, as well as his frequent episodes of suicidal ideation, were seemingly only assuaged by his love of and curiosity surrounding the cosmos and the unknown. Lovecraft himself noted that "certain elements—notably scientific curiosity & a sense of world drama—held me back… Much in the universe baffled me, yet I knew I could pry the answers out of books if I lived and studied longer" (4.682). Throughout his life, the importance of astronomy and the unknown served as a critical reason for him to keep living.

And so, is it through this notion that we see the paradoxical nature of Lovecraft's relationship to the universe. Within much of his literature, the externality of his narratives—whether displayed through interactions between a protagonist and the outside world, or a protagonist and other alienating figures—often serves an inherently negative function, resulting in a sort of 'alienated self.' Yet, the externality of the cosmos and the intrigue it inspired served a positive function in keeping Lovecraft from committing suicide. Conversely, the scope of the universe absolutely terrified him, contributing to the sense of existential, cosmic dread that

he eventually interred within his narratives. This interplay of fear and intrigue produces what

Fisher refers to as the sort of Lacanian *fascination* of Lovecraft's narratives. He notes,

> Accordingly, it is not horror but fascination—albeit a fascination usually mixed with a
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> certain trepidation—that is integral to the concept of the weird. But I would say this is
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> also integral to the concept of the weird itself—the weird cannot only repel, it must also
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> compel our attention...Fascination in Lovecraft is a form of Lacanian *jouissance*: an
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> enjoyment that entails the inextricability of pleasure and pain...That is to say it transforms
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> an ordinary object causing displeasure into a Thing which is both terrible and alluring
>
> which can no longer be libidinally classified as either positive or negative. The Thing
>
> overwhelms, it cannot be contained, but it fascinates. (17)

This fascination, which underscores not only Lovecraft's perception of the cosmos, but remains a

critical component of his narratives, serves an important function when analyzing his cosmicist

philosophy. In the same way that "nothingness is the source of not only absolute freedom but

also existential horror and emotional anguish" (Pratt) for existentialists, Lovecraft's cosmicism

and its representation in his literature produces fascination (underscored by *jouissance*), that

creates a similar dynamic of horror and intrigue critical to existentialism. To refer back to "The

Shadow over Innsmouth,"—though these types of lines can be found in nearly all of his

works—the narrator, when looking at the tiara associated with Innsmouth, notes that "the longer

I looked, the more the thing fascinated me; and in this fascination there was a curiously

disturbing element hardly to be classified or accounted for" (813). This combination of horror

and intrigue, ultimately culminating in the desire for a character to experience more of a thing or

place, echoes the duality of existentialism as it pertains to the problem of existence.

The Invasion of the Other

Lovecraft's use of Otherness is perhaps the most noticeable aspect of both his writing as a whole, as well as the unique brand of weird horror that he employs. Through the use of an Other, Lovecraft purposefully generates a distinct alienation that estranges his readers from the fictional world that he manufactures, the realistic world inhabited by the readers themselves, and, more subtly, from the actual texts of his writings. When I use the term 'alienation,' I am using it as defined within existentialism, but for this section alone, I am dually utilizing the term to also include a more psychiatric definition[11] of alienation. I do this because Lovecraft's writings have the potential to produce an instability in the perception of reality, not unlike an individual experiencing depersonalization or derealization. In the same way that depersonalization results in the feeling of loss of self-identity, or that derealization produces a feeling of the uncanny or unreal projected onto the external world, Lovecraft's writings often induce a sense of detachment from one's reality. By highlighting the vast amount of knowledge of the universe that remains hidden to us, Lovecraft forces reflection about the insignificance of the self, as well as altering our perception of the environment around us to feel unfamiliar or strange.

A key component throughout this alienation process is Lovecraft's dual usage of an Other. Within his narratives, he either utilizes a physically "Other" cosmic being, or he engages in the "Othering" of an assumedly "familiar" world. By doing this, he forces readers to encounter the full extent of his weird horror at two levels: namely, the level of the interpersonal, and that of the larger, external environment. While the "Othering" of the external world is related to the previously-discussed use of environment in Lovecraft's narratives, it also serves as a key

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[11] Utilizing Jermone Braun's definition of alienation, I am working off the idea that "alienation connotes separation" which then leads to "strain in the relationship between the individual and the social structure of which he is a part as well as with his own self image insofar as this depends on social conditions" (9). My usage of this seeks to equate social structures/social conditions with the external world in totality.

component in producing the uncanny, derealizing sensation associated with the alienating quality of his texts. Through perceiving the self in relation to an eerie, alienating Other, Lovecraft's narratives force a breakdown in the traditional process of self-constitution. This is where Husserl's basis for identification becomes a critical element of my analysis, particularly in his assertion that "intersubjective experience plays a fundamental role in our constitution of both ourselves as objectively existing subjects, other experiencing subjects, and the objective spatio-temporal world" (Beyer). If this intersubjectivity lies at the heart of the constitution of the self, as well as the identification of one's environment, a divergence in that process could potentially lead to the type of alienation that Freud discusses (*unheimlich*), and that Lovecraft employs. If one of those elements within the intersubjective experience is utterly unfamiliar, as occurs between Lovecraft's protagonists and cosmic entities, it disrupts the familiarity within the self-constitution process, which, I argue, generates a distinct sensation of alienation. For instance, Husserl considers the expectation that we have during this identification process, in that if a being "looks and behaves more or less like myself, i.e., displays traits more or less familiar from my own case, he will generally perceive things from an *egocentric* viewpoint similar to my own ("here", "over there", "to my left", "in front of me", etc.), in the sense that I would roughly look upon things the way he does if I were in his shoes and perceived them from his perspective" (Beyer). If the familiarity of that encounter is removed—suddenly replaced by a foreign entity, void of the sameness that allows us to engage in the empathetic, intersubjective process of self-constitution—it seems that the constitution of the self becomes far more unstable, left barreling toward a sense of alienation. *This* is the core element of Lovecraft's horror.

While his cosmicist philosophy centers on the insignificance of humanity and a general terror of the cosmic void, Lovecraft's inclusion of Others (and the alienation they inspire) is the

mechanism from which he achieves this. Take, for instance, the townspeople in "The Shadow over Innsmouth." First described by a ticket-agent as having "queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, stary eyes that never seem to shut," with "skin that just ain't right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of their necks are all shrivelled or creased up" (810-811), the natives to Innsmouth are immediately cast as Other, based on appearance alone. Now this language evokes the type of racism Lovecraft remains infamous for, and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" holds back nothing in its connections between racial/class differences as a source of horror. To this, the ticket-agent continues that the "plague of '46 must have taken off the best blood of the place" and that the Innsmouth people are "what they call 'white trash' down South—lawless and sly, full of secret doings" (812). Another person whom the protagonist speaks to of Innsmouth is described as having an attitude that was "one of disgust at a community slipping far down the cultural scale" (814), with an eventual mentioning that "the rumors of devil worship [in Innsmouth] were partly justified by a peculiar secret cult…[that] was undoubtedly a debased, quasi-pagan thing imported from the East a century before" (814). These mentions of "best blood," a "cultural scale," and potential Eastern influences as sources of Otherness hint at the racism underscoring Lovecraft's conception of the Other. Ultimately, at the heart of his writings—whether in discussing the ramifications of understanding our own cosmic insignificance, or in providing descriptions of 'foreign' characters—is pure, unadulterated *fear*.

But this idea is certainly not a new one. To separate fear from horror literature would be ludicrous, and the extent to which Lovecraft's ideological beliefs function within his writings makes the two nearly inseparable. His regular "ruminations on the decay of cultures, which are merely a superimposed layer of intellectual justification" (Houellebecq 133-134) for his bigotry

is underscored by a deep-seated, all-encompassing sense of fear. Even more widely though, fear functions at the heart of any good horror literature,[12] for

> Much horror literature is predicated upon feelings of insecurity brought about by cultural change, by the idea that our families and communities, our familiar beliefs and cultural forms, are increasingly under assault by forces beyond our control. Whether the proposed threat is secularism, modernism, or multiculturalism, tradition is often central to horror narratives. (Evans 100)

And it is within "The Shadow over Innsmouth" that we see Lovecraft's aversion to the foreign and his abhorrence to the intrusion of Otherness into his fragile WASP identity, that his written cosmic horror and fear of multiculturalism fuse into one. Due to his profound hatred, it would be remiss of me to avoid highlighting and interrogating the presence of Otherness in his fiction as often synonymous with the non-white or foreign. For instance, the protagonist, upon seeing the bus driver who takes him into Innsmouth, notes that "just what foreign blood was in him I could not even guess. His oddities certainly did not look Asiatic, Polynesian, Levantine or negroid, yet I could see why people found him alien. I myself would have thought of biological degeneration rather than alienage" (816). Later on in the narrative, when commenting on the Innsmouth natives as a whole, the protagonist questions again "what kind of foreign blood—if any—these beings had, it was impossible to tell" (822). This insistence on determining the type of "blood" within the natives echoes a larger fear of Lovecraft's—namely, the fear of miscegenation. We see this demonstrated at the end of "The Shadow over Innsmouth," where the protagonist realizes that he, too, is related to those "Innsmouth folk" (824), has mixed blood in him, and is infected

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[12] I would like to emphasize that—despite my assertion that fear is central to many successful horror narratives—I am not attempting to justify racism and xenophobia as a legitimate, celebrated means from which horror narratives *should* be crafted. Instead, I use this discussion to demonstrate how Lovecraft's cosmicism (and the means that he achieves its representation in his literature) would not exist without this fundamental ideological component. It lies central to his conception of reality, and provides a platform for reflecting on the "Otherness" of the universe itself.

by the presence of the Deep Ones in the makeup of his biology. As this realization dawns on him

he begins "to acquire a kind of terror of [his] own ancestry" (856), and that in viewing a

photograph of his grandmother and uncle, he "gazed at their pictured faces with a measurably

heightened feeling of repulsion and alienation" (856). This ending is intended to inspire a unique

sense of horror in readers—the horror of being alienated from the self, from the *reality* of an

individual's life being adjacent to their own self-conception.

    We see this idea demonstrated once more in "The Shadow Out of Time," and while the

narrative does not possess such a central fixation on the miscegenation element as expressed in

"The Shadow over Innsmouth," Lovecraft uses this story to highlight perhaps the most impactful

form of alienation: when the *self* becomes an Other. Following the account of Nathaniel

Winsgate Peaslee, a Professor of Political Economy at the fictional Miskatonic University, "The

Shadow Out of Time" details the over five-year "possession" of Peaslee by a Yithian[13] alien, as

well as the consequences of when he awakens with amnesia of the entire experience. Through a

series of pseudo-memories and intense dream sequences, Peaslee questions not only the potential

instability of his mind, but emerges from the experience unsettled and foreign in his own

existence. Upon "waking" from his possession, Peaslee encounters little compassion or

friendliness, noting that "something in my aspect and speech seemed to excite vague fears and

aversions in everyone that I met, as if I were a being infinitely removed from all that is normal

and healthful" (951). Cast into the role of Other by those around him, and eventually left to

perceive himself as "Othered" in some way as well, the instability in his own identity becomes a

source of terror. Much in the same way that the narrator in "The Shadow over Innsmouth"

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[13] The Great Race of Yith is an extraterrestrial species capable of projecting their minds through time into that of other creatures, i.e. switching bodies with a host. The mind of the host is then transported to the Yithian library city (what would become Australia's Great Sandy Desert) where they can converse with others from all different places/times who are presently "possessed." Initially, the Yithians did this to study the histories of people/places throughout time, though they eventually mass body-switched into an alien race on Earth in order to avoid the destruction of their planet in another galaxy.

becomes temporarily alienated from himself as a result of uncovering his lineage, Peaslee develops "a feeling of profound and inexplicable horror concerning [himself]. [He] developed a queer fear of seeing [his] own form, as if [his] eyes would find it something utterly alien and inconceivably abhorrent" (956). This detachment from his own existence illustrates the destructive nature of the "alienated self"—in which the world retains a deep otherness from us, despite us constituting a portion of the world—and similarly mirrors the phenomenon of one's own consciousness existing as a sort of Other.

Additionally, the narrative's continual emphasis regarding the instability of memory and its capacity to determine fact from fiction forces reality to acquire a distinctly unreal quality to it. Frequently, Peaslee questions his sanity through a series of rapid questions, introspectively spiraling toward the inability to create objective conclusions about his existence. After a series of dreams in which he begins to recall memories of when his consciousness was displaced into the Yithian library city, Peaslee spirals further toward total instability. He asks himself, "Suppose I did see strange things at night?... Suppose I did have odd loathings and perspectives and pseudo-memories?... Nothing that I might dream, nothing that I might feel, could be of any actual significance" (965). And yet, despite his continued wrestling with whether or not his vision-like dreams hold any truth or significance, the memories that he begins to recover significantly alter his perception of reality. Through the information that he learns within these dreams, where he converses with "exiled intellects from every corner of the solar system" (968), Peaslee notes that "traditional facts took on new and doubtful aspects, and I marvelled at the dream-fancy which could invent such surprising addenda to history and science" (969). Not only does the "possession" alienate Peaslee from his own body and consciousness, but the information gleaned from the experience itself destabilizes his foundation of once-assumed objective

knowledge. Lovecraft's thematic usage of dreams, memory, and the instability of truth within the narrative all contribute to the overwhelming sense of alienation generated within Peaslee. Toward the conclusion of the narrative, Peaslee stumbles upon what could be perceived as objective evidence that the "possession" he endured was real, and the narrative itself almost completely breaks down. With scattered references that Peaslee's "dreams welled into the waking world" (982) and that he "was awake and dreaming at the same time" (982), the narrative then adopts a sort of fragmented style, considering that Peaslee is recalling the experience and still questioning whether any of what he saw or encountered was, in fact, real. Even in exploring the ruins of the buried Yithian library city he was once a captive in, he dismisses what he sees as "a fragment of febrile hallucination" (991), despite being presently there. At the crux of the narrative, in obtaining the most definitive proof that his experience had been real, Peaslee seems to undergo a complete breakdown of reality, noting that "this [proof] is what I must carry back to the outer world if it truly existed—if the whole abyss truly existed—if I, and the world itself, truly existed" (994). This temporary breakdown of the lines between fantasy and reality generates a moment of utter alienation in Peaslee. His own existence, his memories, his conception of truth, and any sense of an objective reality are destabilized by the experience of himself being dually familiar and Other. By drafting a narrative in which the protagonist becomes alienated from their own existence—not through the physicality of their form, as displayed in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," but through an instability within their mind—Lovecraft demonstrates the potentially destructive power of the Other as it pertains to the development of the self. More largely, this connects back to cosmicism as inherently alienating an individual from the nature of the universe/existence, in that what once may have felt accessible and familiar is suddenly rendered a foreign, cold, and Othered cosmic void.

Mirroring Lovecraft's production of alienation within his protagonists, the very text of his narratives generates a similar alienation in readers, mimicking the estrangement from the world that cosmicism creates. There's a distinct *distance* in Lovecraft's texts—an unnerving space between his purple prose descriptions and the actual image that is intended to emerge within a reader's mind. The distance between the text and the reader is exacerbated by Lovecraft's continual insistence on describing the indescribable, with him often deferring to phrases such as "the Thing cannot be described" (CC 377), "the effect of the monstrous sight was indescribable" (MM 757), "I can hardly describe what I saw" (SoI 813), and that certain sounds were "beyond any adequate verbal description" (SOoT 995), only to then launch into a lengthy, half-clear description of the previously-deemed indescribable. While some critics view this as "far too overdone" and "punishingly redundant" (Fredericks 196), Graham Harman perceives this as Lovecraft performing continual acts as a Husserlian-Heideggerian philosopher. Providing a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Lovecraft's descriptive style and the innate tension it creates with the objects themselves, Harman notes the "two major axes of Lovecraft's literary style: the 'vertical' gap between unknowable objects and their tangible qualities, and the 'horizontal' or 'cubist' gap between an accessible object and its gratuitous amassing of numerous palpable surfaces" (31). In broad terms, the 'vertical' gap is created through attempting to place vague descriptions (sensual qualities) upon an indescribable object, which mimics how Heidegger describes the same "tension between real object and sensual quality" (32). When something is *literally* impossible to visualize within the text, that is when Lovecraft is most directly utilizing a Heideggerian approach to his descriptions.[14] Alternatively, the 'horizontal'

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[14] This is most similar to Heidegger's analysis of the ready-to-hand. For Heidegger, in our everyday dealings with the world, we encounter what he calls the "ready-to-hand"—the equipment and paraphernalia we use. The ready-to-hand is experienced most genuinely as what it is in absorbed use. When we use a hammer or a pen for some project, it disappears, or as Heidegger says, is "subordinates" itself to the project (BT 98). We don't explicitly think about the tool being used; we think about the project itself—what I am *doing* with the tool. When we stand back and try to theorize about a hammer or pen, this quality of "handiness" disappears. We observe the "facts" of the

gap emerges from extensive descriptions that attempt to simultaneously cover numerous aspects of a particular thing, mimicking Husserl's "tension between sensual object and sensual quality" (32). When Lovecraft generates a lengthy list of descriptions—while prefacing those descriptions with a statement about the sensation that the sight invokes in the narrator—his writing mimics Husserl's discussion of sensual objects, their sensual qualities, and how we interact with them. The means by which Lovecraft regularly employs these two axes demonstrates the distinctly Husserlian-Heideggerian philosophical aspect to his writing.

While those two axes function separately, they come together to produce a distinct phenomenological gap within the majority of Lovecraft's narratives. Take, for instance, a mere portion of Lovecraft's description of what Dyer believes to be a mirage of a Cyclopean city when flying over a series of mountains in "At the Mountains of Madness":

> The effect was that of a Cyclopean city of no architecture known to man or human imagination with vast aggregations of night-black masonry embodying monstrous perversions of geometrical laws and attaining the most grotesque extremes of sinister bizarrerie. There were truncated cones, sometimes terraced or fluted, surmounted by tall cylindrical shafts here or there bulbously enlarged and often capped with tiers of thinnish scalloped discs; and strange, beetling, table-like constructions suggesting piles of multitudinous rectangular slabs or circular plates or five-pointed stars with each one overlapping the one beneath...All of these febrile structures seemed knit together by tubular bridges crossing from one to the other at various dizzying heights, and the implied scale of the whole was terrifying and oppressive in its sheer giganticism… we all seemed to find in it a taint of latent malignancy and infinitely evil portent. (746)

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object itself, but lose its character as ready-to-hand.

Through the juxtaposition of intensely-detailed descriptions with an additional emphasis on the

structure as a whole being equally important to the conception of the vision, Lovecraft produces

the 'vertical gap' of his descriptive style. This is where the "implied scale of the whole" (MM

746) becomes something "over and above a literal combination of these elements" (Harman 24).

The tormenting nature of the sight doesn't emerge from the fact that it is innately scary. Only

within the sheer magnitude of the city, the constitution of all the described portions, and in the

psychological implications of said sight that we see the horror emerge. Described as having a

"wholly novel and obscure quality of menacing symbolism" (MM 746), the many individual

parts of the sight become less important than the collective vision as a whole. This 'vertical gap'

and the insistence on the larger structure as more important than the individual parts illustrates

the Heideggerian aspect of this passage. As previously noted, Heidegger views existence as not

defined by its individual parts (such as entities, roles, and self-conceptions), but as a nexus of

such, with existence being a constituted whole—much in the same way that a face is often

viewed as a collective 'face' and not just as the individual features that comprise a face.

Alternatively, the 'horizontal gap' of this example comes from Lovecraft's attempt to overload

the narrative with a near-dizzying amount of description, as if in an attempt to simultaneously

demonstrate every conceivable surface or aspect of what Dyer is seeing. Additionally, the

mention that, within the sight, they found "a taint of latent malignancy and infinitely evil

portent" (746) suggests a more profound sensual quality to the composition of all the surfaces

mentioned. This is the more Husserlian aspect of the description, in that it attempts to ascribe a

pervasive sensual quality to a thing that is being understood through the subjective lens of

personal experience. The sensual qualities of the sight can only be gleaned through the

experience of the sight itself, not through some sort of attempt at objectively understanding the

sight's being. These two axes function together to produce a description that forces a reader to confront every aspect of a thing, yet not be able to produce a distinct image within their imagination. It is at this intersection of the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' gap that Lovecraft alienates his readers from the text itself—known words and descriptors suddenly become distant and foreign as readers' minds grapple with the indistinct outline of the image forming in their mind, just beyond the reach of a substantive recognition.

While Harman acknowledges that "normally we feel no gap at all between the world and our descriptions of it" (27) and that Lovecraft's narratives eerily create that type of a gap, his analysis of Lovecraft's role as a Husserlian-Heideggerian philosopher fails to acknowledge the alienation central to both Lovecraft's texts and cosmicist philosophy as a whole. While Harman's text is moreso geared toward understanding Lovecraft from the perspective of object-oriented ontology (OOO), his analysis goes so far as to describe the precise method with which Lovecraft produces alienation, yet stops just shy of making that conclusion. In understanding Lovecraft's use of language and Otherness, it is fundamental to consider the alienation that lies at the heart of his writing. Additionally, Harman also appears hesitant regarding what he calls the "excessive literalization of the author, which reduces him to someone who happens to express certain views about the cosmos" (232), instead preferring to perceive Lovecraft as much more oriented toward the expression of philosophical themes. To that, I would counter that the pervasive nature of Lovecraft's personal philosophy and vitriolic racism are central to the themes of Otherness that then fuel his writings and the Husserlian-Heideggerian themes within them. To divorce Lovecraft's biography and personal opinions from his writing would leave any analysis of his texts as hollow and half-finished. It is only within the expression of his racism in his

narratives—fueled by the time he spent in New York City—that Lovecraft is able to articulate the intricacies of what it means to be alienated from oneself, the world, and the larger universe.

Lovecraft's cultural fear and general aversion to immigrants and non-white peoples are directly reflected in his texts, and provides an explanation for the theme of Otherness as expressed throughout his writings. Having moved to New York City immediately after marrying his wife Sonia, Lovecraft spent two years in what he would come to consider the antithesis of Providence. The experience began with Lovecraft in high spirits, entertaining "dreams of literary celebrity and to contact editors, to entertain the possibility of success" (Houellebecq 117), and the city provoked a distinct sense of awe within him. However, after his wife lost her job and Lovecraft found it difficult to find work, the city's "starry firmament of dream redolent of faery music" that he described in a 1926 short story very quickly became Lovecraft's deepest nightmare. Due to the difficulties of the couple's financial situation, "Lovecraft had more and more trouble tolerating the hard and aggressive urban environment…[and] he began to feel bitterness toward immigrants of diverse origins, who he saw blending easily into the swirling melting pot that was America in the 1920s, while he himself, in spite of his pure Anglo-Saxon origins, was unable to find work" (Houellebecq 120-121). This instance of economic hardship served as the initial impetus for the racism that would eventually develop into a sort of racial neurosis, leading to a distinct psychological break for Lovecraft. But even in the initial moments of economic hardship, Lovecraft began to see immigrants as the physical manifestation of Otherness, thereby alienating him from the once-idealized New York. Lovecraft himself wrote that,

> In New York I could not live. Everything I saw became unreal & two-dimensional, & everything I thought & did became trivial & devoid of meaning through lack of any

points of reference belonging to any fabric of which I could conceivably form a part. I

was stifled—poisoned—imprisoned in a nightmare—& now not even the threat of

damnation could induce me to dwell in the accursed place again. (2.259)

Here we see the instability of Lovecraft's own identity as a result of continual encounters with

foreign/alien Others. By not having a point of reference from which he could formulate his own

self-conception, Lovecraft's encounter with Otherness directly led toward the breakdown of his

own identity, alienating him from the surrounding environment and destabilizing his perception

of reality.

His time in New York presented him with a profound existential crisis, temporarily

paralyzing the formation of his own identity. Much in the same manner that his protagonists

encounter Otherness within a previously 'known' world—thereby leading them toward

alienation and mental ruin—so, too, do we see the expression of that cycle within Lovecraft's

own life. This illustrates the degree to which Lovecraft fits into the larger discourse of

existentialism, as his life and writings are marked by the common themes of existential anxieties,

issues pertaining to the conception of the self, and the recognition of a pervasive "outside"

invading the interior of subjective experience. The weird horror of Lovecraft's fiction is

mediated through these ideas, particularly as they force the protagonist to confront the horror

beyond the mundane—what we may consider to be an extended metaphor for the life-altering

consequences of encountering and engaging with existentialist ideas in our own lives. It is within

the acknowledgment of a world lacking in intrinsic purpose/meaning, in an individual life that is

no longer truly *individual*, but something mediated through external experiences with a world

that is inherently alienating, that we see the initial powerlessness associated with existential

introspection. Now that is not to say that existentialism doesn't provide the individual with

power—on the contrary, the individual becomes far *more* powerful, tasked with taking responsibility of their own life and existing authentically—but without the movement from simply acknowledging the nature of existence into generating meaning, it becomes far too easy to fall into the trap of nihilistic victimhood, that of which Lovecraft found himself wrapped within.

For Lovecraft, life is suffering—it is a painful, terrifying, *evil* thing. Not only do we see Lovecraft's life marked by numerous losses, crippling mental illness, and a continuous string of economic failures, but within his insistence on the universal presence of evil as a result of humanity straying from traditional values we see the never-ending spiral that Lovecraft endured as a result of his worldview. But this presence of evil is not something that Lovecraft infuses into his narratives as a result of religiosity. Instead, evil is mediated through the lens of his racism, where "evil is the product of a carnal union against nature" (Houellebecq 133), hearkening back to miscegenation and the blurring of distinct social categories as a source of profound existential horror. For Lovecraft, "it is not one particular race that represents true horror, but the notion of the half-breed" (Houellebecq 133), where the construct of civilization cracks under the weight of what Lovecraft considers to be a significant rising force of evil. This perception of society greatly alters Lovecraft's perception of the world (and all of the Others within it) from a passively-alienating realm of the "outside," to something actively evil. In the accumulation of these elements affecting Lovecraft's perception of life—whether in his disdain for industrial capitalism, mass culture, commercialism, or immigration—the world begins to assume a monstrous quality, becoming almost unrecognizable.

CHAPTER II: DUAL FORMS OF ALIENATION IN DOSTOEVSKY'S UNDERGROUND MAN

A Framing Intersection of Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, and S.L. Frank

In the opening chapter of Part II of *Notes from Underground*,[15] at just twenty-four years old, the Underground Man remarks to himself that "already even then I had my underground world in my soul" (40), referencing the perceived differences between both himself and the society around him. Highlighted in the second section of the novel, Dostoevsky explores the intense presence of the Underground Man's internal, existential suffering as something existing even in his youth, at a time when the Underground Man forces himself to question if "there was no one like [him] and [he] was unlike anyone else" (37). Still not yet fully disillusioned from the world—as we see represented in Part I of the novel—the first chapter of Part II shows readers the practical application of the Underground Man's existential perspective, and the alienation he experiences as a result. Shortly following this moment of self-reflection, the Underground Man describes an unsettling interaction with an officer at a tavern—a critical moment that frames Part II in its detailing of the Underground Man's social deficiencies. He notes,

> I was standing by the billiard-table and in my ignorance blocking up the way, and he
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> wanted to pass; he took me by the shoulders and without a word—without a warning or
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> explanation—moved me from where I was standing to another spot and passed by as
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> though he had not noticed me. I could have forgiven blows, but I could not forgive his
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> having moved me without noticing me. (41)

The insistence on not being noticed—not being recognized and therefore, not being *actualized*—by the officer leads into the Underground Man's subsequent stalking and plotting against the man for two years, driven wild by his internalized desire to exact revenge. The rest of

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[15] For my analysis, I am using the 2011 Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky translation of *Notes from Underground*, which seems to preserve much of the original intentionality of Dostoevsky's text.

the chapter features his attempts to achieve some semblance of recognition from the officer, culminating in a planned confrontation of bumping into the man. However, even when he does eventually force himself to physically walk into him, the officer doesn't seem to notice, though the Underground Man convinces himself of his own victory.

The melodrama of this initial encounter helps to illustrate *Notes from Underground*'s continued emphasis on the importance of an individual's engagement with their society as a means of beginning the process of existential actualization. While the Underground Man isolates himself in that "underground world" (40) that he refers to, his self-imposed isolation forces him to suffer greatly, and he himself often notes that he begins to feel subhuman as a result. In that same opening chapter of Part II, the Underground Man reflects on the "wretchedness and abjectness of [his own] little scurrying figure" (43), noting that "I was a mere fly in the eyes of all this world, a nasty, disgusting fly" (44). Through his frequent comparisons to insects and rodents, the Underground Man highlights himself as a figure trapped between his own nightmarish existential inquiries, and his inability to engage with those around him as a result of what he deems being a "coward in action" (41). The Underground Man's warped self-perception as something decidedly subhuman highlights a key component of Dostoevsky's assertions about existence—namely, that there remains an underlying, transcendent connectivity uniting all human beings, and that to actively attempt to excise oneself from that inherent connectivity would be in direct opposition to the inherent nature of one's own existence.

This relates significantly to the writings of the Russian philosopher and Christian existentialist S.L. Frank in his *Spiritual Foundations of Society*—a work that seeks to examine the composition of society as a spiritual being, driven by two interrelated ideas: *sobornost*, or spiritual unity, and *obshchestvennost*, or the mechanics of society, both of which emphasize

service to universal truth as the highest principle of social life. Through the combination of these ideals, Frank asserts a type of freedom, based on the condition of service, that reconciles concepts of social unity and personal freedom, emphasizing that "everything in society is the direct result of the elemental intersection of individual wills" (Frank 38) and that through that intersection we come to understand how vital *sobornost* remains as its connecting force. Considering both Dostoevsky and Frank were similarly influenced by a combination of Russian, Western, and Orthodox Christian influences, through the application of Frank's perspective on *Notes from Underground*, we can see Dostoevsky's overall assertion of a mystical, hidden, experiential love that serves as a uniting force between individuals within society. By highlighting the deficiencies in the Underground Man's character—particularly as he attempts to assert his individualism by isolating himself from society—Dostoevsky attempts to provide clarity to that mystical, unifying force of *sobornost*, while additionally providing a more existential perspective on and critique of the individual, society, and its interrelation.

This initial scene in Part II of *Notes from Underground*, with its open emphasis upon recognition from the Other as a source of self-actualization, highlights a fundamental difference between Lovecraft and Dostoevsky—namely, that the Other serves a negative, destructive function for Lovecraft, while, for Dostoevsky, the Other provides an interaction that highlights the transcendence of love as it pertains to the spiritual interconnectivity of society. While Dostoevsky's characters sometimes share a similar aversion to society as Lovecraft's, his characters instead have the intention to critique Western modernity, rather than being against the idea of society itself, which, in a mystical/spiritual dimension, Dostoevsky champions. For through interactions with the Other within society is the revealing of the notion of *sobornost*, of the "unity [that] is not singularity but wholeness, a holding together, a harmony, all of which

imply plurality. What the principle of this harmony is, the underground man cannot say; he has never found it. But he knows he has not found it; he knows, because his inner disharmony, his dividedness, which is the source of his suffering, is also the source of consciousness" (Pevear). Through existential engagements with Otherness, Dostoevsky asserts both the problems with a purely conscious existence, as the Underground Man demonstrates, as well as the solution to alleviating some of that existential suffering.

And so, while Lovecraft's more isolationist literature is somewhat limited in its existential insights, Dostoevsky's relationalist literature is clear in its direct confrontation of critical issues fundamental to existentialism as a whole. More precisely, his novels address the complications inherent in understanding reality, the prevalence and conscious perpetuation of suffering within human existence, as well as the complicated relationship between an individual, society, and God. Within his confrontation of these topics, Dostoevsky's works provide a platform from which to better understand the deeply psychological, philosophical, and paradoxical nature of reality. More precisely, the existential questions embedded in his texts adhere closely to the type of Christian existentialism espoused by Søren Kierkegaard, particularly as his views center on the inability for one to actualize existence through individual will alone. Through the assertion that one cannot become an "existing individual" (Pereboom xxxiv) without becoming grounded in a relation to the Power that constitutes the self, Kierkegaard's perspective emphasizes the precise method by which human existence can be realized: "This then is the formula which describes the condition of the self when despair is completely eradicated: by relating itself to its own self, and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it" (Kierkegaard 79). It is within Dostoevsky's recurrent emphasis on a relationship to God and spirituality as the solution to

persistent existential questions that we see how Dostoevsky's works highlight certain elements similar to Kierkegaard's Christian existentialism, related to Frank's philosophy as well. Though the desire for true fulfilment emerging from a connection with God closely resembles the type of fulfilment that existentialists posit comes from an individual's projects and transcendence, Dostoevsky suggests only this gap within *Notes from Underground* by more broadly referring to internal void of the Underground Man as a general "ache" (11). This hearkens back to *sobornost*, and to what Frank—himself a close reader of Dostoevsky, as well as an exile from first Communism, and then Nazism—characterized as "strange love," being a yearning for home or a state of dwelling that no longer exists. To Frank, this is a quality of modernity, which nonetheless is only an intensification of the lengthier postlapsarian human exile from Paradise.

Within *Notes from Underground,* we see a distinct lack of the overtly religious tone characteristic of Dostoevsky's later works. But this is a direct result of the censorship of the novel, which Dostoevsky himself realized made the work filled with "forced sentences and internal contradictions" (XXVIII, 73), in which the Underground Man's lack of spirituality as a deficiency is rendered almost insignificant. In a letter to his brother, Dostoevsky complains that the conclusion he initially explored in the novella regarding "the need for belief and for Christ" (XXVIII, 73) that comes to fruition in the penultimate chapter was suppressed by the censors, thereby significantly altering what would have been considered a critical aspect of the work as a whole. Due to the censorship of this idea, it seems pertinent to keep Dostoevsky's intention in mind when continuing with an analysis, particularly as the work explores the dysfunction of the Underground Man as stemming directly from his lack of spirituality, as well as his attempts to excise the innate *sobornost* uniting him with his surrounding society. In place of Dostoevsky's more explicit assertion of the need for spiritual belief, the novella seems to instead emphasize the

"ache" and internal void the Underground Man experiences as another way to highlight Dostoevsky's initial conclusion. Though it was removed from the first version, we can see the echoes of Dostoevsky's prime intention, particularly in Part I as the Underground Man concludes that, though he has his underground world that he can retreat to, that there is "something different, quite different, for which [he is] thirsting, but which [he] cannot find" (30), which highlights the "ache" that, regardless of his persistent intellectual musings, cannot be alleviated.

Much of the philosophical perspective of *sobornost*, as well as Dostoevsky's similarities with Kierkegaard's Christian existentialism, emerges from a series of traumatic events that occur within the latter half of the author's life. Most notably, these events begin with a mock execution scene in 1849 devised by Tsar Nicholas I after Dostoevsky's involvement with the Petrashevsky circle,[16] which led to his Siberian exile and subsequent prison sentence. During his sentence, he spent time reading the bible and engaging with other mainly peasant and working-class prisoners, whose experiences often resonated with Dostoevsky's in a manner that nurtured his belief in a more transcendent, experiential way of understanding society and the interconnectivity of humanity.

In 1878, after the death of his three-year-old son Alyosha, Dostoevsky travels to the Optina Monastery, where he sees the renowned Elder Amvrosy three different times, ultimately influencing his conception of Elder Zosima as represented in *Brothers Karamazov* (Mochulsky

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[16] The Petrashevsky Circle was a group of Russian intellectuals who met weekly to discuss various political and social issues during the 1840s. Led by its namesake, M.V. Petrashevsky, the group held discussions undercut with the belief in "action upon social relations to change [socio-political problems], and the establishment of a socialist system in which those problems...would receive their complete solution" (Troyan 372). Especially at its conception, the group was motivated by a distinct "religious-humanistic pathos" (Mochulsky 116) that adhered closely to the ideals of utopian socialism. One of the better-known writers within the circle, Vissarion Belinsky, was a strong advocate of a more atheistic materialism that ultimately led the group away from Christian utopianism and closer toward something akin to Marxist Communism. The rejection of Christianity by Belinksy led to a "prolonged inner tragedy" (119) within Dostoevsky, in which he was forced to reconcile between his "ardent faith with the greatest disbelief" (120). This produced an intense duality in his own faith, that of which we see expressed in both his personal writings, as well as his fiction.

572). It was through his visitation to Optina Monastery, his avid readings of St. Isaac the

Syrian's mystical homilies, in a volume of the saint's ancient writings popular among Russian

Christians at the time, and his affinity for a non-Western, non-rationalistic Christianity, that

Dostoevsky utilized ascetic teachings as a foundation for the development of his personal

philosophies dually related to religion and secular society. In Dostoevsky's later works, he

attempted to infuse a sort of Christian philosophy into his writings, to unite the concepts of

secular society with a more foundational, underlying spirituality that emphasized lived

experience—religion of the heart—over the hyper-intellectual, an idea that was later articulated

philosophically by S.L. Frank.

Through the Underground Man's opposing desires for connection to those around him

and the impulse toward exerting absolute free-will and independence, *Notes from Underground*

serves as a critical precursor to much of existential thought. However, before beginning an

analysis of the text from a philosophical perspective, it is important to note the critical

conversation surrounding *why* Dostoevsky chose to write *Notes from Underground*, which is now

seen as a philosophical precursor to his greatest novels. Although some critics view *Notes from*

Underground as Dostoevsky primarily foretelling the general cultural and moral deterioration of

society, others view the work as purely polemic, citing Dostoevsky's deep ideological criticism

of Nikolay Chernyshevsky's "rational egoism".[17] Considering the initial author's note within the

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[17] Rational egoism, in its broad definition, asserts that one "ought to perform some action if and only if, and because, performing that action maximizes [their] self-interest" (Shaver), where failing to pursue one's self-interest can be considered irrational. This idea emerges out of the late 19th-century Russian nihilist movement, and was described in Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel *What Is To Be Done?*—a work that advocates for the formation of industrial socialist cooperatives through the fictionalized narrative of Vera Pavlovna on her journey for economic independence. The work was received with mixed responses, with Dostoevsky serving as a major critic of it, though it more widely served as a fundamental revolutionary text, that of which inspired different Russian revolutionary groups. Later, the novel was very positively received by Lenin, who was said to have read it five times in one summer. Lenin himself noted that "[the book] completely reshaped me," and it "changes one for a whole lifetime," additionally noting that *What Is To Be Done?* illustrates "what a revolutionary *must be like*" (Amis 27), which demonstrates the degree to which he was both personally and politically influenced by the novel.

text, Dostoevsky clearly illustrates that the novella is a commentary on the "circumstances in the

midst of which our society is formed" (1), and the lengthy refutation of human beings as

anything other than irrational creatures highlights many of the key issues Dostoevsky critiqued in

Chernyshevsky's philosophy, as well as his combined grievances with what he perceived as a

decline in Russian culture as a result of a sort of cultural colonialism by European ideals[18]. This

is most directly highlighted by the Underground Man's criticism of the "Palace of

Crystal"—referring to the Crystal Palace in London, the construction of which Dostoevsky

greatly contested for its representation of striving toward unrealistic utopian ideals that he

perceives would deny the individual will to freedom (Mochulsky 232). In Part I of the text, the

Underground Man highlights his fears surrounding freedom through his critique of the structure

as one that "can never be destroyed" (28) in its symbolism of what he viewed as human pride,

arrogance, and "mathematical certainty" (27) which highlights both his and Dostoevsky's fears

about the building as a symbol repute with a distinct finality. But beyond the imposing

physicality and seeming finality of the structure itself, the true horror of the Crystal Palace (for

both the author and the Underground Man) is within the ideological consequences of that finality,

where one cannot "put out one's tongue or make a long nose on the sly" (28) against the structure

and the modern ideals that it represents, especially those that echo a utopian initiative, which the

Underground Man sees as a significant threat to autonomy and the pursuit of individual freedom.

In essence, for Dostoevsky, the Crystal Palace serves as an edifice for the type of intellectualism

that Utopian thinkers believe can usher in an era from which they can craft a perfected, rational

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[18] As noted in his 1863 *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*—in which he reflects on a recent trip throughout Europe, commenting not only on European ideals, but on the perceptions held about Russians in general—he discusses at length his belief that European culture was a corrupted one, highlighting both the political systems in Europe, as well as asserting Catholicism and Anglicanism as morally-corrupt and overly prideful. This time spent traveling around Europe helped to affirm his semi-Slavophilic perspective, that of which is represented in many of later works, as well as embedded in his personal, socio-political philosophy.

society (Schoenl 19-20). The architecture of the Crystal Palace and the ideas that have been imposed on it generate Dostoevsky's critique of "all who would try to build their society and order things justly by their intellects alone" (Schoenl 20), which highlights the key issue that Dostoevsky has with rationalism as a whole—it asserts that human beings can be fully categorized and understood through intellectual understanding, rather than the relational mysticality that Dostoevsky believes underscores all of society. This Crystal Palace mentality—in being synonymous with striving toward utopianism through rationalism, a mentality he viewed as characteristic to modernity—is one that Dostoevsky and the Underground Man equally criticize in their fear "of that [crystal] edifice" (28) for its denial of the individual's pursuit toward freedom and meaning..

Alienation from Society

"Without a word, [they] examined me as though I were an insect," (64) the Underground Man states in Part II, Chapter IV—psychologically trapped by the duality of his own self-perception, crowned both measly insect and conqueror alike. This scene within the second section, in which the Underground Man invites himself to a dinner among some of his old schoolmates he had once estranged himself from, provides a critical example of how the Underground Man's alienation from society forces him to equate his existence with the subhuman. By being emotionally and psychologically distanced from those around him, he becomes trapped between the illusion of his own superiority, broken only by the painful truth of his reality, that he remains utterly inadequate. And yet, the source of the Underground Man's wavering superiority complex remains rooted in an authentic critique about the vanity of modern, urban life within St. Petersburg—a genuine grievance Dostoevsky himself held, particularly as it pertained to the city's shifting intellectual and cultural atmosphere trending more toward

Westernized modes of thought. And so, the Underground Man's superiority complex is dually rooted; he experiences moments of grandiosity as an inverse reaction to his own sense of inferiority, yet his claims about society elevate exist as a more "genuine" sense of superiority.

Upon being asked a sincere question by one of the dinner attendees, the Underground Man first rudely jeers at the questioner's speech impediment, and then snaps, "why are you cross-examining me" (62) at an otherwise mundane question. For him, every social interaction is a battlefield, and the only thing that matters is who reigns as the ultimate victor within said engagement, displaying a type of "will to power" nihilism in accordance with his hyper-intellectual consciousness. But to evaluate the issue with more depth, the Underground Man's alienation from social dynamics highlights a much more profound disengagement from the underlying premise of *sobornost*. The lack of it makes "even the simplest encounter of two individuals…impossible, even the most external cooperation between [individuals] is inconceivable" (Frank 59). In his discussion of the spiritual network of human relations, Frank notes that "every connection of *sobornost* is always experienced mystically" (62), and in this we can come to understand that, for Dostoevsky as well, the structure of a society, and the relational aspect of its interactions between its individuals, is an expression of cosmic mysticality and love—a love of the heart and not the head, in line with the ascetic maxim of "getting the mind into the heart." When the Underground Man experiences fleeting moments of superiority in which he attempts to assert his ultimate individuality from those around him, he suppresses this spiritual network, thus leading to his inability to connect on a more profound level with those around him.

While this idea is demonstrated in the scene I initially discussed between the Underground Man and the officer, it is important to note that this lack of engagement with

society is not due to a lack of desire for human connection. This becomes clear when his old friends begin an animated conversation about marriage and, with painful clarity, the Underground Man recognizes the vast social and emotional distance between him and his old friends—where his world is rendered into nothing more than a single distinction between "them" and "me". Noticing this, he recognizes that, "no one paid any attention to me, and I sat crushed and humiliated" (63). This alienation that he feels from those around him, and the subsequent overwhelming sensation of disappointment and unfulfillment, demonstrates his profound internal desire for human connection—to experience the transcendent love inherent to *sobornost*. And yet, despite this realization, just three sentences later, the Underground Man finds himself thrust back into the endless cycling within his dual superiority and inferiority complex, and he concludes: "The brutes imagine they are doing me an honour in letting me sit down with them. They don't understand that it's an honor to them, and not to me" (63). Once more, this rapid ego cycling occurs just a few pages later, with the Underground Man verbally asserting to his old friends that "I'll sit here and drink, for I look upon you as so many pawns, as inanimate pawns," then lamenting when "they did not address me! And oh, how I wished, how I wished at that moment to be reconciled to them" (66). The regular interplay between the highs of his own tyrannical desire for superiority and the lows of his comparisons to an insect or rodent shows the Underground Man as an Othered figure, though Othered through the lack of a spiritual, relational element in his life. This also suggests how, for Dostoevsky, someone can be fully overcome by ideas and thought, or be possessed by an intellectualizing of one's self that becomes a self-objectification that prevents one from being able to love, a theme that is also expressed in his later novels.

The self-Othering of the Underground Man first occurs within the early sections of Part I of *Notes from Underground*, opening with the Underground Man characterizing and introducing himself as a man of "acute" or "exaggerated consciousness" (8). He is a figure trapped within the tailspin of his own hyper-critical, ever-questioning thoughts, thereby unable to engage fully with what he considers to be the "normal man" (8) that exists more readily within society. The perceivably "normal" man is one that remains unburdened by the oppressive weight of consciousness, being just 'conscious' enough to perform their required, embodied functions within society, that of which categorizes them as direct men of action. Throughout his musings, the Underground Man asserts that the mentalities of these men are "most often direct and unthinking, [and they] will dash themselves like enraged bulls against walls and, finding that the walls have stopped them with brutal finality, [they] will immediately turn the effect to good cause by saying that walls are surely a necessity" (Merrill 512). Although the comparison of these direct men of action to bulls exists as more of a commentary on how ideals become objective truths within society, it also loosely mimics the same subhumanizing that the Underground Man engages in when he feels the full depth of his own inferiority. The connection between men of direct action to bulls further highlights his own critiques of the natural, unthinking state of so many within society. This observation that he notes is not unlike Heidegger's notion of *verfallen*, or "falling", which describes the everyday condition of getting lost within the mundane. Heidegger notes that,

> We drift along with the crowd in the busy-ness of day-to-day existence. Life then
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> becomes a mere sequence of episodes in which we try to take care of each new thing that
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> comes along… our existence becomes a series of means-ends strategies with no
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> overarching unity of cohesiveness. (Heidegger 204)

The condition of falling then directly leads to the forgetfulness of everyday life, in which humans forget what Heidegger describes as "happening"[19]—the second component in temporal being. Through falling and forgetting the finitude of our own lives and "happening," we become complacent in simply drifting through life, unconsciously unable to recognize the insignificance of our existence and the means by which we navigate the world through carefully crafted roles, never truly encountering ourselves, but something akin to the shadow of ourselves. Heidegger's notion of "falling," especially in its assertion that life becomes a series of "means-ends strategies" (204) echoes some of the principles of rational egoism that Dostoevsky opposes. Namely, it appears that rational egoism requires a certain degree of a "means-end" perspective, especially as it applies to the belief that an action is only rational if it explicitly maximizes the potential for self-gain. That being said, there seems to be a connection between Heidegger's notion of "fallenness," and the groupthink mentality required of Chernyshevsky's rational egoism, which Dostoevsky infuses his own hatred of into the Underground Man.

Therefore, the Underground Man seems to recognize (and loathe) the "fallenness" of those within his surrounding society—the "enraged bulls"—yet he does understand the ease with which those that are "falling" navigate the world. Unburdened by the same horrific spiral of introspection and self-consciousness, those that have forgotten their "happening" do not experience the same "fatal brew" and "stinking mess" (8) of doubts, emotions, and contempt for others that the Underground Man, or more generally, a man of acute consciousness does as they navigate their reality. Though the Underground Man's reflection about men of action is intended to highlight the more political and philosophical arguments surrounding idealism and how it

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[19] "Happening" refers to the conscious recognition of the finitude of our personal human existence, that our lives are what Heidegger refers to as a finite "being-toward-the-end." Within the process of happening, we come to understand that our life stories will ultimately be completed at some future point, and that "each of our current actions is contributing to realizing our Being in its entirety" (Heidegger 205).

functions in society, my comparison between direct men of action and Heidegger's "falling" demonstrates how rigid idealism or solidified understandings of reality are contingent on the "fallen-ness" of an individual in them forgetting the "true" reality of their existence, having become distracted by other things, whether that be the mundanity of day-to-day existence (or as the Underground Man explores) deterministic idealism. For the Underground Man, he asserts that the only truth is that "there are no truths except those temporarily created by [one's] own caprice and that whoever maintains faith in abstract absolutes and innocent hopes is not only deceived but dangerous" (Merrill 512). Again, while this refers to the tendency of people to fall into idealistic, utopian thought, it highlights the capacity for everyday individuals to "fall" into a simplistic model of thought.

However, the profound differences between the Underground Man's exaggerated consciousness (and his comparison to that of direct men of action) is not the only element that generates despair within his life. Extending beyond the differences he notes between himself and others, the greatest plight of the Underground Man is ultimately his own consciousness, where he remains tormented by an endless series of thoughts and introspective inquiries that force him into a state of total inertia, unable to cope with his conscious existence. Not only does this echo the similar sensation of anxiety or *angst*, as we see represented in Lovecraft's protagonists, but it additionally invokes the context of Dostoevsky's own personal interest in mystical Christian asceticism of desert fathers such as St. Isaac the Syrian, and of the notion of "getting the mind into the heart"—which meditatively focuses consciousness into the "eyes of the soul" through prayer in the Orthodox tradition as described in the *Philokalia*, a traditional spiritual handbook also cited by Frank. He discusses the process of transplanting the mind into the heart as a process that,

> If we are able to look attentively into our own soul and see *our own anguished longing and dissatisfaction* as a manifestation of a new and *profound ontological reality* in the ultimate recesses of our own spirit—we will become come immediately convinced that the object of our seekings is not a phantom, but a genuine reality, not something distant and unattainable, but something infinitely close to us, something that is with us eternally. For the eternal source of life and light which we seek *is precisely that force which compels as to seek it* in the first place. (Appendix)

Through utilizing this notion in his representation of the Underground Man's internal suffering, Dostoevsky appears to highlight the degree to which a spiritually unreflective consciousness is a sick one. We see this throughout the text, where Dostoevsky asserts that "consciousness is a sickness, leading to inertia, i.e., to a 'conscious sitting-with-arms-folded'" (Mochulsky 248), where one's own existence naturally leads to a corruption of the self, preventing concrete action from being taken. Instead, the spirals of inner questioning, trails of endless thought, and the inevitable realization that "the causal chain extends to an ugly infinity, and in this perspective, every truth is not absolute, every good is relative" (Mochulsky 248) generates a disconnect between the self and the world. This disconnect, and more broadly, the suffering that remains inherent to conscious existence, seems to illustrate the degree to which Dostoevsky believes in the necessity of there being something else to help ease that discomfort. Based on his hyper-consciousness, it seems that the Underground Man becomes relatively disconnected from those around him, and thereby closes himself off from experiencing what *sobornost* asserts as the underlying connectivity of social human existence. Dostoevsky's construction of the flawed Underground Man seems to draft a dual critique of society, where he comments on both the "normal man" and their tendency to fall into the Crystal Palace mentality—so easily swayed by

European cultural influence—as well as the Underground Man's own hyper-intellectualism, that of which alienates him from *sobornost*, or the transcendent interconnectivity of society. And yet, there seems to be a paradox in how Dostoevsky portrays the Underground Man's existence. Though there seems to be a genuine despair generated within the Underground Man as a result of his disconnect from society, for Dostoevsky there is something to be said about distancing oneself from a society implicated in the European ideals that the author views as inauthentic and corrosive of community. In a sense, to be distanced from that does indeed place the Underground Man in a temporary position of asserting a more truthful critique of society, even if he himself still remains flawed and alienated as a result of his own personal over-thinking.

By being "acutely" conscious, he becomes alienated, yet still occasionally seeks connection from others as a natural instinct. During the times when he seeks to "embrace [his] fellows and all mankind" (49), he still lacks a fundamental understanding of how to truly do so, and winds up alienating others around him even further, with this being expressly illustrated in the dinner scene. Throughout all of Part II, this cycle of desiring connection, yet purposefully alienating others from him simply repeats itself in each of the chapters, with the Underground Man growing further from experiencing true human connection each time. Part of the reason that this deficiency occurs is as a result of the Underground Man attempting to prove the irrationality of man through the exaction of his own free will—a subject he expounds upon in his Part I musings—even at the expense of his relationships with others. Yet, almost paradoxically, the Underground Man's hyper-consciousness is also, in Dostoevsky's framework, an assertion of the same type of rational egoism characteristic of Chernyshevsky's perspective. Thus, we see that what the Underground Man lacks, at least according to Dostoevsky, is the equal solidarity with all and communion with God that exists as *sobornost* in Russian Christian philosophy.

Purposeful alienation is represented as a common theme throughout Part II of *Notes*, and Dostoevsky explores this paradoxical relationship between the Underground Man's innate desire for human connection, and his tendency to alienate those around him once more within Chapter III. Just prior to this chapter, the Underground Man begins to realize that between his many periods of self-isolation, he experiences an intense and "irresistible desire to plunge into society" (49), that of which leads him to seek out connection with his superior at work, and eventually leads to him visiting a former classmate, Simonov. This leads into the events of Chapter III, that of which precedes the aforementioned dinner, in which the Underground Man first decides to invite himself to a dinner being held by Simonov, as well as a few of his former classmates, for their mutual friend, Zverkov. Though knowing his presence is unwelcome, he remarks that "it seemed to me that to invite myself so suddenly and unexpectedly would be positively graceful, and they would all be conquered at once and would look at me with respect" (54). Despite understanding the precarious nature of his relationship to his former classmates, he seeks to command their admiration through the assertion of his own free will, with the Underground Man stating, "I had already clutched at the idea and would not give it up" (54). Even prior to the actual dinner, the divide that occurs between him and his former classmates illustrates the degree to which he believes that the exaction of his free will and his own desires against those around him will somehow actualize his existence enough to elevate him from the "nasty, disgusting fly" (44) he believes himself to be, to someone socially performing on the "equal footing" (46) he so desires out of the interaction with the officer in the beginning of Part II.

Retreating from both his society, as well as distancing himself from the "faith in metaphysical absolutes or transcendent ideals" (Merrill 508) produces a duality in the type of alienation that the Underground Man experiences—namely, he remains alienated from the social

spheres around him, as well as alienated from what Dostoevsky (and Kierkegaard) assert as an intrinsic aspect of human existence: the divine aspect of being. If operating under a Christian existential framework, as the novel does, this could be considered his lack of engagement with the natural interconnectivity of humanity, that of which generates the intense suffering and despair characteristic of the Underground Man's condition. This illustrates that his alienation is not only produced by his own perceived conscious differences between himself and others, but is also generated through the Underground Man's pointed effort to act in a manner that alienates him from others. Ultimately, this then produces ridicule and judgement from those around him, furthering the cycle of alienation, and distancing himself further from understanding the transcendent, innate connectivity to those around him that he often suppresses. However, in another dimension of spiritual practice, that same ridicule and judgment could be considered martyric and a type of ascetic suffering for truth, but in the Underground Man's case, without a more transcendent faith, it is only absurdity.

In Part I in *Notes*, this ridicule and ostracization that the Underground Man expresses as often receiving is first noted in his theoretical journaling of his thoughts regarding society. It is only when the novel transitions into Part II that we see the Underground Man's theories and perspectives demonstrated through concrete examples. For instance, the very opening of Part II includes the Underground Man's observation that "at work in the office I never looked at anyone, and was perfectly well aware that my companions looked upon me, not only as a queer fellow, but even looked upon me—I always fancied this—with a sort of loathing" (36). Although he then launches into commentary on how he secretly enjoys the aversion that others have for him, this initial moment in Part II sets up the type of dynamic that the Underground Man attempts to uphold throughout his interactions with others around him. This is also where the novel begins to

interrogate the boundaries between self and society, particularly as the Underground Man attempts to distance himself from others through the exaction of his own free will, yet cannot fully excise himself from his surrounding society—again, illustrating the degree to which *sobornost* is represented in the work. Once more, as discussed by Kierkegaard, Frank, and Dostoevsky, this demonstrates the pervasive nature of the human condition, in that the existence of a human being is a decidedly interconnected one. To attempt to excise oneself from the social realm of human interaction—whether forcibly, through retreating to the "underground world" (40), or as a byproduct of alienating actions as noted in the dinner party scene—is to begin the process of excising a portion of oneself, of one's innate existence. This leads into his experienced alienation from himself.

Alienation from One's Self

While illustrated throughout Part II of *Notes from Underground*, the protagonist's estrangement from his own existence, from the necessity of connecting with other individuals, is highlighted particularly well within Part II, Chapter VI, in which the Underground Man is having a conversation with Liza, a prostitute he met within Chapter V. Because of the Underground Man's failure to engage relationally with those around him, he lacks what Dostoevsky views as a key component within the unfolding of one's own identity—one that is decidedly and intrinsically relational. And this lack of relational engagement is, in some part, of the Underground Man's own making, leading to a type of inner alienation that is partially self-perpetuating. Having successfully alienated himself from his classmates at Zverkov's dinner, the Underground Man finds himself in the company of Liza, an individual who finally presents an opportunity for him to generate a genuine human connection with. Even the Underground Man himself seems to pepper her with random questions and carries on in a lengthy discussion

about what an idealized version of a family would look like—all one-dimensional, idealized, intellectual subjects. However, once Liza demonstrates a more transcendent expression of emotion, something he remains utterly alienated from, the Underground Man emotionally retreats into the "underground world" (40) that characterizes much of his behavior. At her reaction to his long monologue about family structures relating to happiness in one's life, he notes,

> I did not understand that she was hiding her feelings under irony, that this is usually the last refuge of modest and chaste-souled people when the privacy of their soul is coarsely and intrusively invaded, and that their pride makes them reduce to surrender till the last moment and shrink from giving expression to their feelings before you. I ought to have guessed the truth from the timidity with which she has repeatedly approached her sarcasm, only bringing herself to utter it at last with an effort. (83)

Even in recognizing the complexity of her reaction to him, the Underground Man does not allow for a more transcendent understanding of human emotion and interaction to invade his intellectual, hardened exterior. Instead, he writes that "I did not guess, and an evil feeling took possession of me" (83). This "evil feeling" carries over into the next chapter, where the Underground Man brutally insults and degrades Liza, all in an attempt to perform a sort of mastery over her. This initial conflict with Liza demonstrates the degree to which the Underground Man's inability to engage with others ultimately estranges him from himself and his own capacity to love or express true emotions, alienating an inherent aspect of his humanity from himself. In an effort to assert his superiority over others by exacting his free will—emboldened by these "evil feelings" that affect in his time of experienced inferiority—the Underground Man draws a firm distinction between "me" and "them," but also generates a far

more subtle duality of "me" and "my humanity" as two separate entities, each estranged from the other.

This idea continues within the Underground Man's discussion of the divide between the "normal" man and one of acute consciousness, where he indicates the true intention of his dialectical writings—namely, to defend and illustrate the sheer irrationality of man, thereby refuting the rational egoism that seeks to assert man as a being operating exclusively by logic. In this, as with his pointed separation from society, the Underground Man is both embodying his own alienation, as well as supporting ideas in which Dostoevsky himself believed, particularly in the author's ongoing campaign against the rational egoism of Western culture, which he regarded as oppressive and dehumanizing. By citing man's desire for "INDEPENDENT choice, whatever that independence may cost" (21), Dostoevsky highlights the unshakable core of all human motivation—that in the irrationality of one's own self-expression, humans are engaged in a continuous effort to justify their own autonomy and self-actualize through their will alone, paradoxically different in essence from any professed individual rationalism. However the Underground Man's stance is at odds with Kierkegaard's Christian existentialism, which asserts that an individual cannot actualize their own existence without being grounded in the higher Power that constitutes their being, i.e. God. By relating to the "power that created the self," an individual then becomes more existentially-fulfilled and completely removes the despair that would otherwise dominate their existence. Even so, while the Underground Man does not necessarily engage in a formal discussion of a higher power, he does allude to an "ache in you, and the more you do not know, the worse the ache" (11). In combination with the despair that he regularly laments about, this ache highlights Dostoevsky's perspective as decidedly similar to Kierkegaard's—namely, that in order to receive true fulfillment, one must acknowledge their

reliance on the higher Power that constitutes existence. Otherwise, any attempt to generate a sustained meaning in one's life falls short, leading to intense and lasting despair.

This idea is further explored by S.L. Frank in his book, *The Meaning of Life*, which broadly discusses the pursuit of meaning amidst intense suffering. As a later Christian existentialist philosopher, and an avid reader of Dostoevsky, Frank concludes that the meaning of life stems from the interaction with immortality of the "proximate whole" (Ch.4) of the spiritual network of human relations. As evident within Kierkegaard's assertion in the necessity for being grounded in the higher Power that constitutes the self, Frank notes that "outside of our homeland and a connection with its destiny, outside of cultural creativity, outside of a creative unity with the past and the future of mankind, outside of love for and solidarity with people, outside of participation in their common destiny, we cannot actualize ourselves, we cannot acquire a genuinely meaningful life" (705). By attempting to remove oneself from that sense of interconnectedness that remains inherent to human existence, one cannot actualize their existence, leading directly to the meaningless—and thus psychologically debilitating—suffering in an isolated urban modernity that the Underground Man experiences. In some ways, that suffering is a sense of non-belonging, and, according to Frank, through enactments of love as a virtue, we can come to not only understand the *sobornost* that underscores society, but we can also begin to recognize a higher sense of belonging to the universe. This could also be compared with Heidegger's later emphasis on dwelling and the fourfold, as both a poetic experience of place, and a source of authentic relational identity. For Dostoevsky, though, the relational identity that Notes from Underground represents is moreso based in the mystical personhood present in the Trinity of Jesus Christ.

More precisely, the Underground Man's continued emphasis of the persistence of despair in his life is evocative of the different types of despair that Kierkegaard discusses in *The Sickness Unto Death* as a result of not aligning oneself with the "power that created the self". With regard to where despair emerges from, Kierkegaard notes three main components that generate despair in a person's life: 1. Despair at not being aware of having a constituted self. 2. Despair as a result of being unwilling to be oneself. 3. Despair at willing to be oneself, but not recognizing the dependency that one has on love, or the power that created them (Kierkegaard 78). The first two types of despair are highly similar to the existential conditions that Heidegger discusses, namely in the process of "falling." This is where the discussion of men of "normal" and "acute consciousness" within Part I of the novel becomes especially pertinent. However, the third type of despair noted by Kierkegaard is where the novel further illustrates the shortcomings of the Underground Man's existence. Due to his hyper-consciousness and insistence on directly alienating himself from society (and with no mention of a higher Power), his despair begins to manifest itself in the form of his complete inertia, and the novel seems to characterize his inertia as being synonymous with despair. This is discussed throughout the novel, with him emphasizing that "to be too conscious is an illness—a real thorough-going illness" (4). Through this hyper-consciousness, the Underground Man seems trapped in the endless production of self-despair and inertia as a result of his lack of reference back to the "power that created the self"—or as Frank asserts, the "proximate whole" of *sobornost*—with this lack being the "ache" or "void" that he often refers to as experiencing.

Additionally, in his discussion of the primary causes of men of action (and his personal lack of a primary cause), the Underground Man notes that "you give [your quest for vengeance] up with a wave of the hand because you have not found a fundamental cause. And try letting

yourself be carried away by your feelings, blindly, without reflection, without a primary cause, repelling consciousness at least for a time; hate or love, if only not to sit with your hands folded" (14). The insistence on primary causes hearkens back to Kierkegaard's notion of being unable to actualize one's own existence without relating to the power that created one. In being the "primary cause" that the Underground Man talks about, the need for that primary cause is potentially another reference to the religiosity, or more broadly spirituality, required in order to actualize one's existence in a truly fulfilling manner that dispels the despair so characteristic of the Underground Man. More broadly, this can be related to Heidegger's notion of resoluteness, in which an individual must adopt a stance on how to live their life—a process that occurs only after one has recognized their "being-toward-death," in which they must reconcile with their personal responsibility to make something of their lives[20]. For instance, "just as a story gains its meaning from where it is heading as a whole—its outcome or realization—so our own lives gain their meaning from where they are headed as a totality—their "being-toward-the-end"" (206), in which the collective actions of an individual's life ultimately contribute to this meaning at the end. This further relates to Heidegger's notion of authenticity, because it is within this process that "we can become authentic in the sense of living up to our lives" (206). The Underground Man's discussion of primary causes loosely seems to echo this notion, in the sense that primary causes can be partially equated with the narrativity that Heidegger asserts is necessary to apply to one's life.

It is in the space where the ideals of Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Frank overlay, that the novel transforms from early existentialist musings to a focused, *Christian* existentialist novel demonstrating the necessity for Christianity and narrativity as actualizing forces in one's life.

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[20] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Blackwell Publishers, 1962, pp. 277, 314.

The novella seems to assert a dual agenda—not only does the work utilize both the construction of the Underground Man's character and his ideological musings as a refutation of rational egoism, as well as a critique of industrializing Western society, but the work seems to subtly highlight and promote an existentially-minded unity of material and spiritual existence. Through Dostoevsky's polemic rebuttal of Chernyshevsky's rational egoism, the work takes on an existential framework in order to perform the specific ideological function of proving man as a purely irrational creature with a burdensome consciousness, one that produces a despair that can only be remedied through "faith and Christ," and, more broadly, through living a more authentic, existentially-responsible life as we see noted by Heidegger.

This framework is further embodied in the Underground Man's discussion of the nature of suffering—a philosophical question that Dostoevsky undertakes in many of his other novels, though most prominently explored in *The Brothers Karamazov.* Although the Underground Man asserts that suffering is a necessary element of reality, as it produces consciousness, the text also suggests a sort of paradoxical causality. While suffering may indeed *produce* consciousness, to the Underground Man, suffering is also a natural *result* of consciousness, in which "consciousness must pass through isolation and solitude; it is pain," where, additionally, "solitary consciousness does not exist; it is always joined with all mankind, it is *organically collective*" (Mochulsky 245-246). Not only, then, does the notion of consciousness produce despair, but it exists as a product felt by the collective, where suffering is rendered a communal phenomenon. Again, this invokes the idea of *sobornost*, or the existence of a spiritual, relational network in which humans are innately a part. Dostoevsky, in his other novels, asserts that each person is responsible for the sins of all, that the suffering of one is actually the suffering of all, in which each person becomes responsible for the collective whole. Though *Notes* does not fully engage

with the relational nature of suffering as a natural occurrence in society, many of Dostoevsky's other texts do, namely *Brothers Karamazov* in its interrogation of justice and relational identity in the trial of Dmitri.

For the Underground Man, the exaction of his free will is something that he views as an individualized, isolating process—the irrationality and near-sadism of his social interactions in Part II reflect his own belief that free will and his own "exaggerated consciousness" forces him to separates himself from the rest of society. Instead, what Dostoevsky's interrogation of consciousness shows—especially illustrated by the Underground Man's persisting emotional despair—is that the exaction of free will, in being the highest pursuit of human beings, is not necessarily incompatible with society, but only for Dostoevsky when involving *sobornost*, or the Power that constituted it, to use Kierkegaard's term. The Underground Man, in attempting to socially excise himself from society in the pursuit of his own individualism, demonstrates that even as his consciousness "thrusts itself back from the world, desperately upholds its self-legitimacy and at the same time is attracted to people, [it must] understand its dependence upon them" (Mochulsky 245). This is explored extensively in Part II, particularly in the Underground Man's wavering desire for human connection (followed by his consistent detachment from others). Upon reflection regarding his dreams of love and the "sublime and beautiful" (48), the Underground Man notes that he "could never stand more than three months of dreaming at a time without feeling an irresistible desire to plunge into society" (49). This revelation occurring through dreams hints at the pervasive psychological component to his desires, as well proves that the Underground Man's inherent yearning to have social connection creates an internal conflict that inevitably produces suffering. Again, this hearkens back to Frank's discussion in *The Meaning of Life* of the "primordial unity" (Ch.7) that underscores

human existence, and the means by which separation from that unity inevitably produces suffering.

The Underground Man's existence is intrinsically connected to those that he alienates himself from, and to alienate himself from society is also to partially alienate himself from his own existence. This idea is where the Christian existentialist undertones of the work begin to further emerge, especially when analyzed in conjunction with Kierkegaard's third categorization of despair: "Despair at willing to be oneself" (Kierkegaard 78). The despair that is generated by recognizing oneself but not accepting the dependence that that self has on the principal power that created it generates a profound despair that only can be reconciled by uniting what Kierkegaard refers to as "the infinite and the finite" (78) of man's existence—i.e., the temporal and eternal aspects of being. Without that acknowledgement, the despair generated is a "disrelationship in a relation which relates itself to itself" (80), in which a portion of the self (being the infinite self) goes unrecognized, and thereby produces an intense suffering. To Kierkegaard, despair is synonymous with this disrelationship, and all despair that is attributed to a specific thing in a person's reality is actually a concealed version of this disrelationship. However, this despair is not an *actuality*—it is *possibility*, in which only the reconcilement of infinite and finite can absolve such misery. Kierkegaard compares the constant *possibility* of despair to something like the *actuality* of a disease. He notes,

> Observe that we speak of a man contracting a disease, maybe through carelessness. Then the illness sets in, and from that instant it affirms itself and is now an *actuality*, the origin of which recedes more and more into the past…its progress is not to be referred every instant to him as the cause; he contracted it, but one cannot say that he *is contracting* it. Not so with despair: every actual instant of despair is *contracting* it, it is constantly in the

present tense...at every actual instant of despair the despairer bears as his responsibility

all the foregoing experience in possibility as a present. (81)

Kierkegaard then goes on to discuss the nature of "the relation which relates itself to itself" (81) by mentioning that part of man's being—that of which constitutes half of the synthesis that is his existence—is the eternal, or infinite. Because it is a portion of that relation that constitutes his existence, he cannot simply get rid of that aspect of himself. Instead, the man in despair is engaged in a continuous "casting" away of the eternal from himself. This perpetual process is what generates despair, as this creates a profound conflict within an individual's own existence, because "the relation to himself a man cannot get rid of, any more than he can get rid of himself, which moreover is one and the same thing, since the self is the relationship to oneself" (81). This continuous "casting" away and the despair it generates is briefly highlighted by the Underground Man when he, in passing, mentions the internal "ache" (11) that persistently exists as a part of his consciousness and the suffering that he experiences.

This ache, while potentially Dostoevsky's reference to the eternal portion of being, can also extend to the inability for the Underground Man to truly connect with those around him. If the casting away of the eternal can become synonymous to the casting away of love as a necessary element of human existence (with love perhaps being synonymous with the "Power that posited it"), then the Underground Man's existence is an even more profound example of the suffering inherent to a loveless, isolated existence—i.e., an existence that has not been actualized. The novel explores the loveless isolation of the Underground Man most prominently in Part II, with the final few chapters dedicated to the Underground Man's complicated relationship with the prostitute, Liza. The Underground Man realizes his inability to experience and express true love, for his expression of love throughout all of his interactions with others was

nothing more than "tyrannising and showing [his] moral superiority," and that he had "never in

his life been able to imagine any other sort of love, and [had] nowadays come to the point of

sometimes thinking that love really consists in the right—freely given by the beloved object—to

tyrannise over [Liza]" (106). This moment is critical to understanding the intense internal

suffering that the Underground Man experiences as a result of his own inability to experience all

components of his own existence, being love and a sense of interconnectedness with the

communal human experiences of those around him. However, this is not to say that the

Underground Man's inability to love and experience human connection occurs passively. Once

again, the Underground Man himself is the source of his own suffering, and regularly throughout

Part II are references to his disdain for feeling certain emotions. For instance, shortly after his

realization about love, the Underground Man finds himself feeling "oppressed" by Liza's

presence in his home, going so far as to note that "real life oppressed me with its novelty so

much that I could hardly breathe" (106). His instinctual reaction to the situation is to hide once

more in his peaceful underground world, to cower as the "luckless mouse" that he believes

himself to be.

The situation with Liza highlights the issues and the subsequent voids present in the

Underground Man's life as a result of his inability to experience true human connection, and

Dostoevsky seems to echo a similar conclusion to Kierkegaard, namely that the exaction of one's

own free will and the expression of their consciousness is not enough to avoid suffering and

despair. If anything, the Underground Man concludes that consciousness is a paradoxical

relationship between suffering and its own presence/existence. If the removal of despair only is

achieved through the true actualization of one's existence, theologically in *theosis*, or becoming

one with God's uncreated grace in Orthodox Christian terms, it seems that Dostoevsky uses the

construction of the Underground Man to illustrate the deficiencies in a purely "conscious,"

hyper-intellectualized existence.

Frank, too, adheres to a similar conclusion—namely, that one requires a certain

engagement with a transcendent sense of spirituality. He notes that "we suffer not from an excess

but from a lack of spiritual strength. We have lost our strength and grown weary in the desert;

our soul seeks not the meaningless expanses of detachment from all things, but, on the contrary,

a close and ultimate fusion with something unknown which could, once and for all, fill,

strengthen, and sate it" (*Meaning*, Appendix). The Underground Man possesses a void that,

according to Dostoevsky, and discussed by both Kierkegaard and Frank, requires a more

meaningful connection with a transcendent unity to spirituality in order to alleviate such

existential pain.

While traditional existentialism doesn't include references to the "power that posited it,"

the insistence on individual projects and the transcendence that those projects generate creates a

similar conclusion to Kierkegaard and Frank, in that *something* is required beyond simple

consciousness in order to experience fulfilment. This notion is most readily discussed by Sartre

in *Being and Nothingness*, in which he espouses that humans possess a universal desire for a

fundamental project[21] that arises from the "for-itself"[22] setting its own self-identity as a task to

identify, occurring only after the "for-itself" recognizes its own lack of identity. The fulfilment

generated by projects as explored by Sartre can be applied to the "*need of faith and Christ*" that

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[21] Projects are the means by which the world "is revealed, takes on meaning" (Crowell), otherwise defined as transcendence. Through projects that are enacted with engaged agency, i.e. not "situated" projects that are more inherent to a world that is unrepresentative of the individual enacting the project, the world and existence as a whole can adopt a chosen meaning. A collection of projects that are enacted with an overarching narrative in mind then produces the type of identity that the "for-itself" seeks to assert upon recognizing its own lack of identity.
[22] Sartre makes a distinction between being "for-itself" and being "in-itself", with the "for-itself" recognizing its own existence based on what it is not: being "in-itself", with being "in-itself" existing as a passive, non-conscious entity that simply "is" and is therefore not capable of enacting transcendence in its own existence. Through this process of recognition, the "for-itself" is able to understand its own existence as an entirely free being made up of nothingness, thereby able to generate and affix meaning to its own existence, i.e. enact transcendence through its own projects.

Dostoevsky highlights as one of the initial, critical elements expressed in *Notes from Underground*. But for Dostoevsky such a "project" could run the risk of becoming a self-objectifying idea as well. In order to achieve a more fulfilled existence, even beyond Sartre's individualized drive for fulfillment, Dostoevsky's framework appears to assert a Kierkegaardian necessity to refer one's existence back to the mystical relationality of the Trinitarian God and Christ. This infuses *Notes* with a much more profound conclusion than many of the Underground Man's dialectical exercises— that at the core of human existence is the prevalent need for Christ and religiosity as a guiding, actualizing, *connecting* force that infuses an individual's life with meaning, while also asserting an importance to the collective. Without that, existence is filled with despair and suffering, where conscious existence becomes a lonesome realm of crippling inertia, as well as spiritual and mental unfulfillment.

CHAPTER III: A SYNTHESIS OF LOVECRAFT & DOSTOEVSKY'S EXISTENTIALISM

In his 1948 article, "Existentialism—a Literature of Despair?," Henri Peyre describes the innate condition of the existential writer:

> They wonder why they exist, and why the universe exists, and why anything should exist, and why human life suddenly irrupted, unwanted, in this world. Their question is indeed the fundamental one asked by all philosophical minds. Their anxiety increases when they realize that they are a paradox in this irrational universe, where, alone with his reason, man is "de trop," unwanted, unfitted, puzzled by the absurdity of his own presence, vainly applying his reason to explain a universe which baffles rationality. (25)

These musings provide a framework for the writings of both Dostoevsky and Lovecraft, whose works—while possessing varied perspectives in their efforts to understand existence—seek to confront the nature of humanity, the absurdity of existence, and the conundrum of generating meaning under said premises. But these questions are not reserved for existential writers alone, and as Peyre describes, they extend more pervasively to infiltrate the interior of all philosophical human thought. Perhaps this is why existentialism remains a critical avenue of reflection for those in crisis—whether of a deeply personal nature, or in response to social concerns. Peyre also discusses this reactionary phenomenon, highlighting that "fear, insecurity, the sense that a whole civilization is near its collapse may invade whole groups of thoughtful or sensitive persons" (22), and that existentialism provides the individual with unlimited choice, with the freedom to continuously engage in the making of their own futurity. The act of producing (or reading) existential literature provides the individual with the ability to engage and reflect more profoundly with the core of these questions, and we see this readily expressed within both Lovecraft and Dostoevsky's fiction.

Literature, as whole, seems to exist as an avenue to respond to social and ideological questions/concerns, and *existential* literature seems to do so in a much more extensive manner. While Lovecraft's weird horror lacks the specification of being intentionally existential, as discussed in Chapter I, his works possess distinct features of existentialism, and tend to trend more toward nihilism. Thus, his integration of science fiction and existential themes produces the nihilistic cosmicism so characteristic of his writing. On the contrary, Dostoevsky's Christian existentialism remains more directly involved in the affirmed "canon" of existential literature, with *Notes from Underground* serving as one of the first recognized existential novels. While his later works like *Crime and Punishment*, *Demons*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* integrate Christian existential themes in a more overt manner, *Notes from Underground* still provides a critical framework for Dostoevsky's critique of religious and cultural concerns. In this manner, both authors engage and interpret existentialism very differently within their literature, and their varied conclusions emphasize different components of existentialism, particularly as it relates to the social and non-social aspects of existentialism. However—and not unlike those that turn to existentialism in reaction to social and existential anxieties—both authors similarly utilize existentialism in their works as a response to concerns surrounding what they assumed to be the looming threat of modernity and its perceived deterioration of their cultures.

Despite their differences in hemispheres and time periods, both Lovecraft and Dostoevsky affirmed that America and Russia, respectively, were experiencing an intense cultural deterioration as a result of modernity's changing ideals, as well as their society's developing socio-economic/political structures. As mentioned in both Chapter I and II, this pervasive aversion to modernity is greatly apparent in their literature, whether written into the subtext, or included as a key element of the narrative itself. For Lovecraft, this can be seen in the

description of the Innsmouth people in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," which indicates his own

cultural anxieties surrounding issues of blurring class and racial distinctions. By indicating the

integration of Othered figures into an otherwise familiar world, i.e. a New England town—with

the protagonist himself discovering a shared heritage with the hybrid creatures—Lovecraft

expresses his ultimate concern: the emerging indistinction of the social hierarchy. What once

easily determined the boundaries between "us" and "them" for Lovecraft is rendered blurry by

the development of modern ideals and the rise of commercialism. As Houellebecq notes,

"[Lovecraft] was just particularly *old-fashioned*. It seemed self-evident to him that Anglo-Saxon

Protestants were by nature entitled to the highest positions within the social order; as to other

races… he only felt a distant and benevolent disdain toward them" (123), up until his time spent

in New York, where he was forced to confront the physical manifestation of modernity in the

form of a robust immigrant community. Integrating Lovecraft's own comments on this

experience, again, Houellebecq highlights the critical nature of the author's time in New York as

it pertains to developing the true horror embedded within his literature. He notes that,

> Being poor, [Lovecraft] was forced to live in the same neighborhoods as the "obscene,
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> repulsive, nightmarish" immigrants…And in the long lines of job seekers he came across
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> them again and realized to his horror that his own aristocratic bearing and refined
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> education tempered with his "balanced conservatism" brought him no advantage. His
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> currency was worth nothing here in Babylon; here "rat-faced Jews" and "monstrous
>
> half-breeds skip about rolling on their heels absurdly." This is no longer the WASP's
>
> well-bred racism; it is the brutal hatred of a trapped animal who is forced to share his
>
> cage with other different and frightening creatures. (123-124)

This intense fear of blurring social categories, of the loss of distinction between himself and Others, helps Lovecraft fully integrate his own existential anxieties into his writings. And while his deeply-ingrained racism serves a critical function for the construction of his horror, those existential anxieties extend far beyond racial and socio-economic distinctions. For Lovecraft, modernity cannot be singularly equated to racial and social hierarchy concerns, but extends further into the larger context of trends toward commercialism, mass culture, and the social changes associated with industrial capitalism. All of these factors seem to combine to create a distinct, looming sense of dread and insecurity as it pertained to modernity, thereby creating an opportunity for Lovecraft to explore such fears through his weird horror narratives.

For Dostoevsky, the concerns that he possessed about modernity appear to be rooted less in a profound hatred of blurring social caste systems, and instead involves his perception of a rising superficiality in society, as well his concern for Russia's adoption of European ideals—a process he viewed as a sort of cultural colonialism of Russia by the West. Whereas Lovecraft's thoughts regarding modernity emerge from a more secular perspective, Dostoevsky's profound Christianity is the basis from which he understands and contemplates the perceived decline in Russian culture. In a similar vein to Lovecraft, Dostoevsky's lived experience in St. Petersburg—a hub of modern industrialization—provided him with direct experiences that produced the same type of aversion to modernity that Lovecraft experienced in New York. We see this most readily explored in *Notes from Underground*, as the Underground Man forces himself into seclusion, away from the painfully modernized St. Petersburg and its highly intellectualized, European ideals. The Underground Man highlights the city as a decidedly artificial space, one that is overly bureaucratic, and entirely systemized. Thus, as the setting for *Notes from Underground*, Dostoevsky casts St. Petersburg—in its wholly urbanized, modern

existence—as a space of utter superficiality. This is reflected not only through the construction of

the city itself (in being a modernized landscape initially founded to integrate European ideals

into Russian culture[23]), but also through its intellectual culture. All of this highlights

Dostoevsky's intense critique of the more secularized, cultural aspects of Russia, which he views

as stemming partially from Russia's captivation with certain European ideals—those of which

are embodied by London's Crystal Palace[24].

Through mentions of the Crystal Palace in *Notes from Underground,* as well as his

personal writings in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863), Dostoevsky highlights the

problems with what he (and other thinkers) view as the ultimate physical manifestation of

modernity. Across the world, the building symbolized the pursuit of the idyllic, utopian—of the

vision Chernyshevsky conceived in his *What Is To Be Done?*. Through this man-made fortress of

iron and glass, "the elegance, simplicity, harmony, and rationality of the structure would provide

evidence of man's absolute and total perfectibility. For Chernyshevsky, the Crystal Palace was

the secular actualization of the kingdom of heaven on Earth," (Katz 47). For Dostoevsky, the

Crystal Palace was a nightmare. It was a "terrifying structure, a symbol of false unity," and "in

the spirit of industrial capitalism...the crystal palace is its temple" (Pevear). Instead of

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[23]St. Petersburg was initially founded in 1703 by Peter the Great (1682-1725), and was modeled after Western European capitals, such as Amsterdam. Expressed within the architectural design, the city was "developed as a product of monarchical self-aggrandizement combined with glorification of the nation" (Hassell 249), and Peter the Great's modernized, Western-leaning ideals were infused into its very construction. Placed strategically on the Baltic coast, St. Petersburg was crafted so that it would engage more readily in European affairs, and required waterway access to do so. Peter the Great regulated the planning of the city with precise detail, overcoming the landscape's harsh conditions to create a hub for Russia's entrance as a great power on the world stage. In its construction, upwards of 100,000 serfs died during the construction process (Osborn). To Dostoevsky, the incredibly artificial nature of the city—in having been constructed with an express purpose of creating a new capital, as well as desiring greater connection with Europe—made St. Petersburg a decidedly 'made' and unnatural space, owing itself to what he perceived as the growing superficiality of the city's intellectual and social culture.

[24] Originally built to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Crystal Palace was the world's first large, freestanding iron-frame building. Enclosing a total of 33 million cubic feet of space, the building was decidedly massive and represented an incredible architectural achievement. Many "emphasized the spiritual or transcendent nature of their experience at the Crystal Palace: they described it as nothing less than a secular cathedral built as a monument to science and technology" (Katz 46).

representing a promising utopian vision of the emerging future, the structure possessed a

frightening finality to it, where the

> [Crystal Palace] represented the triumph of mathematics and civil engineering: it left no
>
> room for man's whims or his fantasy, his free, unfettered, independent desire, his "most
>
> advantageous advantage." The Crystal Palace was final, total, absolute, and immutable; it
>
> was an emblem of human pride and arrogance; it constituted a threat to human freedom
>
> and autonomy. (Katz 47)

And so it is through Dostoevsky's existential anxieties about the Crystal Palace that we see his

overarching aversion to modern, secularized ideals, that of which we see expressed most readily

in his interrogation of the Underground Man's lack of spiritual fulfillment. In that, Dostoevsky

asserts a further extension of his distaste for modern, hyper-intellectualized ideals as they pertain

to Christianity. Instead of engaging with a more transcendent, experiential Christianity that

values lived experience, relational identity, and a deeper connection with faith and God,

Dostoevsky felt that the invasion of intellectualized, European ideals on Russian culture had

significantly degraded that more profound spirituality (as well as the larger intellectual culture).

Instead, modernity presented a far more superficial engagement with Christianity—one based

more in intellectual understanding, and not in shared, lived experience. This is where the crux of

his Christian existentialism emerges as we see displayed in *Notes from Underground* and

subsequent works. Similarly to Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky asserts the necessity of a more

profound connection with both spirituality, and one's surrounding society—a perspective that

invokes the concept of *sobornost,* or a society's interconnected spiritual community. It seems that

through this engagement with others on a more transcendent level, by more greatly

understanding and feeling the underlying *sobornost* of a given society, Dostoevsky believes that

the issues with hyper-intellectualism and an adherence toward secular rationalism can be rectified.

Though their perspectives emerge out of different positions as it pertains to religion, as well as vastly different cultural traditions, both Lovecraft and Dostoevsky saw modernity—specifically how it functioned and was represented in more urbanized areas—as detrimental to the development of their different cultural identities. It is interesting to consider that it was within urban environments where both authors came to fully realize their own existential anxieties. For Lovecraft, New York became a space invoking anxiety, horror, and suffering, and for Dostoevsky, St. Petersburg served as the crux of a Europeanized Russia, fraught with the ideas that he himself held major grievances with. And this makes sense. With both cities serving as hubs for economic and cultural development, they seemed to exist as the greatest physical embodiment of modernity—they became spaces from which both authors could reflect more deeply about the changing social, political, and economic atmospheres around them. And yet, this is where the similarities end between both writers. For Lovecraft, his existential anxieties extend more toward a spectrum of hatred and disgust, where anything deemed Other invokes an intense personal suffering within him. As discussed, this is directly reflected in his short stories, specifically in the shared language he utilizes to describe both his fictionalized scenes of horror, and then his perceived 'real-world' horror as it pertained to immigrants, non-white peoples, and growing concerns about the rise of industrial capitalism. Conversely, Dostoevsky's grievances with modernity seem to show that his existential anxieties are rooted much more in the loss of traditional ideals, rather than the distinct aversion Lovecraft possessed with anyone rendered as Other.

This establishes another important distinction between both authors, which greatly contributes to their varied engagements with existentialism. As the name suggests, Dostoevsky's Christian existentialism is rooted in an Orthodox Christianity, and his writings—both personal and professional—often emphasize aspects of asceticism as a means of understanding the nature of mystical faith and existence. Without an understanding of Dostoevsky's profound spirituality, it would be incredibly difficult to recognize the intricacies of his Christian existentialism, particularly as it connects with the notion of *sobornost*. In stark contrast to Dostoevsky's religiosity, Lovecraft was an anti-religious atheist that greatly detested religion for its contribution toward what he believed to be prevention of socio-political progress within society. Because of this, his literary philosophy of cosmicism is decidedly atheistic, and this produces an interesting comparison between both authors, particularly in how their personal beliefs facilitate their deferments to different sub-categories on the spectrum of existentialism, as well as contribute to the elements of existentialism that they emphasize in their writing. The component of religiosity (or the lack thereof) serves as one of the greatest determining factors toward their different existential beliefs, particularly as that pertains to meaning-making.

In the evaluation of these philosophical differences represented in their literature, it does seem pertinent to briefly acknowledge the variables between their writing styles and lived experience, and how that, too, contributes to their engagements with existentialism as a reactionary mechanism. While the element of religiosity divides both authors, the second greatest distinction between both Lovecraft and Dostoevsky emerges in the form of genre. As a serialized, weird horror novelist, Lovecraft's works are naturally more conducive to vocalizing and representing deeply-rooted fears about modernity. Through the production of his weird horror literature, Lovecraft's stories can seamlessly integrate horrific imagery that dually works

to invoke horror at a fictional environment, while simultaneously presenting a metaphorical, real-world existential horror that Lovecraft himself experienced. It is also important to note exactly how his weird horror is able to function perfectly as a platform for interrogation of these existential ideas. To refer back to Timothy Evan's description of horror as a genre, Lovecraft's literature, not unlike all horror literature, is "predicated upon feelings of insecurity brought about by cultural change, by the idea that our families and communities, our familiar beliefs and cultural forms, are increasingly under assault by forces beyond our control" (100). Even further, it is important to recognize Lovecraft's genre positioning as not merely horror, but *weird* horror—with the "weird" distinction emerging from what Mark Fisher refers to as a "sensation of wrongness" (15), where something is so strange that it feels as if it should not exist, whether here or elsewhere, and that when it is shown to exist within our familiar spaces, "then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid" (15). Through the combination of the "weird" and a more traditional form of horror, Lovecraft's dual-genre writings present an opportunity to reflect on the very specific existential feelings of "wrongness" (Fisher 15) and cultural insecurities that characterize his world view.

In contrast, Dostoevsky's genre of a broader literary fiction provides a much more open platform for acknowledging his existential concerns about modernity. Although he did have to navigate Russian censors during the publication process, which, as discussed in Chapter II, did affect the portrayal of some of his existential concerns as they pertained to religious and social issues, the broadness of his fiction as a genre allows him to explore his concerns about a variety of issues with little constrictions based on the genre itself. However, Dostoevsky's existentialist spirituality—combined with a love of Gothic fiction—helped provide a supernatural edginess to what he called his "fantastic realism" in his writing (Frank 289), that of which became more

pronounced in his later works, and allowed for an even larger, broader platform for discussing his existential concerns about the self and society.

Something else to consider, particularly as it involves Dostoevsky, is the critical distinction of their different hemispheric locations, as well as how that perspective would have altered their intellectual engagements with existentialism. With Lovecraft having been raised in the West, his childhood education, conceived ideals, and exposure to cultural influences would have been firmly rooted in a more Westernized understanding of the individual and society, as well as the interrelation between the two. Most biographies of Lovecraft stress his informal, home-education as a critically influential source for the later development of his nihilistic cosmicism, especially in claims that Lovecraft was well-read on Greek and Roman philosophy (Franch and Macrobert 35). Thus, he would have been more than capable of formulating his own literary philosophy in response to both social concerns with contemporary issues, as well as in response—in the way that works often seem to indirectly respond to those before them—to the vast philosophical canon existing long before his lifetime. In contrast, Dostoevsky's upbringing in Russia infuses his fiction writings, personal letters, and general perspectives with intrinsically Eastern ideals, especially as they pertain to a disdain for the imposition of European ideals on Russian culture. To Dostoevsky, "Russian society had been formed by decades of imported 'development' and 'enlightenment' words" (Pevear), and much of his later writing reflects his concerns for the loss of Eastern culture against the ideological onslaught of the West. Having grown up in a society permanently inflected by European ideals, Dostoevsky experienced, even from a young age, the degradation of Russian culture by modern, Western development. Because of this, his Christian existentialism seems to illustrate that through this "social displacement of an imported culture, [he] perceived a more profound human displacement, a spiritual void filled

with foreign content" (Pevear) with which he endeavored to fill through a deeper, more mystical connection with Christianity.

Given the hemispheric differences between both writers (and the ideological consequences of each), we can come to understand how their unique deferments toward existentialism emphasize different philosophical components. This highlights not only the efficacy of existentialism as a reactionary response, but dually points to the fluidity of the philosophy in its applicability to vastly different literary genres. We can see this variability through looking more closely at the precise differences between Lovecraft's nihilistic cosmicism, and Dostoevsky's Christian existentialism, both of which can be categorized under the larger collective term of existentialism. In many ways, this type of examination can provide us with a better means of understanding the ideological web of existentialism, and where these authors exist within it. As discussed, the largest difference between both authors reflected in their writings emerges in the form of an adherence to religion and spirituality, or in Lovecraft's case, the intentional movement *away* from religiosity. Because of Dostoevsky's ideological and religious connections with ascetic traditions and Orthodox Christianity, his conception of meaning-making seems to be generated through understanding and engaging more readily with the underlying, spiritual interconnectivity of humanity, where to understand the profundity of social, human existence is to begin the process of more transcendently understanding one's own connection with their faith and God. Because of this, his Christian existentialism seems to assert a clear path to relieve a portion of the inherent suffering of existence. Not unlike how other existentialist thinkers discuss the production of meaning in an otherwise meaningless universe, this aligns Dostoevsky with a more traditional conception of existentialism—with the added premise of faith and spirituality, of course.

For Lovecraft, his firmly atheistic perspective generates a much more intense and alienating understanding of the world, where meaning-making seems relatively useless when one first comes to understand their utterly insignificant place in the cosmos. In fact, his nihilistic cosmicism relies on the fruitlessness of meaning-making, and his fiction almost never touches the subject. Instead, his cosmic horror serves to dismantle the familiarity and comfortability of everyday life through the life-altering introduction of the physical embodiment of non-meaning—i.e., the alien creatures that serve as the ultimate reminder of humanity's utter insignificance, where the process of meaning-making becomes almost meaningless with that cosmic reminder always looming in the background. His characters suffer, and their suffering seems almost endless, with many of his protagonists ending their narratives with a psychological "breakdown or psychosis" (Fisher 16), which illustrates the degree to which his writing serves a relatively singular purpose: to establish the insignificance of humanity, but certainly not to provide a solution for it. However, the lack of potential solution could simply be an element of his works as they function in the weird horror genre; if Lovecraft provided an avenue with which his characters could cope with the cosmic horror that unfolds in his narratives, his stories would lack the critically unsettling, non-belonging feeling that readers experience at the story's conclusion. This just demonstrates how genre functions a bit differently for both authors, and how that may contribute slightly to the development of their existentialist philosophies.

Another key difference between each author's existentialism is the mode by which they express their ideas. For instance, Lovecraft relies heavily on the notion of Otherness as the key element that generates the cosmic horror characteristic of his nihilistic cosmicism. Though this remains an extension of his own issues with the Other as expressed in his time in New York City, his stories use Otherness as the key mode by which his characters grapple with their own (and,

by extension, humanity's) insignificance. The cosmic entities, whether seen directly or indirectly—as experienced through characters viewing ancient artifacts or texts that indicate the existence of said entities—serve as the single point of reference, of *Otherness*, that allows characters to understand the unsettling nature of human existence. As we see expressed by Lovecraft, his portrayal of the destructive nature of the Other reflects the existential idea noted by Heidegger regarding the potential for one to become "fallen" when they operate exclusively under the premise of social normativity—i.e., doing something or living a certain way, because socially, that is simply "what one does." Though Lovecraft's portrayal of the Other is not as developed to indicate that philosophical component of "fallenness" in society, his highlighting of the innate power of society—in being the collection of Others—ultimately invokes a sense of destruction that we can similarly view as being the Heideggerian destruction of the authentic self, if one is given way to habits of inauthenticity.

For Dostoevsky, Otherness is utilized in a much different manner than Lovecraft, with *Notes from Underground* emphasizing the inherent *need* for Others, for a connection with one's surrounding society as an intrinsic part of the human experience, where to attempt to divorce oneself from that society is to deny oneself their humanity. This representation of this idea is where he infuses his works with the underlying premise of *sobornost*. For instance, *Crime and Punishment* would point to love between a man and a woman as a potential source of relational identity—a type of *sobornost*—if pointing toward a larger spirituality. His final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov,* would speak of the necessity for involvement in Otherness, in the sense of "other worlds," to live authentically, in the unity of *sobornost*. However, at the same time, through Otherness and its potential for causing alienation, Dostoevsky discusses the implications of a society that is "fallen" and insufficient. In addition to Otherness, Dostoevsky highlights

existential suffering as a mode of understanding the conditions of existence, as well as how to navigate living a more existentially and spiritually responsible life. The recurrent references to the deficiencies of the Underground Man's character highlights that it is within the *lack* of connection to both the underlying *sobornost* of society, as well as the despair inherent to the Underground Man at having not achieved theological and existential actualization, that Dostoevsky best represents his Christian existentialism. Interestingly enough, Lovecraft seems to represent his existential conclusions through the distinct horror of what currently exists in front of his protagonists, whereas Dostoevsky achieves his representation by demonstrating what is in a state of lack, or what is not presently available to the protagonist—a method that loosely mimics the same apophatic concept that underscores his own Orthodox Christianity.

Having analyzed both authors individually, as well as how their existential perspectives differ from one another, it seems critical to reference the existing continuum of existential philosophy in an effort to engage both authors with the larger philosophical conversation. That being said, I'm not necessarily indicating that existentialism is a linear progression from nihilism to Christian existentialism, as the sum of the philosophy relies on the conversant ideas between different existential thinkers, in which existentialism functions more as a nebulous web-like structure. Instead, I see the production of meaning as a way of understanding what one believes, in order to assert where one lies among the interrelated web of ideas. As the name suggests, Lovecraft's nihilistic cosmicism adheres closely to Nietzsche's nihilism in its assertion of the intrinsic meaninglessness of existence. However, Nietzsche's nihilism is not simply an acknowledgement of the philosophical problem of existence, but an additional evaluation of meaning-production in an otherwise meaningless void. For Nietzsche,

> To create meaning and value in a world from which all transcendent supports have fallen
> away is to give unique shape to one's immediate inclinations, drives, and passions; to
> interpret, prune, and enhance according to a unifying sensibility, a ruling instinct, that
> brings everything into a whole that satisfies the non-conceptual, aesthetic norm of what
> fits, what belongs, what is appropriate. (Crowell)

His standards for shaping existence as an ongoing project illustrates the degree to which Lovecraft's nihilistic cosmicism lies somewhat beyond Nietzsche's own conception of existence. For Lovecraft, the production of meaning is never discussed in his literature, and his protagonists only ever come to acknowledge their place in the cosmos, with many experiencing a debilitating loss of identity and direction in the process. It is almost as if Lovecraft's literature presents the meaninglessness of existence that is expressed within existentialism, but leaves it at that—in this process, he defines the problem, but never engages with a given solution. Although, as I discussed previously, the non-conclusivity of this philosophical problem seems to be indicative of the weird horror genre itself. That being said, this is not to say that the concept of meaning is rendered entirely void within Lovecraft's stories. His fiction doesn't assert that life is meaningless and humans are insignificant, therefore arguing for some type of non-existence, or the self-destruction of humanity, almost as if to assert that to continue would be a pointless effort. Instead, his works seem to much more subtly emphasize the underlying conclusion that Nietzsche himself comes to, namely that meaning must be produced if there is to be any 'meaning' at all. By forcing protagonists to confront cosmic entities that render humanity's existence insignificant, Lovecraft forces protagonists and readers alike to engage with the idea that all structures and acts of meaning performed by humans are meaningful, but not *inherently*. They are meaningful simply because they exist, and although Lovecraft never openly discusses

such a conclusion, his writings assert this through the cosmic, nihilistic negation of intrinsic meaning.

For Dostoevsky, his Christian existentialism seems to align significantly with major tenets of Kierkegaard's philosophical beliefs, though Dostoevsky tends to trend much more toward Russian philosophy, as noted by his gesture toward *sobornost* in *Notes from Underground*. Dostoevsky, in his critique of modernity and the means by which ideals become reified into identities—as noted with his critique of the Crystal Palace mentality—is similar to Kierkegaard's idea of the "crowd of untruth," in which the normativity of public opinion often transforms into an individual's sense of self, relieving the individual of the responsibility to generate their own singularity. Additionally, Kierkegaard's discussion of despair, and the means by which despair is generated within an individual's life, echoes the way in which Dostoevsky sees suffering as a removal from the mystical, underlying "proximate whole" (Frank Ch. 2) of social, human existence, in which a person must recognize the web of interrelation underscoring their existence as an individual inherently part of a social collective. However, to use Kierkegaard as the sole point of reference for Dostoevsky's Christian existentialism imposes a more Westernized understanding of existence, when his interrogations into the problems of existence possess more nuance overall. We see this as it pertains to his integration of Russian philosophy and Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the modes by which he understands the individual and society. In this sense, Dostoevsky appears to provide a more relational understanding of existence than Kierkegaard, in Dostoevsky's assertion of a more transcendent, collective unity as a solution to the problem of existence, rather than a fixation of the importance of a single individual, as Kierkegaard asserts.

This variability between both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky's Christian existentialism highlights the fluidity of existentialism in its ability to encompass vastly different perspectives on existence, which we see more clearly as we integrate both Nietzsche's nihilism and Lovecraft's nihilistic cosmicism into the intellectual "web" of existentialism discussed so far. Through this, we see the numerous means by which existentialism can be modified to indicate different paths toward meaning-making, as well as distinct avenues toward the alleviation of existential dread and suffering. Because of this, we can note how existentialism is utilized as a platform by both authors as an expression of their reactionary perspectives toward modernity—whether that be more ideologically-centered (as in Dostoevsky's case), or surrounding the disintegration of social systems and the rise of industrial capitalism (as seen with Lovecraft). By further drafting Lovecraft and Dostoevsky's literature into the larger context of existentialist discourse, this analysis seeks to illustrate the degree to which two authors—so different in their lived experiences, engagement with religion, and genres in which they write—can discuss similar concerns and understandings of existence through the fluidity of existentialism as a philosophical mechanism of reflection and response. Additionally, by acknowledging the vast array of ideological leanings within the larger umbrella of existentialism, we can come to understand how it serves a specific purpose in not only expounding on the nature of existence, but in providing almost all individuals with the opportunity to reflect on their own insecurities and socio-economic anxieties, with this perhaps being the result of existentialism's foundation itself being rooted in a response to modern technology, industrialism, and its resulting sense of alienation. In our postmodern, contemporary society, this type of reflection is critical as individuals grapple with the ever-changing dynamics between the self and society, particularly as

it pertains to the ability to generate meaning in the increasingly unclear spaces between those categories.

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