



LUND UNIVERSITY

Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology

Centre for Languages and Literature

English Studies

A Stranger Among Those Who Are Still Men

Reading Monsters as Performing Transgender
Identities in Four Short Stories by H. P. Lovecraft

Eric Sarkar Nilsson
ENGK01
Degree project in English Literature
Autumn 2019
Centre for Languages and Literature
Lund University
Supervisor: Claes Lindskog

Abstract

In his book *Skin Shows*, Jack Halberstam posits that depictions of monsterhood in horror media can be directly comparable to different socially constructed identities, such as gender, and even transgender. But can such a comparison be made in a text regardless of its author's biases and intentions? The purpose of this essay is to find out how the monsters in four of H. P. Lovecraft's short stories can be read as performing transgender identities. In order to do this, I employ theories of identity performativity, queer readings, queer coding, and Halberstam's ideas on monsterhood and gender and adapt them into a transgender theoretical framework. Using these theories, this essay argues for a link between the way the monstrous characters in "The Outsider", "Cool Air", "The Dunwich Horror", and "The Thing on the Doorstep" perform mind-body dissonance, social tension, and bodily transformation in a way evocative of transgender identity expressions.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Background	2
3. Mind-Body Dissonance	8
4. Social Tension	11
5. Bodily Transformation	15
6. Conclusion	18
Works Cited	21

1. Introduction

When most people hear the word “gender”, they probably think of a binary system. Either you are a man or a woman. This is something decided from birth, with your physical sex. In turn, your sex decides to some degree your personality and your societal and familial role. However, there is another way of viewing gender. This is by viewing gender as something socially, culturally, and politically constructed. One can trace this thought back to Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote: “one is not born a woman, one becomes one” (Beauvoir 330), but it came into its own with Judith Butler’s seminal work on gender and queer theory, *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler’s take on the philosophy of identity, centring on gender and sexuality, is that these are a series of performative acts (*Gender Trouble* 25). Your identity is as you convey it and what other people understand it to be.

This idea of performative identity has developed into a key concept within queer theory and gone on to inspire queer readings of literary works, or queering, as it is also called. By queering texts, one can find LGBT+ representation where it is often overlooked. Queer scholars have found that queer mannerisms and attributes are often given to characters in literature as a shorthand to signal to the reader the character’s strangeness, villainy, or degeneracy (Greenhill 111-112). Jack Halberstam expands on these ideas in his book *Skin Shows* where he discusses fictional horror monsters and otherness. According to Halberstam, monsters in horror stories problematise and complexify human identities, not least gender identities.

This is where H. P. Lovecraft and his short stories come in. Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) was a pulp horror author most famous for his poems and short stories about a fictional universe which would posthumously be called the “Cthulhu Mythos”. He is often credited with being influential in the creation of the subgenre of cosmic horror (Nyikos 40). Characterised by themes dealing with the fear of cosmic indifference and the unimportance of humanity, cosmic horror often involves terrifying monstrosities, either partly human or wholly inhuman (Smith 83-91).

In the past, queer readings have posited that characters in Lovecraft’s stories perform homosexual identities. Scholars like Bobby Derie and Robert Price as well as Internet forum posts and YouTubers like Harris Brewis and the movie *Cthulhu* (2007) all make the point that there is something gay about the Cthulhu-mythos. In this essay, I would like to elaborate on the queer in Lovecraft by examining his characters through the perspective of a queer studies subfield, transgender studies. By adapting the methods of queering into a transgender reading, or transgenering, I will analyse transgender representation in these stories by answering the

question: how can the monstrous characters in H.P. Lovecraft's short stories "The Outsider" (1926), "Cool Air" (1928), "The Dunwich Horror" (1928), and "The Thing on the Doorstep" (1937) be read as performing transgenderism?

For clarity, I am not reading transgender people as monsters or inhuman. According to Halberstam's theories, monsters in horror media can be said to resemble transgender or more broadly queer in behaviour, looks, or other signals. The fact that this similarity exists within horror writing is problematic. However, what this essay aims to do is look past those problematic aspects, whilst still recognising them, by treating Lovecraft's monsters as any other potentially transgender characters. By doing this I seek to find performances by the monsters that transgenderists could relate to. What I would argue with this essay is that whether human or not, the horror in experiencing that one's mind is in the wrong body, of being a victim of social tension and hate, and of one's body changing can be experienced in similar ways.

I will examine how the monstrous characters in four of H.P. Lovecraft's short stories can be read as performing transgenderism. To do so, I will analyse how three aspects often associated with transgenderism are performed in these stories. These three aspects are body-mind dissonance, social tension, and bodily transformation. I have chosen these short stories as they are all stories where the monstrous characters' identities and the revelation of their true identities are core to the narrative. Also, these stories do not contain inhuman characters that are racially coded as in many other of Lovecraft's works, as in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (1936) and "The Whisperer in Darkness" (1931), but with more vague identities, or are even commonly interpreted as somehow queer.

2. Background

In her book *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler argues for a consolidation of the notions of gender and performativity (*Gender Trouble* 179). Gender performativity is the idea that, since gender is a social construct, the way it is truly asserted is through a series of performances (25). In other words, you are regarded as one gender if you manage to pass as that gender. According to Butler, constructs like sexuality and gender all exist merely as acts that everybody, just like drag artists, performs and which do not exist outside of that performance. She writes: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). Simply put, the way you convey your identity, and how that performance is received, is your identity. Similarly, our

identities are restrained by our performances, the way we reiterate norms and conceptions of those identities (*Bodies That Matter* 231-232).

Despite its influential role in queer theory, Butler's idea that gender is a performed construct is today widely debated by the transgender community. The main disagreement lies in whether transgender identities must be performed, as Butler argues, or self-identification is all that is needed for the identity to be recognised (Finlay 3-5). Nevertheless, performativity can still be an effective tool when queering, or in this case transgenering, straight works, if one takes care to convey what constitutes a transgender performance.

Queering is, as Eve Sedgwick describes it, a way "[...] to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled [...]" (Sedgwick 3). It is a way of interpreting straight and cis normative works, often written without any intention of portraying non-normative sexual or gender representation. Alexander Doty explains that queering relies on a form of reader or audience response theory. A novel's audience is not a cohesive entity, but rather a collection of people with fragmented and often contradictory experiences. Therefore, trying to find a text's essential message, and often an actively hetero or cis centred message at that, is in itself pointless (Doty 1-3). Instead, we as readers should focus on our own interpretation to try to find queer or transgender representations. Doty writes:

Queer readings aren't 'alternative' readings, wishful or willful misreadings, or 'reading too much into things' readings. They result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along. (16)

The importance of queering in queer studies and for the LGBT+ activism lies in its effectiveness to deconstruct the illusion of monolithic gender and sexual normativity (Sedgwick 8; Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 232). It can help claim cultural objects such as characters or whole works, as well as open those works to see them from new perspectives.

In accordance with Butler's theories, transgender identities can be performed just like gender, sexuality or any other identity, as transgender has common socially agreed upon properties associated with it. This means that when, for example, transgender people perform their preferred gender, they can also be said to some degree to perform transgender identities depending on the way they convey their experience of being a transgender person. Thus, transgenering literature can by noticing performances be an effective way of reclaiming control of how transgenderism is or should be performed (229).

Of course, queer and transgender readings have been criticised for forcing queer into works where there is no intention of including queer references and falling for presentist fallacies. In the case of this essay, transgenderism is being read into the texts of a homophobic man living in a time where open discussion of transgender issues was non-existent or even malicious. However, Doty argues that since art and media is created at a certain time but does not necessarily belong solely to the time it was created or to the author, it is feasible to read queer/transgenderism onto said works (Doty 19-20). Also, even without “smuggling” queer into literature, queerness is often coded onto characters both with and without intent.

Queer coding is, put simply, a collection of signals that lead the reader to interpret queerness onto the signalling object or subject, for instance, a character. These signals may be anything from what the characters say, to how they look, or their behaviour. Coding is often used to hide messages so that not the entire audience of a work may receive them. The code relies on some readers being able to decode the signal whilst others are not. Often coding is used because the message is either too controversial or too complex to explicitly state. Examples of the kinds of messages that can be coded are the colour red signifying passion or danger, or political messages in allegorical novels. Although not always deliberate or even conscious, coding always works to provide a shorthand for an audience. For example, characters in both novels and cinema might be written to perform queer behaviour as a code signal their villainy to the audience (Greenhill 111-112).

Building on this concept of a queer code used for villainy, Jack Halberstam asserts that the way bodies are depicted in horror is queer (Halberstam 139). Halberstam argues that through abominable monsters and mutilated bodies, horror frequently expresses an interest in showing, reconstructing, and reconfiguring gender. One way it does this, which Halberstam recognises as evocative of Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*, is how gender is routinely linked to the dichotomy of inhumanity versus humanity (140). In this parallel, queer gender is depicted like inhumanity as a force that seeks, often through bodily means, to overthrow the status quo. Similarly, the status quo aims to suppress non-normativity in these stories as they employ means that strictly exclude the involvement of radical inhuman/gender elements (141).

So, by using the idea of inhumanity as a code for queer gender one can find, or smuggle in, transgender representation. In this essay, I will use Judith Butler’s ideas of gender performativity both on their own when the monsters act accordingly and in conjunction with Halberstam’s theories. This means that when the monstrous characters in these stories perform monsterhood in connection to aspects that could be considered a common part of many transgender experiences they can be read as performing transgenderism. This is by no means

the definitive meaning. One of Halberstam's main hypotheses of *Skin Shows* is that monstrosity as a concept is defined by its inability to only represent one issue or notion (28-32, 181). This essay will instead aim to be one transgender reading centring on the performances of mind-body dissonance, social tension, and bodily transformation.

When discussing mind-body dissociation in relation to transgenderism, the most common term is gender dysphoria. This is the distress that arises when an individual's assigned gender does not match with their perceived gender. Gender dysphoria displays itself differently in different people, but when discussing how it manifests in adults it has some common expressions. This essay will use the American Psychiatric Association's definition of gender dysphoria as detailed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (fifth edition). Whilst I have to remark upon the medical language used in the manual, and the fact that it is used to diagnose psychiatric patients, it is meanwhile a professional document with clear and nuanced definitions of gender dysphoria that takes its time to disprove myths related to transgenderism.

According to the DSM-5's definition, gender dysphoria is recognised in six different aspects. Firstly, the transgender person experiences a "marked incongruence" between the gender they were assigned at birth and their own gender identity. Following this, they wish to rid themselves of their sex characteristics. The third, fourth, and fifth aspects suggest that the individual has a desire to have the sex characteristics of, be treated as, or be another gender. Lastly, the individual recognises that they are like their experienced gender mentally (American Psychiatric Association 451-459). The DSM-5 states that a "patient" should express or manifest two or more aspects to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria, but since this essay is not aiming to diagnose but to analyse the performance of literary characters, I will only use these as guidelines as to how mind-body dissonance might be performed.

In the matter of social tension and the role it plays in performing transgenderism, this essay will utilise Patricia Gagné et al's research from "Coming out and Crossing over Identity Formation and Proclamation in a Transgender Community". The study consists of 65 interviews with masculine-to-feminine transgenderists about their experiences of coming out. Gagné et al then compared their findings to see what experiences are shared by most of the interviewees, whilst still recognising that there does not exist one true monolithic trans experience.

Gagné et al found that when in social contexts transgenderists often experience self-censorship. This is when the transgenderist either physically or vocally hides their identity to outsiders and for periods at a time stops performing transgendered behaviour to protect

themselves, although the desire to act as oneself remains (488). I will look for reasons why the characters might feel a need to self-censor, which in transgenderism related cases can be due to fear of transphobic counteraction. In the section on performing social tension, this essay will consider transphobic violence as well as discrimination and discreditation of the monstrous characters' trans identities the focal points of such counteraction. A major way that transgender people get their identities discredited is simply that their experienced or expressed gender goes unrecognised through active misgendering (UNDP 33-34). A common aspect of this is referring to the transgenderist by the name or pronoun they had before coming out (Fae).

Violence against transgender people is common. Around 1700 transphobic killings occurred between 2008 and 2014, and several activist organisations have seen other kinds of violence, like torture and mutilation, actively directed against transgenderists (UNDP 32-33). Violence, or justification of violence, can exist both on an individual level and an institutionalised one. For example, the "trans panic" defence which is used in criminal trials in several western countries. This is legal defence that has reduced offenders' charges from murder to manslaughter if the offence is claimed to have happened in conjunction with the offender discovering that the victim was transgender (Woods et al.). It is an illustration of how violence and discrimination against transgenderists can be justified on transphobic bases, often portraying transgenderists as deceitful, unnatural, unstable, or even evil.

A key part of transgenderism is transformation. But whilst transformation in the sense of changing with time and growth is a common experience to all, transgenderists transition from one gender identity to another, sometimes in bodily ways through medical assistance. However, it must be remarked that whilst some transgenderists never actually go through a bodily transformation, they still transform their performance when deciding to present themselves as their perceived gender identity. I have decided to include such transformations in the section on bodily transformation. This is since performances of bodily transformation can still be coded as non-bodily transgender transformation, especially when considering Halberstam's argument of horror media's interest in reconstructing gender through allegory and coding (Halberstam 139-140). Also, Butler argues that embodying gender is just another kind of performance, since outsiders still interpret your gender based on it, just as any other external signals (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 231-232). So, this essay will interpret the monsters' performances of bodily transformation between humanity and inhumanity as coding for fluctuation within the transgender-cisgender spectrum, regardless of if the real-life change is of the body or not.

About previous research done on Lovecraft, a plethora of it is biographical. Even when disregarding biographies by Joshi, Houellebecq, Fyhr, and Sprague de Camp, there is a substantial amount of analyses aimed at how the author's work reflects himself. Some such research analyses Lovecraft's works using feminist (Oskarson Kindstrand) or race theory (Pettersson). When discussing queer theory and Lovecraft, there is Bobby Derie, who wrote *Sex and the Cthulhu Mythos* (2014) where he discusses how love, sexuality, and gender is portrayed in the Cthulhu mythos by different writers. He has also written an essay on the subject where he discusses the possibility of a transgender Lovecraft based on "The Thing on the Doorstep" being the author's, albeit only, story explicitly interested in gender change (Derie 113-116). Video essayist Harris Brewis also brings up many LGBT+ peoples' fondness for Lovecraft in his video "Outsiders: How to Adapt H.P. Lovecraft in the 21st Century". There he brings up "The Outsider", in a similar manner to Lovecraft scholar Robert Price, as an example of a protagonist experiencing social tension comparable to that of a homosexual. So, whilst there has been plenty of research on Lovecraft in queer theory, most of it has centred on sexuality and not transgenderism, when it has not focused on the author himself.

Next, I will clarify the use of the words "queer" and "transgender" in this essay. Lovecraft himself is known for his prolific use of the word "queer" by its initial meaning to describe something strange or weird ("Queer" def. 1.). This later became a slur for homosexual people that in the late 1900s was appropriated by the LGBT+ community as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities (Bennett and Royle 217). The term spread to academia in the 1990s in the shape of the field of queer theory, which is the study of non-normative sexuality and gender. In close connection to this, transgender studies arose as a subfield focusing on the "transgender" part of queer theory (Bettcher and Garry 1). Whilst transgenderism is a subcategory of queer, it is equally an umbrella term for "Persons who enact alternative gender presentations or who have internalized alternative gender identities [...]" (Gagné et al 481). This essay will use "queer", instead of "transgender", when a character's performance encompasses both the sexuality and gender aspects of queer, to then narrow it down to transgender when seen together with other performances.

Finally, I am going to note on the use of pronouns of the transgender performing characters, since it is an important part of transgender identity formation. As a rule, the characters are referred to by the pronoun that Lovecraft himself used, with some exceptions. One of the exceptions are the body-swapping entity in "The Thing on the Doorstep" since it complicates the utilisation of pronouns when differently gendered minds exchange differently gendered bodies. There is also the outsider from "The Outsider", who is never given a gendered

pronoun. In these cases, the singular “they” will be used as pronoun since it is used to refer to people of unknown or uncertain gender (“They” def. 3.).

3. Mind-Body Dissonance

My transgender reading of Lovecraft’s short stories begins by finding the monsters’ performances of dissociation between what they experience to be their minds and their bodies. This mind-body dissonance is a common experience to many transgenderists, that is often connected to the type of distress called gender dysphoria. This section aims to find performances that hint toward the monsters experiencing such a dissonance and that could be reminiscent of gender dysphoria as outlined by the DSM-5.

When we first meet the outsider of “The Outsider” they have been secluded in a decrepit castle dungeon for as long as they can remember and, in their loneliness, has created the conception that they are a normal human. The outsider relays to the reader that they have never actually met another human, apart from distorted depictions, such as the skeletons they have found lying around the dungeon, and which they find mundane rather than frightening or disgusting. This foreshadows the outsider’s non-normative view of humanity and their inclination to empathise with the non-human, and thus, in a Halberstamian way, with the queer. Because what the outsider learns together with the reader at the end is that their self-image and identity as a human has been wrong all along. The outsider is in fact a walking corpse.

Here, at the moment of realisation we see a clear mismatch between identity previously conceived and the outsider’s bodily attributes, in a way suggestive of transgenderists with gender dysphoria. This is further conveyed to the reader, as the outsider is anthropoid in their rational way of thinking and their appreciation of and proficiency in written English, but is, at least how themselves describes them, corporeally “[...] a leering, abhorrent travesty on the human shape” (Lovecraft 141). Gender dysphoria is seen in the outsider’s rejection of their physical body. When for the first time realising the truth about themselves by looking in a mirror, the outsider tries to return to the safety of their dungeon, which they are unable to. This is suggestive of gender dysphoria not in the vain of desiring to physically rid oneself of one’s physical attributes, but rather to remove or flee from what is reminding the outsider of their body, namely the mirror. The outsider had a conception of what they were, and were supposed to look like, that has now been demolished.

Seeing inhumanity as coding for transgender identity, the body that the outsider is horrified by and rejects is that of a transgender person. By the end of the story, they have accepted their identity as both forever non-normative, stating that “[...] I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men” (147). The outsider has now gone from performing a transgender experience of gender dysphoria to achieving what one might argue body-mind assonance in coming to terms with their identity.

The monster in “Cool Air” is perhaps the most human of these four stories’ monsters, as he, Dr Muñoz, is just a man with a Jekyll-and-Hyde-esque secret. What this reclusive old man has been hiding is that he died 18 years ago and is now experimenting on himself, using an air conditioning unit and mysterious drugs, to keep himself alive, seemingly healthy, and even to some degree handsome. The narrator remarks that Muñoz is of “superior blood and breeding”, but that he at the same time looks sickly and does not possess natural human properties like a functioning blood circulatory system or the need to breathe. Muñoz is at this stage inhuman, but still passing as human, something I will elaborate on in the upcoming sections.

When it comes to the doctor experiencing incongruity between his body and his experienced identity, we get a hint of that the first time Muñoz speaks about his experiments:

[...] will and consciousness are stronger than organic life itself, so that if a bodily frame be but originally healthy and carefully preserved, it may through a scientific enhancement of these qualities retain a kind of nervous animation despite the most serious impairments, defects, or even absences in the battery of specific organs. (228-229)

Muñoz feels that he, along with all other organic life, is being hampered by physical attributes. Not only does he see a discordance between how the body should look and operate and what it actually does, which is comparable to many transgenderists. He also talks about the ridding himself these bodily impairments, including organs. Muñoz’s willingness to adapt the body to look and function like he expects or needs it to, together with his emphasis on organs draws a parallel to transgenderism and the desire to rid oneself of one’s sex characteristics, which can often include genital organs.

In “The Dunwich Horror”, the antagonist, Wilbur Whateley, was born in the rural village of Dunwich to the albino witch Lavinia Whateley and the omniscient cosmic god Yog-Sothoth (297). This unusual heritage expresses itself in Wilbur aging and growing much faster

than other children. By the age of four and a half, Wilbur looks like a fifteen-year-old, and by the time of his death when he actually is fifteen, he stands at around nine feet tall. Aside from this, Wilbur looks for the most part like an “exceedingly ugly” human, but nonetheless a human, when wearing clothes. Underneath his garments, Wilbur is fully animalistic, with many otherworldly features, like furry goatish legs, eye-like protrusions on his hips, and multiple tentacles in place of genitals (284).

Whether or not Wilbur wishes to be either fully human or fully monster we cannot know, as he never performs an act outright stating so. This is mainly because the narrative keeps most of the Whateleys’ lives a secret, and so also Wilbur’s thoughts. However, Wilbur does perform one act that is reminiscent of a transgender mind-body dissociation. It is when Wilbur is in public, when he performs and dresses human. This story does not have a strong connection to gender dysphoria compared to the other short stories, largely due to the way the text is narrated, but even so, the way Wilbur experiences social tension and bodily transformation is exceedingly easy to read transgenderism into.

Writing about the monstrosity and their identity in “The Thing on the Doorstep” is inherently complex as the entire short story is about body swapping. Whilst this analysis will mainly focus on Ephraim Waite as he is the one actively switching bodies, both Asenath Waite and Edward Derby will be regarded as partly monstrous as they, more or less unwillingly, participate in Ephraim’s scheme.

The main plot from Ephraim’s perspective focuses on his quest to, like Dr Muñoz, find the key to eternal life. Ephraim, who is either a mystic or the cosmic creature Kamog possessing the body of a mystic, does this by possessing the bodies of a younger person (635). When the story starts, Ephraim is currently possessing the body of his daughter, whilst his daughter Asenath’s mind is in his elderly body. The problem is that Ephraim does not want to have his male mind in a female body. When the narrator of the story, Daniel Upton, first meets who he thinks is Asenath he describes them saying:

Her crowning rage, however, was that she was not a man; since she believed a male brain had certain unique and far-reaching cosmic powers. Given a man’s brain, she declared, she could not only equal but surpass her father in mastery of unknown forces. (361)

Here we see evidence of Ephraim-in-Asenath performing transgenderism through vocally declaring themselves as such, much in accordance with Butler’s gender performativity. There is

in this case not a need to bring in queer coding, as Ephraim recognises a sort of dysphoria in that his male mind stuck is in his daughter's female body.

To rid himself of his female body, Ephraim marries Edward Derby, whose body he intends to steal. The way Ephraim does this is through a series of rituals that slowly break down both parties' mental barriers and momentarily let them switch bodies in preparation of a final exchange. Through a transgender perspective, the gradual change into another body and another gender is comparable to the real-life transition period that comes with wanting one's body to reflect how one imagines it should.

What makes the monstrous characters of "The Thing on the Doorstep" above all perform transgenderism, is not their acts, but their transgender view of the body-mind dichotomy. It is a given throughout the story that what constitutes oneself is the mind. It is the mind, along with the characters' experienced identities, that stays the same even when operating in another body or with another brain. The mind is seen as the essence of who each character is, which even Upton recognises when addressing Edward-in-Asenath as Edward. It is also seen as what magic emanates from and is amplified by certain gendered organs. The fact that this is recognised by every character in "Doorstep", even the rather judgemental Upton, makes this a powerful trans narrative about the separation of bodily attributes and identity.

4. Social Tension

Next, I turn to look at performances of Transgenderism related social tension. To do this, I cannot only analyse the monsters, but also at how the other characters interact with them. This is natural since identities do not exist in a vacuum to only ever be experienced by the self, but is communicated to, interpreted, and reacted upon by other people. Therefore, transgender experiences of social tension will be compared to the monsters' performances of self-censorship. The violence and discrimination from normative characters will also be analysed as performances of transphobia which leads to social tension.

Social tension is apparent in the transphobically reminiscent discrimination the outsider experiences once they have been discovered. Take the merry-makers in "The Outsider". Their reaction, although somewhat excessive for a direct comparison to transphobia by screaming and running away, still has the same effect. That is a variety of disapproving behaviour aimed at the outsider's uncanny appearance. It is reminiscent of the concept of passing. The outsider

cannot pass as their intended identity as they do not look like a human, and should, according to the merry-makers, not be treated as a human but as a creature or a thing. It is possible to argue that the outsider is allegorically a non-passing transgenderist being met by a clear indication that cis-normative people think them a stranger that cannot fit in in normative society.

This tension is resolved or at least alleviated by the end, as the outsider finds a social context of acceptance. The story ends with the creature telling the reader that they are now living with a group of other ghouls in Egypt. They say “yet in my new wildness and freedom I almost welcome the bitterness of alienage” (147) showing that although they still harbour negative feelings about their identity as a monster, the outsider is slowly coming to terms with their identity and that they have become a part of a community of people like themselves. Parallels have been drawn between the group of ghouls and queer people finding safe spaces, like gay bars or clubs, or finding oneself as a part of the LGBT+ community (Price).

“Cool Air” may be regarded as one of H. P. Lovecraft’s most openly prejudiced short stories. Drawing heavily on the author’s own experiences living in New York and hating it for the plurality of the city’s cultures and people, the story capitalises on the fear of living next to someone doing queer deeds within the confines of their apartment. The way the story is written makes it easy for the reader to empathise with the narrator and see Dr Muñoz as an outsider and even an antagonist. However, by taking on the transgender perspective one can see Muñoz’s role in the story with sympathy as he is constantly judged by friends and strangers alike in a transphobic reminiscent way.

The narrator, and thereby the reader, is first introduced to the doctor through his landlady’s gossip, who describes him as a queer and lonely man who takes “funnee-smelling baths” (Lovecraft 227). He is also called sickly, which can at first be interpreted as the landlady referring to the doctor’s sickly appearance but might also allude to the doctor being of a sickly disposition, in other words, describing the doctor as morally depraved or perverted. This could be said to mirror the way LGBT people, and perhaps especially transgenderists for a long time were seen, and still are by trans- and homophobes, as perverts, delinquents, and people with disorders.

Furthermore, the narrator frequently judges Muñoz’s appearance. When they first meet, the narrator looks at the doctor with both repugnance and admiration. With time, the narrator’s almost lustful appreciation of Muñoz (228) is being overtaken by disgust as the narrator starts to rot. Despite this, the two continue to grow their friendship, with the narrator helping to keep Muñoz cool by treating him in his bathtub.

Throughout this, Muñoz tries in vain to keep his rotting a secret. The doctor tries to keep his cadaveric spasms discreet and hides his drying eyes behind a blindfold. Thereby he performs a form of transgender self-censorship, as he attempts to pass, but fail. This self-censorship can further be seen in that he never leaves his home. Muñoz also tries to limit who he interacts with and on what level. It can be argued that the few friends he has except for the narrator being other undead people, that he only knows through correspondence, is similar to transgenderists with a trusting internet community. The apartment is his safe space where he can escape death and outside judgement. When he lets the narrator into his life, the safe space is slowly deteriorating, shrinking, and in the end, he can only be kept superficially alive by filling his bathtub with ice. The bathroom, being the last cool place in the apartment, takes on the properties of one of the last places of queer secrecy. Thus, when Muñoz leaves to expose his true form, the doctor performs a transgenderist coming out of the closet.

What is shown to be a growing anxiety for Wilbur in “The Dunwich Horror” is the people of Dunwich themselves. During his entire childhood, the community of Dunwich keeps invasively gossiping about Wilbur’s features in a way comparable to transphobic bullying (272, 274). Following the death of both his grandfather and his mother, Wilbur moves out to a garden shed, allowing his brother, the titular “Dunwich Horror”, into the house. Yet, Wilbur grows visibly more and more scared and anxious of the townsfolk. Here, Wilbur performs a type of trans-self-censorship to the inhabitants of Dunwich, by seeming to hide something in his home (275). To a transgenderist, this would be how they behave and dress, which very well could be the case for Wilbur. From an early age, Wilbur tries to perform normal in public, and desperately fails, as he wears loose-fitting clothes over his most supernatural parts. Likewise, transgender people wearing baggy clothing in order to hide their sex characteristics is not unheard-of. In this, Wilbur performs transgenderism by seeming to hide parts of his identity in looks and in behaviour, and the community of Dunwich judges him for it. The townsfolk become so terrified of him and dogs so aggressive around him, which hints at his unnatural being, that he feels the need to carry a pistol for his own safety.

In the end, Wilbur dies in a dog attack whilst trying to steal the occult book, *Necronomicon* from Miskatonic University. When three professors rush into the room to find Wilbur’s body, they begin by positing that his looks are due to inbreeding and end by calling him “only partly mankind” and “half-human” (276-277), but the harshest judgement of Wilbur’s physical characteristics does not come from the professors, but from the narrator:

Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began. [...] Their arrangement was odd, and seemed to follow the symmetries of some cosmic geometry unknown to earth or the solar system. (279)

Reading the text from a transgender perspective, it is particularly interesting that the narrator judges the character and by doing so also invites the reader to do so, with a great interest in his mutated genital area. Here the thought of Wilbur's monstrosity, with a focal point on his bodily gender non-binarity, is so non-normative that his strangeness is considered universal by the three men in the room. The narrator also expresses a scientific interest in Wilbur's anatomy, saying "the torso and lower parts of the body were teratologically fabulous, so that only generous clothing could ever have enabled it to walk on earth unchallenged or uneradicated" (279). Not only does the narrator's description dehumanise Wilbur, but it also justifies his censorship. The Dunwich inhabitants would not just have persecuted the boy, they would have eradicated him.

"The Thing on the Doorstep" begins with Daniel Upton admitting to shooting and killing his best friend, whom by this point has been turned into a dying abomination by Ephraim. Following his confession, Upton justifies the murder to the reader, and argues for why he should be allowed to capture and kill Ephraim-in-Edward (626). As discussed earlier, the parallel between transgenderism and the coding of monsters where they are both seen as inhuman goes to its logical and problematic end where the killing of "unnatural" individuals are justified. Upton even argues that his violent killings should be legal exemptions. The way he speaks about Ephraim-in-Asenath at the start of the story is akin to the way trans-exclusionaries talk about transgender people as predatory, and arguing for legal justification to kill both Asenath and Edward is in the same vein as the "trans panic" defence of the real world (626-627).

Furthermore, Ephraim-in-Asenath also visually performs transgenderism to Daniel as he interprets their expression and mannerisms to be of an alien or magician in the body of Asenath:

By gazing peculiarly at a fellow-student she would often give the latter a distinct feeling of exchanged personality – as if the subject were placed momentarily in the magician's body and able to stare half across the room at her real body, whose eyes blazed and protruded with an alien expression. (631)

The fact that Upton is correct in his assertions hints at the idea that Ephraim-in-Asenath is not passing as a woman, or a human, to those around her.

Upton is not the only one in “Doorstep” projecting behaviour toward Ephraim-in-Asenath that leads to social tension. Derby does so as well. Learning of his wife’s true nature and true gender makes him want to inflict pain on them and eventually even wishing them dead by his doing, telling Upton “[...] I’ll kill that entity – her, him, it [...]” (635). Besides being an example of domestic abuse, we also see Derby misgendering in his confused conception of Ephraim-in-Asenath’s gender. Eventually he lands on the dehumanising pronoun “it”, showing that he has gone from seeing his wife as a person to an unnatural being deserving of violence. A thing on the doorstep.

However, Derby also seems to perform a kind of self-censorship. At one point, Upton has to pick his friend up in a forest in Maine where one of the parts of the transformational ritual had taken place, when in the car home Edward Derby starts to change more physically than before. His posture, manner of speech, and personality changes, becoming more alien to Daniel (635). These are parts of a transgenderist’s behaviour that would typically be inhibited in periods of self-censorship. But as discussed in the background section, transgenderists still feel the need to act like themselves. We never really learn the full nature of what happens to Derby here, as his general behaviour changed even when not possessed (637-638). It all points to the fact that Derby, just like the other monstrous characters, tries to hide who he really is from the world and that he himself is transforming into something queerer.

5. Bodily Transformation

The last part of this analysis will apply a transgender reading to how the monsters perform bodily change. This section will thus be influenced, more so than the other sections, by Halberstam’s connection between monstrous inhumanity and queer identity in horror. In short, characters whose metamorphosis moves them within the spectrum of inhumanity-humanity will also be seen to move interrelatedly between transgender and cisgender.

Admittedly, the reader never gets to see any bodily change in “The Outsider”. However, the most common interpretation of the story is that the creature has already been transformed, from a human to an undead (Fyhr 206). The outsider’s human aspects are currently rotting away. Bearing in mind Halberstam’s theories on monstrosity as coded for queerness, this could

be read as a physical metaphor for the outsider's arc of progressively realising and coming to terms with their non-normativity.

Dr Muñoz's transformation is also about him coming to terms with his non-normativity. At the beginning of "Cool Air", the doctor looks comparatively human. But, as earlier discussed, he does not entirely pass as such, as his landlady and the narrator both comment on his uncanny appearance and behaviour. Further, it fits an allegorical reading well that Muñoz's air conditioning unit breaks down shortly after letting another person emotionally close for the first time in 18 years, and that the doctor rots more the closer they get. "Cool Air" could thereby be read as a physical allegory of the transgender experience of trying to hide one's identity but being more and more unable to when making closer friends. As the short story, and Muñoz's life, comes to a close, the doctor decides to reveal his true identity and accept both death and his queer appearance by writing a letter to the narrator and subsequently leaving the cold, and his untenable secrecy, for his living room, where he and his veneer breaks down.

The decaying of the doctor's body becomes increasingly complex when one examines the importance of his air conditioning and especially his drugs further. Dr Muñoz uses these in order to keep his body from changing and living without certain, unspecified, organs. One of the drugs is explained by Muñoz as a "[...] cryptic formulae to contain rare psychological stimuli which might conceivably have singular effects on the substance of a nervous system from which organic pulsations had fled" (229). To put this simply, this is a mentally affecting drug that seeks to replace the need for certain organs. The doctor probably refers to the heart, but I would argue that the word pulsations could also be interpreted to allude to sexual organs. In that case, Muñoz's situation closely matches some transgenderists', mainly transexuals', dependence on hormonal medications. Although some changes are permanent with transgender hormone therapy, some sex characteristics retreat whilst some might experience drastic side effects as the transgenderist's body does no longer produce their old sexual hormone (Trans Care Project 9). Transgenderists with restricted access to hormones may experience severe depression that comes with a feeling of losing control of one's body as well as returning or stronger gender dysphoria (Israel & Traver 19). Muñoz changes in a physical way that could, in an exaggerated manner, be said to resemble the way a transgenderist envisions what would happen to their body if they lost access to these hormones. Meanwhile, the doctor's rotting is coinciding with, and thematically tied to, the withering of his ability to pass as human, which is allegorical of the way some transgenderists are reliant on hormonal treatment to keep passing as their preferred gender.

The way that Wilbur's body transforms in "The Dunwich Horror" exhibits signs of gender non-binary coding in his pubertal change and that he is neither fully human nor monster. When Wilbur is born, the narrator only comments on his dissimilarity to his albino mother and on his goatish face, which would lead one to draw the conclusion that Wilbur was born a normal-looking child (267-268). It could be compared to, who from birth must be hidden due to his obvious similarities to Yog-Sothoth (297). Wilbur's monstrous features comes with his age, somewhat like a paranormal puberty. I would argue that Wilbur's transformation being a kind of supernatural puberty is supported by the parts that transform, with Wilbur's hairy legs, growth spurts, facial hair, deepening voice, and changed genitalia serving as code for a pubertal change. Transgender readings often connect puberty and transgenderism together by how it is often portrayed as a time of social anxiety and tension accompanied by a kind of bodily metamorphosis (Rogerson). In fact, transgenderists are often said to experience a second puberty after they have transitioned and do not have to suppress their identity. What makes Wilbur's case gender non-binary is that his pubertal change does not seem to transform him into the abnormality, or queerness, of his twin, but rather reconcile humanity and monstrosity and makes find his identity as somewhere in between.

Whilst Wilbur's last transformation, that of his body dissolving after death, leaves the reader to speculate about his true being, it can also imply a happy ending for him. There are two unusual events that connect his death to his twin brother's, the crying of the whippoorwills, the yelling of dogs, and spell-like chanting (Lovecraft 280, 296-297). Following the chanting, Wilbur's twin was teleported out of normal existence to be with Yog-Sothoth. This leads one to speculate whether Wilbur also joined his father post-mortem. In that case, Wilbur's body dissolving could echo Muñoz's rotting, in that his ability to pass rotted away when his body was revealed.

The transformation of Asenath or Ephraim is not visible to the reader as Daniel did not know them before their transformations. However, we get to see the transformation appertain to the occult body exchanges by how Edward Derby changes through the last years of his life, beginning with his marriage to Asenath/Ephraim. Upton remarks that Derby's looks start to change with his behaviour when Ephraim controls his body. Not only does he become more stoic and serious, but he also starts to look like Ephraim and Asenath, physically disturbing but still passing as humans, with their over-protuberant eyes (630-631, 635). At first, Upton and Derby seem to view these changes with ambivalence, but this all changes with time.

By the end, Derby, now in Asenath's body, lies rotting on Upton's doorstep. This portrayal of rotting, which is similar to the examples earlier in this section, has two important

facets to it. First, there is the rotting away of Edward Derby's mind. The death of Derby, the most cis-normative character involved in the narrative, depending on how involved one decides to read Upton, signifies the withering away of trans-discriminatory persecutors and a victory of the transgender in Ephraim, who now possesses Derby's body. Secondly, the decomposition of Asenath's body right in front of Upton and the police is physical proof of the existence of inhuman individuals. Ephraim's facade decays, just like the monsters in "Cool Air" and "The Dunwich Horror", showing the characters' rotting together with their identities being revealed. This establishes a type of physical metaphor where the loss of ability to pass as their intended identities is performed through their rotting.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested that performances of transgender identities can be read into texts regardless of an author's time period, biases, or intentions. I have done so by examining how the monster characters in four short stories by H. P. Lovecraft in their own different ways have similar experiences to that of transgenderists. By, as Sedgwick puts it, smuggling in transgenderism, one can see that transgender representation has always been in these texts in some form. Not necessarily as alternative readings, but rather as perspectives seldom acknowledged in the research of the works of Lovecraft or by the mainstream readers. The analysis has made use of Jack Halberstam's theories of gothic monsters and how they problematise normativity. In conjunction with Butler's theories on identity performativity and queer coding, I have been able to find how transgenderism is expressed in body-mind dissonance, social tension, and bodily transformation.

When analysing the monsters' performances of mind-body dissonance, I used the parallel of gender dysphoria. Using monstrosity as a code for transgender identity, the outsider, Dr Muñoz, and all three body swappers all express an understood incongruence between the identity of their minds and what their appearances convey. All characters would arguably have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria had the coding been stated outright. However, they do so in different ways. The characters in "The Outsider" and "Doorstep" all wish to be treated as or to have another identity, whilst Muñoz actively tries to shape his body into something he feels satisfied with.

In the section on social tension, I looked at the performances of the monstrous characters but also at how the normative characters perform what I interpreted as a type of

transphobia. These supposedly transphobic characters were examined in relation to how the violence, ostracization, judgement, prejudice, and discreditation they subject the monsters to, as well as their justifications and is similar to the social tension that trans people commonly experience. In the analysis, I found that these justifications often used language reminiscent of transphobia, conveying the perspective of the creatures as unnatural, outsiders, malicious, perverted, or disgusting. It was also found that the monsters often reacted by hiding indoors, dressing unprovocative, and suppressing their non-normative behaviour in a manner similar to transgender self-censorship.

Finally, I found that the aspect of bodily change might represent a plethora of transgender performances. For Muñoz, his decaying body represents his gradual inability to pass and keep the secret of his identity when finding a closer friend. Wilbur Whateley's transformation symbolises both an awakening of a transgender identity during puberty and an assertion as a non-binary individual. Lastly, there are the body swappers, whose change are physical metaphors for gradually forming a transgender identity, the breaking out of the closet, and the possible defeat of the story's transphobic characters.

None of the stories expresses equally strong performances in all three trans aspects. Most notably the reader does not get to see the outsider's body transform and Wilbur Whateley only hints at a performance of gender dysphoria. Of course, this is natural based on the narrative structure of "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Outsider", but also due to the stories most probably not written with the intent to convey a 21st century understanding of transgender identity expression. Nevertheless, trans performances are there. "The Outsider" can be read as a horror story about transgender identity formation, where the true horror is having to come to terms with that your expressed identity deviates from your perceived body but eventually finding a welcoming community. "Cool Air" is about hiding your true self from the world and the unsustainability of that state of living. From a transgender perspective, "The Dunwich Horror" can be read as a text about hiding a non-binary identity from a hostile community, whilst "The Thing on the Doorstep" is explicitly about male minds fighting to try to escape the female bodies they are stuck in.

To get an even more in-depth comprehension of the full extent of how one can read transgenderism into Lovecraft, I suggest studying transgender performances and how they intersect with performances of sexuality. According to the research of Gagné et al, it is common for transgenderists to also express same-sex attraction or reorient their sexuality following their transitioning (Gagné et al 492). Whilst sexuality in Lovecraft has been previously explored, it is rarely about this intersection. Beyond this, I encourage similar readings on other horror

literature, perhaps even on the stories that I earlier stated to be more racially coded than queer. They can be both since, as asserted by Halberstam, monsters rarely represent only one idea. Further, I think a study about a similar subject matter but involving reader response and to what degree transgenderists feel represented by the monsters' experiences would be a good way to further the research done in this essay. Even a study tackling the same aspects and stories would work, as a key part of queering literature is based on how a fragmented audience personally interpret media. Someone with other experiences of transgenderism and literature may make completely different assertions than me.

Works Cited

Primary Source:

Lovecraft, Howard Phillips. *Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft*. Edited by Stephen Jones, Gollancz, 2008.

Secondary Sources:

American Psychiatric Association. *American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed., 2013.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, 2011.

Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2009.

Bettcher, Talia., and Ann Garry. "Transgender Studies and Feminism: Theory, Politics, and Gendered Realities". *Hypatia*, vol. 24, no. 3, Summer 2009, pp. 1-10.

Brewis, Harris. "Outsiders: How To Adapt H.P. Lovecraft In the 21st Century." YouTube, uploaded by hbombguy, 3 July 2018,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8u8wZ0WvxI>, Accessed 2019-12-04.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. Routledge, 2010.

---. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

Derie, Bobby. "Great Phallic Monoliths: Lovecraft and Sexuality." *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales: The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror*, edited by Justin Everett & Jeffrey H. Shanks. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

Doty, Alexander. *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. The University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Fae, Jane. "Changing your name should be a joyous moment, but for many it's a nightmare."

The Guardian. 19 May. 2015,

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/19/changing-your-name-nightmare-trans>, Accessed 2019-11-16.

Finlay, Toby. "Non-Binary Performativity: A Trans-Positive Account of Judith Butler's Queer Theory". Wilfrid Laurier University, 2017.

Fyhr, Mattias. *Död men drömmande: H P Lovecraft och den magiska modernismen*.

Ellerströms förlag, 2006.

- Gagné, Patricia, et al. "Coming out and Crossing over: Identity Formation and Proclamation in a Transgender Community". *Gender and Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, Aug. 1997, pp. 478-508.
- Greenhill, Pauline. "Sexualities/Queer and Trans Studies" *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*, edited by Pauline Greenhill, Jill Terry Rudy, Naomi Hamer & Lauren Bosc, Routledge, 2018, pp. 290-298.
- Halberstam, Judith (see also Halberstam, J. Jack). *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Duke University Press, 1995.
- Israel, Gianna E., and Donald E. Tarver. *Transgender Care: Recommended Guidelines, Practical Information, and Personal Accounts*. Temple University Press, 1997.
- Nyikos, Dániel. "The Lovecraft Circle and the 'Weird Class': 'Against the Complacency of an Orthodox Sun-Dweller'." *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales: The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror*, edited by Justin Everett & Jeffrey H. Shanks. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
- Oskarson Kindstrand, Gro. "Lovecraft's kvinnor: En undersökning av kvinnlig monstrositet i Howard Phillips Lovecrafts litteratur" [Lovecraft's women - A study of female monstrosity in Howard Phillips Lovecraft's literature]. Södertörn University, 2014.
- Pettersson, Mattias. "Rasism och rädsla i H.P. Lovecrafts Skuggan över Innsmouth" [Racism and fear in H.P. Lovecraft's The Shadow over Innsmouth]. Karlstad University, 2016.
- Price, Robert. "Homosexual Panic in 'The Outsider'." *Crypt of Cthulhu*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150319212402/http://crypt-of-cthulhu.com/homosexualpanic.htm>, Accessed 2019-11-18.
- Rogerson, Matthew. "A Body In Transformation: Cronenberg's Body Horror as Transgender Cinema" *Long Live the Void*. <https://www.longlivethevoid.com/news/cronen1mr>, Accessed 27 October 2019.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Queer and Now." *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Andrea Bebell, Annamarie Jagose, Donald Hall & Susan Potter, Routledge, 2013, pp. 3-16.
- Smith, Clancy. "A Nameless Horror: Madness and Metamorphosis in H. P. Lovecraft and Postmodernism." *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales: The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror*, edited by Justin Everett & Jeffrey H. Shanks. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
- "They." *Collegiate Dictionary. Merriam-Webster*, 2016, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they>, Accessed 2019-11-16.

United Nations Development programme. *Stigma, Discrimination, Violence & Human Rights. Stigma, Discrimination, Violence & Human Rights.*

Woods, Jordan Blair, et al. *The Williams Institute UCLA School of Law.* 2016.

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/model-legislation/> Accessed 2019-11-16.

“Queer.” *Collegiate Dictionary. Merriam-Webster*, 2016, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/queer>, Accessed 2019-11-16.