‘Awed Listening’: H. P. Lovecraft in Classic and Contemporary Audio Horror

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Abstract:

From the beginnings of radio drama to digital podcasting, horror has been a significant genre. Radio located an immediate and effective affinity with horror, exploiting the form’s qualities of invisibility, immersivity and suggestion in realising the genre in on-air performance. As a part of this, adaptation – from Gothic classics to populist fiction – has been central. One conspicuous absence in early radio is H. P. Lovecraft with only one notable adaptation in the 1930-50s ‘golden age’. Nevertheless, in the radio work of Lovecraft acolyte Robert Bloch as well as shows such as *Quiet, Please* (1947-49) the ‘Lovecraftesque’ is strongly evident. Indeed, various dimensions to Lovecraft’s fiction make his oeuvre ideally suited to audio adaptation. In recent times, the transmedia pre-eminence of Lovecraft is evident in audio culture as much as anywhere else. This article scopes the presence of Lovecraft in both classic and contemporary contexts of horror audio.

Keywords:

Radio Drama; Podcasting; Horror; Adaptation; H. P. Lovecraft

I. Introduction

Despite the controversial aspects to his life and writings, H. P. Lovecraft has attained a preeminent status in contemporary horror culture and his influence can be detected across fiction, film, television, theatre, games (including digital, role playing,

card-deck and boardgames) and more. A particularly rich area of transmediation has been audio with Lovecraft emerging as an adaptive source and influence in music and in, the focus of this article, radio drama. We shall discover in this article that exploring Lovecraft and audio drama takes us on a journey across a century of the form of radio. In early radio drama, the *Lovecraftian* (the direct adaptation of Lovecraft) was ostensibly absent but the *Lovecraftesque* (allusive and/or appropriative works) becomes an increasing presence, not least due to the close relationship between popular radio drama and the pulp magazines. As Lovecraft's status grows, so do more direct adaptations of his work and in our own time we find audio dramas that deploy a panoply of adaptive strategies from playfully retro productions to radical contemporisations. This article will offer an account of horror audio and Lovecraft from the classic to the contemporary with detailed analysis of some paradigmatic works within this timeline. Throughout this diverse repertoire, we will find that the ineffable horrors of Lovecraft can find effective expression in a manner that demonstrates the potential of radio drama: literally invisible, audio drama is a form where the sonic works on, and with, the mind's eye of the listener, co-creating concepts and visualisations through the power of suggestion and sounds both familiar and strange. In the case of Lovecraft, this co-creation has the potential to conjure up ultimate and flawless horrors leaving the listener awed.

II. Horror Audio and Adaptation

Although we frequently consider horror to be driven by the visual – fantastical or shocking spectacles that arrest the eye or function as icons – the auditory is equally important. It is for this reason that the great 'invisible' artform of audio drama has

always drawn on, and evolved through, a close relationship with the genres of the thriller and horror. From its very beginnings, audio drama has exploited the state of utter darkness for a sustained and alarming purpose; it has presented the ineffable through inference and suggestion; and it has slid consummately between the interiority of the mind and exteriority of the material world. In addition to these essential affinities, the wider context of popular culture is equally significant. The emergence of public radio broadcasting in the 1920s coincided with the enormous success of the 'thriller' (and the subgenre of horror) in theatre; and the initial peak in popularity of pulp story magazines.[i]

In its first phase, radio drama essentially amounted to the live transmission of stage plays including popular melodramas such as Eugene Walter's *The Wolf* (1908), which broadcast in August 1922 and is therefore often cited as 'the first "on air" drama' (Blue, 2002: 1). As the profession of the radio dramatist came into being, many of these writers would turn to the thriller and horror genres to entertain the rapidly proliferating audience of the wireless, creating original works but also adaptations of Gothic literature, whodunits, thrillers and horror fiction, from the much-loved to the obscure. Adaptation could be a valuable and expedient choice for radio creatives: by approaching a pre-existing text, they were working with a story that had 'succeeded' in another medium and provided a skeleton of plot, structure and mood. In addition, the dramatization of a well-known source text might exploit the enthusiasm, or at least pique the curiosity, of an audience. The uptake of public radio was phenomenal and as all broadcasting at the time was live, the constant development of new content was as frenetic as the audience's appetite for it was voracious. This was particularly the case in the USA, where competing networks created rival content in a fierce attempt to attract and retain the lion's share of the audience.

There were many examples of 'one off' Gothic and thriller plays in 1920s American and British radio, but the stations and networks gradually developed the format of the series and serialisations. This meant that by the time of the 1930-50s 'golden age', radio drama programmes that specialised in horror emerged, such as the pioneering *The Witch's Tale* (1931-38), which created a Gothic host – Old Nancy the Salem Witch – who presented a repertoire of self-contained tales of terror including original works but also a large number of adaptations, ranging from Prosper Mérimée and Edward Bulwer-Lytton alongside the more anticipated Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson dramatizations. Another popular programme, *Suspense* (1942-62), spanned a wide spectrum of works from hard-boiled crime to supernatural horror and made a feature of recruiting major Hollywood actors as guest stars. *Suspense* also offered opportunities for writers to produce works of startling originality – such as Lucille Fletcher's *Sorry Wrong Number* (1943) – as well as adaptations. For writers such as John Dickson Carr, the successful crime novelist found an exciting new avenue of creativity at the beginnings of *Suspense*'s long run. Carr was the lead writer for the first few weeks of the series, producing episodes that were adaptations of his own fiction as well as original radio dramas. The success of *Suspense* – and Carr's involvement in particular – led to the development of the BBC's *Appointment with Fear* (1943-55) as part of a wartime collaboration with CBS – an extraordinary example of 'transatlantic cultural exchange, adaptation and performance practice' (Hand, 2014: 60) – in which the BBC broadcast their own versions of Carr's scripts, this time including his adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe stories.

Following *Suspense*'s enormous popularity, CBS developed a 'sister series' titled *Escape* (1947-54) which featured adaptation more centrally to its repertoire. *Escape*'s pilot episode was 'Dead of Night' (1947), an adaptation of the ventriloquist episode

(written by John Baines) within the British horror film *Dead of Night* (Alberto Cavalcanti et al, 1945). After this, *Escape* usually chose short fiction as a source, dramatizing classic Gothic works by Poe ('The Fall of the House of Usher', 1947), Ambrose Bierce ('An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge', 1947) and M. R. James ('Casting the Runes', 1947). The programme also presented adaptations of more recent short fiction such as Carl Stephenson's 'Leiningen versus the Ants' in 1948; George Toudouze's 'Three Skeleton Key' in 1949; and Daphne du Maurier's 'The Birds' in 1954, two years after it was published and nearly a decade before Alfred Hitchcock's film version (1963).

As we look at horror radio and adaptation through a twenty-first century lens, one figure seems conspicuously absent: H. P. Lovecraft. It is worth noting that there was an even an attempt to lure Lovecraft into writing for radio: S. T. Joshi reveals that Lovecraft declined an invitation to adapt 'The Dreams in the Witch House' for broadcast as he considered radio to be an inferior medium (Joshi ,1997: 346). We will see in this article that Lovecraft's work demonstrates a preoccupation with technology and is well-suited to interpretation across media and yet the author himself clearly styled himself exclusively as a 'man of letters'. Additionally, it is also worth acknowledging that despite Lovecraft's status now, his reputation has gained momentum since his demise in 1937. His life story is well-known and his legacy evident: a prolific yet not extensively published writer – his work appearing primarily in *Weird Tales* and other pulp magazines – who died in poverty and neglect. Amongst many literary critics, Lovecraft was not taken seriously. Most famously damning is Edmund Wilson who assesses Lovecraft's oeuvre thus: 'The only real horror in most of these is the horror of bad taste and bad art.' (Johansen, 2015: 287). Nevertheless, if we read the tributes that were paid to Lovecraft upon his death, we see that to his devotees he was not regarded as anything like a failure. As horror writer Earl Peirce Jr states in his *Weird Tales* tribute:

> Unlike many other men of genius, Lovecraft was fortunate enough to be living at a time when his work was recognized as outstanding. With the passing of time this recognition will become more universal and his work will take its proper place in the world's great literature. (Peirce, 1937: 124)

Lovecraft was venerated by a small group of other weird fiction and fantasy authors during his lifetime – and beyond. Notable in this regard is the establishment of Arkham House publications by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei in 1939 with the intention of publishing Lovecraft in book form. This circle of influence, allusion and homage has widened and deepened to the extent that Lovecraft has now become arguably the preeminent literary influence on contemporary horror culture in its widest, transmedial condition.

However, Lovecraft was not completely overlooked beyond his fans and associates in the years immediately after his death. This is particularly pertinent if we turn our attention to radio. In 1945, the same year as Edmund Wilson's harsh dismissal of all his work, *Suspense* broadcast a radio dramatization of one of Lovecraft's seminal works, 'The Dunwich Horror' (1928). This production represents a highly significant moment in the history of Lovecraft adaptation: although this adaptation of Lovecraft was ostensibly a 'one-off' during the era, through an analysis of *Suspense*'s 'The Dunwich Horror' we can not only detect a wider Lovecraftesque culture on radio during the period but also gain an insight into the apposite nature of Lovecraft in regard to audio adaptation through to our own time.

III. *Suspense*'s 'The Dunwich Horror'

Suspense's adaptation of H. P. Lovecraft's 'The Dunwich Horror' (1 November 1945) was produced by William Spier and starred Hollywood actor Ronald Colman. It is interesting to note that in contrast to the high profile of the lead actor, the play's on-air introduction does not mention Lovecraft: '*Suspense*… with Ronald Colman as star of "The Dunwich Horror", a suspense play produced, edited and directed by William Spier.' This was, however, standard practice for this era of *Suspense* adaptations which tended to foreground the acting and production talent rather than the textual source.

The adaptation, adhering to the generic format of around half an hour, condenses the original story to focus on the denouement, namely the last few sections of the short story. As a choice for radio adaptation, 'The Dunwich Horror' helpfully foregrounds technology with, for example, telephones a recurrent feature in the story. As we shall see, the *Suspense* dramatization will reflect upon its own technological mediation. Lovecraft's short story is around 17,500 words while Spier's adaptation is approximately 5000 words. In many ways, Spier is able to take an expedient approach to Lovecraft's tale – the 'editor' credit in the title is significant here – stripping back some of the more prose-heavy sections which are characteristic of Lovecraft's style of creating contextual and historical detail in order to create 'authenticity'. Hence, a long paragraph on the handwriting in Wilbur Whateley's diary is summed up as looking 'like Sanscrit'.

The play uses Henry Armitage (Colman), a scholar from Miskatonic University, as its focalizing character and opens with a radio call – 'Come in, Dunwich Massachusetts…' – which is answered by Armitage speaking from the transmitter in his laboratory. This immediately places this version of the story within audio technology itself, a metanarrative approach which is reinforced when Armitage talks directly to the listeners:

> The purpose of this broadcast is to make this unbelievable horror believable to you. I hope for your sake and ours, we are successful tonight. It is the eve of All Hallows. Tomorrow will be too late.

The script creates a spectacle of horror in the imagination of the listener, such as in the description of Wilbur Whateley's dying body – torn to bits by dogs – which adheres very closely to Lovecraft's account of a thing lying in a pool of greenish-yellow stickiness with skin like crocodile hide and, below the waist, black fur and tentacles. The live broadcast was on November the 1st (i.e. All Saints Day), hence the drama is ostensibly about the 'night before' and was, effectively, the weekly *Suspense*'s 'Halloween' show. The sense of time and urgency compels a succinct account of the backstory with Armitage stepping in and out of narration and action. Colman's cool authority as narrator-hero mixes with scenes which establish locale, including characters speaking in New England dialect and colloquialisms. As John V. Pavlik writes:

> The play artfully blends first-person and third-person perspective. […] Environmental acoustics bring the listener to the top of Sentinel Hill to the great circle of stones, while the wind howls and Wizard Wakely [sic] shrieks. (Pavlik, 2017: 139)

Pavlik's reference to the 'Environmental acoustics' is indeed one of the most evocative aspects of the radio play, as important as the tumultuous music which structures the play with overarching momentum. In the short story, Lovecraft does much to create the surroundings of rural Massachusetts, perhaps most memorably with the sound of the indigenous whippoorwill birds. The radio version features whistling whippoorwills at several points, including during the death scene of Wizard Whateley which recreates

Lovecraft's account of the birds timing 'their eerie cries in unison with the sufferer's struggling breath' (Lovecraft, 1963: 163).

In the play, as Armitage starts to ascend to the altar on Sentinel Hill, his assistant Warren Rice describes the action until Armitage's magic formula makes the monster momentarily visible and Rice screams in horror and the broadcast seems to stop. A moment later, a voice says 'Ladies and gentlemen, this is your *Suspense* announcer… Due to conditions- Oh, just a moment, please…' This moment of metanarrative aims to make the broadcast seem 'real', as if the horror is spreading to the network transmission itself, in the tradition of *Mercury Theatre on the Air*'s own CBS Halloween show of seven years before, 'War of the Worlds' (30 October 1938).

Although Lovecraft is uncredited, *Suspense*'s 'The Dunwich Horror' demonstrates an approach to adaptation that is an exercise in concision and action. The story is adhered to closely but is repurposed for the horror radio format. The play focuses on the denouement but with rich detail in its regional accents, barking dogs, howling winds, haunting birds and moments of horror, whether narrated in detail or emitted as a scream. As a generic example of horror radio, it is 'true to form' for the era and although there were no other explicit Lovecraft adaptations during 1930-50s American radio there were many that were, nonetheless, Lovecraftesque.

IV. Robert Bloch, *Quiet, Please* and the Lovecraftesque

One of the most celebrated members of the core 'Lovecraft Circle' is Robert Bloch.[ii] Bloch was just a teenager when he started a correspondence with Lovecraft and the latter became his literary mentor. Bloch became a successful contributor to pulp magazines in a long career which saw him write the novel *Psycho* (1959) as well as

examples of popular television screenwriting. Bloch also had a significant relationship with radio with the author adapting many of his own short stories onto the airwaves. According to Karl Schadow, Bloch was interested in writing for radio from the late 1930s but this was not realised until his celebrated short story 'Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper' (*Weird Tales*, July 1943) was first adapted on *The Kate Smith Hour*, a radio variety show, in January 1944 after which Bloch was invited to write adaptations of his pulp stories for the radio (Schadow, 2016: 64). This led to the creation of *Stay Tuned for Terror*, a horror series scripted by Bloch. As Schadow reveals, only eight of the thirty-nine radio plays were 'original' works (Schadow, 2016: 72), the series devoted to the adaptation of Bloch's pulp fiction, nearly all works published in *Weird Tales*. In fact, the magazine did much to collaborate in the promotion of the show, as Schadow reveals: 'the program's production team negotiated with the magazine's editors for extensive exploitation' (Schadow, 2020: 9). Interestingly, as Schadow reveals (Schadow, 2016: 64), the first horror radio series based emphatically on the pulps was the very short-lived *Weird Tales* (1933).

Even if Lovecraft's own works were neglected in 1930-40s radio, the synergy between pulp magazines and horror radio was already a common phenomenon. It was this that evidently underpinned the aforementioned invitation that Lovecraft himself received – and declined – to adapt a work for radio. Matthew A. Killmeier (2012) successfully articulates the importance of pulp magazines as much as Gothic literature as a source and influence on the aforementioned *The Witch's Tale* (1931-38), radio's first horror series. The affinity between horror radio and horror pulps is immediately evident: these are works that *thrill* the reader, frequently using concision and dramatic momentum ideal for a work designed to be consumed in one 'sitting'. There were exceptions (Lovecraft's works are frequently a case in point), but many examples of

weird fiction from the pulps have a dramatic focus and unity of action that make them highly reminiscent of horror and thriller radio at its most fast-paced, inexorable and 'adrenaline-fuelled'. Some of this work is unmistakably Lovecraftesque.

There are many examples of horror radio contemporaneous with the *Suspense* Lovecraft adaptation that could be chosen but we will focus on *Quiet, Please* (1947-49), written and produced by Wyllis Cooper. After serving in the Signal Corps during the First World War, Cooper moved into advertising. His experience in both military communications and advertising well-equipped him to move into the burgeoning field of radio in the late 1920s. He became a scriptwriter and continuity editor of various dramas such as the Western series *Empire Builders* (1929-31). In 1934, Cooper was given the opportunity to be writer-producer of his own series, the horror show *Lights Out* (1934-47). Cooper would later write and direct radio programmes such as the wartime variety show *The Army Hour* (1942-45) and true crime drama series *Whitehall 1212* (1951-52) but is most celebrated for the horror show *Lights Out* and its successor *Quiet, Please*. Cooper even had some involvement in the film industry as screenwriter of *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) and some of the *Mr. Moto* films (1937-39). Cooper is an example of a creator who joined radio in its early days and understood how to produce drama in this new medium.

Lights Out under the stewardship of Wyllis Cooper and subsequently Arch Oboler demonstrated exceptional understanding of radio form for horror with works that remain remarkably inventive, sardonic or shocking. In *Quiet, Please*, Cooper produced a series that demonstrated a consummate understanding of radio's form and capacity. The generic versatility across the 106 scripts of *Quiet, Please* is impressive. For example, 'Three Sides to a Story' (7 September 1947) is a crime of passion narrative that owes much to *film noir*, while plays such as 'Berlin 1945' (22 December 1947) is a Christian

parable set in war-torn Europe. ‘My Son John’ (28 November 1948) is an inventive vampire story in which a man presumed killed in the Second World War was, in fact, attacked by Count Dracula and now preys upon the citizens of New York. Although never overt adaptations, the plays show an acute awareness of genre and how to develop it within the format of the thirty-minute radio play. As part of this, some of Cooper’s plays takes us into the world of the Lovecraftesque.

In ‘Beezer’s Cellar’ (10 October 1948), superstitious rumours circulate around a deserted house which, some sixty years before, was inhabited by Beezer, a mysterious man who created a cellar under his house before hanging himself. Three burglars decide Beezer’s cellar is the ideal place to hide a hoard of money. Digging in the cellar, the trio open up a hole that seems to go ‘down and down and down and down – hundreds of feet’. One of the gang members, Marlene, suddenly sees ‘something’ in the hole that makes her start ‘yammerin' like a baby’ then fall unconscious. The overwhelming impact of the spectacle is reminiscent of the shocking visions that can tip Lovecraft characters into madness. Once conscious, Marlene asserts there are no such thing as ghosts but there are ‘things that come up out of the ground’. It becomes clear that the pit is an opening to an underworld, a realm of ‘Fire and destruction’ crawling with mortifying creatures. At the end of the play, Stanley the narrator explains to us at the end that although he is on death row, he would ‘rather be here than in Beezer's cellar.’

The core plot of ‘Beezer’s Cellar’ – three criminals hiding their loot in an ominous location – is actually an echo of the first *Quiet, Please* broadcast ‘Nothing Behind the Door’ (8 June 1947), in which three bank robbers break into an astronomy laboratory to hide their loot only to be abnegated when they step inside a vault of pure ‘nothingness’. This itself is reminiscent of a *Weird Tales* story by Lovecraft-follower Edmond Hamilton, whose ‘The Door Into Infinity’ is about a cult who sacrifice victims through a door that

'*leads outside our world*'. (Hamilton, 1936: 130). As a whole, both of these *Quiet, Please* horror plays unmistakably owe a debt to Lovecraft's 'The Terrible Old Man' (1921) which also features a trio of criminals getting a horrifying comeuppance when they venture into a desolate house. Interestingly, 'Beezer's Cellar' is also similar to a *Weird Tales* story by the aforementioned Robert Bloch: 'The Creeper in the Crypt', in which a gangster kidnaps a man (the narrator) and hides in the cellar of a notorious 'witch-house' in Arkham. The narrator tells us that there was 'something creeping across the cellar floor', a terrifying creature he never sees, only beholding, at the end, his captor's '*naked body chewed entirely to ribbons by gigantic and unhuman teeth!*' (Bloch, 1937: 111). It is also worth noting that Cooper did not necessarily have to have read Bloch's short story: 'The Creeper in the Crypt' had been adapted for radio in 1945 by Bloch himself for his radio series *Stay Tuned for Terror*.[iii] Whether Cooper read Bloch's story or heard Bloch's play what we detect here a mesh of influence – works by Lovecraft, Hamilton and Bloch – through which Cooper develops his own stories apposite for the radio medium.

A grim fate akin to pulp horrors lies at the end of *Quiet, Please*'s distinctly Lovecraftesque play, 'The Thing on the Fourble Board' (9 August 1948). The story is narrated to us by Porky, an affable former oilfield worker, who has invited to us to dinner with him and his wife Mike. Porky reflects 'I don't think there's an oilman in the world that don't wonder one time or another what's down there besides rock and oil and gas': once again we find Cooper's characters speculating on the horrors of the deep. Porky recounts an experience in which something emerged on the fourble board (a platform on the drilling tower). What has been dredged up is a creature made of invisible stone, half-child and half-spider. Despite being horrified by it, a creature from 'some horrible dream' with a body he sees 'in my nightmares', Porky becomes beguiled

by it. It becomes clear, in the horrifying denouement, that we are not joining Porky and Mike for dinner: we *are* dinner. Mike is a creature of horror from the depths, predating humanity despite its human face. Its grotesquely hybrid nature is reminiscent of Wilbur Whateley's monstrous twin brother in Lovecraft's 'The Dunwich Horror': '*It was a octopus, centipede, spider kind o' thing, but they was a haff-shaped man's face on top of it*' (Lovecraft, 1963: 202).

In 'Northern Lights' (30 January 1949), we experience Cooper's vision of a Lovecraftian 'cosmic horror'. Paul and another scientist develop a time machine that can move objects along the temporal plane. Rather than a H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) style scientific romance, Cooper locates a more Lovecraftesque horror. Experimenting on a cigarette lighter, the object reappears in their laboratory along with a mysterious caterpillar. The larva commences to sing and eventually, in its high-pitched timbre, begins to imitate human speech, somewhat reminiscent of the alien creatures in Lovecraft's 'The Whisperer in the Darkness' (1931) which speak in an 'accursed *buzzing* which had no likeness to humanity despite the human words which it uttered.' (Lovecraft, 1963: 230).[iv]

Entering the machine himself to discover where the caterpillar came from, Paul finds himself in a 'dead, cold, white world' which might be the Arctic or a distant planet. Whatever the location, it is a terrifying realm:

> I was afraid, shivering, abjectly afraid. […] I heard the sound of voices screaming into my mind, I – I could understand them – I wished heartily I'd never played around with cosmic forces.

The speech is clearly Lovecraftian, albeit written with the clarity and precision that characterises Cooper's radio scriptwriting. The same aspect is evident when Paul describes the aurora borealis of the title which he explains is not just visual but aural:

> […] there's a sound, a humming, a… a crackling somewhere inside your head. And there are times when you'd swear it's a voice talking to you, talking in some kind of strange language you can almost understand – filling your whole being with a kind of desperate, inescapable terror.

If the Lovecraftesque has been implicit in these radio plays, it becomes playfully explicit in *Quiet, Please*'s 'The Man Who Stole a Planet' (26 July 1948). In this play, an American explorer called Norman steals a precious relic from a Mayan temple in Mexico. This is a familiar narrative trope in pulp magazines, as in M. G. Moretti's 'The Strangling Hands' (*Weird Tales*, 1938), in which explorers steal the jewelled eye from an idol in an African temple. In 'The Man Who Stole a Planet', however, we go beyond stories influenced by H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) or Tutankhamun's curse. The priceless artefact Norman steals is a small, perfect model of Earth. Handling the model can affect the climate of the planet in real life. Jabbing it with a pin causes an earthquake and drops of water create floods in the Sahara Desert. Most perilously of all, there is the potential to destroy the world if Norman drops it to the ground. However, the custodians of the ancient temple track him down:

> NORMAN: here I am on a July evening in the year of our Lord 1948, with a houseful of extremely dead high priests who were born in the Mexican jungle some fourteen hundred years ago. [PAUSE] No, I didn't cart them back with me. [PAUSE] No. They walked in on me.
>
> MUSIC: ACCENT
>
> Oh, take that supercilious smile off your face! I know what you're thinking. More of that supernatural stuff. More of that H. P. Lovecraft stuff, that 'my blood froze

> in my veins at the eldritch – whatever that is – being that towered above me'. Well, don't kid yourself. What you people call 'supernatural' is just as natural as apples growing on a tree. The only thing is, our great thinkers, our figurers-out, they all stop when they come to something they can't explain immediately with their slide rules and their log tables and spectroscopes and stuff.

By claiming this is *not* Lovecraftian, Cooper obviously makes it *entirely* Lovecraftesque. Norman's diatribe on the forces of rationalism is emphatically in the cosmic horror tradition: the revelation of the true nature of the universe which is not governed by the superficial dreams of human rationalism but much deeper and older powers.

Cooper's distinctive work in horror demonstrates an influence and understanding of various subgenres. Unquestionably, Cooper should be considered 'one of the greatest auteurs of horror radio' (Hand, 2006: 161), an achievement partly revealing his consummate understanding of radio but also an ability to adapt, appropriate and assimilate a variety of literary sources, including Lovecraft and his followers. This does not simply reveal the penchant Cooper had for these magazines, it also demonstrates – as we have already suggested – a correlation of form: the standard horror drama on radio was around thirty minutes in duration and finds an equivalent in the economic horrors of many pulp stories. Although Lovecraft can often be verbose in his narrative style, the evocative sense of mood he conveys and the inexorable – frequently ineffable – journey into horror signify a dramatic paradigm that radio writers identified and appropriated for their own medium. It is these qualities that have continued to determine and inspire Lovecraft adaptation into the era of digital audio.

V. Lovecraft and Contemporary Audio

The slow but steady rise in Lovecraft's fortunes since 1937 is reflected in academia as well as in transmedia creative culture. Lovecraft has been explored in multiple disciplines as much as in literary and cultural studies. Of key pertinence to this study is the link between Lovecraft and *sound*. If we look Lovecraft's fiction, the auditory is as important as the obvious impact of visual spectacle. Although some works foreground the visual in their titles, as in 'The *Colour* Out of Space' or 'The *Shadow* over Innsmouth', other stories place the reader in listening mode: 'The *Whisperer* in Darkness' or 'The *Call* of Cthulhu' (all italics added). The horrors of Lovecraft are frequently determined sonically. At the end of 'Dagon' (1919), the terror outside the room is most powerful for only being audible: 'I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it.' (Lovecraft, 1987: 19). Similarly, in 'The Terrible Old Man' what is happening to the gang who attempt to rob a vulnerable man is not described beyond the sound of their 'hideous screams' – their 'horribly mangled' corpses are discovered later (Lovecraft, 1963: 280). Most potent is the incantational use of language from the *Necronomicon* grimoire or the utterance of monsters. In a tale such as 'The Whisperer in Darkness', we find one of Lovecraft's most sophisticated explorations of sound from the opening line 'Bear in mind closely that I did not see any actual visual horror at the end' (Lovecraft, 1963: 212) and its use of audio technology to the buzzing imitation of human speech.

These aspects have informed notable Lovecraft criticism. Fabienne Collignon, in her nuanced analysis, explores 'the phonic materiality of sound' (Collignon, 2019: 229) within Lovecraft. For Dean Lockwood, Lovecraft's horror fiction can be read in relation to sonicity and in correlation with contemporaneous technology revealing that in 'Lovecraft, horror is networked, tentacular, and… resonates powerfully with the evolution of media.' (Lockwood, 2012: 73). In contrast to China Miéville and other

critics who have contended that Lovecraft's fiction can be primarily seen as response to the modern barbarism of the First World War, Lockwood argues that cosmic horror is also a response to 'the babel-tongues of the modern as they were transmitted in the early days of broadcasting' (Lockwood, 2012: 80): the chaos and cacophony of mass media. Certainly, contemporaneous technology such as telephones, radio and dictaphones appear in Lovecraft's work. James Kneale concurs that 'modern media played an important part in many of Lovecraft's stories' (Kneale, 2010: 90), partly due to his genuine interest but also because it permitted 'a new set of solutions to the "problem of witnessing"' (Kneale, 2020: 103) thus offering intimate or distantiated ways for his characters to encounter monstrosity.

It is these multiple dimensions of sound that continue to present an opportunity to audio adapters. After the fallow years for direct Lovecraft adaptation in the golden age, a momentum began with notable examples such as *The Black Mass* (1963-67), a programme which served as a conscious homage to the horror radio of the 1930-50s in its style and conception. The principal writer and performer in *The Black Mass* was Erik Bauersfeld and he would use literary adaptation as a central process, with dramatizations of Anglo-American Gothic works by Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, Lord Dunsany, and Bram Stoker. However, the programme also found inspiration for horror radio in short stories by modern writers such as Virginia Woolf ('A Haunted House'), Albert Camus ('The Renegade') and Franz Kafka ('The Judgement'). Although *The Black Mass* had a preference for literature of the past, it also adapted contemporaneous writers such as Graham Greene ('Proof Positive') and Nigel Kneale ('O Mirror, Mirror'). By the time of this era of popular culture, Lovecraft was an unsurprising choice as source for popular horror adaptation and we find *The Black Mass* adapting the 1924 story 'The Rats in the Walls' (July 1964) and the 1926 tale 'The

Outsider' (October 1965). 'The Rats in the Walls' is led by the narrative of de la Poer, following the original's plot closely, albeit excising de la Poer's cat (and its racist name) and adapting Lovecraft's described encounters between de la Poer and Captain Norrys into lively dialogue. 'The Outsider' is adapted into a vivid monologue, energetically embodied by Bauersfeld, augmented with atmospheric sound effects and music. As in *The Black Mass*'s previous Lovecraft adaptation, 'The Outsider' adheres closely to the source but subtly reorders some of the plot for dramatic effect and embellishes the narrative with a dynamic sense of visuals, odours and physicality to enhance its dramatic momentum. Throughout the series, Bauersfeld performs with a heightened and compelling intensity in the tradition of *Quiet, Please* and other 'golden age' horror radio.

The once neglected Lovecraft has become not just a preeminent influence over contemporary horror culture but a notable *literary* figure, with numerous biographical works and critical studies such as Michel Houellebecq's *H. P. Lovecraft: Contre le monde, contre la vie* (1991) legitimising this standing. The life of Lovecraft has itself inspired audio drama with plays such as Sara Davies and Abigail Youngman's *Talk to Me: H. P. Lovecraft* (2018), a biographical drama for BBC radio which explores Lovecraft's failed marriage to Sonia Greene. However, it is of course Lovecraft's works that remain the key source in the intertextuality of audio. As audio moves into the digital age, we find listeners consuming Lovecraft in myriad ways. Countless 'straightforward' readings are available on Audible and various other audiobook contexts. Lovecraft can also be consumed in ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) contexts, including, 'The Reanimation Experiment – H. P. Lovecraft ASMR' (2020 onwards), one of many by ASMR-artist Ephemeral Rift, in which we spend over fifty minutes in the intimate company of 'a particularly infamous Arkham doctor': Lovecraft's Herbert West. Despite

the quiet intensity of this horror experience (indeed, we are 'killed' and brought back to life), Ephemeral Rift's text description explains that the piece is 'meant to help you relax, sleep, hopefully experience ASMR, and any other use that might help you find some peace of mind, concentrate, study, decompress, etc.' (Ephemeral Rift, 2020).[v]

When it comes to the dramatic adaptation of Lovecraft's works into audio, multiple approaches have been taken. The opening narrative frame to each episode of horror podcast *19 Nocturne Boulevard* places the listener asking for directions to the eponymous address and we are advised: 'When you hit Howard, hang a right. Howard meets Philip at a weird kind of angle…'. Clearly, H(oward) P(hillips) Lovecraft is a pivotal influence. Along with various standalone Lovecraft adaptations, *19 Nocturne Boulevard* writer-producer Julie Hoverson has created a subsidiary series titled *The Lovecraft 5* (2009 onwards) in which a group of gentlemen in the early twentieth century share after dinner stories as a way to frame, in Gothic style, adaptations of Lovecraft stories. Similarly, the horror podcast *Tales From Beyond The Pale*'s playfully mannered adaptation of the 1924 short story 'The Hound' (2015) is set in the era of publication.

Since the 1980s, the Atlanta Radio Theatre Company has produced audio drama in live and recorded form with a wide repertoire but often echoing classic radio's proclivity for adventure, science fiction and dark fantasy. This has included a whole subcategory of Lovecraft adaptations. Similarly established in the 1980s, The H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society is an organisation that demonstrates the contemporary transmedial reach of Lovecraft. The Society produces books, films, games, clothing and more. It has also developed the *Dark Adventure Radio Theatre* (*DART*), a series of audio dramas that adapt Lovecraft in an imitation of golden age horror radio. Within an output of over twenty audio plays, the Society produced 'The Whisperer in Darkness'

(2020), a feature-length adaptation by Sean Branney and Andrew Leman. The liner notes to the release state that the episode was produced during the COVID-19 lockdown with actors recording in isolation – in contrast to the usual studio 'ensemble' approach – thus creating a 'found footage' production (*DART*, 2020). Certainly, the adaptation is a successful mix of old and new: the tone and style are like classic horror radio and yet it has a fragmented structure and narrative that is partly Gothic (i.e. collated manuscripts) as much as recent 'found footage' horror.

The dramatization begins with a warning to listeners to stay inside (an oblique allusion to the contemporaneous pandemic) due to a fierce storm. This has impacted on the network as the opening by the Announcer (Josh Thoemke) states: 'We seem to have temporally, er, lost the signal from Albany…'. He pledges to keep the studio live to inform and entertain the listeners. Hastily replacing the usual host who is trapped at home, the Announcer explains that they are in possession of over twenty cylinders discovered in the collection of (currently missing) academic Albert N. Wilmarth. In this way, the adaptation transfers the written narrative account by Wilmarth into recordings. This extends into other 'recorded sources' in the play such as news broadcasts and Henry Akeley recording onto cylinders as arthritis prevents him from writing; and, as in Lovecraft's story, field recordings of the 'buzzing' voices. The adaptation foregrounds the 'texture' of the recordings and their mediating technology: we hear the crackling sound quality, the occasional rhythmic thrum of the rotating cylinder, the mechanical 'clunk' as each recording times out.

While these various adaptations have used audio as a way to create historical context or focus upon sound technology itself, others have had a very different genesis. In 2014-15, Dread Falls Theatre toured the UK with a Lovecraft-influenced performance: *Father Dagon*. This immersive adaptation was staged in factories and

crypts rather than theatres and challenged the typical expectations of a 'script' as artistic director Victoria Snaith explains:

> *Father Dagon* was an immersive theatre show with no dialogue at all. Instead of dialogue the whole show was told through acting, movement, dance, and the combination of live and recorded music that played throughout. (Snaith, 2020)

Sometime after the tour, Snaith decided to adapt the live production into a podcast series. Given the non-verbal nature of the immersive show this immediately represented a major challenge as Snaith reflects: 'The images we created physically for the eyes of our audience, could they be recreated in the mind's eye of our listeners?' (Snaith, 2017).

In developing the podcast, Snaith returned to the script development for the live production, namely the backstories to the characters. These were created purely for actors' not audience consumption but became the core of the podcast. The backstories explained why the characters came to be in the town of Innsmouth and were effectively a prequel to where the immersive show began. For this reason, each episode of the first series of the *Father Dagon* podcast is named after a specific character. The episodes are delivered by a focal character, with occasional mergence into dialogue with other characters. This creates an intimate, almost confessional, style reminiscent of the 'diary-into-dialogue' approach in other horror podcast drama such as the zombie pandemic saga *We're Alive* (2009 onwards). The impact of this approach is that we can be placed in extremely close contact with the character-narrator, a point of listening that privileges us with an insight into their perspective and experience of horror – a dimension which can, of course, become highly disturbing. We can share – between our ears – their hopes and humanity but also their increasing insanity and unreliability. This

approach of distinct voices giving their perspective belongs to a tradition of Gothic narrative and is a particularly acute strategy in the effective realisation of the Lovecraftian narrative, a textual oeuvre that audio adaption, at its best, can explore very compellingly. At the same time, it is worth noting that *Father Dagon* can be playful, frequently disrupting the narrative frame with irony, as in these closing credits:

> At the end of every podcast you can hear the soundtrack from the day's episode in full, without the script. Which is perfect for trying to drown out the voices inside your head. [CHEERY TONE] Unless those voices are telling you to visit our website…! (*Father Dagon* 1.2 'Albert Fletcher')

Music and soundscape are of immense importance in the *Father Dagon* podcast. This comes directly from the live production which used music from a variety of sources but centrally the artist Seesar who is sole composer on the podcast. Seesar's soundtrack creates an eerie backdrop: at times, when the recounted narrative may seem mundane, the soundscape is unsettling or ominous, in juxtaposition to what is being said. At other points, the soundtrack correlates to the script to give emphasis as in the end of the first episode:

> RUTH WINTERS: […] Oh, my mind and body tingles with the anticipation of joining my husband and his family… soon… soon… soon…

Seesar's percussive soundscape has already emerged behind Ruth's words and her final utterance – the repeated word 'soon' – coincides with the emphatic beating of a drum. Initially, the naïve optimism of Ruth seems at odds with the rhythmic discord of Seesar's soundscape but suddenly it coalesces and becomes embedded, chillingly and inexorably, within it.

Seesar is the creative name of composer and ethnomusicologist Will Connor in his extensive project constructing Lovecraft-inspired soundscapes. Seesar principally uses percussion from around the world as well as creating new instruments. In this regard, the *Father Dagon* podcast is effectively in two parts in which we hear the narrative accompanied by the soundscape immediately after which Seesar's 'Lovecraftian Futurist' soundscape is repeated without words. This creates a dualistic consumption experience: the scripted narrative is followed by a purely auditory soundscape which allows us to consume a Lovecraftian experience, divorced from conventional, textual narrative. Overall, the *Father Dagon* podcast is a multi-layered adaptation that emerges from the legacy of a live theatrical performance, incorporating dramatic scriptwriting and experimental composition.

VI. Julian Simpson's Lovecraft Podcasts

One of the most sophisticated contemporary adaptations of Lovecraft is writer-director Julian Simpson's three-part podcast series on the BBC: 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward' (2018), 'The Whisperer in Darkness' (2019) and 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth' (2020). As an approach to adaptation, Simpson uses Lovecraft's stories as a core and inspiration but expands, modernises and re-appropriates them. As a source, Simpson has selected Lovecraft works that can lend themselves 'to modernisation in the same way Sherlock Holmes does.' (Bullough, 2020). The programme develops a conceit wherein the podcast presents a fictional podcast series called *Mystery Machine* which investigates true mysteries, a hybrid of crime podcasts such as *Serial* (2014 onwards) and paranormal investigation shows such as *This Paranormal Life* (2017 onwards). The series consistently constructs a stylistic and tonal verisimilitude. This is largely

achieved by the acting aesthetic. While some adaptations are set in a Lovecraftian past with characters to match, the characters in Simpson's adaptation – especially the British 'host' Matthew Heawood (Barnaby Kay) and the American investigative journalist Kennedy Fisher (Jana Carpenter) – are exceptionally well-realised in tone and performance, sometimes conversational, sometimes journalistic, and convincingly realist even in the most dramatic scenes. The series feature characters who mention IKEA at one moment and the Cthulhic god Azathoth the next. In addition, by inventing a seemingly long-running series (referencing previous cases loyal listeners may have heard), the drama imbeds its seeming authenticity. At the same time, it is also playful. The name of the podcast series the drama presents – *Mystery Machine* – is an allusion to *Scooby Doo* (1970 onwards) as it is a name of Mystery Inc's iconic campervan. In some ways, the adventures of Matthew and Kennedy are in the postmodern neo-Gothic tradition of *Scooby Doo*, albeit far more sinister and complex.

Simpson's Lovecraft adaptations demonstrate an intricate process of bricolage, with diverse references and allusions beyond the confines of Lovecraft's 1920-30s fiction. The narratives retain the core elements: for example, in the first series a young man called Charles Dexter Ward vanishes from a psychiatric hospital near Providence, Rhode Island. The name of the eponymous character is the same as is the circumstances and location of his disappearance. However, Simpson modernises this, setting it in 2017. By the time we get to 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth', the series incorporates the COVID-19 pandemic not merely as a setting but having a tangible impact on the narrative. Throughout all the series, Simpson retains key elements of Lovecraft plots, including the names and functions of certain characters, but enhances, expands and develops the narrative. Part of this is the aforementioned bricolage: Simpson spreads his frame of reference very widely, utilising celebrated examples of folklore, such as an encounter

with ‘Black Shuck’ (the mythical East Anglian hound), or a detailed recreation of the Rendlesham Forest incident (UFO sightings in Suffolk, 1980). Similarly, Simpson draws on the history of the occult, with references to John Dee, Aleister Crowley or the 1940s ‘Babalon Working’ rituals. At other times, Simpson takes us into the realm of political intrigue, exploring Number Stations, the unsolved murder of the ‘Somerton Man’ in 1948 (often assumed to have some link with espionage) or namechecking contemporary whistle-blowers such as Edward Snowden. Simpson will directly reference films from *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) to *The Matrix* (1999) while the unravelling secrecy and rituals may remind the listener of paranoid science fiction and folk horror. Also Eleanor Peck (Nicola Walker), an expert but sceptical academic, dismisses the ‘truth’ of cosmic horror as ‘bollocks’ and explains the wrangling between Cthulhic cults as ‘Brexit for wizards’ (‘The Whisperer in Darkness’, Episode 6). The effect of this bricolage is the construction of a complex fictive world, merging not just horror, science fiction and mystery genres but amalgamating folklore, other literary/cinematic fictions, conspiracy theories, genuine history and contemporary allusion in the creation of a compelling story world, at once disarmingly familiar and abjectly alienating.

In addition to the richness of their narrative construction, these adaptations are acutely aware of *texture* and *form*. The series uses a wide variety of sound sources. As Miranda Sawyer states, ‘There is texture in the sound, which is properly recorded, whether a voice on an old-fashioned minicassette, the fizz and hiss of short wave or the crunch of leaves underfoot.’ (Sawyer, 2019). Sometimes we will hear Matthew speaking to us from the studio, explaining, framing and foregrounding aspects of the investigation, crafting together what we need to know and what we should hear next. At other times, we might hear Kennedy on location, recording her investigations and

interviews on a recording device or simply on her phone. We listen to voicemail, analogue tapes or the distorted output of a Number Station. In 'Charles Dexter Ward' Episode 6 we can clearly hear a ghostly voice that Kennedy cannot. The series edit together these varieties of sound source, creating a patchwork of (super)natural texture and multiple perspectives.

This attention to the potential of sound is also evident in its understanding of the technique of audio drama. Towards the end of 'The Whisperer in Darkness', Kennedy encounters Black Shuck which she defies, only to be greeted by Henry Akeley:

> KENNEDY: You're not real, are you?
>
> SFX: HOUND'S SNARLING DISTORTS AND MERGES WITH CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER
>
> KENNEDY: Jesus, could you stop-
>
> AKELEY: Hello again, Miss Fisher. I seem to have come out without my face.
>
> KENNEDY: PIERCING SCREAM (Episode 8)

The sequence begins from the point-of-listening of Kennedy, confronting the snarling hound, which distorts as she challenges the illusion, then horror as she beholds Akeley. Literally midway through Kennedy's scream, we shift perspective to Matthew elsewhere in the forest who hurries to find her. This is horror audio at its most effective: through taut scriptwriting, urgent performances and efficient editing and sound design, we are enveloped in a sense of space, location and an uncanny, experiential narrative.

In terms of form, the series are structured into ten episodes of, typically but not exclusively, between 20-30 minutes each. For Simpson, this is a calculated decision regarding the average commuting time (Bullough, 2020) and reveals his ideal listener.

Moreover, podcasts do not tend to be listened to like traditional radio. Podcast listeners often download episodes and create their own playlist which they listen to at their convenience, through binging as a 'boxset' or as quotidian habit (as in Simpson's commuter). As Simpson says, in the culture of podcasting, listeners are no longer 'slaves to a schedule' (Bullough, 2020). This flexible listening is emphasised when, for example, Matthew states: 'If you're just joining us I'd advise you to start at Episode 1 and work your way through.' By the time we are in the second series, the complex issues of time, editing and the podcast format is given additional emphasis when Matthew speaks to us, portentously: 'I wish this could be all nice and linear, but I'm afraid that's not going to work anymore.' This technique makes us ask ourselves questions about how and what we are listening to, building suspense, disquiet and even paranoia.

Elsewhere the podcast pushes the conventions of audio listening even further. Episode 8 of 'The Whisperer in Darkness' seems to conclude the story but there is a subsequent episode ('Feed Disrupted') which is effectively a 27-minute soundscape: we listen to a looping musical theme and white noise that contains an indecipherable voice within the distortion. The subsequent podcast – the three-minute long Episode 10 ('Urgent Update from Kennedy Fisher') – offers the key. In the absence of Matthew (who is apparently non-contactable), Kennedy speaks to us about that 'extra episode':

> I don't know how it got there. When I first listened to it, I figured it was just some audio glitch that had somehow gotten uploaded by mistake, but the more you listen, the more it sounds like there's something there.

Taking us through decryption, Kennedy explains this 'weird auditory illusion' can only be heard 'when you know what it is'. If we then go back to Episode 9, we do indeed hear the buried phrase and, quite eerily, can never mishear it again. This challenge to

linearity, wherein we listen back and forth between the podcasts, is ironically implicit in the narrative itself when Henry Akeley explains:

> The idea of time, of past, present, future, well… these are all constructs created in the human brain in order to make sense of the environment. Our perception only reaches so far, so our brains construct a model of the universe that makes sense within the limits of our perception. But *that* is *not* reality. (Episode 8)

Although it is over seventy years later, the speech reminds us of Norman in *Quiet, Please*'s 'The Man Who Stole a Planet' challenging our belief in rationalism. Through adapting Lovecraft into several hours of episodic drama which we can consume in countless ways, Simpson deftly melds the mundane and familiar with the unsettling extremes of horror. Through the intimacy of audio, we experience twists, shocks and conspiracies. Moments of fast action mix with the slow burn of character development. Ultimately, we even find ourselves questioning temporal linearity and even reality itself.

VII. Conclusion

In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927), H. P. Lovecraft argues:

> The one test of the really weird is simply this – whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim. (Lovecraft, 2000: 23)

Lovecraft is talking about readers but the concept of 'awed listening' is extremely – and literally – resonant in the study of horror audio. The ineffable, eldritch universe of Lovecraft is well-suited to the audio medium. He is, after all, an author attuned to sound

as phenomenon and device, producing his work during the rise of radio. Writing about radio's suitability for horror, Katherine Barnes Echols argues that the 'experience of listening is subjective and intimate' and, moreover, 'What we cannot see, we can hear.' (Barnes Echols, 2018: 58). We might argue that being unable to 'see' Lovecraft's monsters makes them even more terrifying. At its best, golden age horror radio was experiential, its sense of liveness (which was, after all, genuine) lending urgency to performance and exposition. Classic radio shows such as *Stay Tuned for Terror*, *Suspense* and *Quiet, Please* used the auditory dimension to realise the Lovecraftesque, dramatizing weird encounters and the dynamism of action. Likewise, contemporary audio adaptation has exploited the same potentialities of sound, technology and intimacy.

In 1997, a mysterious, ultralow frequency noise was detected deep in the south Pacific Ocean. Popularly known as the 'Bloop', this phenomenon – one of the loudest sounds every humanly recorded – has since been explained as the noise of a breaking Antarctic ice shelf (NOAA, 2020). However, the fact that this enormous sound occurred just over a thousand miles from where Lovecraft writes that the eponymous entity in 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928) is imprisoned beneath the ocean – 'S. Latitude 47° 9′, W. Longitude 126° 43′′ (Lovecraft, 1963: 154) – gave rise to excitement, folklore and even paranoia. In our era, with H. P. Lovecraft reigning supreme over popular horror culture, awed listeners are always ready and waiting to *hear* Lovecraftesque horrors that can blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality.

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[i] The popular and critical success of the stage thriller in both Britain and the USA is embodied in plays such as John Willard's *The Cat and the Canary* (1922), H. C. McNeile and Gerald du Maurier's adaptation of *Bulldog Drummond* (1922) and numerous plays by Edgar Wallace. In addition, the French form of Grand-Guignol horror theatre enjoyed its most profound cultural translation during this era with the establishment of London's Grand Guignol (1920-22). Also in the horror genre, Hamilton Deane's *Dracula* (1924) enjoyed some initial success but when John L. Balderston revised the play in 1927 it became a Transatlantic sensation with an enormous influence on the Universal horror 'talkie' films that were on the horizon. The pulp fiction magazines started at the end of the nineteenth century, but from the 1920-40s enjoyed a peak era with diverse genres such as adventure, science fiction, crime and whodunits as well as thrillers and horror.

[ii] The 'Lovecraft Circle' is a term used to describe the closest artistic associates and acolytes of Lovecraft, namely, along with Bloch, August Derleth, Robert E. Howard, Frank Belknap Long and Clark Ashton Smith.

[iii] Sadly, like almost all of the *Stay Tuned for Terror* repertoire, no recording is extant.

[iv] Although invertebrate lifeforms occur in Lovecraft, caterpillars specifically appear in later Lovecraftian writers such as Brian Lumley's Cthulhu novel *The Transition of Titus Crowe* (1975).

[v] ASMR is an audio phenomenon, particularly on YouTube, with a large fanbase who use it for relaxation or stimulation. Joceline Andersen explains that it is 'intended to produce a relaxing shivering sensation' and relies on the 'power of the whispered voice's impression to create an intimate sonic space shared by the listener and the whisperer' (Andersen, 2015: 683). Within this genre, a distinct subgenre of horror ASMR has emerged, frequently using adaptive strategies. As well as Ephemeral Rift, notable figures include Phoenician Sailor who often produces audio adaptation work which explores characters or plots from pre-existing horror such as 'You Broke a Rule: *A Walking Dead*/Negan ASMR Roleplay' (2017), a 77-minute intimate encounter with a major antagonist from Robert Kirkman's zombie saga. CrinkleLuvin ASMR produces *ASMR Horror Story* (styling itself, not least typographically, on the television series *American Horror Story*), featuring episodes such as 'Medical Kidnapping Role Play' (2017) or 'Psycho Surgeon Accidentally Kills You' (2019).