

Shifting Through the Madness: Nature in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft and Georg Büchner

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February 14th, 2018

Although left unfinished by the time of his death in 1837 at the age of 23, Georg Büchner's novella *Lenz* is seen as the precursor to literary modernism as well as a multitude of other European literary traditions in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th century. Predating the cosmic horror of H. P. Lovecraft by almost a century itself, *Lenz* touches upon the questions of madness, human rationality, and the logics of the world, in order to delineate constructs of the human mind as flawed illusions. In similar fashion, the ‘weird tales’ of H. P. Lovecraft place his characters in horrific narratives in hopes of comprehending ethics regarding the human attempt to impose their nature (reasoning, hierarchies, and logics) onto mere Nature. Both writers then, while spanning geographical, historical, and political backgrounds, are able to note the failure of this everlasting imposition. Through a comparative approach, this paper hopes to reveal two alternate modes of ‘madness,’ not as an extent of mental illness, but rather as a result of the attempt and failure to understand mere Nature. Whereas Büchner is only able to question who is more in tune with the reality of Nature, Lovecraft’s own work recontextualizes this concept into his modern time-frame allowing him to unearth even greater insights on the struggle between human nature and the mere Nature. By understanding how Büchner and Lovecraft probe these points in their works respectively, one can begin to garner a better comprehension of how the dichotomy of human nature and mere Nature play huge roles in the ways humans have established their laws and societies, along with the dangers and failures they experience by having done so.

As it is established within the novella, the crazed acts and disillusionments of its protagonist are not rooted within irrational fears or mental damage; instead J. M. R. Lenz’s madness stems from a failure to understand the logics of Nature and his role within it. Büchner is

interested in exploring the failings of a man who not only realizes that his life (preconceived notions, senses, human dogma) means nothing to the grandeur of Nature, but also that he is incapable of producing any meaning out of it. Madness grows out of the consciousness of this notion that throws one into the depths of despair as doubts plague their foundations. “In order to rid himself of his immeasurable torment he had clung anxiously to every person and thing around him. At certain moments it was clear to him that he was merely deceiving himself,”¹ is the conclusion Lenz comes to at every turn when he tries to reconcile with this confusion. And because he attempts to impose his human logic onto the illogics of Nature, only to find the dialectic between the universal and the particular to be mutually exclusive, Lenz is filled with a nihilism he cannot cope with: “indifferent he moved on; the way did not matter to him, up or down. He felt no tiredness, only sometimes it struck unpleasant that he could not walk on his head.”² In this infamous image of Lenz desiring to walk on his head, Büchner implies a myriad of understandings toward human reason and the illogical. Just as the image is portrayed, reason is completely defied as an alternate schematic is established: the logic of the illogical. As Nature itself follows no patterns of logic, Lenz wishes to go about in the same way, by standing on his head he can look up “teeming towards an abyss into which a relentless power was dragging him.”³ Being right side up also connotes the notion of the ‘mind as a temple,’ a structure which establishes a logical structure, while allowing for a direct connection with the ‘divine.’ This aforementioned image then implies Büchner’s rejection of idealism, away from both human logic and institutions (religion, civilization) that attempt to construct human and divine

¹ Büchner, Georg, *Lenz*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Long Beach: Frontier Press, 1970), 28.

² Büchner, *Lenz*, 7.

³ Büchner, *Lenz*, 32.

hierarchies onto human life and mere Nature. In this tradition, Lenz's descent from the “highest point in the mountain range”⁴ can be placed alongside the descent into Hell in Dante's *Inferno* and Satan's Fall from Grace in Milton's *Paradise Lost* as each character is also unable to cope with the logics of Nature or the Divine and turns towards the illogical in order to be able to endure the constraints of world. In Lenz's case, however, because he is caught between trying to be part of Nature and simultaneously translate it through art, his reality is warped, and he finds himself empty and broken.

Throughout the events of *Lenz*, the protagonist finds himself yearning to translate the Natural world through his art. Despite the fact that he demands art be exactly like Nature, Lenz is unable to find harmony within himself. Between capturing the Nature of the world and expressing it through art, Lenz finds himself inadequate to enter the world of the subject while simultaneously remaining an observer. Büchner, by placing Lenz at these opposed poles, allows the reader to question who is more attune with reality: those who are able to detach themselves from the natural and obtain a position as objective observer (to all superstructures) or those who can completely immerse themselves into Nature in spite of being aware of the human constructs surrounding it. As Ronald Hauser describes in his book chapter entitled “Lenz: The Edge of Insanity,” in order for Lenz, or any person “to come to terms with reality [they] must absolutely restrict himself to the ‘sole endeavour’ of imitating nature (God made reality).”⁵ Lenz' removal from his human nature and his subsequent breakdowns are thus consequences of placing himself alongside mere Nature in attempts to translate it. Being able to note the reality and illogics of

⁴ Büchner, *Lenz*, 9.

⁵ Ronald Hauser, “Lenz: The Edge of Insanity,” in *Georg Büchner*, edited by Sylvia Bowman and Ulrich Weisstein (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1974), 56.

mere Nature (where human imposed logics are just constructions in the mere scheme of Nature, yet central to the experience of life), Lenz finds no inherent meaning to continue. One reality being an illusion, the other being unattainable due to limitations of the human mind, Lenz fails in finding a role within the grand scheme of Nature: “he did everything just as others did; but there was a terrible emptiness inside him, he no longer felt any fear, any desire, his existence was a burden to him [...] So he lived on...”⁶ Hauser’s “important problem” regarding mere Nature is then stemmed from the “general failure [...] to come to terms with reality,” because while some people have “no true conception of it,” others, such as Lenz, “consciously turn away from it.”⁷ It is this notion and the ensuing failure to mediate both sides of this human nature versus mere Nature dichotomy that causes Lenz’ suffering. As he cannot mentally cope with this cognitive dissonance nor express it through action, madness stems within him as a result. This madness is unlike anything in relation to mental illness. On the contrary, the madness that Lenz experiences leaves him nullified, uninterested to act in either reality: “It grew darker as they approached Strasbourg [...] only the mountains nearest to them still in sharp relief [...] Lenz stared at it all, not an idea, not an emotion inside him; only blunted fear that grew more intense as the landmarks lost themselves.”⁸ Because mere Nature retreats from his life, unobtainable to his human rationality, “Lenz has projected himself back to a time before the man-nature dichotomy,”⁹ becoming a ‘process of production.’:

⁶ Büchner, *Lenz*, 52.

⁷ Hauser, “*Lenz: The Edge of Insanity*,” 56.

⁸ Büchner, *Lenz*, 51.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 2.

“He does not live nature as nature, but as a process of production. There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing machines, desiring machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all species of life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever.”¹⁰

In H. P. Lovecraft’s short stories the same concepts are dissected as his characters have brief encounters with the Unnatural (an aberration of Nature), forcing them to observe the illogicalness of Nature itself. As various essays examine his work: “Lovecraft’s tales teach us two lessons: all order is chaos, and chaos is gracious in the gifts it offers in allowing us to combine its wondrous expressions into orderings. Our “little spheres” and ‘ornamental fruits of perspective’ [...] are nothing more than coping mechanisms for a teeming universe that will always be too much for human apprehension.”¹¹ While engaging in these ideas in different literary styles, both Büchner and Lovecraft discuss the descent into madness as a failure to cope with the superficial constructs established by humans in spite of Nature. In face with the realization of something bigger than them, in Büchner’s case the Natural and in Lovecraft’s the Unnatural, the protagonists within the work lose all function and will to live. As Hauser elaborates at the end of his chapter, “the clear and tragic implication is that man had invented an arbitrary *raison d’être* to give substance to his strivings. As long as he is unaware of the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Patricia MacCormack, “Lovecraft’s Cosmic Ethics,” in *The Age of Lovecraft*, edited by Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 199–214.

artificiality of this superstructure he can function ‘normally’ in society. However, rational inquiry into the superstructure exposes the individual to great dangers.”¹² The recognition that there are no inherently meaningful constructions in life, let alone a method in which to live without said ‘superstructure,’ is what allows Lenz and the slew of Lovecraft’s characters to succumb to insanity. Although the superstructures erected by the human mind exists as a means of coping with the lack of ‘substance in his strivings,’ the constructs prove to be meaningless and harmful to our human nature because they are not in line with the essences of Nature, but rather they are just another number of processes that form our human nature. While Büchner notes that an encounter with mere Nature is enough for someone to “become locked in a hopeless [...] struggle to buttress an undermined faith,”¹³ Lovecraft takes this encounter and skews it, exposing his characters to even greater dangers.

The encounter with the Unnatural is a staple throughout most of Lovecraft’s work. More than just supernatural elements which affect the Natural world, Lovecraft’s fiction is, according to Darrell Schweitzer, “aware of the whole cosmos and man’s place in it [...] Lovecraft’s horrors from other dimensions or distant space can only be confronted with stoic fatalism, an apt metaphor for the 20th Century condition.”¹⁴ The Unnatural that characters face is then an undisguised form of experience which not only forces the protagonist to confront the illogicalness of Nature, but also depicts the society and horrors humans have created. The encounter with the Unnatural is not brought on by mere chance. Lovecraft connects the human

¹² Hauser, “Lenz: The Edge of Insanity,” 70.

¹³ Hauser, “Lenz: The Edge of Insanity,” 71.

¹⁴ Darrell Schweitzer, *The Dream Quest of H. P. Lovecraft*. (San Bernardino: The Borgo Press, 1978), 61. It is important to also note that Lovecraft’s understanding of the cosmos is something to be feared. As opposed to Büchner’s ‘idealization’ of Nature as which artistic and human expression should strive to achieve.

confrontation with the Unnatural as an effect of human imposition onto Nature itself. While the Unnatural exposes humans to the dangers and the grandeur of mere Nature, it also points out the insignificance of humanity's superstructures with "the possibility of *conspiratorial magic*, a term [used] to suggest two things: first, that malign properties beyond our understanding are at work in the world and threaten the boundaries of human experience and, second, that these powerful forces can enter this world by the shattering of the parameters that guard the human being from chaos."¹⁵ To borrow Scott W. Poole's words, Lovecraft's short stories are about prosaic people whose very foundations are rocked by the Unnatural and who are forced to encounter the true nature of the cosmos: chaos. The 'parameters' that Poole refers to can be then read as the rationality of the human mind. The human mind, while rational through self-imposed solidity, divulges its weaknesses when encountered with the illogics of Nature. Lovecraft heavily believed that "the rational mind, [...] is most horrified by an assault of irrationality" and this "discovery that all previously held comfortable assumptions about the way the universe works are wrong"¹⁶ is a component that Lovecraft attempts to disassemble through his use of the Unnatural's conspiratorial magic. In most cases, once this human rationality has been broken, the protagonists in Lovecraft's work find no other meaningful constructions within the superstructures they once inhabited. What else can we do when we encounter an Unnatural reality that reveals our very constructs to be weak and insignificant?

While essentially all humans are susceptible to this horrific irrationality imposed by the Unnatural, Lovecraft's use of educated or 'gentlemen' characters not only situates this human

¹⁵ Scott W. Poole, "Lovecraft, Witch Cults, and Philosophers," in *The Age of Lovecraft*, edited by Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 223.

¹⁶ Darrell Schweitzer, *The Dream Quest of H. P. Lovecraft*, 6.

nature versus mere Nature dichotomy into the common world, but it also showcases how these everyday superstructures established by the character's rational mind engage with the Unnatural. Throughout Lovecraft's work, extraordinary circumstances find relatively ordinary characters as the world of demons, monsters, and aliens exist on a reality alongside ours. Whether actively imposing their human nature on Nature in itself or not, Lovecraft releases havoc primarily onto these privileged persons because they impose human nature onto Nature more often. "Ordinary people", according to Hauser, "are portrayed as the best models [of the Natural] because their simple ways offer the most direct access to the essentials of life".¹⁷ Instead of Büchner's reverence for the everyday humility, Lovecraft's ordinary people, use conspiratorial magic alongside the Unnatural to invoke fear into the Lovecraft's aristocratic characters. Scott W. Poole mentions how "on the second point [of conspiratorial magic], Lovecraft's racism becomes especially apparent. He himself felt terrorized down to his Anglo-Saxon toes by the *untermensch*, the subhuman. He transformed this into supernatural horror by imagining the subhuman acting in diabolical concert with the extra-human, the cults of the Elder Gods [or any other aberration of the Natural] opening doors to these dread dimensions so that these Beings could lay waste to the world."¹⁸ These concepts mentioned by Poole, become heavily noticeable in several Lovecraft short stories, as Lovecraft's own seeded racism and fear-induced constructs seep into his writing. But "because it enters into his fiction in a pervasive way,"¹⁹ we can read Lovecraft's *untermensch* as a creature that challenges the rigidness of insular conceptions. In this sense, Lovecraft's own philosophy contains an immanent critique over his racism. Nevertheless,

¹⁷ Hauser, "Lenz: The Edge of Insanity," 57.

¹⁸ Poole, "Lovecraft, Witch Cults, and Philosophers," 223.

¹⁹ S. T. Joshi, introduction to *An Epicure in the Terrible* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1991), 29.

through the use of privileged characters there is a direct access to human ‘parameters’ to be broken as their foundations are shattered the easiest:

Through all these narrators, however, Lovecraft develops his own type of gentlemen, whose curiosity brings them too much knowledge of the wrong kind, and whose abilities, both mental and physical, are necessarily unequal to the challenge of the horrible forces they discover, except insofar they as they can appreciate the otherness of these horrors [...] In creating these gentlemen, Lovecraft added to the tradition of which he was a part.²⁰

His 1933 short story, “The Other Gods,” explicitly questions the same concepts as Buchner’s *Lenz* as the ancient hermit Bazari openly challenges the constructs of divinity and superstitious belief. Instead of wishing to advertently turn from the logics of the world, to view the world upside down, throughout the story we are told: “Barzai was learned in the lore of earth’s gods, and had gained a desire to look upon their faces. He believed that his great secret knowledge of gods could shield him from their wrath.”²¹ Bazari follows the human imposed constructs of knowledge to bring himself closer to divinity and gain hierarchical position alongside them. With almost superhuman power and strength (*üermensch*-like, to reference Poole’s *untermensch*), Lovecraft allows Bazari to ignore the fathomless existence of Nature, “fearing not the steepness that began to grow too great for any save a strong and dauntless man,

²⁰ R. Boerem, “Lovecraft and the Tradition of the Gentlemen Narrator,” in *An Epicure in the Terrible*, edited by David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi. (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1991), 271.

²¹ H.P. Lovecraft, “The Other Gods,” in *The Complete Works of H.P. Lovecraft*, edited by Ken Mondschein (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014), 190.

nor pausing at wide black chasms.”²² As he climbs higher into the mountains compelled by his human logic and curiosity, his confrontation with what is at the peak is startling. These ancient gods, who the villagers of Ulthar worship, are real (proof of the illogical despite their ability to grant higher knowledge), but these revered gods are mere subjects to other more wrathful ones who hold no regard for the insignificant human constructs of the world, much less Barzai’s desired secret wisdom. His cries of logical enlightenment, “I have heard the gods! I have heard earth’s gods singing in revelry on Hatheg-Kla! The voices of earth’s gods are known to Barzai the Prophet! [...] The wisdom of Barzai hath made him greater than earth’s gods”²³ soon turn to cries of despair as he is faced with the confrontation of the other gods: “The *other* gods! The *other* gods! The gods of the outer hell that guard the feeble gods of earth!”²⁴ In Lovecraft’s understanding, this is the Nature Barzai, and all us humans construct our foundations on. The simpler gods we follow may allow us some serenity and fundamental “truth” by which to adhere, but the closer we attempt to come in contact with them, the only real indication is that at the distance is the cosmos’ (the other gods in this case) complete indifference to all human design. The parameters of Barzai’s rationality are shattered the moment he comes into contact with the Unnatural. As Barzai symbolically showcases, imposition of human logic onto Nature, whether it be through religious or superstitious beliefs is useless as chaos is the ultimate ruler. “Look away!...Go back!...Do not see!...Do not see!...The vengeance of the infinite abysses...That cursed that damnable pit...Merciful gods of earth, *I am falling into the sky!*”²⁵ As Barzai is dropped into the sky, Lovecraft means to not only establish the illogical Nature and the Unnatural, but also

²² Lovecraft, “The Other Gods,” 191.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Lovecraft, “The Other Gods,” 192.

²⁵ Ibid.

deconstruct any linear hierarchies humans construct for themselves. Up, down, does not matter, logic cannot form a complete understanding of the universal as it is formless. In some design, the image of Barzai also parallels that of Lenz as both characters walk on their heads, making the sky above them an abyss.

It is important to note, however, that all these ‘dangers’ experienced by rational inquiry to the ‘superstructure,’ as mentioned by Hauser, pertain to psychological traumas. Vivian Ralickas alludes in her essay “‘Cosmic Horror’ and the Question of the Sublime in Lovecraft,” a few words on the damages of the Unnatural:

“In Lovecraft, the subject suffers from a violation of its sense of self, but it is graced with no consolatory understanding of the human condition to mollify its fragmented psyche. With its identity and the foundations of its culture destroyed, the subject who experiences cosmic horror always succumbs to one of three comparably dreadful fates, judging from the standpoint of a balanced, rational mind: insanity, death, or the embracing of its miscegenated and no longer human condit.”²⁶

Just as the Unnatural can afflict Lovecraft’s narrators with psychological sufferings by the onslaught of irrationality, it is also able to inflict physical pains that become unbearable to live with. Physical danger is used in a variety of ways throughout Lovecraft’s work: his characters are killed or revived, consumed by Unnatural creatures, even face tortures at the hands of forces beyond comprehension. Beyond solely violence, Lovecraft and Büchner use pain to connect

²⁶ Vivian Ralickas, “‘Cosmic Horror’ and the Question of the Sublime in Lovecraft,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 18, no. 3 (71) (2007): 365.

human imposition with mere Nature as well. This is apparent throughout “Herbert West - Reanimator,” as the deranged doctor and our narrator (both educated men, like Barzai) dream of being able to defy Nature by reanimating a corpse. During a second attempt in reviving a recently deceased body, both characters are attacked by the corpse turned beast: “They found the two of us unconscious on the blood stained carpet, beaten, scratched, and mauled.”²⁷ Later in the chapter another character is “clawed to death in a manner not only too hideous for description, but raising a doubt as to the human agency of the deed.”²⁸ Lovecraft means to explore human’s constant imposition onto mere Nature through this aberration of the Natural. Because West attempts to disregard the logics of Nature, the Unnatural surfaces and resurfaces, physically imposing itself onto the doctor and the narrator. And as aforementioned, since the *untermensch* can enter the parameters of Lovecraft’s gentlemen, it can not only break those parameters, but also alter them. The aftermath of this encounter leaves the gentlemen (or any person really) with new Unnatural components. This new epistemology, a type of ‘madness’ existing within the narrator, allows for a completely new understanding of Nature. By the end of the short story, with West in disappearance and the narrator left in possession of the human nature he tried to supercede, the later is left without any grounding, only Unnatural physical and mental scars remain: “They imply that I am a madman or a murderer - probably I am mad. But I might not be mad if those accursed tomb legion had not been so silent.”²⁹ In *Lenz*, the poet’s inability to understand mere Nature leads him to forcefully harm himself in order to feel something:

²⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, “Herbert West - Reanimator,” in *The Complete Works of H.P. Lovecraft*, edited by Ken Mondschein (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014), 203.

²⁸ Lovecraft, “Reanimator,” 204.

²⁹ Lovecraft, “Reanimator,” 222.

“His half-hearted attempts at suicide, which occurred regularly during this period, were not wholly serious. It was not so much the desire to for death - since for him there was neither peace nor hope in death - as an attempt to recall himself to consciousness through physical pain, in moments of terrible fear or a blank calm that bordered on non-existence. Those times at which his mind seemed to be riding on some *weird* [my italics] and eccentric idea were still his best.”³⁰

Büchner, in causing Lenz to experience physical pain, means to pose how the rational inquiry to any superstructure can also cause dangers beyond psychological ones. As long as the narrators in both Lovecraft and Büchner’s stories can adhere to the external forces of Nature, they can be spared, but failure to appreciate these irrationalities, can lead to worse repercussions. It is important to note how physical pain can lead to death as the Unnatural, just like Nature, can prove to be too much for its characters. The protagonist in Lovecraft’s “Dagon,” after experiencing the frightful monstrosity living in the depths of the ocean, goes mad: “I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more [...] When you have read these hastily scrawled pages you may guess, though never fully realise, why it is that I have forgetfulness or death.”³¹ Death, in this regard becomes an escape from the alternate reality existing underneath our superstructures. Unfortunately though, “Lovecraft’s characters see absolutely and remember absolutely; they never know the bliss of forgetfulness, and are in

³⁰ Büchner, *Lenz*, 48.

³¹ H.P. Lovecraft, “Dagon,” in *The Complete Works of H.P. Lovecraft*, edited by Ken Mondschein (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014), 25.

danger of confusing phantasmagoric hallucination with actual experience.”³² For Lenz the same situation arises as hallucinations begin to take hold of him: “the world was only a fragment of his imagination, that there was nothing but he himself, and the eternally damned Satan, left to himself and his painful imaginings.”³³ These visitations, or rather, Unnatural visitations, stem themselves from an alternate form of ‘madness,’ where the inflictions casted permit the afflicted to live beyond the boundaries of normal experience. In both works the effects are similar, both characters go mad (or are unable to comprehend the complexities of Nature), both characters seek different methods of consolation (through religion or drugs), both characters attempt methods of escape through suicide (jumping out of windows). While separated by almost a century, “Dagon” and *Lenz* grasp at powerfully indistinguishable concepts in the hopes of understanding the consequences of failing to understand Nature.

Despite their differences in approach, the synchronistic thoughts Büchner and Lovecraft are expressed through their style. Each text stretches itself to convey the dichotomy of human nature versus mere Nature through its form. Throughout *Lenz*, Büchner makes it apparent how objective he wants his novella to display itself. Since literature “is limited to descriptive techniques”, Büchner gives his words the “sole aim of reproducing the likeness of life.”³⁴ Over dinner, Lenz discusses alongside pastor J. F. Oberlin and contemporary poet Christoph Kaufmann what true art should attempt to achieve. Unlike the idealistic beliefs of his opponent, Lenz ardently believes “God has made the world [and mere Nature] as it should be and that we

³² Barton Levi St. Armand, “Synchronistic Worlds: Lovecraft and Borges,” in *An Epicure in the Terrible*, edited by David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi. (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1991), 314.

³³ Büchner, *Lenz*, 47.

³⁴ Hauser, “*Lenz*: The Edge of Insanity,” 56.

can hardly hope to scrawl or daub anything better.”³⁵ According to the poet, creations (or human impositions) should not attempt to transform reality, but rather recreate it exactly as it is presented because “the sole criterion in matters of art” is “life, the possibility of existence, and that’s all.”³⁶ Aesthetics and illusions become inconsequential to this school of thought, as the only thing that we can critique in a work is whether it captures an essence of our Nature, reality.

Büchner, while allowing these convictions to exist inside his dialogue and themes, presents *Lenz* as an application of these theories as well. The author’s claims that humans are prone to impose their nature onto mere Nature while probed through the text’s narratives, themes, and dialogues, is virtually non-existent within the literary style of the novella. Hauser describes these inclinations in his chapter: “from the point of view of nineteenth century literary concepts, the most striking feature of *Lenz* is its weak, almost non-existent plot. Action is rarely the focal point; and even when it is treated in some detail, a feeling of nonchalance prevails.”³⁷ Plot is therefore seen by Büchner as a way for human logic to impose itself onto an understanding of the world, because of its inherent ability to structurize action and hierarchize events revealed through the narrative. As showcased through the dinner scene and various other events in the text, because *Lenz* is preoccupied with trying to showcase how humans should try and translate the world through art (in a manner closely interlinked with reality and the Nature of the world), any actual impositions, such as emotions, ideologies, and hierarchies, on Büchner’s end is non-prevalent in order to illustrate a method in which one can focus on “form of the work and perhaps upon the relationship between form and content.”³⁸ Just as Büchner examines the

³⁵ Büchner, *Lenz*, 22.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ronald Hauser, “*Lenz*: The Edge of Insanity,” 52.

³⁸ Ronald Hauser, “*Lenz*: The Edge of Insanity,” 56.

“artistic importance only insofar as it represents an outward expression of these forces” of mere Nature, the writer also uses the *Lenz* text as a means of expressing these practices.

Synonymous with their notion of disregarding “considerations with beauty and ugliness”, author and subject alike both also establish the concept of the Medusa (an amalgamation of beauty and monster) as the “perfection in all mimetic arts” because her gaze is able to capture any perspective into stone. Through this recontextualization, Büchner is not only able to reject literary trends that attempt to present its form as a way to present a flow through time, but also how the “medusa gaze” can give the illusion of movement through single images. This single string of images captures what Büchner strives to vocalize: “The most beautiful pictures, the richest harmonies group and dissolve. Only one thing remains: an unending loveliness that moves from one form to another, eternally undone, eternally unchanged.”³⁹ But while Büchner strives to connect his writing as close as Nature, Lovecraft, on the other hand, rejects these notions as he believes writing cannot begin to fathom a reality and much less, a *weird* one.

Stefan Dziemianowicz mentions how Lovecraft uses a pastiche in order to navigate his weird philosophy. The alienation of the reader is crucial to Lovecraft as he hopes to showcase how any person can come into contact with the Unnatural. Settings become gruesome and mysterious landscapes or abnormal exaggerations of the reality we live in, but “geographically isolated settings” are chosen “to suggest that things beyond human ken occur in places outside the familiar avenues of life.”⁴⁰ Simultaneously, however, there is a certain amount of realism within Lovecraft’s short stories. In “Dagon,” the weird encounter the narrator has, while taking

³⁹ Büchner, *Lenz*, 24.

⁴⁰ Stefan Dziemianowicz, “Outsiders and Aliens,” in *An Epicure in the Terrible*, ed. David E. Schultz and S. T. Joshi (Cranbury: University Associated Press, 1991), 167.

place on a fictitious island, occurs on “least frequented parts of the broad Pacific,”⁴¹ and even places itself in a historical context (the beginning of the great war). Choices like these disorient the reader as they lose bearings in what reality these events are taking place. Perspective is mis skewed and hidden as characters cannot begin to describe what is being perceived: “The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things [...] Perhaps I should not hope to convey in mere words the unutterable hideousness that can dwell in absolute silence and barren immensity.”⁴² According to Dziemianowicz, “such descriptions permit little objective analysis of the narrator’s story, although ultimately they say a good deal about the narrator’s state of mind.”⁴³ And because the narrators become “uncertain whether they had experiences that drove them mad or whether some temporary insanity induced waking nightmares for them,” the reader is forced to speculate on what the stories final events play out. This presentation of an alternate reality, through the mixture of myth, folklore, religious, superstitions, and post World War I modernity, cannot provide an objective view of Nature, but places Lovecraft readers in *weird realism*, a new space in which narrators can engage with Nature through the imposition of human thought.

What then do these alternate forms of madness and their experiences reveal to us? As Deleuze and Guattari mention: “A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on an analyst’s couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world.”⁴⁴ For Büchner, the meaning of that madness, and that heavy relationship with Nature seems to be able to point out the fallibility of human logic and superstructures that impose themselves upon

⁴¹ Lovecraft, “Dagon,” 25.

⁴² Lovecraft, “Dagon,” 26.

⁴³ Dziemianowicz, “Outsiders and Aliens,” 167.

⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 2.

Nature. When Lenz loses his will to continue forward, his perceptions may seem illogical, but he is actually more in attuned with Nature, because his actions act without human imposition.

Madness produces a new alternative for existing (hegemonic) ethical norms that, when observed by humanity, seem ineffective, illogical and unreasonable. However, this is beyond the case as the ‘mad’ exist within Nature as a ‘process of production.’ The all encompassing Nature that humans think they can come to grasp, incorporates the ‘mad’ and ‘sane’ within it. What is then considered to be ‘sane’ or logical excludes human consciousness and thought from Nature, establishing a deep running dichotomy between human nature and mere Nature. The ‘mad,’ on the other hand, sees humanity as essential to this grand scheme of Nature as a process of production “(paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari) that produces one [humans] within the other [Nature].”⁴⁵ While one can read these revelations within Lovecraft’s work, there’s an entirely different kind of reality being navigated.

The weird reality which Lovecraft forms throughout his cosmic short stories is one to fear, as our roles within the vast Universe are insignificant and the Unnatural seeks at every opportunity to shatter our parameters. *Lovecraftian* is a term which thus appears as Lovecraft’s ancient, chthonic, and grotesque deities exist in our reality, along “with another reality [dealt as] matter-of-factly as a scientist or a realist.”⁴⁶ The *untermensch*, *conspiratorial magic*, and the Unnatural all subsist as elements to the Lovecraftian. The Lovecraftian belief in the madness of the gods catapults the individual into a weird reality that, as Graham Harman believes, proves “reality itself [as] weird because reality is incommensurable with any attempt to represent or

⁴⁵ Ibid. (See Footnote 9 for details as the quote was mentioned before).

⁴⁶ Armand, “Synchronistic Worlds,” 314.

measure it”⁴⁷ Despite being unable to rationally grasp it, weird reality allows ‘mad’ individuals to speculate on the weird Nature they encounter. Dziemianowicz goes as far as to argue “that Lovecraft announces his decision to leave the confines of his narrator’s minds and seek ‘outsideness’ in the external world.”⁴⁸ Unlike Büchner who idealizes Nature’s reality as a virtue, Lovecraft seeks to escape it by creating an alternate reality where ‘mad’ humans are allowed to impose their human thought in some manner alongside Nature. No longer confined to the reality of Nature, in weird reality, anything is conceivable and obtainable through human imposition. To borrow James Kneale’s words from “Ghoulish Dialogues” as a final point:

Harman argues that Lovecraft’s style encourages readers to create what are, in effect, new objects. They have to pay attention to the Cthulhu bas-relief, despite the fact that it is a metaphor with one term deleted; [...] Unable to paraphrase the bas-relief, we experience it as an object in its own right. As a consequence, literature differs from philosophy because the former involves “the explicit production of paraphrasable real objects (Antarctic cities, Cthulhu idols) in the very midst of the sensual realm.”⁴⁹

By creating new objects, Harman’s weird realism can also be seen alongside the process of production as the madness that humans experience produces alternative ethical norms outside the normalcy of human nature. Although spanning almost a century, the works of Georg Büchner

⁴⁷ Graham Harman, *Weird Realism* (London: Zero Books, 2012), 51.

⁴⁸ Dziemianowicz, “Outsiders and Aliens,” 167.

⁴⁹ James Kneale, “‘Ghoulish Dialogues’: H. P. Lovecraft’s Weird Geographies,” in *The Age of Lovecraft*, edited by Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 49. Note: this block quote includes a quote from Harman’s *Weird Realism*, 260.

and H. P. Lovecraft touch upon madness beyond their basic understanding as mental illnesses. Both writers, believing that Nature is ultimately unattainable through rationality and other forms of human impositions, transform ‘madness’ and our perception of Nature into new territories and dialectics with which humans can carve new modes of living outside of superficial superstructures; more aligned with Nature. It is then up to us readers to be able to apply these new ethics into our daily lives and realities.

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