# Fear and Trauma in H.P. Lovecraft's Randolph Carter Stories

## 1. Introduction

The works of H.P. Lovecraft are hugely influential as a whole, far beyond the scope of American literature or horror fiction. Evocating strange and terrible images of dead but dreaming gods, flickering inter-dimensional travellers and dreamscapes that sear lesser minds, it has spawned its own genre of "Lovecraftian horror", characterised by what is commonly known as cosmic horror in modern literature studies (Ralickas 364). In the public consciousness, cosmic horror is thought to be any type of horror revolving around creatures that are emblematic to Lovecraftian fiction, in particular tentacled monsters with too many eyes (Sharett 22). However, more specific definitions of cosmic horror make note of a central concept of the "fear of the unknown" (Engle 85). David McWilliam elaborates on this concept further – the main fear is that man lives unknowingly in an incomprehensible world of danger and horror, and to become cognisant of this is to invite madness and doom upon the self (McWilliam 531). In short, the key concept underpinning the genre of cosmic horror, and Lovecraftian horror by extension, is that the world is constantly under siege by a murky "other", whether it knows it or not (Engle 85).

This, in turn, connects with a darker side of Lovecraftian fiction. Another commonly commented-on aspect of the works of H.P. Lovecraft is its association with bigotry. Amongst others, S.T. Joshi has made note of Lovecraft's extreme – even from a contemporary perspective – beliefs regarding ethnic minorities; for example, claiming that the abolition of slavery has damned the subservient Black race from the eyes of God (Joshi 69). These reactionary beliefs frequently bleed into his written works as well; *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is often read as Lovecraft's warning against miscegenation (Lovett-Graff 182), while the main horror elements of "The Rats in the Walls" stem from not knowing one's genetic history (Frye 238). Furthermore, Lovecraft had a propensity of portraying non-Anglo-Saxon cultures and religions as backwards, superstitious or outright barbarous (Paz 7), as in works such as "The Moon-Bog". Through this, Lovecraft evokes cosmic horror by way of allegory – that the unseen

"other" threatening the sane world are the myriad of non-Anglo-Saxon cultures.

Lovecraft's views are generally not unique for his time, and this has led most scholars to connect his racism with contemporary social trends, taking note of concepts and events such as the rise of the eugenics movement in 1920s America (Lovett-Graff 3) as well as the idea of Greek, Roman and Nordic superiority (Paz 7). However, in exploring potential causes of his bigotry, scholars tend to focus exclusively on surrounding external factors and place little emphasis on Lovecraft's agency and psyche. Lovecraft's fear is not limited to race, gender or the like, but is instead expressed as a general fear of the unknown that is in fact expressed frequently, particularly in narratives that involve the character Randolph Carter – of particular note, as Randolph Carter is the most well-known alter ego character associated with Lovecraft, and the only recurring one (Hölzing 184). For example, "The Statement of Randolph Carter" has only minor elements of Orientalism and is based almost wholly on an indeterminable presence that is hidden from the protagonist, a theme shared by the appropriately titled "The Unnamable".

As such, it becomes unrealistic to approach Lovecraft's bigotry solely from the perspective of external factors when this generalised xenophobia – the "fear of the unknown" which manifests partially as a distaste for foreign cultures – points to hitherto overlooked personal aspects (Evans 125), such as his trauma.

Lovecraft's history of trauma is well-documented in his own correspondence and by contemporary accounts (Joshi 60), and the link between phobia and trauma is similarly established (Orsillo et al. 235). With this in mind, the need for a more personal analysis on Lovecraft's psyche becomes clear. Lovecraft's correspondence provides a relatively complete image of his background and history, but has comparatively less insight on the inner workings of Lovecraft's mind. However, the Randolph Carter stories provide a viable alternative avenue in which the psychoanalytic approach can be taken, as Carter works as Lovecraft's alter ego. As such, this text aims to explore the linkages between Lovecraft's history of trauma, cosmic horror, and the Randolph Carter texts, thus examining how trauma can be expressed through writing and its associated implications. This will be conducted through employing concepts associated with psychoanalysis – specifically, George Vaillant's refined model of defence mechanisms. This text first seeks to establish links between Lovecraft and Randolph Carter as reflections of one another, followed by an examination of the trauma and defence

mechanisms associated with Lovecraft and Carter. The text will then aim to delve deeper into the specific defence mechanism of displacement in relation to xenophobia, as well as a discussion on the implications of Lovecraft employing increasingly pathologic defence mechanisms in writing.

## 2. Lovecraft and Randolph Carter

Randolph Carter is one of the few recurring human characters in Lovecraft's body of work. However, he is by far the most visible one, appearing in five texts ("The Statement of Randolph Carter", "The Unnamable", *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, "The Silver Key" and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key") and being mentioned in two others (Hölzing 184).

Carter is often directly identified with Lovecraft himself, sharing many similar traits in terms of background and temperament. "The Unnamable" provides valuable information in this regard; Randolph Carter, much like Lovecraft, publishes stories in magazines and is generally overlooked by his peers (Lovecraft 79). Additionally, near the climax of the story, Carter faints under pressure, similar to how Lovecraft exhibited physical symptoms under stress (Lovecraft 82). In "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", it was revealed that Carter had fought in World War I, which Lovecraft had attempted to do so by way of enlisting in the National Guard (Joshi 140). As a note, both Lovecraft and Carter share a love for cats, as indicated in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* where the latter's care for a small black kitten is rewarded by an army of cats coming to his rescue after his capture by the almost-humans (Lovecraft 14).

More significant, however, is the fact that the vast majority of threats faced by Carter are those of an indistinct nature – in "The Statement of Randolph Carter", the monster that apparently killed Harley Warren is never shown, and only makes an appearance at the climax of the story when it taunts Carter by telling him that Warren was dead. Carter never sees the "unnameable" monster in "The Unnamable" either – he faints before it appears, and only learns about its form from his friend Joel Manton afterwards – an amorphous and ambulatory mass of slime. At the mid-point in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, Carter is abducted by pitch-black "night-gaunts" with no faces and dropped into the perilous Vale of Pnoth, in which he is continuously haunted by the prospect of attracting the attention of the unseen Dholes, which are giant interdimensional worm-like creatures that burrow underground, surfacing only to hunt

prey. This is in contrast to other stories such as "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Dreams in the Witch House", where the central antagonists of the narrative are both humanoid and clearly shown, and in the former, overcome by the protagonists.

The theme of "indistinctness" in the antagonists faced by Carter is therefore comparatively unique. Carter faces monsters that he cannot see, and for those that are visible, are horrible due to their featurelessness. This is similar to Lovecraft's real-life fears – the invisible concept of "the other", something so vague as to be indescribable, or perhaps "unnameable" – that will be elaborated upon in later sections of this text. In creating his alter ego, Lovecraft has referenced his own background as a writer alongside his history of trauma, establishing Randolph Carter as a writer of limited renown (true of Lovecraft, at the time) and is prone to exhibiting physical symptoms under stress. However, he has also – perhaps unconsciously – transferred his own trauma-derived fears onto Carter as well. Aside from the vague nature of the threats, Carter's visible enemies are often ethnically-coloured as well; in *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*, he is deceived and abducted by the turbaned "almost-humans", an Arabian-coded slave race to the "moon-beasts" that reside on the Plateau of Leng, and at the climax of the story he faces the duplicitous Outer God Nyarlathotep who appears in the guise of an Egyptian pharaoh. In contrast, the comparatively much more hospitable onyx-traders of Inquanok are sharp-featured and are hypothesised by Carter to have divine blood in them, much like Lovecraft's well-known admiration for the perceived elegance and nobility of Anglo-Saxons (Lovett-Graff 177) and later Teutons (Joshi 133). Taken as a whole, it can be concluded that Lovecraft and Carter are inextricably linked to one another – both share similar backgrounds, responses to and histories of trauma, and both are xenophobic both in general terms and in terms of Anglo-Saxon supremacy.

As the two can be considered reflections of one another, the Randolph Carter stories can therefore be a venue through which the psyche of Lovecraft can be examined through relevant story elements and the actions and thoughts of Carter.

## 3. Lovecraft and Trauma

Lovecraft was no stranger to trauma and manifestations thereof. At a young age, he was frequently exposed to the loss of loved ones; his father, Winfield Scott Lovecraft, was institutionalised in 1893 and died of "general paresis" in 1898 (Joshi 22), and the

death of his maternal grandmother in 1896 sent him into deep depression (de Camp 30). At the turn of the century, his grandfather suffered a series of financial losses and his family's once-sizeable fortune decreased considerably. During this time, Lovecraft's mental state further worsened, and in a letter dated to 1934 he confessed that during that time he was considering the prospects of "slough[ing] off consciousness altogether" (Joshi 60).

This series of misfortunes took a significant toll on young Lovecraft; he would have frequent nightmares about dark figures he termed "night-gaunts" that attacked and tormented him (Joshi 31). Throughout his high school years, he experienced several mental episodes that necessitated periods of removal as well as physical and verbal tics (Joshi 99). This culminated in what he called a "nervous collapse" in 1908, where he suffered "intense headaches, insomnia and general nervous weakness which prevents my continuous application to any thing" (Cannon 3).

Lovecraft himself attributed these nightmares, outbursts and bouts of malaise to a variety of causes, including high school life specifically in conjunction with his 1908 collapse (Joshi 81). However, Joshi suggests instead that his failure to excel in algebra meant he would be unable to work in the fields of chemistry or astronomy – both great interests of his, implying that the 1908 collapse was, too, trauma-related (82). His other outbursts were also clearly tied to traumatic events, which strongly suggests that they were in fact defence mechanisms in response to the trauma he received.

The traumas suffered by Randolph Carter have less relation to dead family members or bankruptcy but are instead tied to eldritch menaces and dream-world horrors. Despite the decidedly more fantastical nature of stress faced by Carter, he too exhibits mundane defence mechanisms in response to these traumas, albeit somewhat more pathologic ones than Lovecraft himself does at the time of writing.

The notion of defence mechanisms was first incepted by Sigmund Freud and expanded upon by Anna Freud. The basic concept suggests that in response to undesirable feelings or unacceptable impulses stemming from the id, the ego and superego unconsciously employ various "defence mechanisms" that either block or transform these feelings and impulses (Freud 7), allowing for coping. Anna Freud then outlined a variety of defence mechanisms. These include the mechanisms of displacement and sublimation, both of which are of interest to this paper. George Vaillant builds upon the work of both Freuds as well as Otto Kernberg and introduces

additional defence mechanisms, including further relevant mechanisms of conversion, denial and schizoid fantasy, alongside a four-style classification system, classifying each defence mechanism as narcissistic (stage 1), immature (stage 2), neurotic (stage 3) or mature (stage 4) (Vaillant 52). Each stage is characterised by decreasing levels of pathology – stage 1 mechanisms are pathological in nature, while those of stage 4 are acceptable and benign. The mechanisms of conversion and denial are all classified as stage 1 defence mechanisms, while those of schizoid fantasy, displacement and sublimation are of stages 2 to 4 respectively.

The stage 1 defence mechanisms – narcissistic or psychotic defences – are characterised by a complete break with reality, and emphasised expression of these mechanisms are associated with psychosis (Vaillant 9). Specifically, conversion refers to the manifestation of physical symptoms such as weakness, blindness or unconsciousness in response to mental trauma, while Vaillant cites Freud to provide further explanations for the mechanism of denial: denial refers to outright rejection of a reality deemed threatening to the psyche (Vaillant 10). Both Lovecraft and Carter exhibit the mechanism of conversion, but it appears that only Carter expresses denial, most significantly in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key".

Stage 2 defence mechanisms are considered "immature", in that extended use is often similarly socially unacceptable though to a lesser degree than stage 1 mechanisms. The mechanism of schizoid fantasy, or simply "phantasy" as termed by Freud, refers to the tendency of retreating into imaginary scenarios that are often divorced from reality in some way – Vaillant quotes Freud providing an example of a man who had no interest in marriage yet had a waking fantasy of being married to his physician's daughter (Vaillant 13). Schizoid fantasy is perhaps the most significant defence mechanism associated with Carter as this is a central element in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, "The Silver Key", and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key".

Stage 3 defence mechanisms are termed "neurotic" mechanisms, in that they have a more pronounced effect in coping and engage with reality on a more concrete level, but are still associated with long-term mental issues if used as the primary means of coping (Vaillant 41). As schizoid fantasy is to Carter, displacement is to Lovecraft; this refers to a transfer of impulse from one object to another target – in Lovecraft's case, the feelings associated with his childhood trauma to the "other". Carter, as a reflection of Lovecraft, evidently shares some of the same biases with him and therefore can be

said to exhibit the mechanism of displacement as well.

Stage 4 defence mechanisms are mature mechanisms in that they are associated with healthy coping of trauma, and are often conscious processes in contrast to those of previous stages. In particular, sublimation refers to the act of channelling unacceptable impulses into a productive outlet. Lovecraft himself can be associated with sublimation in that he channels – "sublimates" – trauma in his writing, depicting those that he feels fear or dislike towards into written work. This is lent credence by the fact that Lovecraft does not exhibit other pathologic or neurotic defence mechanisms in life past high school.

Through careful examination of defence mechanisms employed by Lovecraft and Carter, valuable insight on the specific functioning of writing as a form of sublimation can be provided. Specifically, when channelling urges of the id, the act of creation serves as a layer of abstraction through which the superego can exert unconscious influence to depict neurotic, immature and narcissistic defence mechanisms through the conscious process of coping. This can be observed through how Carter never employs mature mechanisms, but is mainly limited to those of stage 1 and 2, and occasionally 3 by way of expressing the racism he shares with Lovecraft. The specific natures of these manifestations and implications are discussed below.

Carter exhibits the mechanism of conversion, much like Lovecraft in earlier years. As stated earlier, Lovecraft was subject to physical and verbal tics, and Joshi quotes Harry Brobst, who once spoke with a high school classmate of Lovecraft; "She… described these terrible tics that he had – he'd be sitting in his seat and he'd suddenly up and jump – I think they referred to them as seizures" (Joshi 81). Similarly, Carter is prone to fainting spells or dizziness, as was the case in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" when he was confronted with a glimpse of higher dimensions, or in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* when Carter first meets the ghouls in the inhospitable Vale of Pnoth.

Though Lovecraft's tics and "seizures" stopped later in life, Carter's fainting spells do not. "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" is set during Carter's fifties, twenty years after "The Silver Key" and it appears that he, unlike Lovecraft, has never conquered his particular case of conversion. Furthermore, Carter exhibits signs of denial – in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", he is confronted by a vision of all his infinite selves across an infinite number of realities, experiencing great distress. His immediate

response to this new trauma is to immediately suppress it and put it out of mind when he meets the cosmic entity Yog-Sothoth. There is no processing or compartmentalisation when confronted with psyche-shattering trauma – Carter simply denies the experience and refuses to engage with it the moment a suitable distraction presents itself.

Additionally, Carter expresses the stage 2 mechanism of schizoid fantasy, a category of mechanisms never associated with Lovecraft. It can be argued that the entirety of *The Dream-Quest for Unknown Kadath*, "The Silver Key" and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" are expressions of schizoid fantasy, particularly when taken into account with the stories of "The Statement of Randolph Carter" and "The Unnamable", which take place chronologically before the former three texts. In response to the trauma of losing a friend and being attacked by a formless horror, Carter retreats to fantasy in his later life, spending much of his time in the Dream Lands where he adventures to exotic locales and meets all manners of fantastical creatures and people. This is most apparent in "The Silver Key" – at the age of thirty, Carter loses the ability to enter the Dream Lands through sleep, which leads him to a period of melancholy and aimlessness as he becomes unable to cope with the pressures of everyday life. He attempts to sublimate trauma into religion, writing and travel, but proves unable to do so, and eventually comes to discover the titular silver key that enables him to return to dream and live as his ten-year-old self – a clear tie to the related defence mechanism of regression (Freud 43).

Carter never progresses past stage 3 defence mechanisms. He attempts to do so in "The Silver Key", but fails to do so, as detailed prior. In contrast, the defence mechanisms used by Lovecraft are significantly more mature. Lovecraft has never been seen to express stage 2 defence mechanisms, and there are no accounts of stage 1 defence mechanisms manifesting past his period in high school. In his adult life, his employed defence mechanisms are limited to those of displacement and sublimation – he channels his socially unacceptable urges and defence mechanisms into his writing through his alter ego that fully engages with said urges. By doing so, he has expressed his urges in a socially acceptable manner, as fictional characters are a layer of abstraction away from the author themselves. However, not all of these urges are fully sublimated; perhaps due to the contemporary social climate where racism and white supremacy are more normalised, Lovecraft still actively engages in displacing fear

towards ethnic minorities, particularly Black people and Jews (Joshi 137). It is possible that the act of sublimation and perhaps other stage 4 mechanisms have a greater social component that is not commented on by either Freud or Vaillant – if it is socially acceptable to express negative feelings towards a certain body or group, then there would be no need to progress past displacement as the displacer may in fact regard this particular mechanism as mature, or perhaps even engage in displacement consciously.

As such, a conclusion can be drawn about the process of sublimation in writing, or how trauma informs the content of writing. According to Vaillant, a key element of sublimation is that the "feelings [borne from trauma] are acknowledged, modified and directed toward a relatively significant person or goal" (Vaillant 248). In the case of writing, impulses from the id and socially unacceptable defence mechanisms are taken into account by the writer and directed towards a goal or person of note; this can take the form of a literary alter ego, as Lovecraft has done so with Carter. In turn, this alter ego can take the place of the author in expressing these impulses and defence mechanisms, typically those of stage 3 and below.

In Lovecraft's case, his feelings of fear shape the narrative as well. Owing to his general xenophobia, Carter necessarily has to share the same fears. Both writer and alter ego are menaced by the "other" – the "almost-humans" and the "slant-eyed merchant" with dealings in the Plateau of Leng – and the "indistinct" – Dholes, something unnameable, and of course, the very same night-gaunts that young Lovecraft had nightmares of (Joshi 31). The xenophobia is on full display here, but while Lovecraft is limited to sublimation and displacement, Carter is freer in how he defends himself against the feelings of fear in that he faints and retreats into daydream and fantasy. In other words, Lovecraft's impulses from the id are redirected towards Carter, who is subject to the same trauma, and the unconscious, unacceptable defence mechanisms manifest through a layer of socially acceptable abstraction.

## 4. Lovecraft and Displacement

Other than sublimation, Lovecraft also employed the defence mechanism of displacement extensively. Of note is that his displacement of trauma onto "the other" is not sublimated, despite its neuroticism, unlike the mechanisms of conversion, denial and schizoid fantasy. Carter is shown to share this defence mechanism in his mannerisms and references to the certain peoples of the Dream Land – his sigh of relief

when the ghouls that aided him left, or his instinctual fear and dislike of the slant-eyed merchant and the turbaned ruby-traders – which suggests that the feelings of fear stemming from the trauma imparted upon him during the events of "The Statement" and "The Unnamable" have been displaced onto those determined as the "other". However, Lovecraft is still known to freely express his dislike of minorities in real life, sometimes engaging in conflicts with public figures such as with James Ferdinand Morton in 1915 (Joshi 136). In comparison to the other defence mechanisms, Lovecraft's specific expression of displacement is an aberration in that it is clearly of a neurotic nature, yet not at all consciously sublimated as the other mechanisms are.

The nature of this difference lies in the specific type of fear experienced by Lovecraft; he fears the unknown and the unknowable. His trauma stems from loss in childhood, during a period where death and bankruptcy are difficult to comprehend. Significantly, he was largely ignorant about the illness that his father suffered from, even into adulthood – Winfield Scott died of syphilis, termed "general paresis" (Joshi 13), but Lovecraft was recorded stating his father suffered from a "complete paralytic stroke", suggesting that he never learned the true nature of Winfield Scott's death as he suggests what he believes to be a likely cause based on nothing more than his death certificate (Joshi 15). This is further bolstered by his own admission that he "was never in a hospital till 1924" (Lovecraft 14) in a letter to J. Vernon Shea written in 1934, indicating that he never visited his father during his sickness. To Lovecraft, what had taken his father away from him and left him to die in an institution was unknown to him, and perhaps ultimately unknowable beyond the vague term of "general paresis" on his death certificate. Similarly, Lovecraft experienced further loss in his adolescence when his grandfather died of a stroke and his business failed, forcing him and his family to move out of their mansion and into a comparatively much more modest house. At the age of 14, it was not likely that Lovecraft was privy to the specifics of Whipple Phillips' businesses or their downturn caused by a drainage ditch being washed out (Joshi 58), and only perceived a series of losses that seemed to have little reason for happening.

These two episodes of trauma, from the perspective of a child or an adolescent, share in their absurdity – there are no clear reasons, and in the case of the death of Winfield Scott, even the nature of what exactly has happened appeared murky to Lovecraft. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Lovecraft's early defence

mechanisms and reflections of the id share in this theme. During this time, he would have nightmares of the night-gaunts that he would later describe in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (Joshi 20):

> "And worst of all, they never spoke or laughed, and never smiled because they had no faces to smile with, but only a suggestive blankness where a face ought to be. All they ever did was clutch and fly and tickle; that was the way of night-gaunts." (Lovecraft 23)

Though Lovecraft may not be fully cognisant of it, the fear of the "other" was clear in his aversion towards the strange, indistinct or featureless, likely stemming from the unclear circumstances to which he lost his father, grandfather and family wealth. In lieu of a clear cause, Lovecraft was fixated on the seeming lack of any cause, leading him to direct feelings of fear towards the unknown.

However, as he matured in his utilisation of defence mechanisms, Lovecraft eventually happened to displace these feelings of fear. This was partially out of necessity, as the object of displacement is often a thing, a stranger or a group that is less cathected (Vaillant 246). Therefore, it becomes untenable for Lovecraft to continue directing feelings of fear into a nebulous and abstract concept. Driven by childhood biases – there is Winfield Scott, who had hallucinations of a "negro" who molested his wife (Joshi 70) and the contemporary social climate of America (Lovett-Graff 3) to take into consideration – Lovecraft instead redirects these feelings of fear from the general concept of the "unknown" into the more visible "other" – namely, those of different skin colour and culture from him.

While there exist ample contemporary accounts of Lovecraft's bigotry, and even certain correspondence in which he appears to take pride in his anti-Semitism (Joshi 70), more telling examples also exist in the Randolph Carter texts as Carter has to be necessarily less developed in his expression of defence mechanisms than Lovecraft is. A closer examination of Carter's actions in *The Dream-Quest for Unknown Kadath* provide valuable insight.

After being dropped into the Vale of Pnoth by night-gaunts, Carter eventually happens upon a group of ghouls led by a Richard Upton Pickman, an apparently deceased friend of his (as well as central character in the earlier short story "Pickman's Model"). The ghouls provide a great deal of help and support to Carter, giving him information and dispatching three of their own number to guide him through the abode

of the monstrous Gugs. Yet after escaping from the Vale of Pnoth and parting ways with his benefactors, Carter "could not help sighing in pleasure when they left. For a ghoul is a ghoul, and at best an unpleasant companion for man" (Lovecraft 30). Even after fighting off the moon-beasts with them near the conclusion of the story, it is evident that Carter thinks little of the ghouls beyond a force that has been useful for defence and posturing – "Randolph Carter had hoped to come into the throne-room of the Great Ones with poise and dignity, flanked and followed by impressive lines of ghouls in ceremonial order" (Lovecraft 68).

Throughout the text, the ghouls act as a stand-in of sorts for a general "other" – whereas the "almost-humans" are Arabian-coded, with their turbans, scimitars and their status as a class of soldier-slaves as being reminiscent of the Mamluks, the ghouls appear as a generic caricature of how Lovecraft views non-Anglo-Saxons – as shambling, barely human creatures with a guttural tongue. Through this lens, it can be seen how the feelings of fear are displaced upon the "other"; though they aid Carter in his quest to reach the city seen in his visions, the ghouls are described with similar language with that used to describe the more antagonistic denizens of the Dream Lands, having "canine faces and slumping forms and unmentionable idiosyncrasies" while making camp around "partly consumed refuse heaped at one side" (Lovecraft 24). Furthermore, the first reaction when confronted by the friendly ghouls that of fear as well – Carter has to consciously will himself to avoid fainting, and almost screams at the sight of them.

All of this suggests feelings of fear beyond prejudice on the part of Carter and hence Lovecraft, bordering on phobia. Lovecraft himself was more aggressive in his displacement, being somewhat active in his bigotry, but Carter reveals a side of fearing the "other" and the "unknown" that ties the former's racism and regressive views to the childhood trauma previously detailed. It is possible that in the process of processing and expressing the id, Lovecraft had combined the feelings of fear regarding the unknown and indescribable with biases inherited from family and the contemporary social climate, which led to the specific form of displacement into xenophobia. This provides insight on the process of maturing defence mechanisms, and poses the question of the implications of the relationship between sublimation and the defence mechanisms of other stages. This provides significant insight on how unconscious beliefs exhibited by the writer can take on a modified and possibly much more personal

form through the process of sublimation; rather than outright hatred for foreign cultures and ethnic minorities commonly associated with Lovecraft, the writings relating to Randolph Carter are suggestive of a deeper part of the Lovecraft's unconscious that is more fearing than hating. As such, conscious sublimation – even unconscious attempts to do so – can be informed by the unconscious, and have the possibility of being much more revealing than the author had originally intended.

## 5. Lovecraft and Sublimation

As stated earlier, the general trend of Lovecraft in depicting defence mechanisms as a process of sublimation involves his alter ego engaging in defence mechanisms of lesser maturity that are socially unacceptable. This section of the text aims to discuss the reasons thereof, as well as the possible implications of this specific process of sublimation through writing.

Vaillant suggests that Freud's original conception of defence mechanisms was flawed in that not all defence mechanisms are unconscious in nature (5). Indeed, in his own contribution to the concept Vaillant makes the point that stage 4 defence mechanisms necessarily require cognisance of trauma and trauma-derived impulses alongside conscious efforts to cope with said trauma.

Therefore, when operating under the assumption that Lovecraft was sublimating his trauma through the process of writing, it stands to reason that he was consciously depicting Carter into expressing defence mechanisms he believes are socially unacceptable. As observed earlier, Carter is shown expressing stage 1 and 2 defence mechanisms, most significantly that of schizoid fantasy. There exists one exception in which Carter attempts to consciously engage in sublimation during the events of "The Silver Key", but fails to do so and returns to schizoid fantasy. The reasons for Lovecraft doing so are unclear, but textual evidence in conjunction with Freudian theory provide possible reasons – namely, that Lovecraft lives vicariously through Carter and yearns to express the id in a baser form.

The connection between Lovecraft and Carter has been made clear prior, but in specific terms, Carter is not simply a reflection of Lovecraft as he is, but who he wants to be. In addition to the similar background, Carter possesses traits, experiences and abilities Lovecraft does not but has aspired to in the past. By most accounts, Lovecraft can be described as a patriot, and his correspondence suggests as much. A 1917 letter

addressed to John T. Dunn reveals that Lovecraft had attempted to enlist in the Rhode Island National Guard before the draft bill of that year had even been signed (Joshi 140) and was only exempted from military service when his mother sabotaged his efforts to enlist (Joshi 141). Additionally, Lovecraft was a long-time cat lover, but never owned another cat after the death of his first one in adolescence (Joshi 316).

In contrast, Carter was explicitly said to have fought in World War 1 as part of the French Foreign Legion, even seeing combat and suffering a nearly mortal wound (Lovecraft 48) as mentioned in "The Silver Key". This is again mentioned in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", indicating that Lovecraft placed a significant emphasis on this particular piece of character background. Furthermore, in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, the cats of the city Ulthar are a major plot element and Carter frequently interacts with them. In particular, Carter befriends a small black kitten by petting it and providing it with cream, who later returns the favour by asking its grandfather to lead an army of cats to save Carter from captivity at the hands of the almost-humans. The description of the "little black kitten" is reminiscent of Lovecraft's recollection of his childhood pet as a "tiny black handful" (Joshi 59). Furthermore, Carter displays a number of desirable virtues, including courage and ingenuity as well as a family history of esotericism that translates to experience in travelling through dream-dimensions and dealing with all manners of fantastic beings.

In other words, Randolph Carter, much like many other literary alter egos, can also be classified as a sort of self-insert character in that they represent the ego-ideal of the writer, or exactly who the writer wishes to be as patterned after their aspirations (Akhtar 89). The implication here, therefore, is that far from depicting Carter's stage 1 and 2 defence mechanisms as undesirable, Lovecraft is in fact not opposed to exhibiting less mature defence mechanisms if given the chance. In particular, the mechanism of schizoid fantasy offers a unique appeal in conjunction with the complaints directed towards everyday life in "The Silver Key"; Carter shares many of his criticisms of religion with Lovecraft, who was an atheist (Joshi 26), which suggests that the rest of his grievances regarding modern life may be rooted in Lovecraft's own worldview as well. It would not be a stretch to suppose that Lovecraft harbours some unconscious desire to retreat into dream and fantasy, away from a world of vapid individuals, petty organisations and meaningless distractions.

As such, a conclusion to be drawn here is that sublimation through writing does not

directly suppress or channel defence mechanisms of low maturity, but instead seeks to express them nonetheless, albeit through a layer of abstraction. The urges of the id are still present, and the superego may still tend towards neurotic, immature or narcissistic defence mechanisms, but the ego can employ conscious effort to suppress these urges or mechanisms in society and instead express them in the only space where they are socially acceptable – through the act of creation, where the creator is omnipotent and immature defence mechanisms are not necessarily immature. The conventions of Lovecraftian fiction further enables this by providing justification; fainting out of fear is a much more reasonable when one is being brought towards the "central void where the daemon sultan Azathoth gnaws hungrily in the dark" (Lovecraft 38), and retreating to dream is not irrational if one remains full agency in it and adventures within have tangible effects.

The specifics of sublimation through writing suggests that in dealing with trauma, one does not, in fact completely graduate from the use of defence mechanisms categorised in stages 1 to 3. Vaillant alludes to this by indicating that it is possible to backslide from use of stage 4 defence mechanisms when under excessive stress (247), but perhaps backsliding is possible in the first place due to the fact that the superego maintains the low-maturity mechanisms even under conscious efforts of the ego to do otherwise. Sublimation, however, provides an out by allowing these low-maturity mechanisms in a controlled environment that is largely free of scrutiny, satisfying the urges of the id, the low-maturity mechanisms of the superego, and the conscious attempts to cope by the ego in a single process. The nature of other mature defences is suggestive of this as well; for example, the mechanism of altruism is similar to the immature mechanism of projection, but differs in the fact that the needs of others are evaluated objectively instead of selfishly (Vaillant 247). In other words, the expression of altruism satisfies the conscious ego and the superego that retains projection as a mechanism, as well as defending against the id.

In conclusion, examining the specifics of how Lovecraft sublimates trauma through writing is suggestive of the fact that less mature defence mechanisms are never truly discarded, but mature defence mechanisms are effective in that all three components of the human mind are satisfied when they are expressed.

## 6. Lovecraft and the Psychoanalytic Perspective

The examination of Lovecraft's psyche in conjunction with the Randolph Carter texts provides some perspective on concepts relating to psychoanalysis, in particular that of defence mechanisms. The specific operations of Stage 4 defence mechanisms in conjunction with those of previous stages has already been discussed prior in that Stage 4 mechanisms are not discrete but instead incorporate less mature mechanisms as a means of catharsis. The previous discussion was centred around the mechanism of sublimation, but it can be argued that the other Stage 4 mechanisms too exhibit similar structure. For example, Vaillant (247) feels the need to specifically differentiate the mature mechanism of altruism from the immature mechanism of projection and the neurotic mechanism of reaction formation. This is due to the fact that closer examination of altruism shows how it is essentially a more benign form of the less mature mechanisms cited. As Vaillant explains, "altruism can include benign and constructive reaction formation, empathy, philanthropy and well-repaid service to others". In the case of altruism, it employs the operational principles of projection and reaction formation productively to assess the needs of others and to evoke empathy on the part of the donor, which showcases once again how stage 4 mechanisms can work in tandem by employing less mature mechanisms. This is once again repeated with humour – associated with displacement and schizoid fantasy – and suppression, in turn associated with denial and repression.

As such, the different stages of defence mechanisms cannot be said to be completely discrete from one another. Vaillant alludes to this fact by mentioning how it is possible to backslide from stage 4 mechanisms in times of extreme stress, but does not explicitly state how and why this happens. Lovecraft and Carter provides some insight on this – on the part of sublimation, it can be observed how sublimation takes a variety of immature mechanisms either desired or previously exhibited by the sublimator and expresses them in a risk-free manner, and it is likely that other stage 4 mechanisms also operate in a similar manner. Vaillant illustrates a variety of defence mechanisms through different responses to a case of miscarriage – he describes the woman who miscarried as engaging in altruism.

> "The woman, a month after surgery, organised a group of other women who had had breast and uterine surgery to counsel and visit patients undergoing gynecological surgery. They tried to give information, to give advice and

comfort, and from their experience to provide answers to questions and fears that such new patients might have." (Vaillant 248)

In this case, the mechanisms of projection and reaction formation can be observed, albeit in a benign manner. Key to this is that the woman utilises principles of projection and reaction formation to determine needs of other women in similar circumstances, once again employing less mature mechanisms in a socially acceptable manner.

As such, this examination suggests that further studies made relating to defence mechanisms should take this relationship between the different stage mechanisms into account – specifically, it is no longer viable to treat each stage as wholly disconnected, and to recognise the possibly benign applications of defence mechanisms previously termed neurotic, immature or psychotic.

## 7. Lovecraft and Lovecraftian Horror

Much of this text is based off of the notion that Lovecraft is Carter, whether it comes to background, manner, prejudice, aspiration or neuroticism. There exists much evidence to suggest that Lovecraft has based Carter off of his own self, and the majority of Lovecraft scholars believe the same (Joshi 230), and as such, much like his creator, Carter is subject to significant trauma, though as far as we know Lovecraft never had to contend with Outer Gods.

But despite the different nature of the trauma experienced, Carter's responses and utilisation of defence mechanisms is still greatly grounded, likely because of the fact that Carter embodies Lovecraft. He reacts by employing less mature defence mechanisms, as Lovecraft did early on in life. He attempts but fails to alleviate trauma by seeking solace in religion and writing, as Lovecraft does successfully. He is also racist, as Lovecraft was. In the process of sublimation, Lovecraft has transported himself into his own work, and as the omnipotent creator of the Dream Cycle, subject himself to his own fears of the unknown. But this is not limited to Carter himself; at a certain point, the line between Lovecraft and his writing begins to blur. Lovecraft is not just Carter – he is Robert Blake; he is Edward Derby.

To this end, there is little wonder why Lovecraftian horror is characterised by the fear of the unknown and the other. Arguably, all of Lovecraftian horror stems from the fear a young boy feels when he does not know why his father left the family when he was three and died of something called "general paresis" six years later. Though

Lovecraft dresses his otherworldly threats in yellow silken masks or in the guise of pschent-wearing deities, the ultimate enemy is not them, nor even ethnic minorities like some Lovecraft scholars may claim. Rather, it is absurdity – the notion that people suffer and die of nothing, for nothing at times. Lovecraft's fear of the unknown is in actuality a fear shared by all, and in fact, Lovecraftian fiction can be less bleak in that at least one knows if the prayer works or not.

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