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Brian J. Reis

National Coalition of Independent Scholars, brianjamesreis@gmail.com

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Satanic Indifference and Ultimate Reality

Brian Reis

*National Coalition of Independent Scholars
Chapman University Alumni Association*

Abstract

*Satan has captured the imagination of writers in the English language for centuries. This figure and the notion of evil have gone through many changes in English literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. Something changed Satan during this time, and made him into an arbiter of truth rather than a figure of rebellion. In *The Mysterious Stranger*, Mark Twain used him as the grand narrator of the universe who explains the truth of all existence, that life is an illusion. The American horror author H.P. Lovecraft carried this one step further, using Rudolf Otto's *mysterium horrendum* to divest Satan of his supernatural status. Satan was transformed from a symbol of evil in a Manichean universe to an articulate arbiter of the revelation that human existence means nothing cast against the broad spectrum of the cosmos.*

There are many vantage points from which to examine a subject like Satan. To paraphrase Mark Twain's comments about man, Satan "is too large a subject to be treated as a whole," so this paper will "merely discuss a detail or two of him at this time."¹ There are many platitudes about Satan that have been as grossly misunderstood as his legacy. The most interesting comes from Percy Shelley: "Depend upon it, that when a person once begins to think that perhaps there is no Devil, he is in a dangerous way." (Shelley 1965, 87) At first glance, this appears to be similar to the statement in Charles Baudelaire's "The Generous Gambler," that "the devil's slickest trick is to convince you that he does not exist!" (Baudelaire 1991, 407) Shelley seems to state that the Devil is a real force in the world, and if one is to deny this force's existence, one is in danger of falling into sin. However, Shelley's "On the Devil and Devils,"—from which this statement is taken—presents a rebuke of the Christian religion, invoking the Devil in order to explain how a Manichean universe—one with a Devil—could justify and give greater moral agency to the Devil than to God. This is a call to understand that—in the religious mindset—if there is good, perhaps there is evil. Baudelaire's story takes this a step further and presents the Devil not as this necessary force, but as a freethinker and explicator of truth. The narrator, a preacher relates:

¹This paper will be using the word "Satanic," as it originally means—adversarial. An illuminating article, "The Doctrine of Satan I: The Old Testament" by William Caldwell puts this in perspective. The word Satan, he states is "often used in the Old Testament as a verb, meaning to be or act as an adversary. Satan as a noun means a human adversary" or a "superhuman adversary." According to Caldwell, "[. . .] it appears as though these adversaries are[. . .]only functionally separate from God." He further states that "angels that have evil tasks are not themselves thereby evil." Moreover, "the Book of Job" mentions "one of the 'sons of God,' or angels, called Satan or Adversary. Anything like a clear outline of Satan appears here for the first time in the Old Testament. But even here it is *the* Satan. The presence of the article denotes the function of adversary rather than a character personally adverse to the good." In *The Biblical World* 41.1 (1913): pg. 32

He explained to me the absurdity of different philosophies which, to the present, had seized possession of the human brain. He even deigned to confide in me several fundamental principles whose benefits and propriety I find inexpedient to share. He did not complain in any fashion about his reputation in the world, assured me that he himself was the one most interested in the destruction of *superstition*. !” (Baudelaire 1991, 407)

In Western literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, the figure of Satan was used for the purpose of casting away perceived inaccuracies and superstition. The impious Romantics—Percy Bysshe Shelley and George Gordon, Lord Byron—used him in their respective manner to combat what they saw as Christian dogma and literary hypocrisy. According to William Caldwell, it is the duty of Satan the Adversary to destroy “sham and false pretensions.” (Caldwell 1913, 32) Byron and Shelley both thought the notion of a benevolent God—with no maleficent figure to create a balance—was a sham and false pretension.² For this, they were roundly criticized, even to the extent of being decried as “Satanic.” The first instance of the accusations of “Satanism” against these literary figures of the 19th century can be traced to Robert Southey's declaration that they “promulgated a 'monstrous' combination of 'horror,' 'mockery,' and 'impiety,' which had begun to 'pollute' English poetry.” (Wittreich 1968, 3)³

This accusation of Satanism against Percy Shelley and Lord Byron initiates a progression of “Satanic” thought. One reason that Robert Southey charged Shelley and Byron with Satanism was the deliberately provocative manner in which they wrote. But these Romantics also posited a heretical notion which they thought made more sense if God did in fact exist. They posited Manichaeism, the belief in two competing forces of good and evil, allowing for Satan to be more significant.⁴ This discourse did not end with the Romantics. In *The Mysterious Stranger* and *Letters From the Earth*, Mark Twain took this “Satanic” discourse a step further, away from mere polemicism. Twain presented Satan as a figure who dissociated man from his supposed central place in the universe. Much like Baudelaire's Devil, Satan then became a figure representing what Twain thought to be truth.⁵ Finally, the materialist atheist, science fiction and horror author Howard Phillips Lovecraft brought about a final evolution in this “Satanic” thought process. He removed “Satan” from his place in theology, and cast the power of the spiritless universe as an awe-full, real force. Lovecraft essentially presented what

² Shelley's attitude can be best expressed in this statement: “But is the Devil, like God, omnipresent? If so, he interpenetrates God, and they both exist together.” “Devils,” pg. 69.

³ Wittreich's article illustrates how such a term came into being: “By linguistic extension, 'Satanism' was broadened in the seventeenth century to include any devil-inspired doctrine,” or “anyone with a diabolical disposition.” Robert Southey, however, is the first to link Satanism with the Romantics, specifically Byron.” See also Southey, Robert, “Preface to *The Vision of Judgment*,” in *The Complete Works of Robert Southey*. New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1860.

⁴ The term Manichaeism originally refers to a 3rd century Gnostic religious sect. However, it fell into common use, as a synonym for a worldview defined by the binary opposition of good and evil Shelley and Southey alike used this term is in this figurative sense. All uses of this term in this paper are in accordance with this figurative usage.

⁵ To clarify, this paper cites the simplified version of *The Mysterious Stranger*, the patchwork of various drafts of stories that Twain's biographer, Albert Paine compiled. While this has been classed an editorial fraud, even contentious scholarship points to the fact that Paine's ending—taken from the last manuscript in which Twain named the character No. 44—fits the first tale, “The Chronicle of Young Satan,” “remarkably well.” No. 44 is also not so different a character from Satan, he is a trickster magician that transcends time and space and is “Satanic” in his revelation of the universe as different than the Christian conception. Similarly, if one reads *Letters From the Earth*, one will find that Satan says very many of the same things and exemplifies an attitude that Twain also did about mankind himself. Therefore, the implication that No. 44 is not a concurrent figure with Satan in “The Chronicle of Young Satan,” is rendered moot. See *No. 44: The Mysterious Stranger*, University of California Press, 1982, and *The Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*, Ed. William Merriam Gibson, University of California Press, 2005.

Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium horrendum* in *The Idea of the Holy*. (Otto 1958, 82) To Otto, the *mysterium tremendum*—the cosmic power above all humans that defies explanation—has a darker side, this *horrendum*. Otto describes this *horrendum* as the “ferocity” of Lucifer in whom the “potentiality for evil is realized.” (Otto 1958, 106) But the *horrendum* refers not just to this figure, but to a feeling that has a power all its own. As Otto states: “It might be said that Lucifer is[. . .]the *mysterium tremendum* cut loose from the other elements and intensified to *mysterium horrendum*.” (106) It is ultimate dread without ultimate hope. After Shelley and Byron made Satan into a righteously rebellious figure—and Mark Twain used him to depose humanity of its perceived significance—H.P. Lovecraft employed this sense of cosmic terror, cutting loose the elements which implied a beneficent force governing the universe. If “Satanic” is to be defined as adversarial to Christianity, Lovecraft ranks as a pre-eminent “Satanic” thinker through this process. In Lovecraft's works, a force akin to the *horrendum* reveals the universe to be antithetical to Christian thought. Essentially, the *horrendum* transforms Satan into the Satanic arbiter of truth, beyond good and evil.

Percy Shelley provides the initial impetus of this progression. In his description of Satan in “On the Devil and Devils,” he complains how some wish to sweep the Devil under the rug because in the best of all possible worlds there could not possibly be an “evil agency equal to God.”⁶ To Shelley, “Divines” attempt to quell the appropriate understanding of Satan:

They seem to wish to divest him of all personality; to reduce him from his abstract to his concrete; to reverse the process by which he was created in the mind, which they will by no means bear with respect to God. (Shelley, 70)

According to Shelley, in order to keep the problem of evil from complicating discourse, the “divines” attempt to relegate Satan to a familiar and fleshly force, rather than someone who incurs numinous—transcendent—awe. Beginning with Shelley, a pantheon of thinkers attempted to reverse this process to return Satan back to his more powerful “abstract.” The Devil, Shelley states, must be considered if one is to take the religious view seriously. If God is all powerful, his adversary must be comparably powerful. The “dangerous way” to which Shelley originally referred, is the way toward a dishonest appraisal of his theological view. Ironically enough, Shelley's idea of Satan seems to echo the attitude summed up by another Romantic figure, Sir Walter Scott. Scott stated that there are forces beyond the senses, able to be discerned through a Divine imprint that was imposed on humanity. He explains:

The[. . .]universal belief of the inhabitants of the earth, in the existence of spirits separated from the encumbrance and incapacities of the body, is grounded on the consciousness of the divinity that speaks in our bosoms, and demonstrates to all men, except the few who are hardened to the celestial voice, that there is within us a portion of the divine substance, which is not subject to the law of death and dissolution, but which,

⁶“Devils,” pg. 70. The progression most nearly begins with the conflict between those who thought that the fall of man—instigated by Milton's Satan—precipitated a loss in spiritual goodness, and with those who believed a Manichean universe necessitated a different explanation of this so called “evil.” The prevailing thought of the age seemed to be that there was a spiritual dimension that existed before man—with which man has since lost touch, but Byron and Shelley turned this on its head, declaring that Satan was a force with which God contended, equal in power and influence to the Creator. This type of thinking continued through the Romantic period, which is precisely why Robert Southey decried Shelley and Byron as the “Satanic school.”

when the body is no longer fit for its abode, shall seek its own place, as a sentinel dismissed from his post. (Scott 1970, 17)⁷

The “indestructible essence” of which Scott speaks is perceived through an experience separate from the senses, revealing the divine substance imposed by a wholly good Creator. But as Scott himself stated in *Demonology and Witchcraft*, other forces are also at work. Essentially, Scott makes the claim that such spirits exist in a realm inaccessible to humans, but are able to be experienced through veiled means. Other spirits—ostensibly including Satan—are abstract forces by definition. Scott's definition most readily describes and justifies the Manichaeism which Shelley and Byron posit. An atheist, Shelley nevertheless thought that an abstract—like the “indestructible essence” of which Scott speaks—was a more honest representation of Satan than one which was concrete. Despite Shelley's atheism and Byron's knack for nebulously sincere provocation, these Romantics present Satan as a figure that must necessarily exist if indeed God does.⁸ In their work, Satan becomes one of the forces of which Scott spoke. The Romantic authors reverse the way that divines have attempted to quell the Devil, simultaneously stoking the flames of controversy by portraying John Milton's Satan as a sympathetic figure. This Manichaeism is the first step in bringing Satan back to his more powerful abstract, or closer to Rudolf Otto's *horrendum*.

Byron contributes to the initial stages of this discourse in his play, *Cain*. When Lucifer takes *Cain* through outer space, he remarks on the eternal struggle between himself and God. He implies that the great conflict will not cease, as though it will go on forever—God will not be the victor, as there will be no victor:

And the interminable realms of space,
 And the infinity of endless ages,
 All, all, will I dispute ! And world by world,
 And star by star and universe by universe
 Shall tremble in the balance, till the great
 Conflict shall cease, if ever it shall cease,
 Which it ne'er shall, till he or I be quench'd!
 And what can quench our immortality,
 Or mutual and irrevocable hate? (Byron 1970, 815)

This Manichean idea, positing that Satan could be such a powerful, active force—and a sympathetic one at that—appears to be what rankled Southey and ruffled feathers in the literary world. Lucifer mentions that “Star by star” and “universe by universe” trembles in the balance, which illustrates an eternal struggle, a conflict far outside the realm of humans themselves. Byron gives Satan a distinction as a force omnipotent like God Himself. Mark Twain employs this in *The Mysterious Stranger*, but in a

⁷According to Scott, this also “must infer the existence of many millions of spirits who have not been annihilated, though they have become invisible to mortals who still see, hear, and perceive, only by means of the imperfect organs of humanity.”

⁸See “On the Devil and Devils,” pg. 87. Here Shelley speaks directly of the Devil in a way that frames him as a sympathetic figure, perhaps vindicating William Blake's assertion that Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it. Of course, Shelley does not necessarily believe that this Devil really exists, but presents the Manichean idea as the most necessarily compatible form of metaphysics with Christian doctrine. This idea “if not true, is at least an hypothesis conformable to the experience of actual facts.” “Devils”, pg. 87. It is an error to assume Shelley believed that the Devil really exists, as he is merely using the Devil as a means to discredit Christianity, or at least showing that the Devil is central to Christian belief.

more profound way. H.P. Lovecraft takes Satan and remedies the problem of which Shelley complained. He reverses Satan's concrete, fleshly form and renews the process by which Lucifer was created in the mind. The Satanic force is not a mere "mysterious in gross form" that can be dismissed as a fleshly being, but it also does not obey good and evil. (Otto, 82)⁹ It is in its truest sense, indifferent. The manner in which Satan is used by all of these authors appears to take on several dimensions. One of these dimensions is the motif of a Satanic figure who takes man through the universe and shows him what was previously unknown, removing all facets of illusion.

Byron applies this *Divine Comedy* trope intriguingly, especially in his play *Cain*. Instead of Virgil leading Dante through hell so he may experience redemption, Lucifer takes the fratricidal brother of Genesis through outer space. One of the most striking quotes from Lucifer to Cain is "Believe and sink not! doubt and perish." (Byron 1970, 901) Lucifer sardonically suggests that belief in God will allow Cain to fly. But it seems that all Cain has to do to fly is hold Lucifer's hand. Guided by Lucifer, Cain floats independently of God's injunctions due to natural law—there is no gravity in the vacuum of space. Of course, the ambiguity of Lucifer and his truth telling—whether or not he is a deceiver—still depends upon Byron's penchant for provocation. Before the real revelation of time and space, Byron still depends on the Christian myth in order to advance a greater Romantic notion and the Byronic hero. As indicated by Peter Schock, Lucifer's characterization was a response to certain "specific circumstances:"

These include the campaign to suppress anti-Christian publications in the Regency years, which[. . .]brought to Byron's attention the currency and power of blasphemous writing as a vehicle of controversy; the pressure on Byron to respond to ideologically charged accusations of Satanism and Manichaeism coming from conservative voices; and the poet's concern to elude charges of blasphemy and to avoid presenting an easy target to his opponents. The ambiguity of Lucifer is strategic, then. (Schock 1995, 185)

According to Schock, Byron makes Satan a controversial subject that upends traditional discourse, but also places Satan within the traditional framework of tempter and altogether immoral figure. Clearly, Byron needed to posit Satan within a familiar framework to make his views known. Byron's attempt to provoke clearly extends his reputation as a literary gadfly. Yet, the way Byron wrote Lucifer also reflects many actual opinions he held about the Christian religion.¹⁰ Whatever Byron may have actually thought about Lucifer's intentions in liberating man in *Cain*, he at least uses the liberation as a means to advance a conversation about Lucifer as a liberating figure. While Byron appeared to be strategic, Mark Twain appeared to make no bones about his opinions of this liberation, by being both intentionally blasphemous and sincere.

In Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*, the demonic force of Satan reveals human existence as antithetical to Christian teachings. Twain presents Satan as the harbinger of a graver revelation. He reveals the purposelessness of human life, and that humans are not the central point of all creation. In the novella, Satan appears to Austrian children, producing real fruit and creating miniature cities which

⁹According to Otto, God "only brings to its grossest expression the thought intended by all other examples of animals." This seems to be a way to justify the existence of terrible beings—an answer to the problem of theodicy—but it is actually entirely compatible with the Lovecraftian vision.

¹⁰Through the figure of Lucifer, Byron struck generally at the "tyrants who are trampling upon all human thought": all who contributed to repression at this time, from "the Tory ministers who authored the Six Acts to the Crown lawyers who prosecuted infidels." Byron, George Gordon. *Byron's Letters and Journals*. Ed. R.E.Prothero. Echo Library, 2007, pg. 152.

he later destroys at will. When he does so, he reveals a discomfiting truth about human nature. Satan constantly derides the “Moral Sense” of man, and refers to the lower animals as higher. Since the lower animals do not have the illusory Moral Sense which compels men to do evil, they are higher creatures. Ironically, because humans have a concept of good and evil, they are compelled to do evil. A Satanic inversion of man's place in the universe is thus created. The Moral Sense which Lovecraft would later declare to be a construction of philosophy was not endowed by a Creator upon humans for their special purpose. Instead, it is a defect which lowers man below other animals, and creates “wrong” out of whole cloth. For example, Satan rebukes the narrator for describing the torture of a man in their local jail as “a brutal thing.” “No,” he says, “it was a human thing[. . .]You should not insult the brutes by such a misuse of that word; they have not deserved it.” (Twain 1992, 50) He then commences with a diatribe against the “paltry race of man,” which is “always claiming virtues which it hasn't got, always denying them to the higher animals, which alone possess them.” (50) Satan inverts the normal order in which man considers himself as made in the image of God and master of the animals.¹¹ To Satan, humanity and cruelty are one in the same. A brutal thing appears done out of instinct, without the capacity for cruelty. Brutality appears to be more virtuous as it is done without the knowledge of right and wrong. However, cruelty necessitates a knowledge of right and wrong. Wrong is only known because man has a Moral Sense which compels him to do evil. Ironizing the arguments for morality as inspired by God, Twain's Satan makes it clear that it is the Moral Sense itself that is solely responsible for evils like the beating of the jailed man:

When a brute inflicts pain he does it innocently; it is not wrong; for him there is no such thing as wrong. And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it—only man does that. Inspired by that mongrel Moral Sense of his! A sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. [...] He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. There shouldn't be any wrong; and without the Moral Sense there couldn't be any[. . .]The Moral Sense degrades him to the bottom layer of animated beings and is a shameful possession.” (Twain 1992, 51)

The Moral Sense which supposedly makes man a higher creature, actually makes him dishonest, for it gives him license to harm. Rather than a blessing, this human choice is a curse which leads to further evil action. Sin and freewill likewise create a problem in which evil is the natural outgrowth of human choice. If God had originally given man a Moral Sense through which to choose good or evil, the subsequent consequences do not speak well of God. But Satan's admonitions notwithstanding, the way in which Twain introduces Satan represents the author's attitude to the whole matter. After the stranger makes grapes, apples and oranges for the little children, creating people and other biological entities seemingly out of his own boredom—he introduces himself. After declaring himself Satan, he catches one of the women he has created out of dust, saving her from death. He quips that “she is an idiot to step backward like that and not notice what she is about.” Satan is not concerned with the safety of the woman he has created, he is merely interested in the way in which she fails to recognize her

¹¹Genesis clarifies this point of view as inextricable from the Christian creation myth: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. *The New American Standard Bible*. Foundation Publications, Inc., 1997, (Genesis 1.26).

surroundings. Twain later shows that this myopia represents humanity's own incorrect assumptions about existence. Satan introduces the concept of sin, and then implies that it does not apply to him, as sin is a human invention:

We others are still ignorant of sin; we are not able to commit it; we are without blemish, and shall abide in that estate always. We—" Two of the little workmen were quarreling, and in buzzing little bumblebee voices they were cursing and swearing at each other; now came blows and blood; then they locked themselves together in a life-and-death struggle. Satan reached out his hand and crushed the life out of them with his fingers, threw them away, wiped the red from his fingers on his handkerchief, and went on talking where he had left off: "We cannot do wrong; neither have we any disposition to do it, for we do not know what it is." (Twain 1992, 16)

When Satan commits this shocking act against beings he has created, he explains that he knows no sin for an equally shocking reason. As he has made these creatures out of nothing but clay and given them life only to eradicate them as if they were flies—he is merely acting out the mechanistic universe and its blind watchmaking, in which sin does not exist. Man is much like the tiny beings Satan has created, and any concept of right and wrong dealt to or between two human beings is too petty to be considered consequential. Satan quashes the men, as an omnipotent force that takes no stock in sin. Satan reveals the true nature of the universe in other ways as well. Much like in Byron's *Cain*, Satan gives the children a tour of the true nature of reality. First, this is done on a small scale, and later on a cosmic scale.

In the beginning of *The Mysterious Stranger*, Satan regales the children with tales of his travels. These tales appear to them as real before their very eyes. He tells them of "the interesting things he had seen in the big worlds of our solar systems and of other solar systems far away in the remotenesses of space," and "about the customs of the immortals that inhabit them." (16) In this same instance, he engages in an act that diminishes the lives of creatures that would live in one tiny corner of the far universe. Satan looks down with annoyance at the beings paying funereal respects to the dead man that he has just swatted:

The wives of the little dead men had found the crushed and shapeless bodies and were crying over them, and sobbing and lamenting, and a priest was kneeling there with his hands crossed upon his breast, praying; and crowds and crowds of pitying friends were massed about them[. . .]—a scene which Satan paid no attention to until the small noise of the weeping and praying began to annoy him, then he reached out and took the heavy board seat out of our swing and brought it down and mashed all those people into the earth just as if they had been flies, and went on talking just the same. (16)

Satan has just created life *ex nihilo*—out of nothing—and destroys it in a matter of moments. Through this act, Twain remarks upon man's over-inflated claims of significance in the universe. The fact that Satan—who knows no sin—conducts such miracles as well as describe whole universes paints a bleak picture of the reality of the universe itself. Satan's demonstrations of the cruelties of life are further explored later. He instigates a war in which many of those people of clay are killed, and decides—in an almost Biblical fashion—to destroy his creations, the earth swallowing them up. The ethical considerations of the children are ignored, and Satan casts his hand over the small clay creations. The creatures are all killed, but not before Satan offers the children a chilling reassurance: "Never mind

them,” he says of his tiny creations. They are “of no consequence.” (Twain 1992, 21) Satan looks upon the whole matter with an indifference that is chilling, if not comic. When the children protest and cry that the little clay people have gone to hell, he simply retorts, “Oh, it is no matter; we can make plenty more.” (21) But this is not even the most profound reach of Twain's narrative. Later in *The Mysterious Stranger*, Satan takes the narrator on a tour of the universe.

Twain begins to veer from the precedent established by Byron and Shelley at the climax of *The Mysterious Stranger*, where Satan shows the narrator the vast reaches of space beyond all human knowledge at the time the story takes place. Eventually, the narrator asks him if they will meet in another life. Satan replies that there is no other. In a theatrical fashion as he begins to fade, Satan tells the narrator that life itself is an illusion:

It is true, that which I have revealed to you; there is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream—a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought—a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities! (Twain 1992, 140)

This statement profoundly changes “Satanic” discourse heretofore examined. The truly “Satanic” portion of the story occurs as the seeming progenitor of evil—despite his supposed power and his abilities—reveals himself to be a human construction. He is made of the stuff of philosophy that has no bearing on the universe itself—or the empty eternities which have no real interest in the useless thoughts that traverse them. Here Satan states: “I myself have no existence; I am but a dream—your dream, creature of your imagination. In a moment you will have realized this, then you will banish me from your visions and I shall dissolve into the nothingness out of which you made me.” (Twain 1992, 139) The Luciferian guide reveals himself as a mere personification of the nothingness that truly comprises the universe. He is also a human invention, and one who will dissolve when the true nature of the universe is revealed. In the original sense of the word “Satanic,” this is the most adversarial proposition to Christianity. The origin of evil—Satan himself—evaporates when he reveals truth to mankind. Even Manichaeism is uprooted. God, the positive entity in Manichaeism—who appears to have been absent for the entire story—remains absent. Satan tells the narrator to dream other dreams beyond the idea of God, and the human race as specially created. Man is revealed to be useless, and only a thought, rather than a concrete subject—let alone one for which the universe was conditioned. Twain excoriates the idea that man as the central point of creation, railing against the contention that the world must have been made to sustain him as such, through comparing man to beasts.

In the original manuscript of *The Mysterious Stranger*—“The Chronicle of Young Satan”—Mark Twain distinguishes between the bestial and the human, but in a manner contrary to most. The human nature is the worse of the two. This implies that man is a depraved cosmic accident in a tumultuous and disordered universe, hardly the “best” world. This is best expressed in Twain's own words, referring to humanity in the harshest possible terms:

Man was not made for any useful purpose, for the reason that he hasn't served any; that he was most likely not even made *intentionally*; and that his working himself up out of the oyster bed to his present position was probably a matter of surprise and regret to the Creator. (Twain 2010, 312)

Twain denies the existence of the care of an omnipotent being. The very idea that the central point of Creation in the Bible was a cosmic accident, or made by an ignorant Creator, is certainly a Satanic

conceit. In Twain's view, the Creator does not intend for man to be made, let alone to be made in his Divine image. Likewise, theological claims to God's plan for humanity are cast off in the first sentence. When Twain writes about Satan, or narrates from Satan's perspective, the character makes similar pronouncements. When presented by a Satanic figure, the universe widens into a void in Twain's pessimistic, yet ultimately realistic view. If Twain opened up these vistas, H.P. Lovecraft certainly widened the horizons further.

H.P. Lovecraft presents a parallel view to Twain's in a scientifically demonstrable manner. His narrators are exposed to the nature of existence apart from their perceived significance. To accomplish this, Lovecraft uses forces that are beyond "Satan." In order to further depose man of significance, he removes Satan from his place in human consciousness and replaces it with the naturalistic cosmos, which is still evoked by "Satanic" forces. His narrative has less to do with the nature of thoughts floating "among the empty eternities." (Twain 1992, 140) Rather, he focuses on the material world and its finality, taking his protagonist through the entire lifespan of the universe and its inevitable end. This is most prevalent in *The Shadow Out of Time*. A common device at the core of Lovecraft's philosophy and fiction, is the opening of a person's mind to the real significance of the universe. Lovecraft removes the natural limits of man's view of the cosmos to reveal the truth of the universe, and removal comes in many forms. Byron's poem "Darkness" seems to be a natural precursor to this idea. The speaker states: "I had a dream, which was not all a dream./The bright sun was extinguished, and the stars/Did wander darkling in the eternal space." (Byron 1970, 273) This inevitable death of the universe is now known to be a near certainty by contemporary science.¹² Byron illustrates this as the most terrifying of all truths—the permanent absence of light and the imposition of darkness. Palaces of "crowned kings," the "habitations of all things which dwell," are "burnt for beacons;" cities are "consumed" and men gather "round their blazing homes" in order to "look once more into each other's face." (Byron 1970, 273) Byron directs his attention to the destruction of civilization in the face of something far greater than man. In doing so, Byron highlights humanity's pitiful need to preserve its significance visually, in a flame which quickly flickers out. It is clear that this is not a scene of Christian Armageddon in which the world is consumed in fire. Quite the opposite occurs. Darkness consumes the world—a first step to the way the universe may end according to recent discoveries in science.

Happy were those which dwelt within the eye
Of the volcanoes, and their mountain-torch;
A fearful hope was all the world contained;
Forests were set on fire -but hour by hour
They fell and faded -and the crackling trunks
Extinguished with a crash -and all was black. (Byron 1970, 272)

Though fire destroys much of Earth, it is eventually extinguished. In Byron, Christian Armageddon appears to occur, through a worldwide fire, but is rebuked as it is extinguished. Byron's poem has a parallel in H.P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow Out of Time*, in which man is shown the concept of ultimate reality. In this ultimate reality, entire universes are shown to collapse and die, and the Earth, along with all the universe—loses all light and warmth. Lovecraft thereby intensifies Byron's foreboding.

In *The Shadow Out of Time*, those creatures who populate the planet after humankind burrow to the earth's core for warmth before all heat is finally extinguished. In Lovecraft, Byron's "pall of a past

¹²See any number of articles by astrophysicist Lawrence M. Krauss, or Glenn D. Starkman One particular article, "The Fate of Life in the Universe," is especially illuminating. In *Scientific American*. November 2002: 50-57

world” is the pall of a past universe. In the novella, an amnesiac professor named Alfred Peaslee suddenly regains his memory. He remembers that beings outside of his realm of perception had once taken him on a tour of the universe, echoing the earlier narrative structures of Byron and Twain. He learns that “after man there would be the mighty beetle civilization,” and then there would be “races after them, clinging pathetically to the cold planet and burrowing to its horror-filled core, before the utter end.” (Lovecraft 2008, 576) The planet and all the stars disappear into cold space, the heat of their cores evaporating, life forms searching for heat even though it is utterly futile. “If that abyss and what I held were real, there is no hope,” Peaslee states. (Lovecraft 2008, 605) Other creatures, all thinking they are the central point of all creation attempt to do what the humans in Byron’s “Darkness”—seek the life sustaining quality of heat as far as it exists. Yet, they are eventually killed when all life sustaining properties evaporate. This glimpse into ultimate reality induces a maddening realization—that all is determined. Even the races that usurp the planet after man has been extinguished will die with the planet. As Lovecraft puts it:

And pretty soon the solar system will play out, and nobody in the cosmos will know that there has been any earth or human race or Brahmins or Moslems or Christians or Shintoists or such. . . dust to dust . . .and the ironic laughter of any entity which may happen to be watching the universe from outside . . . ho hum! (Joshi 2010, 42)¹³

To Lovecraft, the cosmos is indifferent, and the concerns of any and all religions are rendered moot, since religions all place man as central to the cosmos in some manner. Lovecraft even considers the possibility of an entity looking on from outside, whether god or extraterrestrial. But this is rhetorical. He personifies entities with cold, ironic laughter in order to declare a God who intervenes in human affairs absurd. It is clear he did not believe in any gods, and the insignificance of man necessitates this belief. Not only the Earth perishes, but so too does the solar system. If that is the case, it renders absurd the idea that the universe would correspond to the paltry sectarian tribes of man—Christians, Moslems, Shintoists, et cetera. Byron’s poem is congruent with such an idea, and ends with the essential nature of the universe itself as darkness and stagnation. It also indicates the dependence of the earth on external spheres which also perish. Not only is the Earth gone, but there also go the natural forces which conduct the Earth:

The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,
The Moon, their mistress, had expired before;
The winds were withered in the stagnant air,
And the clouds perished! Darkness had no need
Of aid from them -She was the Universe! (Byron 1970, 273)

Byron makes absolutely clear the idea that the Universe itself is darkness, and needs no physical compounds to impose darkness on it. Far from a place fit for humans, the universe lack’s action, purpose, being, or substance. The Earth, far from being independent, relies on other bodies for its functions. Once those disappear so too do the functions and processes of Earth.

¹³In order to best present Lovecraft’s ideas in their most concise manner, this essay relies primarily on S.T. Joshi’s presentation of his most prominent atheistic writings rather than relying on the Selected Letters as compiled by August Derleth. Derleth did an admirable job of preserving his writings, but Joshi, considered the leading authority on Lovecraft, has done much to preserve the integrity of Lovecraft’s ideas while providing excellent insight into his thought.

Lovecraft's *The Shadow Out of Time* ends similarly, not just with the planet's death but with a final, irrevocable instance of blackness. When Peaslee goes to discover the origin of his dreams, he encounters a chasm which also reveals this monstrous truth to him. He sees the chasm's "edge," leaps "frenziedly with every ounce of strength" he possesses, and is "instantly engulfed in a pandaeoniae vortex of loathsome sound and utter, materially tangible blackness." (Lovecraft 2008, 605) The phrase "materially tangible" is the key to Lovecraft's viewpoint. Peaselee witnesses an empirically demonstrable instance of the void of existence, which reflects the indifference of the universe. To preserve his narrative of the unveiling of ultimate reality, Lovecraft evokes something that seems ineffable, yet horribly and tangibly felt through empirical discovery.

H.P. Lovecraft's ultimate reality is Satanic in its application. The most famous and oft quoted of Lovecraft's sentiments is his insistence that the human mind cannot comprehend ultimate reality, as indicated in "The Call of Cthulhu." He states that "the most merciful thing in the world" is "the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents." Humanity lives on a "placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity," and "it was not meant that we should voyage far." (Lovecraft 2008, 201) Lovecraft's narrator makes the claim that mankind cannot truly handle this information, and that deterministic science will at least allow a peek into the true nature of things. The result is a horribly empty "naturalistic cosmos." (Price 1991, 34) Since man has been brought up and still continues to understand his rightful place in the universe as central, this cosmos is anathema to all religion and even humanism and Enlightenment values. As Lovecraft's narrator puts it:

Some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (Lovecraft 2008, 201)

Lovecraft refers to the maddening and thoroughly destabilizing notion that the universe was not created with man in mind. This terrifying vision of reality harkens to Otto's *mysterium horrendum*, the feeling of something terrible in an ancient, animistic sense, to most sensibilities "older than God," (Lovecraft 2008, 70) Lovecraft's use of the *horrendum* is not supernatural, however. The *mysterium horrendum* is instead the mechanistic universe, empty of gods. It only appears supernatural because of the way humans perceive reality. It appears non-rational to the believer simply because humans cannot understand the mechanistic universe.

H.P. Lovecraft employs the *mysterium horrendum* in order to represent ultimate reality as contrary to Christian thought. To do this, Lovecraft introduces demonic forces in his stories, then reveals them to be scientifically explicable, though no less terrifying. They appear to be what Otto called "the mysterious in gross form," physical manifestations of that which appears inexplicable. (Lovecraft 2008, 82) Specifically, Lovecraft makes a distinct connection between the witch-laden mythology of his background and new scientific discoveries in his "Dreams in the Witch House." The story integrates the witch cult mythology of Rhode Island and New England while also containing non Euclidean geometry and Einsteinian principles. Though laden with mythology, it presents an affirmation of the scientific, while still employing Satanic imagery. Like Twain's Satan in *The Mysterious Stranger* manuscripts, Lovecraft describes the true nature of the universe through a force perceived as evil. In both cases, the universe is a yawning cosmic void. In "The Dreams in the Witch House," he establishes a link between Satanic forces and an unknown reality which comprises the universe. This link is an old woman, revealed not to be a witch of legend—merely someone with access

to inter-dimensional realities. The protagonist, Walter Gilman, is intrigued by the fact that an arcane peasant was able to unearth discoveries beyond that of contemporary science:

Gilman could not have told what he expected to find there, but he knew he wanted to be in the building where some circumstance had more or less suddenly given a mediocre old woman of the Seventeenth Century an insight into mathematical depths perhaps beyond the utmost modern delvings of Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein, and de Sitter. (Lovecraft 2008, 359)

The old woman does not possess any folk knowledge that transcends modern science. Rather, there is a materialist explanation for the folk tales in which she opened the gate to other, outer realms. There is clearly an awe-full dimension to what Gilman witnesses, reflected in bizarre extra-dimensional space and otherworldly music. As “the screaming twilight abysses” flash before him, and as he finds himself trapped in the “formless grasp of the iridescent bubble-congeries,” he encounters a “small, kaleidoscopic polyhedron.” (359) All through this “churning void” there is a “heightening and acceleration of the vague tonal pattern” which seems to “foreshadow some unutterable and unendurable climax.” (359) Such a descent through Gilman's dream-life does not result in a supernatural hell. Rather, it results in a geometric physical space, another dimension. The reality is clearly otherworldly, but not supernatural—only explicable through material means, though beyond human perception. However, this takes on the dimension of an evil Satanic force, encapsulated by the ritual of *Walpurgisnacht*. But they are limited to explicable phenomena, such as resounding cosmic music. Gilman hears this strange music, which does much more than simply reverberate in his eardrums:

Gilman seemed to know what was coming, the monstrous burst of Walpurgis-rhythm in whose cosmic timbre would be concentrated all the primal, ultimate space-time seethings which lie behind the massed spheres of matter and sometimes break forth in measured reverberations that penetrate faintly to every layer of entity and give hideous significance throughout the worlds to certain dreaded periods. (359)

The Walpurgis rhythm pulses with these primal and ultimate “space time seethings”, which are essentially Satanic by their very association with *Walpurgisnacht*. These reverberations are constants within the universe, brought about by the old woman's incantations. The so-called “evil” music is simply the awe-full power of the cosmos experienced through human ears. These vibrations are constants—yet give the sense of malice or evil behind the otherwise neutral “massed spheres” of the perceptible material world. This is how Gilman's dream reveals the “Satanic” powers of the universe—the universe is shown to be older, stranger and more chaotic than the Christian conceptions imposed upon it. As Lovecraft presents a Satanic force as materially explicable, he strips away a layer from humanity's conception of the universe.

In *At the Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft continues this pattern, and slowly strips away the layers of man's significance, to the point where all of man's traditional theological presuppositions are eliminated. In the novella, William Dyer accompanies his fellow researcher Danforth to the great mountains of Antarctica. All reach a zenith higher than Mt. Everest. The two explorers discover an ancient city populated by ancient aliens, long preceding the evolution of man, and are chased from its depths by a nameless entity. After escaping, Danforth goes mad and begins speaking in tongues after glimpsing something. The final horror is “a mirage.” It is “not anything connected with[. . .]those echoing, vaporous, wormily honeycombed mountains of madness.” (Lovecraft 2008, 502-503) Rather,

it is a “single, fantastic demoniac glimpse, among the churning zenith clouds, of what lay back of those other violet westward mountains which the Old Ones had shunned and feared.” (502-503) This single glimpse is an example of the the *mysterium horrendum*. It is a power evoked through a feeling of awe at something supposedly ineffable, though perceived through material indicators. The zenith clouds mask what is beyond, seemingly intangible. In this case, the *horrendum* lays bare the real elements of the universe that Lovecraft declares are the products of real inquiry. The religious experience of the non-rational becomes visible, but represented within the physical realm, and given a location. The revelation of the *horrendum* comes only after the experience of the explicable results of its power. In Lovecraft's view, the *horrendum* must have material perceptors to be real.

Therefore, when material perceptors decay and die, the idea of the *horrendum* disappears. This is precisely why Lovecraft believes in the eventual dissolution of theological ideas—and all ideas. Ideas themselves will disappear, as he argues that they have no essential nature that exists apart from physical matter. When human minds disappear, so too will the ideas contained in them. In this way, Lovecraft echoes the sentiments of Twain's Satan, remarking on the final uselessness of human influence. Lovecraft's opinion on the matter is best represented through one of his letters:

Idealism and Materialism! Illusion and Truth! Together they will go down into the darkness when men shall have ceased to be when beneath the last flickering beams of a dying sun shall perish utterly the last vestige of organic life on our tiny grain of cosmic dust. And upon the black planets that reel devilishly about a black sun shall the name of man be forgotten. Nor shall the stars sing his fame as they pierce the aether with cruel needles of apple light. (Joshi 2010, 55)

Lovecraft makes this daring statement by honestly examining the fate of all human thought and experience cast against the cosmos. Philosophy, a human endeavor, is of necessity not an eternal concept to Lovecraft. Once there are no minds to perceive it, there will be no philosophy. Hence, Lovecraft leaves no room for any special pleading for any specific philosophy, or idea to take precedence over another as eternal. The stars have no ideas, and have no concept of man, so they obviously will not sing man a final eulogy. Additionally, creatures throughout the far stars have philosophies according to their own dicta, and perhaps think themselves the center of the universe. By all accounts, the manufactured significance of any of these creatures has no bearing beyond the survival of its respective race.

The final single, demoniac glimpse in *At The Mountains Of Madness* illustrates this point of view. Lovecraft removes the natural limitations of the mind that render man unable to understand infinity. When man realizes that his specific world views do not correspond to infinity, he is unable to bear the terrible truth. Lovecraft removes the last layer of illusion of man's significance through representing a more realistic version of what was deemed Satanic. As he said of his own personal attitude: “I can at last concede willingly that the wishes, hopes and values of humanity are matters of total indifference to the blind cosmic mechanism.” (Joshi 2010, 7) The horror author evokes the real cosmic indifference of the world and the universe to humans and human life by employing what is seen as otherworldly and supernatural forces by the “rabble.”¹⁴ In Lovecraft's mind, most religious thought,

¹⁴Lovecraft continues—“It is the momentary destiny of that evanescent ephemera called “man” to seek as much surcease as he can from the dulness of life; to do what he can to mould his oft-erring race to the manifest course of Nature, and to await the end prepared for him by the mighty elements which mould not only his own transitory tribe, but all the eternal and unfathomed recesses of existence that yawn about him, even beyond the vision of his excited and disordered fancy. Man

especially Christianity is “built upon the relation of the Deity with the one crawling atom we call man.” Once this is removed, it is clear that indifference reigns, and “no theologian can sustain his religion unless he can prove that this speck in infinity is the central point of all creation.” (Joshi 2010, 29) Lovecraft deposes humanity of this central status through his narratives. This renders Manichaeism moot, and by extension renders Satan moot. For Lovecraft, natural cosmic explanations necessarily destroy much of the original notions of these forces of good and evil:

[...] a mere knowledge of the approximate dimensions of the visible universe is enough to destroy forever the notion of a personal Godhead whose whole care is expended upon puny mankind, and whose only genuine and original Messiah was dispatched to save the insignificant vermin, or men, who inhabit this one relatively microscopic globe. (Joshi 2010, 28029)

In this way, Lovecraft gives “evil” a name, “indifference,” while he evokes the negatively numinous. The *horrendum* and this cosmic emptiness are one and the same. Rudolf Otto employed a sense of the cosmic universe as Indifferent, or at least beyond man's faculty of reason. H.P. Lovecraft's fiction relies on this concept, but there is one key difference in approach between the theologian and the horror author. Lovecraft's antagonism towards the notion that God intervenes in human affairs—to the extent that He sent a Messiah—explains this difference. Lovecraft managed to square his cosmic view with the scientific discoveries of his day and thus rendered the *horrendum* as a Satanic force, but—in Friederich Nietzsche's terms—“beyond good and evil.” Otto attempted to reconcile the *mysterium* with Christianity, but did not fully explore the *horrendum*.

Rudolf Otto approaches an analysis of the *horrendum* when he examines the notion of God in Martin Luther and Jakob Böhme: In their writings, Otto finds an “Indifferent,” in which is to be found “the potentiality for evil as well as for good, and therewith the possibility of the dual nature of deity itself.” (Otto 1958, 106) His analysis seems to agree with the contention that the *mysterium* is beyond human comprehension. Therefore any attempt to discern its purpose is rendered futile. Otto himself states:

The truly mysterious object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently wholly other, whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own. (Otto 1958, 28)

If this “wholly other” is beyond apprehension and comprehension, the ability to discern its purpose is by definition impossible. As Otto indicates, this *mysterium* is non-rational, and its existence incommensurable with that of humanity. If that is the case, no amount of speculation as to the real character or purpose of this Being can be accurate, perceivers with “irremovable limits” will perceive it. If this is the case, then arriving at the conclusion of the existence of a God with a vested interest in humanity—through rational human means—is erroneous. Otto has a similar attitude toward Satan—a force of extreme malice and power without recourse to the whims of man. When Otto attempts to analyze Lucifer from the perspective of the *mysterium* as incommensurable with humanity, applying his earlier analysis of Luther and Böhme, he reaches the conclusion that Lucifer is a “negative” version

knows nothing. Man probably is nothing. But let the poor creatures do what they can to avoid cope conflict with destiny.” From “The Nature of God,” in *Against Religion*, pg. 22.

of the awe-inducing power of the *mysterium*: “a horror that is in some sort numinous,” and that its object is “negatively numinous. (Otto 1958, 106) In other words, Lucifer is the fury and destructive force that represents the clearly awe-full power of the “wholly other.” It is clear that Otto also does not believe that the figure of Satan explains this intensity, as he states that “the rationalism of the myth of the fallen angel does not render satisfactorily the horror of Satan and of the depths of Satan.” (106) Otto believes that the rational and fleshly version of Satan only scratches the surface of the *horrendum*. In this way, his opinion is similar to Shelley's, in that a more powerful abstract version of Satan better explains the demonic dread of Satan's presence. He further remarks that it “should be the subject of a special inquiry.” (106) However, Otto does not continue this inquiry into Lucifer, despite its apparent importance to him. It is only when he mentions the idea of the “dread” of such an entity as incommensurable with humanity that he comes close to acknowledging his own request for a special inquiry. It is this inquiry that H.P. Lovecraft explores by evoking the Indifferent power of the cosmos. However, despite the importance of Rudolf Otto's thought to H.P. Lovecraft—and Lovecraft representing the *horrendum* in his work—one single, fundamental difference remains between the two figures.

In his analysis of the under explored notion of the *mysterium horrendum*, Dr. Simon Podmore provides a thorough account of how Otto explains the concept of dread of the ultimate. In doing so, he refers to Otto's chapter on Martin Luther, and remarks that Luther's theology “can be described as an attempt to flee from Wrath to grace.” (Podmore 2011) Essentially, this means that Luther, viewing the horrible wrath and negative power of the *tremendum*, finds solace in the “redemptive power of love,” the positive power. (Podmore 2011) If one applies this dialectic to Otto, it seems that Otto falls prey to the same blunder. Throughout *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto attempts to examine the *mysterium tremendum* in various contexts, and inevitably reaches an analysis of its effect in early and modern Christianity. Otto clearly indicates the non-rational “wholly other” is indifferent to humanity's concerns, explaining God's essence as “hidden away from all reason,” and “knows no measure, law or aim.” (Otto 1958, 101) However, he ends up falling back on a notion which relies entirely on a God with a specific aim, that which Lovecraft thought was ridiculous given the place of man in the cosmos. A difficulty arises when he summarizes his analysis of the *mysterium*, and its relation to Christ. Specifically, this problem occurs when Otto claims that the “suffering of Job,” is that which reflects the awful power of the “transcendent mysteriousness and beyondness of God.” (Otto 1958, 120) Otto argues that the “Cross of Christ,” the “monogram of the eternal mystery,” is the completion of that suffering.” (120)¹⁵ While it is still possible to invoke the sheer power of the non-rational presence of God without reference to a perceptible intervening power, the sacrifice of Jesus is an entirely different matter. If Jesus is the physical representation of the non-rational terror of suffering at God's behest, his sacrifice is for the benefit of humanity. It then follows that this overwhelming power exists for the retribution of a set of creatures set on a small planet in the midst of an infinite void. This sort of logic is precisely what Lovecraft thought to be fatuous. This thought process would imply the existence of an intervening God, with humanity as its central project. In Lovecraft's mind, the continual revelations and discoveries of science, presuppositions like this one appear demonstrably false. Otto's attempt at reconciliation amounts to—as Lovecraft would put it—fleeing into the “new dark age” without exploring the *mysterium* fully. Furthermore, while Otto explores fully the notion of the *mysterium tremendum* in *The Idea of the Holy*—in a thorough analysis to which the majority of the work is devoted, he relegates the *horrendum* to a single footnote. (Otto 1958, 106) Lovecraft, however,

¹⁵ A further difficulty arises as it is still within the realm of humans—the realm of the rational—to decide that Christ's sacrifice is the fleshly representation of the horror of suffering.

explores the possibilities of the *horrendum*, but in a naturalistic setting. As Dr. Simon Podmore indicates, “the natural world provides an analogy for divine wrath.” (Podmore 2011) If the entire universe is purposeless, there is no real wrath proper—but that is precisely the point. The revelation that there is no wrath, or no God—no heaven or hell—is a revelation that Nietzsche sought as a means of liberation for the human race. This Satanic liberation is brought forth in the figure of Lucifer, but it is only brought forth in its total and most terrifying form—in all of creation. In Lovecraft, all creation is hostile to the very idea of God as interpreted by humans. The true nature of God is eternal emptiness. The *mysterium horrendum* becomes unhooked from its theological underpinnings, and wanders alone in what Mark Twain called “empty eternities” that comprise the true nature of life.

In H.P. Lovecraft's “The Outsider,” cosmic language is used to evoke this *horrendum*, which when fully revealed, obliterates the centrality of man. “In one cataclysmic second of cosmic nightmarishness and hellish accident,” there crashes down upon the narrator's mind “a single fleeting avalanche of soul-annihilating memory.” (Lovecraft 2008, 146) Here, Lovecraft's narrator happens upon a pane of polished glass that reveals his true nature, that of a decrepit corpse. In one instant, as is implied by the passage, all his preconceived notions about his own origins and existence are eviscerated by simple observation. The reflection of the narrator's face in the polished glass as a “leering, abhorrent travesty on the human shape” indicates a reality that is too terrible to bear, but also undeniable. (146) No manner of theological surmising can possibly ameliorate what has been witnessed. When confronted with an internal or external apocalypse, man either goes mad, dies, or eliminates from his mind said terror.¹⁶ In either case, man is far too obsessed with his preconceived notions of his own centrality—made in the image of God—that when the truth of his natural decay is revealed, madness, death, or denial occurs. The *horrendum* is simply too much to bear. Other “Satanic” writers display the *horrendum* similarly, as indifferent and entirely unresponsive to man's wishes and concerns. Charles Baudelaire offers a striking illustration of this indifference.

Charles Baudelaire—the decadent author whose illustration of Satan is a destructor of superstition—evokes the *horrendum* in a story from *Paris Spleen*, “The Fool and the Venus.” A man beckons the statue of Venus, begging her to show him the nature of beauty, and to grant him access to this knowledge. Yet, the goddess remains stolid and entirely aloof: “the implacable Venus gazed into the distance with her eyes of marble, seeing who knows what.” (Baudelaire 1991, 343) In this sense, the concept of beauty—an abstraction that is entirely outside of man's perception—does not give man the benefit of reciprocity. This is man's unfortunate bid to the universe, for it refuses to grant significance to him, and refuses to care about his fate and his time spent on Earth. The external void only returns a steely, glaring gaze. Venus, a symbol of beauty, remains unattainable. Another story in *Paris Spleen*, “To Each his Own Chimera,” describes a similar instance of indifference. Each has a chimera attached to his head, gnawing down on him as he walks across a desolate wasteland. The speaker attempts to see why the men continue on with their Chimeras, but is quickly overcome with a greater truth:

And for a few moments I was determined to understand the mystery. But soon an irresistible Indifference beset me, and I became more hopelessly oppressed than they themselves had been by the crushing Chimeras. (343)

¹⁶Lovecraft's narrator remarks, “in the supreme horror of that second I forgot what had horrified me, and the burst of black memory vanished in a chaos of echoing images.” “The Outsider,” pg. 146.

The word “Indifference” is capitalized, indicating that Baudelaire seeks to elevate indifference to Godlike status, or something which reigns with similar dominion. He is then consumed with “the resigned expression of those condemned to hope forever.” This resigned expression is clearly juxtaposed against those who believe in Providence or some sort of salvation for mankind, which does not exist. Humans will be compelled to feel this hope in perpetuity, despite the revelation that it is meaningless. No matter the effort, the attempt to understand the universe beyond human perception, especially if seeking out data in humanity's favor—is rendered a futile task. As Baudelaire says, “the study of beauty is a duel in which the artist cries out in terror before being conquered.” (343) Baudelaire expresses man's insignificance in comparison to this abstract concept of beauty in much the same way that Lovecraft does. He describes a power above man that is clearly indifferent to the interests of humanity. Baudelaire invokes what is normally considered beneficent, “beauty” and declares it a force which conquers its pursuer. Similarly, Lovecraft invokes scientific curiosity, which results in the destruction of the knowledge seeker. Terror is the result of this confrontation in all cases.

H.P. Lovecraft clearly indicates that through a skeptical outlook, one cannot assert that humans are specifically suited to the Earth or if they are—in Nietzsche's words—the result of some “special purpose or will or end.” (Nietzsche 1954, 500) Lovecraft acknowledges that he cannot prove anything beyond the spectrum of his own experience, which is why he professes his own ignorance and lack of significance—and the necessity to understand that ignorance and insignificance. All hope for existence beyond any limited perception is a dream at best. It is fair to say that Percy Shelley began this Copernican revolution in literature that produced this ultimate conclusion. Lord Byron aided in the spread of the “Satanic” narrative, and Mark Twain cemented Lucifer as a truth teller who dispelled all notions of heaven and hell. Lovecraft is simply a more potent nail in the coffin. As Lovecraft himself makes it clear, thinkers before him have already rendered spiritual ideas moot:

Acute thinkers began to pause and ask themselves how real the commonly assigned values and motives might be; and thence how much actual validity the existing emotional attitudes and social institutions might possess.[. . .]After the analysis and shakeup it became pretty clear that the moving impulses of mankind, their relation to the basic structure of the universe, and their manner of operation under various sets of conditions, are far, infinitely far from what orthodox religion and conventional sentimentality had assumed. (Joshi 2010, 138)

Shelley certainly questioned the “commonly assigned values” of an omni-benevolent God. Byron predicted a malevolent end to the universe which mercilessly ended the human race—clearly a shift in attitude to man's relation to the structure of the universe. Mark Twain most definitely exemplifies the quality of declaring that the universe is infinitely far from orthodoxy—as he declares that all life is an illusion and an accident. Acknowledging this, Lovecraft recognized the selfishness of man's desires, goals and place in the universe as consistent with those of the lower animal—his place in the cosmos no different or more special. Along with the works of the “acute thinkers,” Lovecraft specifically mentions Twain's “What is Man?” as a means to explain man's selfish desires, and that self-sacrifice is neither to be praised nor understood as a real or effective practice in reflecting the reality of existence. He stated it was “materialistic because it recognized man's innate selfishness.” (138) Whether materialism is a Satanic conceit is a much broader question, but it certainly is viewed at the very least as impious—taking into consideration the earlier attacks on Shelley and Byron for “Satanism.” But Twain's “What is Man” offers more than just a recognition of man's innate selfishness. It calls for the removal of the illusion that the human race and the world are products of the Divine:

It is the strangest thing, that the world is not full of books that scoff at the pitiful world, and the useless universe and the vile and contemptible human race—books that laugh at the whole paltry scheme and deride it. (Twain 2010, 34-35)¹⁷

That the human race is vile and contemptible, and pitiful does not necessarily make Twain's statement antithetical to some subsets of Christian doctrine. However, the very idea that the human race is anything other than the product of the Divine is certainly adversarial to the central tenet of Christian thought. The whole paltry scheme of the useless universe—in Twain's mind—deserves to be mocked and scoffed at in print. Twain and his characterization of Satan offer the same sentiments. In *Letters From the Earth*, his Satan speaks truths about the universe and God as a means to describe and shift man's place away from his supposed centrality in the cosmos. Twain is mostly dismissive of the idea that the human race is specifically selected as the central point of all creation. However, another use of the Satanic narrative is put in play by Shelley and Byron—and to a greater extent, Lovecraft—that achieves these same ends.

Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Howard Phillips Lovecraft refer to another adversarial notion that necessarily denies the tenet of humans as specially created by God. This is the eternal return, an idea popularized by Friederich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's "eternal return" harkens back to a conception predating Christianity, but is rendered in modern terms. At first glance, the notion of the eternal return seems a mystical idea. But it at least casts itself against the theistic notion of creation for a special purpose, and hence is antithetical to Christianity.¹⁸ Byron also makes use of this concept, and so does Twain, if only by implication. Shelley speaks of the eternal return as the only real conclusion to be drawn from the lack of knowledge of the origin of the soul. As previously indicated, Byron refers to the eternal return as the eternal struggle between God and Lucifer. They both, however, reject the notion of an afterlife outright.¹⁹ Shelley's argument is best expressed in a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener:

“Might there not have been a prior state of existence? Might not we have been friends there? The creation of the soul at birth is a thing I do not like. Where we have no premises, we can therefore draw no conclusions.” (Shelley 1964, 203)

Shelley makes it clear that the origin of life is inexplicable, and that the idea of the soul as beginning with the birth of a person is absurd simply because there is no way to measure such an entity. There are no premises beyond the testimony of those who already believe. This is essentially an argument against creation by a God, and in favor of a different concept of eternity. Shelley speaks of the eternal return as a possible replacement for the idea of God—as eternity. Similarly, Twain implies that there is no

¹⁷Lovecraft has helped bring some of the books to which Twain refers into being, not necessarily conforming to all of Twain's ideas.

¹⁸Shelley eloquently describes this difference between eternity and the Christian afterlife. When he speaks of eternity, he warns his friend to not misinterpret his words. “Do not think I am going to insinuate Christianity, though I think it is as likely a thing as that you should. I annihilate God, you destroy the Devil: and then we make a Heaven entirely to our own mind.” Shelley, “Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener” in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Vol 1: Shelley in England*. Ed. F.L. Jones, 1964, pg. 205.

¹⁹If there be any doubt as to whether or not Byron—while using the figure of Satan to illustrate his act of literary rebellion—did not literally believe in an afterlife, his letters provide sufficient examples. As he stated in one of his letters: “I will have nothing to do with your immortality; we are miserable enough in this life, without the absurdity of speculating upon another. If men are to live, why die at all? and if they die, why disturb the sweet and sound sleep that 'knows no waking?’” Byron's letter's to Francis Hodgson, Newstead Abbey, Sept. 3, 1811. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, pg. 88.

beginning or end or God or Devil, but an idea of impermeable thought in dream life. Lovecraft does not believe in the reality of such a proposition, but instead uses the concept of eternity to regard causation by a deity as improbable and a mere tautology:

As to the origin of a supposed deity—if one always existed and always will exist, how can he be developing creation from one definite state to another? Nothing but a cycle is in any case conceivable—a circle or an infinite rearrangement, if that be a tenable thought. Nietzsche saw this when he spoke of the *ewigen widerkunft*. In absolute eternity there is neither starting point nor destination. (Joshi 2010, 23)

Lovecraft essentially makes a rhetorical case for an eternal state of being rather than for an omnipotent creator. Much as Shelley employed Manichaeism as the most honest way of explaining the existence of God, Lovecraft posits that eternity cannot account for a creation. Hence, by exploring what would prove the existence of a creator God, Lovecraft reaches the conclusion that such a God could not exist. This absolute eternity to which Lovecraft refers has no need of the properties of a Creator, and cannot be a God which intervenes in human affairs. Even while entertaining the prospect of an eternity beyond material existence, Lovecraft argues for this “Satanic” concept of the cosmos. In this view, if there are forces that govern man's existence in the realm of the eternal, they cannot be gods that view humanity with any warmer emotion than total indifference.

The so-called Satanic school of literature has more forms than Robert Southey would like to have imagined, and has evolved into a far greater challenge to Christian thought than the rebelliousness of the Romantics. With the advent of authors like H.P. Lovecraft, the Satanic narrative became one in which the materialistic universe was designated as truth, that no gods exist apart from human illusion, imagination, or misinterpretation of the universe as a whole. Mark Twain used Satan as a figure who opened up the “vast vistas of reality,” of which Lovecraft would later speak, and removed man from his supposed special place in the universe. Lovecraft evoked a “Satanic” force that flew in the face of religious mythology. Eventually, this “Satanic” school found its way back into its supposed original context, in which the adversaries of religion were called atheists, and later designated as Satanists. (Wittreich 1968, 817) Lovecraft introduced a Satanic force explicable through a materialistic universe, returning the Satanic narrative to a form which cast itself as against Christianity in an adversarial fashion. But this time, it did so with science and the modern world on its side.

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