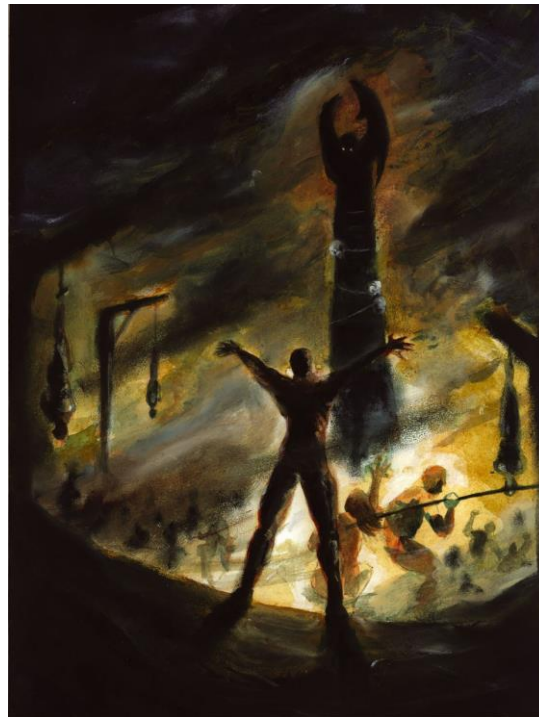


# 'Haunted Space': Non-Representational Encounters in *Heart of Darkness* and H. P. Lovecraft

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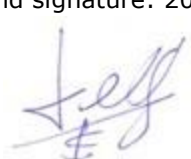
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## Abstract

This MA thesis will explore the narrators of *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Call of Cthulhu* by H. P. Lovecraft and examine how they relate to the space beyond their perception. It will focus on the trouble they have representing what they cannot perceive, and the encounters they have in that space after venturing into it. Following non-representational theory, this thesis will follow J. D. Dewsbury's notion of the "haunted space" in order to understand the narrators of these novels and how they interact with what lies beyond their perception and representation.

Keywords: non-representational theory, Conrad, Lovecraft, mystery, horror

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## Introduction

James Kneale's 2006 article "From beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the place of horror" discusses H. P. Lovecraft and his works, and very briefly mentions something that this thesis will explore in great detail. It mentions Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and how this work of literature, like many works by Lovecraft, uses indeterminate descriptive words, such as calling certain tribal religious rites "unspeakable" (Conrad, quoted in Kneale, 107), which is an acknowledgement of not being able to describe them. Kneale's article also briefly mentions a connection between this use of indeterminacy and non-representational theory (107), but then returns its attention to Lovecraft's work and omits any comparative discussion. This thesis, however, aims to explore indeterminacy and non-representational theory in both *Heart of Darkness* and Lovecraft's works.

Lovecraft, though regarded by Kneale as "arguably the most significant horror author of the 20th century" (108), appears less frequently in academic discussion than a figure like Conrad, whose work has achieved canonical status. Lovecraft was relatively unknown during his life, often being regarded as an outsider until he gained recognition from a new readership a few decades later (Kneale, 109). This thesis will pursue this idea of a similarity in narrative strategy between a canonical author and an author of smaller stature and follow up on the trail that was so briefly started in Kneale's article.

The unspeakable or the ineffable are concepts that started to be explored in the 1990s when non-representational theory became increasingly established by scholars such as J. D. Dewsbury and Gavin J. Andrews, who have written important theoretical works that explore the distance between a person and the parts of the world beyond their perception. These theories and ideas will serve as possible analogies that can help us understand these works better, as this thesis will show. A potential problem here is that these ideas have come dozens of years after the publication of Conrad and Lovecraft's works, which means that these authors could not possibly have been influenced by this theory. My research question is this: how does non-representational (affect) theory help readers

understand encounters with the indescribable in *Heart of Darkness*, and how does this novel compare to the works of H. P. Lovecraft in this sense?

This thesis will explore the relationship between a person and that which cannot be represented. The theoretical framework that will be used is called non-representational theory. J. D. Dewsbury's article "Witnessing Space" will serve as a fundamental starting point, as it explains the act of witnessing and what the different problems of witnessing are. He describes the problems of empiricism and questions the idea that sensory experience is the only way of gaining a complete understanding of the world (1911), and suggests a model of observing that is based on the relations between the individual and the other entity. Dewsbury's complex ideas will be explained in more detail in the next chapter and will serve as a building block for this thesis.

The area beyond one's immediate sensory experience is something that Dewsbury calls "haunted space" (1915), which suggests that there is something inherently horrific there. This thesis will also examine how the idea of the unrepresentable relates to the presence of horror in the works of Conrad and Lovecraft, and how horror may surface from the inability of the characters to represent the unrepresentable.

This thesis will try to uncover what non-representational theory may offer in reading this contradictory phenomenon in these novels. The goal is to make clear how this theory sees perception, its limitations, and the idea of the encounter, and to then apply it to our primary texts. It will offer a framework of theory concerning the relationship between external space, internal sensory experience, and the inaccessible nature of external space, in order to make clear what the primary texts do with the space between the self and the indescribable.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is commonly placed in the context of postcolonial literature (R. Radhakrishnan, 19) and is often researched for the ways in which it represents societies and tribes from different parts of the world. However, it seems that there may be another layer to this novel that has not been given as much attention. Kneale's article, as stated above,



briefly mentioned *Heart of Darkness* and illustrates that there is an attempt to represent something that is going on in a distant tribal space, but that truth remains inaccessible (107). This thesis employs Kneale's brief insight as a starting point for further exploration of the use of the distance between a narrator and the unrepresentable.

H. P. Lovecraft, a leading figure in horror fiction from the early twentieth century, has been researched for his signature methods of evoking a sense of horror out of fantastical elements; he places all of humanity in a context of external forces which are not directly experienced, and evoke horror on close contact if a daring explorer were to venture far enough towards it (Houellebecq, 10). Lovecraft's stories *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Call of Cthulhu*, both regarded by Houellebecq as part of his key works (7), share the premise of an explorer who was curious about the mystery of these inexplicable monsters and chased clues to remote parts of the world in order to unearth these mysteries. This thesis will present how these works align with non-representational theory by focusing on the limitations of the narrators' abilities to represent what is found in the space beyond their immediate perception.

Following up on Kneale's notion and the theory laid out by Dewsbury and other non-representationalists, this thesis will explore Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and see how a sense of the unspeakable horror plays out in the novel. It will then explore these same ideas in H. P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Call of Cthulhu*. The last step is to then compare and contrast how these elements work for these different writers, and see how Conrad and Lovecraft utilise these elements of horror and perception, noting where and how they converge and diverge in their approaches.

## Chapter 1: Non-Representational Theory

Before this chapter jumps into non-representational theory and how it works, it must be addressed how a more traditional reading of works like *Heart of Darkness* is done, which is usually within the context of postcolonialism and orientalism. For example, Edward Said has cited Conrad as an important figure for postcolonial literature (quoted in R. Radhakrishnan, 19). Conrad has been read many times in this context. Laura Chrisman's book *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism*, for example, has a chapter dedicated to *Heart of Darkness* and discusses the way this novel represents the spaces of the city of the coloniser and the area of the colonised.

This traditional context is one that focuses on the representation of these different parties, and how this representation is formed. Said mentions that Conrad writes with an “uncompromising Eurocentric vision” (quoted in R. Radhakrishnan, 17), which is the perspective from which the narrative is told, and following Said's logic, Radhakrishnan points out that this school of thought also makes a case for the formation of identity over the course of the narrative. “Identities, entities, and subjects are constituted in, by, and through narration” (Radhakrishnan, 59). This means that there is a point of view from which the narrative is told, and the narrative will end up shaping how certain points are represented. In other words, there is no preconceived and fixed idea of the world beyond what is offered in the narrative: there is only the narrator's perspective, and this perspective will shape and determine the representation of what is described, and that will determine the identities of what is represented in the novel. The idea is that all the subjects are formed through some kind of representation that is formed by the perspective that is given in the novel.

However, *Heart of Darkness* takes a step beyond this idea of representation turning into identity: there is a focus on certain parts of the world that cannot be represented. If representation is impossible, then the formation of identity is also problematised. *Heart of Darkness* has been researched for the instability of its boundaries: Laura Chrisman talks about how the boundaries

between coloniser and colonised in *Heart of Darkness* are often blurred (Chrisman, 24-25), which is also what Edward Said's analysis suggests according to Radhakrishnan (60). This instability is an interesting starting point for this thesis: *Heart of Darkness* starts with the representation of the coloniser and the colonised, but ends up distorting and blurring their boundaries in the narrative. This novel also insists that there is something indeterminable about the encountered otherness: it cannot fully be determined or denoted. F. R. Leavis mentions that Conrad gives glimpses of representation of horrific elements that would work well as climaxes for *Heart of Darkness* on their own, but that Conrad also adds another layer of mystery to the story with references to something ineffable that is buried in the African jungles (179). There is a sense of something else that cannot easily be represented.

One of Conrad's contemporaries who has not gained an equally canonical status in literature, H. P. Lovecraft, has some novels that also work from the idea of the inability of humans to perceive and represent certain entities that lie beyond visible reality. This thesis will also include one of his more well-known works, *The Call of Cthulhu*, and examine how this same problem is explored there.

There seems to be an instability surrounding representation in these novels, which leads me to the theory that deals with the problems of representation. Non-representational theory has to do with the problems that surrounds one's perception of the world and the way this perception is represented and formed in language, and offers alternative ways to think about the self and the world beyond one's perception. This is why this thesis will read *Heart of Darkness* and *The Call of Cthulhu* in light of non-representational theory, as that may offer more insight into how these novels deal with the problems of representation and the exploration of what lies beyond the visible world.

This thesis will take this idea of a first-person point of view in a narrative and look at it from the perspective of non-representational theory. Having briefly looked at traditional ways of reading Conrad and the postcolonial context that usually surrounds him, I will now explore what non-

representational theory has to offer in terms of thinking about representation, and how it can be applied to the study of narrative.

### 1.1 Non-Representational Theory Introduction

“What is language that does not say perfectly and preserve in itself an Unsayable, an Ineffable, a Mystery?” (Thomas Carl Wall, quoted in J. D. Dewsbury, 1920). This is one of the problems that will be tackled and one of the reasons why non-representational theory will be used. The idea is that representation is sometimes insufficient because there are things that simply cannot be represented. Non-representational theory deals with this idea: there are things that cannot fully be captured by our representational system. This chapter is devoted to the exploration of non-representational theory in order to find concepts that can help us understand descriptions of what cannot be described, or cannot be accessed by a text or its protagonist. The premise that I would like to work from is that there is a distance between the protagonist, or the narrator's perspective, and the unspeakable, and that this distance will also be the cause of an emotional reaction in the body. I will turn to non-representational theory in order to explore this distance and find useful ways to think about it in terms of the discussion about literature that will come in a later chapter.

*Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography*, edited by Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, points out that this frame of theory comes from various places (2), and there are many things that it can offer for exploration. For example, it has been applied in human geography and cultural studies (Anderson and Harrison, 2), studies of the creative process in arts (Candice P. Boyd, 1) and even nursing (Gavin Andrews, 1), and it is consequently also not a singular idea but rather a framework of multiple ways of viewing and thinking about the world (Andrews, 3). What this chapter is aiming for is finding out how to define the distance between a person, or body, and that which that person cannot access from their own point of view. This theory has had very little literary application so far, but J. D. Dewsbury's article leans on a literary work to prove his points, which is why his article will be of use for this thesis.

## 1.2 The Body

It has to be pointed out that non-representationalists seem to work from the idea of a first-person point of view, which can be labelled as 'the self' or 'the brain' or what have you, but that the general terminology for this idea in this branch of theory seems to revolve around the idea of 'the body'. So instead of more mental ideas or abstract terms to think about one's perspective, there is a large emphasis on the physical body as a starting point. One of the points of origin of this branch of theory is human geography and cultural interaction, which is focused on human bodies as they operate in the physical world.

Dewsbury's article starts off with talking about empiricism and how this theory can be seen as problematic. The starting point of what one can experience from a sensory and physical perspective plays a large role here. This chapter will continue with this idea of thinking about the physical self, e.g. the body, and how it relates to the ideas that will be presented.

## 1.3 Empiricism

This section will explain what goes on within the body in terms of existing knowledge and gaining knowledge through primary experience and how this relates to the way we make sense of our environment according to these ideas about the body. Empiricism, which is described as a theory of learning where all knowledge comes from the personal sensory experience, is the place where this chapter will start. Elliot Sober describes that “empiricists emphasize the role of sense experience” (quoted in Psillos and Curd, 128) and that “the empiricist’s preoccupation with sense experience takes the form of a thesis about the role of *observation*” (quoted in Psillos and Curd, 129). The central idea seems to be that knowledge comes from what can be observed. This also relates to the discussion about the body in the previous section: there is an emphasis on what we can physically learn through direct observation. An emphasis on the body rather than a higher divine force also seems to play a part here. Peter Carruthers and Cynthia Macdonald also talk about empiricism and point out that an empiricist school of thought denies that humans have innate “a

priori” (64) forms of knowledge: everything that a human being knows comes from direct experience that has been had in the real world and not something that is there before that experience takes place (65). Again, the physical experience seems to be the starting point of knowledge in this school of thought.

“Nothing is in the intellect that is not first in the senses” (Jesse J. Prinz, 106). This definition is a good segue into the next part, which is moving from sensory experience to representation. Prinz suggests that sensory experience will lead to an internal concept of what is perceived, and then takes this idea of the concept one step further: “[A]ll (human) concepts are copies or combinations of copies of perceptual representations” (108). This definition states that a sensory perception will lead to an internal representation of what is perceived, and that will become the learned concept of what is experienced. This concept is then expressed externally via language, for example, and this is what Prinz refers to as “representational systems” (104): going from a sensory experience to an outer representation through inner representation and the formation of concepts seems to be the way that empiricist learning and communication is described.

There are two concepts that I would like to mention before moving on. The first one is the idea that what we learn also shapes who we are, which is explored in Anderson and Harrison's chapter on “incorporation” (224): following Bordieu's logic, they argue that a person is formed by cultural ideas and practices: these ideas become so fundamentally ingrained in the body that they end up transforming the way a body behaves and presents itself (Bordieu, quoted in Anderson and Harrison, 224). Bordieu lists a concrete example of using the right hand for a knife instead of the left hand and more general examples of behavioural details (Bordieu, quoted in Anderson and Harrison, 224). Incorporation works as a way for the body to assimilate practises and experiences into itself.

The second concept is what Anderson and Harrison call “social constructivism” (4), which is the idea that there is a collective network of codes between humans that in turn dictates their

behaviour: “[T]he collective symbolic order is that by which its members make sense of the world, within which they organise their experience and justify their actions” (4). Even though the embodiment of culture comes much later in this book, there may be a connection in the other direction between the idea of embodied knowledge and the collective construction that comes out here.

Useful as empiricism could be as a way of starting with the concept of observation to explain the process of learning and human interaction, it also raises some questions. This next section will attempt to tackle some of these questions and use them to delve deeper into non-representational theory.

#### 1.4 Departing from Empiricism

Elliot Smith is quick to point out that empiricism contains a “need to address problems in the philosophy of perception” (quoted in Psillos and Curd, 131). Knowledge through perception as a model for scientific thinking may indeed invite discussion about the limits of our perception. Representation in language coming from concepts learned through sensory experience is also discussed and questioned by Prinz, who even mentions a history of language analysis that wanted to find out whether concepts come exclusively from sensory experience or not (104). Discussion about the limits of perception does not seem to be all that new, but what this chapter aims to do is to connect it to non-representational theory. J. D. Dewsbury's “Witnessing Space: 'Knowledge Without Contemplation'” starts with the representational system that was mentioned earlier, and uses it to begin to talk about a non-representational way of thinking about perception. It talks about what happens when representation as we commonly know it fails to do what it sets out to do. This article states early on that “the representational system” (1911) unfortunately does not cover all of the ground necessary. Dewsbury argues that this system is “not wrong: rather, it is the belief that it offers complete understanding—and that *only it* offers any sensible understanding at all—that is critically flawed” (1911). Dewsbury takes this idea in order to move from relying solely on personal

perception for an understanding of the world to the idea that the world is bigger than what one person can perceive. He talks about what is “not immediately shared” (1907) in our experience and argues that “we are only a part of the world” (1908) as a contrast to thinking about the physical self as a central starting point. This idea that the world is bigger than what one can perceive is important for this thesis and will be examined further in the next section.

### 1.5 The Hotel and the Haunted Space

Dewsbury tackles this problem of perception and the self versus the world through an analogy that he found in a novel, which is about being in a hotel room and thinking about the rest of the hotel from the perspective of that room. The central idea is that instead of having the people in the hotel as the focus and the sensory experience they have of themselves and the rooms they inhabit, we should use the entire hotel as our starting point for our knowledge (1915). “The Hotel itself’: the practices that make it up, the many possessions, occupations, and events it has given room to” (Dewsbury, 1915) is what this concept is called: it is not seen as a construct of the perception of one of its inhabitants, but as a single, ever-changing and ongoing entity. This idea is also discussed by Andrews, who says that “the world is made of ongoing neverending processes, of series of actions that follow, and flow, with some order” (7), and he calls this “the processual” (7). This shift from the body to the space outside of perception is an important part of non-representational theory. Dewsbury argues that we should move away from constructing our own view of the world through our own physical perspective, and instead place ourselves in the context of a larger world. Dewsbury argues that we should accept that we live in a world that is itself a constantly evolving and happening phenomenon, and the knowledge we gain from it is something he ends up calling “life knowledge” (1928), which can be translated to the knowledge that life is happening beyond us at all times.

Dewsbury's idea of the hotel and the invisible space that is beyond us raises the following question: if there is such a thing as space beyond our perception and we acknowledge its existence,



could we then not move towards perceiving and learning about it? Dewsbury poses this very question and immediately follows with an answer. “The question here, then, is 'how do we witness the playing out of attributions, the actualization of life as it happens in all its complexity?' This is not a task that can be fully accomplished” (1913). One might imagine that this perceptual problem needs a solution, and Dewsbury offers one and does not offer one at the same time. Dewsbury reconciles the inability to fully understand an unfolding world outside of our perspective with the idea that we should be aware of our own perceptual limitations and see ourselves as a part of this bigger world: “[A] stance, then, of being attentive to the way we believe in the world – the singularities that evolve out of our investments and beliefs – and the way the world believes in us – the subsistence of things that draw us into certain ways of being in the world” (1927). Dewsbury seems to argue that this question answers itself: there is no way around the problem, but we should simply be aware of the shortcomings of our perceptions, and accept that there is another world beyond us as well (1927). Seeing the world as a place where things happen in front of us and beyond our immediate perception and rethinking our place in the world as part of a greater whole is what Dewsbury seems to prefer instead of the idea that our perception is the only way of creating a worldview.

There is an important word that surfaces in Dewsbury's article twice, but it may carry more significance in the context of this subject than it is given credit for in Dewsbury's article. The space that was mentioned earlier that exists beyond one's perception is labelled in Dewsbury's summary as “haunted space” (1915). Choosing the word 'haunted' to describe the space beyond perception is fascinating because it colours a number of qualities attached to this idea with emotions and reactions that one might have. Dewsbury's description of the hotel as an analogy for a world that is only partially perceivable (1915-1916) is now coloured with anxiety. There is a line between the seen and the unseen, and Dewsbury gives this outer area a dark and frightening quality. The anxiety about this outer region that may be present is important to keep in mind, and will be explored in

later chapters.

The last point that should be mentioned in this section is what Andrews calls “fundamental spatial events that occur everywhere and all the time” (9), and Dewsbury also touched upon this idea of the event. Dewsbury's idea of the space beyond perception is also viewed as a space where events continue to take place even though they cannot be perceived as they are happening. He labels these as “‘pure’ events” (Gilles Deleuze, quoted in Dewsbury, 1915), which means that these events have not been perceived, and that they are consequently also not represented even though they are taking place. It may be summed up like this: a tree does make a sound when it falls to the ground, even though there is no person around to hear it. Deleuze calls this unrepresented events “indeterminate infinitives that are not yet actualized in determinate modes, tenses, persons, and voices” (quoted in Dewsbury, 1915). Dewsbury also links this idea of continuous events to the concept of haunted space: events will take place and we have no control over what will transpire, and that may cause us to be anxious or afraid (1915).

### 1.6 Non-Representational Affect Theory

The last paragraph touched upon the emotional quality of the space between the person and the place that cannot be accessed by one's perception, and the affect that occurs when the former enters the latter. This section will look at affect, or the moment when a person is emotionally moved by something, how it comes into being, and how it relates to non-representational theory. What I would like to use for this is Ben Anderson's study of affect theory and how it relates to non-representational theory. Anderson studies the idea of the encounter in a broad sense of the word, which is between the body or the self and the other, and has two claims that may explain why affect in the body could be seen as a non-representational phenomenon: “first, affect is rendered equivalent to a level of bodily life before representation and, second, affect is treated as a synonym for life's excessive generativity beyond representation” (Anderson, 85). The first claim essentially states that the feeling or emotion that comes from an encounter precedes our rational

representational of that encounter, and the second claim states that this generated feeling can be seen as an analogy for more of those forces that humans cannot quite put their finger on that are at play in life. This non-representational aspect of emotion that is put forward in the first claim is also emphasised earlier in Anderson's book. "This is why all emotion is more or less disorientating, and why it is classically described as being outside of oneself, at the very point at which one is most intimately and unshareably in contact with oneself and one's vitality" (Brian Massumi, quoted in Anderson, 83-84). What we see here is that a non-representational way of thinking about an encounter seems to offer the idea that our initial emotional reaction is something that goes beyond what we can explain with our representational system.

Anderson also argues that there are multiple forces at play during an encounter that influence the way it will play out before a participant can rationally react to it: "Elements from elsewhere or elsewhen will be active participants in how an encounter happens" (89). What he means by that is that past experiences of one's life or one's history – which is related to the idea of "incorporation" (Anderson and Harrison, 224) – are deciding factors in what one's reaction or affect is going to be during an encounter before the rational mind can start to conceptualise. All that we have learned and incorporated in the past suddenly come into the present and will determine our emotional outcome. The multitude of factors that are influencing an encounter before the body itself can react also ties into Andrews' notion of "multiplicity" (6): he says that non-representational theory includes "the way that space-time is ruptured – non-fixed and nonlinear – and the relatedness of life across these ruptures" (7), which, in more simple terms, means that "things that are real to people" (Andrews, 7) but are not literally present at a given moment will still be present in a way and will have an influence on an outcome of a certain situation. Andrews gives the example of visualisation (7): one can visualise a place or event, but it is not really there, and yet the visualisation can influence an emotional state of mind in the present in something like a meditative breathing exercise. Our past experiences that are embodied but not literally present can similarly be

influential in the process of affect, and this is explained as a non-representational process.

It may be said that there is a relation between non-representational affect and Dewsbury's haunted space. It may be argued that an encounter with something that cannot be described will cause a sense of horrific affect in a person. The details of this type of affect is what I will examine in the primary texts.

### 1.7 Literary Application

Dewsbury's analogy of the hotel, which he evidently uses multiple times in his article to support his claims, relies on literature for the illustration of this abstract idea, and can be applied as a way of reading other works of literature. What we end up with is a way of thinking about the character in a first-person narration and the limitations of that character's understanding of the world that they are in. Seeing a character as just one piece of a narrative that consists of many different parts that are always moving beyond them allows a reader to further think about what they get to see from the narrative. A character has the limits of their own hotel chamber and may be curious about the hotel that they exist in. They may catch a glimpse or a reflection in a window, or hear about a clue of something hidden in another place, which may cause them to venture into the haunted space. As a reader, this causes us to think about what is not represented by the character with whom we are forced to share a perspective. A character's knowledge of the world is then enlarged as they pursue that glimpse of the haunted space, and they may have a strong emotional reaction to the realisation that the world had been bigger than what they could perceive all along.

There is one question that arises when we place this frame of theory in a literary context: how can something called non-representational theory ever have something to do with literature, which is a medium that is fundamentally based on representation? It is true that literature is all representation by default, but it is also possible for literature to explore where representation starts and ends. A character that is also the first-person narrator could be especially useful in that regard as the limits of their perception could be challenged. A character may be investigating a trail and

looking to find something of which they are not even sure what it is going to be, but they do talk about the possibility of what it could be. In other words: references to the rooms of Dewsbury's hotel that the narrator cannot see can occur in a narrative, which ends up reinforcing the realisation that events are taking place beyond the events that are directly offered by the narrative. There can be a representation of the things that lie beyond the perception of the narrator. These are merely possibilities, and these and more will be investigated in the readings and analyses of the primary texts. The texts both feature this quest for something unknown, followed by an encounter with the mysterious, or that which cannot be understood by a character.

### 1.8 Conclusion

Non-representational theory is a model that points out that there is a sphere of existence that goes beyond the directly observable. Contrary to an empiricist school of thought which starts from that observable portion, it seems to argue that the starting point should actually be the world that goes on as a perpetual event. There is no need to disregard our sensory experience in light of this realisation, but we must rather accept its limitations and shift our focus from ourselves to what goes beyond ourselves. Dewsbury does have an interesting word attached to the space that we cannot see, which is “haunted space” (1915), and this emotional quality that is attached to this space is important to bear in mind as this thesis progresses. Affect and encounters have been studied in a non-representational manner, and this way of looking at an encounter is important for the reading of the primary texts.

## Chapter 2: *Heart of Darkness*

*Heart of Darkness* and the traditional theoretical context in which it is often placed is discussed in chapter one. Representation is often a key concept to research in that context. However, chapter one also stated that this novel complicates many standard representations and relations surrounding colonisation. Andrew Gibson researched *Heart of Darkness* and concluded that the novel “obstinately insists on the limits of representation and insistently dwells on the significance of those limits” (114). Chapter one also stated that this novel does not work from merely representing the different forces that are at play, but rather complicates representation by focusing on where representation starts and ends. This chapter will also bring the problem of perception into the fold. The limitations of perception and what lies beyond it is a key concept in non-representational theory, as the previous chapter examined in great detail. This chapter will provide a reading of *Heart of Darkness* which will trace the theory and ideas of the previous chapter in certain passages of the novel: problems of perception, conceptualisation, representation, the haunted space beyond perception, and the encounter with the unrepresentable. The goal is to see if reading *Heart of Darkness* in light of this theory will reveal certain aspects or layers of the novel that would otherwise remain undiscovered.

### 2.1 Maps

*Heart of Darkness* is told from the first-person perspective of Marlow. One of the first things that Marlow tells about his life is his early “passion for maps” (Conrad, 7). He talks about how he was always fascinated by them and dreamt of going to all these foreign places. However, there is one particular description that is striking in the context of non-representational theory, and that is how Marlow is particularly drawn to the “blank spaces on the earth” (Conrad, 7). Marlow was most of all fascinated by the uncharted parts of the world: he wanted to explore the parts of the map that were unrepresented. Conrad positions Marlow in a world full of mystery, and actually turns his interests to those mysteries. Marlow is aware of the space beyond his perception and is actually

interested to discover what could be found in that space.

A map is an example of a representational system: the world is conceptualised and represented on scale. A map that has blank spaces on it is an example of how our perception of the world is limited: there is an indication that there is something that could be represented by displaying a blank space, but the contents of this space are not fully represented yet. It is a very visual way of acknowledging that our perception does not cover all grounds. Conrad's usage of this metaphor fits into non-representational theory really well.

The novel goes on by saying that this part of the map that was once blank is now “a place of darkness” (Conrad, 7). It may be expected that the representation that is given of this particular area would be one of actual “rivers and lakes and names” (Conrad, 7), but instead it is described as something else. Marlow is fascinated by a particular river, which is described as “resembling an immense snake uncoiled” (Conrad, 7). Although there is no blank space on this map anymore, there is still no actual description of what this area looks like. What we do get is not only a metaphor of a snake, but also a snake that has the potential to charm and lure. “The snake had charmed me” (Conrad, 8). There is an invisible entity that is drawing Marlow into its domain. The next section will go into the power of nature that lies in the jungle in more detail, but it is important to note that the same force that will be discussed in the next section is portrayed as something that is capable of luring someone who is miles and miles away.

## 2.2 Conrad's Jungle

The next passages that suggest a presence of something beyond perception in *Heart of Darkness* are the descriptions that Marlow gives of jungles. This section will examine some of these descriptions and see both how they build up as Marlow progresses deeper and deeper into the jungle and what they have to offer in terms of the limits of perception.

The first moment where Marlow contemplates foreign and unknown territory and the sight of a jungle is when his ship sails by sea coasts. Marlow says that looking at a coast “is like thinking

about an enigma” (Conrad, 14). Marlow continues to contemplate how there is something that cannot be seen beyond the coastline. “There it is before you— smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out” (Conrad, 14). There is an insistence on a presence beyond what Marlow can see here. He seems to suggest that the coastline wants him to learn something that he does not know yet, but it can be learned by venturing into the lands. Marlow contemplates how he does not know the secrets of what lies beyond his perception.

Marlow then continues by describing the edges of the jungle, and the chosen imagery suggests a space that is full of mystery. Marlow describes “[T]he edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black” (Conrad, 14) and further elaborates how it is located “along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist” (Conrad, 14). The jungle is portrayed as a black space that is surrounded by mist that obscures things that should be visible. It may be argued that Marlow is looking at a haunted space. The previous paragraph of this section suggested that there is something hidden beyond the visible shoreline in *Heart of Darkness*, and the added darkness and mist suggest a creepy atmosphere that is suggestive of a haunted area. What lies beyond Marlow's perception is not just beyond his perception, but also full of darkness and mystery.

This complicated layer of mystery is amplified when he starts observing the inner parts of the jungle. Marlow observes the jungle and the natural realm he is in, and not only fills it with mystery, but claims that it is an entity. He describes the full picture of nature, the river, and the moonlight on the whole scenery as if there is an observing face made up of it all. “I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us?” (Conrad, 32). Marlow actively places himself in the context of a larger world, and asks questions about how he relates to it. He feels as though there is something hidden in this realm, and that this realm is actually an active entity that will maybe take over control. “I felt how big, how



confoundingly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there?" (Conrad, 32). The mystery of what is hidden in the invisible space is continued here, but the space is actually animated as well.

The next step into non-representational theory is Marlow's deeper descent into the jungle. "It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention" (Conrad, 43). Marlow feels something but is unable to articulate what it is, which causes that same haunting quality that was mentioned earlier to arise. The descriptions that are given seek the edges of Marlow's perception and they cause a few associations to arise. Marlow talks about how being in the jungle caused him to have flashbacks of his past (Conrad, 42) and how this jungle felt like a place of a different time, which is a primordial time before mankind "when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings" (Conrad, 42). There is a sense of multiplicity in this description of Marlow's present experience, as it brings him into the past of the world at large. He is facing moments "from elsewhere or elsewhere" (Anderson, 89) during his encounter with this environment. Conrad layers this jungle with an unnameable force and it causes Marlow's perception of time to ripple. It causes him to face a past of the world that he has never personally encountered before. The important point is that the primordial past long before Marlow's birth is influencing his experience in the present here, which is an idea that can also be found in non-representational ways of thinking about encounters.

What this mystery and multiplicity then amounts to is savagery. Marlow is thrown back into a time where humanity was not in control of the world. Nature was in charge before civilisations as we know them in the Western world came to be. Marlow is now facing an ancient force that precedes life as Marlow knows it. Laura Kesselring calls this force "a connection that transcends time and civilization, a common passion and savagery of human nature that the natives have retained throughout the ages and that here, in the 'heart of darkness', is common to all humanity, including Marlow and Kurtz" (23). Kesselring continues to talk about this force as the source of

savagery that has completely overtaken Kurtz. However, it is important to note that this force is presented by Conrad as something that cannot be accessed or represented directly: Marlow mentions that there is a “mysterious stillness” (43) that is lingering and watching him, and it is this force that lures a civilised person into savagery. The distinction here is that Conrad seems to take that external force as the starting point for the transformation of a civilised man, and not something inherent in them. They would not transform without that unrepresentable external force as the catalyst. There is no representation of it, but simply a statement that it is there. It is feared, but not fully conceptualised or represented.

### 2.3 Representing Kurtz

The main case of a man that has succumbed to savagery in *Heart of Darkness* is the character of Kurtz. His savage nature and what it represents is something that has been widely researched, but this section aims to look at another aspect regarding this character. Kurtz remains an enigma throughout most of the novel as he is not revealed until later on, yet he is still always a big part of what drives the plot. He is there, but also not there, and there are many stories surrounding what he may or may not be. These stories and the language will be the focus of this section: it aims not to look at Kurtz but rather at the language and representation that surrounds him, and the problems that Conrad inserts there.

Kurtz is recurrently mentioned as the novel progresses long before he is encountered, and Marlow talks about how having nothing but tales of Kurtz is problematic: Kurtz is talked about and others try to represent him through language and story, but Marlow has no sensory experience of him for a long time. Marlow talks about the problem that he has in visualising and conceptualising Kurtz. “He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?” (Conrad, 33). His inability to form a concept of Kurtz in his head is frustrating: Kurtz is elusive, hidden in the jungle, and others try to represent him through their stories, but Marlow cannot conceptualise Kurtz on the basis of just those words.

Marlow goes on by making this problem of having just language even bigger: he states that simply representing something without the direct experience is problematic in general. "It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams" (Conrad, 33). Marlow's frustration with the elusive nature of Kurtz causes him to say that he simply cannot be represented, and ends up making the problem even bigger by saying that any representation in general is pointless when the thing that is being represented is unrepresentable. The whole process of representation is brought into question here: Prinz's model of going from perception to conceptualisation to representation, which was discussed in the first chapter, is complicated by Conrad as he examines what happens when we skip to representation and omit the first two steps. Marlow experiences difficulty when he has only a representation without a perception or a concept.

Marlow talks to Kurtz when the latter's health is almost completely gone, and mentions that simply talking to him does something to the words that are used: Conrad questions the use of language and the representational system again. "They were common everyday words" (Conrad, 87), but the words "had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares" (Conrad, 87). Marlow even questions the idea of retelling the exact words because he feels like something will always be missing. "I've been telling you what we said – repeating the phrases we pronounced – but what's the good?" (Conrad, 87). Marlow acknowledges that language fails to represent something crucial about the conversation. A conversation was had, and familiar words and phrases were used, but Marlow states that there is ultimately no point in repeating them because there was something beyond those words that cannot be expressed simply by repeating the words. The "suggestiveness of words heard in dreams" (Conrad, 87) cannot be conveyed. There was a haunted space beyond the representation of the

conversation. The limits of representation are once again explored here, and the exploration of these boundaries evokes a sense of horror. Conrad acknowledges a presence during a conversation that cannot be represented by repeating the language itself. It is an ineffable presence that evokes horror.

The final representation that Kurtz offers is also a problematic one, as it tries to offer a sum of what Kurtz has seen in the jungle but it fails to make it concrete. “The horror! The horror!” (Conrad, 91). This famous line is the last thing that Kurtz utters before he dies, and it is a vague utterance to say the least. Kurtz attempts to describe what is hidden in the heart of darkness, but he fails to come up with a concrete description. Instead, he offers a vague term that corresponds with Marlow's earlier observations about the jungle. Conrad emphasises the mystery of the unrepresentable force by showing that the character who has been in the mysterious area the longest also fails to give a concrete representation of what is there.

#### 2.4 Savagery in Man

The previous section explored the problem of representation that surrounds Kurtz and ended with his account of what is to be found in the jungle. This section will explore what is internal in Kurtz, and in the savage man in general. *Heart of Darkness* mentions savagery in man and links it to the indescribable, and this section will delve into that connection in more detail.

Conrad's unrepresentable mystery that lingers in the areas that are unknown to his characters and the savagery and horror they feel in these areas are seemingly linked. However, it is interesting to see that Conrad foreshadows this connection very early on in the novel. The first description of occupying an unrepresentable space is given early on when Marlow meditates on how the Romans first came to England, and how the inhabitants of what is now England were seen as savages by the Romans. Marlow visualises a Roman that has to live among the ancient people of England and uses a striking sentence. “He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable” (Conrad, 5). To label a different culture not as a place of savagery or of difference, but as something beyond comprehension is an interesting choice that comes up rather quickly in this

novel. It places otherness not in the context of something that can be represented as being other or as being savage, but as something that cannot be represented. The Roman can form no concept of these natives of England through observation, and his incorporated frame of reference offers no help. The difference in culture is so big that the Roman cannot conceptualise his surroundings. He can only name something he cannot understand as incomprehensible, and be repulsed by that inability to represent it. The savagery here is connected to the edges of the Roman's perception: the natives of England are only seen as savages because the Roman cannot represent them and their surroundings.

Kurtz is portrayed as someone who has undergone some sort of a transformation during his time in the haunted space of the jungle. He is described as someone who “had kicked himself loose of the earth” (Conrad, 87), someone who carries “an impenetrable darkness” (Conrad, 90), and someone whose final facial expressions reveal pain and certain haunting qualities that amount to “an intense and hopeless despair” (Conrad, 91). Following Anderson and Harrison's idea, Kurtz could be seen as someone who has incorporated the haunted nature of the jungle by dwelling in it for a long time. Kurtz may be the Roman who has been overtaken by the detestable unrepresentable surroundings of the other. “The horror” (Conrad, 91) was around him for a long time, and was consequently also in him. These vague words could be seen as a summary of what he has incorporated.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a novel that toys with the ideas of perception and representation. It places Marlow in the context of a wider world that is filled with mystery, and makes the characters want to seek out the parts of that world that they do not understand. The novel also animates that world as a force that can influence a person and drive them mad: it suggests an ineffable force that can evoke a sense of horror when a human is in touch with that force for a longer period of time. This ineffability is then placed in the context of representation: Marlow can

never represent what this force actually is. He remains vague in his descriptions and constantly places this presence beyond his own perception. Marlow's venture into the haunted space brings him close to many forms of darkness and Conrad explores how Marlow's representational system fails him when he has to give his account of this darkness.

Representation is also complicated and questioned through the character of Kurtz. There is a great deal of difficulty in representing Kurtz and Marlow often talks about how the use of normal language is pointless in relation to Kurtz. Kurtz is one of the secrets that are buried in the jungle: he incorporates the darkness of that haunted space, and it changes his physical presentation and the language that he uses. He is the true embodiment of the unrepresentable horror of the African jungle.

### Chapter 3: H. P. Lovecraft

We have seen how *Heart of Darkness* complicates representation and is interested in what lies beyond the perception of a narrator. The next step is to look at the work of one of Conrad's contemporaries, H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft is not as canonical as Conrad, but still Conrad's contemporary, and non-representational ideas have been linked to Lovecraft's work before, albeit not in great detail (Kneale, 106-07). This chapter will specifically look at two of Lovecraft's more famous works, *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Call of Cthulhu*, both of which are listed by Michel Houellebecq as part of his "major works" (7). If there are canonical Lovecraftian works, then these would probably be among them. This chapter will take certain passages from these novels and see what can be found there in light of the non-representational theory and the ways of reading that were discussed in the first chapter, and how what was discussed about *Heart of Darkness* in the previous chapter also surfaces here.

#### 3.1 Lovecraft's Haunted Space

The very first sentences of *The Call of Cthulhu* are loaded with an emphasis on the existence of a haunted space, and they reflect one of Lovecraft's core ideas that he uses in most of his works. "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live 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, *Call of Cthulhu* 139). Lovecraft immediately opens with his thesis: there are many things beyond our perception that we cannot grasp and we are not meant to grasp them. If we do end up discovering some truth about these things beyond life as we know it, we "shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age" (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 139). Lovecraft does not only state that there are forces at play that humans cannot grasp, but he also states that these things, whatever they are, are not meant to be grasped because we will not be able to handle the scary and horrific truth about them.

W. J. Hanegraaff explains that one of the core concepts behind the Cthulhu mythos is that Earth was once inhabited by a race of beings more powerful than humans, and that they are not dead, but hidden on Earth (92-93). Lovecraft's stories about this mythos almost exclusively feature a character that comes across some vague remains of these entities, and then goes mad when he discovers the truth about these hidden entities. Hanegraaff calls this the moment when “the final horror comes” (93). The idea of the encounter with a glimpse of something that is unknown to mankind is a core part of Lovecraft's storytelling. *The Call of Cthulhu* is no exception in this regard: it is written from the perspective of a narrator who has come across certain loose pieces of information that he linked together, which resulted in “knowledge of the thing” (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 140). He did not choose to piece the information together, and would rather not do it again if he had that option (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 140). Much like *Heart of Darkness*, Lovecraft's works contain places of horror that are unknown or otherwise poorly charted by humans. This section will examine these horrific places and how they are situated in unrepresented territory. It will focus on Lovecraft's emphasis on the remoteness and mystery of these locations.

*At the Mountains of Madness* follows a group of Antarctic scientists that stumble upon two things that were initially beyond their perception: ancient fossils and caverns below the Antarctic grounds, and ancient ruins filled with carvings and actual monsters. “They had struck a cave” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 28) is the first sentence that starts the discovery of the former. Lovecraft opens with an emphasis on contact with an ancient and primordial past in his initial description of the uncovered area: “there yawned before the avid searchers a section of shallow limestone hollowing worn more than fifty million years ago by the trickling ground waters of a bygone tropic world” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 29). What they end up finding there are strange specimens of ancient life that are later described as “strangely sound in texture for all their structural injuries, from a world forty million years dead” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 53). The more detailed descriptions of these specimens will be examined in the next section, but this



section is more concerned with their age and their location. They are tokens of a time before modern civilisations, and they are placed below the ground, where no cartographer or researcher could have easily found them. They are placed in a hidden space beyond our immediate perception, and this seems to be part of Lovecraft's strategy: suggesting that the earth is not fully explored, but that there are still remote or buried parts of the earth that we have not conceptualised yet.

The ruins in the mountains in *At the Mountains of Madness* are also described as a mysterious place that has never been conceptualised or explored before. They are discovered by two characters that end up flying into the highest mountains after catching a glimpse of a strange entrance into one of these mountains. They end up finding this entrance into the ruins located in a mountain pass, and there is a mention of the uncharted nature of the place where they find themselves. They even mention the peculiar nature of the sky that they see at that mountain pass. “Beyond it was a sky fretted with swirling vapours and lighted by the low polar sun – the sky of that mysterious farther realm upon which we felt no human eye had ever gazed” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 61-62). Lovecraft emphasises that this is territory that has not been seen or charted by humans. There is no concept and consequently no representation of any of these places.

*The Call of Cthulhu* also features two ways of suggesting the location of horrors that can be found beyond our usual perception of the world. This novel first places clues and hints of monstrosities in the hands of a “singular tribe or cult of degenerate Esquimaux” (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 149) that live in a remote part of Greenland. Arctic territory is explored here again, and Lovecraft uses this to hint at the existence of artefacts and rituals meant for the worship of these hidden monsters (*Call of Cthulhu* 149). The remoteness and mystery plays a large role in these descriptions: these rites are performed at remote places by tribal people and Western society has no idea or concept of these events. Like *Heart of Darkness*, this is an exploration of distant tribal lands that resonate with an old and primordial past, and the contents of these distant lands are capable of luring people into haunted spaces.

The second instance of a remote and uncharted place of horror in *The Call of Cthulhu* is given towards the end. The narrator is given an account of a group of sailors that discovered the tip of a pillar sticking out of the ocean between New-Zealand and South-America, which is revealed to be the entrance to the fictional city of R'lyeh that is home to Cthulhu and countless other monstrosities (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 165). Only the tip sticks out in the ocean and it serves as an entrance to a large subterranean area. Lovecraft suggests again that there are very remote places on the earth that contain buried mysterious places filled with horrific creatures.

Much like the blank spaces on maps in *Heart of Darkness*, Lovecraft's characters stumble upon undiscovered or unknown parts of the earth where secrets of primordial times are hidden. Lovecraft emphasises the existence of spaces that contain echoes of primordial times where humans were not the rulers of the earth, and places the horrors that he works towards in these spaces. His main strategy seems to revolve around suggesting that our perception of the world is always limited, and that the more remote parts of our earth contain hidden areas and items that we have never seen or perceived before. All of this leans on an idea that was also discussed in the previous chapter: there is a place that humans have never perceived before, and venturing into this place can only cause a horrific reaction as we have no concepts of its contents. It may be argued that Lovecraft turns Dewsbury's hotel into a haunted house. Lovecraft fills the hidden space with monstrosities and ancient creatures that are horrific to witness and creates a truly haunted space that is best left alone.

### 3.2 Representational Systems Fail

Lovecraft also explores the inability of language to fully represent these mysteries. This section will dive into some of these passages and examine in more detail how language is presented as an inadequate tool, and how this relates to the limits of perception and conceptualisation.

The first instance where Lovecraft toys with language and our representational system in *At the Mountains of Madness* comes at the description of the strange specimens that the scientists pull from below the ground. The scientists struggle to place them in the context of our system for

naming creatures and plants, as they seem to cross the boundaries that we have for ourselves. “Can’t decide whether vegetable or animal. Many features obviously of almost incredible primitiveness” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 33). Lovecraft suggests that these specimens fail to fit into a clear category of either plants or animals, and thus questions our representational system that we use for the natural world. He seems to suggest that these specimens are a combination of plants and animals, and that humans have never had to conceptualise such a creature before. If we do not have a concept for something strange like that, then we also cannot represent it using our known representational system. Our own representational system falls short, and Lovecraft purposefully does not offer a remedy.

One of the first passages that deals with problems of representation in *The Call of Cthulhu* is the encounter with the idol that depicts the monster in the second chapter. The idol is made of certain materials that are hard to determine and has some writing on it that cannot be read. The descriptions of it that are given state that its material “resembled nothing familiar to geology or mineralogy” (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 149), and the written characters on it could not be connected to “even the remotest linguistic kinship” (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 149). The same strategy is employed here: Lovecraft suggests that there are things that cannot be represented by our representational system because we have not yet had the opportunity to sense and conceptualise them. Lovecraft even doubles it up here by suggesting that both our knowledge of the materials that are present on the earth and our knowledge of the languages that are used are limited. The world, again, is larger than our maps make it out to be.

Lastly, Lovecraft suggests the failure of language in encounters with the mysterious. The narrator and his companion in *At the Mountains of Madness* explore the mountains in search of the ancient ruins and the narrator notes that it is hard to explain through language what it feels like to be in this tense atmosphere in the presence of a haunting mystery. “The touch of evil mystery in these barrier mountains, and in the beckoning sea of opalescent sky glimpsed betwixt their summits, was

a highly subtle and attenuated matter not to be explained in literal words” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 61). He alternatively suggests that it is more of a matter of letting the mysterious environment speak to them in ways that go beyond words. “Rather was it an affair of vague psychological symbolism and aesthetic association—a thing mixed up with exotic poetry and paintings, and with archaic myths lurking in shunned and forbidden volumes” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 61). Language and representation are seen as inadequate for the representation of this ineffable atmosphere. The exact subtle nature of being puzzled by various moods in an environment is highly personal and associative, and Lovecraft breaks down the function of language for the expression of this mysterious feeling.

Rosemary Jackson notes that this emphasis on the failure of language is a key feature of Lovecraft's works. She writes that “H. P. Lovecraft's horror fantasies are particularly self-conscious in their stress on the impossibility of naming this unnameable presence, the 'thing' which can be registered in the text only as absence and shadow” (Quoted in Kneale, 110). Lovecraft effectively questions the functional completeness of a representational system: he often states that the monsters that are encountered are unrepresentable if we rely on our known representational system. Dewsbury's notion that only a representational system is not enough to form a complete truth (1911) falls into the same category. Our ideas of what is what in the world are challenged: Lovecraft inserts monstrosities, unknown materials and unknown language into his stories and shows how our representational system is not fully formed yet. The horrors fall outside of everything humanity has encountered in the past, which means that there is no concept of these horrors and that representation is impossible.

### 3.3 Incorporating Madness

Finally, this section will examine the contact with these unrepresentable horrors that are uncovered at the uncharted parts of the world. Lovecraft repeatedly suggests that contact with those mysterious horrors will cause people to lose their sanity or their lives. This section will examine

how the encounter with the horror works, how it ties in to Anderson's ideas of the non-representational encounter, and how it relates to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and the problems of representation that arise around the idea of the madman.

The first sign of an uneasy encounter with a mysterious horror in *At the Mountains of Madness* is described when the dogs of the scientists start to show hostile behaviour towards the specimens. “They can’t endure the new specimen, and would probably tear it to pieces if we didn’t keep it at a distance from them” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 33). Lovecraft immediately shows that these specimens evoke some sort of reaction in the body. It is interesting to see that the first creatures that are affected are the ones that do not use language. The dogs show their natural instincts through their physical behaviour rather than talking about how they feel. Their reaction precedes representation as dogs do not use a representational system. However, dogs do have finer senses than humans and they also have a very primitive conceptual system. Their sensory experience is more intense, and they end up acting on a very basic representation that only tells them that the specimens are bad or dangerous. Lovecraft's use of the dogs sensing the horror before the humans do may be an indication of the limits of the human sensory perception. The human representational system is questioned again, as Lovecraft seems to suggest that other creatures can actually sense certain things better than we can.

One of the most notable cases in *At the Mountains of Madness* of a character that goes mad is Danforth after looking back at the ruins in their escape at the very end. He catches a glimpse of something horrific and the novel never states what it was. The narrator notes that they almost crashed their aeroplane in the mountains because of Danforth's “mad shrieking” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 137), which is Danforth's very primal initial response to his vision. Representation of this vision is never given: Danforth only offers some loose words that are described by the narrator as “disjointed and irresponsible things” (Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 138). It is important to note that Lovecraft describes this encounter as something that occurs before

representation. Anderson noted that affect occurs before representation, as was discussed in the first chapter, and this is a prime example of such an affect. It may also be argued that this affect is one of shock and terror because we are dealing with something that was hidden in the haunted space. The encountered entity is a horrific entity and there is an anxiety about its unrepresented and unknown nature.

*The Call of Cthulhu* similarly notes that an encounter with the horrific will transform a person, or even take their life completely. Johansen's document of his encounter with Cthulhu notes that he flees in complete terror, but that he does not navigate or act rationally after his escape because "the reaction had taken something out of his soul" (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 169). Johansen is transformed and something in his way of thinking and acting is now different. He has written his document after this encounter, but the narrator notes that there is a problem with representation in this document. He reads Johansen's document and says the following: "I cannot attempt to transcribe it verbatim in all its cloudiness and redundance, but I will tell its gist enough to shew why the sound of the water against the vessel's sides became so unendurable to me that I stopped my ears with cotton" (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 164). The terms that are given are vague, and they have an associative and physical effect on our narrator. He reads the words and is also affected by a sense of dread and horror. The problem with Johansen's words is twofold: they are incapable of representing these horrors as the words that are used are too vague, and there is a horrific quality to this language that goes beyond the words themselves. Our narrator can feel it, and worries that repeating the words will not represent that ineffable horrific quality.

Similar to *Heart of Darkness*, Lovecraft does two things to the characters that encounter the unrepresentable hidden horror: their language breaks down and they are transformed by the horror. First of all, they attempt to represent what they encountered through language, but they find themselves unable to do so. The only thing that Danforth offers in *At the Mountains of Madness* are some loose and unconnected terms that are described as fully disjointed and not particularly useful

(Lovecraft, *Mountains of Madness* 138), just like Kurtz only offers the two famously vague words (Conrad, 91). Something in their language has changed because of the encounter: they find it difficult to accurately represent what has changed them because it involves an unrepresentable force. Secondly, they are transformed or even brought to death because of their encounter. *The Call of Cthulhu* sees Johansen's soul being torn because of the encounter with Cthulhu (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 169) and the narrator also notes that he sees pain where he once saw beauty because of his horrific discoveries (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 169). They encounter a sense of horror and dread, and that is what they end up incorporating.

### 3.4 Conclusion

H. P. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* places not just one character, but all of humanity in a context of the unknown. Life as we know it is but one of Dewsbury's hotel rooms, and Lovecraft exploits this fact by suggesting that there are remote parts of the world that contain secrets of times when humanity was not in charge, and that these times may come back because there are monsters waiting to take over. Those that have caught glimpses of what lies beyond our known world often lose a part of their sanity, or die completely. An encounter with the unrepresentable will transform a person. Lovecraft's descriptions of these horrors are often vague and ambiguous, and rooted in stating that our current representational system is not adequate for the representation of these horrors. They are truly unrepresentable in this sense.

## Chapter 4: Comparisons and Conclusions

Joseph Conrad and H. P. Lovecraft have been read in the context of non-representational theory. They have both been examined for their use of what lies in the space beyond our immediate perception, the problematisation of representational systems, the emotional reactions of characters when they venture into this haunted space, and what they seem to incorporate when they move through this space. Non-representational theory helps to think about this space beyond perception, the problems that come with a limited perception, and the failures that a representational system can have. Ben Anderson's work on affect theory is also useful for thinking about the encounters that Conrad and Lovecraft's characters have with this haunted space and how their bodies react to it in the absence of a representation of what they encounter. Though this field of theory is relatively young and has had very little literary application, it serves as a frame of reference to understand these characters, how their responses are portrayed, and how the failure of representation in literature can be read. This chapter will compare the examined novels and writers in light of non-representational theory, offer some conclusions, and point to various possibilities for future research.

### 4.1 *Heart of Darkness*, Lovecraft and the Haunted Space

*Heart of Darkness* and Lovecraft's key works both seem to work with the idea of a haunted space. The African jungle is a place beyond the normal civilised world and contains mystery and horror. Lovecraft buries monstrosities and remnants of old cities underneath the Arctic plate or the Pacific ocean, where no man has ever perceived them before. These places lie outside our immediate perception, and Dewsbury's idea of the haunted space of the hotel works as an analogy to describe these places in relation to the narrators of these novels.

The two are also similar because of their narrators. They both use a first-person perspective to enhance the mystery of what these narrators cannot see, and they also make their narrators explorers that want to discover what they do not know. They are fascinated by the blank spaces on



the map and will venture into that blank space to find what is hidden there. Marlow has the African jungle and Lovecraft's characters have the planet's outskirts, from Antarctica to the middle of the Pacific ocean.

Lovecraft and Conrad also problematise the use of representational systems by showing that there are situations where the representational system fails, and they use their characters to discuss the effects of this failure. Marlow has trouble explaining his image of Kurtz before he meets him, as well as the haunting atmosphere that seems to be lingering in the heart of the African jungle. Lovecraft's characters encounter remnants of monstrosities and cannot seem to use their normal words to denote what they see. They fall beyond the normal categories that language offers.

#### 4.2 Incorporated Horror

Conrad and Lovecraft both show that exposure to the haunted space will cause their characters to incorporate the horrors that hide there. Conrad's example of Kurtz succumbing to the African jungle is similar to Lovecraft's Johansen or Danforth, who are fundamentally changed through their encounter with a horror. It should be said, however, that this sense of incorporation is also where the two are different. Laura Kesselring notes that Marlow is ultimately “keeps a perspective that returns him, secure in his identity, to London” (26), even though he gets so close to the horrors of the jungle. *Heart of Darkness* sees Kurtz succumbing to the haunted space, but not Marlow. He is exposed to the haunted space, but is able to return sane enough to recount his tale and to carry on with his vocation. Lovecraft's characters, on the other hand, go mad by only glimpsing at the haunted space. Lovecraft has been known to resist making his horrors clear, and his characters amplify the need for Lovecraft's horrors to remain in a shadowy place, as Houellebecq notes: Lovecraft's horrors “remain, fundamentally, *unspeakable*. We have only fugitive glimpses of their eldritch powers; and humans who seek to know more will pay ineluctably in madness or in death” (24). Conrad, on the other hand, has two characters that show a nuance in the exposure to the haunted space. We have Kurtz, who ends up speaking in vague terms and dead afterwards, much

like some of Lovecraft's characters. On the other hand, we also have Marlow, who ends up being able to return with his sanity mostly intact. Conrad experiments with the haunted space in the jungle, but places nuances in the exposure to it. Lovecraft goes for the immediate incorporation that can be as extreme as death, but Conrad seems to suggest that the haunted space is something survivable if it is approached with care.

It should be pointed out that Marlow has changed because of his journey. He is described early on as a “Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower” (Conrad, 5), marking him as something other than an ordinary man from London. He has incorporated something that makes him different. He also acknowledges that his journeys have had an effect on him as a person, and that the full tale is necessary to understand what that is (Conrad, 6). Marlow is a different man because of his exposure to the haunted space, but he has been able to return from it and resume working, instead of fully succumbing to it.

#### 4.3 Further Research

Lovecraft and Conrad also both seem to work with a lot of narrative distance. *Heart of Darkness* is told by a nameless narrator who gives the direct speech of Marlow as he tells his tales of his past in Africa. The character of Kurtz is consequently hidden in many layers of narration, much like a matryoshka doll. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* also works with this distance. The story is given in the form of pieces of documents that were found among those of “*the Late Francis Wayland Thurston*” (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 139). These documents contain Thurston's account of reading Johansen's document, which tells of the discovery of Cthulhu. There is a great deal of narrative distance there as well, as Cthulhu is similarly buried in a series of narrative layers. *At the Mountains of Madness* also contains some narrative distance, especially early on in the novel. The discovery of the underground specimens is done by a part of the group that went ahead of the rest of the group, and they give their account through radio transmissions. Lovecraft's narrator was there, but also separated from the actual discoveries.

Dewsbury's haunted space is effectively also placed beyond the reader's perception in these novels. We get glimpses of it through multiple layers of narration, but the truth about it remains vague and alien to a reader. Conrad and Lovecraft talk about the remote areas of the world and suggest that there are things buried there, but they also amplify this remoteness through the form of their text by adding multiple layers of narration. There is physical distance for the characters, and narrative distance for the readers. Further research could be done on the link between narrative distance and non-representational theory.

One aspect that is also worth examining in light of non-representational theory is the postcolonial discourse that surrounds *Heart of Darkness*. This thesis has focused mainly on the narrators of the novels and the unrepresentable sense of horror that seems to linger in the spaces that they end up exploring. However, Conrad and Lovecraft also work with representations of the tribes and their rites, as well as colonial representations and ideas. For example, Marlow sympathises early on with the Roman that conquers the savage English lands: he sees himself as the powerful force that enters the haunted space, instead of the person that inhabits a space where a stranger comes to explore (Conrad, 5). Lovecraft, on the other hand, places hints of the monstrosities in the hands of a “singular tribe or cult of degenerate Esquimaux” (Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu* 149). This is a representation of a distant other: the narrators from America are juxtaposed with a more tribal society that is described as degenerate. Both of these novels have more colonial attachments in some of their human descriptions, but this thesis has not been able to take this rather large postcolonial debate into discussion. However, non-representational theory and the idea of the haunted space may be applied to this discussion to see how these novels describe the entering of the space of the other, and the cultural descriptions that follow from that.

Finally, there is also a possible connection between writing that involves the beyond and the reception of these works in different moments in time. Kneale provides a small overview of the reception of Lovecraft's work, and states that the end of the twentieth century, years after

Lovecraft's death, saw a bigger reception of Lovecraft's work (109). He also notes the trouble that Lovecraft had to face in the context of his own time: he was not seen as a big writer but only had a niche in amateur journalism and could not make a living based solely on his writing (109). The reception of his work and the establishment of Lovecraft's name came decades later. Conrad's work, on the other hand, has gained canonical status and has been a relevant figure in the literary landscape since his first major reception during his lifetime in 1914 (J. H. Stape, 119). However, Conrad's version of the haunted space has seen some resistance in academic criticism. F. R. Leavis discussed the presence of the indescribable force that lies in the jungle in *Heart of Darkness* in the 1960s, but it was not met with praise: Leavis actually makes a case that Conrad overuses the usage of words like "unspeakable" (Conrad, quoted in Leavis, 179). His verdict is that it actually damages the narrative and stands in the way of the narrative: direct glimpses of certain horrific elements would be a more powerful tool and would work better as a climax, but the insistence that there is a mystery behind what is glimpsed at damages the narrative (179). "If it were only, as it largely is in *Heart of Darkness*, a matter of an occasional phrase it would still be regrettable as tending to cheapen the tone. But the actual cheapening is little short of disastrous" (Leavis, 179). It is interesting to see that this piece of scholarly debate about this same idea from fifty years ago actually criticises this canonical novel as flawed for containing elements of the unrepresentable. Writing about the beyond seems to have been somewhat problematic, and it is only now that there are theories like non-representational theory that can aid in understanding these writings better. Further research could be done on the link between writing about the space beyond perception and both older and contemporary reception of these works.

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