Hedge Trimmings

Vol. 2, No. 1 | November 2008

A Requiem for Happy Things

A Fiction

The following short story was ritten after viewing the music video for the Minilogue song "Animals," directed by Kristofer Strom. The video was posted to BBtv on Sept. 16, 2008.

No one knew where the happy things came from, but one morning, they showed up everywhere. At Starbucks and bus stops, crosswalks and restaurants, the brightly colored happy things just appeared. Between three inches and a foot tall, the cartoony creatures—if you can call them that—seemed to be made of a Play-Doh-like plasticine substance. They were solid but had no hard edges or seams. And they *smiled*.

While the happy things were fully articulated and functional, they did have limited interactivity, if not intelligence or autonomy. In fact, most of them appeared to be programmed with a looping subroutine. One, colored bright yellow, was a pear-shaped, short-legged creature with stringy arms. It would sit down and stand back up, crossing and uncrossing its arms while turning its smiling face toward the sky and stretching out its arms as though for a hug. Sit down, cross arms, pause, uncross arms, stand up, close eyes, look up, reach out, and so on. A modified Sun Salute. Over and over and over again.

I first saw *that* one—the happy thing I ended up considering "mine"—at the corner of Driggs and Lorimer, on the edge of the park. I made a point to walk past it on my way to and from work, taking a longer route than necessary just to see how it was doing. Sit down, stand up, smile, smile, smile.

At first, people in my neighborhood loved the happy things, including the one I considered mine. Small crowds would gather around it, take pictures with their phones, and pose with their friends crouching on either side. Then the bloom fell off. Fewer people would stop. Those who did were vaguely suspect. Then, someone tagged it with a Sharpie or something, and you could see the thing grinning vapidly through "Jezbel" or something similarly lame. Regardless, the happy thing continued to sit down, stand up, smile, smile, smile. It never got tired. It just kept doing what it did. And it did it well.

When fall came, it got dirty. Between the rain and the cars and the leaves, it started looking like a day laborer or a homeless man. A little dirty and dejected, just off the beaten path. At the same time, it was like a hobo cheerleader—five o'clock shadow and a scar on the cheek but still smiling brightly and doing pert calisthenics.

I started passing it less frequently because it made me sad. There were hundreds of other happy things around, each with their own designs and subroutines, and each one embraced by area residents to varying degrees. They'd been on the news and in the newspaper, but no one knew who made them or how they did what they did. They were certainly self powered, but they weren't solar powered. They kept going all night, not missing a beat. They didn't require any fuel, and they didn't create any waste. They just

were, and they did what they did. All around the world.

Once the novelty wore off, we got tired of them. Then we got angry. We couldn't avoid them. They were always on. They had boundless energy. And they were so damn happy! But they were too heavy to lift—they were somehow affixed to the ground. And they were unbreakable.

People tried kicking them—kicking a doe-eyed puppy scampering in a never-ending circle after its own tail because there was a butterfly on it. People tried hitting them with sledge hammers—smashing a bright blue miniature whale that spat syrupy lemonade with ice cubes out of its blowhole only to have it cascade down its curved back to be absorbed by its glistening skin! And people tried to run them over with automobiles—driving into a brightly colored polka-dotted ball that rolls around and then unfolds into a baby bunny that winks and curtsies! People even tried snowblowers, lawn mowers, and Big Wheels—each instance ending in a mini-disaster that left the instrument of supposed destruction worse for wear and the happy thing still smiling and hopping or hugging and yawning. Too cute.

So we gave up. And eventually, we got used to them, I guess. The ones in the bushes by the fence around the pool could stay there. The ones at the corner by the public library weren't really in anyone's way. And the ones on top of statues or light posts were still kind of amusing sometimes. At least you had to crane your neck to see them. But we hardened our hearts and we closed our eyes to the happy things.

One day, they stopped moving. Nobody knows if anyone actually realized exactly when they stopped moving because it took us awhile to notice. Most people noticed because someone else told them, and the next time they checked, sure enough, the happy things were still. So there they sit, all over. Still smiling, still stretching, but no longer moving or dancing. They look a little weathered now—more wind-blown and pockmarked, their once-bright coloration mottled and dull—but they continue to reach out to embrace the world and share their exuberance and affection even as they've gone static and still.

I miss them. I at least wish I knew who made them and what they were for, but I miss my little yellow hobo cheerleader especially so. I've built a little shrine in front of him at the corner of Driggs and Lorimer: a votive candle, a couple of smooth stones. Others have added their own contributions to the shrine—a bottle from a mini bar, a pocket mirror, a snapshot of two girls laughing in their braces and eyeliner on either side of the happy thing in happier days, a Susan B. Anthony dollar coin.

But now, however, no one looks at or stops by the shrines any more. And the shrines are going away. You never see anyone adding or removing items. Things just disappear. Some shrines have been removed entirely. Others have been swept away by the wind or street cleaning. The happy things remain. And when I pass my happy thing, at the corner of Driggs and Lorimer, I walk a little faster.

H.P. Lovecraft's Use of Dream and Elements of the Fairy Tale

A Survey of Five Topics

The following paper was submitted on May 26, 1995, as part of the coursework for a Northwestern University class titled German Fairy Tale taught by William Anthony. It was recently retrieved from an old 3.5-inch floppy disk.

The fiction of H.P. Lovecraft has long been studied as a precursor to modern horror and science fiction literature. Born in 1890 and dying in 1937, Lovecraft was a long-time contributor to magazines like

Weird Tales, *Astounding Stories* and various small press annals of amateur journalism. Lovecraft is best known for his stories written in the Cthulhu mythos, a fantastically cosmic New England world based on a hierarchy of elder gods and nameless horrors. Within this world, the occult and dreams are given heavy stock, and it is the dream stories of Lovecraft that are most explicit in their exhibition of elements of the fairy tale.

Before I analyze parallels between Lovecraft's dream fiction and the fairy tales we have studied in class, however, it is important to outline the characteristics of the fairy tale on which I will focus. In the course of this paper, I will address the roles of local folklore, Todorov's schematic of the uncanny and the marvelous, animal helpers, and character maturity and development. Because I am looking at only a small sampling of Lovecraft's work, eight short stories, novellas and novels written between 1919 and 1933, my conclusions are limited to that body of work. The sampling includes the following: "At the Mountains of Madness," The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," "The Shunned House," "The Dreams in the Witch House," "The Statement of Randolph Carter," "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath," "The Silver Key" and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key." More wide-ranging conclusions will require an in-depth reading of Lovecraft's almost 100 stories and novels.

For ease of analysis and reading, I will separate my survey into seven sections to address Lovecraft's use of dream and other fairy tale elements.

While dream does not play a sizable role in "At the Mountains of Madness" and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," it is the dominant narrative mechanism in the other stories and novellas. At least one story, "The Statement of Randolph Carter," was actually based on a dream, one in which Lovecraft and fellow amateur journalist Samuel Loveman open a swampy grave in a terrible graveyard. (Derleth, p. 166) Written like a courtroom testimony, some of the tale's dreaminess is displayed. Lovecraft writes of illusion, a dark cloud over Carter's mind, uncertain and indistinct memory, and vision and nightmare. (Lovecraft, p. 299)

This description will hold true for Lovecraft's other dream fictions, particularly in "The Dreams in the Witch House," where Lovecraft writes, "The dreams were wholly beyond the pale of sanity, and Gilman felt that they must be a result, jointly, of his studies in mathematics and in folklore." (Lovecraft, p. 266) Nevertheless, these dreams, although clouded by the dreamer's perception and interpretation, and perhaps serving as a protective buffer, form a new reality in which the characters act. When the witch house dreams escape Walter Gilman's sleep state, "only his tendency toward a dazed stupor prevented him from screaming aloud. The fusion of dream and reality was too much to bear." (Lovecraft, p. 279)

In "The Dreamquest of Unknown Kadath," which also possesses sections influenced by dream, Carter must traverse through varying levels of dream in order to achieve his goal, a glimpse at the marvelous city inhabited by the Great Ones above the clouds on unknown Kadath. Each level offers new mysteries and horrors, and could represent different levels of consciousness and emotional consideration. In his biography of Lovecraft, L. Sprague de Camp writes that Lovecraft's early work portrayed the conflict between good and evil, paralleling the concept in Christianity and other theological religions. In his later work, Lovecraft's monsters and aliens aren't so much evil as they are self-interested. (de Camp, p. 442) This self-interest is in turn mirrored by many of Lovecraft's protagonists, Carter not excluded.

Lastly, in "The Silver Key" and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," Carter loses the ability to dream and returns to his childhood to regain this ability. With some qualification,

Lovecraft held dream in high esteem as a complement to waking existence. "If there be not some virtue in plain TRUTH; then our fair dreams, delusions and follies are as much to be esteemed as our sober waking hours and the comforts they bring. If TRUTH amounts to nothing, then we must regard the phantasma of our slumbers just as seriously as the events of our daily lives." (Derleth, p. 63) While these stories deal with dream, they also focus on character development and the process of maturing within the framework of the story. I will discuss them more below.

Like the German *sage*, many of Lovercraft's stories include elements of local folklore or contain explanations of local phenomena. "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" contains many references to rumors, local stories and Ward researching city records for clues to events and locations. Lovecraft weaves in imaginary newspaper accounts a la articles about cemetery guards surprising nocturnal diggers (Lovecraft, p. 169, 176) and dogs baying crazily in the middle of the night. (Lovecraft, p. 177) In the course of the narrative, the reader learns what caused the baying, but Lovecraft devotes a large portion of the story explaining how area residents react to the supernatural events around Joseph Curwen's farm and how they eventually send a lynching party to put a stop to them. This is surely the stuff of which local legends and tales are made.

"The Shunned House" and "The Dreams in the Witch House" also include references to local folklore. "What I heard in my youth about the shunned house was merely that people died there in alarmingly great numbers. … (T)he house was never regarded by the solid part of the community as in any real sense 'haunted.' … Extremists sometimes said the house was 'unlucky.'" (Lovecraft, p. 237) The rest of the story explains why the house was deadly, not quite haunted and unlucky. By using realistic locations mostly in New England, plausible street names and a wide array of names, Lovecraft gives a sense of history and therefore legitimacy to his fantastic tales. One of Lovecraft's cities, Arkham, is described as a "changeless, legend-haunted city." (Lovecraft, p. 262) As above, by the end of "The Dreams in the Witch House," the reader understands what made the witch house so storied.

If we were to apply Todorov's schematic of the uncanny and the marvelous to the dream fiction of Lovecraft, the stories discussed in this survey would fall on the side of the marvelous, perhaps in the gray area of the fantastic/marvelous. So much of Lovecraft's writing requires new laws of reality. People are confronted by nameless, gibbering horrors, things that should not be and beings called from beyond. With a strong metaphysical and alchemic tendency, Lovecraft's fiction could seem scientifically plausible, but the marvelous elements overwhelm any inherent realism. Ward's occult tinkerings may seem interesting, but when he ends a letter to Dr. Willett with the phrase, "Shoot Dr. Allen on sight *and dissolve his body in acid*. Don't burn it," (Lovecraft, p. 182) the reader must question the sensibility and sanity of this request. What led Ward to make it? What is he doing anyway?

The tricky realism, although interrupted by fantastic creatures like the zoogs (to be discussed later), the Great Ones and feared figures like Nyarlathotep, is bolstered by Lovecraft's knowledge of science and his use of modern effects like newspaper clippings, library research and a university setting, Miskatonic University. Lovecraft was well-read in astronomy and wrote astronomical articles for local newspapers. (Derleth, p. 4) This fascination with science carried over to other fields of study as well.

Todorov's hesitation, when the reader doubts the truth of what she is reading, can be seen in the fantastic elements of Lovecraft's work and in the dream stories. While a narrative detailing the waking world may have a line of belief the reader refuses to cross, a narrative taking place in the dream land erases the line.

Something may not be possible in real life, but readers may give more benefit of thedoubt to dreamed events.

In "The Dreamquest of Unknown Kadath" and subsequent dream stories with Carter, the standard hero cycle as outlined by John Campbell is most evident. "Dreamquest" also includes trebling, the use of terrain to mirror state of mind and another fairy tale element, the animal helper. As Carter is beginning his quest, he called for and was approached by the zoogs, which I mentioned above. Described as "flitting brown and small and unseen," as well as "lawless spirits" with weird eyes and small, slippery brown outlines," (Lovecraft, p. 309) the zoogs pass on rumors they have heard and information they have gathered while shuffling through dream land. Ironically, the zoogs later threaten other animal helpers in the story, the cats.

When Carter is kidnaped and threatened by mysterious sailors, "the cats rose and assumed a closer formation, crowding protectingly around Carter and preparing to take the great leap through space back to the housetops of our earth and its dreamland." (Lovecraft, p. 324) Obviously, Carter values the help of the cats more because he betrays the zoogs to the cats after a zoog attacks a young kitten. This reveals Lovecraft's long-lasting love for cats. In fact, Lovecraft said he had "a veritably feline interest in and devotion to places." (de Camp, p. 40) Later in the novel, Carter is also helped by a band of ghouls whose leader was once a compatriot of Carter.

Another animal helper arises in "The Dreams in the Witch House," furthering the concept that the story reflects a local tale. The helper, described as a good-sized rat and "quaintly called by the townspeople 'Brown Jenkin,'" had long hair and a sharp-toothed, bearded face and tiny human hand-like paws. (Lovecraft, p. 266) Brown Jenkin, who could speak all languages, acted as a messenger between the witch who lived in the house and the devil, or all sorts of nameless horrors. Later in the tale, Jenkin helps the witch battle Walter Gilman, asserting his role as familiar and helper.

In almost all of Lovecraft's fiction, there is character development and a process of maturity. Sometimes, as in "At the Mountains of Madness," the development is purely scientific or intellectual. The scientists traverse uncharted ground, discover an ancient city and the evil lurking within, and learn how the Old Ones came to earth, expanded their empire and eventually contracted to their current, near-extinct state. In other stories, like "The Dream-quest of Unknown Kadath," show no development or maturity and, in fact, offer a renewed status quo or even a step back from conditions earlier in the story.

But in "The Silver Key," definite mental and physical growth is evident, progressive and regressive. The story opens, "(w)hen Randolph Carter was thirty [and] he lost the key of the gate of dreams." (Lovecraft, p. 408) For awhile, he was content with waking reality, but then he wanted to venture forth again into the dream land. To do so, Carter reverts back to childhood, and Lovecraft offers a cyclical narrative section in which the current narrative (i.e., Carter returning) fills a hole left when he was actually a child. This return to youth resolves Carter's current conflict and sets the stage for his future, a future already being enacted.

One could argue that, because Carter is reverting to childhood to move forward, it is not actually a situation of development or maturation. However, the current Carter would not be as he is had he not returned, and the past Carter grows into the current Carter. At a very simple level, even the return of the dream could be seen as a maturation process.

In "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," Carter matures even more, hence the story's title. He goes beyond the development in "The Silver Key" and takes on characteristics of the beings with which he had longed to interact. At one point, he even loses his character,

definitely a pause in his development. "No death, no doom, no anguish can arouse the surpassing despair which flows from a loss of *identity*. . . . (T)o know that one is no longer a definite being distinguished from other beings—that one no longer has a *self*—that is the nameless summit of agony and dread." (Lovecraft, p. 438) In the end of the story, after the Carter thing is unable to convince the lawyers that Carter is not dead, it reveals that it is an inhuman representation of Carter's facets and characteristics. Carter had matured beyond the veil.

In his biography of Lovecraft, de Camp divides fiction into two categories: realistic and imaginative. Imaginative fiction is further divided into science fiction and fantasy. While science fiction is based on a scientific or pseudo-scientific assumption (i.e. Curwen's alchemy in "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" and the pseudo-scientific tinkering in "The Sandman"), fantasy is rooted in supernatural assumptions like the existence of gods, demons, ghosts and other supernatural beings, and magic. (de Camp, p. 332)

Lovecraft's dream fiction and the fairy tales in the Grimm canon, exhibit strong tendencies toward fantasy instead of science fiction. Wishes, as seen in "The Frog King" are a sort of magic, as are the incantations posited in "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward." By focusing on the supernatural, Lovecraft goes farther than many fairy tales, whose fantastic elements aren't as explicit. Nevertheless, Lovecraft's work possesses enough of these parallels to warrant a further study of his use of fairy tale elements and characteristics of the fantastic.

Bibliography

de Camp, L. Sprague, *Lovecraft: A Biography*, Garden City, Doubleday & Co., 1975.

Derleth, August, and Donald Wandrel, eds. *H.P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924*, Sauk City, Arkham House, 1965.

Lovecraft, H.P., *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels*, Sauk City, Arkham House, 1964.

Manheim, Ralph, trans., *Grimms' Tales for Young and Old: The Complete Stories*, New York, Anchor Books, 1977.

A Conversation with the Bundle

First of all, let me thank Ivan D. Snyder for the prompt welcome letter upon my joining the APA. It was helpful to have the process outlined, and I appreciated the early examples of items someone might submit to the APA. Mr. Snyder included a couple of his own publications—*Odds & Ends* #43 from 2005 and *Amateur Observer* #3 from this year. § Also before I received my first bundle, the October one, I received emails alerting me to several PDF journals that were newly available. I particularly enjoyed the personal and informal approaches of Hugh Singleton's *Things in Motion…* and David Griffin's *The Windswept Journal.* Given that last night was Halloween, I found Mr. Singleton's one pager particularly appropriate. I was *also* somewhat relieved that the PDF journals were given equal billing to the physical items. As someone who's not involved in letterpress or other amateur printing, I was wondering whether photocopying was OK. If PDFs are, photocopies must be. § But imagine my delight and surprise upon receiving the October bundle, my first, which arrived in yesterday's mail. This was my first exposure to an actual mailing, and now I *really* have a good idea what the AAPA is about. Mr. Liddle, what *are* those typefaces you chose for the logos of Nos. 1034 and 1035? Having just gotten married for the first time Oct. 12, I was intrigued by *Independence Way* #52 even if I didn't totally agree with the writer. *Over the Fence…* reminded me of the recent vice presidential debates. And I need to spend more time with the 2008 *Ink Cahoots*. I've exchanged emails with Mr. Hawes expressing interest in donating a set of *American Amateur Journalist* back issues to DePaul University in Chicago. Hello, my name is Heath. Happy to be here. ###