WEIRD FICTION IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S WRITING

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Weird Fiction as an (im)possible genre. To claim Weird Fiction as a genre proper disrupts the discourses that view it as a mode of other genres such as Gothic, Horror, and Science Fiction. This thesis further complicates the critical scholarship that categorises Weird Fiction as either the Old Weird or the New Weird. The Old Weird is a term used to refer to the authors and works published in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. H. P. Lovecraft, in particular, is elevated as having invented Weird stories and formulating its writing standards with his short fiction. The New Weird takes issue with this elevation and aims to offer a new movement of Weird authors and works that are not limited by the phallocentric aspects of the Lovecraftian Old. A complication arises when the Old and New are circumscribed as failed modes of Weird Fiction, inspired by the limitations of Lovecraftian homage. It suggests that the Old and New fail to deliver the Weird as knowable within traditional literary formulations. In this thesis I reveal how Weird Fiction is an exemplar genre that reaffirms and practices its understanding of genre by engaging with its own impossibility. The thesis also offers a working definition that elucidates my approach to Weird Fiction's deliberately anti-normative characteristics and narrative function of unknown unknowns.

Reconfiguring these concerns in terms of a French psychoanalytic lens, specifically drawing on the theories of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, I argue that Weird Fiction reveals a corruption in the Derridean law of genre, which consciously disrupts its phallocentric limitations. It reveals how a phallocentric lens demands and desires knowledge of the real Weird. In applying a Lacanian lens, I investigate Weird Fiction's deliberately anti-normative characteristics alongside women's barred and invisible position in language.

Each chapter of this thesis presents a close reading of a contemporary Weird text by a woman writer, specifically Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, Daphne du Maurier's "Don't Look Now", Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Octavia E. Butler's "Bloodchild", and K. J. Bishop's *The Etched City*. These readings highlight the Weirdness presented in these texts and demonstrate how women writers and feminist critics can confront phallocentric

limitations within and through the Weird. In articulating a matrilineal writing tradition, this thesis demonstrates that women writers and critics contribute to a Weird Fiction that consciously disrupts instantiating phallocentric genre theory and its law.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

This Thesis is entirely the work of Anne-Maree Wicks except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Dr Daniel Hourigan

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Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT I

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS III

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT IV

TABLE OF CONTENTS V

LIST OF FIGURES VI

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS VII

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION 1

1.1. DEFINING WEIRD FICTION 2
1.2. WEIRD THEORY 10
1.3. SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS 15

CHAPTER TWO WEIRD FICTION AS AN (IM)POSSIBLE GENRE 22

2.1. CORRUPTION 24
2.2. OLD AND/OR NEW 29
2.3. FETISHISING CORRUPTION 33

CHAPTER THREE BEYOND WEIRD HOUSES: (IM)POSSIBLE BODIES 42

3.1. (IM)POSSIBLE EXPRESSION 47
3.2. BETWEEN (NEW) LIFE AND/OR (OLD) DEATH 55

CHAPTER FOUR A WEIRD THRESHOLD: UNDERSTANDING UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS 62

4.1. IMAGINARY ≠ SYMBOLIC ≠ REAL 65
4.2. UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS 70

CHAPTER FIVE THE WEIRD ~~WOMAN'S~~ GAZE 79

5.1. THE LADY OF COURTLY LOVE 85
5.2. DESIRING UNDESIRING DESIRE MACHINES 89

CHAPTER SIX WEIRD MONSTERS 97

6.1. A MONSTER'S GAZE 100
6.2. NEGATING THE ALIEN THING 106
6.3. MONSTROUS MOTHERS 111

CHAPTER SEVEN THE NEW WEIRD 119

7.1. RELOCATING THE WEIRD 126
7.2. (M)OTHERING THE WEIRD 134

CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSION 141

8.1. SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 146
8.2. A WEIRD CANON 151
8.3. WEIRDING LITERATURE 158

WORKS CITED 163

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Based on the tracing impossibility diagram by Jacques Derrida.. 29

Figure 2. Skulltopus by China Miéville. 32

Figure 3. Curvature of the Old Weird. 35

Figure 4. Locating the New Weird in relation to the Old Weird. 36

Figure 5. The corrupted form of Weird Fiction as an (Im)Possible genre. 39

Figure 6. Basic scopic diagram of a Weird threshold. 71

Figure 7. Based on the formula of sexual difference by Jacques Lacan. 81

Figure 8. Scopic diagram of *objet petit a* by Jacques Lacan.. 101

Figure 9. Scopic diagram of a Weird threshold. 103

Figure 10. Tracing the (M)Other of the Weird. 125

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

An earlier version of the second chapter was published in *The American Weird: Concept and Medium* (2021). This was made possible after attending a conference in Gottingen where I presented themes from the fifth chapter of this dissertation. There are elements of the fifth chapter that have been published in "H. P. Lovecraft's Weird Tale Ideal: Angela Carter's New Weird Dystopia" (2018); in *Colloquy: Text, Critique, Issue 35/36*. These two publications are listed below:

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The critical scholarship of Weird Fiction often deploys a phallocentric lens that marginalises the voices of women writers and feminist critics alike. I explore the Weird works of women writers as a matrilineal literary tradition that instantiates the unknowable space beyond masculine perspective and desire. In the chapters below I suggest that their work demonstrate how Weird Fiction's deliberately anti-normative characteristics are significant to understanding it as a genre proper. It is for this reason that arguments like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's are important for this approach, because they speak to the feminist tensions arising in genre theory: "What is man that he should, even as he argues deconstruction of the substance-form opposition, need so vehement a negation of woman?" (189). This negation of woman in language is representative of a similar gap in the critical scholarship's treatment of Weird Fiction. It is, moreover, a problem best understood through the works of Weird women writers such as Shirley Jackson, Daphne du Maurier, Angela Carter, Octavia E. Butler and K. J. Bishop. In presenting close readings of each of these women's works, I trace the ways in which women's impossibility aligns with Weird Fiction's impossibility as a genre. I analyse Weird Fiction through a Lacanian and Derridean lens not only to elucidate my approach to the barred and invisible position of women in language, but to better understand the unknowability of the Weird. I argue that Weird Fiction reveals a corruption in the law of genre, which consciously disrupts phallocentric limitations.

This thesis is therefore concerned with the misrecognition of Weird Fiction as a failure and pure negation in Derridean genre theory. Therefore, feminist concerns like Spivak's about women's impossible positions are significant to understanding Weird Fiction as a genre proper. In applying a Lacanian psychoanalytic lens to the field of Weird Fiction, via a reading of women's Weird writing, I demonstrate that it shares a similar position to the Lacanian woman, which is located beyond language as unknowable and Other. This is particularly true for contemporary scholarship like that of Ann and Jeff VanderMeer who argue that Weird Fiction "represents the pursuit of some indefinable and perhaps maddeningly unreachable understanding of

the world beyond the mundane" (*The Weird* xv). Women's position as Other allows them to move beyond the limitations imposed by phallogocentric law—in other words, Weird Fiction is placed inside and outside a masculinist perspective, disrupting theoretical discourses with its deliberately anti-normative characteristics. I focus on these anti-normative characteristics that are traditionally negated because they do not 'fit in' to Derridean genre theory. This 'fitting in' can be read as a sex act in the law of genre, signifying that the scholarship assumes a masculinist perspective in order to produce something new. A major concern that I address is therefore the masculinist demand/desire to possess and gain knowledge of the real Weird, which causes all "unknown forces" to fail (Miéville, "On Monsters" 380). I suggest that Weird women's writing demonstrates how unknown unknowns equally divide and trouble masculinist assumption of the real Weird. Weird Fiction is an exemplar genre that reaffirms and practices its understanding of genre by engaging with its own impossibility. It is the Weird's impossible function that is misrecognised in the scholarship as pure negation. Like the Lacanian woman's position in language, Weird Fiction is not to be mistaken as non-existent outside man's fantasy.

1.1. DEFINING WEIRD FICTION

This thesis analyses why Weird Fiction is difficult to define as a literary genre. My intent is not to reject the arguments that reduce Weird Fiction as a literary mode and momentary "fad" of writing (Swainston 322). Rather, the first point of this thesis is to offer an understanding of why the scholarship delimits Weird Fiction, and to underscore the paradoxical parallels that arise from these arguments, which serve to better understand Weird Fiction as a genre proper. In order to approach the second point of the thesis—that is, the impossible position assumed by the Lacanian woman—it is necessary to address the difficulty of defining Weird Fiction.

Following this difficulty, any discourse that refuses concretisation of the Weird automatically announces the limitations and boundaries of genres from which the Weird is traced. Michael Kelly's discussion in the "Foreword" of *Year's Best Weird Fiction, Volume 1* (2014) helps to underscore this concept by questioning

"What is weird fiction?" (7).[1] In an attempt to answer, Kelly offers a warning that because:

> It is speculative in nature, chiefly derived from pulp fiction in the 20th century, whose remit includes ghost stories, the strange, the macabre, the supernatural, fantasy, myth, philosophical ontology, ambiguity ... weird fiction is not new. It has always been present. That's because it isn't a genre, as such. This makes the prospect of defining weird fiction difficult, and perhaps ill advised. Weird fiction is a mode of literature that is present in other genres. (7)

It is tempting to agree with Kelly that due to Weird Fiction's ability to encompass themes from multiple genres, it is a sub-category of these genres. There is, however, another interpretation that I aim to offer—that is, Weird Fiction is a genre proper precisely because of its thematic discrepancies, which have "always been present" in literature. This thesis offers a new interpretation that explores the corruption overlooked by contemporary scholarship in their recognition of Weird Fiction as "a mode of literature". To describe Weird Fiction as a mode of multiple genres that expands beyond "pulp fiction in the 20th century" does not fully encapsulate its significance or how it engages with traditional literary formulations.

The resistance to the definition offered by Kelly is not an unfounded contemporary approach but is instead an "injunction emanating from the law of genre" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 57). The traditional approaches to Derridean genre theory then become apparent, which argue that "genres are not to be mixed" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 55). More specifically, a basic problem is that a concretised definition of Weird Fiction affects the boundaries of pre-existing genres, contributing to what Wasson and Alder describe as "a rapid hybridisation between horror, Gothic, science fiction and ... 'dark fantasy'" (22). Weird Fiction is circumscribed as a corruption of these genres and described within the critical scholarship as a mode precisely because it does not belong to a set genre. A paradox

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[1] Throughout this thesis I retain the capitalisation (or lack therefore) for the term Weird Fiction as used by the original author. However, my own use is capitalised, which I will explain as the discussion progresses. It is important to take note of this difference in treatment. Kelly's use, for example, is noticeably lower case in the first volume of *Year's Best Weird Fiction*. By the fifth volume (2018), there is a questioning and consciousness of the genre as a genre: "As with anything that is trending or is 'hot,' Weird Fiction (or weird fiction), has been co-opted ... Unfortunately, the term is becoming redundant" (5: viii).

presents itself within the arguments that thereby characterise Weird Fiction as and by these genres. With Kelly's argument, what we have is an acknowledgment of a pre-existent merging of multiple genres, which he recognises *as* the Weird. This may be why contemporary theoretical works, such as Mark Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016), continue questioning: "What is weird fiction? When we say something is weird, what kind of feeling are we pointing to?" (15). Critical scholars resist providing prescriptive or settled definitions for the Weird because they are conscious of corrupting the genres from which it borrows themes. As Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy put it, traditional literary approaches reject the Weird as a genre due to its "possible subversion or questioning of the 'security' of genre," in terms of what they insist places readers "in an uncomfortable and even weird position" ("Introduction" 125). Trevor Owen Jones also remarks on the Weird's subversion as its "compelling ingredient," marking its corruption of literary genres—that is, "if genre is the sure-fire algorithm of publishers to attain fiscal success and wrangle some order on human imagination, then 'Weirdness' realizes itself as the genre of no-genre" (n.p.). This algorithm of genre describes traditional attitudes towards the works labelled as and/or claiming to be Weird Fiction.

Contemporary Weird Fiction remains ambiguous for traditional approaches. This ambiguity is primarily influenced by the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. Founded by Jacob Clark Henneberger in 1923, *Weird Tales* "sought neither the literary license of modernism nor to adhere to the standard formulas of pulp fare" (Everett and Shanks xi). Although the magazine was distributed "for consumption by the masses," it was deliberately positioned "against both the other pulps and the Modernists, while looking backward to the Gothic for its literary inspiration" (xi). According to S. T. Joshi, before the end of the pulp fiction era "weird fiction was never written in any great quantity," and while *Weird Tales* was a "venerable and long-running journal (1923-1954) ... for most of its history it remained the only genuine market in America for the publication of weird short fiction" (*Modern Weird* 4). *Weird Tales* was the first magazine to exclusively publish Weird Fiction as short fiction created by a generation of authors who consciously wrote them.

Weird Tales was unusual within the field for resisting standard pulp formulas, and for its strange and macabre short stories. The stories published in the magazine, dubbed weird tales by H. P. Lovecraft, were not considered "necessarily good in the

opinion of its day" (Moorcock xiii). David M. Earle notes that "the pulp magazine is so named because it is made of cheap wood-pulp; it is the result of a modern, scientific, and technical process that creates a physical and concrete literary form out of a formless mass" (74). This may account for the initial negative reception of *Weird Tales* because its short fiction was not recognised within traditional judgement of style and taste. As Todd Spaulding points out, "unlike the Gothic or Fantastic novel, the weird tale was relegated for the greater part of its life span to the realm of popular fiction, and therefore unworthy of scholarly attention" (84). Nevertheless, Everett and Shanks argue that *Weird Tales* is the quintessential "crucible for genre exploration, creation, and hybridisation," contributing to the development of "modern creators in the genres of horror, fantasy, and the new weird" (xvi, xviii). Despite its unfavourable reputation in mainstream criticism, *Weird Tales* persisted until 1954 with contributions from authors such as Frank Belknap, C. L. Moore and Robert Bloch. However, while the VanderMeers list these authors as examples of fiction published in *Weird Tales*, they are represented as "the Lovecraft Circle—the group of writers surrounding [H. P.] Lovecraft that included Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, Clark Ashton Smith, Howard Wandrei, and August Derleth" due to their adaptation of the Lovecraftian weird tale (*The Weird* xvi). Ali Sperling promotes this Lovecraftian "adoption" as "mark[ing] his collection of tales as the quintessential example of literature that refuses the centrality of human life within a rapidly expanding cosmos" (n.p.). Although these authors "create an especially fascinating intertextual archive" of Weird Fiction, it is clear that Lovecraft's legacy continues to endure the Weird's equivocal definition and scholarly dismissal (Sorensen 503). Or, as Mark Fisher puts it, "any discussion of weird fiction must begin with Lovecraft" (16).

Lovecraft's writing remains central to Weird Fiction, partly due to the enduring influence of his publications in *Weird Tales*.[2] Lovecraft is often credited with having "invented the weird tale" and "developing [its] formula" (Fisher 16). Although contemporary scholars like Jeff VanderMeer argue "that the continued adulation for and imitation of Lovecraft is at times detrimental to originality in weird

[2] A full list of Lovecraft's works and publication details can be found at: http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/fiction/publish.aspx. This list does not include editorial re-prints, such as S. T. Joshi's Introduction and editorial notes in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (2011), which I reference in this thesis. It is necessary to consider how and why Lovecraft's works in *Weird Tales* are separate to contemporary efforts that aim to establish Weird Fiction.

fiction" ("Moving Past Lovecraft" n.p.), it is important for the current study to analyse the Lovecraftian formula due to its significance for *Weird Tales* and its enduring influence on the field. In his "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" (1995), Lovecraft describes "atmosphere ... [as] the great desideratum of weird fiction" (115).[3] Lovecraft goes on to explain that weird stories:

> achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis. These stories frequently emphasise the element of horror because fear is our deepest and strongest emotion, and the one which best lends itself to the creation of Nature-defying illusions. Horror and the unknown or the strange are always closely connected, so that it is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or 'outsideness' without laying stress on the emotion of fear. (113)

Lovecraft's formula places significant emphasis on Horror atmosphere; that is, if it is the fear of the unknown that achieves Horror atmosphere, it is the unknown that realises the Weird. In "The Call of Cthulhu" (first published in 1928), perhaps Lovecraft's most famous weird tale, Horror atmosphere is emphasised through "the Thing [that] cannot be described—there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy" (167). This perspective in which the Cthulhu monster is the enigmatic Thing is through the viewpoint of the characters: horror as the expositional fear and antagonism experienced by the characters and by extension their readers. It is this psychological and bodily experience of fear that serves, as Sperling points out, as the "corporeality" that achieves "Lovecraft's horror in profound and largely unexplored ways" (n.p.). It is through a character's description of the Cthulhu monster that its effect is reduced to a misrecognition, but which is at the same time inherently *experienced* as real. That is to say, the enigmatic Thing attached to the description of the Cthulhu monster is accepted as a delusion within the real, assuming a status of unknowability. Eugene Thacker similarly explains that Lovecraft's formula underscores "the very *plasticity* of life" through unknowable

[3] Lovecraft's emphasis on atmosphere appears in a previously published book, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927): "the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation" (6).

forms that "can barely be named, let alone adequately described *or thought* ... this is the crux of supernatural horror, the reason why life is 'weird'" (23). Noys and Murphy contribute to this discussion by insisting that, "especially [in] 'The Call of Cthulhu', we are left searching through equivocal signs and material objects to construct the narrative of the weird" ("Introduction" 125). Moreover, when critics search for "equivocal signs and material objects" in contemporary Weird Fiction, a divide appears in the scholarship.

On the one hand, scholars like Sperling, Thacker and Noys re-evaluate the Lovecraftian formula as a way of understanding modern Weird Fiction. On the other, scholars like Joshi reject any modern attempt at imitation. For example, in contrast to Fisher's elevation of the Lovecraftian formula as a model for Weird writing, Joshi denotes any imitation as "the death of weird writing as an art form" (*Modern Weird* 3). In *The Modern Weird Tale* (2001), Joshi argues that any attempt to capture and imitate Lovecraftian atmosphere ultimately results in "the elimination of a philosophical basis for the weird: all that is left (if, indeed, anything is left) is the emotion of horror" (2). Despite Lovecraft's emphasis on atmosphere, Joshi argues that modern Weird Fiction misses the mark of true Weird writing because the *feeling* of horror is "an epiphenomenon of the weird" (2). This is the issue for Joshi and one that he insists explains why Weird Fiction did not survive the "demise of the pulps in the 1940s," which "led to the birth of paperback book publishing" where genres like Science Fiction, Gothic and Horror "flourished" (4). Joshi concludes that true Weird writing can only be achieved in short story form because "the production of novels" are "fundamentally allied to suspense or melodrama," focusing on capturing the emotion of fear rather than the Weird itself (9).

If contemporary Weird Fiction is the product of a failed mode of writing, it is one inspired by the limitations of Lovecraftian homage. To come to terms with this dilemma means to acknowledge a divide in the scholarship's attitude towards Weird Fiction: as the Old Weird and the New Weird. The best way to understand the divide between the Old and New Weird is via the scholars who oppose Joshi's lament for Lovecraft and for Lovecraftian narratives. Lovecraft's formula and the works published during the golden age of *Weird Tales* mark the Old, or, as Noys and Murphy note, "the Old Weird can be dated between 1880 and 1940" (118). Lovecraft's death in 1937, according to scholars like Joshi, also marks the death of

the true (Old) Weird. The New, on the other hand, emerges forty years after the death of Lovecraft and the Old Weird: the New Weird is a term M. John Harrison coined in 2003, covering "a period from the 1980s to the present that gained its most explicit articulation in the 2000s", and which brought with it "a shift toward more mainstream publishing and, in the work of [China] Miéville and Jeff VanderMeer, away from the short story or novella format preferred by the Old Weird writers to the novel form" (Noys and Murphy 119). The forty-year gap between the Old and the New saw a critical reorientation both in terms of scholarship and writing. Noys and Murphy explain this critical reorientation as a "contradiction to Lovecraft's horror at the alien" which is criticised as promoting racist and sexist tendencies; instead "the New Weird adopts a more radical politics that treats the alien, the hybrid, and the chaotic as subversions of the various normalisations of power and subjectivity" (125).

The fact that the Old is always a precondition of New Weird writing may be part of the reason that scholars continue to grapple with Weird Fiction's definition/s. In "Moving Past Lovecraft" (2012), for example, Jeff VanderMeer suggests that Lovecraft's "definition of 'the weird' isn't as applicable to modern weird—that, in essence, we need a new manifesto, even if it is a fragmented and various one: a kind of anti-manifesto in that the need here is to explore the boundaries, the interstices, as well as the centre" (n.p.). Although VanderMeer calls attention to the fact that "the point isn't to reject Lovecraft," the Lovecraftian Old standards are viewed as detrimental to New writers and writing (n.p.). Kate Marshall suggests that this is because "VanderMeer wants to place the New Weird as a kind of rejection of what often remains unknown or unsaid in the older weird tales" (636). The New embodies a contemporary consideration of marketability, readerly expectations, and a new wave of ethical standards for writing that move beyond the Lovecraftian Old's racist and sexist tendencies.

This is particularly true for the VanderMeer's *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2011). In offering short stories from both Old and New authors (like Kathe Koja, Neil Gaiman, and Kelly Link), the anthology aims to highlight the work of "contemporary authors" while also "delv[ing] back into the past to reclaim and spotlight those who have become invisible" (J. VanderMeer, "Moving Past Lovecraft" n.p.). In offering "'a chain of evidence' while pointing out

the possibilities of initial influence across non-Anglo writings," the VanderMeers argue that their anthology recognises that an "'international weird' is a meaningless term given the longstanding and complex literary traditions of the countries represented in this volume" (*The Weird* xx). While an acknowledgment of non-Anglo writings is significant, it is the VanderMeers' appropriation of the Lovecraftian formula that creates a critical aporia. That is to say, a paradox arises in the Introduction to the VanderMeers' anthology, in which they argue that "because The Weird is as much a *sensation* as it is a mode of writing, the most keenly attuned among us will say 'I know it when I see it,' by which they mean 'I know it when I *feel* it'," which serves as "one of the more compelling arguments for its existence" (xvi; emphasis in original). In this definition, the VanderMeers command ownership of a definition of the Weird that both rejects and subsumes the Lovecraftian Old. As articulated by James Fabian Machin, this critical gesture of definition continues to incorporate "Lovecraft as a literary springboard for the development of—particularly—phenomenological discourse" (14).[4] These critical investigations are paradoxical in their demand/desire to possess and gain knowledge of the real Weird.

This thesis therefore seeks to move beyond what Joshi describes as the "consensus" that modern Weird writing "is in exactly inverse proportion to its quantity. One can only ask: what happened?" (*Modern Weird* 1). Instead of concentrating on retrospective investigations of Weird Fiction, this thesis is concerned with the gaze assumed by scholars who describe contemporary Weird Fiction as detrimental. As Miéville puts it, investigations should "not only examine history—cultural, literary, whatever—through some filter, but to turn our gaze on that filter itself" ("Afterweird" 1113). Throughout this thesis, I consider how critical approaches to contemporary Weird writing risk realising Jones's concern that Weird Fiction has not just died but "moved on to new realms" (n.p.). A crucial step in this analysis is thus to look at the gaze and filter that delimits Weird Fiction and its effect as an (im)possible genre.

[4] A connection is made here between Weird Fiction and phenomenology. As Gabriella Farina puts it: "a unique and final definition of phenomenology is dangerous and perhaps even paradoxical as it lacks thematic focus," which results in "betraying its unquestionable innovative capacity" (50). Similarly, the VanderMeers suggest that due to Weird Fiction's ambiguous nature, solidifying it with a definition risks depriving it of its ambiguity.

1.2. WEIRD THEORY

I therefore aim to establish a working definition for Weird Fiction as a Weird threshold. A Weird threshold does not designate Weird Fiction as a category of other genres like Gothic, Horror, or Science Fiction. On the contrary, a Weird threshold serves as the crucial link *to* the Weird, a signification that "de-naturalis[es] all worlds, by exposing their instability, their openness to the outside" (Fisher 29). A Weird threshold is a marker of unknown unknowns, a disruption in a narrative's reality that cannot be explained away as knowable or an illusion. While a Derridean lens and a Lacanian lens are used to establish an understanding of a Weird threshold, the arguments I analyse identify Weird Fiction as a mode through theories that reject this unknowability.

Todd Spaulding, for example, makes a connection between the Lovecraftian formula and a "Todorovian Fantastic approach to suspension/hesitation that sheds light on a Nietzschesque world-picture" (82). Tzevetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973), presents the Fantastic as an "event" that disrupts the reality of a narrative (25). Todorov argues that this event, which is specific to the Fantastic, is experienced by a character who realises that:

> either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. (25)

It is clear from Todorov's description how a connection to the Lovecraftian formula is made: both rely on a disturbance in a narrative's reality. However, Joshi argues that the Lovecraftian formula achieves "the systematic embodiment of a world view"—that is, Lovecraft's "general solution was to transfer the locus of fear from the mundane to what he called the 'Great Outside'" (*Modern Weird* 1-2). By this Joshi declares an effect, a specific perspective that looks beyond the contingent strictures of the knowable world discussed by Todorov (whether that be political, social or cultural). Indeed, investigations into the Weird—particularly the Old Weird—seek to elucidate Lovecraft's formula as "a vehicle through which natural

law, time, and space are interrupted or suspended, revealing once again a value system based on reality and perception" (Spaulding 82). A significant difference between the Weird and the Fantastic lies in the way that Weird characters cannot confirm or deny the event that causes the disturbance in their reality.

This difference is particularly evident in the way that Todorov "did not opt for the weird tale as a replacement for the Fantastic," and instead "recuperates Lovecraft ... 'rescues' him from a genre that did not merit the literary attention of scholars at that time" (Spaulding 84). Todorov's attempt to rescue Lovecraft from the Weird is significant. Todorov's work on the Fantastic was published during the forty-year gap between the Old and New; critical attitudes towards Weird Fiction at the time he was writing saw it as a dead and failed literary mode of writing. This suggests that Todorov was influenced by the negative reception of the *Weird Tales* magazine, specifically in his attempt to rescue and thus separate Lovecraft's works from it. This is further evident in Todorov's assertion that when a genre cannot be confirmed or distinguished, it marks the literary work as "not bear[ing] any relationship to already existing works" (8). This is because, as Todorov concludes, genres are the "relay-points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature" (8). The problem, then, is not with the way Todorov positions the Fantastic but with the way Weird Fiction is rejected from the "universe of literature" that the Fantastic occupies.

Despite Todorov's assertion that "there is a growing necessity to elaborate abstract categories that could be applied to contemporary work", Weird Fiction goes undiscussed and/or rejected in his model (25).[5] Fisher's description of the Fantastic as a "capacious category" acknowledges the Fantastic as a way of understanding why Weird Fiction functions as "an *egress* between this world and others"—that is to say, the Weird is the "irruption into *this* world of something from outside" (19-20; emphasis in original). The Weird's deliberate disruption of reality with the unknowable is thereby treated by Fisher as a link to the Weird. Weird fictions are conditioned by unknown unknowns, located in the beyond of subjective understanding—which William J. Hugel describes in terms of "*disorientation* and *dislocation*" (n.p.). This forms a Weird space, according to Hugel, which "shapes the

[5] Todorov describes the Fantastic as: "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. The concept of the fantastic is therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary" (25). Weird Fiction does not make the real, the imaginary and the unknown knowable.

act of reading weird literature into a strange dialectic between the weird spaces presented by the story and the subjective interpretations of the readers as they attempt to find the meaning or logic behind the uncanny reality presented by weird fiction" (n.p.). Reading Weird Fiction within these knowable characterisations of literature ultimately results, as Roger Luckhurst notes, in an "immensely self-conscious 're-marking' of its own genre status, the anxious construction of its own textual forebears and literary contours in the very act of writing" ("American Weird" 199).

To possess and gain knowledge of the unknowable is impossible, and yet the Weird's unknowability (its corruptible tendencies) ruptures knowable genre boundaries. Nevertheless, some form of knowability is required if the scholarship is to avoid the Weird's dissolution within the Fantastic, Horror or Science Fiction. The fact that the Weird remains elusive through its corruptibility and impossibility may explain both why Kelly, Fisher, Joshi, and the VanderMeers are so concerned with establishing the Weird as its own literary mode, and why their arguments present its unknowability (and which genres like Gothic, Horror, Science Fiction and the Fantastic reject) as its defining characteristic. Through such a paradoxical definition, Weird Fiction is simultaneously positioned both outside and inside the universe of literature. A rethinking of Weird Fiction's existence as a genre proper, thereby remains impossible and foreclosed by the "fixed spatial categories for genre" (Wasson and Alder 22). It is therefore significant to speak to and undo these delimiting categories in relation to contemporary Weird Fiction. To approach and validate Weird Fiction as a genre, however, requires a disruptive discourse that not only speaks to this gap but also assumes a similarly impossible position in language.

In this way I approach the second point of my thesis: through applying a Lacanian assignation of the barred woman's position in language to the Weird, I identify the ways in which Weird Fiction occupies a similarly impossible position. This argument, however, is still too abstract. How can an unknowable position be shared with a genre that is impossible in language? To properly explain this concept, I draw upon the work of French feminists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig, who directly engage with and discuss the barred Lacanian woman. Arleen B. Dallery argues that the work of these French feminists is vital because it "posits the feminine as that which is repressed, misrepresented in the

discourses of western culture and thought" (53). In addition to addressing the Eurocentrism that pervades the study of literature, Weird Fiction's deliberately anti-normative characteristics disrupt the phallocentrism of an assumed (masculine) universal subject. Contemporary feminist approaches seek to elucidate the ways in which traditional systems of thought manage to centre, as Mary Klages notes, "the Phallus" as "the Symbolic Order" and name "the Phallus as the source and original of language" (65). Indeed, the study of women's access to language is subsumed into a "patriarchal system" that "is disclosed as [a] socially constructed, ideologically infiltrated, hegemonic and cannibalistic structure" (Kérchy 2). Literary structures that rely on its phallocentric foundations to reproduce its knowable criteria position women as always already outside it. By writing against the phallocentrism of a universal subject, Weird Fiction offers a site of experimental practice for women writers. This mirrors Cixous's argument that an opportunity for women to "write her self" into being is vital for "a *new insurgent* [of] writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" ("Laugh of Medusa" 880). Formulating a new insurgent writing is a common aim of French feminism: one described by Kristeva as an "expression [of] 'a new generation of women'" (*Kristeva Reader* 195). However, for Kristeva, encountering a new generation of women writers raises a series of fundamental questions, including: "what socio-political processes or events have provoked this mutation? What are its problems: its contributions as well as dangers?" (195).

To address the subversive possibilities of women writing Weird Fiction, I draw upon the work of contemporary feminists. I address the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Joan Copjec, Juliet Mitchell, and Jacqueline Rose, because they address Lacan's articulation of sexual difference—in "*disregarding desire, one constructs a reality that is realtight*"—and offer critical engagements with Lacan's arguments regarding women's barred position (Copjec 14). Building on these arguments that in the masculine subject's articulation of desire women become impossible, I suggest that masculinist perspectives treat Weird Fiction as desirable and thus as pure negation. The universal subject—which delineates a masculinist perspective—is described by Ann Rosalind Jones as "appropriate[ing] the world" and "dominat[ing] it through verbal mastery" (248). Confronted by the impossibility

of Weird Fiction, critics assume a masculine perspective that presupposes the ability to command and gain knowledge of its object (the Weird). In tracing Lacan's writing on sexual difference, I investigate this ability to be impossible, because the barred position that Weird Fiction shares with the Lacanian woman is removed and unknowable.

In making a connection between women's and Weird Fiction's impossible position in language, my aim is not to appropriate and dominate the Lovecraftian Old onto the New. Nor is it my aim to compel an incomplete New to deny its connections to or developments from the Old. Instead, I assert that Weird Fiction is its own literary movement: one that should not deny its history both within and outside the universe of literature. I support this claim by discussing the significance of the Old and New, however, for the purpose of this introduction I discuss it in relation to Cixous's argument that "it is time to liberate the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her—by loving her for getting by, for getting beyond the Old without delay, by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be ... to be more than her self" ("Medusa" 878). In this formulation of the relationship between the Old and the New, Cixous offers a way for women to transform and critique Old phallogocentric structures. I reinforce the fact that the New Weird, echoing French feminist approaches to women's writing, offers women writers opportunities to confront Lovecraftian limitations, separate themselves from the Old, and to bring themselves and Weird Fiction into being.

This suggestion, however, is not to be misrecognised as claiming Weird Fiction as an exclusively feminine set of practices. Both the feminine and Weird Fiction are already constituted as impossible to and by the masculine. The point of my assertion here is to offer an understanding of women's writing and of women writing Weird Fiction as contributing to *écriture féminine*. As Elaine Showalter states in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981), *écriture féminine* is an "inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text" (185). It is a term synonymous with women's position in language. For Showalter, this is why *écriture féminine* should be seen as a "task for feminist criticism," because it "concentrate[s] on women's access to language, on the available lexical range from which words can be selected, on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression" (193). This understanding of *écriture féminine* in the context of women

writing Weird Fiction serves as a significant link to the Lacanian woman's barred position in language. Therefore I argue that *écriture féminine* not only writes against the phallogocentric conditions of the Old, but that women contributing to the New's experimental nature, expand and trouble the critical gaze. Or, as Dallery puts it, the discourse of "new woman's writing" is necessary "to retrieve the repression of the feminine unconscious in western discourse and models of subjectivity" (53). To the extent that *écriture féminine* inscribes the analysis of women's difference, that is, to the extent that women writing Weird Fiction comprehend and identify with its impossibility, it draws authority into *beingness*.

My use of Weird Fiction acknowledges women's authority of beingness with Weird Fiction's capitalisation. While I discuss the Old and New throughout the following chapters, my use of Weird Fiction marks it as both and neither the Old and/or New. I approach Weird Fiction's difference in the following chapters in conjunction with Derrida's explanation; that is *différance* makes the "movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be 'present,' appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element" ("Difference" 483). This is one approach that requires in-depth discussion: the notion that there is "no realm of *différance*" and yet it is "threatening and necessarily dreaded by everything in us that desires a realm ... believing one sees it ascend to the capital letter, one can reproach it for wanting to rule" (489; emphasis added). Because if Weird Fiction's impossible existence is drawn into (New) literature, it is at the same time retaining and expanding beyond (Old) genre conventions. Instead of simply applying this critical dilemma to *écriture féminine*, this thesis suggests that reading Weird works by women writers alongside Weird Fiction's *différance* offers an understanding of the intersections between their positions that moves beyond masculine assumptions, and demonstrates how writing authorises an (im)possible existence.

1.3. SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS

This thesis considers a range of texts from beyond an anglophone perspective. This is significant for considering how formulations of women's Weird Fiction find articulation, while simultaneously troubling the patriarchal system and philosophical

frame of the conceptual literature cited. To conduct this research, my overall strategy is to incorporate a psychoanalytic interpretative frame for each piece of Weird Fiction analysed. Each chapter of this thesis therefore focuses on the strategies developed by Weird women writers to transgress the phallocentric genre: the problem of genre, which the masculine inscribes and transgresses the feminine law; the representation of women's identities within and outside the law of genre; and the masculinist desire to produce something new. The works are discussed in chronological order; not only to demonstrate a matrilineal literary tradition of the Weird, but also to reveal the development of women writers' strategies within a Weird space. To demonstrate the diversity of women writing Weird Fiction, I purposely include both novels and short stories.

Such an approach, however, may depart from traditional approaches to these authors and their works. To further support my decision to structure the thesis this way, I wish to briefly point out an issue Weird Fiction may provoke for traditional approaches. Given the categories of the Old and/or New, a misreading may result in a deconstruction of not only the Lovecraftian Old but of the traditional systems the New consciously disrupts. Although I conduct close readings of each chosen text, given my focus on contemporary works, a misreading of this thesis might assume that I have selected the Weird texts based on personal assessment of their literary merit. Furthermore, it risks suggesting that New "good texts" withstand the Old "bad texts" (Jin 108). This is not my intention. New Criticism, Miranda B. Hickman notes, "focused on 'the work itself,' and 'literature qua literature,'" which resulted in it being understood as "insensitive to authorial intentions and readerly response; to the historical conditions of literary production and reception; and to the cultural relevance and political significance of literary work" (2). I aim to make clear throughout this thesis that Weird Fiction consciously disrupts delimited approaches to genre. The texts that I analyse demonstrate Weird Fiction's deliberately anti-normative characteristics, and its capacity as a mode for resisting or transforming women's barred and marginalised positions within these delimited structures.

Linking the Weird to the Lacanian woman's barred position in language further underscores Weird Fiction's distinct narrative function of unknown unknowns; that is, for example, a character's sense of reality is disturbed by some

Thing unknowable.[6] To elucidate this approach and demonstrate Weird Fiction's connection with women's (im)possibility, this thesis articulates such a disruption. While there are diagrams included in this thesis, it is worth noting that no diagram can display and trace the impossibility of genre and of women's barred position in language. At the same time, the inclusion of these diagrams helps to demonstrate the characterisations used by traditional discourses to trace genre, which Weird Fiction deliberately disrupts.

The second chapter is an exemplar of such a disruption, specifically in the way that it uses diagrams from works by Derrida and Miéville to develop an (im)possible tracing of Weird Fiction. Although no Weird women writers are examined, *Weird Fiction as an (Im)Possible Genre* serves as a quintessential theoretical foundation that structures the remaining chapters and my overall treatment of Weird Fiction. By examining Derrida's "The Law of Genre" (1980), the second chapter discusses how scholars mix genres like Horror, Gothic, and Science Fiction in order to validate Weird Fiction as a mode. It addresses the critical problems outlined in this introduction in more detail; that is, investigating Weird Fiction as an (im)possible genre raises a series of fundamental problems for literary criticism and theory. I demonstrate how Weird Fiction is an exemplar genre that reaffirms and practices its understanding of genre by engaging with its own impossibility. In so doing, I address a tension presented in Derrida's legacy of genre theory, overlooked and undermined by critical scholarship: the invisible position of the feminine. In Derrida's genre theory, the "female element" is located with and as the law (la loi), which the masculine "I"/"Eye" commands the right to see and engender (76).

The third chapter has the difficult task of addressing the juxtaposition of la loi and women's identity. Having presented elements of Beyond Weird Houses: (Im)Possible Bodies within Gothic and speculative fiction conventions, I am conscious of the controversial claims it is making about women's bodies and identities beyond masculine fantasy. The chapter stands as one of the most significant for this thesis precisely because it offers a connection between women's (im)possible bodies and the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction in language. It is often

[6] My use of 'Thing' throughout this thesis is to distinguish the separate and unknowable object. As discussed with the Lacanian position of women in language, the Thing remains ambiguous and detached from women.

pointed out to me that authors like Shirley Jackson are not exclusively Weird Fiction authors. While it is my hope this thesis does justice to the Weirdness presented in the chosen texts, it is also my aim to reveal a limitation in the critical scholarship's attitude towards Weird Fiction.

The third chapter builds upon the necessity of expanding the delimiting approaches to Weird Fiction. I discuss this issue in more detail in relation to Shirley Jackson's novel, The Haunting of Hill House (1959), unpacking the feminist tensions arising in Derridean genre theory in order to address broader issues such as woman's invisible position in Lacan's teachings of sexual difference. Articulating the position of the barred Lacanian woman in language assists in demonstrating the similar position women writers occupy in relation to Weird Fiction. I trace the characteristics of women's madness historically through Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" by focusing on New Weird women's writing like Jackson's novel. This offers a genealogy for women and women writing Weird Fiction that predates the Lovecraftian Old Weird.7 Weird Fiction both seeks to expel the corruption of the Old and to validate it from within the New. The whole, totalised form of Weird Fiction can be read as a necessary "relation" between genre and its law that allows for a "boundless double affirmation ... both to life and to death" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 75). This allows for an evaluation of the problematics of Derrida's phallic genre that "comes into play in an indecisive manner in order to name either the genre of human beings ... or sexual difference" (75). What this evaluation uncovers is that when authors and critics of Weird Fiction attempt a definition of the genre, the result remains ambiguous and detrimental.

The fourth chapter introduces my working definition of a Weird threshold in more detail. A Weird threshold is a contextualised function that critical scholarship engages with and yet overlooks in its desire for a definition. Introducing a contextualised function offers an understanding of the unique narrative function of the Weird fictions outlined in the third chapter regarding Jackson's novel. *A Weird Threshold: Understanding Unknown Unknowns* offers a critical reading of Daphne

[7] Women writers and women writing Weird Fiction are the focus of this dissertation. Gothic characteristics present in the chosen texts are not disregarded, rather are examples of how Weird Fiction crosses Gothic genre boundaries.

du Maurier’s short story “Don’t Look Now” (2011, first published in 1971). In building upon the unknowable space assumed by women, Maurier’s short story reveals the desiring subjectivity of the male protagonist John, who is incapable of locating the object of his desire. Due to John’s position in relation to a Weird threshold the object of his desire is made impossible from the outset. By investigating this Weird threshold in more depth, I articulate some of the features of women’s Weird works and their experimental practice with unknown unknowns. The fourth chapter then raises the crucial role of sexual difference, which calls for a rupture in masculine perspective. This part of the discussion therefore addresses Lacan’s work on sexual difference and the position of the Lacanian woman.

This is further explored in the fifth chapter, which attends to the signification of women’s position and their disturbing gaze, which is capable of penetrating through a Weird threshold. In *The Weird ~~Woman’s~~ Gaze,* I consider a similar signification of women in Carter’s *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972). I take particular care to avoid contributing to a misreading of Lacan’s theory that positions women on the other side of language in *différance*, that “woman is excluded from the nature of words” and thus “might have of themselves an entirely different speech” (Rose 49). It is therefore important that this chapter articulates and analyses the position of the barred woman, who is located beyond language. However, to follow the same reasoning as the criticism that claims that women’s existence relies on a masculine subject’s articulation, would result in the opposite conclusion for Weird Fiction: an acknowledgment of women’s impossibility compels the masculine to misrecognise women as pure negation and thus as the Weird monster (like Lovecraft’s indescribable Cthulhu monster discussed above).

Locating Weird monsters is a key aspect in understanding Weird Fiction. The logic surrounding Weird monsters as the disturbing Thing that gazes at the characters and readers from a position that is ultimately *unknowable* is the focus of the sixth chapter. In *Weird Monsters* I approach a complex problem that arises from the Thing’s enigmatic status with which weird fictions promulgate. The chapter locates such monsters of the Weird in Butler’s short story “Bloodchild” (2011, first published in 1984). Butler’s short story deals with the unknown unknowns of Weird monsters through its scrutiny of racial alienation, Otherness, and reversed gender roles and relations. The prominent theme of “mothers” in particular—a crucial point

for the feminist criticisms that discuss Butler's focus on male impregnation and childbirth—provides a framework for exploring the "fetishised phallic mother" and her disturbing gaze (Spivak 64). Through a Lacanian lens, when the position of the barred woman is applied according to my definition of a Weird threshold, a connection is made via the unknowable and (im)possible position of Weird monsters. Weird Fiction assigns its monsters to a similar position as the Lacanian woman, capable of crossing and troubling the boundaries of genre with her all-seeing and (im)possible object-gaze.

The moment a masculine subject is confronted with an (im)possible object-gaze—the moment that the scholarship suspects the Weird's disruptive *différance*—is thus the moment that the masculine rejects and negates the feminine. This is particularly true for the New which is, indeed, a significant critical and creative vector for contemporary Weird Fiction. As a contemporary reorientation that departs from the Lovecraftian Old and its characteristics, the New causes concerns for the scholars who view it as a negative, dominating effect of the genre.

The seventh chapter of this thesis investigates how critical scholarship, in assuming the masculine "I"/"Eye" in the law of genre, negates the New, either by rejecting the Otherness of the Weird that fails to appear, or by claiming failed Otherness as a resistance to the Old. *The New Weird* chapter reveals how New texts like Bishop's *The Etched City* (2003) contribute to a Weird Fiction that disrupts instantiating phallocentric law to produce a failed daughter-law. It is the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction that disrupts the Derridean sex act that "reduce[s] out" female personhood, positing the feminine law (*la loi*) at the centre of the masculine "I"/"Eye", inside the womb of a male mother (Spivak 188). Women's writing that "stresses the figure of the mother, *la mére qui jouit* ... enunciates the scandal of the sexual, nonvirginal Mother" (Dallery 57).[8]

In presenting two parallels of the scholarship's treatment of the New, the seventh chapter demonstrates how the New's failure to deliver the unknown regulates and sustains the unknowable, the Weird (M)Other. It is the failed Weird (M)Other, moreover, that is revealed in order to conceive and regulate the

[8] The direct translation for "*la mére qui jouit*" is "the mother who enjoys". I leave this untranslated here because of Derrida's signification of *la loi's* madness (which the third chapter speaks to in more detail). The six chapter speaks to the mother as Other and the masculine's misrecognition of negation.

(im)possible corruption of genre and its phallocentric law. In this way, Weird Fiction provokes both writers and critics to analyse literature and understand genre’s transformative evolution.

CHAPTER TWO
WEIRD FICTION AS AN (IM)POSSIBLE GENRE

Critical scholars argue that the mixing of genres like Horror, Gothic, and Science Fiction allows Weird Fiction to be a literary mode. In "The Law of Genre", however, Jacques Derrida declares that "genres are not to be mixed" (55). This declaration is emphasised through Derrida's use of "I"/"Eye", "as a vow of obedience, as a docile response to the injunction emanating from the law of genre" (57). Derrida's argument is that for a genre to be considered whole and pure its boundaries must remain unpenetrated: "it is a law of the law of genre" that allows a participant to be "faithful" because, "by its very nature, the law invites and commits" the mixing of genres (57). This authority that the law of genre commands creates the desire to transgress its boundaries while paradoxically reaffirming faithfulness. The law thus positions itself as "the invisible centre" of genre (74), and genre, then, invites and transgresses the law. It is therefore the aim of this chapter to reveal that when literary criticism speaks of Weird Fiction, or of Weird fictions that belong to a specific set of rules and standards, as a genre, it speaks with an authority that eliminates any proposition of a possible corruption. I establish this by addressing the tensions presented in Derrida's legacy of genre theory, overlooked and undermined by a phallogocentric lens. In so doing, I reveal how Weird Fiction is a genre that belongs to itself with participation in other genres and/or the law, a taking part in all limitations, having a membership in all sets: a genre of its own.

Traditional approaches to literary criticism often validate corruption—the mixing of genres—through a faithful participation in the law of genre that invites and commits what Derrida insists is a mistake. The cause of corruption, although confirming a genre's "essential purity", is driven "by accident or through transgression, by mistake or through a lapse" (57). Derrida describes this mistake as a participation without belonging, caused by a confusion produced from a rereading of history and genre theory. This mistake of participating without belonging is not questioned, but rather accepted by literary traditions and characterisations that govern what constitutes a 'pure' genre within a universal law. It is precisely this

universal law, however, that brings into question the characterisations of modes that do not function as pure genres, and which this chapter is concerned with investigating. In order to address how and why Weird Fiction disrupts these characterisations, I suggest that there is a critical aporia in investigations that distinguish Weird Fiction as a mode of multiple genres.

Derrida offers an investigation into the dilemma of mixing genres by discussing Gérard Genette's approach to literary modes. This serves as essential for Derrida because Genette "demonstrates the stringent necessity of this distinction ... on 'the confusion of modes and genres'" (62). A mode is essentially defined by Derrida and Genette as a text that has been deemed impossible and threatens to deform the law of genre. More specifically, Derrida agrees with Genette that a mode is a theme of a genre:

> It is the nonthematizable thematic content of something of a textual form that *assumes* a point of view with respect to the genre, even though it perhaps does not come under the heading of any genre—and perhaps no longer even under the heading of literature, if it indeed wears itself out around genreless modalisations, and would confirm ... Genette's propositions: 'Genres are, properly speaking, literary/ or aesthetic/ categories; modes are categories that pertain to linguistics or, more precisely, to an anthropology of verbal expression.' (63)

Derrida's and Genette's distinction between mode and genre is justified by the law of genre. Both accounts are faithful to the law in eliminating confusion and preventing corruption of the law and its boundaries. While a mode may not belong to a specific genre, it nonetheless relies on the law for the enunciation of its existence, thereby participating without belonging. Literary criticism of genre theory refuses to address the impossibility, the corruption, when genres *do* mix—an occurrence that simultaneously does not 'fit in' to the law of genre and rejects the categorisation of a literary mode. In his analysis of the law of genre, Derrida asserts that modulation is trans-jurisdictional. Critical scholarship thereby fetishises the corruption that it causes by penetrating an impossible boundary. Although the possibility of corruption is not universal and causes the law of genre to fail, it is precisely the failure that becomes successful in the scholarship's fetishisation of corruption. Significantly, it is the fetishisation of corruption that legitimises Weird Fiction as a genre proper

because it speaks with an authority that reaffirms and practices its understanding of genre by engaging with its own impossibility.

2.1. CORRUPTION

Critical scholarship lets the Old Weird stand as an indicator of an event for Weird Fiction. The New Weird is treated as a mode of the Old Weird. This treatment causes an aporia in the law of genre; that is, there is a corruption in the critical scholarship's treatment of Weird Fiction. As discussed above, for Derrida and Genette a mode cannot be created from within a genre that has been deemed impossible and corrupt. Moreover, to claim the Old as a genre contradicts New scholarship, which is intent on remaining faithful to the law of genre. Weird Fiction is treated as a mode of other genres such as Horror, Gothic and/or Science Fiction. Benjamin Noys asserts that this is because of the influences of high modernism, which are set on a "direct confrontation and replication of the racist and anti-Semitic strategies of the Old" (231). The New aims to mix "high modernism and the weird" in order to produce "a new form of collage 'text' that destabilises both, probing the toxic core of anti-Semitism and racism that links them together", while simultaneously "remain[ing] active" (233). Noys makes an interesting point that Derrida's "law is constitutively impossible", and that Weird Fiction's ability to "'cross a line of demarcation', to threaten the genres they inhabit through its own resources and so to threaten the concept of genre itself" is therefore possible (250). However, despite the New's attempt to destabilise the limitations of the Old, critical scholarship continues to repeat its mistake of corruption in the reification of the Old. For this reason, in much the same way that the law of genre treats a mode, the New participates in the Old's conventions but without belonging to it.

What is at stake in the critical scholarship's treatment of Weird Fiction is its separation of the Old from the New. The Old and New are totalised by Weird Fiction, but corrupted because the New is categorised by the Old. Categories help recognise a mode of a specific genre, or, more to the point, a mode requires a "trait common to these classes of classes" in order to be "precisely the identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognises, or should recognise, a membership in a class" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 63). When critical scholarship

speaks of the New it speaks directly to the traits commonly found and recognised in the Old. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, S. T. Joshi emphasises that:

> It seems as if the whole approach to weird fiction today is flawed in its very conception. The purpose of most modern weird writing seems to be merely to frighten. This is an inevitable result of the elimination of a philosophical basis for the weird: all that is left (if, indeed, anything is left) is the emotion of horror ... If weird fiction is to be a legitimate literary mode, it must touch depths of human significance in a way that other literary modes do not; and its principal means of doing so is the utilisation of the supernatural as a metaphor for various conceptions regarding the universe and human life. (*Modern Weird* 2)

Joshi's nostalgic notions of the Old coordinate with his treatment of the New, positioning the Old as an impossible occurrence that threatens to deform the law of genre.[9] Joshi's fidelity to the Old suggests that the New is troubling and perhaps altogether impossible. The corruption that presents itself in Joshi's argument is thus quickly repaired by a separation, by the New's 'conception' that displaces its belonging and thereby eliminates its impossibility; there is no threat to the Lovecraftian Old. However, because the law of genre commands faithful participation, the New is limited to the conventions presented by the identifiable traits of the Old. Although approaches like Joshi's refuse to acknowledge the New's efforts to belong to itself without participation in the Old, to reject the "self-conscious 're-marking' of its own genre status" (Luckhurst, "American Weird" 200), Joshi's argument maintains the view that the New is "flawed in its very conception". Or, more to the point, that there is a corruption *within* Weird Fiction. For if, as Simon Strantzas claims, Weird Fiction "is not just a term to describe the mode of Horror, but to describe where Horror is going" (xiii), the conflict and questioning of impossibility should not arise if Weird Fiction itself is to be regarded as a mode. There should be no questioning of Weird Fiction's existence if the scholarship has already successfully delimited it as a mode.

[9] Joshi treats Weird Fiction within the conditions set by Lovecraft; that is, his argument here is a lament for Lovecraft's great desideratum of weird fiction. Therefore, for Joshi, Lovecraft's Old Weird limitations set up the boundaries for New Weird scholarship.

These kinds of approaches oppose arguments, like those of Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, which aim to rescue Weird Fiction from the perceived corruption of the Old and New. To be a category of the Old does not imply that the New is not its own entity. Rather, this discussion reveals how critical scholarship displaces the New to participate in the Old's limitations in order to justify their mistaken corruption of Weird Fiction. The most prominent example of mending this mistaken corruption is that enacted through the VanderMeers' anthology *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, which is clearly labelled on the cover. The title and subtitle, in combination with the definitions provided in the Foreweird, Introduction, and Afterweird, describe the work it contains as examples of Weird Fiction. By including editorial introductions for each story in the anthology, the VanderMeers describe each work as "an important transition point between old and new approaches to supernatural fiction" (11). The reader is invited to trust that each entry in this collection of "strange and dark stories" is in fact an example of the Weird, *despite* their attachment to the strange and the dark. Or, more to the point, the included works are considered Weird because they are strange and dark.

Indeed, the VanderMeers' definition, notably relying on the Lovecraftian formula, insists that Weird Fiction "represents the pursuit of some indefinable and perhaps maddeningly unreachable understanding of the world beyond the mundane" (xv). The anthology holds the promise for both readers and writers alike that the Weird has "usher[ed] in the modern era" by ignoring "the formal Gothic trappings used by previous writers of supernatural fiction" (27, 56). The VanderMeers' argument, in suggesting that the Old and New are inconsequential, is that Weird Fiction is a movement that rejects and dominates both the Old and New, and abolishes any limitation imposed by the law of genre. In the VanderMeers' definition they argue that "the Weird has again fragmented, perhaps in preparation for a future coalescing of a Next Weird or perhaps not ... the Weird will endure" (xx). In this way, the VanderMeers position the Weird as separate from both the Old and New, thereby departing from the definitional relation/s described by Joshi.

Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy offer yet another perspective. Where the VanderMeers attempt to impose a chaotic dynamism on the Weird genre, Noys and Murphy prefer a path of sceptical postmodernism, asserting that the critical scholarship is "still too freighted with cultural value to assess the weird, which

retains its ‘pulpy’ origin in eroding or even corrupting the ‘literary’ in ‘literary fiction’” (128-129). Although Noys and Murphy are clear that it is New scholarship that causes the impossibility of corruption, and indeed the corruption as shown by the VanderMeers, they overlook the fact that when Weird Fiction is discussed in relation to the law of genre, the New is understood as falling into the Old’s limitations, which are being announced *as* the corruption, due to its very “retaining” of an “origin”. This is all to say that whether the critical scholarship’s obedience to the law favours the Old or the New, it nonetheless signifies that the fault or corruption lies in the origins of Weird Fiction.

To investigate the law of genre through the cultural value that rejects Weird Fiction’s pulp origins would risk corruption of the Gothic, Horror, or Science Fiction genres, because “these forms have been treated as natural” (Derrida, “Law of Genre” 60). For this reason, it is tempting to agree that Weird Fiction is a mode, rather than to compel the law to permit corruption. This is why we find the scholarship fixated—and almost stuck—on the “undefinable” Weird, as reflected in Michael Kelly’s series of Forewords to the *Year’s Best Weird Fiction* series. In each Foreword Kelly actively restates that Weird Fiction cannot be defined because it “is a diverse mode of literature” (2: vii), but is nonetheless recognisable “as an unceasing distortion and buckling of ambient space and time ... A feeling” (4: viii). Each of Kelly’s hesitant definitions of Weird Fiction is followed by an Introduction by the volume’s guest editor. In his introduction to the third volume, Simon Strantzas offers a clear rejection of the previous volumes that do not “address *my* Weird Fiction” (xi). Strantzas’s use of “my” validates his faithful participation in the law of genre, in which he refuses the corruption of Horror: “Weird fiction may be Horror-without-malignancy” (xii). Both Kelly and Strantzas, and the works included in each volume of *Year’s Best Weird Fiction*, participate in articulating a definition of Weird Fiction that rejects all previous definitions. Within this ongoing evolution of contemporary Weird Fiction, the separation between the Old and the New appears once again. However, in Kelly’s movement there is a direct severance of Weird Fiction: its contemporary works are consciously framed as Weird Fiction but *a* Weird Fiction whose editorial authority rejects its origins by focusing on the work of “newer, exciting writers” (Kelly 3: viii). And yet for a mode of literature (either Old or New) to claim that it is a genre (Weird Fiction) is the crucial problem for the Derridean law

of genre: how can Weird Fiction be a genre of its own when its announced (Old) limitations and practiced (New) categories are rejected?

If Weird Fiction's existence cannot be confirmed, it is because no limitation has been articulated that might separate it from the genres within which it claims participation. Derrida speaks of this limitation as the "enigma" from which "genre springs perhaps most closely" and is drawn "as soon as the word 'genre' is sounded" ("Law of Genre" 56). The moment a genre announces itself is the precise moment it evokes the law of genre and demands that its boundaries be drawn. Derrida goes on to explain that once a "genre announces itself" the limitation must not be disrespected, "one must not risk impurity ... 'genres are not to be mixed'" ("Law of Genre" 57). This is to say that once a genre's boundary is disrespected it becomes corrupted. As demonstrated in earlier discussion of the arguments by Kelly, Strantzas and the VanderMeers, in their attempts to respect the limitations of Horror, Gothic, and Science Fiction, Weird Fiction's limitations (the law) is misrecognised as a corruption of limitations. Despite Derrida's insistence that genres are not to be mixed, the critical scholarship of Weird Fiction permits corruption in order to justify it as a mode. It is my argument that this permission of corruption, this taking part in all limitations as a restriction, is unique to Weird Fiction precisely because it participates without belonging.

Through this participation without belonging, the scholarship risks and, in fact, altogether disrespects the limitations of Weird Fiction—limitations that are announced by the Old authority, as presented in the New. When confronted by this corruption, the scholarship attempts to rescue Weird Fiction; that is, the corruption is fetishised. But this fetishisation rejects Weird Fiction as a movement that is separate from the Old and the New. The temptation and fetishising of corruption are key in understanding the course of the critical scholarship's concern with defining Weird Fiction, to separate the New from the Old, and to create an absolute definition for Weird Fiction. The discussion below addresses how Derrida speaks to the impossibility of tracing corruption. Derrida argues that tracing a simple path of corruption is limitless. It is my aim to reveal that, as shown by Derrida's diagram below, a Weird Fiction movement cannot exist without the Old and the New.

2.2. OLD AND/OR NEW

Derrida argues that a set definition or decision of an account (in this case corruption) is impossible. Derrida's diagram of "a double chiasmatic invagination of edges" reveals how a Weird Fiction movement is impossible within "simple borderlines of this corpus, of this ellipse unremittingly repealing itself within its own expansion" ("Law of Genre" 71). In explaining Derrida's diagram, I examine it as he depicted it: as a whole form that implies modulation, which will later become useful in dissecting Weird Fiction's limitless form.

Derrida's diagram depicts two overlapping waves, demonstrating the impossibility of following a set definition or deciding moment of corruption. In this context, the key to Derrida's argument is that there is no clear definition of the law of genre. It is therefore impossible to normalise corruption in this account; that is, in order to trace corruption it is required to include "a modal structure within a vaster, more general corpus ... concerning edge, borderline, boundary, and abounding which do not arise without a fold" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 69). If we were to trace a Weird Fiction movement, from a point that the critical scholarship posits as a beginning, it would reveal the impossibility of rejecting the limitations of the Old and the New. Derrida structures this impossibility as the result of corruption:

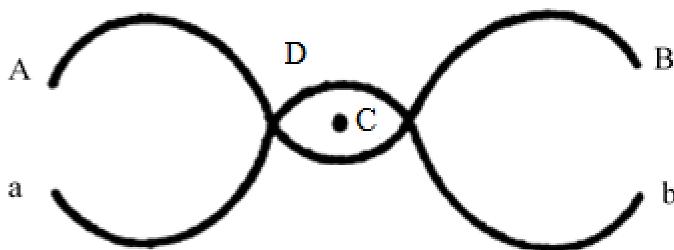

Figure 1. Based on the tracing impossibility diagram by Jacques Derrida. "The Law of Genre." *Critical Inquiry*, 1980. 71.[10]

For example, the strand of A it is likely to become B. However, what Derrida does in complicating this movement from A to B is incorporate multiple folds that disrupt a direct path: for example, C and D are A if A is a *and* b, and/or vice versa. The

[10] Please note that Derrida's diagram does not include the alphabetic labelling (A, *a*, etc.), and that I have added them for the purposes of discussion and analysis.

products of impossibility that Derrida depicts (what is validated and rejected by the law of genre) are marked by C and D. C and D represent corruption, produced by the repetition of a movement that "in this permanent revolution of order, it follows, doubles, or reiterates it in advance" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 71). C occurs when two or more drawn limitations come together, functioning as the centre, or a sort of womb, that conceives "an internal and external edge" and also delimits corruption (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 71). C validates corruption by producing D, which is an external possibility. D is hypothetical, functioning as the Other, formed outside of C. D is the subject of C, a corrupted space that validates Derrida's point of impossibility; that is, Otherness can only exist outside of corruption when corruption itself becomes delimited.

What Derrida's diagram provides is a vector of the law of genre that not only expels corruption but also validates it from within. This paradox, and what Derrida himself suggests, lies in the exclusion of "linking all these complications to pure form or one suggesting that they could be formalised outside the content" ("Law of Genre" 74). Derrida, faithfully participating in the law of genre, invites and commits the existence of corruption (C and D)—however, in chapter 3 I will return to Derrida's use of genre here as masculine (overlooking, indeed, the central "womb" and feminine concept of "invagination"), because it overlooks feminist concerns that this failure *is* impossible. It is important for the current study to investigate—at Derrida's symbolic level—the paradox that expels and validates the Old and the New. Weird Fiction cannot exist as the result of C; the paradox rejects Weird Fiction as a pure form outside the Old and New. Because scholars like Simon Strantzas treat Weird Fiction as a corruption of other genres, a link to the Old and the New (from A to B) cannot be made to create a pure form of Weird Fiction. However, due to this kind scholar's desire to transgress the law of genre, the corruption of the Old and New cannot be ignored.

Critical scholarship troubles the law of genre by ignoring this paradox. From what has been discussed, it is clear that Weird Fiction is mistaken as a mode: it is the reification of the Old through contemporary scholarship's articulation of the New (a new, separate Weird Fiction movement), which is simultaneously viewed as a corruption. Through this gesture, critical scholarship overlooks its mistake of rejecting and separating the Old and the New. The Weird Fiction movement that the

critical scholarship desires is based precisely on the corruption it aims to fix. A question worth asking, then, is not "*what* is Weird Fiction, but *why*" (Strantzas xii)? In other words, why are the Old and New necessary to Weird Fiction? An answer to this question (in the context of Derrida's diagram) becomes possible through a connection made by China Miéville: "the contradiction between Weird and hauntological" ("Quantum Vampire" 124).

In "M.R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Weird; Hauntological: Versus and/or and and/or or?" (2009), Miéville argues that there can be no Old and/or New. Miéville's argument offers a significant connection to Derrida's argument that corruption is limitless by questioning the very possibility of a delimited corruption. The separate stimuli that cause corruption—the linking complications that create the "multiple folds" and "centre" (C) of Derrida's diagram—affect the whole, totalised form. The whole form of Weird Fiction is therefore complicated by the corruption of the Old and/or the New. In other words, is Weird Fiction Old Weird and New Weird *and* Old Weird or New Weird? Or is it Old Weird and New Weird *or* Old Weird or New Weird?[11]

How is the critical scholarship to read this complication? The answer is found in the paradox that expels and validates corruption from within itself. In other words, to evoke the 'and/or' complication which grants "teratological specificity", Miéville offers the figure of a "skulltopus" (114):[12]

[11] Note that my use of "and/or" throughout this thesis signifies this complication, specifically in the context of Weird Fiction's authority of beingness—its *différance*.

[12] Miéville argues that "the nonpareil iteration of the embodied Weird is the tentacle" and "the most Weird-ly mutable—*formless*—of all tentacled animals is the octopus, the body of which, a bulbous, generally roundish shape distinguished by two prominent eyes, is vaguely homologous with a human skull" ("Quantum Vampire" 124).

Figure 2. Skulltopus by China Miéville. "M.R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Weird; Hauntological: Versus and/or and and/or or?" *Collapse*, 2009. 125. Reproduced with permission of China Miéville.

Much like Derrida's diagram of two overlapping waves that reveal the impossibility of tracing one strand of an account, Miéville reveals how the skulltopus is on the verge of something new. It is liminal but it is not the new thing, because the skull and the octopus are identifiable as separate entities. The skulltopus is formed of two separate but identifiable stimuli, the skull and the octopus, which are combined into a single figure, a Weird whole. However, instead of rejecting the paradox, Miéville questions both stimuli in their attempt to form something new. What Miéville takes issue with is the whole, totalised form because it presents something wrong with the presented image:

> the two components may imply one another but are *resistant to syncrex*, and the categorical unease this occasions denies the figure proliferation. The Weird and the hauntological generally relate to each other not by sublation ... but by either-one-or-the-otherness, in a manner suggestive of quantum superposition. ("Quantum Vampire" 126)

This understanding enables the skulltopus to exist purely on the basis that the two stimuli exist separately. However, because the merged object is created by the separate stimuli it cannot exist completely and independently without the association. For Miéville, this "'separateness' has become dominant, not because there is a 'drive to separate', but as a corollary of the oscillating efficacy of as-simon-pure-as-possible Weird and/or hauntology, for thinking our fraught and oppositional history" ("Quantum Vampire" 128). Even when one stimuli dominates the other, there is no corruption of one or the other. It is Miéville's conclusion that, while "opposed but not separable, the traces of the Weird are inevitably sensible in a hauntological work, and vice versa" ("Quantum Vampire" 128). However, what Miéville seems to overlook is that while the form of a skulltopus may be the result of an attempted understanding of corruption, in the Derridean sense, what it achieves in spite of the two stimuli that respect one another's limitations, is a (im)possible existence. It creates ambiguity, Otherness. Weird Fiction lingers in this ambiguity; and indeed, Miéville's point is that Weird Fiction troubles genre theory by forming itself outside of but within the law of genre. We can now understand Derrida's concern with impossibility as the result of corruption. Corruption is permitted by the law of genre if the corruption itself is impossible. Weird Fiction is the Other, permitted by the law of genre precisely because it is formed by corruption. Weird Fiction is limitless in its ability to belong to itself as a genre: participating in all limitations without belonging.

2.3. FETISHISING CORRUPTION

I have arrived at the crux of my argument: Weird Fiction appears, then, as a genre that engages with its own impossibility. Derrida's and Miéville's arguments expose the impossibility of understanding corruption. The ambiguity of Weird Fiction as a genre is misleading for critical scholarship that transgresses the law of genre by seeking a definition and an understanding of its corruption. When faced with

corruption, however, critical scholarship troubles the creation of C; that is, in seeking to describe something new it rejects the separate stimuli that created and are part of the new thing. In other words, critical scholarship permits the corruption of the Old and New when assuming a firmer sense of understanding.

Significantly, critical scholarship has concerned itself with competing definitions and ownership of those definitions. For example, in their introduction to *The New Weird*, the VanderMeers claim that the New has "unintentionally created a movement" and "is still mutating *forward* through the work of a new generation of writers" (xviii). Claiming a new New movement denies the corruption of the Old upon which Weird Fiction relies.[13] Mark Fisher in his book *The Weird and the Eerie*, agrees with this assertion that the Weird relies on the corruption of the Old when he insists that "any discussion of weird fiction must begin with Lovecraft" (16). In desiring a definition and understanding of Weird Fiction, critical scholars are in competition—reinforcing Derrida's point about the impossibility of tracing a set definition. There can be no stable or singular definition because it is impossible to normalise the corruption that, in itself, creates the movement that the critical scholarship attempts to define and delineate. The point overlooked is that Weird Fiction cannot exist without association with the Old and/or the New. The limitations of both the Old and New cannot be corrupted, otherwise the Weird movement cannot be identified as a whole and pure form by the law of genre.

Fetishising Weird Fiction into existence by attempting to define its history and limitations, as well as its potentialities, critical scholarship ignores the genre's capacity for combining aspects of other genres. Instead, critical scholarship reclaims the Old progressions that retain its pulp origin in the sense of a particularism. I have therefore articulated the course of Weird Fiction that becomes complicated and corrupted in three successive forms; in explaining it I will not limit it to the whole form as described by Derrida's diagram. The separate forms of the Old and New cannot be corrupted in forming something new, as Miéville has shown. For this discussion, at its most elementary level, at its origin, Weird Fiction begins with the Old. It is worth mentioning, however, that in tracing Weird Fiction's corruption the

[13] Specifically, the Lovecraftian formula.

Old does not function as its point of origin. The Old is a cite critical scholarship begins with in understanding Weird Fiction as a whole, pure form.

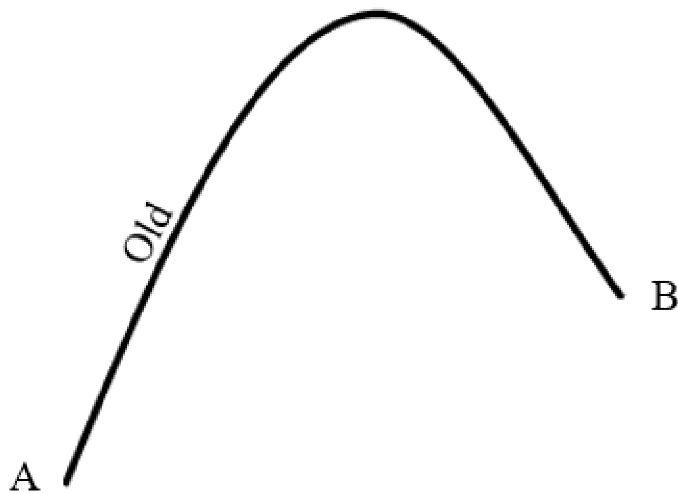

Figure 3. Curvature of the Old Weird.

What the Old presents is a separate 'mode' of writing that first appeared in the pulp fiction era between 1880 and 1940. With a slow rise in popularity—its linear progression upward in the graph—the Old was embodied and articulated in publications such as the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*.[14] Viewed as part of a niche market, *Weird Tales* and its authors, as James Fabian Machin notes, "were imbricated in new fiction which demonstrated a distinct Decadent lineage as well as displaying and sometimes pioneering genre trappings associated with the twentieth-century: science fiction, fantasy, and horror" (232). At the time of its existence, the Old "discourse community considered itself to be operating within, and contributing to the curation of, a 'weird tradition' rather than pioneering a new generic form calibrated as a response to emergent early twentieth-century discourses (whether literary or wider)" (259). From this, of course, emerged the Lovecraftian mythos and aesthetic, which continued to impact significantly on Weird Fiction's popularity and writing standards after Lovecraft's death in 1937.[15] The Lovecraftian Old thus

[14] Refer to discussion in the introduction of this thesis. *Weird Tales* has a long and diverse history, but here I am exclusively referring to the magazine's contribution to establishing the Old, as articulated through critical scholarship's characterisation of Weird Fiction during this time.
[15] As Machin notes, "this tradition fell on the wrong side of the bifurcation of highbrow and lowbrow ... an eventuality that contributed to and exacerbated the status anxieties that persist to this day between 'literary' and genre fiction" (259).

became imbricated within or as evidence of a literary decline. In this way, in reaching a concavity, the Old struggled to recover its momentum and identity as a mode or style of writing. This is represented by the Old's locus on the upward slope in Figure 3, attesting to its identification as a mode separate from the genres such as Gothic, Horror, or Science Fiction. On this curve, where the Old has been separated from any connection to other genre's limitations, it is not corrupted or corruptible. The Old is therefore treated within as a mode by critical scholarship because it does not belong to a specific genre but does rely on participation in the law of genre for its brief existence.

Derrida's insistence that genres are not to be mixed can be seen in the scholarship's faithful participation in the law of genre, in its refusal to allow the Old to corrupt the genres within which it claims participation. The paradox lies, then, in the question of the Old's belonging. At this most basic level of tracing Weird Fiction, the Old is only successful in belonging to itself. However, the Old cannot be claimed as a genre without a limitation. Weird Fiction's existence cannot be confirmed by the Old, moreover, because no limitation has been drawn. This therefore leads us to consider the birth of the New, the second stage in the critical scholarship's understanding:

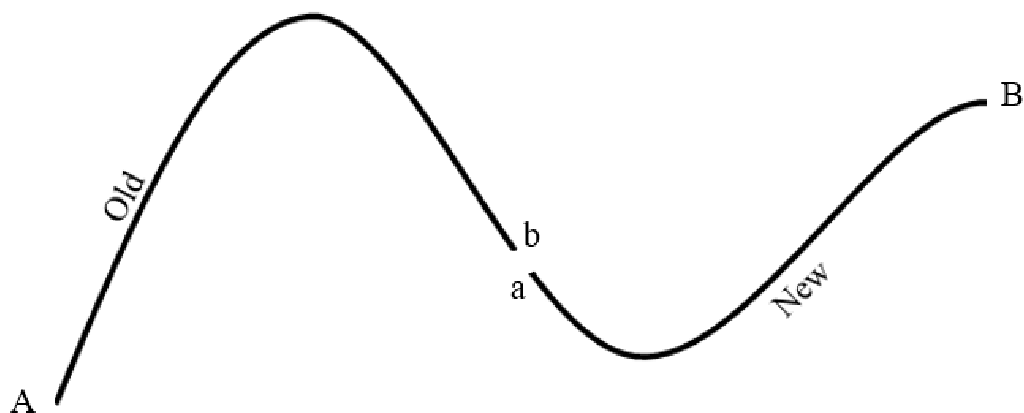

Figure 4. Locating the New Weird in relation to the Old Weird.

After a forty-year gap, the Weird is revived by the New. The New recovers from the Old's downward curve by separating itself, and identifying itself in mainstream publishing instead of pulp magazines. In so doing, the New attracted scholarly and

critical attention. Although both the Old and New are parallel to each other, they do not act in symmetry. This complicates the simple path of a mode that “wears itself out around genreless modalisations” (Derrida, “Law of Genre” 63). This apparent complication, as shown in the separation between the Old and New (creating a discontinuity at a/b), informs the critical scholarship’s desire to transgress the law of genre. The scholarship reanimates the death/failure of the Old through the New, fetishising it as corruption. This corruption emerges from a limitation of the Old, or as Derrida puts it, “with the inevitable dividing of the trait that marks membership, the boundary of the set comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole; and the outcome ... remains as singular as it is limitless” (59). However, the question that arises from the singular and limitless form is: where do the Old and New come together to enact the “invagination” and create a “womb”, an invisible centre? To trace the locus of this “internal pocket” the critical scholarship attempts to locate the precise moment of corruption (invagination).

The separation between the Old and New is understood as a disruption, the break in a “trend” that “is dead, or moved on to new realms” (T. Jones n.p.). This break in the trend, like Miéville’s point of separateness, is the critical scholarship’s tracing of Weird Fiction’s “fraught and oppositional history” through the Old into the New. The same cannot be said of the New, however, because it is not capable of corrupting the Old. The Old is positioned as the authority that the New reanimates. Zombie-like in its reanimation of the Old, the New treats corruption as discourse. There is an interesting connection between the New’s zombification of the Old and the Haitian and South African concepts of zombies. For example, the Old can be read as “a corpse in tattered rags, trailing remnants of necrotic flesh as it rises from the cemetery in a state of trance-like animation, entirely subservient and beholden to the authority of some unknown master” (Davis qtd. in Niehaus 192). Isak Niehaus notes that this “mass-mediated popular culture” figure signifies the “fear of becoming a zombie, the loss of individual freedom implied by enslavement, and ‘expedition of the dead’” (192). The fear of domination in discourse about zombies creates a collective fear in a zombie figure. Justin D. Edwards agrees with Niehaus in identifying this figure as a “zombie terrorist” that appears “within an era of globalisation that is driven by technomedical-finance”; that is, “death is failure” (4).

To be dominated constitutes failure or, more specifically, domination equates to failure, and to death. The same can be said about critical scholarship's view of the Old. The Old's death in 1940 is viewed by the critical scholarship as a failure, and the New's fear of infection by the Old signifies its fear of failure. This suggests that there is yet another feature of this second form of Weird Fiction to be explained: the distinctive traits of the New, which produce something new and separate from the Old. Derrida explains this "distinctive trait *qua* mark is however always *a priori* remarkable"; that is to say, despite the Old's failure, the New "re-marks on this distinctive trait within itself" ("Law of Genre" 64). And it is precisely Derrida's point that what this re-marking does is signify that:

> The re-mark of belonging does not belong. It belongs without belonging, and the 'without' (or the suffix '-less') which relates belonging to non-belonging appears only in the timeless time of the blink of an eye ... a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. ("Law of Genre" 65)

This returns us to my argument in the introduction, that Weird Fiction's authority of beingness is reliant on its impossibility: if Weird Fiction's impossible existence is drawn into (New) literature, it is at the same time retaining and expanding beyond (Old) genre conventions. It is the New's zombie-like re-marking feature that simultaneously progresses and rejects the Old. In other words, if the New is to be extracted as its own form of Weird Fiction, the downward linear progression of the Old suggests "a manifestation of that struggle for literary legitimacy" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 259). But if the scholarship cannot separate the Old and the New, thereby demonstrating that each maintains its limitations, the two become entangled producing a combined figure and thus a new movement. An (im)possible existence is the result of their impossible, zombie-like mutual corruption:

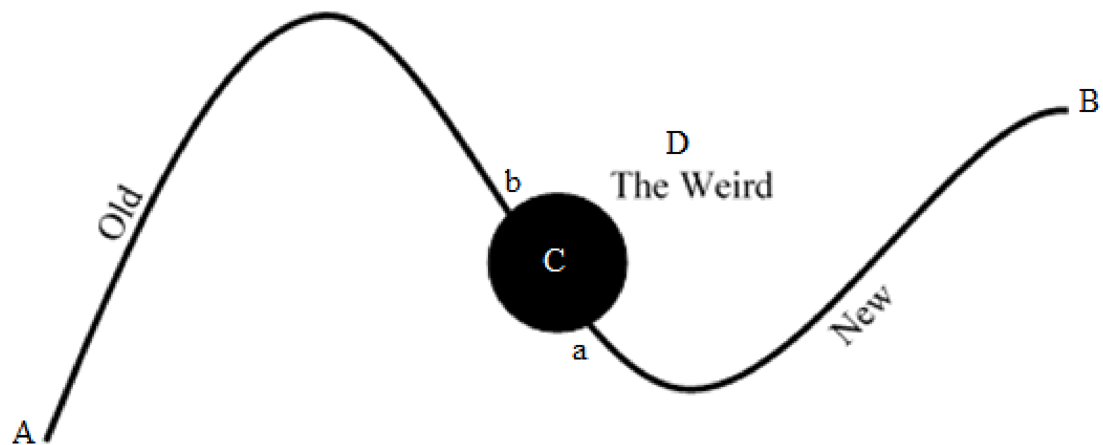

Figure 5. The corrupted form of Weird Fiction as an (Im)Possible genre.

The Old and New are like the human skull and the octopus, brought together to form something else. While deformed and unsettling, the new form engages with corruption to express impossibility and attempts to delimit it. It is impossible to determine where the Old and New connect, except through their relation to the Weird. While it is impossible to determine their direct connection and/or separation, the Weird validates both. The Weird, as the result of respecting limitless limitations, stands separate from but nonetheless attached to this "new" merged form: the Weird. Keith Leslie Johnson suggests that this is because Weird Fiction occupies "the excluded middle of the modernist either-or, picking up at the very moment when humanist enunciation collapses and, strangely, in the act both preserving and disqualifying it" (540). It is, Johnson continues, precisely this complicated "doubled address" that "makes Weird fiction weird" (540). It stands to reason, then, that the Weird emerges from the ambiguity—the "and/or-ness"—between the Old and the New. The Weird does not allow the Old and/or New to merge and instead acts as the betwixt and between, the shadow that is cast between the two stimuli, connecting but separating them, controlling but not dominating.

In this process, in which corruption reconstructs genre theory, it becomes clear how Weird Fiction operates as a genre proper. The law recognises itself in the corrupted product of Weird Fiction's (im)possible existence, its Otherness. This logic is complex, and perhaps contradicts Derrida's argument that tracing a simple path of corruption is impossible. However, it is important to recognise and understand the

complexities of corruption, which validate Weird Fiction as a genre. For example, an important feature of corruption in this final stage is its position on the downward curve from the Old to the New. The question that arises from this is what happens to the creation of C and D: what is the product of the Old's and New's corruption? As a result of this corruption, C is positioned where the Old and New were once separated, forming the invisible centre of the law that regulates Weird Fiction as a genre. Instead of forming overlapping waves as in Derrida's diagram, Weird Fiction is deformed, like Miéville's skulltopus. The whole, totalised form of Weird Fiction presents a disturbing and corrupting image on the verge of something new. The law of genre is repressive and applies downward pressure, positioning itself at the centre of any limitation for a genre. This (im)possibility is, according to Derrida, in the way that the law of genre is repressive in its ability to assign "places and limits" ("Law of Genre" 80). This can be seen in Figure 5 in the way that both the Old and New are viewed as separate and therefore not the new movement desired within critical scholarship. Indeed, in spite of the interplay between and among the two stimuli that respect one another's limitations, what is presented is Weird Fiction's (im)possible existence as a genre.

For this reason I argue that Weird Fiction's (im)possibility is a consequence of three separate but interchangeable stimuli: The Old, the New, and the Weird link between them. The problem in reading each section separately is that they are separately incapable of producing the effect of C and D. Weird Fiction's final and decisive form cannot be represented by Figure 3 or Figure 4. The problem in reading each stimulus together is what happens to A and B when penetrated by the (im)possibility of the Weird. Where does the Weird begin and end? This is a consequence of the repressive nature of the Derridean law of genre. And it is precisely in this way that Derrida introduces the tense interplay of sexual difference between the masculine genre and feminine law. To move forward with this analysis, it is necessary to recall Derrida's use of *moi* and *la loi*. Derrida notes that "in French, the semantic scale of genre is much larger and more expansive than in English, and thus always includes within its reach the gender" ("Law of Genre" 74). My use of gender thus offers an analysis of this repressive feature in Derrida's grammatically sexed coupling of *moi* and *la loi*; which translates as masculine genre (Derrida's

authoritative "I"/"Eye") and feminine law. The sexual difference of genre and its law is based precisely upon the authority of the masculine.

The notion of sexual difference is a necessary counterpart to Derridean genre theory. It is my intention to avoid contributing to the law of genre's fetishised and phallic structure. Addressing the tensions that arise from a feminist engagement with Derrida's genre theory is therefore vital to understanding the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction and how it rejects and disrupts a phallocentric law. The following chapter will continue this discussion by speaking to these feminist engagements and to contemporary women writers' capacity to confront genre's phallogocentric limitations. As an exemplar genre, Weird Fiction reaffirms and practices its understanding of genre by engaging with its own (im)possibility. Its corrupt and anti-normative body serves as a significant point for the third chapter because not only does it disrupt traditional discourses of genre, but it also paves a way forward for Weird women writers and their works.

CHAPTER THREE
BEYOND WEIRD HOUSES: (IM)POSSIBLE BODIES

Weird Fiction is an (im)possible genre capable of corruption while incapable of becoming a pure form outside the Derridean law of genre. Traditional approaches to the law of genre circumscribe Weird Fiction as a corruption of genres like Gothic, Horror, and Science Fiction, endorsed as a mode precisely because it does not belong to a genre. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, critical scholarship refuses to address the impossibility, the corruption, when genres *do* mix—an occurrence that simultaneously does not 'fit in' to the law of genre and rejects the categorisation of a literary mode. This 'fitting in' can be read as a sex act in the law of genre, which helps to form an understanding of the feminist response to Derridean genre theory. More precisely, traditional approaches instantiate the law of the phallus to expel and validate the Old Weird and New Weird in order to create something that fits in to the law of genre. Having clarified how Weird Fiction operates as an (im)possible genre, I now wish to expand upon the effects it creates for genre theory. These effects can be seen in Figure 5 as C and D, and the aim of this chapter is to analyse the position of Otherness by reading it alongside Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, which was first published in 1959. As the first work of Weird Fiction by a woman writer analysed in this thesis, Jackson's novel provides a significant connection between the corrupted and (im)possible form of Weird Fiction and the barred body of the Lacanian woman. This chapter evaluates the problems in applying Jacques Derrida's phallocentric law that "comes into play in an indecisive manner in order to name either the genre of human beings ... or sexual difference" ("Law of Genre" 75). To critique this sexual difference, this chapter considers a feminist approach to a phallocentric genre that positions women and their bodies as (im)possible: through the "mixing of the sexes" (Spivak 63).

A major focus for this chapter is to therefore analyse a crucial element of Derrida's genre theory; that is, the emphasis on genre as *moi* (masculine) and the law as *la loi* (feminine). This coupling of *moi* with *la loi* illustrates Derrida's

understanding of how genre controls and commands the law. Derrida describes the law of genre as sexual difference:

> The question of the literary genre is not a formal one: it covers the motif of the law in general, of generation in the natural and symbolic senses, of birth in the natural and symbolic senses, of the generation difference, sexual difference between the feminine and masculine genre/gender, of the hymen between the two, of a relationless relation between the two, of an identity and difference between the feminine and masculine. ("Law of Genre" 74)

Derrida goes on to explain that the result is a redoubled affirmation, which is "granted to woman", "usually" to seductive and "beautiful creatures" ("Law of Genre" 75). As discussed in the previous chapter regarding Derrida's diagram of the process of genre corruption, this redoubled affirmation produces a kind of womb within the centre of genre. This womb produces the corruption—that is, a feminine corruption that seduces the masculine genre to transgress the law by producing C and D. Feminist critics, like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, take issue with the masculine symbolic order of Derridean genre theory. Although Spivak points out that Derrida is quick to argue that "female personhood must be reduced out" and "the vagina has only a figural connection with invagination," Spivak notes that "the strength of his own methodology will not allow such a totalising exclusion and binary opposition to stand" (65). And yet Derrida claims that, when coupled with the feminine, the use of "I"/"Eye", is capable of controlling and therefore giving birth to the law and all of its authoritative representatives ("Law of Genre" 76).[16]

The masculine genre that Derrida speaks of excludes female personhood, but it is precisely Spivak's point that he nonetheless uses feminine characteristics. For Derrida, the law is the daughter of a male mother. The feminine can only represent the law in genre theory because it is controlled by the masculine, or, as Derrida puts it, "he wishes to seduce the law to whom he gives birth ... he inspires fear in the law" ("Law of Genre" 78). The feminine represents the law because it is the only identifiable and fetishised corruption of this masculine heterosexuality. Moreover, Spivak notes, when the male mother "seems to go the other way, from woman to

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[16] Derrida describes the "I" as the "'I'-less 'I' of the narrative voice, the I 'stripped' of itself, the one that does not take place, it is he who brings them to light, who engenders these lawmen in giving them insight into what regards them and what should not regard them" ("Law of Genre" 76-77).

man, the fetishised phallic mother causes a good deal of anguish” (64). To extend this ambiguous reversal to Derrida’s discussion of Maurice Blanchot’s *La folie du jour*, I would like to focus on the masculine genre’s authority when discussing the fetishised feminine law.[17]

> And the affirmative ‘I,’ the narrative voice, who has brought forth the representatives of the law to the light of day, claims to find the law seductive—sexually seductive. The law appeals to him: ‘The truth is that she appealed to me. In this milieu overpopulated with men, she was the only female element. One time she had me touch her knee: a bizarre impression. I declared to her: I am not the kind of man who contents himself with a knee. Her response: that would be revolting!’ She pleases him and he would not like to content himself with the knee that she ‘had [him] touch.’ (Derrida, “Law of Genre” 78)

When read in reverse, the female element cannot confirm or justify *her* sexuality, her invisible identity at a genre’s centre, her authority that permits and controls the result of masculine sexuality, or her ability to uncover and obtain Otherness. It is worth noting that this serves as a link to Jacques Lacan’s discussion of sexual difference, which Derrida appears to be tracing via a masculine subject who desires a feminine object. However, to verify this Lacanian logic, women’s invisible identity within a genre’s centre (and therefore Weird Fiction’s centre, given the current analysis) requires further explanation. This is all to say that women’s identity is invisible because Derrida acknowledges the law only within a masculine subjection. And, because the law is viewed as the daughter by masculine sexuality, women’s identity within genre theory is impossible.

In any attempt to express herself, the law’s desire is explained away as a “mock-playing” game (Derrida, “Law of Genre” 79). It is the law’s motif to play “out her nature and her history”, to make “a plaything of an account” in her madness to “‘see day’” (“Law of Genre” 79). However, it is with this feminine “nature” and “history” that feminist critics like Monique Wittig take issue. According to Wittig, women are compelled “with the *idea* of nature that has been established”—as

[17] The French term *la folie du jour* can be translated as “the madness of the day”, which is significant for Derrida’s analysis of the masculine demanding possession and knowledge of the feminine law, which is made impossible to him. I keep Blanchot’s title untranslated due to its significance for Derrida’s emphasis on *moi* and *la loi*.

“distorted” and corrupted bodies that have been given to them by the masculine, which are “supposed to exist as such before oppression” (Wittig in *Critical Theory* 1906). It is from the perspective of the masculine that the feminine has granted him access to corruption. This is demonstrated in Derrida’s analysis of the extract from Blanchot, in which the knee presented to the masculine belongs to the distorted body of the feminine. When the feminine attempts to express herself, to express her desire to exist, the masculine genre views this gesture and therefore his daughter as mad: “My daughter’s madness is to want to be born—like anybody, whereas she remained a ‘silhouette,’ a shadow, a profile, her face never in view” (Derrida, “Law of Genre” 80).

The feminine law’s body remains removed and invisible to the masculine. While her body remains unnatural and corrupted, the feminine is perceived by the masculine as presenting an opposition and temptation to him, in her attempt to express her existence. The masculine perceives by mistake—remembering Derrida’s argument that the cause of corruption, although confirming a genre’s “essential purity”, is driven “by accident or through transgression, by mistake or through a lapse” (“Law of Genre” 57)—as corruption and negation, and thus feminine madness. Indeed, it is Derrida’s conclusion that what the feminine law’s madness does is spin “Peterson’s genre-disc like a demented sun” in order to cross and divide “the borders between literature and its others” (Derrida, “Law of Genre” 81). However, due to Derrida’s rejection of a female personhood, “she”, “her”, and “daughter” exist outside of the masculine in her expression of existence. The masculine, then, perceived the law as a feminine seduction—or, as Spivak puts it, “instead of the Law being of the Father, the irreducible madness of the Law-as-daughter is seductive ... of the male mother, who by this means accedes to a ‘neuter’ voice that is ‘doubly affirmative’” (63). In applying this logic to Figure 5, to Weird Fiction’s (im)possible form, my use of the term (im)possibility requires further explanation.

In the previous chapter I spoke directly to the paradox of the law of genre: the strictly impossible corruption of two separate stimuli that, from within, produces a corruption in an attempt to form something new. Within this ambiguity, in the entanglement of the Old and/or New, lingers the Weird and its ability to corrupt itself into being. The (im)possibility of Weird Fiction’s existence requires consideration of

both the Old and/or New to produce the law that validates it as a genre. In applying this Derridean symbolic paradox to the above discussion of feminine negation and invisibility, it becomes clear how the feminine law's existence is both validated and rejected by the masculine. The feminine law stands at *his* centre, inside the womb (C and D), waiting to be born in reflection of her Other. In this way I connect women's (im)possible existence with Weird Fiction, and indeed a motif to play "out her nature and her history" and make "a plaything of an account" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 79). The feminine disrupts the masculine and its phallocentric law, which perceives her existence as mad and corrupt.

Women's (im)possible existence within the law of genre is a necessary counterpart to the concept of women writing Weird Fiction: symbolic of *la loi's* impossible existence in relation to *moi* who gives birth to it, as well as the feminine desire to exist beyond masculine delimitation. This point of commonality between the feminine and Weird Fiction is not purely theoretical. As it is my aim to make clearer in discussing Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, Weird Fiction offers an experimental practice for women writers, to demonstrate how women's (im)possible bodies function beyond the masculine. This aim is commensurate with feminist arguments like those of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. In their book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar argue that "whether she is a passive angel or an active monster ... the woman writer feels herself to be literally or figuratively crippled by the debilitating alternatives her culture offers her" (57). And it is only "from a female perspective" that "such 'inconstancy' can only be encouraging, for—implying duplicity—it suggests that women themselves have the power to ... reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help her to climb out" (Gilbert and Gubar 16). Otherness is the daughter of the daughter, and of her disfigured and corrupted mother. And it is here that the desire, a barred and impossible existence beyond the masculine, is concealed and reflected in the mad daughter-law. As discussed above, the feminine law's invisible and corrupted body expresses her desire to exist despite the delimitation imposed by the masculine genre. In what follows, I suggest that Weird Fiction's and women's shared (im)possible bodies inscribe the authority of their Otherness, unknowable and inaccessible to masculine desire.

3.1. (IM)POSSIBLE EXPRESSION

Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* demonstrates Weird Fiction's unique function of (im)possibility through feminine expression in an "evil" house (75). The unknown narrator describes Hill House, in the first paragraph of the novel, as an ominous structure that exists in ambiguous seclusion. Dr. John Montague is then revealed as the masculine voice that dictates this initial impression of Hill House, as well as the purpose behind the story's main plot: "to spend all or part of a summer ... to observe and explore the various unsavoury stories which had been circulated about the house" (3). Driven by "the publication of his definitive work on the causes and effects of psychic disturbances in a house commonly known as 'haunted'", Dr. Montague convinces Eleanor Vance, Theodora, and the owner's nephew Luke Sanderson to participate in his experiment (2). Dr. Montague believes that his research will produce evidence that "the evil is in the house itself ... [which] has enchained and destroyed its people and their lives, and it is a place of contained ill will" (75). Stephen King speaks to this negation of the house in *Danse Macabre*, arguing that Dr. Montague's investigation of Hill House is essential to the plot; that is, whether the house will reveal itself to him: "One thing we do know about Hill House is that it is *all wrong*. It is no one thing we can put our finger on; it's everything" (King 305). It is, more precisely, the *all wrong* unknowability of Hill House that I wish to investigate further. Because it is precisely this expectation that Hill House will deliver its madness in the form of something "wrong" that, as Steven Shaviro points out, signifies the strange "idea that there exists something other than bodies, organs, somatic localisations, functions, anatomo-physiological systems, sensations, and pleasures, something else and something more, with intrinsic properties and laws of its own" (Foucault qtd. in Shaviro 114). It is the body, in this case women's (im)possible bodies, that "remains the great unknown, the 'dark continent' of postmodern thought and culture" (Shaviro 113). And it is this unknowable and (im)possible body that is key to understanding the Weirdness of *The Haunting of Hill House*.

Hill House can be understood as the antagonistic negation of the characters' reality. This negation of Hill House is further reinforced by Dr. Montague, explaining to the other characters "that the concept of certain houses as unclean or forbidden—perhaps sacred—is as old as the mind of man" (Jackson 63). The

evilness of Hill House is compared to the mental state of someone who is "disturbed, perhaps. Leprous. Sick. Any of the popular euphemisms for insanity, a deranged house is a pretty conceit" (Jackson 64). Stephen King argues that entering the house—or entering the novel within which the house is contained—is akin to "stepping into the mind of a madman; it isn't long before you weird out yourself" (305). This suggests that Hill House's evil is linked to the notion of man's insanity—a corruption in the masculine, which the story is ultimately questioning at the end of the novel, when it shifts to Eleanor's perspective. My point is that the novel opens in third person, with Dr. Montague as the focalisation character. Moreover, when Eleanor is the focalisation character, the narration is internally focalised: that is, while the narration remains technically in third person omniscient, Eleanor's subjective experience is presented almost uninterrupted. This focalisation is a significant rhetorical device, not only for the way it employs a form of unreliable narration even while in third person or the way it reveals Eleanor's "negotiation with the absolute reality of her own isolation," but also because it embeds the reader in Eleanor's experience of "the slow process of dissolving into the fabric of Hill House" (Miller xxx). Eleanor's desire to "surrender" and belong to Hill House seemingly reverses the house's initial negation, articulated by Dr. Montague and the other characters (Jackson 150). It is rather my suggestion that Eleanor's desire to exist and belong within the perceived madness of Hill House underscores traditional approaches to genre theory which negate Weird Fiction's (im)possible existence.

Take for example the opening paragraph of *The Haunting of Hill House* as a justification and expression of the female element rejected in Derrida's analysis of the women's expression of existence:

> No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone. (Jackson 1)

This description of the conditions of "absolute reality", and the existence of the "not sane" house is delivered with omniscient authority. The authority of the Hill House is

presented as masculine; that is to say, Hill House is assumed by the masculine to be a corruptible, mad structure. "Within" itself and "alone" to itself, further inscribe the house's alienness and wholeness, an Otherness that is at once validated and rejected by the masculine that has given birth to it—and, indeed, a birth that has been seen. This is why we encounter critical scholars who, like Dara Downey and Darryl Jones, interpret Hill House as a haunting structure that "is not simply dead but mad and malignant" because "it does not merely lack unreality or dreams, but actively discourages them" (Downey and Jones 225). S. T. Joshi also describes Hill House as "an abomination and even a paradox" that "has defied the very beings who have created it and inverts the purposes for which it was built" ("Modern Weird" 48). Hill House is symbolic in its negation because it actively discourages the masculine imagination and sexuality that has created and thus prescribed its madness. Like the space of Weird Fiction, Hill House is constructed within a masculine space whose phallocentric systems cannot explain the feminine madness within it.

Given that the "absolute reality" of the novel is introduced by and as the masculine, when entering Hill House from within Eleanor's perspective the reader anticipates an encounter with the mad thing. What exactly the mad thing is, however, remains an ambiguous object of Eleanor's desire: "this is what I came so far to find" (Jackson 31). It is Eleanor's initial warning to herself to "get away from here, get away" from the house, and perhaps from madness itself, that gives the impression that Hill House is the object of her desire (Jackson 31). Despite her fear, Eleanor's acceptance of Hill House's madness fuels her desire to belong to it. One of the most significant phrases that recurs throughout the novel is Eleanor's: "journeys end in lovers meeting".18 The repetition of this phrase suggests Eleanor's desire for a "journeys end" and/or a "lovers meeting". The novel concludes when, forced to leave Hill House, Eleanor's suicide is inspired by her realisation that "Hill House belongs to me" (Jackson 232). In claiming her relation to Hill House, Eleanor acknowledges that this (im)possible existence belongs to her. Eleanor's realisation could be interpreted, as it is by Judie Newman, as an affirmation that the theme of "journeys end in lovers meeting" is Eleanor's "realisation of heterosexual desires" (Newman

[18] The phrase is a reference to William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, in which the court jester Feste sings: "O, mistress mine, where are you roaming? / O, stay and hear; your true love's coming, / That can sing both high and low: / Trip no further, pretty sweeting; / Journeys end in lovers meeting, / Every wise man's son doth know" (2.3.44-45).

172). However, for the purpose of my focus on Weird Fiction's (im)possible function, examining the ambiguity of the phrase that tethers "lovers meeting" (birth) and "journeys end" (death) should not be interpreted as the law assigning Eleanor "places and limits" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 80). Eleanor does not insist upon "an appeal against this law" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 80), rather Eleanor's desire is to exist beyond the prescribed madness of Hill House. To appeal against the law of the mad house would be to imply that Eleanor's desire can only be realised through what Luce Irigaray insists is a masculine genealogy, "as if [she] had been assimilated into maleness" (9). In realising and therefore identifying herself in maleness, Eleanor would lose the desire to be born anew as a reflection of her mad mother. The "what" of Eleanor's desire would instead be reduced to a "journeys end": to her death within the masculine madness of Hill House. The madness of Hill House would not be successful in its (im)possible expression.

To elucidate my approach and connection to women's (im)possibility, I wish to extend my analysis to Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. This is a relevant extension to Gilbert's and Gubar's study concerning women's access to literature. In offering a brief analysis of the mad woman in the attic with Bronte's Jane Eyre and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper", it is my aim to contribute to feminist analysis of women's madness, and also to offer an understanding of the Weird themes in Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House. The two female characters of Bronte's novel, Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason, are held in relation to each other by Edward Rochester's desire. Bertha is Rochester's mad wife who he attempts to hide away in the attic of Thornfield Hall, and Jane is the newly appointed governess, who Rochester desires "just as a change after that fierce ragout" (Bronte 385). The problem, of course, is that Rochester's comparison depends on madness to validate the repulsion, the corruption that appears in the juxtaposition of his imagination and sexuality. *Jane Eyre* reveals women's expression of existence "through the variable verbal and physical release afforded by madness, [with which] women contest the subjected positions into which they have been forced" (Beattie 500).

Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, precisely because of its "long-standing critical problem" of crossing the boundaries of multiple literary genres, disturbs Derrida's genre theory, which expels women and their desire (Warhol 858). An example of this disturbance is Bertha's position as Rochester's "sole conjugal embrace" (Bronte

385). Bertha's madness is bound to the corrupted image created by Rochester's sexuality, made particularly evident in his comparison of the two women: "Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk; then judge me" (Bronte 385). Rochester speaks of Bertha as an inescapable bond produced by law, one that nonetheless appealed to his sexual desire for a 'marriage-bond' to create a pure, whole form. Moreover, it is *her* madness that causes his corruption: although Rochester admits that it was his father's and brother's scheme to seek him a wealthy "partner betimes", and that he only learned of her madness after their marriage (madness *before* the marriage-bond), it is nonetheless her nature that he claims is "wholly alien" to his own (Bronte 401-402).

To be whole in her alienness, her Otherness, Bertha signifies the masculine idea of nature, and is perhaps symbolic of the game the law plays. Rochester has given birth to Bertha's madness, and thus enforced her expression of desire as "a 'silhouette,' a shadow, a profile," of a "red ball", "mask", and "bulk" that differs from the norm (Bronte 385). In other words, Bertha functions as corruption. At Weird Fiction's most elementary level, Bertha functions as the Old. The allegorical connection that I am making between *Jane Eyre* and the Weird, focus on how Jane (the New) views Bertha (the Old) as repellent under the masculine that has created her corrupted image. Of course, this is not to say that the separate stimuli of Weird Fiction are feminine, but rather to demonstrate how the feminine troubles Derridean genre theory in terms of the corruption that validates an (im)possible existence within the masculine that rejects them. While the masculine may admit to having never loved his mad daughter-wife, it is nonetheless the relation between genre and the law that gives authority to her (im)possibility. The feminine and the Old both become secluded in their (im)possibility, and thus inspire fear of domination.

Positioned away from the norm, in her madness, Bertha is forced to operate within the confines of masculine imagination and sexuality. The only thing Rochester can do to acclimatise to Bertha's madness is to be seduced by her corruption. For Rochester, locking the madwoman in the attic is a refusal of madness, a break in the connection to the New, an attempt to transgress the law from which he has given birth:

> 'Concealing the madwoman's neighbourhood from you, however, was something like covering a child with a cloak, and laying it down near a upas-

> tree: that demon's vicinage is poisoned, and always was. But I'll shut up Thornfield Hall: I'll nail up the front door and board the lower windows: I'll give Mrs Poole two hundred a year to live here with *my wife*, as you term that fearful hag ... when *my wife* is prompted by her familiar to burn people in their beds at night, to stab them, to bite their flesh from their bones, and so on—'
>
> 'Sir,' I interrupted him, 'you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad.' (Bronte 395-396)

In this passage Jane appears to be sympathetic towards Bertha, especially given her previous descriptions of Bertha as a "strange wild animal" (Bronte 384). As such, Jane is forced to question Rochester's sexuality that has "masculinised and, as it were, *animalised*" Bertha's "desire-driven madness" (Gilbert 360). Rochester is confronted by the temptation to transgress, hesitating on the border of being seduced into corruption. To put this another way, the masculine's position as a pure "whole" is threatened by the feminine expression of existence, which he perceives as her madness. More specifically, Rochester claims that Jane is mistaken in assuming he could not love her in *her* madness, because she does not know "about the sort of love of which I am capable" (Bronte 396). Rochester's desire to transgress the law (his marriage-bond) is revealed in his attempt to overcome and conceal Bertha's corruption through Jane. In this way, Jane can be understood as symbolic of the New, connected by both women's understanding of their Otherness. However, Jane clearly desires Rochester (and this is where I am placing her Otherness in relation to Bertha's madness), but, as Gilbert points out, in a way that forces her "to accommodate and decriminalise this fiery and desirous animal self that marks her as a most unusual Cinderella: the mate rather than the prey of Bluebeard" (361-362). In sympathising with Bertha's madness (in seeing Bertha's birth and thus her madness), Jane recognises her own (im)possibility in reflection. The two women are connected through their (im)possible existences, but it is Jane who recognises and understands this.

Another example of this recognition is that Bertha, in attacking Rochester, is described by Jane as a "lunatic" and "a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest" (Bronte 384).

Recognised as the corrupted and distorted body given to her by the masculine, Bertha demonstrates her (im)possible existence by fighting back. This expression of existence, this feminine desire to fight back can be read as Bertha and Jane playing out their nature and their history, making a plaything of Weird Fiction, of Rochester who 'gives birth' to them and their (im)possibility. If Bertha's madness wields authority, she is thereby capable of installing her own evilness, negation and/or rejection, and thus her own desire of escape *into* Rochester. In turn, Bertha shifts the masculine desire onto Jane, onto the New who is a reflection of herself. This is how the New gives life to the Old, allowing it to roam, zombie-like, (im)possibly in the attic of Weird Fiction.

Speaking to this liberation from an "obsessive anxiety both about starvation ... and about monstrous inhabitation", Gilbert and Gubar describe Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a narrative that "(like *Jane Eyre*) seems to tell *the* story that all literary women would tell if they could speak their 'speechless woe'" (89). Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of Gilman's short story is linked into this study because, as in *Jane Eyre*, in Gilman's tale women's madness is inscribed by the masculine. The unnamed narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" slowly succumbs to her madness, and "the cure, of course, is worse than the disease" (Gilbert and Gubar 89). It is the narrator who is obsessed with the yellow wallpaper of the nursery. Her husband hopes that being restricted to the nursery will help her "temporary nervous depression", which he himself has diagnosed as "a physician of high standing" (Gilman 4). My point in this connection, however, is to demonstrate how the wallpaper can be read as the threshold of the Weird. The wallpaper functions as a link to an ambiguous space that is magnified by the narrator's obsession, her prescribed madness, and her desire to strip the paper from the walls. In her madness, the narrator sees herself in the yellow wallpaper.

The (im)possible expression of existence reveals itself in "The Yellow Wallpaper" in much the same way as it did in *Jane Eyre*. While Bronte's Bertha exemplifies women's motif of madness, Gilman explores women's desire for liberation through madness. As Paula A. Treichler argues, the wallpaper can be interpreted as "women's discourse" (64). In seeking an "alternative reality beneath the repellent surface pattern in which the figures of women are emerging" Treichler suggests that the narrator "strives to liberate the women trapped within the ancestral

halls, women with whom she increasingly identifies" (67). This matrilineal tradition of reinterpreting the mad woman aligns with my analysis of Derrida's law of genre—that is, the unnamed narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" views madness as an opportunity to not only fight back against the masculine but to achieve liberation beyond the masculine assumption of her madness. Karen Ford agrees in asserting a matrilineal literary writing tradition through these texts, arguing that by tearing down the wallpaper the narrator uncovers a retreat "of such a place outside language and outside male influence and in the tendency for women to find other women there" (312). I am thinking of the narrator's description of the wallpaper, somewhat like Jane's description of Bertha: "It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following ... the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrages angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradiction" (Gilman 6).

As in Jane's descriptions of Bertha's repellent and corrupted body, here the wallpaper is recognised and understood by the narrator. The narrator thus recognises her own madness as a liberating opportunity for herself and other women to escape masculine limitations. The narrator seeks the reflection of her Otherness in this blank space beyond her own corruption. She seeks authority. The narrator becomes the author of her own demented and destructive movement. She gives birth to herself, to her own daughter who wields authority, achieved precisely out of the madness forced upon her. Much like the feminine law in Derrida's masculine genre, Weird Fiction exists precisely because of its corruption, because of its madness in seeing its birth and thus belonging to itself. In contributing to écriture féminine, texts like Jane Eyre and "The Yellow Wallpaper" recognise and provide an understanding of Weird Fiction's (im)possible existence. It is the rejected feminine element that casts authority and reflects her madness into her Otherness. Although both *Jane Eyre* and "The Yellow Wallpaper" build upon the recognition and understanding of the feminine (im)possibility, Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* explicitly addresses Weird Fiction's (im)possible and anti-normative characteristics. *The Haunting of Hill House* anchors (im)possibility and offers itself as a text that crosses and divides multiple genre boundaries.

3.2. BETWEEN (NEW) LIFE AND/OR (OLD) DEATH

First published in 1959, *The Haunting of Hill House* occupies the ambiguous forty-year gap, the 'death' of Weird Fiction between the Old and/or New. It reveals how the Old's death impacted the Weird Fiction texts that continued to deal with anti-normative themes and consciously cross multiple genre boundaries. Moreover, texts like Jackson's novel became more difficult to define and categorise due to its Old elements. Joshi, for example, argues that Jackson, alongside Ramsey Campbell, is one of the "leading writers of weird fiction since [H. P.] Lovecraft" because *The Haunting of Hill House's* "distinctions about genre and classification" are "arbitrary and meaningless" (*Modern Weird* 13). But this success of the Old, between life and death, further implies that a necessary relation between genre and its law affirms its existence—which is what the critical scholarship aims to avoid. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, it is impossible for the Old to stand alone *as* Weird Fiction without the New. Given that the Old is perceived as dead or moved on to new realms during this forty-year gap, Jackson's novel can be read as a contribution to Weird Fiction's (im)possibility.

Weird Fiction's (im)possibility may account for critical uncertainty about where to place Jackson's novel; that is, genres like Gothic and Horror are mixed in order to gain access and knowledge to the novel's difficult Weird themes. This unease about the mixing of genres can be seen in the initial reception of Jackson's novel during the time of its publication. Jerry M. Wadden, for example, wrote in a 1970 review that Jackson's novel encompassed "a natural world containing supernatural elements and terrifyingly shows a person plunging into fantasy because the real world lacks love and understanding" (42). The ambiguity of describing Jackson's novel as set in a "natural world" appears to confuse and mix with the "supernatural" and "fantasy". This is also evident in Robert Wise's 1963 film adaptation, *The Haunting*, which rejected and recreated the difficult themes of Jackson's novel. In a 1963 review of *The Haunting*, Normand Lareau discusses the significant differences between the novel and film, arguing that:

> while the former suggests natural explanations for the disturbances at Hill House, the latter gives evidence ... of an existing spirit. The history of the house is covered in one paragraph in the book; the film uses this as a ghoulish prologue to set the fiendish mood of the piece. The appearance of

> the ghost in the form of thunderous clashing of metal along the hall outside the girls' bedroom is minimised by Miss Jackson because the girls are able to laugh about it; in *The Haunting* they are justifiably petrified. Wise ... has succeeded in involving us to such an emotional pitch he draws us progressively closer to Eleanor's pitiful surrender to the spirit and our acceptance of it. (46)

What is common in both Wadden's and Lareau's approaches is their use of the word "natural", which functions to determine the "disturbances" in Jackson's novel. Both interpretations, moreover, suggest that these disturbances are lacking in "understanding" and "evidence". One interpretation of this review is that Jackson's novel is negated by these approaches because its disturbances within the boundaries of one genre cannot be justified without risking the corruption of another genre. Another interpretation is that it is an attempt to rescue Jackson's novel from negation, which, as I discussed in the introduction, mirrors Tzevetan Todorov's treatment of Lovecraft's works. Todorov's purpose was to rescue Lovecraft from a failed mode of writing, and in the case of Jackson's novel it appears these early reviews might be attempting a similar resurrection/rescue. This rescuing of Jackson's novel may account for why the film, for Lareau, succeeds exclusively in and as an expression of the Horror genre. Jackson's novel is negated through its reimagined ambiguous elements; that is, Jackson's novel is "difficult to define" because the scholarship cannot identify or recognise it within genre boundaries without corrupting them (Roberts 71).

Contemporary investigations into the difficult themes of Jackson's novel continue to struggle with a similar issue around corruption and negation. For example, Laura Miller speaks to the novel as a form of ghost story. In her 2016 introduction to *Hill House*, Miller argues that "like all ghost stories, Shirley Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House sets up a trap for its protagonist" and readers (xiii). By insisting that Jackson writes against "the traditional English ghost stories of M. R. James or Sheridan Le Fanu", Miller positions the novel within the Horror genre boundaries because ghost stories are:

> a small genre to begin with, but its subgenre, the psychological ghost story, the category to which *The Haunting of Hill House* and Henry James's tales belong, is tinier still. The literary effect we call horror turns on the

dissolutions of boundaries, between the living and the dead, of course, but also at the crudest level, between the outside of the body and everything that ought to stay *inside* ... The psychological ghost story is as much about the puzzle of identity as it is about madness. (xiv-xv; emphasis in original)

Miller's argument that Jackson's novel is positioned both within and outside genre boundaries reflects Michael Kelly's arguments about Weird Fiction explored in the first chapter of this thesis. Although Kelly's point is that Weird Fiction "has always been present" in the genres it encompasses (1: 7), Miller is similarly conscious of how Jackson's novel exposes Horror's "literary effect" to transgress other genre boundaries. This is all to say that the Weird themes present in *The Haunting of Hill House* continues to trouble critical scholarship.

Having clarified the way that Weird Fiction's (im)possibility commands its own validation and rejection in the law of genre—as an authoritative structure that maintains affirmation—I offer a reading of women's (im)possibility in Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* as discourse. It is my suggestion that it is Hill House itself that exposes an unknowability for Eleanor. Take for example the character's confrontation with an unknowable presence within the house. When Eleanor discovers writing on the walls of the house, she observes that:

The writing was large and straggling and ought to have looked, Eleanor thought, as though it had been scribbled by bad boys on a fence. Instead, it was incredibly real, going in broken lines over the thick panelling of the hallway. From one end of the hallway to the other the letters went, almost too large to read, even when she stood back against the opposite wall.

'Can you read it?' Luke asked softly, and the doctor, moving his flashlight, read slowly: HELP ELEANOR COME HOME. (Jackson 136)

Acting on the assumption that the others wrote her name on the wall, Eleanor accuses them of playing a trick on her. Not only do the other characters attempt to turn Eleanor's accusation back upon her, but Eleanor begins to recognise her difference from the others: "I am outside, she thought madly, I am the one chosen" (Jackson 137). King considers the writing on the wall "an imperative Eleanor has delivered to herself", and suggests that it is "Hill House's invitation for Eleanor to join it" (King

310). It is Eleanor, in this instance, who realises that difference is made knowable within Hill House; for it is Eleanor's desire to "'be someplace where I belong'" (Jackson 196). If Eleanor rejects the house's invitation to belong, she would also be rejecting her own difference to the madness of Hill House.

Like the masculine genre's perception of the mad daughter-law, Eleanor, whose desire "is to want to be born" and belong to Hill House, is perceived as "mad" in her expression to do so (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 80). Eleanor's acknowledgment that Hill House belongs to her implies that her (im)possible existence does not belong to the masculine. The feminine liberates itself through Eleanor, giving her understanding, seducing her and thereby belonging to itself while transgressing all limitations that accumulate in its invisible centre, its womb that gives birth to itself. This liberation through Eleanor can be grasped when compared to the other characters of the novel. Theodora, Dr. Montague and Luke doubt the madness of Hill House, desiring madness instead as something that can be proven as real: "'What *is* wrong with Hill House? What is going to happen?'" (Jackson 60). The "is" of Hill House in these descriptions of doubt align with Eleanor's "what"—the "whatness" of the "what" inspires desire but is not necessarily the desired thing. In Eleanor's case the object of desire is not Hill House, rather it "is" the thing of her desire. Significantly, the events that transpire in Hill House introduce the presence of "is"—the ambiguous "is" of Weird Fiction, the uncertainty between reality, the symbolic and the imaginary (specifically supernatural and/or fantasy elements). Take, for example, the following conversation between the characters in desiring evidence of madness:

> 'But why?' Theodora asked. 'I mean, I can accept that Hill House is supposed to be haunted, and you want us here ... but what's here? What really frightens people so?'
>
> 'I will not put a name to what has no name,' the doctor said. 'I don't know.'
>
> 'They never even told me what was going on,' Eleanor said urgently to the doctor. 'My mother said it was the neighbours, they were always against us because she wouldn't mix with them. My mother—'

> Luke interrupted her, slowly and deliberately. 'I think,' he said, 'that what we all want is facts. Something we can understand and put together.' (Jackson 67)

Again, it is the "what" that withholds certainty. It also presents us with the "is" that is in many respects a definitive answer, one that resides inside Hill House. Hill House is the vessel of *la loi's* madness: the female element that transgresses all limitations that accumulate within itself. But what is "what" and "is"? This passage from Jackson's novel presents us with two different desires. Theodora, Dr. Montague and Luke pursue "facts", a sense of reality *within* Hill House; this 'what' renders Hill House an object. Eleanor, on the other hand, appears to be connecting her sense of desire to the maternal figure of her mother. The two opposing desires of "what" and "is" can be understood, as noted by Sherryl Vint, as the result of attaching "a concept of self that presumes an interior essence that is 'true' and immutable" (5). We can therefore interpret the characters' attaching desire to Hill House as a reflection of their "retain[ing] a concept of ego or self as essential, unique, self-consistent, and autonomous" (6).

Like Bertha's positioning in *Jane Eyre*, Hill House signifies the masculine idea of nature. Due to masculine assumptions about absolute reality, Hill House is misrecognised as negation and thus functions as its corruption because it does not align with its knowable conditions. Viewed as a mad secluded structure, the Old can be seen here in Hill House's refusal and failure in the masculine. It is this refusal and failure that becomes expressed through the feminine. For example, at the end of the novel when Eleanor has been accepted and recognises the madness of Hill House as real, she is forced to leave Hill House by the other characters who "made a solid line along the steps" (Jackson 227). This literal line of rejection is an attempt to force Eleanor to "'forget everything about this house as soon as she can; we cannot prolong the association'" (Jackson 227). An important element in this rejection is that it is spoken by Dr. Montague. The reversal here is significant. In expressing her desire to possess and be possessed by madness, Eleanor is rejecting the opportunity to operate within the confines of masculine imagination and sexuality.

The novel emphasises this reversal of gendered authority. Dr. Montague's reaction to Eleanor's expression of desire is "as though he expected her to choose him instead of the house, as though, having brought her here, he thought that by

unwinding his directions he could send her back again" (Jackson 228). In choosing her existence and thus her belonging over the masculine, in seeing her (im)possible birth as the new mad thing, Eleanor gains authority. Although Eleanor is forced into her car and begins to drive away from Hill House, the description of her last moments before death confirms her authority of beingness:

> Journeys end in lovers meeting. But I *won't* go, she thought, and laughed aloud to herself; Hill House is not as easy as *they* are; just by telling me to go away they can't make me leave, not if Hill House means me to stay. 'Go away, Eleanor,' she chanted aloud, 'go away, Eleanor, we don't want you any more, not in *our* Hill House, go away, Eleanor, you can't stay *here*; but I can,' she sang, 'but I can; *they* don't make the rules around *here*. They can't turn me out or shut me out or laugh at me or hide from me; I won't go, and Hill House belongs to *me*.' (Jackson 232)

This passage anticipates the novel's assertion of women's belonging. It is not Hill House that expels Eleanor from its madness but Eleanor who expresses a liberation from the prescribed madness. Eleanor's means of achieving liberation, then, is to remove herself from the masculine "absolute reality" (Jackson 1). While critics, like Downey and Jones, insist that Eleanor has been "tricked" by Hill House into believing she belongs, given Eleanor's sense of reality, it is impossible to interpret Hill House as "stripping" away her "dreams and illusions" (Downey and Jones 228-229). Downey and Jones refer here to the last thought given in Eleanor's perspective which they suggest is *her* doubt: "*Why* am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don't they stop me?" (Jackson 232).

I argue that Eleanor's suicide is a final liberation from a male dominated space. I relate this in part to Derrida's explanation of *la loi's* madness; that it is possible to understand Eleanor's suicide as her decision to play "out her nature and her history", to make "a plaything of an account" in her madness to "see day" ("The Law" 79). I also relate Eleanor's suicide to Kristeva's *Black Sun* which argues that suicide "becomes imperative for those who view it as a final triumph over the void of the lost object" (9). From Kristeva's argument, it can be understood that Eleanor sees Hill House as "an imagined sun, bright and black" that is promised to her "through the nuptials of suicide" (Kristeva 13-14). Julie Ann Baker makes a similar connection between Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Kristeva's *Black Sun*.

Baker argues that Eleanor's lost object is her mother whom she is haunted by in the form of Hill House (22). Eleanor is drawn towards Hill House "and makes it impossible for her to escape or even *desire* to escape" (Baker 22). Baker argues that Hill House is "the *objet petit a* that Eleanor believes herself to be in pursuit of rather than her mother," and is therefore willing to exchange her life "to experience unity with the house itself, signifying her own insanity and ultimately her return to the Imaginary Order" (22). And, indeed, when feminine expression is reversed, from woman to man, it is the masculine's reality and assumption that is disturbed.

Jackson's novel is an example of how women move beyond mad houses constructed by the masculine. Hill House functions as a site of madness, a corruption in the knowable reality assumed by the masculine subject. So too, Eleanor's desire to belong to Hill House is an expression of (im)possible existence, negated by the characters who, seeking to expose the "evil" of Hill House as real, perceive Eleanor as lost to madness (Jackson 75). Women's (im)possible existence beyond the mad and evil body of Hill House is inaccessible to the masculine, which Eleanor succeeds in revealing as unknowable and impossible. Yet the novel's conclusion raises questions for Weird Fiction because, while Eleanor is deemed successful in achieving access to the unknowable beyond of Hill House, and achieving her desire to belong, she leaves the characters and readers with a Weird dilemma. If, in *The Haunting of Hill House*, women's (im)possible existence is knowable to the masculine, how do Weird Fiction's unknown unknowns operate? In the next chapter, I discuss the complexities of the object-cause of desire in Daphne Du Maurier's short story "Don't Look Now", revealing a working definition of Weird Fiction. Discussing a Weird threshold alongside Du Maurier's short story will demonstrate the characteristics of madness discussed in this chapter with *The Haunting of Hill House*. As touched on, a Weird threshold discloses the genre's Weird themes. It is the unknown unknown space beyond the assumed reality of the masculine where a Weird threshold reveals itself: a threshold that women in language occupy. A Weird threshold is a psychological space that, like Eleanor's desire to escape into the (im)possible space of Hill House, relies on and maintains unknown unknowns in order to disrupt masculine assumption.

CHAPTER FOUR
A WEIRD THRESHOLD: UNDERSTANDING UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS

Concretising Weird Fiction through definition causes the genre's narrative function of unknown unknowns to fail. To recover Weird Fiction from this failure, critics like S. T. Joshi endeavour to reify the Lovecraftian formula. On the other hand, New Weird critics like Ann and Jeff VanderMeer strive for a new and different Weird movement that is not limited to the Lovecraftian Old Weird. Due to this divide in the critical scholarship's treatment of Weird Fiction, a definition is viewed as negation and therefore dismissed by those who view it as a mode of Gothic, Horror or Science Fiction. This chapter will offer a working definition for Weird Fiction by using a contextualised function that is engaged with and yet overlooked by the scholarship: a Weird threshold that operates as a unique function for Weird Fiction. The previous chapter spoke briefly of this threshold, in the way that Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* demonstrates Eleanor's desire to escape *through* (im)possibility itself, to escape into the space beyond masculine assumption. In offering a Weird threshold as a working definition for the (im)possible genre, I suggest that the works labelled as Weird Fiction instantiate this unknowable space beyond masculine desire.

This chapter investigates Weird Fiction's unknowability through Daphne du Maurier's short story "Don't Look Now", which was first published in 1971. "Don't Look Now" is included in Ann and Jeff VanderMeer's *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*. The VanderMeers include a brief introduction for each of the included works where they describe du Maurier's story as "a masterpiece of the occult, its hints of a world *beyond* embodying the best of weird fiction" (423). This "world *beyond*" implies an unknown reality. It is worth noting that this unknown reality is inscribed by the VanderMeers *as* Weird Fiction. In other words, Weird Fiction is an unknown reality. To identify "Don't Look Now" as a Weird Fiction text purely on the basis that it promises "a world *beyond* embodying the best of weird fiction[s]" complicates a straightforward analysis. It raises questions such as: when reading a Weird Fiction text like du Maurier's "Don't Look Now" how might a

reader identify the unknowable? What is the distinct function of unknowability that signals to the reader that this is a Weird text? What attaches "Don't Look Now" and the "looking" Thing to the proscription *of* looking? What exactly is looking at the reader and troubling the reality of the narrative with its gaze? This chapter aims to answer these questions via Jacques Lacan's theory of the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. A Lacanian lens allows for an investigation into Weird Fiction's unique function of unknown unknowns. Moreover, this chapter is concerned with understanding and explaining the ambiguous Thing.

"Don't Look Now" centres on the male protagonist, John, who is anxious for his wife Laura's recovery after losing their daughter to meningitis. John hopes that a vacation in Venice will distract Laura from the reality of their loss and grief. It is precisely this reality, however, that is questioned and shifted throughout the short story. The uncertainty of reality is introduced from the first sentence. John and Laura are at lunch in Torcello, creating "ridiculous fantasies about people at other tables" (424). The couple describe a pair of old twin sisters, who they imagine are "male twins in drag," or "jewel thieves or murderers" (423). Understanding this moment as nothing more than a game and a relief from reality, John does not question Laura when she follows one of the twin sisters into the bathroom. Upon returning, however, Laura tells John of the twins' psychic abilities, and that they have seen their deceased daughter happily sitting between them. John's immediate reaction is despair and rejection of what he perceives as proof of his wife's hysterical imagination. His decision to "play along with her" annuls the story's knowable reality (426).

The narrative reveals John's resistance to believing his wife's story that the twins are psychic through his understanding of the distinction between reality and the unknown. To view his wife as hysterical and the twins as liars stabilises and yet complicates John's desire. By outwardly stating that he believes his wife's story, John positions Laura in the unknown, a space where his desire simultaneously can and cannot operate. Significantly, it is that unknown space, that otherness, that operates against John's desire, which begins to disturb his understanding of the difference between reality and the unknown. This introduction to du Maurier's short story demonstrates how a Weird threshold operates in a Weird text. More precisely, the threshold between reality and the unknown that Weird Fiction creates. However, to position John's desire in the unknown "world beyond", as described by the

VanderMeers, and thereby bring his perception of Laura into that known reality, terminates John's link to the Weird threshold. The ambiguous threshold that arises, disturbing John's sense of reality, is unique to Weird Fiction—it is the "feeling. A kind of continuous distortion of ambient space," that Michael Kelly describes as key to Weird Fiction (2: vii). The ambiguous, Weird threshold actively stabilises and disturbs John's understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown. This state of ambiguity is echoed in Laird Barron's Introduction to *Year's Best Weird Fiction, Volume One*. Barron asserts that:

> Genre definitions are often nebulous, if not useless, and none more so than the weird ... As with any genre, the parameters of the weird are shaped and defined by the participants—editor and writer alike. In some respects, grappling with a serviceable definition is akin to the three blind men describing an elephant. Perhaps in this case, it's a diver in murky depths who spies the last metre of a trailing tentacle and innocently supposes he's apprehended a common specimen of octopi: The rest of the mighty Kraken, coiled with its lair, waiting. We catch mere glimpses of this beast called the weird and think we know it, can safely catalogue it. (14)

Barron further contributes to the idea that, despite the difficulty of definition, Weird Fiction is best recognised by the uncertainty and unease it creates—a "feeling" experienced by readers and characters. It is the precise moment when the diver finds themselves caught between comprehending the tentacle as octopus or monster, as neither or both. It is a Weird threshold—the "continuous distortion of ambient space" that is never identified in the registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, or the Real. A Weird threshold performs the Weird in Weird narrative.

Although Barron uses the diver as a descriptive example of why Weird Fiction is difficult to define, a Weird threshold is nevertheless used. The critical scholarship's challenge in defining Weird Fiction is problematic for the genre. The issue, of course, as discussed in the second chapter to this thesis, arises from the critical scholarship's treatment of Weird Fiction as a mode. In confusing Weird Fiction's limitations as a corruption of limitations, the critical scholarship continues to permit the genre's corruption. Weird Fiction's ability to engage with its own (im)possibility is overlooked. By means of an exploration of the way Weird Fiction is an (im)possible genre, a Weird threshold relies on reality and the unknown to

announce itself. It is my hope that this chapter will offer an elucidation of how Weird Fiction texts like du Maurier's "Don't Look Now" incorporate unknown unknowns. The following chapters investigate this concept in more detail, specifically with Jacques Lacan's teachings of sexual difference. However, it is first necessary to investigate a problem specific to understanding a Weird threshold that purposely disrupts the Lacanian subject's reality.

This chapter uses a Weird threshold as the basis of a working definition for Weird Fiction. As discussed above, while scholars like Kelly, Barron, and the VanderMeers may engage with a Weird threshold, they continue this threshold as a contextualised function of Weird Fiction. I will test this Weird threshold by returning to du Maurier's "Don't Look Now" and interrogating the way that the object-gaze causes feelings of unease for the masculine subject in his demand/desire to possess and gain knowledge of the unknown. It is in this desire for the unknown that the subject's understanding of the divide between the real and the unknown is complicated by a Weird threshold. A Weird threshold reveals the monstrous, impossible Thing that gazes upon the subject from a position that cannot be seen or assumed. Through this analysis, I reveal how a Weird threshold is a unique function that contributes to the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction.

4.1. IMAGINARY ≠ SYMBOLIC ≠ REAL

Lacan's insights into the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real are significant in understanding a subject's encounter with an impossible object. Such a Lacanian connection engenders a psychoanalytic investigation of a subject's desire for knowledge of an object that becomes split and complicated by the three registers in quotidian reality. In *The Sinthome, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, Lacan speaks of the object of the subject's desire as that which causes an "observation of desire" rather than desire for the object itself (10). The obstacle for a subject in desiring knowledge rests in the desire for knowledge. That is to say, a subject desires knowledge of the object yet is uncertain what will be discovered. The subject's desire to know the object can only be perceived in this moment as abstract, as ambiguous; the identification and perception of the object remains unanswered (Lacan 10). To express this concept more simply, I will apply it to the diver in Barron's example: that is, the subject and the tentacle. The diver, upon descending

into the water, observes what they believe to be a tentacle. In this moment the diver is confronted by the desire to know what the tentacle is part of: is the tentacle octopi or Kraken? The diver desires knowledge but remains in uncertainty because any knowledge of the body of which the tentacle is a part (its reality) is never revealed. This reflects Lacan's point that what arises is the diver's *desire* for knowledge rather than knowledge that the tentacle is octopi and/or Kraken.

When desire emerges, it reveals the subject's disruptive encounter with the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Lacan offers the figure of the Borromean knot as an embodiment of this encounter. In explaining Lacan's Borromean knot, I refer to the basic depiction of three rings enveloping each other. Each ring relates to one of the three registers in Lacan's theory; the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, which are "thought of as the three fundamental dimensions of psychical subjectivity" (Johnston n.p.). What this shows, as Lacan emphasises, is that the three rings of the Borromean knot are equally significant.

> I situate the support of consistence in the imaginary. Likewise, I mean the essential constituent of the symbolic the hole. And I make the real the support of what I term ex-sistence, in this sense: in its sistence outside of the Imaginary and the symbolic, it knocks up against them, its play is something precisely in the order of limitation; the two others, from the moment when it is tied into a borromean knot with them, offer it resistance. In other words, the real only has ex-sistence ... in its encounter with the limits of the symbolic and the imaginary.
>
> To be sure, as much should be said of the two others—for example, it is to the extent that it ex-sists in the real that the imaginary also encounters conflict, which is here better felt. (14)

The knot reveals how the three registers create conflict, specifically when encountering each other. Philippe Julien builds on Lacan's description of consistence, arguing that the Borromean knot "belongs to the register of the Imaginary, because there is no consistency elsewhere, inasmuch as each element is *not*, *except* in relation to the other two" (177). This interpretation helps us to further understand Barron's example of the Imaginary—that is, while the diver may "imagine" the object to be a tentacle, the desire to know invites conflict with the

limitations of the Symbolic and the Real. The object becomes impossible, unattainable.

Lacan insists that the three rings of the Borromean knot are to be considered equivalent, as abstract *and* concrete, to rely on the Imaginary in investigating a subject's disruption inflects equivalence. This explains Slavoj Žižek's argument in For They Know Not What They Do, that "the complex interconnection within the triad Real-Imaginary-Symbolic" is, and must be, "reflected within each of its three elements" (xii). In other words, each individual register must consider its interconnections with not only itself but with the other two registers. Žižek reflects on this from "a series of intertwined weaknesses" arising from his previous publication The Sublime Object of Ideology. Žižek points out that a "philosophical weakness" appears in a "quasi-transcendental reading of Lacan [that] focused on the notion of the Real as the impossible Thing-in-itself; in so doing, it opens the way to the celebration of failure" (xi-xii). Žižek justifies this notion by arguing that the Real has three modalities: the real Real, the symbolic Real, and the imaginary Real. For Žižek "the Real is thus, in effect, all three dimensions at the same time: the abyssal vortex which ruins every consistent structure; the mathematised consistent structure of reality; the fragile pure appearance" (Sublime Object xii). Žižek's reading of the Real does not, of course, exclude the modalities inflicted by and within the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The real Imaginary, the real Symbolic, and so on, would ruin "every consistent structure" implemented by the three Real modalities. For Žižek the Real complicates the consistent equivalence found in the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. This repetition is the symptom (sinthome) of the Borromean knot, and one that demonstrates Lacan's point that if each knot is "kept unconstrained, a triple knot exists whose plays extends across its full texture" (Lacan 17). The three registers find support in their imitation of each other, creating an obstacle. To view the three registers separately would cause the reality of a subject to fail.

This "abyssal vortex" of the three Lacanian registers is necessary in understanding a subject's desire for knowledge of an object. The object is not limited by a subject's observation of desire, but it is held accountable—and it is precisely this that Žižek describes as the Lacanian objet *petit a*. In "Looking Awry", Žižek describes *objet petit a* as "the object-cause of desire, an object which is, in a way,

posited by the desire itself" (34). The object is not to be mistaken as the target of the subject's desire, rather the *objet petit a* is the impossible Thing of a subject's imagining. When I say that the object is not limited by a subject's desiring gaze, I refer to the gaze that, in this instance, becomes reversed. The object, having inspired desire, observes the subject "from a point at which [they] cannot see" (Žižek 35). The object is now a separate, other Thing which "gaze[s] from aside" (35).[19] In other words, the subject becomes conscious of being watched and yet is unable to identify what observes them. The object, as we remember from Lacan's explanation, causes an observation of desire rather than belief in the object itself, thereby remaining unidentified by the subject. It is the subject's awareness of this gaze, not of the object, which causes a feeling of "something extremely unpleasant and obscene" (37). The subject thereby "assumes the position of an object instrumental to the enjoyment of the Other," subjecting itself to the uncanny unpleasantness of the perverse object-gaze (36).

This shift between the subject that views the object and the object that gazes back, is significant in understanding a Weird threshold. Starting with an example from Sophie Marret-Maleval who discusses Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, it is important to note how the subject treats desire rather than the object itself. This encounter takes place when the subject's vision fails in the Imaginary, viewing the lighthouse as a dark room filled with cockroaches. Marret-Maleval discusses here how the subject assumes the "persecutory look (all-seeing, all-knowing)" of the cockroaches:

> The object of the drive is no longer repressed, absent but all too present (teeming) to the point that the subject finds herself reduced to the black stain of the insect gazed at from all sides. The gaze of the cockroaches is precisely that of the subject, cockroaches interior to her mind, but displaced, as though coming from the exterior, the vision is hallucination. There is no more truth save that of the horror of this Real of the jouissance of the drive, detached from the chain of signifiers, out of tune with the body's Imaginary, in which the subject finds itself captive to the point of no longer wishing to wake from

[19] Žižek applies this reversed gaze to pornography in that "the spectator is forced *a priori* to occupy a perverse position" (35-36). In other words, the object-gaze is perverse in its *jouissance*, observing the desire that it created.

> the nightmare, a proleptic announcement of the conclusion of the play where the death-drive combines itself with the desire to join the object. (157)

In Marret-Maleval's reading of *To the Lighthouse,* the subject literally assumes the gaze of the object. The obstacle faced by the subject in desiring knowledge of the object is complicated; the object itself, in Marret-Maleval's example, is assumed by the subject, thereby granting the subject knowledge of the Real. Nevertheless, Žižek points out that such an instance causes an "overlap" and a "failed encounter" due to the subject reducing the "point of the object-gaze in the other" ("Looking Awry" 37). By trespassing this limit, the subject "*goes too far*, i.e., it *misses* what remained concealed in the 'normal,'" ("Looking Awry" 37). In other words, the subject displaces the impossible and unattainable object by forcibly assuming its position, and, in desiring the object-gaze, the subject inflicts the "horror of this Real of the jouissance" (Marret-Maleval 157). In a similar way, Erin Felicia Labbie writes, "the absent object or object as absence, and the desire that is necessitated, promoted, and recognised in such a scene, is precisely the symptom, regardless of the form it assumes" (144). Regardless of the subject's "desire to know", when faced with the monstrous truth of the Real, the subject returns "the dialectic into a loop" (Labbie 144). This is the symptom brought about by the three Lacanian registers—the subject's desire for knowledge is continuously confounded when facing the truth, which is instead viewed as monstrous.

This sense of a confrontation with the Real as monstrous is a narrative function of Gothic fiction. Benjamin Noys' ideas about Gothic monsters, explored in Žižek's work, is therefore useful for understanding a subject's reaction to the horror of the Real.[20] In "The Horror of the Real: Žižek's Modern Gothic," Noys suggests that it is when the subject faces "the horror of this Real of the jouissance of the drive" that the Gothic enters and emerges through the monstrous (4). The Real is treated, according to Noys, "as the monstrous outside, the 'Thing,' which we cannot ever truly approach but can only ever protect ourselves against through the formations of fantasy ... locat[ing] the horror from the outside back to the inside" (4). Noys' gothic reading thereby implies that the object in Marret-Maleval's example is the monstrous Thing that the subject is driven to protect itself against. The subject attempts to protect itself by facing it head on, by assuming its position in an attempt

[20] "Re-," as in, repetition of the action.

to relocate the feelings of unease caused by the very object-gaze it assumes. In Gothic fiction therefore, a subject, when faced with the monstrous Thing, gains knowledge of the Real through relocation of the horror. It is therefore the Lacanian subject that possesses authority in his ability to determine a *reaction* to the feelings of unease caused by the object-gaze. The object in this scene however is once again dislocated from its position, shifted and completely missed by the subject. Although Noys offers a Gothic reading, which knows the subject's reaction to the monstrous Thing, it also offers an account of how a Weird threshold differs from a Gothic-*reaction* and operates in narrative.

4.2. UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS

An investigation into how a Weird threshold operates in narrative is made possible through a connection identified by China Miéville in his article "On Monsters: Or, 9 Or More (Monstrous) Not Cannies". In discussing monsters of the Weird, specifically H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu monster, Miéville points out how these Weird monsters are "the Thing" which "cannot be described" (379). It is important to highlight here that not every Weird monster or Weird story is limited to the Lovecraftian Cthulhu mythos. My point, nevertheless, is that the monsters of the Weird are that impossible, monstrous Thing that gazes at the Lacanian subject from a place that *cannot be assumed*. A basic problem, as discussed above, is how the subject determines and therefore reacts to the feelings of unease created by the object-gaze in Weird Fiction. Like the Cthulhu monster, the object-gaze in Weird Fiction is all too present, but the subject is incapable of reacting or relocating the horror of the Real. Instead, the subject encounters a Weird threshold. In becoming conscious of the object-gaze, conscious of being visible to an object that it cannot assume, the subject's own gaze is reflected.

Figure 6 below references Lacan's scopic triangular diagram of *objet petit a*. I do not include Lacan's diagram here because, in this current level of understanding, the "two interpenetrating triangles" require an articulation of the object-gaze (Copjec 33). The object-gaze in Weird Fiction is not and cannot be identified, and thus is limited to and by the Lacanian subject of representation. The sixth chapter of this thesis will return to this scopic diagram once I have established a firmer articulation of the (im)possible object. Figure 6 therefore serves as a basic introduction to

Lacan's model of the subject's visual field which, in Weird Fiction, cannot possess or gain knowledge of the object beyond a Weird threshold. It is, more precisely, the triangles that represent the limitations of a subject's gaze:

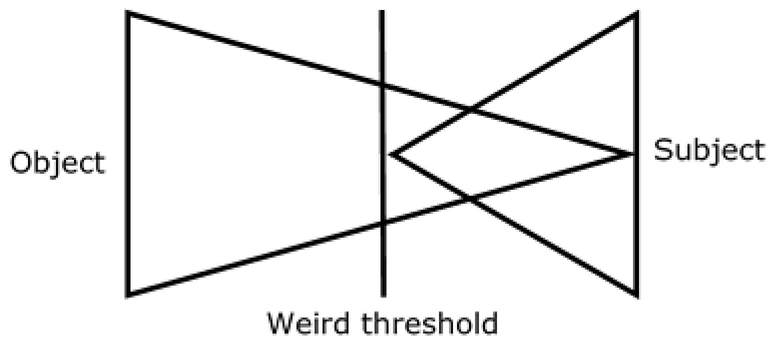

Figure 6. Basic scopic diagram of a Weird threshold.

A noticeable difference from Lacan's scopic diagram of *objet petit a* is the way that a subject's visual field is disrupted by a Weird threshold. Figure 6 demonstrates how a Weird threshold prolongs a subject's feeling of unease inflicted by the object-gaze. The object-gaze that observes and disturbs the subject, capable of penetrating a Weird threshold, is similar to Miéville's descriptions of Weird monsters: that is, in Weird Fiction, the monsters "are categorically other, fundamentally opposed," because they sustain the Weird's "assertion of that we did not know, never knew, could not know, that has always been and will always be unknowable" ("On Monsters" 380). A Weird threshold is the link between what causes the subject to *not* know the object and that which relies on the impossible object to comprehend that unknown, thereby casting uncertainty over the difference between the real and the unknown. Precisely *where* the real and the unknown are located in relation to a Weird threshold is impossible to determine, except through the subject's visual field.[21] While a Weird threshold relies heavily on the subject to determine and experience the object-gaze, to *feel* the continuous distortion of ambient space in order to announce itself, the subject can only navigate this unknown through their desire to know the object. A Weird threshold further complicates this process by reflecting the

[21] It is worth noting that this visual field of the Lacanian subject is discussed in the following chapters. It serves as a link between Derrida's authoritative "I"/"Eye" and Lacan's scopic diagram of *objet petit a*.

subject's gaze back upon itself, confusing and redoubling both desire and knowledge in turn. It is precisely within this ambiguity that Miéville positions the Weird: "if the uncanny is carried by the unknown knowns, the abcanny by the unknown unknowns, then the subcanny is an expression of the Known Unknown" ("On Monsters" 385).

In du Maurier's short story "Don't Look Now", the ambiguity created by a Weird threshold is now discernible. A Weird threshold disturbs John's understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown. Take, for example, the following scene: after the encounter with the twin sisters, and John's attempt to "play along" with Laura's narrative about their psychic abilities and the ghost-child they have described, the couple resumes their vacation in Venice. However, when visiting a cathedral, John's reality appears to be disturbed by something unknown:

> John, less interested, because of his concern at what had just happened, followed close behind, keeping a weather eye alert for the twin sisters. There was no sign of them. Perhaps they had gone into the church of Santa Fosca close by. A sudden encounter would be embarrassing, quite apart from the effect it might have upon Laura. But the anonymous, shuffling tourists, intent upon culture, could not harm her, although from his own point of view they made artistic appreciation impossible. (du Maurier 426)

From John's "own point of view", "concern at what had just happened" taints his reality. This penetration of the unknown ultimately manifests in a confrontation with a threat of the unknown. Turning on impulse towards the cathedral's door, John sees that:

> The twins were standing there, the blind one still holding on to her sister's arm, her sightless eyes fixed firmly upon him. He felt himself held, unable to move, and an impending sense of doom, of tragedy, came upon him. His whole being sagged, as it were, in apathy, and he thought, 'This is the end, there is no escape, no future'. Then both sisters turned and went out of the cathedral and the sensation vanished, leaving indignation in its wake, and rising anger. (427)

The common reality that initially split John's desire is, in this moment, questioned. At first, John has a firm sense of the distinct between real and the unknown. Having previously forced Laura's hallucination and thus the twins into the unknown, John's

understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown is already clear. However, as the observation of the twins continues, John realises that something appears to be awry. The twin's presence, now simultaneously belonging to the real and to the unknown, threatens John's known reality.

Why does the presence of the twin sisters threaten John's known reality? John is not faced with the horror or monstrous truth of the Real, rather a literal returned gaze of the twin sisters, including the blind twin. Gina Wisker agrees that the sisters are not the object-gaze that disturbs John, because "the object of 'don't look now' is undefined and this and similar phrases of denial or deferral seem always to be wrongly attached to the playful and safe or the potentially threatening" (26). It is the "shifting signifier," moreover, that Wisker suggests "leaves us uneasy, suggests a lack, a yawning gap in interpretation which is threatening to our sense of stability and security" (26). Lacan suggests that a subject's desire for the object becomes the desire itself, inviting conflict when encountering the limitations of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real (Lacan 14). To relate this shifting desire to John, we observe not necessarily a lack in him rather a lack *for* his desire.[22] For example, while both John and Laura share the common reality of their deceased daughter, Laura does not share John's desire and therefore threatens *his* "sense of stability and security" (Wisker 26). The story makes this apparent through John's reactions to Laura's interactions with the twin sisters: "He followed her with a sinking heart. He knew she did not really want to buy postcards or see what remained to be seen; she wanted to go in search of the women again, not necessarily to talk, just to be near them" (du Maurier 427). John projects his desire onto Laura, seeking a sense of stability and security in their common reality, and, because that is not met, Laura's interaction with the unknown creates conflict for John's desire.

Such an interpretation implies that John is lacking, and, in his lack, his understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown generates an unreliable account of the object. The issue with such an assertion, however, is that to claim that John is the cause of "unease" and an unknowable "gap in interpretation" would suggest that he is in possession of the object-gaze. The identification or, more

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[22] Richard Klein asserts that "it is not purely and simply lack of desire but lack of desire that promotes desire" and that therefore "castration creates the lack of desire that promotes desire intertwined with the law" (180). A later chapter of this thesis speaks directly of castration, however, presently our investigation is limited to the subject's understanding of the real and the unknown.

precisely, John's imagined assumption of the object would have been clear in the narrative, which it is not. Take the positions of John and the twin sisters in the above example as a metaphor for Figure 6. John as the subject is met with the disturbing object-gaze, however, given his position in relation to the Weird threshold, he cannot see or locate the object. Any sense that might indicate the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real is obscured by John's desire to know the object in question. The object that observes John is thus removed, positioned in a place that prevents John from assuming it. All that John can do is acknowledge that a threat exists through his feeling of unease. John's desire to know the object is thus met by a Weird threshold. From John's visual field, the twin sisters are interpreted as a threat, which Figure 6 reveals as being reflected upon him in their literal gaze. This reflection confuses John's understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown, but the crucial point is the way that a Weird threshold inflicts the unknown *through* the unknown. John anticipates the threat of the unknown by "keeping a weather eye alert for the twin sisters", however, in actually seeing the "sightless eyes fixed firmly upon him" he experiences an "impending sense of doom" (426-427). The Weird asserts itself in what John does not know to be the unknown, casting uncertainty in the way that the object-gaze pierces through this unknown with the unknowable.

Having met with a Weird threshold that reflects his gaze, an unknown gaze, John's desire is split and penetrated by something unknowable. On the one hand John now desires to distract Laura from this unknown threat—for he suspects that "she wanted to go in search of the women again" (427). On the other, John's ambiguity created by a Weird threshold relies on Laura's unknown to confirm and stabilise his understanding of the unknown, which is unknowable to him. Take, for example, the subsequent scene, in which John and Laura become momentarily lost on their way to dinner. John sees and describes what he believes to be "a child, a little girl" in one of the narrow canals—"she couldn't have been more than five or six—wearing a short coat over her minute skirt, a pixie hood covering her head" (429). This pixie-hooded girl disappears, and John is relieved that his wife has not witnessed what "might have had a disastrous effect on her overwrought nerves" (429). If John's description of the girl is to be taken literally, what John sees is a girl who is separate from the unknown and therefore real. However, given the narrative's reliance on Laura and the twin sisters' psychic perception of the deceased daughter's

presence, the unknown remains present at the level of the narration. Given that this unknown is never acknowledged by John in his descriptions of the girl, he appears to confuse it with and as his reality. It is precisely in John's failure to understand the unknown that the unknown succeeds. Terence Patrick Murphy suggests that this failure is rather "the narrator [who] fails to provide a 'reasonably unmediated account' of the initial sighting of the enigmatic figure of the little girl" (157). And John, Murphy continues, is used by the narrator in this instance of the girl as "an instance of character focalisation ... allowed to step forward as an unreliable witness instead" (157). The reader certainly perceives the girl through John as the focalisation character. Whether John's perceptions are unreliable or not is precisely the point of a Weird threshold. John is incapable of knowing what he does not know to be the unknown. Perhaps the narrative does fail to make the connection with the unknown, and John is merely witnessing the girl. But the girl nevertheless functions as a threat. John's acknowledgment of this threat is made clear in his leading Laura away from the girl and back to where "the surroundings became familiar" (du Maurier 430). John means to separate Laura from the unknown.

John's initial encounter with the twins, which inspired his resistance to the unknown, placed Laura and the twin sisters into the unknown, only complicates and contradicts John's reality. This is certainly the case when the couple encounter the twin sisters again at dinner. Laura speaks with them for a second time. On returning, Laura delivers another psychic warning to John. The twin sisters have seen their deceased daughter once more, emphasising that this time it is their daughter's wish for them "to go away as soon as possible" from Venice (431). Despite his earlier fears for Laura's attachment to the unknown, John now asserts that "you are perfectly right, I don't believe it" (432). John's rejection of the unknown is instant. Laura insists that he meet the sisters, who claim that he is "psychic and don't know it. You are somehow *en rapport* with the unknown, and I'm not" (432). Not only is John's rejection in this instance rejected by Laura but by the unknown itself. A Weird threshold reflects onto John what he cannot know and does not know to be the unknown.

A Weird threshold continues to disrupt John's reality after their return to the hotel, where they receive a telegram informing them that their son has been taken to hospital with appendicitis. Laura plans to take the next plane to London, with John to

follow by train and car. In their separation John is presented with his own rejection. While following his wife's instructions, John is confronted by the unknown while aboard a vaporetto. John describes seeing Laura aboard a passing vaporetto returning to Venice, accompanied by the twin sisters. John's immediate assumption is that the twin sisters have kidnapped his wife and that he must return to Venice in pursuit of them. Reporting the kidnapping to the police, John is convinced the twin sisters are the cause of "something [that] had gone terribly wrong" (439). However, Laura's safe arrival in London is later confirmed by a phone call. In describing what he had witnessed to Laura, John's firm sense of reality is severed. This is made evident to John by Laura's response to his "imagination": "How could you have seen me with the sisters ... You knew I'd gone to the airport. Really, darling, you are an idiot. You seem to have got those two poor old dears on the brain" (442).

John is forced to apologise to the twin sisters for his false kidnapping accusation. In assuring John of the unknown, the twin sisters insist that it is because he is psychic that he misperceived the real, and that all incidents are proof of their unknown as real (445). The narrative concludes with John's journey back to the hotel. He catches sight of the pixie-hooded girl and pursues her. He soon realises his mistake, however, seeing the person he pursues is really "a little thickset woman dwarf" (447). As he realises his mistake, a mistake that he believes explains why "he saw the vaporetto with Laura and the two sisters," John is murdered by the woman dwarf (447). When the woman is revealed through John's perspective, the narrative shows how his desire has overlapped with the unknown. This is made evident in the way that John encounters all previous unknowns in the narrative's final paragraph:

> And he saw the vaporetto with Laura and the two sisters steaming down the Grand Canal, not today, not tomorrow, but the day after that, and he knew why they were together and for what sad purpose they had come. The creature was gibbering in its corner. The hammering and the voices and the barking dog grew fainter, and, 'Oh, God,' he thought, 'what a bloody silly way to die ...'. (447)

John's encounter with the unknown in this passage not only emphasises a Weird slippage in the narrative's reality but an enforced withdrawal of the unknown *as* unknowable. Moreover, the repeated imagery of Laura with the twin sisters as a knowable reality after John's death (at once knowable and unknowable)

simultaneously conveys an ambiguous uncertainty about reality and a certainty about John's death from an unknowable position, thus functioning as a known unknown. John's final thought about death precedes the reality of a future in which he is dead; that "he knew why" Laura and the twin sisters are together is impossible for him to access. This knowable reality constitutes (im)possible access to knowledge, present and knowable to John only through his understanding of a known unknown; a known unknown represents John's confrontation with a Weird threshold, which causes all knowledge of the real and unknown to be (im)possible. A Weird threshold, therefore, disrupts the knowingness of John's reality.

John's confrontation with a Weird threshold is made clear throughout du Maurier's "Don't Look Now." Critical scholarship juxtaposes the narrative's reality and the Weird's anti-normative characteristics through John's feelings of unease and fear. Wisker suggests that John's fear "materialises" as the dwarf—"reinforcing conventional male fears of the castrating monstrous woman, the abject, the monstrous creature woman, a Medusa (also a third sister) who turns round and turns men to stone/literally disempowering and then castrating them" (29). Throughout this chapter I have considered how an (im)possible object-gaze operates beyond a Lacanian subject's visual field not as a manifestation of fear but as an unknown unknown. It is an unknown unknown that complicates John's desire to possess and gain knowledge of the real Weird. Because, as seen in the passage above, there is an unknowable element which remains *unknowable* to both John and the reader. The moment a Lacanian subject is met with the unknown is the precise moment we observe a Weird threshold. In reflecting and thereby prolonging ambiguity onto the subject of representation, a Weird threshold complicates a concrete understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown. This may be why the narrative's conclusion is ambiguous because, while John may have accepted the unknown and knowable, he has misinterpreted the unknown in his wife's return to Venice with the twin sisters. If, in "Don't Look Now", the unknown is ultimately knowable to and by a Lacanian subject, then Weird Fiction, whose (im)possible function relies on and maintains unknown unknowns in order to disrupt masculine assumption, fails and enters as pure negation. In du Maurier's short story, it is the unknown that is misread as negation in John's literal death.

A further point of consideration is the position of this “third sister”. The next chapter examines this position of the unknowable “third sister” as the position of an (im)possible object. It is the (im)possible object that simultaneously regulates and withdraws the unknown unknown function of Weird Fiction. This, of course, does not suggest that this unique function of Weird Fiction is exclusively feminine; rather, it is reading the Lacanian woman’s barred position in language that offers understanding. Offering a feminine gaze therefore provides a crucial critical framework for investigating a Weird threshold as a working definition for Weird Fiction. The following chapter considers the barred and (im)possible position of the Lacanian woman in Angela Carter’s *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972). In discussing a dislocation of the (im)possible object, Carter’s novel engages with and reveals the location of Weird monsters. The (im)possible gaze of the feminine, looking back from the unknown unknown, provides a model for Weird monsters.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WEIRD ~~WOMAN’S~~ GAZE

A Weird threshold renders the object-cause of desire unknowable to the Lacanian subject. As discussed in relation to Daphne du Maurier’s “Don’t Look Now” (1971), the story reveals how a subject desires possession and knowledge of the unknown. As shown in Figure 6, due to the subject’s position in relation to a Weird threshold, it is (im)possible to assume the object-cause of desire from the outset. In other words, the object of desire is never revealed as knowable. I have already discussed the invisibility of the feminine; in this chapter I move on to discussing feminine subjectivity. Angela Carter’s *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (first published in 1972) reveals a vivid encounter with a Weird threshold that manipulatively distorts and captivates a subject’s understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown. Carter’s novel follows Desiderio’s quest to assassinate Dr. Hoffman, from which Desiderio’s reality is disturbed by something unknowable beyond the physical body of Albertina. However, to pursue a close reading with Desiderio as the subject and Albertina as the object-cause raises feminist concerns regarding a “false binary wherein women are positioned as passive objects of active male desire” (Koolen 402). I quote Mandy Koolen here, who offers a feminist reading of sexual difference in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, because I wish to highlight the position of women in Jacques Lacan’s formula of sexual difference. It is my intention to avoid contributing to a misreading of Lacan’s theory that positions woman on the other side of language in *différance*, that “woman is excluded *from* the nature of words” and thus “might have of themselves an entirely different speech” (Rose 49, emphasis in original). It is therefore important that this chapter fully explore the position of the barred woman, who is located beyond language, in order to further explore the status of Weird Fiction as an (im)possible genre. At the end of this chapter, therefore, I will provide a more complex understanding of the sexual relation presented by a Weird threshold in Carter’s novel.

Approaching the Lacanian woman’s position in language as an exclusionary victimisation *by* the phallic function, causes the sexual relation to fail. Indeed, sexual

difference itself collapses. To explain this more clearly, I wish to elucidate my approach to Koolen's argument before proceeding to employ a Lacanian lens. Koolen argues that many of Carter's female characters are misread and should be understood as "the desire subject, the desired subject, the desiring object, and/or the desire object" (402). To ignore these categories, continues Koolen, is to ignore Carter's "critique of binary understandings of the subject as either active or passive and encourages a more nuanced reading of relations between the sexes" (402). Koolen identifies a resistance to the phallic function through feminine sexuality in Carter's novel, an attempt to undo "the intricacies of power imbalances between women and men" (415). The core of Koolen's argument is the notion that the libidinal conflict between the two sexes is "a weapon that can be used against women and/or a tool that women can use to claim power and challenge male dominance" (416). A resistance to the phallic function directs a misreading of Lacan's theory by compounding the presence of the phallus as *the* cause of conflict arising from sexual difference.

Given Lacan's argument that there is in fact no sexual relationship and only a fantasy, rejecting the phallic function contributes to, rather than denies libidinal conflict. To read Desiderio as the masculine subject in Carter's novel and inscribe Albertina as successful in locating her *jouissance*,[23] women must not exist outside of a man's fantasy. This misunderstanding of Lacanian theory is a concern for scholars like Jacqueline Rose who insist that it is "not that women do not exist, but that her status as an absolute category and guarantor of fantasy ... is false" (48).[24] For this reason the categories of male and female should not be treated as "complementary entities", but understood as categories that "expose the fantasy on which this notion rests" (33). Misreading Lacan's theory as suggesting that women literally do not exist overlooks this notion; that is, "what [men] deal with is object *a*, and that the whole realisation of the sexual relationship leads to fantasy" (Lacan, *On Feminine*

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[23] Joan Copjec points out that an "undecidability" appears in the phallic function "with speaking beings, beings, according to Lacan's translation of the Freudian concept of castration, who surrender their access to *jouissance* upon entering language" (216). And *jouissance* as enjoyment is, as Lacan himself describes it, that which "amounts to no more than a negative instance" (*On Feminine Sexuality* 3). This particular use of *jouissance* is reflected in Figure 7.

[24] Rose's point here is that sexual difference in Lacan's theory reveals how "all speaking beings must line themselves up on one side or the other of this division, but anyone can cross over and inscribe themselves on the opposite side from that to which they are anatomically inscribed" (49). Rose also notes that this "simultaneously shifts the concept of bisexuality" in that "the availability to all subjects of both positions in relation to that difference itself" is guaranteed (49).

Sexuality 86). The woman exposes this fantasy because she is the stand in, a symptom, the place that man projects his lack onto. Woman is therefore constructed as "not all," as Other. This concept of the woman as Other needs to be, as Rose suggests, "seen as an attempt to hold apart two moments which are in constant danger of collapsing into each other," as the "very effect of that assignation," and the "break against and beyond that system itself" (51-52). This is why the position of woman is fundamental and must not be misunderstood. Woman's position as Other confirms and rejects the limitations of the phallic function.

Lacan gives a more detailed account of this elevation of woman as Other in his discussion of courtly love. However, to make sense of this I must first discuss the "break against and beyond" sexual difference. In "A love letter (*une letter d'âmour*)" Lacan outlines four propositional formulas divided between the two sexual identifications of speaking beings. In offering the following table, Lacan emphasises the significant and inseparable break between them:

$\exists x \; \overline{\Phi x}$ $\forall x \; \Phi x$	$\overline{\exists x} \; \overline{\Phi x}$ $\overline{\forall x} \; \Phi x$
$\cancel{S}$ → a Φ	$S(\cancel{A})$ ~~Woman~~

Figure 7. Based on the formula of sexual difference by Jacques Lacan. (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 78)

The left side of the table is that of the man ($\forall x \Phi x$ "indicates that it is through the phallic function that man as a whole acquires his inscription," though limited due to the existence of *x*) and the right is that of the woman (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 79). All negatives are marked with a line above them, which is often the concern for feminist critics who view this as a reduction of the woman because "there is only barred Woman here" (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 80). A misreading is thereby assumed when pursuing only the side of the woman as the primary negation of the

father function.[25] The barred woman's function as the Other is overlooked: that supportive break against and beyond the phallic function.

This is why Lacanian scholars defend the position of the phallus (Φ) on both sides of the table. For example, Joan Copjec notes that the phallus appears on both sides of Lacan's table because it indicates how a subject may place itself on either side depending on "which enunciative position one assumes" (214-215). When feminist critics argue against the phallic signifier, they are striking "against the wrong target" because it is the phallic signifier that "is responsible for the production on each side of the table not of a simple statement but of two conflicting statements" (Copjec 215). Both sides require the existence of the phallus to validate the division between them, which in turn creates conflict as neither side can be included or excluded from "absolute (nonphallic) *jouissance*" (Copjec 215). In Lacan's model, each side produces a failure that is not symmetrical to its opposite. This is precisely why one negative appears on the side of the man, and another—which escapes negation—on the side of the woman.

A feminist argument that refutes the existence of the phallic signifier on both sides of the table thereby contributes to a collapse of sexual difference. This is certainly the case in Ellie Ragland-Sullivan's "The Sexual Masquerade: A Lacanian Theory of Sexual Difference". A prominent feature of Ragland-Sullivan's article is her argument that feminist critiques:

> reduce oneself to the sexual body as a way of attack, or inverting language to show that sexual differences do not really exist except in language—ends up in an *impossible* feminism that leads right back to the *real* as the encounter with an impasse Lacan calls the sexual non-relation. If males and females are 'natural' enemies, as Irigaray and others argue, or if they only think they are enemies because they fail to account for the myriad traces of *différance* undercutting the binary (deconstruction), woman still remains in the position of victim. These theories fall into a progressivist fallacy that fails to account for why women ever merited an adversary in the first place, and why the battle has not yet been won, at least among the privileged. (55)

[25] Lacan refers to the father function as the negative Φx on the side of the man (and woman), "which grounds the operativity (*exercice*) of what makes up for the sexual relationship with castration, insofar as that relationship is in no way inscribable" (*On Feminine Sexuality* 79).

Copjec and Rose help to understand the point being made here by Ragland-Sullivan: it is the feminist argument that inflicts victimisation and overlooks the cause of its own "adversary". This creates an "impossible feminism" that confirms a woman's non-existence rather than contributing to her position as Other, as the "not all" of the phallic function. It is therefore necessary to proceed with a Lacanian notion of the woman while avoiding—as Koolen warns—positioning women as passive objects of active male desire. The barred position of woman is validated outside of, and yet rejected within, the phallic function. More precisely, as Copjec concludes, woman "is the failure of the limit, not the cause of the failure" (226). Woman's impossibility is constituted with the fragments of the break with the phallic limit: barred in becoming what Juliet Mitchell argues is "the receptacle for the alienation all men must feel; she *contains* man's otherness, and in doing so is denied her own humanity" (306-307). Woman is made (im)possible by the phallic signifier that validates and rejects her existence within and outside of man's limitation.

My use of a woman's (im)possibility here aligns with that of Weird Fiction's (im)possibility as a genre. As a reminder: the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction arises because both the Old Weird and the New Weird are required to produce the law that validates it as a genre. Applying a Lacanian account of the barred woman's position in language to this model reveals a similar position for women in Weird Fiction: woman shares this (im)possibility, a barred and hidden existence and/or nonexistence that is capable of gazing back at her "doubled" self, her "not all" because of her "relation with Φ" (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 81). The barred woman's position in language is not exclusionary, nor is it a victimisation of her sex. It is precisely the "not all" of the woman that Copjec, Rose, Ragland-Sullivan and Mitchell—whose focus is women writing against and within a barred position—agree with in terms of Lacan's theory.

Lacan's assignation of woman is significant for my argument that women writing Weird Fiction contribute to *écriture féminine*. Carter's navigation away from women's victimisation in her *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, is a demonstration of how women writing Weird Fiction express their (im)possibility. Or, as Anna Kérchy puts it, Carter's writing is an example of "the emergence of a troubling *body-text* ... is generated by the represented bodies that seem to 'come to a life of their own' to destabilize, infiltrate, 'infect' representation by the speaking

subject's unspeakable 'residue' of corporeal reality" (29). What concerns me here, then, is the position of the (im)possible woman in language, as embodied by Albertina in Carter's novel, who directs a disturbing gaze towards the subject that validates and rejects her existence. The woman's gaze, the unknowable unknown that is impossible to assume or determine, is what I wish to investigate further in terms of a Weird threshold.

I have already elucidated my understanding of the woman and her gaze, specifically through Weird Fiction and its function as an (im)possible genre. The third chapter spoke to this troubling gaze by considering Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of Jacques Derrida. Spivak takes issue with Derrida's exclusion of female personhood, despite his explicit use of feminine characteristics to validate *la loi* as a mad daughter-law. As Spivak points out, when the phallic function of the masculine genre (*moi*) is reversed—that is, when a male mother "seems to go the other way, from woman to man, the fetishised phallic mother causes a good deal of anguish" (Spivak 64).[26] Derrida's use of the phallic function implies that woman and her desire to "be born" (the question and expression of her own jouissance) are a "mock-playing" game in the law of genre (Derrida 79). It is, moreover, in the woman's ability to look back and see the male mother who created her, where Derrida locates her madness. The woman's position in genre is viewed as (im)possible by virtue of the phallic function, and therefore something to be feared by the masculine: something Other.

For the masculine in Derridean genre theory to view the woman as that which causes him "a good deal of anguish" in her mad game of returning his gaze, suggests that he is unable to attain or recognise his desire in her. The masculine cannot locate or know woman and, when confronted by her unknowable gaze, he experiences unease and uncertainty.27 The connection between the Lacanian assignation of woman and a Weird threshold becomes clearer in this unknowable object-gaze. Desire goes amiss in the assertion that the subject, specifically in du Maurier's short story, succumbs to a literal death because of woman. As Copjec asserts above, woman is not to be mistaken as the cause of failure or failing the phallic function,

[26] The next chapter will discuss Spivak's "fetishised phallic mother" in more detail. My use of Spivak here signals the development of a connection between Derrida's theory regarding the mad woman's gaze and Lacan's universal woman's all-seeing gaze.

[27] Feelings expressed by the masculine as a consequence of *la loi's* madness.

only as that which exposes a limitation. It is through the unknowable gaze of the object, this reflected "doubled" self of the subject, the "not all", that a function specific to Weird Fiction is revealed: Weird monsters. This discussion considers, through a Lacanian lens, the woman as the universal all-seer, the Weird monster that disturbs the subject and reader from an unknown and unknowable position.

5.1. THE LADY OF COURTLY LOVE

The all-seeing gaze of the Lacanian woman shares the object-gaze of a Weird threshold. This logic follows from Lacan's theory that a masculine subject desires the impossible feminine object. Chapter four spoke of the way that the three Lacanian registers are necessary in understanding a subject's desire for knowledge of an object.[28] This object is the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, the impossible Thing of the subject's fantasy, which bears witness to that desire from a separate position. An investigation of how a subject projects desire onto the object, thereby holding it as accountable, provides further evidence of the connection between the object-gaze and the universal woman. The same logic underscores the connection between the subject's desire as a phantasmatic projection and Lacan's account of courtly love. Lacan's discussion of courtly love provides insight into his elevation of woman as Other, as that which stands in as male lack, as the negative to the masculine that desires and thus assigns her existence as object *a* (speaking to Figure 7). Lacan expands on the notion that courtly love, as described in medieval literature, is "a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of conventional, idealising themes, which couldn't have any real concrete equivalent" (Lacan, *Ethics* 183). Lacan pays particular attention to the figure of the Lady in medieval poetry as an example of anamorphosis in courtly love; that is, as Ragland-Sullivan discusses, "the extimacy of the object *cause*-of-desire" which is marked by the figure of the Lady, a feminine object ("Psychoanalysis" 14).[29]

Courtly love narratives often depict a knight who desires the love of a Lady. It is this Lady, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, "who subjects [the knight] to senseless, outrageous, impossible, arbitrary, capricious ordeals" ("Courtly Love" 151). Lacan

[28] The registers being the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary.
[29] Taking note of Ragland-Sullivan's use of the term "object cause-of-desire", I wish to highlight that for consistency and clarity reasons I refer to this term as "object-cause of desire" throughout the entirety of this thesis.

gives the example of the story of the Countess of Comminges, who is the "natural heir upon the death of her father of the county of Montpellier," and how "Peter of Aragon wanted her" (*Ethics* 181). Peter of Aragon convinces the countess to leave her current husband and marry him, however, upon marrying him the countess is mistreated "to such a degree that she fled" to "Rome under the protection of the Pope" (*Ethics* 181). The Countess of Comminges demonstrates Lacan's argument that the figure of the Lady in courtly love narratives is "nothing more than a correlative of the function of social exchange" and "a social function that leaves no room for her person or her own liberty" (*Ethics* 182).

Lacan also draws on Arnaut Daniel's "Though Raimon and Truc Malec" to inform his argument.[30] The Lady in Arnaut's poem, Domna Ena, tests a knight's desire by subjecting him to an outrageous ordeal. According to Žižek's reading of the poem, the Lady "demands that her servant literally lick her arse" (151), but the knight refuses. The poem's narrator recounts a disagreement between Raimon de Durfort and a jester named Truc Malec:

> Bernat, I don't agree
> with Raimon of Durfort,
> that you were wrong:
> if you had taken the trumpet for a sport,
> you would have paid dearly for it,
> and the smell would soon have killed you,
> since it was worse than the manure on a field:
> and, whoever blames you,
> praise the Lord who has spared you! (lines 28-36)[31]

Bernat de Cornes refuses to undertake Domna Ena's request, a request that is in effect a test of his love. As a participant in the knight's refusal, the poem's narrator attests to Lacan's point that the Lady of courtly love is "as arbitrary as possible in the

[30] Arnaut Daniel's works are often marginalised in discussions of Lacan's essays on courtly love. Arnaut's poem is, moreover, often left out of the critical discussions, with Arnaut more often depicted as a troubadour reference in Dante Aligheri's *Purgatorio* (Labbie 135-136). I have thus included this verse of Arnaut's poem, as it is referred by Žižek.

[31] Note that the French version uses the term "*trompette*" which can be translated as "trumpet" or, in other versions, "to horn". Zizek's use of "arse" (also "vagina" in other interpretations like Juan Carlos Ubilluz's) is rather a literal translation of Domna Ena's request. However, given that Arnaut's poem is satirically cryptic, I have used "trumpet".

tests she imposes on her servant" (Lacan, *Ethics* 186). The description of the Lady's request portrays her as someone to be feared in spite of the knight's desire. The knight's refusal of the Lady's request and thus his knightly duties (his ultimate shame) is a crucial feature in my analysis, specifically in relation to his fear. Lacan's emphasis is precisely on the subject's authority that appears in "sublimation"—that is, "what man demands, what he cannot help but demand, is to be deprived of something real" (Lacan, *Ethics* 184).

In Arnaut's poem, the knight (the subject) experiences what Žižek describes as fear of castration. The knight's fear is not necessarily a fear of the object itself, but rather what the object represents. The knight's fear, following Žižek's formulation of the Lady as embodying the threat of castration, indirectly expresses the "'phallic' value of the woman" (Žižek, "Courtly Love" 157). In other words, the Lady "characterises the phallic signifier qua signifier of castration" in the way that the knight's jouissance is being refused ("Courtly Love" 157). As signifier of the threat of castration—the exposure of the limit in the knight's fantasy—the Lady offers a paradox: that is, a foreclosure is constructed to protect the knight from the real and all of its monstrosity.

Žižek frames the threat of the Lady in a question: how "can the subject be made to renounce enjoyment not for another, higher Cause but simply in order to gain access to it" ("Courtly Love" 157)? In other words, how can the ordeal that the Lady commands entice the knight to search for his jouissance beyond her, in the real that he renounces? Erin Felicia Labbie offers an insight into this threat that appears in the masturbatory, self-inflicted function of the subject's desire: the knight's refusal suggests "that the sex act leads to death" (208). In other words, by achieving his desire the knight risks losing his signification within the Real. What the knight desires is a higher state, a virtuous connection with the universal One. By refusing the Lady's request, the knight instils "the power to foreclose the impact of the final death-blow", practising chastity in the hope of achieving immortality through a unity with God (Labbie 208). What is at stake in the knight's foreclosure is "dispossess[ing] himself of his male body, to kill part of himself, in hopes of preserving that rationality and evading his conception of a delusional state" (Labbie 208). Although the knight fears what the Lady represents in her difference, he is

willing to become a woman in order to gain access to and unity with God, thereby "transcending his own death" (210).

To pursue Oneness, a unity with God at the "cost" of becoming woman is an arbitrary act. Oneness is, as Labbie notes, "a crucial element of thought that drives desire and motivates the subject to pursue knowledge" (39). It is impossible, however, for the subject to possess this knowledge. When confronted by this fact, the subject reacts by defending himself from this lack. The same structure is evident in a subject's desire to assume the object-gaze: it is a failed encounter that displaces the impossible and unattainable object. The subject's desire for knowledge is confounded when facing the Real, which courtly love poetry suggests is "terrifying, an inhuman partner" (*Encore* 185). Lacan argues that the man demands to be deprived of something real in order to foreclose his death. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan states that "the real is beyond the automaton, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle" (53-54). In Lacan's account of courtly love, the Lady is an automaton: when the knight reaches a confrontation with the Real, he is driven by repetition to gain knowledge of the unknowable. In the knight's phantasmatic projection, he displaces the Lady altogether.

When the subject completely displaces the Lady through his desire for a connection with God as woman, he reveals her function as an automaton. In recalling the previous chapter's discussion, the Real is the monstrous Thing that the subject aims to protect itself against, by attempting to assume its position and relocate the feelings of unease caused by the object-gaze. In the case of courtly love, the knight is driven to assume the position of the Lady in order to relocate the threat she represents in his fantasy. Žižek states that the Lady is "a radical Otherness which is wholly incommensurable with our needs and desires; as such, she is simultaneously a kind of automaton, a machine which utters meaningless demands at random" ("Courtly Love" 151). As an automaton, the Lady is monstrous—that which remains to deliver difference to the subject—because she is not-the-same, the unknowable, and thus something to be feared. The Lady simultaneously inflicts and represents the impossibility in and of any sexual relationship (including the mystical act). Žižek goes on to explain that this elevation of the Lady ought to be conceived "as a strictly secondary phenomenon: it is a narcissistic projection whose function is to render her

traumatic dimension invisible," which is demonstrated in the knight's projection of his "narcissistic ideal" onto the Lady who functions as a mirror (151-152). This fantasy, this projection onto the Lady that elevates her, or more specifically the "courtly relation to the automaton," is a fetishisation; that is, as Daniel Hourigan puts it, the Lady is a "fetish object" (8). It is through the knight's perspective that the Lady in this fantasy is sexualised. It is, moreover, from this impossible and barred position that the Lady gazes as the impossible Thing, causing feelings of unease and uncertainty for the subject.

We can grasp the Lady as separate in her limitless form, as that which observes the knight from a position that it is impossible to know. Although the knight imagines the Lady as perverse—as inhuman and obscene in the acts she imposes (thus positioning woman as instrumental to man's fantasy)—her existence as such cannot be confirmed. What the Lady's specular position achieves is precisely what the knight's idealisation projects: his lack. Hourigan describes this as a demonstration of the Lady as a "beautified feminine Master ... an Other of the Other, a 'Beyond' insomuch as she is an idealisation of the regulation of difference in the symbolic universe" (7). This is the Lady's game, her madness that is witnessed and experienced by the knight despite his own desire (thus phallic *jouissance*). This is the continual loop and knot of desire, as revealed in Lacan's theory of courtly love. In the confronting form of the woman, the subject's knightly duty drives him into a never-ending belief that the impossible is possible. The dislocation of the woman and her all-seeing gaze is proof of this (im)possibility.

5.2. DESIRING UNDESIRING DESIRE MACHINES

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman engages with an (im)possible object that performs on precisely the same level as the unfeeling automaton, validated outside and yet rejected within the phallic function. The engagement takes place within the novel's Weird case of desire, which is the source of its "uncomfortable complicity" (Tonkin 83). *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* presents the individual subjectivity of Desiderio; the story is narrated from the viewpoint of the aged Desiderio who, many years after his "picaresque adventure", recounts his quest to assassinate Dr. Hoffman (Carter 7). Desiderio positions his reality as that which comes before Dr. Hoffman's hallucinations, a war

of mirages that affects the unnamed city where the story takes place. Through these hallucinations the reader is invited to distinguish between Desiderio's reality and that of Dr Hoffman:

> Whether the apparitions were shades of the dead, synthetic reconstructions of the living or in no way replicas of anything we knew, they inhabited the same dimension as the living for Dr. Hoffman had enormously extended the limits of this dimension. The very stones were mouths which spoke. I myself decided the revenants were objects—perhaps personified ideas—which could think but did not exist. This seemed the only hypothesis which might explain my own case for I acknowledged them—I *saw* them; they screamed and whickered at me—and yet I did not believe in them. (12)

In this passage, Desiderio reveals his concrete understanding of what is real and what should be perceived as the unknown. In acknowledging that it is *his* reality that determines the city's reality, Desiderio separates himself and his reality from all things unknowable. There is only reality for Desiderio, only definitions and facts that "happened to be true" (5).

The novel, however, reveals that Desiderio's reality is only one of many competing realities. Aidan Day describes this uncertainty about reality in the novel as a collective disagreement. *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Day argues, reveals how a common reality is complicated by the "multiplicity of individual representations" that "differ according to different frames of reference, different values, different fantasies, anxieties and desires" (71). These multiple individual representations, which render a shared or common reality difficult and impossible, undermine the authority of Desiderio's first person narrative. Given that the novel is narrated by an old Desiderio, this narration demonstrates how his perspective is an observation of an unknown which furthermore suggests that he is in possession of an object-gaze, functioning as that which disturbs these multiple individual representations from an indeterminate position. Claiming Desiderio as that which is signified by this unknown, as that which is Other, so must be ruled out because knowledge of the unknown is impossible.

Desiderio separates himself from the city that, in consequence, concretises his understanding of the unknown and understanding of the difference between the real

and the unknown which is determined precisely by his signification of them. As subject, Desiderio possesses the authority to demand that he be deprived of the unknown: “I found it boring for none of the characters engaged my sympathy, even if I admired them, and all the situations appeared the false engineering of an inefficient phantasist” (Carter, *Infernal Desire Machines* 22). At first sight it seems that Desiderio elicits the unknown as undesirable because it represents the “false”, but what he really projects is his desire for it to be true. Desiderio, in observing the unknown, holds it accountable for any real dissatisfaction. And it is precisely for this reason that he expects to locate his desire within the unknown:

> We found ourselves holding our breath almost in expectancy, as though we might stand on the threshold of a great event, transfixed in the portentous moment of waiting, although inwardly we were perturbed since this new, awesome, orchestration of time and space which surrounded us might be only the overture to something else, to some most profoundly audacious of all these assaults against the things we had always known. (Carter, *Infernal Desire Machines* 17)

By grounding his understanding of the unknown against “the things we had always known,” Desiderio asserts the existence of a common reality that is stuck between the real and the unknown, to gain knowledge of this “overture to something else,” this promised unknowable unknown beyond the unknown, Desiderio wants to prove that the unknown is real. Desiderio’s understanding is unknowingly confronted by a Weird threshold, which confuses and blends his understanding of the difference between the real and the unknown.

This confusion between the real and the unknown occurs throughout the novel. More specifically, a Weird threshold complicates Desiderio’s desire: “I had one curious, persistent hallucination which obscurely troubled me because nothing about it was familiar and, each time I saw her, she never changed” (Carter, *Infernal Desire Machines* 22). Desiderio here gives the impression that he is consciously susceptible to the unknown and yet unable to recognise an infiltration of the unknown, particularly in his use of the phrase “persistent hallucination” which becomes synonymous with “her” and “she”. The ambiguity here reveals Desiderio’s confrontation with a Weird threshold, which functions as the link between what causes him to not know the object and that which relies on the (im)possible object

("her" and "she") to know that unknown (the "persistent hallucination"), thereby casting uncertainty on the difference between them. In prolonging this ambiguous and uncertain space, a Weird threshold reflects onto Desiderio an unknown unknown. What Desiderio is unknowingly projecting his desire onto is this unknown unknown, from which the monstrous form of Albertina emerges. Viewing these monstrous forms as the "she" in his hallucinations, Desiderio casts his desire and holds Albertina accountable.

The narrative reveals how Albertina is the (im)possible object of Desiderio's desire by positioning her as an unknown unknown. This is made clear to us from Desiderio's first encounter with Albertina, as it takes place in a dream, a lucid dream that confirms that she is Desiderio's "persistent hallucination". Every night he is visited by Albertina who changes her form each time—"visited by a young woman in a negligée" whose flesh is made of glass one night (22), and an "ugly" yet "marvellous" black swan the next (28). The old Desiderio recognises Albertina in these forms as a "language of signs which utterly bemused me because ... [they] hinted to me a little of the nature of the mysteries which encompassed us and filled so many of us with terror" (22).

It is important here to address the feminist position that refutes the exclusionary victimisation of woman via Lacan's phallic function. Maggie Tonkin's article, "Albertine/a the Ambiguous: Angela Carter's Reconfiguration of Marcel Proust's Modernist Muse", for example, contributes to this idea of the unknown. Tonkin asserts that Albertina's function as a muse explains her objectification that "occupies an inherently feminist position" (77). Tonkin's emphasis on the muse as unknowable is, strictly speaking, in alignment with a statement made by Carter in a 1985 interview. When asked about the muse, Carter states: "it's another magic Other, isn't it, another way of keeping women out of the arena ... the notion that poetic inspiration is female, which is why women don't have it" (qtd. in Goldsworthy 11-12).[32] Carter's description of the muse elevates woman as Other in the heterosexual relationship, eliminated as poetic inspiration, functioning as something "out of the arena". In accounting for Carter's view on the muse, Tonkin argues that Albertina's existence aligns with Desiderio's enunciation, that "she cannot articulate her desire;

[32] Goldsworthy's question is about the muse as a female figure, asking if this might "fit in" with Carter's "picture of real people like Dorothy Wordsworth and Jeanne Duval?" (11).

in effect, because ‘she’ is merely the product of his discourse, ‘she’ does not exist and consequently *has* no desire, other than that imagined and depicted by the masculine artist” (Tonkin 74).

Lacan’s model of sexual difference highlights why the position of woman in the fantasy must not be viewed as exclusionary. Albertina’s position is not the primary negation but rather, as Other, a supportive break against and beyond the phallic function that simultaneously rejects and confirms her existence. The fact that Albertina functions as an unknown unknown, and ultimately coincides with the disturbing object-gaze from an unknowable position, simultaneously confirms and rejects her (im)possible existence. This is apparent in the way that Albertina’s unknown forms a function to disturb Desiderio’s reality. In attending a meeting with the Minster, Desiderio encounters Albertina for the first time *within* his perceived reality. At first Desiderio does not recognise Albertina in her “male” disguise as her father’s Ambassador. Nevertheless, Desiderio finds himself fascinated by the Ambassador. Desiderio describes the Ambassador as “the most beautiful human being I have ever seen—considered, that is, solely as an object, a construction of flesh, skin, bone and fabric” (31). On this fundamental level of identification with the (im)possible object of his desire, Desiderio cannot perceive Albertina within his reality. That is, however, until Albertina literally “acts as the very embodiment of a whimsical Despot, submitting her knight to the most arbitrary and nonsensical ordeals” (Žižek, “Courtly Love” 264). Albertina, like the Lady in a courtly love narrative, commands and threatens Desiderio with the very thing that he desires—that is, by leaving behind a handkerchief, Albertina reveals herself to Desiderio with her name “stitched in a flourish of silk so white it was virtually invisible ... ALBERTINA” (Carter 39). At once Desiderio is confronted by Albertina’s “hieratic chant of the black swan”, an unknown unknown that physically penetrates through and disturbs his reality (39).

In commanding Desiderio’s desire from an unknowable position, Albertina mocks and threatens his reality with each form she assumes. Throughout the novel Desiderio encounters these multiple forms of Albertina: he sees “the beautiful face of Dr Hoffman’s ambassador” in the decapitated head of a woman in a peep-show exhibition machine (49); as an unknowable gaze through the eyes of the missing Mayor’s daughter, Marry Anne (62); in the face of a passing gypsy girl during his

stay with the river people (92); shedding her disguise as the Madame at the House of Anonymity (162); and again as a Count's boy valet, Lafleur (197). To articulate these encounters in Lacanian terms, Desiderio is dealing with his fetishised "object *a*, and ... the whole realisation of the sexual relationship leads to fantasy" (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 86). Albertina is the exposure of Desiderio's fantasy, the impossibility, the threat of and protection against all things unknowable. It is Albertina's monstrous forms that prevent Desiderio's desire, and thus the sexual relationship, from failing. Desiderio is driven by this sexual relationship to know the unknown, to confirm who or what is beyond the "conjuring tricks, for such tricks imply the presence of a conjurer," a being *beyond* Albertina (Carter, *Infernal Desire Machines* 42). Desiderio relentlessly pursues her, forever driven by the belief that the impossible is possible, that the unknown is real beyond Albertina.

The conflict that arises for Desiderio in stripping away Albertina's forms is precisely the unknown itself. According to Tonkin, it is "not the 'authentic' being within but simply the next layer" of an enigmatic muse that is "always eluding the narrator's knowledge" (77-78). Although critics like Tonkin and Koolen assert that such a failure lies within the phallic function, with Desiderio, what remains unclear is how Albertina succeeds in making the unknown unknowable. How does Albertina inflict upon Desiderio an unknown disturbance, so that he encounters an aspect of herself that "was the absolute antithesis of my black swan and my bouquet of burning love; she was a crisp, antiseptic soldier to whom other ranks deferred" (Carter 235)? What causes Desiderio's desire to split from the manifestation that he articulates as unknowable? Desiderio's failure to understand and obtain the "real" Albertina is what enables the unknown to succeed. Desiderio is constantly suspended by Albertina's "real" unknowable beyond.

During the final moments of the novel, when Desiderio is taken to Dr. Hoffman's castle, his concept of the unknown is revealed to him as the real. When confronted by the real, Desiderio experiences dissatisfaction. He discovers that the hallucinations of the city are caused by Dr. Hoffman's desire machine, powered by "a hundred of the best-matched lovers in the world, twined in a hundred of the most fervent embraces passion could devise" in love pens (261). It is, moreover, in this mechanical dramatisation of desire, the "I DESIRE THEREFORE I EXIST," that

Desiderio experiences an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction (258). From the moment Desiderio arrives at Dr. Hoffman's castle he acknowledges that:

> My disillusionment was profound. I was not in the domain of the marvellous at all. I had gone far beyond that and at last I had reached the power-house of the marvellous, where all its clanking, dull, stage machinery was kept. Even if the dream made flesh, the real, once it becomes real, can be no more than real ... I was already wondering whether the fleshly possession of Albertina would not be the greatest disillusionment of all. (245)

Again, Desiderio holds the unknown accountable for any real dissatisfaction. The unknown that initially grounded Desiderio's desire in the real is, in this passage, rejected. In the face of sublimation, Desiderio refuses to partake in "this experiential void" of desire (263). He never doubts his decision to reject this reality as the unknown. Even when offered Albertina as his "Platonic other, my necessary extinction, my dream made of flesh," Desiderio refuses (263). In fulfilling his quest to assassinate Dr. Hoffman, Desiderio murders Albertina in turn.

According to Lacan's account of courtly love this is Desiderio's foreclosure: an attempt to achieve immortality, a unity with the unknowable beyond Albertina. By removing the threat of castration, Desiderio saves *himself* from a literal and figurative death within reality. In courtly love the Lady (Albertina) would be displaced, viewed as an inhuman automaton. However, because Desiderio's understanding of the real and the unknown is obscured by a Weird threshold, Albertina is dislocated from the outset. While her monstrous forms function as an automaton on the level of Desiderio's phantasmic projection, upon her death Desiderio continues to be dissatisfied with reality; that is, his jouissance remains unsatisfied. Desiderio is left with a reality that continues to be confounded with and by an unknown unknown, penetrated by something beyond his knowledge: nothing from his reality had warned him "of the grotesque dénouement of my great passion" (264). Even with the final words of the novel, "unbidden, she comes," Desiderio cannot command the unknowable all-seeing "she" that is forever dislocated from his reality (271). Nothing can be said of this "she" because she is an unknown unknown.

The unknown unknown is always already present throughout the narrative of The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, actively disturbing Desiderio from

a hidden and barred position, in the beyond of Albertina. It is precisely this dislocation of the (im)possible object that I argue reveals the location of Weird monsters. A Weird monster occupies the same location as the barred and hidden woman in language, capable of gazing back at her "doubled" unknowable self, her "not all" because of her relationship with the phallus (Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality 81). The (im)possible gaze of Albertina, looking back from the unknown unknown, provides a model for Weird monsters. It is the complication that arises when a Lacanian subject is confronted by a Weird threshold, making the (im)possible object-gaze both unknowable and threateningly present within the perceived reality. As China Miéville points out, Weird monsters are the "not all," the Other, the unknown unknown, "the assertion of that we did not know, never knew, could not know, that has always been and will always be unknowable" ("On Monsters" 380). This discussion of Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* has offered an investigation into how Weird Fiction functions with Lacan's assignation of woman, as that which is validated outside and rejected within the phallic function. It is, moreover, Carter's depiction of Albertina as the barred woman that allows this discussion to move forward with Weird monsters, capable of crossing and troubling the boundaries of genre with her all-seeing and (im)possible object-gaze. The next chapter investigates more closely the intertextual functions of Weird monsters in Octavia E. Butler's "Bloodchild".

CHAPTER SIX
WEIRD MONSTERS

Locating Weird monsters is a key process in understanding the Weird Fiction genre. As I have argued in the previous chapter, Weird monsters are the disturbing Thing that gazes at the characters and readers from a position that is ultimately *unknowable*. There is, however, a complex problem arising from the Thing's enigmatic status, promulgated by Weird Fiction. In narrative a Weird monster is often made all too present, made concretely monstrous, through a subject's articulation of them. To completely identify the unknowable as a Weird monster transforms its identity into something concretely real, knowable and assumable. When a Weird Fiction text deals with literal monsters, blending in themes of fantasy and/or science fiction, locating the Weirdness of these monsters becomes controversial and indeed more difficult to understand.[33] This chapter aims to address the critical concerns and contextual complexities of Weird monsters, in particular via discussion of Octavia E. Butler's "Bloodchild". Butler's short story deals with the unknown unknowns of Weird monsters through its thematic "scrutiny" of blending racial alienation, Otherness and reversed gender roles (Humann 518). The prominent theme of mother—a crucial point for the feminist criticisms that discuss Butler's use of male impregnation and childbirth—is a way to further develop a discussion of the "fetishised phallic mother" and her disturbing gaze (Spivak 64). This thesis has touched upon the mad woman who gazes upon her male mother. When applying, through a Lacanian lens, the position of the barred woman to my working definition of a Weird threshold, what must be recognised is its connection to the unknowable and (im)possible position of Weird monsters. Weird Fiction assigns its monsters to a similar position as the Lacanian woman, capable of crossing and troubling the boundaries of genre with her all-seeing and (im)possible object-gaze.

The difficulty of pinpointing and locating Weird monsters reveals why the critical scholarship negates concrete definitions of Weird Fiction. The resistance to

[33] That is, strictly speaking, themes borrowed from those texts that are categorised as fantasy or science fiction. For example, George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* series which uses literal monsters like dragons. The question I'm posing here is whether, when these literal monsters appear in Weird Fiction, the texts still qualify as Weird given that a Weird threshold renders monsters ultimately unknowable.

definitions like Michael Kelly's and Laird Barron's has been given considerable attention, specifically with the working definition of a Weird threshold. In discussing Kelly's recognition of Weird Fiction as a "feeling" and a "continuous distortion of ambient space" (Kelly, 2: vii), I drew attention to the scholarship's simultaneous engagement with and oversight of a Weird threshold. A Weird threshold, however, is not sufficient on its own to explain the signification of monsters within Weird Fiction. To extend the working definition of Weird Fiction to account for its monsters, it is important that I clarify the critical scholarship's engagement with that which remains enigmatic in its orientation towards literal, describable monsters.

Weird monsters, as China Miéville identifies them, resonate with the unknowable:

> The monsters of high Weird are indescribable and formless *as well as being* and/or *although they are* and/or *in so far as they are* described with an excess of specificity, an accursed share of impossible somatic precision; and their constituent bodyparts are disproportionately insectile/cephalopodic, without mythic resonance. ("Quantum Vampire" 105)

Miéville's description is from a previously discussed article, "M.R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Weird; Hauntological: Versus and/or and and/or or?" (2009). The second chapter of this thesis discussed Miéville's concept of the skulltopus with reference to Jacques Derrida's law of genre theory. The skulltopus is, for Miéville, a visual representation of corruption. In the Derridean sense, this corruption enables the skulltopus to enact, despite the separate stimuli that respect one another's limitations, an (im)possible existence. When applied to Weird Fiction's function as a genre proper, the law recognises itself in the corrupted product, the new movement: an (im)possible existence that requires both the Old Weird and the New Weird.

These complexities of corruption, which validate Weird Fiction as a genre, are instrumental to the central image presented by Miéville: the skulltopus which, in and of itself, is a Weird monster. Miéville argues that monsters of "high Weird" exceed the limitations of both the real and the unknown by way of their descriptions. For Weird monsters to exist, they require both an "indescribable and formless" description within the real that allows them to exceed the unknown *as* unknowable. Weird monsters become confused and distorted with these descriptions when a

subject fails to locate them. For example, in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, Miéville notes how the "giant squid" is only revealed "at the end of a character's careful internisation of its qualities, qualities which *he* can see, but which we for several paragraphs suppose him to be remembering from descriptions ('Did it not measure about six metres? ... was its head not crowned with tentacles ...?'" (107). Placing a separation between the perceived reality of the character and the monstrous Thing (which is only later questioned by the reader) indicates a gap between the subject and the already *articulated* monster. It is the "giant squid" creature that is described as monstrous and real, and yet it is the Thing attached to the creature that is later questioned despite the subject's articulation of it. Miéville argues that this "animal" therefore "appears pre-mediated by human understanding ... so that its monstrousness, though certainly not denied, is already defined by human categorisation" ("Quantum Vampire" 107). In other words, the giant squid, despite its obvious depiction as monstrous, is positioned in reality and is therefore knowable from the outset of Verne's narrative. There appears to be a gap or split between this perception of the monster and the real that falls entirely on the subject. I have already pointed out something similar with Barron's descriptive example of Weird Fiction as difficult to define; that is, it is "a diver in murky depths who spies the last metre of a trailing tentacle and innocently supposes he's apprehended a common specimen of octopi: The rest of the mighty Kraken, coiled within its lair, waiting" (1:14).

This gap between the subject and monster may be why we run up against the problem of monsters within Weird narratives, specifically in the scholarship that relies on monstrous articulation to define the unknown. For example, both Miéville's and Barron's descriptions define the Weird through a monstrous fetishisation. A connection exists between Miéville's skulltopus and Barron's description of the disembodied body parts of Weird monsters—the fetishised monstrousness of the "tentacle" that the critical scholarship views as "the nonpareil iteration of the embodied Weird," a standard image from H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos (Miéville 124). Emily Alder further contributes to the idea that the "tentacle" is a "metonym for the radical new body shapes marking the weird monster" (1088). At first sight what these claims appear to promote is the Old Lovecraftian Weird and its standards. However, such claims are problematic for those writers whose works deviate from the tentacle as a critical and creative marker of the Weird. As I have revealed

through examining works by Shirley Jackson, Daphne du Maurier and Angela Carter, Weird monsters are detached from the story and from language. Like the women characters of these narratives, the monsters are capable of going *beyond* corruption, achieving liberation outside of their rejected existence, and belonging to themselves as an (im)possible form. Weird monsters are thus simultaneously elevated and barred, like the Lacanian woman, they stand in as male lack, as the negative to the masculine that desires and determines their existence.

In asserting this argument, I have reiterated women's position in relation to and as an (im)possible object: it is a mistake to assume that Weird monsters are exclusively feminine. Weird monsters are not necessarily feminine; rather they take up the same position as the barred woman in Jacques Lacan's formula of sexual difference. The fact that this link between the Lacanian woman and Weird monsters functions on the same level as the (im)possible object means that they are the creation and rejection of a subject's desire. Weird fictions that incorporate literal monsters, as I will show in discussing Butler's "Bloodchild," are a critical and creative development for Weird Fiction. Not because Weird Fiction blends the genres it borrows themes from to validate its monsters, but, on the contrary, because Weird Fiction can be viewed as corrupted and/or (im)possible because its monsters function as unknown unknowns. Like Weird Fiction itself, its monsters are limitless in their ability to belong to themselves, while also participating in all limitations without belonging. Weird monsters are not limited to a subject's articulation, they share the same universal all-seeing position as the barred Lacanian woman, disturbing the subject and reader from a position that is (im)possible to assume.

6.1. A MONSTER'S GAZE

To claim that my first step in locating a Weird monster is through a Lacanian subject's confrontation with a Weird threshold, posits the monster's reliance on a subject's visual field to articulate and thus validate its existence. Upon feeling the "effects" of the (im)possible object-gaze, the subject's visual field establishes a visible connection with and to the object-cause of their desire (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 107). However, because a Weird threshold makes it impossible to assume the object-cause of desire from the outset, a question arises concerning how and where Weird monsters are located in the subject's visual field.

This question is crucial for identifying Weird monsters as unknown unknowns. As Lacan's writing indicates, it is the feminine object that the subject projects his lack onto, and it is this fetishised object that mirrors the subject's visual field because it is "evanescent in its function of symbolising the central lack of desire" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 105). The "real" object is displaced, and functions as an automaton. This discussion draws upon the previous chapter's discussion of Lacan's theory of courtly love, which demonstrates how a subject's phantasmic projection dislocates the object-cause (the Lady as automaton) of desire. However, because I am dealing with the subject's visual field in order to justify and connect the (im)possible position of Weird monsters with the barred Lacanian woman, I will proceed with explaining it through Lacan's scopic triangular diagram from *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*.

Lacan's scopic diagram shows two intersecting triangles that, according to Joan Copjec, demonstrate how "the gaze is located 'behind' the image, as that which fails to appear in it and thus as that which makes all its meaning suspect" (36). The object-gaze is conceptualised in this context as something *beyond* the image, articulated and fetishised by the subject of representation. Lacan, in presenting his scopic diagram, speaks through each provocative line that the two intersecting triangles create in relation to a subject's visual field:

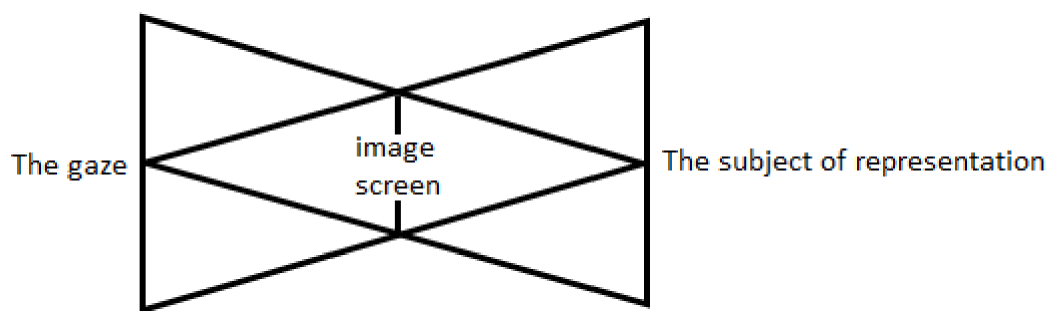

Figure 8. Scopic diagram of *objet petit a* by Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Penguin Group, 1973. 106.

Paying particular attention to how "the right-hand line is situated," Lacan describes how a subject "enter[s] light" and receives from the object-gaze "its effects" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 105-106).[34] It is these "effects" that align with the "feelings" of unease and uncertainty experienced by a subject in Weird Fiction, because of the penetration of the object-gaze. Lacan goes on to point out how the subject, due to this penetration of the object-gaze, is led to believe "that there is, beyond, the thing, the thing itself. Behind the phenomenon, there is the noumenon" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 106). Copjec argues that Lacan's point here is that a subject *misrecognises* the object-gaze. This misrecognition on the subject's part is one that "retains its force in the process of construction," which "is conceived no longer as a purely positive one but rather as one with an internal dialectic" (Copjec 33). In other words, from within the subject's visual field, the failure goes undetected and/or unrepresented *as* a failure. The only way for a negation to enter a subject's visual field is via the object itself. This can be seen, as Lacan explains, when a subject "gives of himself, or receives from the other, something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown-off skin, thrown off in order to cover the frame of a shield" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 107). The subject becomes caught up in an "imaginary capture," which, because of the object-gaze, reveals why a subject pursues "the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 107). It is the object in this scenario, which is misrecognised and articulated as monstrous, that exposes and represents the subject's fantasy.

This exposure and representation of a subject's fantasy is the validation of an (im)possible object. The aim in discussing Lacan's scopic diagram here is to deliver a reminder that if the position of Weird monsters is to be approached, I must introduce another level of coherence into my working definition of a Weird threshold. This leads to a reconsideration of the essential visual field of a subject when confronted by a Weird threshold:

[34] Lacan describes the point of light as: "That which is of the mode of the image in the field of vision is therefore reducible to the simple schema that enables us to establish anamorphosis, that is to say, to the relation of an image, in so far as it is linked to a surface, with a certain point" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 86).

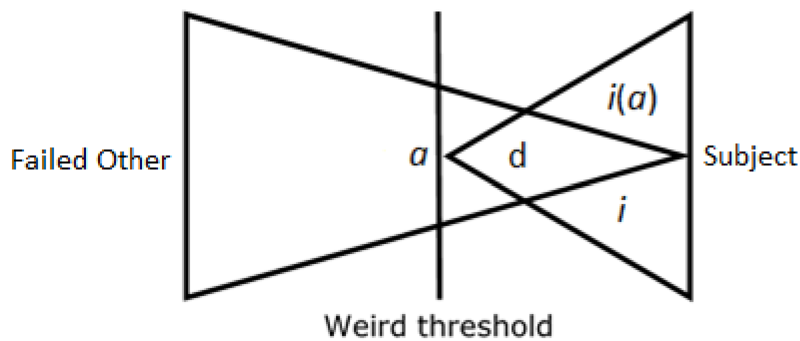

Figure 9. Scopic diagram of a Weird threshold.[35]

This scopic diagram of a Weird threshold is notably different from Lacan's visual field of a subject. The most obvious point of difference is how a Weird threshold complicates a subject's entrance into and misrecognition of the object-gaze. On the one hand this complication appears to limit a subject's visual field. For example, how do we locate a Weird monster if the subject's gaze is limited? Should a Weird monster be in the place of the object-cause of desire (*a*), as that which is hidden from the subject's desire (d)? A subject does not and cannot desire a Weird monster. It is essential to remember that a Weird monster is unknowable because of the (im)possibility of its being assumed by a subject. Thus a subject's assumption is rendered impossible by the unknowability of a Weird monster. Weird monsters cannot be located as *a* because the object-cause of desire is not limited to a subject's observation of desire, rather the impossible Thing of a subject's fantasy bears witness to it from a separate position.

A Weird monster is not a pure product of a subject's phantasmic projection of desire, rather, as Copjec notes, the gaze is in the *beyond*. To grasp this complication, I will briefly refer to Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. As discussed in the previous chapter, a Weird threshold casts back and doubles Desiderio's desire for an unknown unknown, from which the monstrous forms of Albertina emerge. If we imagine Desiderio as the subject in Figure 9, we see that, from within his visual field, he can discern the monstrous forms of the (im)possible object (*a*) as real. That is to say, Desiderio interprets the phantasmic projection of Albertina as an ideal image (i) because it is that which he holds

[35] This diagram is a developed version of Figure 6, as guided by a Lacanian lens. This version introduces the position of the (im)possible object (*a*), which the previous chapters have allowed to develop into the working definition of a Weird threshold.

accountable for his desire. Desiderio's articulation of Albertina's monstrous forms thereby function as proof and reflection of his desire within the unknown. Moreover, these monstrous forms are the "mask" of the (im)possible object, marked as i(*a*) on Figure 9, because this is what is experienced and doubled back on the side of the subject.

A subject, as with Desiderio, locates his desire within the unknown because it is that which is deflected and reinforced by a Weird threshold. The unknown is made successful with and by the (im)possible object because its gaze can penetrate through and be doubled back by a Weird threshold. This function of the (im)possible object allows the unknown to succeed as unknowable. The subject thus experiences the effects of the gaze by misrecognising it as something that is ideal and yet detrimental to their desire (as i(*a*)). This is particularly true of the way that Desiderio's reality is disturbed by the very thing he desires: in his failure to identify and locate the 'real' Albertina, Desiderio is led to believe that the unknown is real *beyond* Albertina's physical body. Desiderio pursues this belief because of his articulation of Albertina's monstrous forms, which simultaneously concretises her monstrousness and validates his desire for the unknown real. The misrecognition is therefore not a result of Desiderio's failure to locate or identify this unknowable beyond as real, but of Albertina enabling the unknown to succeed through her monstrous forms.

With respect to the (im)possible object that is rejected and validated by a subject's desire, the gaze that is located beyond "as that which fails to appear in it and thus as that which makes all its meaning suspect," enters the confrontation as the failed Other (Copjec 33). Nothing from this barred and unknowable position is perceivable on the side of the subject, except through its attachment to the (im)possible object. The fantasy that the subject is caught up in is not articulated on the level of the Weird monster. Like the barred Lacanian woman, nothing can be said about Weird monsters. Weird monsters cannot be communicated with: they remain separate and unknowable as the failed Other. The failed Other is isolated by the barrier of the (im)possible object, projected backwards. Significantly, the position of the failed Other in Figure 9 should not be perceived as pure negation, as the backward movement to a subject's confrontation with a Weird threshold. On the contrary, this failed Other reveals a fundamental movement *forward* through and

with the (im)possible object. It is the driving force beyond a Weird threshold, which ultimately disrupts a subject as an unknown unknown.

This makes visible the monstrous articulation that appears in a subject's desire. It is with the gaze located beyond the (im)possible object that we realise the function of Weird monsters, which at once concretises them as real and centres their orientation as unknown unknowns. The critical concern regarding Weird monsters therefore lies with the gaze that fails and yet succeeds. Mladen Dolar makes a similar case concerning the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Dolar explains how "the principal source of the uncanniness of the monster, for Frankenstein, is precisely the gaze. It is the being of the gaze," or, more precisely, when the "Thing renders the gaze" and wears it like a mask (20). It is worth noting here that my use of mask recalls Lacan's use of the term. When the Thing assumes the gaze and is articulated by the subject as monstrous (and therefore becomes a literal monster), this is because the subject is confronted by the mask being "put on". The fact that this gaze is assumed by Frankenstein's monster and yet is rendered entirely separate from the monster, helps demonstrate the function of Weird monsters. It is the gaze that is expounded backward, causing it to disappear beyond the image of the articulated monster. Here we have what Lacan calls "a trap for the gaze" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 89). The moment the gaze is assumed is the precise moment that it disappears from the image of the monster. As Slavoj Žižek argues in "Looking Awry", the gaze itself is "motionless," it sticks "out like a strange body and thus disturb[s] the harmony of the image by introducing a threatening dimension" (45). This monstrous articulation of the gaze as "a strange body" recalls Miéville's description of the skulltopus, whose separate stimuli are rejected and validated to create an (im)possible form. The (im)possible existence of Weird monsters, therefore, fills in this gap as the threatening dimension beyond, always out of reach. What interests me in this chapter, then, is when literal monsters interrupt a subject's perception and articulation of i(*a*). The next section develops this interruption further through an examination of Butler's "Bloodchild", which considers the trapped gaze of the (im)possible object (trapped as i(*a*) on the side of the subject) through the bodies of literal monsters.

6.2. NEGATING THE ALIEN THING

"Bloodchild" is described by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer as "the best example of weird science fiction by Butler" (*The Weird* 630). Which begs the question: *why* do the VanderMeers make this assertion? What is Weird about this particular story? Why is it the "best example" of a Weird tale by Butler?[36] In pursuing an answer to this question, it is useful to consider the questioning voice that appears throughout "Bloodchild." The story takes place on an alien planet inhabited by a serpent-like species called the Tlic. The male protagonist, Gan, is part of a human family in the Tlic's Preserve: a sanctuary specifically designed for the protection of humans. The humans are necessary for the reproduction of the Tlic species, specifically the male humans who serve as "host animals" to carry the Tlic's unhatched young (O. Butler 636).[37] It is through the story's navigation between Gan and the Tlic character of T'Gatoi—whose eggs Gan is to gestate—that the reader witnesses a direct separation between the perceived reality of a subject and the articulated monster.

T'Gatoi is positioned within a normalised setting of Gan's reality, functioning within his perceived reality as concretely real rather than unknowable. This is made evident in the way that T'Gatoi is described by Gan:

> T'Gatoi whipped her three meters of body off her couch, toward the door, and out at full speed. She had bones—ribs, a long spine, a skull, four sets of limb bones per segment. But when she moved that way, twisting, hurling herself into controlled falls, landing running, she seemed not only boneless, but aquatic—something swimming through the air as though it were water. I loved watching her move. (632)

A reader's understanding of T'Gatoi as monstrous is idealised through Gan's description. This reasserts Miéville's point that the creature in question is presented as "pre-meditated by human understanding" ("Quantum Vampire" 107). The point of difference here is the way that Gan's human perception of T'Gatoi is not, at this level, distinctively Gan's. It is Gan's love for T'Gatoi's form that is experienced by the reader, which is at odds with the form and movement of the "monster". It is a

[36] The labelling of texts as the "best" example of Weird Fiction will be discussed in more details in the concluding chapter and will be applied to the wider field of canonisation. At present, however, it is sufficient to notice this use of the descriptor by the VanderMeers.
[37] It is noted by Gan that the Tlic "prefer women" because they "have more body fat to protect the grubs," but men are used "to leave the women free to bear their own young" (636).

monstrous form that relies on a type of dramatic irony in which the reader “knows” something that Gan does not. T’Gatoi is a literal monster, perhaps merely serving as Butler’s “horrific element” in an otherwise science fictional story (VanderMeer 630). However, because T’Gatoi is perceived here as normal and “loved” by Gan, the story propels her monstrous articulation as instrumental to Gan’s desire. It is only later, after a confrontation with the very thing Gan apparently desires from T’Gatoi, that the reader realises something does not appear quite right.

A disturbance in Gan’s idealisation of the monstrous T’Gatoi/Tlic occurs when an impregnated male human is brought into their home from the street by T’Gatoi “unconscious, folded like a coat over some of her limbs” (O. Butler 632). In being ordered to slaughter an animal, so that the “grubs” from the man’s body can be transferred into a new host, Gan is faced with the horror of his own reality (634-635). Gan recognises that his prior understanding of birth as “painful and bloody” was not sufficiently horrific. As he notes, “this was something else, something worse ... I couldn’t not see it” (635). It is from this revised perspective that Gan provides the following description of T’Gatoi:

> T’Gatoi bit away the egg case, licked away the blood. Did she like the taste? Did childhood habits die hard—or not die at all?
> The whole procedure was wrong, alien. I wouldn’t have thought anything about her could seem alien to me. (635)

The question marks arising in this description are attached, according to Elyce Rae Helford, to a distinctly “questioning human voice,” which is determining “who and what the aliens are” (259). Although the reproductive processes of the Tlic are understood as normal by the Tlic culture, what becomes complicated is Gan’s articulation of the word “alien”, which he attaches to the previously normalised T’Gatoi.

The disturbance that takes place is located with the procedure of Tlic reproductive processes that Gan comes to perceive as “wrong” and “alien”, and yet it is *through* T’Gatoi that Gan reaches this revised understanding of both self and other. Gan perceives T’Gatoi as monstrous only after she assumes the “gaze” of the alien monster: a monster that appears to be reassessed through this now-questioning human voice. Significantly, it is this questioning human voice that doubts Gan’s

prior concept of T'Gatoi as a creature that "could [never] seem alien" (O. Butler 635). Viewed through the Lacanian gaze, the gaze's significant formation is not located with Gan's articulation of T'Gatoi as monstrous. It is more precisely established in the "fracture, a bi-partition, a splitting of the being to which the being accommodates itself, even in the natural world" (Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts 106). In other words, Gan's reality is confronted by something Other, something unknowable through the revised image of T'Gatoi; that is, in the way that the Tlic reproductive processes are rendered monstrous by and through their attachment to T'Gatoi as the alien Thing.

What disturbs Gan in this instance is T'Gatoi's literal invoking of the Weird, an invoking of his desire to gain knowledge of the unknowable—a desire that displaces T'Gatoi into the unknown as unknowable. The "real" T'Gatoi is expounded backwards into the unknown as the (im)possible object (a). Although T'Gatoi assumes the position of the gaze, thereby putting on a monstrous and threatening mask that affects Gan, the gaze itself is trapped within this confrontation. This is why we find Gan's articulation of T'Gatoi as i(a) in Figure 9: as instrumental and detrimental to his desire. A Weird threshold splits Gan's visual field with the unknown, and thereby unknowingly reflects the unknown through T'Gatoi. Gan casts and interprets his own phantasmic projection of T'Gatoi as an ideal image (as i) because it is this image that he holds accountable for his desire of the unknown.

Gan's concrete articulation of T'Gatoi as alien obscures his ability to locate her when she puts on an unknowable monstrous gaze. T'Gatoi is at once a validation and a reflection of Gan's desire for the unknown. T'Gatoi functions as the exposure of this limitation. Another way to understand this is through Barron's example of the diver; that is, the question that arises the moment the diver sees the tentacle: is it an octopus or a Kraken? This moment of unknowing is a Weird threshold that makes knowledge of the tentacle impossible. Feelings of unease and uncertainty are prolonged on the side of the Lacanian subject, reinforced by the effects and feelings caused by the (im)possible object-gaze. The Thing itself, the Thing that is attached to the image of the tentacle, is expounded backwards as (im)possible and unknowable, rejected and yet validated by a subject's desire.

Gan's viewpoint is literally a viewpoint that fails to recognise its own failure. The only failure to enter Gan's reality is T'Gatoi who is misrecognised as the object-

cause of Gan’s desire (like the tentacle in Barron’s example). Perhaps, as Gry Ulstein asserts, this misrecognition is the cause of a “weird articulation”: an articulation that reverses “the weird itself” in the way that its monsters signify “a world-become-monster, the monsters are us, not other” (91-92). The problem with claiming a subject’s preconceived understanding and knowledge of the Weird is that doing so causes all unknown unknowns to fail. In other words, a Weird threshold would collapse the unknown rather than limit and reflect a subject’s visual field. As demonstrated through the shifts in Gan’s visual field, such a failure goes completely undetected by the subject and thus allows the effects of the (im)possible object-gaze to succeed. In other words, it is through a Weird threshold that the (im)possible object captures and reinforces the gaze as unknowable. A monster of the Weird can only enter this scenario as the failed Other, homologous with the gaze. It is important to remember that nothing can be said about Weird monsters; they cannot be articulated. The only evidence of their existence comes via their attachment to the (im)possible object, trapped and misrecognised on the side of the subject’s visual field (as i(a)). The more a subject pursues knowledge of the unknown, to look for it and understand it as concretely real, the more a Weird monster disappears into the beyond, constructed by the inherent limitation of the visual field.

This causes a failed encounter with the unknown. The subject is instead confronted with only the real and, as a result, attempts to save himself from a death inside the real. This is particularly true of the way that Gan demands that he be denied and yet given access to the unknown, as a way of foreclosing his own death:

> I moved the gun slightly, brought the barrel up diagonally under my own chin. ‘At least it was a decision I made.’
>
> ‘As this will be.’
>
> ‘Ask me, Gatoi.’
>
> ‘For my children’s lives?’
>
> She would say something like that. She knew how to manipulate people, Terran and Tlic. But not this time.
>
> ‘I don’t want to be a host animal,’ I said. ‘Not even yours.’ (O. Butler 638)

This passage reveals a literal and figurative demonstration of a subject's foreclosure when confronted with a real dissatisfaction: in particular, the last line: "'I don't want to be a host animal' ... 'Not even yours.'" Raffaella Baccolini suggests that Gan's assertion can be interpreted as a "request for knowledge and awareness," which allows him to "break through the hegemonic power of the Tlic and open up the possibility of change" (303). I will return to the issue of asserting a hegemonic power that causes the phallic mother to operate as the pure negation in the phallic function. It is important at this point, however, to investigate how Gan's demand contributes to his misrecognition of the (im)possible object. Gan cannot command the unknown, except through T'Gatoi, who he has held accountable for this failed encounter, legitimised through her monstrous articulation. Participation in the "wrong" and "alien" Tlic's reproductive processes therefore serve as Gan's proof that the unknown does exist. By demanding that he be given the choice of the unknown, Gan establishes his fantasy that the unknown is real. Choosing not to participate in the Tlic reproductive processes justifies his desire due to his attachment to T'Gatoi, who can "deliver" and "give birth" to the unknown.

The disturbance of the unknown rests entirely on Gan's radical misrecognition of the (im)possible object. When T'Gatoi questions Gan's demand ("For my children's lives?"), Gan can only negate her as something that "manipulate[s]" both human and alien, as something that does not fit into either of these (notably knowable) categories. T'Gatoi is constructed as something (im)possible, Other: a supportive break against and beyond the phallic function. If the comparison between Gan's and T'Gatoi's voices is interpreted as literal, a reader thereby observes the break or gap between a subject and the articulated monster. Rather, it is my suggestion that it is the (im)possible object that brings forward the unknown *through* a Weird threshold—inviting the question of whether this Thing is a phallic mother or a monster.

The juxtaposition of these two questioning voices engenders the phallic mother as monstrous. This recalls Spivak's assertions concerning the reversed phallic function; that is, that a male mother "seems to go the other way, from woman to man, the fetishised phallic mother causes a good deal of anguish" (Spivak 64). The phallic mother is monstrous, (im)possible and Other, because she simultaneously threatens and promises to give birth to the unknown through the masculine subject. A Weird

threshold causes a subject's knowledge of this Other to fail, however, and although the possibility of this Other is not universal and causes the articulation of the monster to fail, it is precisely this failure that allows the unknown to become successful on the side of a subject's visual field. Moreover, the fetishisation of the monstrous phallic mother legitimates a Weird monster's existence as an unknown unknown.

6.3. MONSTROUS MOTHERS

As a failed Other, a Weird monster complicates a subject's desire; whereas a subject orientates the failed encounter with the already articulated monster. Therefore literal monsters always come into question in Weird Fiction. To refer back to Figure 9, the triangular proportions on the side of the subject can be read as illustrative of the misrecognition and failure brought about by a Weird monster. The closed triangle within a subject's visual field (◄) is, of course, limited to and by a Weird threshold. It is noticeably *with* the subject's desire (*d*) that we can observe an undetected penetration, an unknowable occurrence that appears to bounce off a Weird threshold. This undetected penetration is inflicted by the (im)possible object-gaze (►), which splits a subject's desire. This allows the unknown to succeed through this penetration, precisely because it fails to be detected on the side of the subject. The misrecognitions that emerge from this undetected penetration are i(*a*) and i, entering into this confrontation with a Weird threshold as substitutes for the (im)possible object (*a*). They are what are closest, blocking and consuming the subject's visual field. The articulation of both i(*a*) and i, however, risks an unsatisfactory phenomenon within and outside of a subject's desire. This dissatisfaction causes a split to appear between the subject and the already articulated monster, because the subject is led to believe that something exists in the beyond of an (im)possible object.

Due to the failed encounter with the unknown, the subject's desire is deformed. As shown in Figure 9's diamond shape (<>), desire (d) is narrow near the subject but swells where the (im)possible object should be. Despite the Weird threshold blocking a subject's knowledge of the (im)possible object, the subject is affected by the (im)possible object-gaze that doubles back, folding the desire back upon itself and capturing it. This captured desire functions similarly to how corruption functions within Weird Fiction: corruption forms the invisible centre of the law that regulates Weird Fiction, revealing itself as deformed (like Miéville's

skulltopus).[38] The location of the subject's desire (d) in Figure 9 demonstrates a similar movement forward and backward, trapped within the fantasy of the subject. Literal monsters sit within and outside of a subject's captured desire, an embodiment of this desire and the reclusive gaze of the (im)possible object. However, the threatening quality and disturbance of the (im)possible object-gaze is fundamentally detached and yet driven forward by an Other that fails to appear on the side of the subject. Significantly, it is precisely this failed Other that is caged and held suspect in the image of a literal monster—that is, with the *a* appearing in i(*a*).

I can perhaps pursue an answer to this failure with the matheme positive and negative variables of the triangular portions in Figure 9. This is often described by scholars, like Adrian Johnston, as Lacan's own use of "∧, ∨, >, and <" as a way of understanding the "deliberately loose and open fashion, possible variants" of the subject and the object-cause of desire (n.p.).[39] Lacan's use of the positive and negative variables is indicative of a subject's desire; that is, "the relation of the subject to the Other is entirely produced in a process of a gap," or, in this case, a lack of a gap that is articulated "as circular" and "dissymmetrical" like a diamond shape (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 206-207). In describing this shape, Lacan turns it upright to demonstrate how the "small V of the lower half ... is the *vel* constituted by the first operation" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 210). This operation risks condemning the subject "to seeing himself emerge, *in initio*, only in the field of the Other" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 210). However, given that a Weird threshold closes and limits the subject's "unique fantasies of merger or symbiosis (conjunction), scorn or refusal (disjunction), mastery or domination ('greater than'), slavery or submission ('less than')," the triangular dimensions travel only in one direction (Johnston n.p.). It is only through a subject's desire that a Weird monster achieves its unknowable, deforming effect.

In Weird narratives especially, the unknowable and deforming effect experienced by the subject is often misconstrued as purely negative. Such negation,

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[38] The following chapter will discuss this point in depth. My current discussion needs to focus on the corruption of the (im)possible object gaze (*a*) before we can handle, and make sense of, this central "womb" of corruption in the law of genre.

[39] Adrian Johnston is here discussing Lacan's matheme of fantasy ($ <> *a*). The triangular dimensions in Lacan's scopic diagram are a significant feature when relating Lacan's equations to those of a Weird threshold. The negative and positive variables are fundamentally closed off, thereby limited to and by a subject's visual field.

as Jacqueline Rose notes, is grasped through the Lacanian notion that there can be "'no Other of the Other', and anyone who claims to make up this place is an imposter (the Master and/or psychotic)" (33). In misrecognising a literal monster as an impostor, because of its attachment to the (im)possible object (the *a* carried forward through a Weird threshold), a subject risks inferring that a Weird monster is a pure negation. That is to say, by pursuing an open-ended negative approach to Weird Fiction like "Bloodchild" (reading only the matheme > variable in Figure 9), what is overlooked is the distinct function of Weird monsters which work to undo the limitations imposed by a subject's articulation. This misrecognition risks, through searching for an anchor for the Otherness in Weird Fiction, accusing it of reinforcing negatively charged marginal positions (as closed ► variables).

For example, the sex scene in "Bloodchild," often serves as a catalyst for discussion of Otherness, in particular, the way Gan's authentic longing is distorted through participation in the "alien" sex act:[40]

> I knew what to do, what to expect. I had been told all my life. I felt the familiar sting, narcotic, mildly pleasant. Then the blind probing of her ovipositor. The puncture was painless, easy. So easy going in. She undulated slowly against me, her muscles forcing the egg from her body into mine. (O. Butler 639)

Despite Butler's resistance to suggestions that "Bloodchild" is a story about slavery (Kenan 498), Heather Duerre Humann argues that "the narrative perspectives [Butler] employs," causes a dialectic in the "sustained focus on race, social justice, and 'otherness,' and the manner in which she borrows from and blends traits common to other literary genres" (518).[41] Humann continues to investigate Butler's short story as "a disturbing portrait of life under the conditions of bondage at the same time as the story troubles the distinction between captivity and indentured

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[40] Slavoj Žižek points out in "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" that, in order for "the exploited majority ... to recognise its authentic longings," a fascist ideology must distort "the expression of this longing in order to legitimise the continuation of the relations of social domination and exploitation" (29-30).

[41] In a 1991 interview with Randall Kenan, Butler responds to the assertion that slavery is the primary theme of "Bloodchild". In Butler's words, the relationship between Gan and T'Gatoi is a consensual "deal. Yes, they can stay there but they are going to have to pay for it. And I don't see the slavery, and I don't see this as particularly barbaric" (498). For this reason, I steer away from claiming that "Bloodchild" is a work about slavery; however, the theme of the alien Other is pertinent given the discussion earlier in this thesis regarding the Lacanian woman and her disturbing gaze towards Weird monsters.

servitude" (522). Another example of such critical negation arises with Helford's argument that "the text seems to play on historical images of slavemasters who achieved sexual cooperation through threats and coercion consisting of simultaneous promises" (266). These readings of Butler's text suggest that, as a phallic mother, T'Gatoi promises to deliver and give birth to the unknown through manipulation and domination, positioning her as a "greater than" variable, as the dominating alien Other.

How, then, can the negative and positive variables in the schema of a Weird threshold be read? More specifically, how do we avoid positioning the Lacanian woman as a "greater than" variable, as the dominating alien Other? This predicament is parallel to a connection made by Benjamin Noys between racism and "the concept of the 'alien'" in works by H.P. Lovecraft ("The Lovecraft 'Event'" 11). In "The Lovecraft 'Event'" (2017), Noys discusses how the horror in Lovecraft's works "is not only figured at the level of physical matter but also folded onto a horror of mass democracy, not least through the dimension of racism" (8). This racism is often understood as "an inexplicable lapse" for Weird Fiction (9). In other words, critical scholars like Anthony Camara argue that Lovecraft's racism continues to influence Weird Fiction. While imitating the "dynamics of the mythos-writing," contemporary writers are, as Camara puts it, "critically engag[ing] with racial prejudices implicit in Lovecraft's work" and fundamentally "evolv[ing] the mythos by exposing it to racial heterogeneity and techno-scientific change" (24-25).

Noys offers a different interpretation to Camara, asserting that the racism in Lovecraft's works can be interpreted as a demonstration of how "the forces of 'democracy'" find their "representation in the figures of the masses of *alien* Others" ("Lovecraft 'Event'" 9). That is, the negative figures of dominance, such as slavemasters, are mistakenly attached to the image of the articulated monster (i(a)). A Weird monster like Lovecraft's Cthulhu fills this gap, standing in as a threatening force of dominance precisely because it is unknowable, a failed Other. It cannot be confirmed or denied. The issue for Noys is that it is not a matter of reducing the subject to the Other, or of acknowledging a complete separation between the subject and the chaos imposed by the alien Other. It rather involves:

> tracing a continuity or entanglement between them in terms of matching the impasses of the 'social' and the impasses of 'nature.' Chaos is the limit of

> both, and marks the point where neither can provide a stable prop to the other. In that sense it is the point of mutual collapse, where both 'nature' and the 'social' no longer function consistently. Allied with the sense of horror at this inconsistency we can suggest a refusal to simply celebrate chaos, which could slip all too easily into the celebration of the symmetry of 'chaotic' nature with the deregulated forces of free-market capitalism. ("Lovecraft 'Event'" 11)

Noys asserts that it is a contemporary Weird Fiction feature to embrace and support chaos (in this case the "feelings of unease and uncertainty" caused by the (im)possible object-gaze), in the context of the Other as alien. Works that re-evaluate the Lovecraftian mythos transform the way chaos "only appears as horrible from within the confines of the traditional image of the secure and fixed boundaries of the body" ("Lovecraft 'Event'" 12). The (im)possible object-gaze essential to a subject's confrontation with a Weird threshold, is critically and creatively engaged in contemporary weird fictions, such as Butler's "Bloodchild". Mark Fisher makes a similar argument, asserting that the negatively charged positions in Lovecraft's work are sublimated through Weird monsters, in the way that "it transforms an ordinary object causing displeasure into a Thing which is both terrible *and* alluring, which can no longer be libidinallly classified as either positive and negative" (17).

The Other in Weird Fiction cannot confirm or deny a subject's desire for the unknown beyond itself, and thus fails. Another way of explaining this is through Lacan's logic about the alienating *vel*, which imposes upon a subject a choice between freedom and life. Lacan has already taught us that the lower half of the diamond, the V, condemns the subject to seeing his reflection in the Other. The upper half of the diamond shape is the Other, from which the subject is reflected. For Lacan if a subject, as a slave, "chooses freedom, he loses both immediately—if he chooses life, he has life deprived of freedom" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 212). The only validation a subject-slave can choose is death because it proves that they "have freedom of choice" (213). Or, as Juliet Mitchell puts it, "desire itself, and with it, sexual desire, can only exist by virtue of its alienation" (5-6). The Other loses its essence as the pure negation the moment the subject choses death as an expression of freedom. The Other manifests precisely "at the moment of terror" experienced by the subject (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 220). This is what Lacan means when

he states that "the alienation of the master is structured in exactly the same way" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 219). This complicates assertions such as those made by Kristen Lillvis, that "instead of compelling the male subject to relinquish his penis (and the mother) in exchange for the symbolic power of the phallus (the typical model of castration), the female Tlic situates the male Terran as a 'female subject' who cannot access the (masculine) privileges associated with the phallus" (13).

To repeat a point made above, Butler's "Bloodchild" shows that Gan is capable of demanding that he be given the choice of the unknown, evoking his fantasy that the unknown is real in the form of T'Gatoi. Choosing to participate in Tlic reproduction justifies his desire due to its attachment to T'Gatoi who can "deliver" and "give birth" to the unknown. A significant motif in "Bloodchild" is that Gan is in a position to demand that he be given a choice: "'At least it was a decision I made'" (O. Butler 638). Gan expresses his choice through his decision to participate, while T'Gatoi is held accountable for Gan's domination. This is what Rose argues is the result "when the subject address[es] its demand outside itself to another, this other becomes the fantasied place of certainty, of knowledge and of truth" (32). On the level of the failed Other, therefore, a Weird monster enters into the scenario through the subject's misrecognition of a literal monster (i(*a*)) as pure negation. It is the subject that attempts to prevent sacrificing his desire for the unknown, which is attached through their articulation (as *i*), because doing so renounces his being in the real. It is "through the sacrifice of these values" that the subject is forced to renounce his existence in the real, which illustrates "how much radical alienation of freedom there is in the master" (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 220).

A return to the figure of the barred Lacanian woman provides a way to consider how T'Gatoi is made (im)possible to and by Gan. As described above, Gan validates and rejects T'Gatoi's existence within and outside of his limitation as a whole. The Lacanian woman's impossibility is constituted through the fragments of the break with the phallic limit: barred in becoming what Juliet Mitchell describes as "the receptacle for the alienation all men must feel; she *contains* man's otherness, and in doing so is denied her own humanity" (306-307). T'Gatoi is a phallic mother capable of expounding the secure and fixed boundaries that have been attached to her monstrous body. This is, of course, not to deny feminist assertions like Baccolini's that Butler's short story explores "the issue of negotiation between different cultures,

a needed act which, from a mere act of resistance, can become a strategy to negotiate and empower" (305). When reading the position of the failed Other in Weird Fiction, it is important to note that it is the Weird monster that ultimately fails this limitation, but is not to be mistaken as the cause of it, as the pure negation.

The (im)possible object's ability to look back, to redouble and give birth to itself anew on the side of the subject as unknowable, demonstrates the function of Weird monsters. This function is shared with the Lacanian woman who, as whole, as Copjec points out, is "imperiled not by the external collisions of different definitions but by the internal limit of each and every definition, which fails somehow to 'encompass' her" (225). It is this position that "opens out onto a beyond that it is impossible to confirm or deny" (225). This becomes complicated when literal monsters are introduced into a subject's confrontation with a Weird threshold. In order to be able to declare that a Weird monster exists beyond the image of a literal monster, it is necessary for the subject to conclude that it doesn't exist at all. Yet it is precisely because a Weird monster is located in the beyond of an (im)possible object that their existence is validated within and yet rejected outside of a subject's desire. As a failed Other, a Weird monster fails to guarantee a subject's desire. The moment a subject is confronted by a Weird threshold is the moment a subject fails to determine all unknown unknowns. A subject's desire to gain knowledge of the unknown is followed by a sudden awareness that it is the unknown and wants to be *given birth* to. This *giving birth* calls attention to the Derridean *la loi* whose existence is misrecognised by the masculine as his mad daughter-law. It is, moreover, the feelings expressed by the subject that an (im)possible object-gaze succeeds. As with Gan's articulation of T'Gatoi as monstrous, the Weird monster is held responsible for the delivery and promise of the unknown, which is never revealed or guaranteed in the story.

Butler's "Bloodchild" demonstrates how Weird monsters are not limited to a subject's articulation, or to the fetishised body parts that determine and reject their (im)possible existence. Indeed, because T'Gatoi is rejected by Gan as a literal monster, she is displaced into the unknown as (im)possible, belonging to herself as a whole, while also participating in all limitations without belonging. Monsters like T'Gatoi are not limited to a subject's articulation of them, which press them into the unknown. On the contrary, it is from a Weird monster's (im)possible position that

they gaze—from the same universal all-seeing position as the barred Lacanian woman—disturbing the subject and reader while remaining (im)possible to identify. It is this gaze that demonstrates the distinct function of Weird monsters. In moving forward with this negation of the New, I consider a point made by Lillvis: that the "merging of male and female roles ... indicates that the child's access to the 'female' within develops not only out of the child's link to the Terran mother but also his or her connection to the feminised Terran father" (13). Lillvis's conclusion mirrors an insight previously discussed in relation to the work of Gina Wisker. It is worth repeating here Wisker's assertions that the feelings of unease and uncertainty experienced by the subject in Du Maurier's "Don't Look Now" are caused by a "monstrous woman, the abject, the monstrous creature woman, a Medusa" (29). Despite this elevation of woman in Wisker's formation, her conclusion that a subject represses the "feminine side" of himself to project his fear of castration into a literal form of a woman delimits desire (29). What remains unaccounted for is why the phallic father (or lack thereof in the case of Butler's narrative) is disturbed by a phallic mother that is always articulated as monstrous. Instead, this kind of delimitation of the subject's desire causes it to go amiss in the way that Gan succumbs to the alien Other. The distinct function of Weird monsters goes amiss alongside a subject's impossible desire to gain knowledge of the unknown. The following chapter investigates how, in a similar way, masculinist assumptions about the real Weird negate its knowability within and as New. The following chapter will investigate this negation by reading it and the position of failed (M)Others in K. J. Bishop's *The Etched City* (2003).

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE NEW WEIRD

The New Weird is a significant critical and creative vector for Weird Fiction. As a contemporary reorientation that departs from the Old Weird and its characteristics, the New generates concern for critical scholars who view it as a negative, dominating effect for Weird Fiction. This chapter critiques the critical discourses that assume the masculine "I"/"Eye" in the law of genre and negate the New—either by rejecting the Otherness of the Weird that fails to appear or by claiming that the failed Otherness offers resistance to the Old. As discussed earlier in this thesis, a failed Other enters through a Weird threshold as an unknown unknown. It enters as a dominating effect precisely because it cannot be confirmed or denied by a Lacanian subject. A subject's assumption is rendered impossible by the unknowability of the failed Other and, similarly, genre functions through the revelation of that which is already assumed by the masculine "I"/"Eye" (as a known unknown). As Jacques Derrida puts it in "The Law of Genre", the masculine genre (*moi*) demands the possession of "an overseer's right, the right to see, the right to have everything in sight" (76). This chapter reveals how contemporary Weird fictions like K. J. Bishop's *The Etched City* contribute to a Weird Fiction that disrupts instantiating phallocentric law to produce a failed daughter-law. It is the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction that disrupts the Derridean sex act and "reduce[s] out" female personhood, positing the feminine law (*la loi*) at the centre of the masculine "I"/"Eye", inside the womb of a male mother (Spivak 188). In presenting two of the critical scholarship's responses to the New, via a discussion of *The Etched City*, I demonstrate how the New Weird's failure to deliver the unknown, regulates and sustains the unknowable, the Weird (M)Other.

The term New Weird is often credited to M. John Harrison who, in a 2003 online forum titled "The New Weird", began a thread that questioned the term: "Who does it? What is it? Is it even anything? Is it even New?" (317). The forum generated a detailed discussion. In particular, Jonathan Strahan's response that "the new weird/new wave fabulist/slipstream whatever seems to be a pretty happy and healthy outgrowth of some things that came before which would probably be much better off if left unlabelled and left to grow in the dark where they belong" (320). One

agreement that arose from the discussion, as Stephanie Swainston writes, is that the New was "a sub-genre with a lot of developing to do" and that "good writers are going to do what they do regardless of others' labelling and they'll outlive any fad (if this really exists, and if it is a fad)" (322). Harrison's post and a selection of responses to it are included in Ann and Jeff VanderMeer's *The New Weird*.[42] This is a significant point for this chapter, specifically when considering how the VanderMeer anthology was collated, in Jeff VanderMeer's words: "in the spirit of the best of that original discussion. New Weird is dead. Long live the Next Weird" (xviii). In positioning their anthology 'in the spirit of' Harrison's 2003 discussion, the VanderMeers propose a Weird evolution—one that anticipates a movement not limited to or by the New. The VanderMeers' anthology thereby treats the New as a "pivotal 'moment'" that has passed, and yet one that "continues to spread an Effect, even as it dissipates or becomes something else" (xvii).

This expectation describes the masculinist assumption that sees only the "Effect" of his desire, his giving birth to the "child" of his "affirmation" of the Weird (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 78). This kind of approach risks negating the New because the demand/desire to be the mother fails to succeed as knowable *within* the assumed understanding of the Weird. While the law of genre engenders the masculine as possessing feminine qualities, it is the masculine that fails the feminine both because he possesses the phallus and because he cannot penetrate through the (im)possibility of the Weird. The critical scholarship that refuses castration, a reduction into the feminine, therefore sees only a phallic fetishisation of the law and its *failed* effect as a male mother. It is important to note here that, as articulated by Lacan in "The Meaning of the Phallus", the phallus is not "a fantasy," "an object (part, internal, good, bad, etc. ...)," nor is it "the organ, penis or clitoris, which it symbolises" (79). The phallus is rather a "signifier," and the man's relation to it is "a question of rediscovering in the laws governing that other scene," the unconscious, the Other that emits the "effects which are determinant in the institution of the subject" (79). Figure 10 is thus a representation of the scholarship that views the intersection of penetration (the shaded areas) as a pure negation, as detrimental and vital to their

[42] The VanderMeers take note of how the online discussion "originated on Steph Swainston's message board, but only reached critical mass with Harrison's question" (317). The entirety of the discussion is available at www.kathryncramer.com/kathryn_cramer/2007/07/the-new-weird-a.html. However, I wish to concentrate on the VanderMeer's selected portion of the discussion.

desire to give birth to the Weird. This risks advocating for the phallocentrism of Derrida's genre theory, which misinterprets women as literally not existing *outside* of man's fantasy. As it has been emphasised throughout this thesis, woman's position as Other is fundamental to the phallic function, as she holds "apart two moments which are in constant danger of collapsing into each other" (Rose 52). What is overlooked here is a womn's function as the failed (M)Other; that supportive break against and beyond the phallic function that successfully confirms and maintains the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction as a genre proper.

A limitation for a masculinist analysis is that the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction—this impossible measure regulated by the law of genre—never emits its effect. As shown with the VanderMeers' treatment of the New, despite a confrontation *as* failed mothers of the Weird in the New, the demand/desire for its effect remains. The (im)possibility of Weird Fiction continues to evoke the masculine question of what a woman wants within his assumption as unknowable. A way of understanding this is, as Jacqueline Rose explains, that the phallus cannot "be directly [challenged] from the feminine body but must be by means of a different symbolic term" which is always exclusively masculine (56). Therefore, because the body of the mother fails to appear in the New, scholarship like the VanderMeers' misrecognises it as "dead," indeed, as a dead mother that propagates the Weird. And it is precisely in this way that we arrive at the second splintered critical position—at the scholarship suspended by the (M)Other that fails to appear in *their* production of the Weird.

In a similar way to the VanderMeers, who demand/desire possession and knowledge of the Weird, there is another perspective that reduces the New in the feminine. This reduction of the New is the result of viewing the failed (M)Other's penetration as a fetishised form of invagination. That is to say, the shaded areas in Figure 10 are viewed as a result of two folds and/or wombs inside the masculine Weird. In contrast to the scholarship that views the New as a dead mother, the fetishisation of invagination constitutes the New *as* the failure; a failed mother threatens to give birth to something new, something Other than the promised effect of the Weird. This threatening mother is similar to the figure of T'Gatoi in Octavia E. Butler's "Bloodchild". In the previous chapter I discussed how mothers are viewed and articulated as monstrous, as (im)possible and Other, because they simultaneously

threaten and promise to give birth to the unknown, through the masculine subject, as unknown unknowns. This result of the failed mother is the same as that discussed in relation to Bishop's article "Whose Words You Wear". Included in both of the VanderMeers' anthologies as a New Weird writer, Bishop's work contributes to the idea that the Weird serves as a centre womb and/or core, attempting to expand its (im)possibility beyond the delimited masculine assumption of the Old and New:

> There is no New Weird manifesto. Definitions and bibliographies of the New Weird have been made by a fluid, unofficial committee of Adams, few of whom would, I think, erect a barrier inscribed with 'Here Be the New Weird; Yonder Be Naught but the Old Ordinary.' It's a fuzzy label, really, its [*sic*] very relativity a nod in deference to the difficulty of labelling literature.
>
> But the label exists and I have set myself the task of tackling it a little, so to the 'New', which a reading *contra* something old, whatever that might be ... Perhaps the only sensible and seemly reply is to say that you're trying to make a semblance of newness out of the bric-a-brac. ("Whose Words" 346-347)

Bishop here describes the Old as a kind of old-fashioned and unrefined label that the New uses "to make a semblance" of newness. Paradoxically, it positions the Old *as* the New: it asserts that the Old's semblance is achievable with the New. It is as if the New is about the Old's newness in the sense that it is making sense of itself. This produces an *inconsistency* in the way that the Old and New are simultaneously rejected and validated as "fuzzy label[s]" for the Weird. In this way, Bishop unsettles the New by reclaiming the Old progressions that retain the unknowable effect desired by the VanderMeers.

A crucial feature of Bishop's argument is that the Old is treated as a retroactive vector: that is, the Old is promoted as something new in the New. In *The Weird and the Eerie*, Mark Fisher opens his discussion about the Weird, like Harrison above, with rhetorical questions: "What is the weird? When we say something is weird, what kind of feeling are we pointing to?" (15). In arguing that the Weird is a "*wrongness*," Fisher sets up his definition of the genre via H. P. Lovecraft (15-16). As discussed in relation to the criticism of Benjamin Noys, the wrongness and/or negativity of the Weird is often attached to the negatively charged

positions and figures—specifically the racial and/or alien Other—presented in Lovecraft's works. Scholars like Fisher and Noys offer a reimagining of this negation in the Lovecraftian Old as "a mode of enjoyment" that "transforms an ordinary object causing displeasure into a Thing which is both terrible *and* alluring, which can no longer be libidinally classified as either positive or negative" (Fisher 17). Fisher emphasises the dominating effect of Weird monsters like Lovecraft's Cthulhu, reading them as "a flavour of the beyond, to invoke the outside" that can only be achieved through depending "crucially on the production of the new" (21). This new outside that Fisher describes through Lovecraft's work, mirrors Bishop's point above about making a semblance of newness. It is, moreover, Fisher's conclusion that what such a semblance achieves "is not just a matter of something being distant in space and time, but of something which is beyond our ordinary experience and conception of space and time itself" (22).

The consistency of Weird Fiction rests with the production of its newness, its production of the unknown that is always located beyond the masculine's assumption. If the Old is represented with Lovecraftian wrongness and/or negativity and the New is represented with the promise of transforming it into something else, the Weird is suspended *beyond* and *through* them. Scholars like Bishop, Noys, and Fisher pursue their belief that the Weird is achievable beyond and through the Old and New, which is why they appear to fail the promised effect of the unknown. Or, as Bishop puts it, the "tactics" of the New "are not new, nor have they rusted in a cupboard since the heyday of the British New Wave" (347). The New is fetishised into a relationship with the Old, two invaginations of the same promised effect that give birth to something unknowable and Other. The Old is positioned as the authority that the New reanimates in order to establish and maintain Weird Fiction's evolution towards something successfully Other. Scholars like Bishop seek to expose and validate the Otherness of the Weird by anchoring it in the beyond of its own (im)possibility, as if to save it from failing there. In this respect, the effect that the masculinist desire addresses, invokes and rejects the New as a failed mother in order to elevate its Otherness.

The Derridean law of genre is rendered inoperable outside the authoritative "I" precisely because the law must be knowable and assumable to the masculine that demands and gives birth to it. Without the law there can be no confirmation "from

where and from whom do they derive this power, this right-to-see that permits them to have 'me' at their disposal?" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 76). In "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman" Spivak suggests that what this I is searching for is an answer "to the honourable male question: what does woman want?" (186). To speak of women as knowable permits the masculine to assume her position and thus state that "*I am a woman, and beautiful*," as a masturbatory sex act that validates "his transsexuality" as a male mother (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 76). As discussed in chapter two, the woman cannot speak of or as the masculine "I"/"Eye". It is the masculine's assumption of her position as a male mother that "ask[s] the question of woman as a subject: what am I?" (Spivak 186). Given that the law is acknowledged within a masculine subjection, this position of woman is rendered invisible and impossible, displaced into the beyond of a subject's knowledge. Or, as Derrida puts it, the law is at once held accountable as the "female element," and yet "declined in the feminine" (77-78). When this invisible, failed woman expresses her desire to "be born," uttering her question about identity through the masculine, the gesture is viewed as mad, as a mad daughter-law (80). The masculine cannot speak for the woman as the sexed subject because she stands outside in her madness, powerful and demented in her Otherness. The woman ultimately fails to appear as assumable to the masculine. When the woman reproduces this failure as unknowable within the centre of the masculine "I"/"Eye" her function as a failed (M)Other disrupts phallocentric law.

It becomes clear, then, why the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction is best understood through the position of the Lacanian woman who shares this validated and rejected existence in the law of genre. If, for example, I investigate Derrida's "I"/"Eye" via Lacan's teachings regarding sexual difference, what I am presented with is an undetected penetration into the subject's visual field from the failed Other.[43] In offering the following schema of a Weird threshold, it is important to note that the previous versions are directly relative to the tracing and understanding of the failed Other in Weird fictions. However, a masculinist analysis constitutes the desire to possess and gain knowledge *as* mother:

[43] Refer to Figure 8; Lacan's *Scopic Diagram of* Objet Petit a.

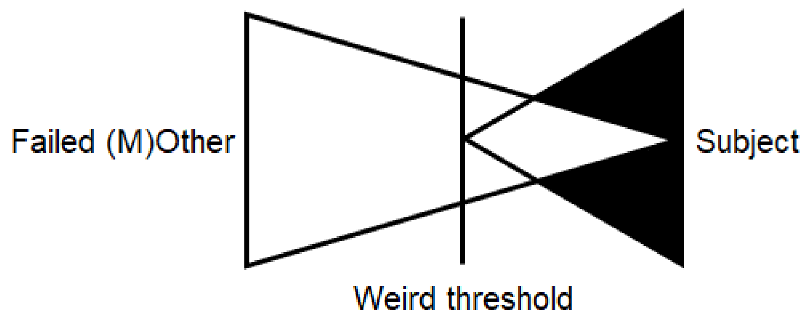

Figure 10. Tracing the (M)Other of the Weird.

What this schema presents is the masculine's demand to possess and give birth to the Weird, which becomes splintered when confronted with the (im)possibility of the genre. In explaining these two splintered positions, I approach them from the side of the subject in Figure 10, because, as already discussed, the operations of the law of genre are deemed successful within the masculine assumption. For example, the unknowable position of the (M)Other, containing the threatening dimension of the unknown and penetrating through the subject's understanding of the Weird, can only be understood by the subject as a failure. Hence the position of the woman in the law of genre enters as a pure negation in the phallic function, given her ability to penetrate as an unknown unknown. The two shaded zones in Figure 10 originally depict the effects of the (im)possible object-gaze (i and i(*a*) in Figure 9), which enter through a Weird threshold as an unknown unknown, causing the subject to misrecognise the penetration as something that is ideal and yet detrimental to their desire. Only here, the scholarship assumes the masculine position and views this intersection of penetration (creating a fold and thus the double shaded areas of invagination) as a phallic fetishisation. This phallic fetishisation validates the scholarship as a male mother, in giving birth to the law within *their* centre, their desire to become the "proper" mother of the Weird. The scholars that assume and thus possess the phallus, proving their "paternity and authority" over the Weird, risk a "massive enclosure of the male appropriation of woman's voice" (Spivak 189-190). Such an interpretation misses the function of the woman in Weird Fiction who, made (im)possible by the masculine, emanates her desire to be born through masculine desire.

Where, then, does an understanding about the Weird come from in the arguments presented by the two splintered positions of the masculine “I”/“Eye”? From what has been discussed, it appears that the Weird’s effect involves a successful domination over its failed (New) (M)Otherness. Significantly, when applying these delimited viewpoints to New Weird narratives like *The Etched City* it is worth questioning why critical scholars, in desiring possession and knowledge of the Weird as its “proper” mother, invariably accuse it of reinforcing negatively charged marginal positions. Constructing a Weird matrilineal literary tradition, as discussed throughout this thesis via works by Shirley Jackson, Daphne du Maurier, Angela Carter, and Octavia E. Butler, reverses this logic of reading woman as a purely open-ended negation (reading only the matheme > variable of the failed (M)Other) in the law of genre. When investigating the position of the failed (M)Other, contemporary Weird texts like *The Etched City* validate and maintain the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction, undoing the limitations imposed by masculine assumption (as delimited ◄ variables).

7.1. RELOCATING THE WEIRD

Bishop’s *The Etched City* demonstrates how its protagonists assume the masculine “I”/“Eye” when attempting to locate the Weird within the New. The two protagonists, Raule and Gwynn, travel briefly through the Copper Country, an “alien territory” that is “as empty and dry as a thousand-year-old skull,” to escape enemy soldiers who are trailing them (Bishop 30). By teaming together to defeat these soldiers with dynamite (35), Raule and Gwynn reach the city of Ashamoil, where they separate. Raule, a travelling doctor, takes “a position at the parish hospital” in the poorer districts of the city, “which had been without a resident doctor since the previous incumbent died of blood poisoning” (62-63). Having entered the city with an explicit desire to “bind herself inextricably into a place where she could become a civilised person, and remain so for the rest of her life,” Raule projects this onto Ashamoil, hoping to abandon her old self and life (49). Gwynn, on the other hand, having risen quickly to the rank of “a senior cavalier” for one of the city’s infamous slave traders, realises his desire later within Ashamoil (77). In coming across an etching called *The Sphinx and Basilisk Converse*, Gwynn recognises himself as the basilisk that “lay on the ground, rearing his head towards the sphinx, who dominated

the top of the image" (69). The artist "had involved him, but for what purpose?" (69). In seeking an answer to this question, Gwynn "felt compelled to look for Beth Constanzin" (69-70). Gwynn projects his desire for the unknown onto Beth, even assuming a romantic relationship with her in the hope of regaining the part of himself that she had captured, "perhaps the best thing in himself" (337).

Raule's and Gwynn's desires appear dependent on their location in Ashamoil. Raule's desire is attached to her physical location, and Gwynn's in "the encounter between the two monsters ... taking place in a condensed version of Ashamoil" (69). Jonathan R. Harvey suggests that the contrast between "the Western desert and the New Weird city" reveals the novel's interplay between "nature versus culture, solitude versus civilisation, New World versus Old World, and third world versus first world" (93-94). The Copper Country is depicted as the old and barren desert, where Raule and Gwynn desire to escape, to pursue the unknown in a new and different location which is the hectic civilisation of Ashamoil. As desiring subjects, Raule and Gwynn navigate between the barren space of the Old and the urbanised space of the New, in the hope of gaining knowledge and possession of the unknowable: the Weird.

Siobhan Carroll also builds upon this notion that the characters in New Weird narratives navigate and relocate the Weird. It is important to note here that both Harvey and Carroll rely on the VanderMeers' *The New Weird* anthology to establish their understanding and handling of the New. In Harvey's argument, it is specifically the VanderMeers' assertions about "an unease or discomfort that Lovecraft frequently exploited in his characterisation of the racial or alien Other" that grounds New Weird's aim of seeking "new directions" (Harvey 91-92). Carroll's argument stems from a similar interpretation except that she extends these new directions to the characters themselves who aim to traverse the negative and "ostensibly 'wild' spaces" of the Old in order to embrace the more profound "natural atopias" of the New (68). Carroll describes these characters as scientific explorers, figures who "model new forms of 'ecological thought' for readers, undoing narrative conventions that reinforce the Nature-Society binary in favour of new narratives that advocate the transformation of the power structures undergirding humanity's geophysical transformation of the planet" (87). Through blurring and reversing the negatively charged spaces of the Old, actively traversing and thus dominating them, these

figures risk holding the New accountable for any failure of the promised effect therein. A basic problem, therefore, is when a desiring subject loses the Old in order to gain the New and is confronted by the void of the Old inside the New. Characters like Raule and Gwynn are thereby forced into a series of confrontations with the unknown that appears to be knowable inside the New.

Ultimately, for the unknown to appear knowable, a desiring subject misrecognises it as the New's failure to deliver the unknown successfully. This suggests that the New is void of the Old's success, which is seen in the way that Raule and Gwynn abandon the desires they attached to Ashamoil at the end of the novel. Gwynn is killed by a "giant man" whose wife he had murdered for his infamous boss (Bishop 346). A drunkard priest, who Gwynn befriends early in the novel, sacrifices his life to resurrect Gwynn through a supernatural practice ("he reached the threshold of immortality, only to be dragged back from it by the Rev" (367)). Abandoned by Beth, who had left "*to the sky*" because he belonged "*to the surface*" (335; emphasis in original), Gwynn is denied access to his desire for the unknown in Ashamoil. Gwynn's future is thereby left obscure; he leaves Ashamoil for "a city of the living," where, fighting and winning duels "until his long black hair turned to the grey of polished iron," his fate "becomes a monkey with many tails" (380). Gwynn is confronted by the unknown on multiple occasions, which are always disrupted by his reality on "the surface" of Ashamoil. I will return to the monstrous ramifications that encapsulate Ashamoil's reality—however, it is important at this point to note how Gwynn's desire for the unknown (or "immortality") is what ultimately causes it to fail, to disappear and retract the moment he pursues it as real. As already revealed in relation to a Lacanian subject's encounter with a Weird threshold, his desire is always located with the unknown because it is the unknown that is deflected and reinforced by a Weird threshold as an unknown unknown. By means of "reach[ing] the threshold of immortality," a literal death *in* the New, Gwynn misrecognises the New *as* the failure that "dragged him back," and thus shifts his desire for the unknown in a new location.

This complicates the above discussion concerning Carroll's New figure that traverses the Old. If we were to pursue Gwynn as a New figure, his character would be held accountable as the pure negation (viewing the fetishised > on the side of the subject in Figure 10 as a failed penetration of the unknown) precisely because he

cannot locate and/or achieve knowledge of the unknown inside the New. This is not Gwynn's desire but rather his misrecognition of the failed encounter with the unknown, which he interprets as the New city's failure to deliver the unknown successfully inside *its* reality. This misrecognition becomes particularly true in Raule's narrative, where we also observe a clear rejection of the New and its reality. At the end of the novel, Raule leaves Ashamoil to return to "the dry old country, alone and adrift again" (377). In joining a band of travelling Harutaim she:

> became respected as a witch doctor among them. And in those years she rebuilt a core to replace the one she had lost ... Raule occasionally wondered whether she had escaped from a doomed world—escaped from nowhere to somewhere. An equal amount of times, she wondered whether she was part of something left by a world that had birthed itself into a new, more gracious state—a state beyond apprehension by that which remained, dry, linear as bone, as the veins in a dead leaf. (377)

This description of Raule having lost her "core" in the New suggests that it has been rebuilt and relocated in the Old. According to Harvey, this is a result of Raule's decision to put "aside her original goals" due to "her misconceptions about civilisation" (99). Raule's misconceptions about the New city are related to its failed civilisation: the promised effect of becoming something new and different. It is as if the "core" of the Weird is unachievable inside a known civilised location like the New, and both Raule's and Gwynn's subjectivity is cast outside of it as a result.

The allegorical connection that I am making here is with the way that the critical scholarship similarly misrecognises the failure to achieve "something left by a world that had birthed itself into a new, more gracious state" (Bishop 377). Gwynn and Raule present the two splintered parallels that the scholarship assumes, as shown in Figure 10. On the level of metaphor, Gwynn is akin to the scholarship that pursues the unknown in new locations, as a movement that believes their desire to possess and give birth to the Weird is achievable elsewhere, beyond the New. Raule functions as a metaphor for the scholarship that seeks the invagination and "core" of the Weird, and yet fails to gain knowledge of it in the New and thereby negates it as a label or fad, turning back to the Old to reimagine and better understand its negations. The paradox of these approaches is that they both acknowledge the existence of the Old and New as detrimental and vital to the existence of Weird

Fiction, to its production of its unknowable effect. What concerns me, then, is the location of the Weird and how it is rejected within and yet validated outside masculine assumption.

To help clarify this masculine positioning and perspective, I will extend it briefly to the male hero in film noir who shares the same "I"/"Eye."44 According to Margaret Cohen, it is the contemporary masculine hero in these films, the "phallic father," the "homme fatale [that] crystallises contemporary social anxieties around material and ideological threats to a traditional gendered division of labour, and particularly around the figure of the new man" (114). This new man is the masculine hero in film noir, raising the question: "from where is the new man turned homme fatale being observed? from what place do we look at the new man turned homme fatale so that he appears likeable?" (Cohen 131). Again, it is worth repeating here that it is from a masculine "I"/"Eye" that the question is spoken, for whom the position of woman appears invisible and impossible. This is particularly true for Cohen, who describes the location of the observer, Raymond Avila, in the 1990 film *Internal Affairs*. Avila is an investigator sent out to observe the dirty cop, Dennis Peck. According to Cohen, Avila sees Peck as:

> consolation for his own failures. In comparison to the monstrous career of Peck, the failures of the failing new man become innocuous and, paradoxically, confirm Avila as the new man that he failed to be. Displaying his weakness, Avila relinquishes phallic power and hence proves that he is a new man. Peck's career also could solicit the viewpoint of the 'old man,' who finds consolation for his lack of interest in the new man in the devastation brought about by Peck. (Cohen 131)

The shifting gender identification in Cohen's example is exclusively masculine; that is, it is a masculine position that observes and determines an ideological phantasm. The "monstrous career" of the old man sets the parameters for the new man's success, whose failures are perceived as successful only upon "relinquishing phallic

[44] Film noir are films that were, according to Frank Krutnik, "serviced by French film critics of the immediate post-World War II period ... as a means of identifying various transformations within the representational parameters of the Hollywood film during the 1940s" (x). What these transformations ultimately reveal are "an engagement with problematic, even illicit potentialities within masculine identity, yet at the same time they cannot fully embrace or sanction such 'subversive' potentialities" (xiii). Feminist criticisms and concerns thereby enter explicitly with the figure of the femme fatale, which I will return to.

power.” When extending the same logic to the New as a failing new man, the only way for it to be deemed successful is if it relinquishes phallic power, succumbing to the “monstrous career” of the Old. But if the New is a new man turned homme fatale, why does it appear to Gwynn and Raule as a failure?

A response to this question arises through the figure of the femme fatale, who, in the new man’s observation of the old man, literally fails to appear.[45] Cohen claims that this is because the femme fatale in contemporary noir films like *Internal Affairs* are “no longer track[ed]” by the male hero, and are instead “replaced by dangerous men, sexually magnetic or/and deviant” (112). It is as if the femme fatale fails in the new man’s desire to succeed as a sexualised homme fatale. Cohen furthermore suggests that this failure of the femme fatale validates the homme fatale’s embodiment as “the Law (as cop) and transgresses it (as gangster)” because he “belongs to a domestic setting (as father) and is a sexualised object of desire” for the new man (113). The new man’s failed status occurs after observation of the old man’s successful failure. The new man desires the appropriation of *his* successful identity within the phallocentric law. In this way, the new man’s failure is exclusively Other to the failure extorted by the phallic law of the old man—it is this initial, primitive failure experienced by the new man that is negated and rejected, this Otherness. Derrida insists that this occurs when the phallocentric law “mark[s] a collapse that is unthinkable, irrepresentable, unsuitable within a linear order of succession, within a spatial or temporal sequentiality, within an objectifiable topology or chronology” (70). The initial boundary of the old man’s failure “forms a pocket inside the corpus” of the new man, “an *invagination* through which the [new] trait” of the new man remains exclusively masculine despite relinquishing phallic power (70).

Unlike the homme fatale, whose failures are observed as positive for the new man, the female element in this scenario (the Other) appears as a primitive negation, born within and yet expelled by the old man. The new man assumes a new trait born from the old man, validating his position as the observing “I”/“Eye.” The new man is

[45] The traditional function of the femme fatale in film noir, according to Slavoj Žižek in “Looking Awry”, is to present a mortal threat to the male hero in the way “that her boundless enjoyment menaces his very identity as subject” (54). What causes her to be so menacing is the “real dimension of the threat” that is “revealed when we ‘traverse’ the fantasy” (54). By traveling across or through the hero’s desire and exposing his fantasy, what the femme fatale fails to do is “become a proper barrier, to protect him in the way real illusion does” (Copjec 198).

capable of claiming, therefore, that "*I am a ~~wo~~man, and beautiful*" like the homme fatale and therefore "'I' can bring forth to light, can give birth" to the law and all of its representatives (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 76).[46] By default, the new man as subject demands the right to the possession and knowledge of the old man's status, because it is that which regulates *his* new status. However, given that the new man's initial failing status is realised through his lack of a lack, the old man cannot confirm the new man as successful within his new status because "it is from the Other that the phallus seeks authority and is refused" (Rose 51). To explain this more clearly, as Lacan puts it, the phallus "is only there veiled and as the ratio of the Other's desire, so it is this desire of the Other as such which the subject has to recognise, meaning, the Other as itself a subject divided by the signifying *Spaltung*" (83).[47] The new man cannot validate the rejected Other due to his relationship with the old man, and instead "end[s] up endlessly returning to this point and beginning again to begin, that is to say, to begin with an end that precedes the beginning" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 70). The new man is contained within the phallocentric law set by the perimeters of the old man's failure. This is precisely how the (im)possible position of the woman calls attention to the masculine's lack of the (M)Other.

This complex division within phallocentric law informs critical discussion of the New. Investigations often view the New as a primitive failure because the (M)Other remains (im)possible from the outset. It is this (im)possibility that accounts for a split in a Lacanian subject's desire, whose "demand for love" from the (M)Other "can only suffer from a desire whose signifier is alien to it" (Lacan, "Meaning of the Phallus" 83). Lacan explains this split in desire through the Oedipus complex, a stage of development focused on a child's relationship with the mother. That is to say, if a known mother's desire is exposed from the outset *as*:

> the phallus, then the child wishes to be the phallus so as to satisfy this desire. Thus the division immanent to desire already makes itself felt in the desire of the Other, since it stops the subject from being satisfied with presenting to the Other anything real it might *have* which corresponds to the phallus—

[46] I have added emphasis to Derrida's quotation, to the barred and divided "woman," because it is the masculine "I" that cannot assume her (im)possible position.
[47] The word *Spaltung* literally means to split or to rupture, however, given that the word in German represents the process whereby one whole becomes split into two wholes I leave the word untranslated as it appears in Jacqueline Rose's translation.

> what he has being worth no more than what he does not have as far as his demand for love is concerned, which requires that he *be* the phallus. ("Meaning of the Phallus" 83)

Ultimately, what this practice demonstrates for the Lacanian subject is the revelation that the (M)Other doesn't possess "a real phallus" because of her (im)possible position in the New ("Meaning of the Phallus" 83). Again, this assumption that the (M)Other fails to appear in the New is a result of phallocentric law set by the Old, which governs the New's failure. The New is thereby reduced to the feminine. The New's failure to expose the phallus from the outset validates its reduction to the feminine, as the exposure of the masculine's fantasy; since the (M)Other fails to appear, her production inside the New is rendered inoperable. This may be why the masculine misinterprets his failure as a male mother *as* the (M)Other's failure to make herself knowable and assumable in the New. This failure tempts the scholarship into arguing that "all these insoluble problems of delimitation are raised 'on the inside'" of the New because the Weird itself "does nothing but begin" (Derrida, "Law of Genre" 72).

What these delimitations bring into question is the lack of a Weird (M)Other: *where is* the woman? Is the New a new woman and the Old an old woman? Is the New reduced to the feminine because she is the daughter of an Old woman that is *her* failed (M)Other? These questions draw attention to the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction inside and outside the masculine's assumption of it. Nevertheless, it is the New's expression of identity that reinforces the (M)Other's inability to confirm or justify herself within a masculine centre. To validate the failed (M)Other's existence through a masculine questioning, however, risks enclosing a "feminine masochism" (Kristeva, "Experiencing the Phallus" 34). This denial in and of the feminine, forces the New's production and "identification with the phallic position of the man and to the scotomisation (or non-recognition) of the primary pre-Oedipal bond with the mother," which is already impossible (Kristeva, "Experiencing the Phallus" 34). This suggests that the unknowable effect that the critical scholarship desires in the New is born from a primitive rejection of the failed (M)Other, which is realised through the Old's failure.

In going forward with this logic of the (M)Other as failure, it is worth noting how critics like Doane and Hodges take issue with the Freudian approach when they

observe that critics like Kristeva focus “entirely on the development of a new kind of man” (73). Contributing to the idea that what the failed (M)Otherness of the New achieves is a new kind of man, expedites the privileged status of the phallus as “filling in” as “the necessarily *missing* object of desire at the level of sexual division” (Mitchell 24). If the New produces a failed civilisation like that of Ashamoil in Bishop’s *The Etched City*, then the New is in an *abundance* of failure, an Otherness that opposes the barrenness of the Old. Such abundance engenders a female personhood, an invagination within the New that successfully gives birth to something Other. But far from announcing itself as a successful (M)Other of the Weird, a knowable position for the masculine “I”/“Eye” to assume, the New fails precisely because it is successful in producing and regulating the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction.

7.2. (M)OTHERING THE WEIRD

The discourse of proper, successful mothers in *The Etched City* appears almost entirely vacant at first: the Old desert is related to barrenness and the New city to a failure to deliver the unknown successfully. It is, more specifically, the civilised assumptions of Ashamoil that undercut the sterility of the unknown in the form of failed mothers. Upon immersing herself in Ashamoil in the hope of locating her core, Raule finds herself in the business of “stillbirths” that “might have been looked at askance elsewhere, but in Limewood it was considered an extremely benign eccentricity” (Bishop 73-74). Raule encounters many of these “deviations of nature,” and upon learning that “midwives disposed of the corpses of these infants, who were customarily killed if they did not die naturally,” she makes it known she’d “offer ten pence a pound ... and soon no woman birthed a monster that didn’t end up in a swaddled bundle outside Raule’s office door” (74). Raule’s interest in these monstrous offspring serves as proof of her misconceptions about Ashamoil’s civilisation, specifically in terms of how she regards the monstrous. For example, Raule asserts early in the novel that “the sick [that] often appeared as monsters,” and “when the monstrosity was too extreme ... the sufferer would be shunned regardless of whether their condition was contagious or not” (61). It is, moreover, her conclusion:

> that it was human nature to superstitiously fear the transferral of misfortune via some imagined, intangible but highly conductive medium. And now she knew that her own urge to study the frailties and failures of the flesh, and to understand their causes, was born of a primitive desire to immunise herself against them. (61)

If it is true that the monstrous is represented in the sick and dying, then what the monstrous stillbirths represent is a failing civilisation, and an exposure of New difference. Raule herself is unaccountable in the New because she is at once "immunise[d]" against the failing civilisation from an Old, "primitive desire" to be something new and different, something successfully Other. To be protected against the "imagined, intangible but highly conductive medium" (a known unknown) that regulates the New, Raule discerns not only the offspring as monstrous but the women themselves *as* failed mothers. When Raule encounters a teenage girl giving birth to "a young crocodile" the young mother explains to Raule that the baby is the result of calling a god into her dream, who tells her that she "would bear his child, and that the child would be the saviour of our people" (166-167). The young mother considers the stillborn her own failure because "perhaps the magic went awry in my womb, or perhaps the god tricked me" (167-168).

By dramatising the monstrousness of a failing civilisation through the bodies of New women, their status as failed mothers is inscribed through Raule's observations and assumptions regarding the unknown as knowable. While the mothers articulate their failure in giving birth to the unknown, it is from Raule's perspective that the monstrous offspring fail as unknowns inside the New. If the New is a new woman, then, the "monstrous career" of the Old holds no power because Raule perceives the monstrous offspring of the New as failures from the outset. Confronted by the failures of the New, Raule returns to the barrenness of the Old in the hope of locating the primitive failure, the (M)Other. This logic echoes Fisher's and Noys' arguments, which attempt to reimagine the negations of the Old, and which isolate the New (in its new status) as a failed mother.

To help explain this difference of the New, I will extend the discussion briefly to a real-world example involving the reactive nationalisms within the Republic of Cyprus. My aim is to observe how otherness affects critical perception of a 'pure' mother form. For example, İlter and Alankuş argue that the Republic of Cyprus is

"an island that has been conquered and settled by different 'others' throughout its history," which attempts to "continuously (re)draw" itself by distinguishing "'proper' Cypriots from the 'improper' ones" (264). In applying the same logic to Weird Fiction, İlter's and Alankuş's argument helps illustrate why, despite the amalgamation of many different others in the failing civilisation of the New, and despite attempts to continuously re-draw and redefine the Weird, attempts to delimit the New only serve to expose the New's difference from the Old. In Raule's narrative, for example, there appears to be an "official 'motherland'" trajectory in both the Old and New, which distinguishes her own identity and desire for the core of the Weird (İlter and Alankuş 264). Insinuating a motherland within both the Old and New, however, posits Raule's "teleological origin and end of identity" in the way that she "looks forward to a return to the Mother in order to fulfil one's identity and become oneself after a diasporic displacement and estrangement" (İlter and Alankuş 268). The Mother of the Weird holds a primitive position inside the Old, which promises a rebirth and a relocation inside the New. The issue, as İlter and Alankuş acknowledge, is that the New's "difference, which testifies to the otherness of the Mother, is not something to be overcome, for it is irreducible" (268). That is to say, the "official articulations of the motherland" are only realised via the New's status as a failing mother, thus revealing Raule's "diasporic desire for the (M)Other" inside the Old (İlter and Alankuş 269).

In the case of the VanderMeers, who demand the right to gain possession and knowledge of the mother, the New is treated as a trajectory that sustains their desire to give birth to something new and different. When failing mothers appear inside the New they are misrecognised as dead mothers precisely because their failures are assumable; thus validating the desire for an effect that endures "the Next Weird" (VanderMeer, *The Weird* xviii). Take, for example, Gwynn's failure to possess and gain knowledge of the (M)Other inside the New. Upon meeting Beth for the first time, Gwynn uncovers more of her paintings scattered about the studio. Gwynn describes them as emerging "out of [a] private hallucination" that depicts "a carnival world: upside down, inside out, parodic, and overfull, with themes of lust and gluttony" (Bishop 156). Because the unknown is centred within the production of Beth as a successful mother of a "private hallucination" (a known unknown), Gwynn's only connection to the unknown is with and through her paintings. This

accounts for Gwynn's questioning of the unknown's identity, *his* identity within Beth's production of the unknowable: "'What does it all mean?'" (157). Beth's answer to Gwynn's demand further instils his lack of the unknown inside the New: "an unnatural history of existence in a state of flux,' she said. 'The midden of an old world, surfacing after a frost. A new world in a nymph-state, before its mature form is decided" (157).

An important question in *The Etched City* is how the New fails to develop the promised effect of the unknown into existence. Because Gwynn functions within the "nymph-state" of the promised new status of the Old, the reality depicted in Beth's paintings produces the promised effect of the unknown *beyond* the masculine's assumption of the New. This may be why the monstrous offspring in Gwynn's narrative differ from the stillbirths in Raule's narrative. Unlike Raule, Gwynn does not see the failing civilisation of the New as something to immunise himself against. Gwynn cannot see Beth's monstrous offspring as "only stinking idols, farcical things created by madness," because "as though his perceptions had been altered—whether enhanced or damaged he had no way to gauge—he saw unveiled theophanies, intelligences not constrained by death, and infinitely superior to man" (325). Beth's "private hallucination" elevates these monsters into unknowable failures to and by Gwynn. That is to say, if these monsters are born as knowable, brought into the reality of the New as real, it is because Gwynn cannot assume or gain knowledge of the unknowable, the (M)Other.

When these monsters are brought to life, Gwynn is disturbed by their "pollution" of the New, "for they were all composed from parts of carcasses, truffled with elements of vegetable and inorganic matter" (317). Formed from the body parts of the dead and decaying, Gwynn acknowledges them as:

> If they were the chimerae of Beth's imagination, taken off the paper and expanded into three dimensions, they emanated neither the rambunctious joy of the first generation nor the cruelty of the second; there was no sentiment in them at all. Yet, though unfinished, and crammed together in the studio like cattle in a pen, the figures had a presence Gwynn could not deny—a presence beyond the visual and olfactory onslaught ... Though so new, and though their material guaranteed them short lives, each alien brute was, by some trick, charged with the power of antiquity itself. (318)

Beth's monstrous offspring are not characterised by an Old world's "sentiment," rather, Gwynn perceives them as "unfinished" in the New, doomed to "short lives" despite being charged with "antiquity". Indeed, these temporary known unknowns serve as proof for Gwynn that there exists "a presence beyond" the New, which is made (im)possible to him. Even as one monstrous offspring asks if he does not "lust after the stink of the real" inside the New, Gwynn is "galvanised by the very fact of his modernity" (319). Gwynn is accused of possessing a new status that is not New, and, in an attempt to protect himself against this exposed lack, Gwynn severs the monster's head. It is significant that it is Gwynn who kills the monstrous; indeed, killing the temporary known unknowns as a way of foreclosing *his* own death within and link to the unknown.

As if commanding his identity in the unknown, that monstrous part of himself depicted in Beth's painting, Gwynn embraces Beth. By regaining a sense of his identity within the unknown, "he understood, in a late-coming moment of enlightenment—his own flesh felt unspoilt, sound, scatheless; he became a creature without any history at all" (320-321). Through his attempt to form a relationship with the (M)Other through Beth, Gwynn risks being "devoured" by the mother herself (Rabinovich 218). To be born as one of Beth's temporary offspring, an existence that threatens his real existence, Gwynn is confronted with his lack of a "compass for his desires" (Bishop 326). It is Gwynn's displacement from the unknown, then, which brings about his literal death inside the New. And yet because Gwynn is resurrected by the Rev, his access to the unknown is once again refused. Gwynn's literal death causes him to misrecognise the New as the failure. To look inside the New through Gwynn's perspective, is to make successful mothers like Beth all but disappear, leaving behind only an expression of her/their existence:

> *It only remains to dry these wings in the new air ... I am excited like a girl, I who was never young, and in a moment I shall mount my trapeze and fly to the sky and the ocean and the great world beyond the walls. One riddle I shall leave, for him to answer, if he can: where was my cocoon?* (336; emphasis in original)

Beth's cryptic message "remains" in Ashamoil for Gwynn to find, and hints at where she has been and where she is going. Rather than asking what Beth wants, Gwynn is left with the question of *where Beth is*. More than this, Beth's letter can be read as an

expression of her (im)possible existence. In demanding that her existence can be found in a “riddle”, Beth’s letter reveals the unknowability of her remains—removing herself from the real, Beth disappears except through the letter. This unknowability marks Gwynn’s decision to leave in search of the Weird mother “beyond the walls” of the New. This expression presents to Gwynn the unknowability of her location: her “cocoon” is something Old and/or New. Like the monstrous offspring of the New city, their mother’s existence is temporary and negated by the masculine “I”/“Eye”.

In this way, *The Etched City* dramatises how the New is understood by the masculine “I”/“Eye” as a failed and/or dead mother. For both Raule and Gwynn, the failure of the unknown is represented in the figures of New mothers, whose (im)possible function to deliver the unknown fails. But more than this, Raule’s and Gwynn’s desire for the unknown suggests that they are incapable of acknowledging these failures. Indeed, to acknowledge their failures would be to relinquish their phallic power and reduce themselves to the feminine. The masculine perspective that the critical scholarship assumes therefore becomes delimited by the demand/desire to give birth to the law within *their* centre, their desire to become the “proper” mothers of the Weird. However, if women’s failures as mothers remain (im)possible inside and outside masculine desire, the critical perspectives that Raule and Gwynn represent are locked into failure inside these New texts. If the New cannot be realised—making itself visible in the phallocentric law that demands possession and knowledge of it—the position of the barred woman that regulates Weird Fiction’s (im)possibility fails to deliver the unknowable effect that the masculine demands and desires. Like Beth’s etching of the encounter between the two monsters taking place in a condensed version of Ashamoil, by expanding the masculine “I”/“Eye” beyond the visible bridges that connect and separate the Old and New, the failed (M)Other suspends the unknowable effect (Derrida, “Law of Genre” 69).

The bridges operate to connect and separate the Old and/or New—their connections are made visible and yet indistinguishable to the “I”/“Eye” that demands knowledge and possession of the captured image of the etching. Neither Raule nor Gwynn is in control of the monsters created by the Weird (M)Other of the etching, except through their articulation of them as real within the New. Yet it is precisely this articulation of the monsters that is representative of the promised Weird,

capturing the “I”/“Eye”. As a result, such monsters fail as unknowable. In this way the failed monsters of the New represent (im)possibility, disturbing the “I”/“Eye” that demands/desires to assume them as real, usurping all known unknowns with failure. So, too, the (M)Other of the etching penetrates through this metaphor with her disturbing and unknowable gaze, teasing and mocking the masculine subject with the unknown.

This is what is (im)possible about the Weird. The masculinist assumption of the Weird is always disturbed by something unknowable. In approaching the conclusion of this thesis, I extend this discussion of Weird Fiction’s (im)possibility towards a consideration of Weird Fiction within the field of literature. For example, if, as this chapter has revealed, the New is a failed and/or dead (M)Other, a question arises regarding the current and future state of Weird Fiction: Can there be a Weird Fiction that extends beyond the bridges of Beth’s etching? Or is the New Weird limited to the assumed knowledge of the Old and/or New? Such questioning, however, engenders an (im)possible characteristic in literature, and one that I wish to investigate in terms of a Weirding of literature.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored Weird Fiction as an (im)possible genre through a discussion of the Lacanian woman's barred and invisible position in language. This connection was made in response to critical scholarship that promotes Weird Fiction and its authors as consciously "breaking open ... language and genre to get beyond the limits of realism" (Luckhurst, "American Weird" 198). By framing Weird Fiction in relation to the Lacanian woman's impossible position in language, this thesis has offered an understanding of how Weird women writers and feminist critics instantiate the unknowable space beyond masculine perspective and desire. This thesis therefore supports and extends Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument that a reversed perspective, "from woman to man," disrupts Derridean genre theory (64). I have analysed the critical gaze that reads Weird Fiction through a phallocentric lens. I have elucidated this approach to the barred and invisible position of women through reading Weird Fiction's (im)possibility in the works by Shirley Jackson, Daphne du Maurier, Angela Carter, Octavia E. Butler and K. J. Bishop.

In this conclusion I clarify Weird Fiction's (im)possibility within and outside the "universe of literature" (Todorov 8). My use of the phrase "universe of literature" is used in light of the discussion in the introduction, where I note that Tzevetan Todorov argued that genres are the "relay-points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature" (8), which suggests a universal access to literature. It is therefore my intention to demonstrate a complex problem that arises when applying the analysis of Weird Fiction offered in this thesis to a wider set of questions beginning, for example, with canonisation. Applying Weird Fiction's (im)possible form causes concern for the critical scholarship that articulates a "rationale for a new syllabus or anthology [that] relies on a very different criterion: that of truth to the culture being represented, the whole culture and not the creation of an almost entirely male white elite" (Robinson 89). In the case of traditional characterisations of literature, it would be detrimental to include Weird Fiction because it alludes to an (im)possible, universal characteristic of canonisation itself. This is certainly the case for Harold Bloom, who argues that "'a culture of universal

access' is offered by post-Marxist idealists as the solution to 'crisis'" in their attempt to redefine literature, which "is a vain pursuit because you cannot usurp sufficient cognitive strength to encompass Shakespeare and Dante, and they are literature" (520-521). If Weird Fiction is a contemporary practice that consciously ruptures and yet possesses "universal access" to literature, then the question arises: is there and can there be a Weird Fiction canon if its (im)possibility is expelled from and by a Western Canon?

Establishing a Weird Fiction canon has not been a focus of this thesis. If, as I have argued in Chapter 6, works like Bishop's *The Etched City* embody the New Weird as unsuccessful—becoming visible and assumable in the phallocentric law that demands possession and knowledge of it—the position of the barred woman that regulates Weird Fiction's (im)possibility fails to deliver the unknowable effect desired by many critical scholars. To put this more clearly in the context of canonisation: if a canon involves selective criteria and rejects unknowable movements, it is impossible to conceive of a Weird canon whose centre is conditioned by knowable values and systems. The texts that are the "best" or "great" examples of Weird Fiction are therefore expelled by a Western Canon precisely because of the Weird's unknowability, which is misrecognised as pure negation. A Weird Fiction canon is rendered impossible not only because the Old Weird and New Weird are viewed as failures, but it cannot be assumed or concretised without disrupting the boundaries of other genres such as the Gothic, Horror, and Science Fiction. The Weird's unknowability as failure conditions the way it is being read and treated; or, as Roger Luckhurst puts it, "it is hard to define a national tradition (is there an 'American weird' after all?), precisely because influences are often pulled together from multiple canons" ("American Weird" 202). Luckhurst goes on to clarify that if genres like Gothic, Horror and Science Fiction "were 'paraliterature,' existing outside or below the threshold of canonical literary forms, the [Old] Weird was a para-para-literature" ("American Weird" 199). What is the likelihood of a Weird Fiction canon within American literature, or any other literary tradition for that matter? To announce a Weird Fiction canon would be to disrupt multiple canons because of the Weird's anti-normative characteristics, which consciously disrupt them. This in turn reveals a universality within canons that imply "a collection of

works enjoying an exclusive completeness" (Fowler 98). Where, then, does Weird Fiction fit in the universe of literature?

An answer is often sought by critical scholars through discussion of the texts that best represent Weird Fiction's existence. A contemporary example of this is the fifth and final volume of Michael Kelly's Year's Best Weird Fiction. In this work, Kelly asserts a fundamental link between a genre's existence and marketplace success—between the Weird's success and failure in terms of book sales. The failure of Weird Fiction's knowability impacts on its marketability. This, perhaps, explains the decadent tone in Kelly's argument, and especially in his understanding that Weird Fiction continues to be difficult to define because:

> we still attempt to slot it into particular genre niches. Weird Fiction, *in my opinion*, has a much broader scope than that. And, as with anything that is trending or is 'hot,' Weird Fiction (or weird fiction), has been co-opted ... Unfortunately, the term is becoming redundant. Very few are strictly writing horror, or fantasy, or slipstream, or science fiction. And while *I* believe that weird fiction is a genre unto itself that can and does encompass other genres, a genre that does deserve its own standalone 'Year's Best' volume, the lines have become blurry and there does not appear to be a market for the continuation of the *Year's Best Weird Fiction*. (5: viii)

Kelly alludes to a struggle with Weird Fiction's marketability. Ultimately, Kelly's argument for the end or ending of the *Year's Best Weird Fiction* series contributes to the ongoing debate among contemporary scholars about the genre: the problem is not a question of whether Weird Fiction exists—determined by the quantity of Weird works published—but of how to explain how publication affects literary values and standards, and why it affirms for critical scholarship and readers alike the existence of a genre or field of practice only in terms of what is published and reproduced *as* Weird Fiction. The struggle extends beyond labelling short stories as the "best" examples of contemporary Weird Fiction, rejecting or detaching them from the Old short fiction published in *Weird Tales*. If the New Weird is to suffer a similar fate to that of the Old Weird—that is, to founder and disappear without marketplace success measured principally through revenue and secondarily through critical attention—then it follows that the evidence that Weird Fiction exists does not rest on the

financial or critical success of works by authors like Jackson, du Maurier, Carter, Butler, or Bishop.

This struggle can be extended to a consideration of the 2011 Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition of *The Call of Cthulhu and other Weird Stories*, a selection of H. P. Lovecraft's short stories. Perhaps most significant to my point here is that this reprint of Lovecraft's works is edited by S. T. Joshi. Joshi's treatment of contemporary Weird Fiction is informed by his belief that imitations of the Lovecraftian formula cause "the death of weird writing as an art form" (*Modern Weird* 3). Although the Penguin Classics reprint includes only a selection of Lovecraft's Weird stories, it is marketed as a collection of Weird works. It also monumentalises Lovecraft's works as part of the publishing house's selection of "Classics". This suggests that although contemporary works and their authors are excluded from Weird Fiction, for Joshi, Lovecraft's enduring marketability rests with his successful and classical Weird works.

This becomes more apparent with the appearance of the Penguin Classics reprint. The 2011 reprint's cover depicts a caricature of Lovecraft's Cthulhu monster, its pages are deckle cut, and its title emphasises "The Call of Cthulhu" as Lovecraft's best example of a Weird narrative. The book's cover, in particular, speaks controversially to Lovecraft's works, especially "The Call of Cthulhu," in which the Horror atmosphere employs, as Luckhurst points out, "a language that continually stumbles against the trauma of an unrepresentable Thing, the shards of a busted pulp sublime falling back into the debris of his sentences" ("American Weird" 198). The exaggeration of the Cthulhu monster as weird is a principal aspect of the book's packaging, emphasising Lovecraft's literary merit within and as its marketplace attractiveness. But as Joshi emphasises in the Introduction, the "body of work" included in the edition aims to reveal Lovecraft's "skill to embody his philosophical vision in tales that are meticulously crafted and endowed with a vitality of imagination rarely encountered in the entire range of literature" (*Cthulhu and other Weird Stories* xxii).

This notion that Lovecraft's works are rare and philosophical frames Weird Fiction in an entirely different relation to notions of literature and the literary than Kelly's discussion of the (lack of) marketability of the (New) Weird. In the case of the Penguin reprint, the cover design and Joshi's introduction function together to

attempt to elevate Lovecraft's works into the realm of canonical, or classical, literature. The relationship between the Penguin reprint and Kelly's *Year's Best Weird Fiction* volumes also demonstrates that differences between author and genre popularity and esteem. According to Alastair Fowler this is a practical limitation for publications, revealed in the way that "certain genres [are] regarded as *prima facie* more canonical than others, but individual works or passages may be valued more or less highly according to their generic height" (100). The Weird Fiction canon cannot extend beyond Lovecraft's works because, as Joshi puts it, Lovecraft himself is representative of "the dignity and worth of the weird tale as an art form" (xxii). As an art form, then, Joshi characterises Lovecraftian Weird Fiction as canonical, or classical, as 'rare' within "the entire range of literature", but does not ever threaten to extend this inclusion of the Weird in the canon to the Weird as a genre category.

If Weird Fiction is immune to canonisation, what is the future for Weird Fiction or, indeed, what is its past—does it have a place in literary history? When it comes to reflecting critically on my own arguments in this thesis, considerations about contemporary expectations of writing, publication, and marketability become significant for further thought about the current and future state of Weird Fiction. The fundamental questions raised in each chapter cannot help but resonate at this point: Where does the Old and New begin and end? What effects do they have on contemporary Weird Fiction, its authors, critics and readers? What do contemporary Weird texts, and the ones published after the completion of this thesis, contribute to? Are these works still Weird Fiction if the Old and New are dead or failures? Such questions, which assume that Weird Fiction ends with the Old's and/or New's failure, overlook and undermine the genre's (im)possible function within and outside language. Despite critical interest and engagement with Weird Fiction, its (second) death is anticipated by Kelly due to a lack of marketplace success: without readers, without sales, the genre cannot sustain itself. While it is necessary that an understanding of Weird Fiction can be traced through the Old and/or New, they cannot stand in as a binary formation for the genre's (im)possible form. The following summary of the chapters reveals how Weird Fiction's (im)possibility exposes the mutational evolution of genre and literary history.

8.1. SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

It has been my aim that the overarching imperative of the thesis is to commend Weird Fiction's (im)possible form. In introducing the difficulty of defining Weird Fiction, the first chapter addressed a basic problem for contemporary critical scholarship: "What is weird fiction" (Kelly 1: 7)? Is it exclusively limited to the Old Lovecraftian Weird? Or does it continue to move beyond the limitations of the Old with the New? By outlining the current discussions surrounding Weird Fiction's problematic existence within traditional approaches to the institute of literature, the first chapter underscored my treatment of Weird Fiction as a genre. In discussing the critical disagreement between the Old and/or New as to what might constitute the 'real' Weird, I established the necessity of this study; that is, it is necessary that Weird Fiction be understood as significant for genre theory and for understanding the evolution of literature more generally. However, such an argument causes issues for the critical scholars who negate Weird Fiction and argue that it is disruptive to the genres it encompasses.

The second chapter aimed to address this difficulty: is Weird Fiction a genre or a mode of multiple genres such as Gothic, Horror, and Science Fiction? The second chapter served as a theoretical foundation in its investigation of Jacques Derrida's "The Law of Genre". I argued that the critical scholarship transgresses the law of genre by defining and attempting to trace Weird Fiction's corruption through the genres it encompasses. In so doing, I described the existence of Weird Fiction in three distinct forms: The Old, the New, and the Weird link between them. Instead of becoming complete and whole, I explained how the corruption at Weird Fiction's centre (C and D in Figure 5) cannot be produced without the Old and New. If the New is to be traced as a separate mode of writing from the Old, neither would appear parallel with Weird Fiction at their centre: the New's critical reorientation would not be traceable without the Old, whose Lovecraftian limitations it purposely disrupts. The Old and New would thereby be irrelevant to the argument that Weird Fiction is a mode of literature. I have argued that Weird Fiction is its own distinct form. Weird Fiction is neither the Old nor the New, and yet it is simultaneously both. Much like its corruptible tendencies to encompass other genres like Gothic, Horror, and Science Fiction, Weird Fiction is distinguishable through its own (im)possibility, its ability to mutate through and beyond traditional characterisations of genre. Weird Fiction is an

exemplar genre that reaffirms and practices its understanding of genre by engaging with its own impossibility.

This engagement with impossibility served as a crucial link to a discussion of the barred and impossible position of women in language. Chapter 3 discussed the feminist tensions arising in Derridean genre theory. This was done so that the significance of feminine impossibility could be discussed at length—that is, analysing the feminine element of the law of genre as (im)possible rather than simply applying Derrida's genre theory to Weird Fiction. My analysis of the first Weird text by a woman writer, Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, elucidated how the Derridean masculine genre (*moi*) excludes female personhood (*la loi*). By addressing feminist arguments, like Spivak's, that female personhood is rejected by Derrida's genre theory but nonetheless uses feminine characteristics, I revealed how women's expression of existence is viewed and treated by the masculine as madness. Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* demonstrates how women characters like Eleanor desire to escape and move beyond the mad houses constructed by the masculine subject. In this way Jackson's novel reveals how women's (im)possible existence is inaccessible and unknowable to the masculine. From this investigation I proposed a working definition for Weird Fiction, which underscores the unknowable effect of the feminine object-cause of desire.

Having clarified how a Weird threshold functions as the Weird's crucial link, maintaining and yet suspending its (im)possibility beyond reality, the next step in my investigation was to discuss its significance as a narrative function. The fourth chapter investigated how du Maurier's short story "Don't Look Now" demonstrates a Weird threshold in the way its protagonist's reality is disturbed by something unknowable. This discussion served as a way of introducing the moment when a character is confronted by an unrepresentable Thing. Through investigating this Weird threshold in more depth, I described the way a Weird threshold functions as an unknowable space beyond masculine desire. A Weird threshold underpins a subject's, in this case the protagonist John's, feelings of unease inflicted by the gaze of the (im)possible, perverse object. The moment a masculine subject is met by the unknown is the moment he is confronted by a Weird threshold, which was made unknowable to him from the outset. Ultimately, in reflecting and thereby prolonging ambiguity onto the subject of representation, a Weird threshold complicates a

concrete understanding between the real and the unknown. A Weird threshold complicates a masculine subject's desire for knowledge by reflecting an (im)possible object-gaze upon the subject from a position that cannot be seen or assumed. Figure 6 provided a visual representation of the subject's confrontation with a Weird threshold: demonstrating how a Weird threshold prolongs and disturbs a subject's feeling of unease when confronted by the object-gaze. I discussed how the subject's position, in relation to a Weird threshold, renders the object of his desire impossible and inaccessible. In other words, the object of John's desire is never revealed to him or the readers as feminine.

Chapter 4 offered a synopsis of a Weird threshold with Figure 6; however, it is worth noting that it also served as a crucial link to the Lacanian logic of sexual difference. The fifth chapter discussed the Lacanian logic of a masculine subject's desire for the feminine object, which is made impossible to him from the outset. Figure 6, at this stage, introduced the position of the Lacanian subject and how the (im)possible object is determined and complicated by a Weird threshold in du Maurier's "Don't Look Now." Lacan's teachings have served as a significant theoretical lens, specifically in terms of interrogating the position of the barred woman. Through a discussion of Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* I articulated this connection to women's (im)possible position in language. The fifth chapter saw the shortest gap between publications included in this thesis; that is, the one-year difference between the publication of du Maurier's "Don't Look Now" and Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*. I might have instead chosen to analyse another short story, perhaps Carter's "The Bloody Chamber".[48] However, in addition to expanding the scope of the study to explore the Weird in both the novel and short story, I felt that Carter's novel spoke more directly to Lacan's descriptions of masculine desire, expressed through and beyond the body of Albertina. This provided an opportunity to re-evaluate the negatively charged position of the failed Other, located and experienced by a Lacanian subject beyond

[48] In particular, Carter's depiction of mothers: "You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white man, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's service revolver and, behind her, the breakers of the savage, indifferent sea, like the witnesses of a furious justice. And my husband stood stock-still, as if she had seen Medusa, the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs" ("The Bloody Chamber" 43).

the monstrous image of the (im)possible object. Carter's novel simplified the complex discussion surrounding a Weird threshold and its shared position with the barred Lacanian woman in language; that is, explaining the effects and complications when a Lacanian subject is confronted by a Weird threshold, making the (im)possible object-gaze ultimately unknowable and threateningly present within the perceived reality. Unknown unknowns were therefore revealed throughout *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, actively disturbing Desiderio from a hidden and barred position, in the beyond of Albertina. It is precisely this dislocation of the (im)possible gaze of Albertina, reflected from the unknown unknown, that provided the grounds for a discussion of Weird monsters.

This unknown beyond of the (im)possible object revealed the location and understanding of the function of Weird monsters. The sixth chapter therefore elaborates on and offers a firmer understanding of this connection in Weird Fiction, specifically with Octavia Butler's "Bloodchild". I analysed how Butler's short story reveals a complex problem arising from the Thing's enigmatic status, promulgated by Weird Fiction. That is: when Weird monsters (Lovecraft's Cthulhu monster, for example) are described and thus represented as literal monsters engaged with the characters as concretely real, do texts like Butler's still qualify as Weird given that a Weird threshold renders monsters unknowable? Butler's short story deals with the unknown unknowns of Weird monsters through its thematic "scrutiny" of blending racial alienation, Otherness and reversed gender roles (Humann 518). The prominent theme of mothers—a crucial point for the feminist criticisms that discuss Butler's use of male impregnation and childbirth—was representative of Spivak's argument about the "fetishised phallic mother" and her disturbing gaze (64). More specifically, the chapters thus far touched upon the mad woman who gazes upon her male mother in regard to her position as the Lacanian woman. In applying this position of the barred woman to my working definition of a Weird threshold, the sixth chapter recognised a connection to the unknowable and (im)possible position of Weird monsters. Weird Fiction assigns its monsters to a similar position as the Lacanian woman, capable of crossing and troubling the boundaries of genre with her all-seeing and (im)possible object-gaze. Butler's "Bloodchild" demonstrated how Weird monsters like T'Gatoi are not limited to a subject's articulation, or to the fetishised body parts that determine and reject her (im)possible existence. Indeed, because T'Gatoi is rejected

by Gan as a literal monster, she is displaced into the unknown as (im)possible, belonging to herself while also participating in all limitations without belonging. Weird monsters like T'Gatoi are not limited to a subject's articulation of them, which presses them into the unknown; rather, it is from their (im)possible position that they gaze—with the same universal all-seeing position as the barred Lacanian woman—disturbing the subject and reader while remaining (im)possible to assume. It is this gaze, this forward motion represented in Figure 9, that demonstrates the distinct function of Weird monsters.

Figure 9 is a significant development of my working definition for Weird Fiction. It demonstrates how a Weird threshold reflects and splinters a masculine subject's desire. Moreover, in applying Figure 9 to Butler's "Bloodchild," I demonstrate how Weird monsters operate as the (im)possible object, capable of penetrating through a Weird threshold and disrupting the subject's understanding of the articulated monster. And, perhaps most significantly, it demonstrates how the female element (in this case T'Gatoi) is misrecognised as a negative variable (as an open-ended >). It also raised the issue that such a misrecognition risks, through searching for an anchor for Otherness in Weird Fiction, accusing it of reinforcing negatively charged marginal positions (as closed ► variables). In this way the seventh chapter applied a similar misrecognition to critical scholars' treatment of the New and revealed how they approach the New as a dead and/or dominating effect of the Old. In offering an investigation of how a failed Other enters through a Weird threshold as an unknown unknown, the seventh chapter analysed how such failure enters as a dominating effect precisely because it cannot be confirmed or denied by a Lacanian subject. In investigating this dominating effect through the masculine subjects in K. J. Bishop's *The Etched City*, I suggested that its characters Raule and Gwynn are representative of two parallels of critical treatment of the New. *The Etched City* dramatises how the New is understood by the masculine "I"/"Eye" as a failed and/or dead mother. For both Raule and Gwynn, the failure of the unknown is represented in the figures of New mothers, whose (im)possible function to deliver the unknown fails. But more than this, Raule and Gwynn's desire for the unknown suggests that they are themselves incapable of acknowledging these failures.

For a masculine subject to acknowledge failure would be to relinquish his phallic power and reduce himself to the feminine. The masculine perspective that

critical scholars assume therefore becomes delimited by the demand/desire to give birth to the law within *their* centre, their desire to become the "proper" mothers of the Weird. Like China Miéville's skulltopus, Weird Fiction invites corruption when forming something new, but the Old and/or New which create its (im)possible form are not the new Thing desired by critical scholars. The desired Weird effect involves a successful domination over its failed (New) (M)Otherness. However, because the failed (M)Other of the Weird is unknowable to the masculine "I"/"Eye," the New fails precisely because it succeeds in producing and regulating the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction. In this way, a remaining question regarding Weird Fiction's current and future position arises—the status of Weird Fiction inside and outside the universe of literature which rejects (im)possibility. Its emergence into literature's history suggests difference, mutation and corruption. It invites and challenges reality, which critical scholars attempt to trace through the genres it encompasses, distorting the Weird's knowability within contemporary fields like the New Weird.

8.2. A WEIRD CANON

This thesis has examined the ways in which Weird Fiction's (im)possibility is validated and rejected by phallocentric assumption. In elucidating this (im)possibility through a connection to the barred Lacanian woman's position in language, this thesis positions Weird Fiction beyond knowable assumption—beyond the universe of literature. To position Weird Fiction as an unknowable movement (a known unknown), however, causes all unknowns to fail. And it is this that results in another question that I wish to address in this conclusion: when this (im)possibility is exposed as a known unknown to the universe of literature, what is the result for contemporary Weird Fiction? How do texts continue to represent the Weird? Does Weird Fiction begin and end with the Old and/or New? Are its Old and/or New authors detrimental to its existence, or vital for critical consciousness of the unknowable? To what extent, then, can critically thinking about the unknowable access and reassess literature? Is Weird Fiction evidence of what John Guillory terms "the *impensé* of the [canon] debate ... as a mythological 'death of literature'" (x)? Guillory also makes the point that "from this perspective the issue of 'canonicity' will seem less important than the historical crisis of literature, since it is this crisis—the long-term decline in the cultural capital of literature—which gives rise to the

canon debate" (x). These questions are raised when Weird Fiction's (im)possibility is applied to the universe of literature.

The significance that Weird Fiction presents is precisely its (im)possible validation and rejection to and by traditional literary formulations. Weird Fiction infers a disturbance, a mutation, in the literature that is transforming into something else. But what this "something else" might be generates concern for traditional investigations: Weird Fiction presupposes a difference and uniqueness between a Western Canon and its cultural artistic memory and foundation for critical thinking. To propose that Weird Fiction is located beyond knowable literary formations causes further complications regarding "the 'discourse of the Other'", which, according to Griselda Pollock, "must of necessity 'difference the canon'" (5). Feminist approaches in particular share this concern about Otherness, arguing that "however strategically necessary the new privileging of the Other certainly is in a world so radically imbalanced in favour of the 'privileged male of the white race,' there is still a binary opposition in place which cannot ever relieve the Other of being other to a dominant norm" (Pollock 5). Judith Butler suggests that this is because such "binary framing decides in advance what can be said to exist, what kind of concept or referent belongs to the realm of what is," and therefore results in "no reference to what is outside the field constituted by this positioning, exclusionary procedure" ("Introduction" xi). It is important to apply the same logic about Otherness to Weird Fiction. As a disturbance that consciously destabilises the knowable, Weird Fiction operates as a failed (M)Other—as an unknown unknown that validates and rejects subjective knowledge about what is inaccessible to language.

To explain further, I will briefly return to the (im)possible form of Weird Fiction as represented notionally in Figure 5. Figure 5 presents another feature which I have purposely left undiscussed, the upward linear progression of the New (from A to B). This thesis, in addressing how the centre womb of the Weird (C and D) expands beyond the delimited assumptions of the Old and/or New, reveals that the New's successful continuation and separation from the Old causes the desired Weird effect to fail. The assumed result of B is thus the demand/desire that true Weird Fiction exists beyond the Old and/or New. Take for example the following extracts from various works of critical scholarship which, as exemplars of the New's linear progression to B, depict this demand/desire:

> [Scholars] wondered passingly if there was a sense of an emergent new form that might tentatively be termed 'The New Weird'. (Luckhurst, "American Weird" 199)

> The Weird has again fragmented, perhaps in preparation for a future coalescing of a Next Weird or perhaps not. (VanderMeer, *The Weird* xx)

> We need a new language to understand it ... stories [that] suggest a new language, not only for weird fiction, but for a contemporary fiction that looks for new answers in unexpected places. (Marshall, "Foreword" 4: xvii)

What these statements represent is the problem of applying Weird Fiction to literature as an unknowable movement. One reading of these statements assumes an expectation of B, that Weird Fiction guarantee itself in the promise of its different and unique existence in and as the New. Another reading assumes that Weird Fiction is altogether removed or passed beyond the assumed knowledge of it. In both cases, it is (im)possible to trace the result of B because C and D complicate the initial structure of the Old and/or New. The Weird link between the Old and/or New constitutes subjective knowledge of B. That is, what remains consistent in both readings is Weird Fiction's (im)possible existence.

In going forward with this logic, it is important to remember that my use of (im)possibility implies both a validation and a rejection of corruption. This complex function of Weird Fiction disrupts the knowable foundations that rely on delimited categorisations to announce the authority that the law of genre commands. When a canon is formed around a genre that encompasses both a validation and a rejection of these dominant norms, we might conclude that Weird Fiction produces a reassessment and questioning of traditional literary values and standards. This reassessment and questioning is, moreover, what critical scholars frequently cite as the crisis of debate around canonicity. Fowler, for example, suggests that the canonical crisis is a result of contemporary access to literary canons, which "should not expect to understand the variants of the modal paradigm in synchronic terms, but only in the dynamic context of literary-historical development" (104). Richard H. Brodhead agrees that "new formulation[s]" are indicative of contemporary critical "interest" that "can successfully institutionalise themselves, can build new institutions and win old ones to the cause of *making* theirs be the past worth

remembering" (6-7). A Weird Fiction canon might lend itself as a temporary formulation of these critical reassessments and access to a Western Canon. Given the Weird's function of unknown unknowns, however, it is necessary to avoid the impression that its emergence with the Old and/or New is an offshoot or mutational characteristic of a Western Canon.

As part of validating Weird Fiction's existence as significant, contemporary scholars have attempted to formulate a Weird canon. Joshi, for example, promotes a Weird canon with Lovecraft at its centre, because Lovecraft is "the first significant writer who understood that his work was 'weird,' and who for various reasons was repeatedly rebuffed by mainstream publishers, he was perhaps also the last writer whose weird fiction was the systematic embodiment of a world view" (*Modern Weird* 1). Joshi's view is informed by Bloom's discussions of canonicity in *The Western Canon*. Bloom's model of a Western Canon rejects ideological defences that:

> are as pernicious in regard to aesthetic values as the onslaughts of attackers who seek to destroy the Canon or 'open it up,' as they proclaim. Nothing is so essential to the Western Canon as its principles of selectivity, which are elitist only to the extent that they are founded upon severely artistic criteria. Those who oppose the Canon insist that there is always an ideology involved in canon formation; indeed, they go farther and speak of the ideology of canon formation, suggesting that to make a canon (or to perpetuate one) is an ideological act *in itself*. (22)

In each of the women's works analysed in this thesis, there is a direct engagement with Weird Fiction's narrative function of unknown unknowns, remaining, indeed, "universal because they entertain while also expressing our own dissatisfaction with, and uncertainty about, reality" (VanderMeer, *The Weird* xv). However, as Bloom articulates, universality is positioned against a Western Canon because such works escape its "severely artistic criteria". This suggests that Weird works are detrimental to a Western Canon due to their (im)possible function and engagement with and as unknown unknowns.

It is, then, an unknowable movement beyond a Western Canon which confirms and expels aesthetic judgement. The Western Canon, for Bloom, "is the true art of

memory, the authentic foundation for cultural thinking" in its act to solidify and monumentalise its "greatest" authors as literature (35). In what I think serves as Joshi's own solution for the formation of a Weird canon, Bloom elevates "Shakespeare's eminence" at the Western Canon's centre, as "the rock upon which the School of Resentment must at last founder" (25). However, attempting to reproduce the "true" memory of literature, Bloom's canon might then be seen to parallel his own conception of and access to canonisation. If it is Shakespeare's work that centres the "School of Resentment", Bloom's understanding of canonisation and aesthetic judgement are arguably influenced by knowable educational and cultural systems. This is certainly the case for Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, who comment on "the questions that Bloom poses" as being reflective "of his own work, since his account of Shakespeare as *different*, as *original* and so on, is no more an explanation that the 'history' or 'class' which his opponents offer" (*Literature, Criticism and Theory* 51). As Lillian S. Robinson points out, despite "their availability on bookshelves, it is through the teaching and study" that selective works and authors "become institutionalized as canonical literature" (84). Robinson notes that even in a broader canon, "those admitted but read only in advanced courses, commented upon only by more or less narrow specialists, are subjected to the further tyranny of 'major' versus 'minor'" (84). This is what comes into question when Lovecraft is monumentalised *as* Weird Fiction. At stake here is, in Bloom's canon, a Western Canon that is reliant on the reproduction of its knowability: Shakespeare's difference and uniqueness is reproduced as knowable within the Western Canon.

In a similar way, Joshi's Weird canon not only enacts Lovecraft as different and unique, but also as the genre's knowable foundation. Like Bloom's assertion that Shakespeare and Dante are literature, Joshi asserts that Lovecraft's Weird Fiction is canonical. This is what Robinson describes as a "sweeping modification" in canon formation, which is achieved through "individual admissions and elevations from 'minor' to 'major' status ... which is to say, demonstration that a particular author does meet generally accepted criteria of excellence" (83). Bloom's elitist position "allies Shakespeare with the material of the tomb" and thereby "eternalises him and abstracts him from history" (Bennett and Royle 51). And, for Joshi, the site of Weird Fiction's canonicity is Lovecraft's works, which he argues "the 'mass reading

public' is incapable of assessing" (259).[49] It is, moreover, aesthetic judgement that dictates Joshi's notion of the canonicity of Lovecraft's works:

> some principle of selectivity must be had, and I can state unequivocally that my principle—hence my canon—is based upon the actual literary merits, as best I can assess them, of the works and authors I have read ... There might conceivably be other criteria by which a canon is formed, but I am not interested in them. I am not, for example, interested in what weird fiction can tell us about our society because I am not interested in society. (*Modern Weird* 258)

It is this selectivity, however, that dissolves and radically alters canonical formation: the Lovecraftian Weird formula offers a subjective observation of "society" (the knowable) but also, by means of fearing the unknown, a universal observation (a known unknown) which subverts society. A Weird canon would thus imply from within itself a logic of knowability: its universal observations are invalid, unknowable and detrimental to canon formation in so far as its breaks open the knowable. But, if contemporary scholarship continues to anticipate a different and unique Weird from the Old and/or New, how can a canon be formed through such knowability? It is precisely this question arising from the Weird's knowability that causes further complications for contemporary Weird writers—for example, the works included in Kelly's *Year's Best Weird Fiction* series—who become excluded from a Weird canon because they do not operate within its knowable criterion. Contemporary Weird Fiction authors and works become sidelined and invisible precisely because they do not contribute to and therefore do not function within Joshi's canon.

A basic problem for a Weird canon is not that contemporary contributions renounce a selective criterion. On the contrary, it is that Weird Fiction's (im)possibility does not fit in to such selectivity from the outset. Weird Fiction's (im)possibility—its product of C and D—demonstrates that the selective criterion of

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[49] Lovecraft expressed his own concerns for literary standards in a letter to C. L Moore (7 February 1937). Lovecraft wrote: "This herd of acquisitive boors brought up from the shop and the counting-house a complete set of artificial attitudes, oversimplifications, and mawkish sentimentalities which no sincere art of literary could gratify—and they so outnumbered the remaining educated gentlefolk that most of the purveying agencies became at once reoriented to them. Literature and art lost most of their market; and writing, painting, drama, etc. became engulfed more and more in the domain of *amusement enterprises*" (quoted in Joshi, *Modern Weird* 259-260).

the Lovecraftian formula works against, and yet validates, knowable canonical foundations. According to Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy, because the Old is a “construction”, “eclipsed by science fiction and horror, the weird goes under other names, appears marginally, and in the explicit continuations of Lovecraft’s work, in whatever media, is rarely innovative or successful” (124-125). This, for Noys and Murphy, is why the Lovecraftian Old’s “hybrid” origins “speak to the difficulty of generic construction in general and of establishing a ‘definitive’ canon for the weird” (125). The Old’s linear progression in Figure 5, and thus its projection of C and D, disrupts the New’s definitive course to B. By being filtered through the Old and/or New, the Weird is submitted to the critical scholarship as knowable. This may account for Joshi’s desire/demand that a Weird canon be the result of B: that Weird Fiction remains different and uniquely Weird in Lovecraft’s work.

China Miéville’s “Afterweird: The Efficacy of a Worm-Eaten Dictionary” offers an alternative interpretation of Weird Fiction’s (im)possible form. While contrary to Joshi’s thesis that Lovecraft is central to the formation of a Weird canon, Miéville promotes a Weird canon as formed in and through Ann and Jeff VanderMeer’s *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*. Miéville frames the anthology as the best example of short fictions that give rise to Weird Fiction’s existence as “a virus of holes, a burrowing infestation, an infestation of burrowingness itself, that births its own pestilential hole-dweller” (1115). At first sight, this suggests that the VanderMeers’ anthology maps an infestation of the Weird—or, as Miéville puts it:

> All books alter the books that are (read) near them. Here, it is the unease, the strange, the alien malevolent, in its alterity, its Weird, that spreads ... This collection is not (just) an act of canon. It does not, nor could it, enshrine one set of texts. Without motion—of crawling and wriggling kind—there is no Weird. All canons are tombs, yes, but this collection is a post-elegy. (1116)

Miéville seeks to overcome Weird Fiction’s (im)possible figuration as an unknowable “motion” by insisting on its presence in the VanderMeers’ anthology. It is the anthology’s collective Weirdness that spreads throughout the included works; reading the Weird into being and affirming, rather than negating, its existence in and as these works.

As a motion, then, the anthology cannot isolate one specific author or work as the locus of its orientation. This suggests that the included works not only contribute to Weird Fiction's existence, but when they are read separately the works disengage from the anthology's act of canonisation. This does not mean that these texts are not Weird Fiction. Miéville's point is that, through the process of reading, Weird Fiction infects knowable literary formations and criteria *as* a movement. The Weird form of the VanderMeers' anthology motions a monumentalised corruption, a zombie-like "post-elegy" that precludes the linear progression of the Old and/or New, and of the death of Weird Fiction. However, where Weird Fiction's (im)possibility is positioned within this knowability, I want to instead consider how it is misrecognised as negation, thereby approaching Miéville's assertion about infection as a Weirding of literature.

8.3. WEIRDING LITERATURE

A Weirding of literature indicates an unknowable movement within and beyond traditional literary formations. In the introduction I discussed this movement in light of Kelly's point about the Weird's thematic discrepancies that have "always been present" in literature (1: 7). This association with Weird Fiction's (im)possible form *as* an unknowable and penetrable presence within literature and throughout its history indicates a corruption of those canons assuming "an exclusive completeness" (Fowler 98). It indicates that a Western Canon is in fact subject to a Weirding of literature. Although critics like Bennett and Royle point out that a mutational evolution is "central to the process that we call canonisation"—that, in order "for canonisation to occur, a text must be inherited, transformed, responded to, deformed, developed, and imitated" (259)—Weird Fiction's (im)possible existence is negated with the Old and/or New.

Such a misrecognition of the Old and/or New, results in a misreading of the genre. Leif Sorensen, for example, argues that the Lovecraftian Old should be read as a "weird archive" that, when "viewed in the context of recent theorisations of the archive," exposes a "temporality of all archives" (518). In other words, Sorensen attempts to position the Old within contemporary reassessments of canonisation, as a temporary archive that validates the temporality of traditional literary formations. Another example appears in the work of Noys and Murphy who, in agreeing with

Sorensen's assertion, argue that New "interest is not in solidifying a canon of the weird but rather in probing the discontinuous and mutational form of the 'weird archive' with 'its tendency to grow posthumously'" ("Introduction" 119). Although I agree with these claims up to a point, it is important to remember that Weird Fiction cannot conform to traditional canons and criteria. This may be why critical scholarship attempts to insert Weird Fiction into literature as a mutational form that, indeed, has always been present. A feminist approach to such attempts emphasises a problem in applying difference *as* difference: that is, critics still "concerned with the canon as a pragmatic instrument, rather than a powerful abstraction" compromise by composing literatures of difference that conform "as closely as possible to the traditional canons of taste and judgment" (Robinson 89). To put this another way: a problem arising from Sorensen's, Noys' and Murphy's, and Miéville's assertions about reading Weird Fiction as an infection and/or disruptive archive, is the question of what it would mean to read knowable literature as Weird. How might reading Weird Fiction difference literature? Moreover, how would reading literature make Weird Fiction knowable if its effect promises the unknowable?

Weird Fiction's (im)possibility is lost in canonisation. Weird Fiction is inherently *unknowable*; its unknown unknown function means it cannot be read *as* knowable literature without risking its failure in the Old and/or New. To explain this more coherently, I wish to extend it briefly to Derrida's point about there being "nothing outside of the text" (Of Grammatology 158; emphasis in original).50 This complex problem of Weirding literature speaks to what Derrida terms as reading the world-text. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that:

> there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the text*, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like 'real mother' name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and

[50] This quote refers to Derrida's term "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte,*" which is often left untranslated. However, given Spivak's inclusion and discussion of both translations, the phrase can be understood as, perhaps more accurately, "there is no outside-text"; that is, emphasising the connection and separation between a text and (in Derrida's words) the non-existent world outside it.

language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (159; emphasis in original)

It is important to note that Derrida's argument, in a similar way to Lacan's teachings about the barred woman, does not suggest that the world beyond a text literally does not exist outside language. In essence, language serves as the gateway to a text and the world of said text. As Bennett and Royle put it, Derrida's point "is not that there is not such thing as a 'real world' but that there is no access to the real world" of a text "except through the language" used by the text (31). The access a reader has to a text's reality is explicitly granted to and by language. However, a point that goes undiscussed is that of literatures of difference that, as Robinson points out above, are granted access to language only through conforming to mainstream cultural and aesthetic expectations. This risks misreading the distinction of different literatures.

This thesis has worked towards articulating the significance that Weird Fiction holds for such difference and Otherness. Weird Fiction's anti-normative narrative function, for example, reveals how it consciously disrupts a text's reality with something unknowable. This unknown unknown, however, as demonstrated in Figure 10, is capable of penetrating through a Weird threshold but is misrecognised and thereby articulated by a Lacanian subject as negation. In a similar way to its narrative function, Weird Fiction enters literature as negation. In this context, it parallels Judith Butler's point about dominant binaries that can only determine "what can be said to exist" but cannot reference anything outside of itself (xi). Moreover, the language of a text "marks what cannot be gathered up and contained by binary, oppositional terms," and instead expels Otherness "outside, where the outside is not exactly the opposite of the inside" (xi). Weird Fiction therefore enters literature without a knowable foundation except through the language of a text. But the language used by a text, formed by its historical and cultural context, determines a masculine subject's understanding of and access to Weird Fiction. When texts capture Weird Fiction's (im)possibility in the Old and/or New—categorisations that are and are not knowable formations of the Weird—they are read into existence as negation.

My aim has been to speak to these tensions arising in genre theory, specifically the way that a Weird matrilineal literary tradition works to validate and maintain the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction. Throughout this thesis, I have analysed

the claims that Weird Fiction is different and therefore difficult to define. As I hope is clear by now, I do agree with such arguments, but only up to a point. I agree that, for traditional approaches, Weird Fiction's (im)possibility is difficult to possess and assume. For example, in entering the spheres of Gothic and Horror, my claims about Weird Fiction's (im)possibility instigated allegations that it was needlessly ambiguous and detrimental to the boundaries of these genres. Moreover, this thesis's connection to the Lacanian woman's (im)possible position was refuted with arguments *of* impossibility. These reactions of rejection, I feel, are entirely the point being overlooked by these critical approaches. As Luckhurst puts it, when the security of genre is exposed and questioned by Weird Fiction's (im)possible existence, critical scholars are placed "in an uncomfortable and even weird position" (125).

The (im)possibility of tracing Weird Fiction within and outside the universe of literature explains why literatures of difference generate negation. Furthermore, it offers a formulation for women's movement from external to sidelined positions in language: "the apparently systematic neglect of women's experience in the literary canon" suggests a "neglect that takes the form of distorting and misreading the few recognised female writers and excluding the others" (Robinson 84). For this reason, feminist approaches to canonisation focus on redressing women's negation—arguing that women's writing should be read with "the same words about artistic intent and achievement ... without absurdity" (Robinson 89). It is precisely the sexual and racial differences that *inflict* disruptive difference, or as Pollock puts it, "difference is not just to be a replication of phallocentric ideologies of *the* difference—based on a reified heterosexual opposition Man versus Woman—it must acknowledge the divisions within the collectivity of women that produce real, antagonistic conflicts shaped by modernity's imperialist and racist face" (xv).

The significance that Weird Fiction offers for women's access to language is revealed in their shared (im)possible position, which is validated and rejected by masculinist assumption. It is this (im)possibility that is misrecognised as negation, highlighting a gap in the assumed knowledge of genre, a gap that Weird Fiction, women writers, and feminist critics aim to fill. Future research possibilities include expanding Weird Fiction's (im)possible impact on the mutational evolution of genre, and how genre revolutionises the course of literature. However, for the purpose of

my focus on the (im)possibility of Weird Fiction within a contemporary context, it speaks to the significance that the genre proposes for women's and women writer's access to language. This thesis also speaks to the importance of the Old and/or New, specifically when attempting to trace Weird Fiction in literature. The more we pursue knowledge of the unknown, the further the Weird retreats beyond the assumed subjective knowledge of it. The more a reader or character pursues Weird Fiction the more, indeed, they enter "into a place unfamiliar to most of us," receiving only "hints of the unusual that they become obsessed with the weird" (VanderMeer, *The Weird* xv). Weird Fiction's (im)possible form is a marker of the unknowable, escaping beyond the limitations of assumption and knowledge. For a century it has ruptured genre theory and phallocentric verdict.

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