



The Unnamable

H.P. Lovecraft

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H. P. Lovecraft was one of the greatest horror writers of all time. His seminal work appeared in the pages of legendary Weird Tales and has influenced countless writer of the macabre. This is one of those stories.

The Unnamable Details

Date : Published July 1925 by Weird Tales, Vol. 6 (first published 1925)

ISBN :

Author : H.P. Lovecraft

Format : Paperback 4 pages

Genre : Horror, Short Stories, Lovecraftian, Fiction, Fantasy

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From Reader Review The Unnamable for online ebook

Andrew Pixton says

A story responding to criticism of his use of anti-descriptions. Indescribable, unfathomable, etc are common adjectives Lovecraft uses about his monsters. On the surface these might look like cop-outs to giving a disappointing description of his aliens. Not so, says he, because some of these things aren't completely in our dimension or aren't totally perceptible. It's like, how do you describe a brand new color you've never seen before? That's what this is. I could grant him that, except that he also uses words about things that seem more describable: "blasphemous torso" or "tenebrous wings" which make for eloquent prose, but also purple and non-descriptive. It also sort of bends his own mythos, if they're not totally perceptible, then how do they perceive them at all? Wouldn't he just not see it? Well, his effort is imaginative and original enough, I think. My favorite is the impossible geometric angles.

osoi says

(?? dark ambient playlist).

[illegible][illegible]

annikeh.net

Joshua Shiohita says

This story is pretty meta. It's almost like Lovecraft was commenting on his own work, cliches, and techniques. He throws in a little scare at the end just to make sure you know it's all real and then it's over. Featuring Randolph Carter.

Miriam says

Besides, he added, my constant talk about "unnamable" and "unmentionable" things was a very puerile device, quite in keeping with my lowly standing as an author. I was too fond of ending my stories with sights or sounds which paralysed my heroes' faculties and left them without courage, words, or associations to tell what they had experienced.

Haha, I see why Carter is supposed to be a stand-in for Lovecraft himself.

I feel like I have to give him props for making fun of himself for doing that thing, while in the act of doing it.

<http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/t...>

Jason MacDee says

Masterful flit of a pseudometa tale. Particularly impactful when read after "The Shunned House" and a good bit of popular Lovecraft. He brings the reader in a journey parallel to that of the narrator's friend. Though seemingly autobiographical reference, he uses the reader's detection of allusion against them just as his friend's trust. You're left with revelations that neither fully see coming.

Thor The Redbeard says

5/10

Ringman Roth says

Absolutely Horrible. Probably one of Lovecraft's worse, up there with the tomb, and the first Nyarlathotep. I'm a huge Lovecraft fan, but this is silly, stupid, and feels like it was written by Frank Belknap Long and not Lovecraft.

The very opening begins with the 2 main characters discussing how something could be "unnamable" which is a really stupid idea if you think about it, but IMHO it would have to be something so borderline incomprehensible that you just didn't have words to describe it. Having a fully detailed description of the creature kind of defeats that purpose.

The first thing I thought after reading the creatures initial description was, it's not unnamable! It's clearly a Gorriaffalo! After that, I couldn't take this story seriously. If you are new to Lovecraft, don't start with this story.

Its a shame for this to be Randolph Carter's second appearance, as its a horrible follow-up to the delightfully eerie "Statement of Randolph Carter" which is a great short story to read at a campfire.

Oleksandr says

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Godzilla says

A change of tack for Lovecraft, with this almost autobiographical tale of unspeakable darkness.

He alludes to many ancient superstitions and acts as devil's advocate in a philosophical debate as to the purpose and ideas behind tales of terror.

It's worth bearing in mind that some of these literary devices that seem trite today, were probably ground breaking at the time.

The tension builds, and the ending, whilst slightly predictable, is effective.

Andrew Leon says

Okay, before anyone says anything, I know "unnamable" is "misspelled." It is not misspelled because I am spelling it incorrectly; it is "misspelled" because that's how Lovecraft spelled it, so I can only assume that that was the correct spelling at the time. I'm assuming that because Lovecraft was rather a fascist of grammar, so it would be more than odd for him to have such a glaring mistake.

Now... Does anyone remember that old horror story (it was told by one of the boys in Dead Poets Society) about the person putting together the jigsaw puzzle only to have it reveal a picture of the person in question being murdered, an event which immediately happens upon completion of the puzzle? Yeah, you should just keep that in mind.

This story made me chuckle. It begins as a philosophical discussion between the narrator, who is an author, and his friend, who is a high school principal, about the author's foible of referring to things in his stories as "indescribable" or "unnamable." The principal holds that this is a "puerile device" of the author and is the reason, at least in part, that he has not become more successful. I have to imagine that Lovecraft is here reflecting upon actual comments to him as an author, because it's one of the things that has come to annoy me most about his writing, his constant retreat into saying that something is too horrifying to describe. The narrator, Randolph Carter, attempts to defend himself.

The two men are, of course, sitting on a tomb in a cemetery as they have this conversation. And, of course, something is going to go terribly wrong.

It was a clever set up. Lovecraft offers us pieces of the surroundings as he tells us about the two men talking,

the dilapidated house not far away, the tombstone engulfed by a tree, the very tomb they are sitting on. Then, as Carter begins his defense about unnamable things, he relates to his friend a story, and we discover that they are in the very place where the story takes place. If you're paying attention (and, yes, I know I'm ruining this part), it will dawn on you as he tells the story to his friend, but, if not, at the end of the story, his friend says he would really like to see the house from the story. Carter replies that he can, or could have before it got too dark (because it is so dark at that point that the two men can't even see one another), because it's right over there.

And that is when things go to hell.

I liked this one a lot. That Lovecraft was willing to point out and, to a certain extent, even make fun of this failing of his as a writer, even in the midst of defending himself, is interesting to see. The story within the story becoming the setting for what happens in the story was also sufficiently subtle and interesting. I think this is possibly the most sophisticated of the stories I've read by him to date. Even if it does fall back to his favorite style of ending, which is, of course, the point.

? Irena ? says

Two friends are sitting near an old house on Meadow Hill in Arkham, Massachusetts. They are arguing about the way the narrator writes about the unnamed in his stories.

'... my constant talk about 'unnamable' and 'unmentionable' things was a very puerile device, quite in keeping with my lowly standing as an author. I was too fond of ending my stories with sights or sounds which paralysed my heroes' faculties and left them without courage, words, or associations to tell what they had experienced.

So he tells his friend a story about the old house and the attic and the thing that is said to exist there.

Jimmy says

This is the first story by Lovecraft I've read and I am happy to say, I'm hooked; I need to read more by him. Fear lies in the unknown, the mysterious, and by keeping most of the descriptions regarding the monster to its actions and consequences, allowing the readers to let their minds create the monster themselves, Lovecraft really manages to plant the fear inside our minds rather than outside our windows. I love it.

Netanella says

Lovecraft is sitting at the pub, having a draft with his homies. He starts his story:

We were sitting on a dilapidated seventeenth-century tomb in the late afternoon of an autumn day at the old burying-ground in Arkham, and speculating about the unnamable.

Of course you were, Howie. You could have been sitting at the bar having a draft with your homies, and you still would have been speculating about the unnamable.

That's what's so damn sexy about your writing, you just can't describe it.

Whatever *it* is.

And then, your characters get all queasy and crazy and faint-y. Because, you know -- *oh God! I just can't describe it!*

Anna says

2,5-3/5

Blackjack605 says

This was a good story, but it kind of seems like Lovecraft wrote this story as a sort of "what if" rebuttal in his head, probably to make himself feel better about an argument with a friend. Also I find it very amusing that he names something that he claims can't be named

Carole Rae says

The second story I have read by Mr. Lovecraft. SO much better then the first one. It was shorter, but I was on the edge of my seat. I read through it two or three times, because I was trying to make sense of what happened in the end.

SO CREEPY! OH SNAP! I DID NOT SEE THAT COMING!

LESSON ONE: DON'T QUESTION THINGS ESPECIALLY THE 'UNNAMBLE'! LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE! *shudders*

This was so much better then the first one, in my opinion. It was super creepy and you just KNEW something was around the corner. The tone of the story, you could just feel the heaviness. Amazing. I shall stamp this with 5 stars.

Favorite Character(s): Carter and Manton (even tho they should have not questioned or talk about it)
Not-so Favorite Character(s): nada

Droid says

Pretty autobiographical. Effectively the protagonist is Lovecraft and his friend is Robert E Howard. Interesting to gain a little insight into Lovecraft's mind and see him defending the idea of terrors so extreme

that they defy the boundaries of human nomenclature. I sort of felt sorry for him.

The protagonist encounters an unspeakable horror and names it "The Unnamable". Not sure if the blatant irony is intentional or not. Funny either way.

Bill Kerwin says

This little piece is unusual for Lovecraft. It is not so much a weird tale as a discussion about weird tales, in which two men sitting on a dilapidated tomb in an old graveyard—writer Randolph Carter (H.P. surrogate) and his friend high school principal Joel Manton—debate whether a writer owes his readers an explicit description of horrors, or whether it is better to leave the greatest horrors “unnamable.” H.P. often took refuge in the “unnamable,” and was criticized for it by many—including his English high school teacher friend Maurice Moe, who is almost certainly the model for Manton.

I would urge those of you who aren't fans of expository prose or who dislike literary criticism not to be discouraged. The description of the cemetery, though brief, is evocative and filled with the realistic details of a New England landscape, and you will be happy to know that eventually the debate of our two “critics” is resolved—not by an extraordinary persuasive argument—but by the appearance of the “unnamable” itself.

Marco says

Carter, a genre fiction writer, meets with his close friend, Joel Manton, in a cemetery near an old, dilapidated house on Meadow Hill in the town of Arkham, Massachusetts. As the two sit upon a weathered tomb, Carter tells Manton the tale of an indescribable entity that allegedly haunts the house and surrounding area. He contends that because such an entity cannot be perceived by the five senses, it becomes impossible to quantify and accurately describe, thus earning itself the term 'unnamable'. Manton scoffs that Carter's use of such a word is a puerile device, just what you'd expect from a hack writer. No doubt he says this with love, but Carter's inspired by their eerie setting to defend his dark romanticism from Manton's rationalistic world view.

What sets this short story apart from the other, is this defense of Lovecraft's romantic literary style and credo, against the supposedly rational naturalist position of his critics. I said supposedly because, according to Lovecraft at least, his critics are the same that are religious and credulous of certain bits of folklore. The author (and Carter) has seen enough to believe nothing is beyond nature, though it may be beyond present understanding. Carter appears to be a religious skeptic, and it's he who tries to buttress his ideas with research and investigation instead of listening to well-established superstitions.

Another interesting theme of this short story is the author take of the American Puritan age, described as "dark", populated by "crushed brains" that spawn such horrors as the 1692 witch panic. "There was no beauty, no freedom", only "the poisonous sermons of the cramped divines". The period was, overall, "a rusted iron straitjacket".

Amy (Other Amy) says

[shockingly attacked after the sun goes down (hide spoiler)]

