



## A Tale of Two Red Hooks: LaValle’s Rewriting of Lovecraft’s “The Horror at Red Hook” in *The Ballad of Black Tom*

*Josué Morales Domínguez*

*Abstract:* This article analyses and compares the representations of the monster in H. P. Lovecraft’s “The Horror at Red Hook” (1927) and Victor LaValle’s *The Ballad of Black Tom* (2016), the latter being a rewriting of the former, both rooted in the Weird tale. The aim of this article is to illuminate the process through which LaValle turns Lovecraft’s narrative into one where racism becomes evident. The framework for this analysis is Cohen’s “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” (1996), which argues that monsters are bodies of text that have an iterative nature; each iteration adds new layers of meaning to the monstrous body. Whereas Lovecraft’s text arouses racist fears, LaValle’s analyses how these fears turn the racial other into a monster.

*Keywords:* H. P. Lovecraft, Victor LaValle, Monster, The Horror at Red Hook, *The Ballad of Black Tom*.

### 1. Introduction

H. P. Lovecraft has become an influential figure in modern literature, as demonstrated by the amount of scholarly attention the author has gained in the fields of speculative literature and posthumanist philosophy (see especially Sederholm & Weinstock 5–7), but also by a vast list of Lovecraft-inspired media that range from movies to board games. Lovecraft’s current importance has prompted a discussion about his stance on issues like racism, misogyny, and anti-Semitism (Moore xi–xii). The monsters Lovecraft used in his narratives act as allegories for the other, inspired by fear of contamination of the Anglo-Saxon stock that settled in America (Poole 222–28). The evident racism present in Lovecraft’s writings cannot be overlooked. The fear of the unknown that he describes in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1926) becomes fear towards the other. Lovecraft posits that the origin of horror in Western folklore is due

to “hideous cults” from “pre-Aryan” times, giving the monster in Western tradition a historical explanation: the religious and racial differences become monstrous features; therefore, the religious and racial other becomes a monster that inspires horror. In his fictions, Lovecraft uses the concept of a racial other as a danger to white society, but supplants the religious tones of the Gothic for 20th-century scientific and pseudo-scientific approaches (Luckhurst, Introduction xiv–xv).

In “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” (1996), Cohen argues that monsters, which are present in cultural and historical spaces, are projections of fear towards difference – racial, sexual, economic, religious, and politic (3–6). These projections involve giving difference monstrous characteristics and creating a narrative surrounding them; thus, granting the monster a function within the cultural space in which it is created. As Cohen exemplifies in describing an encounter with a Bosnian Serb militiaman who claims with certainty that Muslims feed Serbian children to zoo animals, the monster’s function is to make sense of the other’s difference within a self’s own cultural space and its norms – independently of whether the beliefs that inform the understanding of the monster are accurate or not (8). The monster’s body becomes text; its reading provides further understanding of the culture that shapes it.

Halberstam reads the monsters present in the English Gothic novel of the 19th century as allegories for the fears present in English society of that time: when the non-English and non-heterosexual are turned into monsters, these are rendered abhorrent (21). While she focuses mainly on the sexual aspect of the monster, her insights into race relate to Lovecraft’s own interpretation of the monster. For example, when discussing Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Halberstam argues that “vampires are precisely a race and a family that weakens the stock of Englishness by passing on degeneracy and the disease of blood lust. Dracula, as a monster/master parasite, feeds upon English wealth and health” (95). As Halberstam explains, 19th-century English society could enforce racial, sexual, economic, and religious norms through the Gothic novel by creating monsters out of differences. Count Dracula was inspired by stereotypes and collective fear of Jewish people; through him, Jewishness was enforced as inferior to Englishness (93–97). As Cohen would put it, Jews have always been part of “monstrous history” (8), which is the practice of projecting a monstrous image on the other to the point it becomes an accepted view. The Gothic novel monster is also defined by its invasion of English land; it no longer inhabits the outside; instead, it is present in English homes. When immigration to England grew, English worries about miscegenation became present in the Gothic genre in the form of monsters (Halberstam 79). These aspects of the monster are also found in Lovecraft’s work, as shown below.

Scholars like Jed Mayer propose that Lovecraft’s racism is a reaction against anthropocentrism (119). However, this article argues that in “The Horror at Red Hook”,<sup>1</sup> his racist beliefs are transparent statements, and so they be neither avoided nor excused. When discussing Jewishness and 19th-century psychology, Halberstam clarifies that any pseudo-scientific justification for prejudice “obscures the political agenda of racism by masquerading as objective description and by essentializing Jewishness in relation to particular kinds of bodies, behaviors, and sexualities” (97). Echoing Halberstam’s statement, this article compares Lovecraft’s “The Horror at Red Hook” and Victor LaValle’s *The Ballad of Black Tom* in their depictions of the monster

<sup>1</sup> This article uses the version of “The Horror At Red Hook” in *The Classic Horror Stories* (2013), edited by Roger Luckhurst, pp. 3–23.

and the process that turns the other into a monster. Both stories share a similar plot, but from the points of view of distinct characters. Monsters “ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression” (Cohen 20); therefore, this article aims to shed light on what Lovecraft’s monster means and how its meaning changes once it is reincarnated in LaValle’s rewriting of *Red Hook*.

“The Horror at Red Hook” (1927) narrates the story of New York police officer Thomas Malone, who is investigating Robert Suydam – a wealthy old man, leader of a group of immigrant criminals he has gathered in Red Hook. Once Malone discovers that Suydam is planning to summon an elder god with help from his criminal group, horror arises. When Malone confronts Suydam at the end of the story, the building they were in collapses, leaving Malone physically and mentally strained but killing Suydam and ending the summoning. *The Ballad of Black Tom* (2016) follows the eponymous Black Tom, an African-American man and one of the people recruited by Suydam to assist him in the summoning of the Sleeping King. Previously an unseen character, Black Tom kills Suydam and takes control of the ritual.

Before discussing the works analysed in this article, it is important to delineate – although not define – the Weird. There is no concession on whether the Weird is a genre or an approach to fiction (where any genre can have Weird elements), but there is agreement on its characteristics: it is concerned with the liminal and the undefinable, it is transformative, and it rejects literary conventions in favor of achieving a bewildering and strong emotional reaction – such as fear – that goes beyond the ontological security of the human (Luckhurst, Introduction xiv–xvi). The Weird “acknowledges failure as sign and symbol of our limitations” in a literary space where the expressions of “dissatisfaction with, and uncertainty about, reality” become an exploration of the incomprehensible or hard to understand (VanderMeer and VanderMeer). This article will use Weird as an approach to horror fiction where monstrous transformations are at the centre of fear.

## 2. The Horror at Red Hook

Lovecraft’s influence on expressions of popular culture is vast. There are annual events such as the *H. P. Lovecraft Film Festival* and the *NecronomiCon*, the latter of which takes place in his natal Providence, Rhode Island. Alan Moore has written various Lovecraft-inspired comic book series, *Providence* (2015) being the most recent. Video games *Call of Cthulhu: The Official Video Game* (2018) and *The Sinking City* (2019) also draw heavily from Lovecraft’s work. Although this shows that he has been widely accepted, there have also been examples of critical questioning, such as Nnedi Okorafor’s rejection of the 2017 World Fantasy Award because of her discomfort as a black writer at possessing an award modeled after Lovecraft, a demonstrable racist. Poole recognises that Lovecraft’s views on race informed his writing, and that it would thus be irresponsible to separate them (228).

When Lovecraft’s characters face the unknown, they face the racial other in monstrous form. Both “At the Mountains of Madness” (1936) and “The Call of Cthulhu” (1928) put their scientifically minded protagonists against a bigger-than-life force bent on erasing humanity; each protagonist is defeated by racially mingled monsters and left with a sense of impending doom. The racial component in Lovecraft’s cosmic horror of elder gods manifests in his fear of these cosmic forces

working in tandem with the other to overthrow the Anglo-Saxon centre (Poole 223). This sentiment surfaces in the monster of “The Horror at Red Hook”.

According to Frye, Lovecraft echoes in his writings the works of eugenicists Henry Goddard and Madison Grant, who claimed that the mixing of races would ruin the “superior” Aryan bloodline (238–53). In his 1905 treatise, *The Color Line: A Brief On Behalf of the Unborn*, William Benjamin Smith condemns the decision of the Democratic party to free enslaved African-American people, arguing that black people are inferior to white people, and a source of pollution to its racial purity (10). Based on similar arguments, the Immigration Restriction League was founded in 1894 to limit the number of immigrants entering the US, under the belief that the growing immigrant population would cause an increase in poverty, unemployment, and crime. These events mirror the ones that created the parasitic monster in the Gothic novel, and they have the same effect in “Red Hook”: a monster already lives among the society it threatens to destroy.

Unlike other Lovecraft stories, “Red Hook” does not take place in an isolated town or a place that would seem far away to a white American. It is set in Red Hook, New York, about 100 kilometres north of New York City along the Hudson River. Furthermore, while there are various mentions of the supernatural, these entities barely make an appearance in the tale. Yet Lovecraft creates a horror story in the mundane setting of Red Hook when he turns the metaphor of the unknown into plain text: the monster does not allude to the other, it is the other. Influenced by Margaret Murray’s *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) – an anthropologic genealogy of witch cults in Europe – “The Horror at Red Hook” centres on the ancient magic practices of the non-white American coming in contact with the white American, and the ensuing horror that comes with the union of such powers – this premise can be read as a response to fear of miscegenation. The tale was written during Lovecraft’s marriage to Sonia Greene (Joshi). He was appalled by the multicultural lifestyle that surrounded him in New York City. As Greene writes:

He became livid with rage at the foreign elements he would see in large number, especially at noon-time, in the streets of New York City, and I would try to calm his outbursts by saying: “You don’t have to love them; but hating them so outrageously cannot do any good”. It was then that he said: “It is more important to know what to hate than it is to know what to love”. (qtd. in Joshi)

The “purity” of the Anglo-Saxon bloodline and the “threat” that other races posed to it were an integral part of both Lovecraft’s work and life; the Weird was a tool that enabled him to encode the racial other as a monster and interact with miscegenation, where his reaction to the immigrants of New York is identical to how his characters behave upon discovering alien races, or that they are descendants of said races (Luckhurst, Introduction xxv–xxvii).

Luckhurst points out that border zones, where the unknown inhabits, are a common part of the Weird tale (*Weird* 1055–57). Cohen writes that the monster polices the Outside border, where the racial, sexual, religious, or politic norms of a social and cultural group are broken (15–16). In “Red Hook”, the monster inhabits the border zone of Red Hook, and it is represented by a racial difference that, because it cannot be homogenised into white America, erases norms.

Lovecraft describes Red Hook with negative connotations, giving monstrous features to different aspects of Red Hook’s people: religion becomes “spiritual putrescence”, language plurality “assails” the sky, groups of people become “hordes of

prowlers”, and their faces – signs of race and identity – are “sin-pitted” (6). Lovecraft’s immigrant population is not a community of individuals, but a hive-mind that attempts to contaminate white American society. The monster in *Red Hook* is a parasite, standing in for the fear of miscegenation and the corruption of race.

Suydam’s criminal associates are “the blackest and most vicious criminals of Red Hook’s devious lanes ... offenders in the matter of thievery, disorder, and the importation of illegal immigrants” (9). Malone’s objective is to “to compute their numbers, ascertain their sources and occupations, and find if possible a way to round them up and deliver them to the proper immigration authorities” (10). The problem the Red Hook criminals present is a “category crisis” (Cohen 6–7): there are too many of them, they participate in multiple illegal activities, their “sources and occupations” are unknown. In this manner, Lovecraft continues to blur the line between horror story and his actual racism through the process of othering (creating a monster). He describes immigrant criminals wearing American clothes as grotesque (10). The combination of something other and something American equating to nothing else but the grotesque is sign of Lovecraft’s fear of the parasitic monster invading and corrupting home.

The only characters of importance in “Red Hook” are Thomas Malone and Robert Suydam: hero and antagonist. Malone, a police officer, is meant to reflect the author’s thinking: he is an observer of the chaos caused by the immigrants living in Red Hook. He’s curious about the immigrants’ religious practices; when he becomes aware of the elder god, he – as Lovecraft’s protagonists do – loses his sanity, unsure as to when the eventual end of (white) humankind will arrive, but assured that it will happen (22–23).

In Lovecraft’s “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” (1927), the narrator discovers that he is a descendant of an Innsmouth resident, a town that has been breeding with the Deep Ones (a race of humanoid fishes) for decades; later, his body acquires the characteristics of the monsters (639–41). The parasitic and alien Deep Ones stand for the racial other, while the degradation of the Innsmouth townspeople and the narrator stands for miscegenation. Similarly, Robert Suydam is an expression of miscegenation where the source of corruption is a direct – if still exaggerated and fantastical – representation of the racial other in the form of Red Hook’s people. Malone expresses the supposed dangers of allowing the other to mingle with white “civilised” society:

He would often regard it as merciful that most persons of high intelligence jeer at the inmost mysteries; for, he argued, if superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the very integrity of the universe.  
(5)

Cohen argues that the monster is a double narrative: a story of how the monster came to be and a cautionary tale on how to avoid becoming the monster by following the established rules of society (13–14). Suydam embodies this double narrative. When his knowledge of the “inmost mysteries” of “lowly cults” increases, he undergoes a monstrous transformation. The “superior mind” (the white) establishing a relationship with “lowly cults” (the other) serves as a warning on the dangers of miscegenation.

Red Hook’s inhabitants act as a single force, which aligns them with Cohen’s interpretation of the monster as a “category crisis” (6–7). Lovecraft mentions the “Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements” of Red Hook, but still relegates them to

a single unit when he describes its people as a “hopeless tangle and enigma” and a “maze of hybrid squalor” (6). All differences that white society cannot homogenise are merged into one uncategorisable monster. Lovecraft translates the racial and cultural differences he finds in Red Hook into the fear of a breakdown in white society through the intervention of an outside other. The fact that Red Hook houses difference in every corner only adds to the chaos of trying to classify it.

In this regard, Lovecraft’s Red Hook acts like a monster from another of his tales. In “The Call of Cthulhu”, he describes the eponymous creature as “of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws ... and long, narrow wings behind” (134). The category crisis here arises from the varied number Cthulhu’s animal characteristics, unrelated to one another and fused into a single body. In “The Horror at Red Hook”, Lovecraft opts for exaggerating what is already different and heterogeneous to him.

A – perhaps unconscious – consequence of the way Lovecraft portrays Red Hook is its lack of depth. Suydam is the one who moves the plot forward by leading his criminal group, while Red Hook’s people have the only characteristic of being the monster bent on disrupting white society. In this, both “Red Hook” and *Dracula* are similar, in that their monsters lack voices of their own, while their actions are told through the points of view of other, non-monstrous, white characters (Halberstam 90–91). Lovecraft writes with what Rieder calls the colonial gaze: the tendency of white authors to write the other as technologically impaired relative to a white counterpart, and thus inferior to them. The white reader marvels along with the characters at the customs of the other, although never reframing it outside of being “inferior” (7–9). While Rieder uses the colonial gaze to explain the other in early science-fiction literature – hence the emphasis on technology as an indicator of status – this same tendency is visible in the relationship between Suydam and Red Hook. Suydam is the white “superior mind” who commands the “lowly cults” of Red Hook and takes away the voice of its people.

Lovecraft’s monster as a parasite is further indicated by the line: “Policemen despair of order or reform, and seek rather to erect barriers protecting the outside world from the contagion”, where the other is referred to as a sickness that needs to be contained to avoid further contamination outside of Red Hook (6). He uses physical elements of the other to create differences between the self and the other, but these aspects also come from nationality and the foreignness of Red Hook. As Florack argues, stereotypes can be used in fiction to form characters; whether these stereotypes are portrayed with good intention or not depends on the cultural and historical context of the author (494). Florack also mentions how these national stereotypes ossify when certain pieces of information regarding a nation’s people become accepted by the self’s group regardless of their accuracy (482–92).

One example of this in Lovecraft’s fiction is “The Picture in the House” (1921), in which, as Klinger notes in *The New Annotated H. P. Lovecraft*, Lovecraft uses nonfactual information about a Congo tribe to inform the reader of the cannibalistic horror that unfolds in the tale (34). Similarly, Lovecraft’s Red Hook is informed by the beliefs that immigrants bring poverty, crime, and unemployment, as well as by Lovecraft’s own biased interest in the ancient mysticism of the other (Poole 221). Lovecraft’s racist discourse informs Red Hook as a monster; therefore, Red Hook is described only through exaggerated physical difference and other aspects of nationality, such as language and religion.

While influential, Lovecraft's Weird tales have a deep connection to his racist views, making it impossible to separate them. When interviewed by Weinstock, author China Miéville posits that, in order to approach Lovecraft, one cannot simply acknowledge his racism or excuse it; rather, it must be confronted head on to "metabolize" it ("Afterword" 241–42). This means that, as with biological metabolism, new approaches to the Weird must ingest Lovecraft as a whole, while seeking to confront and eliminate the most distasteful elements of his fiction. Often, Lovecraft's racism is excused as a natural characteristic "of its time", but this posture only obscures racism as if it were an archaic anomaly that no longer exists (Miéville, Introduction). The Weird should not write along with Lovecraft, but counter to him. The following chapter shows how LaValle's rewriting of "Red Hook" counters the racism of Lovecraft's monster.

### 3. The Ballad of Black Tom

Victor LaValle's *The Ballad of Black Tom* is written as a direct answer to Lovecraft's "Red Hook". In a similar way to how Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* (1969) focuses the plot of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–1611) on Caliban, *The Ballad of Black Tom* tells Lovecraft's Weird tale from the point of view of a previously unseen character. In LaValle's version, Thomas Tester – an African-American "hustler" and failed street musician from New York – narrates how he meets Robert Suydam and joins his criminal group. LaValle's work is a commentary on Lovecraft's views on race and how those relate to African-American people of both Lovecraft's time and now – LaValle being a 21st-century African-American author from New York himself. Unlike Césaire's rewriting of Shakespeare, which reinterprets the functions of the characters – if Caliban is now the oppressed hero, then Prospero must fulfil the role of villainous oppressor (Vaughan 302) – LaValle does not negate Lovecraft's portrayal of Red Hook and its people as monstrous. What LaValle seeks to do instead is to explain how Red Hook's immigrant and African-American populations became a monster.

While Lovecraft's monster appears fully formed in "Red Hook", LaValle shows Thomas Tester's transformation into the monster Black Tom. The actions and behaviours of Thomas Tester/Black Tom act in opposition to Lovecraft's monster: where Lovecraft's monster acts as an extension of a white character (Suydam) and the only characteristics of it Lovecraft offers are descriptions to accentuate difference and horror, LaValle's monster starts as a human character that reaches monster status when the white centre shuns him and makes him the marginal other. When we see the monster arise, Thomas Tester/Black Tom becomes a victim of horror instead of being the sole perpetrator of it.

Cohen argues that the cyclic nature of the monster allows it to convey a deeper understanding of how people perceive the world in each new iteration of itself (20). Halberstam's reading of Gothic novels asserts that the separation of monstrosity from what it makes monstrous (sexual, racial, religious, economic, national difference) might lead to a discourse that opposes the norms the monsters were meant to enforce (112). LaValle does not separate the monstrous from racism; he focuses the plot on the people made monolithic by Lovecraft in order to dissect the systems that make the other monstrous. In this manner, when Lovecraft's "Red Hook" monster returns in the form of LaValle's monster, it brings with it a wider understanding of racism. However, Lovecraft's Weird tale is separated from racism as the source of horror.

When questioned about Lovecraft in an interview with Maurice Broaddus, LaValle uses a metaphor where Lovecraft stands for a relative who, despite faults, he still loves (122). When LaValle confronts “The Horror at Red Hook”, he understands that the separation of the Weird tale from its racism is a key process to counter its prejudices instead of obscuring them or erasing them completely. The relative loved in childhood (Lovecraft’s Weird tale) is still loved, but its racism is made explicit and condemned.

At the beginning of *The Ballad of Black Tom*, Thomas Tester’s father urges him to get a job at the same construction company at which he works. Thomas refuses due to the poor health in which years of construction work has left his father. Thomas’s mother has died because of her extremely demanding job as a maid. Rather than accepting the jobs that white society offers him, Tester prefers to live as a “hustler”, as he has had little to no success in his musical career (LaValle 10–11). Unlike Lovecraft’s monster, LaValle’s Thomas Tester/Black Tom is introduced as a character with a personal life and intrinsic motivations. From here on, Thomas’s interactions with white society are about his attempts to survive it. When leaving his home in Harlem to do his “hustle” in Queens, he restrains himself from behaving in his usual manner:

The open arms of the natural world worried him as much as the white people, both so alien to him. When he passed whites on the street, he kept his gaze down and his shoulders soft. Men from Harlem were known for their strut, a lion’s stride, but out here he hid it away. (LaValle 13)

When interrogated by Malone and another police officer, Tester’s response is to acquiesce to white society’s assumptions about him to protect himself: “He decided to play a role that always worked on whites. The Clueless Negro. ‘I cain’t says, suh,’ Tommy began. ‘I’s just a simple geetar man’” (LaValle 25). The way Tester recoils when in contact with white society mirrors Fanon’s assertion that “willy-nilly, the Negro has to wear the livery that the white man has sewed for him” (22).

Yet Tester’s view of the other is not based solely on his perceptions of white Americans. He takes his father to the Victoria Society, a social club for Caribbean immigrants, for a night of excess; he assumes the place is an opium den with women performing erotic dances, but he feels guilty and disappointed when he discovers the place “might as well be a British tearoom” (LaValle 29), which contradicts his image of Caribbean immigrants. As Cohen would put it, Tester had already changed one aspect of Caribbean people – their nationality – into another: crime and eroticism (10). Tester cannot avoid othering or being othered himself because he lives in a system obsessed with one group being superior over the rest. However, he is willing to reverse his views on the other.

Suydam, still the “superior mind” with an interest in “lowly cults”, offers to pay Tester a large sum of money if he plays guitar at a party in his house, which he accepts. Once in Suydam’s mansion, Tester starts to play when Suydam begins to rehearse a speech that he plans to deliver to his band of criminal immigrants from various parts of New York. Words of Suydam’s speech are lifted from “Red Hook”: “Your people,” Robert Suydam began. “Your people are forced to live in mazes of hybrid squalor. It is all sound and filth and spiritual putrescence” (LaValle 47). By repositioning the words from Lovecraft’s omnipresent narration to the villainous speech of Suydam, LaValle creates a polyphony – a contrast of the original meaning of the words and the one LaValle gives them – that puts Lovecraft into question, displaying his racism under critique (Bakhtin 31; Hutcheon 91–92).



Suydam narrates how, in pursuit of his wealth, his family gathered evidence of his mental inferiority to convince the police to launch an investigation of him. LaValle maintains Suydam's role of white man turned monster by interacting with the other, but reframes him as a victim: his family uses his interest in mysticism to convince the police he is "feeble minded" – a reference to Lovecraft's support of eugenics and the forged results of eugenic research, such as Henry Goddard's manipulation of photos, where he made his subjects appear as "mental and social defectives" (Black). LaValle demonstrates the negative effects of othering: Tester hides his confident self when othered by police, he feels guilt when he others Caribbean people, and Suydam's othering exiles him from white society.

After Suydam confesses to his plan to wake the Sleeping King, Tester escapes Suydam's mansion only to find out that his connection to Suydam has made him part of the investigation, and that a police officer has killed his father. The murder of Tester's father, innocent and defenseless, reflects the ways American police officers treat African-Americans, where police killings of black people. Martinot asserts that the United States has seen numerous cases where police agents create situations where the "only" course of action is to shoot and kill innocent people of colour, often resorting to the excuse of feeling threatened by harmless objects that looked like firearms (58–59); in this case, Tester's father's guitar is the gun-like object, and serves as a pretext that replaces race as a reason to treat black people as monsters. It can be argued that black people are part of Cohen's concept of "monstrous history" as well.

Consumed by grief after his father's murder, Tester joins Suydam's group, thus beginning his transformation into a monster. As Suydam addresses his group with the same speech, Tester reconsiders his purpose: "Destroy it all, then hand what was left over to Suydam and these gathered goons? What would they do different? Mankind didn't make messes; mankind was the mess" (LaValle 76). LaValle's monster differs from Lovecraft's in that it does not threaten to shift the *status quo* of white society over to the other, but instead seeks to eliminate the systems that perpetuate the existence of monsters; in other words, eliminate racism. To Suydam's shock, Tester enters the Outside realm where the Sleeping King lives, completing his transformation.

The rest of the tale follows Malone's investigation after discovering that Suydam and Tester – now Black Tom – take ownership of three buildings in Parker Place. Inside one of the buildings, Suydam and Black Tom begin their ritual to wake the Sleeping King while Malone observes; however, Black Tom kills Suydam and takes command of the ritual. Black Tom explains to Malone that he does not seek to obtain power, but to cause destruction, and the following exchange occurs: "'You're a monster, then,' Malone said. 'I was made one'" (LaValle 136). Thomas Tester's transformation into Black Tom is the result of surrendering to white assumptions about him. This sentiment is echoed at the end of the story: Black Tom returns to the Victoria Society to talk with Buckeye, a Caribbean friend of his, and tells him that "nobody here ever called [him] a monster, so why'd [he] go running somewhere else, to be treated like a dog?" (LaValle 147).

As the ritual to wake the Sleeping King continues, Black Tom cuts Malone's eyelids and tells him that he won't be able to "choose blindness when it suits [him]" (LaValle 133). This is symbolic of Malone's role in "Red Hook". Lovecraft's Malone is an observer as described by Edward Said: like an Orientalist observer, Malone chooses to be fascinated by the other's mysticism, but repulsed by everything else about the other (98–99). When Black Tom cuts his eyelids, he robs him of his ability to choose what pleases or interests him about the other. Houellebecq describes Lovecraft's

characters as ones that only perceive (62). Since Lovecraft's characters perceive race in the same manner he does (Luckhurst, Introduction xxvi), by attacking Malone's eyes, LaValle reinforces his critique of Lovecraft's worldview.

The building collapses with the ritual inconclusive. Malone is rescued, but Black Tom is nowhere to be found. Unable to recover his humanity, Black Tom informs Buckeye of the eventual arrival of the Sleeping King, then vanishes. When Malone shares his account of the events, no one believes him. This may represent the triumph of white culture over otherness: without eyelids, Malone cannot choose to ignore the other, but remaining white people persist in observing and imposing their own white values.

## 4. Conclusion

Cohen states that the monster always returns with a major understanding of human condition; each iteration of a monster is the same theme as seen through the lenses of current social context (20). LaValle's reincarnation of the "Red Hook" monster comes back with Miéville's stand on Lovecraft: Black Tom is not separated from the racism that originates him, nor is this racism excused and never mentioned again. Instead, the racism inscribed in Black Tom is confronted and questioned. In Miéville's terms, LaValle metabolises – appropriates, then faces and erases – the racism within Lovecraft.

While Houellebecq acknowledges that Lovecraft's hatred, even if tragic, is the source of his narrative's horror (115) and Poole distinguishes between Lovecraft and his fiction to warn others about the implications of using him as a paragon for modern schools of philosophy (228), LaValle attains Miéville's metabolisation. Halberstam writes that "monsters have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, [monsters] make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual" (22). When Black Tom affirms that "Mankind didn't make messes; mankind was the mess" (76), he becomes an expression of the non-human that sees the human as intolerant and prejudicial. He favors the elimination of systems that propagate monsters (othering) instead of establishing a new *status quo* that fosters the proliferation of monsters. Although LaValle casts Black Tom as the monster, the resulting invention of the human is a negative one where monsters (othering) are a consequence of the human condition, not an Outside invader. The monster might threaten to destroy society, but those who made it a monster were the ones who gave it its mission.

Monsters always return, bringing with them a further understanding of the culture that produced them (Cohen 4–6). Black Tom, a reincarnation of "Red Hook's" monster, brings a deeper knowledge of the one-sided process of othering, taking as a central argument racial stereotypes. Black Tom works as a symbol of rejection of a white system of values that has systematically diminished and demonised other cultures in reality as well as fiction.

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*Biography:* Josué Morales Domínguez is an English Translation graduate from UAEMex (State of Mexico Autonomous University). He resides near Toluca, where he teaches English as a second language and translates short stories. He enjoys reading comic books and about comic books.

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