The Case for Creepypasta:

Defining the Genre and Finding the Horror

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved March 2022 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2022

ABSTRACT

Online communities have created such an outpouring of new media that academia has not had the time to catch up. Creepypasta is a genre of online horror short story that began in the early 2000's on the forums 4chan and Something Awful. In the twenty-two years since its inception, the academic discourse around it has sprouted but not flourished. Creepypasta as a genre is perhaps one of the newest and least understood offshoots of horror and the gothic. Thus far there have been no full-bodied attempts at defining the genre or looking at the works as a whole, instead there is only focus on the parts. This thesis will be attempting to define the genre and will undertake this by first analyzing the components that define the genre, its origins, claims to authenticity, and publishing routes, as well as the folkloric connections which have been the focus of the majority of the literature thus far. This will move into an analysis of a single example of the form, Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station, to demonstrate the application of the definition of the genre, but also to show the wide breadth of potential of this genre in being analyzed academically.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Online communities have created such an outpouring of new media that academia has not had the time to catch up. Creepypasta is a genre of online horror short story that began in the early 2000's on the forums 4chan and Something Awful. In the twenty-two years since its inception, the academic discourse around it has sprouted but not flourished. Creepypasta as a genre is perhaps one of the newest and least understood offshoots of horror and the gothic. Thus far there have been no full-bodied attempts at defining the genre or looking at the works as a whole, instead there is only focus on the parts. In this thesis I will be attempting to define the genre and will undertake this by first analyzing the components that define the genre, its origins, claims to authenticity, and publishing routes, as well as the folkloric connections which have been the focus of the majority of the literature thus far. Then I will move into an analysis of a single example of the form, *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, to demonstrate the application of the definition of the genre, but also to show the wide breadth of potential of this genre in being analyzed academically.

To begin with, the academic discussion currently existing surrounding Creepypasta is somewhat lacking. Not only in number of contributions, there being a very short list of articles and academic works about the genre, but also in the scope of them. Discussions about the emergent genre of Creepypasta has been stunted by a narrowed focus on a singular example of the genre. Slenderman is the story plucked out of the sea of others and analyzed most, primarily by folklorists. This is extensive, with the book *Slender Man is Coming* edited by Trevor Blank and Lynne McNeill epitomizing

this. While not the only academic work written about Creepypasta, it is certainly one of the biggest academic artifacts currently existing about Creepypasta. Interest in Slenderman was generated by a sensationalized teen stabbing in Wisconsin in 2014. Many of the contributions to Blank and McNeill's volume begin with that stabbing, using it as a jumping off point for their chapter.

The two girls, in an attempt to summon and become "proxies" of the internet legend Slenderman stabbed a friend with intent to sacrifice her. The victim survived the attack, thankfully, and the two perpetrators' trials signaled a moral panic regarding Creepypasta, which echoes into the articles themselves. For example, in chapter 2, Andrew Peck gives a detailed account of the crime, and hints towards the panic by saying that "of all the gruesome details of the Wisconsin stabbing, the involvement of Slender Man resonated most in the subsequent news coverage" (51). The moral panic is discussed more in length in chapter 4 by Jeffrey Tolbert, who compares it to the same kinds of panics that cropped up around Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds*, and other media presented as fact.

It's shocking how unable to move past the crime the authors of the various chapters are, despite demonstrating a sometimes deep understanding of Creepypasta. Yet the authors in this collection seem intent on justifying the study of Creepypasta through this real-life event. Scholars of more canonical literary forms typically don't demonstrate this pervasive need to justify why they are embarking upon the analysis. This continuing to return to the beginning could simply be looping back on itself as so many starting points do, like laps on a racetrack; but it appears to be more of a reason offered as to why one should care about the topic. In chapter 7 of *Slender Man is Coming,* Elizabeth Tucker

prefaces her chapter by explicitly saying that the "stabbing has proliferated in print and digital journalism and in folklore publications" (141). It's clear that part of what drove people to writing about this genre was the new coverage of the crime, and so the inevitable starting point for all the writing is the introduction to the genre. Almost as a way to justify why anyone would be academically interested in this genre.

Within the academic study of horror, which stems from the gothic in many ways and departs from it in others, there is a great amount of anxiety. Steffen Hantke wrote the article "Academic Film Criticism, the Rhetoric of Crisis, and the Current State of American Horror Cinema: Thoughts on Canonicity and Academic Anxiety" about these exact fears. While the article is focused on the film studies aspect of horror analysis, the article written in 2007 really anticipates some of the same problems that exist in the current literary analysis, stating that "academic criticism about horror film has always operated under duress, facing the challenge of legitimizing its subject" (Hantke 195). While the article deals with the larger anxiety over the state of the genre, it also reflects this anxiety particularly about the validity of the field within academia. Extending out of this one article, it is possible to see the continued justifications in the academic articles written specifically about Creepypasta.

These anxieties reverberate through all the introductions that justify the study of Creepypastas by tethering them to the real world, and specifically to real-world violence. But the genre of horror, and Creepypasta specifically, is not made more important because of just these real-world reverberations. Hantke offers the suggestion he found from Carol Clover's argument that the popularity of the genre is enough to warrant its study. Creepypasta then must be very worthy of study, since the popularity of it in online

spaces is massive. For example, one YouTube channel dedicated to the readings of Creepypasta has over 1.6 million subscribers. So, for the mere fact that this genre is popular, it is worthy of study. This is confirmed in other sources, who offer this as well, saying that "horror is a part of our world" (Kawin 3).

In my attempt to move beyond the anxieties that plague this field of thought, I will begin with an analysis of what the definition of Creepypasta as a genre could entail. Because this is an attempt to define a genre, there will need to be inclusion of a variety of stories throughout what can be seen as an emergent online genre of Creepypasta. This comes from my extensive experience with the genre, reaching back over a decade of consumption and interaction. A definition of the genre has been lacking in the field, and so this will be an attempt to pull apart the different strands of these stories, including parts of the function of different aspects of the genre. The goal of this analysis is to define the genre and conventions within. This involves walking through aspects of form, publishing, the history of the genre, and deeper ties to other areas of study, such as folklore. From there, using a longer form story, *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, we will demonstrate both the application of the definition, and an example of the kind of literary analysis that can come out of the genre of Creepypasta. This analysis will focus on the function of horror, reaching back into the roots of the gothic, and working to understand how the horror of Creepypasta is constructed.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING THE GENRE

A good place to begin in building a definition of Creepypasta's as a genre is to look at the basic origin, including the name. For Creepypasta, the name itself gives a large hint to the nature of the genre. Derived from the computer commands copy and paste, the internet slang Copypasta is born. These are typically in-forum jokes, snippets of text that one copies and pastes into a variety of contexts. Creepypasta comes from that lineage of online memetic sharing, specifically on forums. Forum culture is part of what made the genre as "in 2007, the term Creepypasta began to appear across 4chan's boards, denoting horror and gothic content with similarly viral potentials" (Balanzategui 188). From the origins of the term in 4chan's forum boards, it spread to a variety of different platforms online, including the Something Awful forums which served for a long time as the birthplace to some of the most well-known Creepypasta, according to the fan made timeline on the Creepypasta Wiki[1]. Now however, you can find Creepypasta in most forums as well as an archive of some on their own website creepypasta.com. Two of the biggest platforms to find Creepypasta are Reddit and YouTube.

One could argue that in tracing the history of Creepypasta, a significant start is the story of cave diver Ted. This is confirmed again by the timeline fans put together of Creepypasta on the Wiki, which traces the story of Ted the Cave Diver alongside the pop-cultural milestones that build to famous Creepypasta. Published on an Angelfire blog in 2001, the story functions as a log of one man's exploration of a cave. The story was

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[1] Wiki here refers to the practice of fans of media, producing sites akin to Wikipedia. These can include pages for characters, plot points, and all manner of information that in-depth fans would pool together. They are collaborative spaces, crowdsourced from the people consuming the media.

written by a real cave diver about a fictionalized account of a single expedition. With the building horror of the story and the claims to authenticity, the creative story was spread far across the internet. Posts like this scatter the internet, with people sharing the story and talking about it, from discussions of quality to origin, as "I don't even know for sure where it originally came from" (Pastey). The fictional Ted is exploring a cave in an undisclosed location. As he and his companion breach the cave's wall, they discover a narrow passageway which they work for days to widen till Ted can enter it. Once he enters, it becomes clear that Ted is not alone in the side of the cave he finds himself perilously traversing. The whole log ends with an ominous entry saying that Ted is returning to the cave, never to return to his website, despite his promise to "See all of you soon, with a lot of answers" (Ted). This connects with Creepypasta in a lot of ways, notably in how it got spread around online and the ways it was shared. The story, hosted on its own website, got linked in many forum posts, sent from friend to friend, and was passed around similarly to an urban legend. The story is boosted by Ted's inclusion of pictures and diagrams, alongside the prose. There was an air of authenticity, and this story demonstrates some of the early characteristics of Creepypasta.

Within the Cave Diver Ted story, we see some of the hallmarks of what Creepypasta will come to be in terms of both form and content. Each of these will be explored in the coming pages, as they are the different parts that define the genre. First, there is the root of the story, being published on a blog, epitomizing the online publishing aspect. Then there is the sharable nature of it, being spread and linked on different platforms from corner to corner of the internet. And then there is the style of content of the text, with the claims for authenticity and the slow-building horror of the unknown

creature. While not all Creepypasta use the same creature, the focus on creatures and monsters in the story is something to note that is prevalent in the majority of the stories in the genre. However, before we get to the flesh and terror of the monsters, we must first understand their roots and how a story like this gets published.

PUBLISHING

The publishing of Creepypasta is quite different from a lot of more traditional genres. To start, there is no Creepypasta without mainstream usage of the internet. Because Creepypasta is an online phenomenon, the way that it gets created and disseminated differs greatly from other media in the realm of horror and the gothic. There is little barrier to entry here, provided one has access to a computer and internet connection. But more importantly there is no publishing house that decides if it reaches audiences or not. Instead of a publishing head judging the quality of the content, it is instead a job outsourced to the community. These masses of people often come from the audience already using the platform that Creepypasta is posted on. The platforms chosen to host these stories are not incidental to their creation. They are chosen with purpose, often with the goal of interaction. It is no coincidence that the largest platforms that host this genre are forums, often with voting systems integrated into the platform. The two biggest are Reddit[2], the largest forum on the internet, and 4chan where the term Creepypasta originated. This encourages interaction and community and is one way in which the defining characteristic of Creepypasta is the genre's community. Creepypasta is judged by the community reading it, in a much more direct way than traditional

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[2] In talking about forums, it is helpful to know that these are often split into different smaller boards for more dedicated topics. For Reddit, these are referred to as subreddits

publishing allows. Forums often have a means for rating a post, for example on Reddit these are "upvotes" and "downvotes". The Creepypasta standalone site also incorporates a rating system, allowing the reader to sort the archives by highest voted as well. The ratings serve loosely as guides for quality, but also play into the community-building process. In order to rate stories, often people have to be subscribed to the forum or subforum, and oftentimes are writers of these stories in their own way. For example, user Grand_Theft_Motto who has the number 2 rated story of all time in the subreddit r/NoSleep also comments on other's posts, including in subreddits that are offshoots of the community NoSleep, like NoSleep OOC[3].

FORMS

For furthering the definition of what Creepypasta as a genre is, it is helpful to sort the stories broadly into categories. These largely come based on the form of the stories, though each has its own markings and more specific tropes within. But the largest types, as I put forth, are such: Ritual, Diary/Log, Forum/Message, and Childhood/Memory, and one sub-form of the final group being twisted nostalgia. These forms make up the bulk of the writing in the Creepypasta genre and are largely based on how the story presents itself rather than the content within. That is why I will primarily refer to them as forms, rather than sub-genres.

Beginning with the form of the Ritual, this often takes the form of lists of steps or rules to follow. These detail real steps that one can take to achieve a horrific end. They often weave the horror of the story into the details of the steps, either with what the step

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[3] OOC stands for "out of character", designating a space for authors to come and talk about their stories beyond the confines of the fiction. This can mean help with writing questions, a space to network, or simply a place to engage in the community without the pretense of the story.

asks of them, that "the doll will find you and try to prick you with the pin you gave it" or with admonishments of what NOT to do "don't look at the shadow in the mirror". A great example of this kind of story is "How to play hide and seek alone," which tells of a ritual to summon a spirit into a doll, who then chases you around the house. The story epitomizes the kind of way that these stories build horror, piece by piece in each step, often implying consequences of not following the rules to the letter. For example, in one of the many warnings throughout the story, the narrator admonishes "Please do not stop this ritual halfway. You must do it through to the end. This is a dangerous ritual, and I will not be responsible for what happens to you if you try" (One Man Hide and Seek).

This type of story is so large that it often inspires satire and mocking offshoots, exemplified by the story "Does anyone know a good plumber? I did one of those stupid rituals and now my shower is leaking. And there's a faceless guy in my kitchen". This story takes a more comedic tone, using a completely indifferent narrator who is intoxicated and more concerned with his material reality to offset the horror of a ritual gone bad and seemingly having summoned a creature to his home. He has gone onto the forum to ask for help with a leaky faucet and reveals both horror and mundane despair with his lamentations on his problems with his landlord and his cat, saying "I needed to reevaluate my life. Maybe I shouldn't drink as much. Maybe I should give Fish Sticks to a good home. Maybe I should find women with intellect and poise. Maybe I should move out of my shit neighborhood where KKK people roam around at 4am" (Narrativeofthelife). This kind of mocking of the form helps identify the conventions of the form as well as verifying that it is specific and popular enough to be able to successfully produce satire. The mark of parody solidifies the form, mocking the referred

to form and tropes within the form, giving shape to the form with its mocking. We will touch more on the satire later in another aspect.

Secondarily, there is the form of the diary or log. These are almost all in the first person and detail the author's experience through segmented snippets. Often broken into parts, these can be published all at once or more often in a serial form. These can often mimic official documentation or reports, for example the story "The Disappearance of Ashley Kansas". Written as a kind of police log, or journalistic timeline, it breaks down the increasingly odd things that happen in the town of Ashley, Kansas. It culminates in the skies above it breaking open and "everyone who died, or went missing, they're back. And they're looking for US" (The Disappearance of Ashely Kansas). Important to this form is the unfolding narrative of the story, marked by time markers around the text, lending authenticity to the report style form the story takes. The authenticity of these forms often lies with the fact that they look like official documents or written long before publication in a real-life context.

The diary or log often uses its segmented nature to build the horror of the story slowly, and to build a longer and more complicated plot. Some examples of these longer stories would be "Tales from a Gas Station" or "My Property isn't Normal". All of these are longer stories, with a larger building narrative. "Tales from a Gas Station" for example leads to an 8-hour audio reading of the first season, not counting the holiday specials and 5 books that have been traditionally published from this story originally created as a serial posted on the r/NoSleep subreddit. They represent the upper length of this form, but the diary or log can also be quite short. But often, for longer Creepypasta, this is the form they tend to be written in.

Next there is the form of forum posts or messaging conversation. Grounded in the context through which most stories are found in the genre, these take on the shape of a forum or multiple posts back and forth, either by users on anonymous text forums or of two people carrying a conversation through texts. What is important is a kind of back and forth between two or more characters. One example is in the style of "Annie96 is typing…" Written as IM messages sent back and forth between the two characters in the story, the form of it is quite clear upon quick glance. The horror is built in the dialogue between the two, with the ultimate horror being that a creature posing as one of the characters breaks into the house of Annie, with the story ending on her continual typing. Or perhaps the typing of the creature.

"Candle Cove" would be another example of this form. "Candle Cove" is another fairly well known Creepypasta and has a myriad of updates expanding the story from a simple tale of nostalgic forum posting revealing a disturbed childhood memory into a deeper web of horror. Though it pulls in content from the final form in tone, it predominantly uses the mimicking of a forum post to build its story through different characters' entries and replies. This is just one example of some blended aspects of the forms, but it is important to note that these categories are largely based on the form the story takes and have less to do with categorizing the content.

Finally, there is the form of the memory, or childhood recounting. Detached from as particular style or form as the others are, this form is often the most simplified way of telling the story at hand. As a recounting, it can fit into the shape of a forum post, but more often is presented as is, in a character sitting down in a single sitting to recount a memory. Most often this is a one-shot story, though sometimes this has a follow-up part

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revealing the horror has returned, after more updates, it slides more into the diary/log form, as the memory becomes the background for the present horror. Examples of this kind of story can include "Mr. Widemouth". The story is from the perspective of a now adult looking back at what he assumed was an imaginary friend. Through this perspective, Mr. Widemouth turns out to be a sinister figure, who urges the then child narrator to jump from a window or juggle knives, ultimately telling the narrator that he will lead him down a path into the woods at the edge of the property. The narrator moves away shortly after, but upon returning to the property finds that the path Mr. Widemouth had planned to take him led to a cemetery, where "many of the tombstones belonged to children".

One such sub-form that exists in this space is the nostalgic twisting story. Where a story like "Candle Cove" makes up a childhood entertainment property to twist into horror, this uses real nostalgia based on real child entertainment. These often take a show or video game that was popular with kids, and adds a macabre element, adding fiction levels to video games, corrupt cartridges, or lost episodes of TV shows. Examples include "Lavendertown", a story based on *Pokémon*, or "Squidward's Suicide" based on the animated show *SpongeBob*. In one example, "Suicidemouse.avi" the narrator described a Mickey Mouse cartoon from the 1930s that was apparently unreleased. The story tells of this short 3 minute loop of Mickey walking to banging piano sounds, but the narrator further says that a source had emailed him the longer 9 minute loop that ends with "distorted screaming lasted until 8 minutes and a few seconds in, and then it abruptly cuts to the Mickey Mouse face at the credits of the end of every video with what sounded like a broken music box playing in the background" (Suicidemouse.avi). This subcategory,

popularly known as lost episode but encompassing more than just lost or missing TV episodes, is not large enough to make the base of its own form, but because it relies on the nostalgia of the audience, it fits best under the umbrella of a childhood memory.

AUTHENTICITY

All of the categories listed above deal in some way with authenticity. Authenticity is at the heart of a lot of Creepypastas and is in fact one of the largest points through which one can identify them among seas of online horror short stories. For further example, the Creepypasta titled "630-296-7536", also called more simply "Boothworld" is one story dependent on its reality tie-in. The story is about a man who gets a call from what he assumes to be a contractor, and in trying to set up an appointment with a cryptically vague woman, she demands a name. When he tries to give his own, she rejects it, as she also rejects a fake name seemingly very aware that the name is false, "Sir, as your operator, I must point out that fictitious names, or the names of people that you don't know, cannot be used" (Boothworld). The narrator finally lands on the name of an ex-girlfriend of his, and when the scheduled date comes the appointment turns out to be her death. The narrator tries to set up another appointment for someone he hates and is told he can't because he has his own scheduled soon. The only way for him to get out of it is by referring one hundred people to the Boothworld services, thus he enters the frame to instruct the audience to call the number of this story, "I'm inviting you in. You can help me. Just call 630-296-7536" (Boothworld). At the time close to the story's publication one could call, get a cheerful female voice confirming that the number is Boothworld, and a representative would be sure to call back. I, alongside what I assume to be quite a few other readers, called the number, assuming it would go nowhere. But it

went somewhere, and it confirmed the context of the story and grounded it immediately into the real world. The authenticity of the story is made by the use of a real phone number to interact with in the real world, and this takes to the extreme the kind of reality that Creepypasta plays to. While certainly not all stories have a phone number to call, the majority of them call to real-world connections. This is just one example of how Creepypasta uses authenticity, or claims to it, as one of its defining characteristics.

The authenticity in the context of Creepypasta lies with a purported authenticity of the text. In the sense that these stories pretend, through form or statement, that they are real and genuine. Indeed, in Jessica Balanzategui's article "Creepypasta, 'Candle Cove', and the digital gothic" authenticity takes center stage for the discussion of "Candle Cove". Mentioned earlier, it was categorized as a forum post, since it does mimic the shape of an interaction between users remembering a specific show from their childhood. This is important, since the Creepypasta was originally published in a forum as well, since stories "deliberately embed such informal circuits of production, consumption, and dissemination into their generic form as a marker of folkloric authenticity" (Balanzategui 189). Balanzategui explores how the digital gothic emerges from Creepypasta, and how Creepypasta demonstrates "play with the boundaries between authenticity and artifice, reality and fiction, folk and mass culture, and the everyday and the sublime" (Balanzategui 191). Authenticity is a part of that, as is nostalgia and technology, since what "Candle Cove" is emulating is a sort of "uncanny nostalgia" about childhood but also a different technological age (Balanzategui 194). Outside of the context of the story, this kind of interaction online is a very common one, typical for any user who would be reading the Creepypasta. After all, the origin of Creepypasta is forum culture, and so the

readers of this were likely very familiar with it. Thus, the presentation, the frame of the story, is grounded in a reality that the audience is familiar with, a reality they have more than likely personally experienced.

In traditional publishing spheres, the question of authenticity would be more concerned with plagiarism and the stealing of ideas, as the "copy and paste" nature of the form is generally unacceptable practice in writing. Creepypastas, however, removed from these traditional modes, address these concerns differently. The sharable nature of online content can and does raise alarms of art theft quite often. However, with Creepypasta, the stories are built around a collective sharing that instead builds community, rather than separate it and introduce conflict. An example of this community-building aspect would be the YouTube Creepypasta community, a subset of the larger whole. This community, built around major names like Mr. Creepypasta, CreepsMcPasta, and CreepypastaJR, was centered on the readings of Creepypastas. These videos, often set to no more visual than a single still image, would be assumed to compete with each other. Each creator would have a huge catalog of their readings of Creepypastas, often the most popular in the community. But instead of conflict with the repetition of readings, a community cropped up on the YouTube platform around the different creators. They often collaborated, and drove themselves to better their craft, inserting audio effects for one or taking the still image and distorting it over the runtime of the video. One example of this collaborative nature is in the reading of "Warning", posted on the CreepypastaJR channel in 2012, but featuring three other members of the community: Mr. CreepyPasta, CreepsMcPasta and CreepyPastaRaven. This video is not alone in showing the collaboration between different creators but is just one entry into the community. Concerns about plagiarism in

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the creation of Creepypasta is not as important as the continued collaboration and community building aspect that the genre both thrives on and fosters. Plagiarism, whether in the publishing or recirculating of these stories, is not the main concern of authenticity with Creepypasta.

FOLKLORE

The authenticity of Creepypastas leads to a very interesting connection with folklore studies. This is in fact where a majority of the literature on Creepypasta comes from. Folklorists have had a keen interest in some of the functions of the form, though they tend to stick to Slenderman since it is the most visible story. Slenderman as a Creepypasta stands fairly alone in the genre with how people extensively interact with it in the real world. However, applying some of the ideas they present to other stories can help in breaking down the functions of the text. In terms of what is discussed through the various chapters of *Slender Man is Coming*, belief and practice are at the heart of the majority of the articles tying folklore studies to Creepypastas, and it is here we will focus. What is important is how the two concepts tie into the community aspect, as each is reworked to better understand Creepypasta.

One important term in folklore is ostension, and from the start, this is a concept talked about in many ways by the various authors of the chapters. This can be understood as actioning folklore, and the book constantly puts it in discussion to Creepypasta. In chapter 1, Tolbert cites Degh and Vazsonyi's definition of ostension in folkloric contexts meaning "showing the reality itself instead of using any kind of signification" (27). Furthermore, ostensive action is the "direct performance of a given action, or its representation through a related action" (27). This is why one can refer to ostension as

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actioning a story, taking it, and acting it into reality. In relation to Creepypasta it is helpful to carve out an understanding of what ostension is and looks like, since the form of Creepypasta harkens to a lot of folkloric trends and style without necessarily being folklore itself. So, to accommodate that, a few authors in their chapters put forward reorientations of the understanding of ostension in how it relates to Creepypasta.

Andrew Peck puts forward a repositioning of the term ostensive action in the context of what Creepypasta inspires, shifting action to ostensive practice in chapter 2. He makes the distinction that "if action refers to expressions of individual volition, then practice refers to the genres of behavior that come into being as the result of many actions" (54). This delineation, action in the singular versus practice in the plural context is important in tying back to the community aspects of the genre. The actions do not exist in a vacuum, and rather form a collective practice. Many people engage in enacting the stories, playing the folklore, or in Creepypasta's case the folkloresque. This is one way in which the authors of *Slender Man is Coming* rework existing folklore frameworks to understand some aspects of Creepypasta.

In this vein, Jeffrey Tolbert explores reverse ostension in chapter 1, which he states that "if ostension involves privileging of experience over representation… Slender Man's creators are effectively reversing this process by weaving together diverse strands of 'experience'... into a more or less coherent body of narratives" (27). In this, the folkloric is made of the actions, rather than the actions being made and enacted from the folkloric origin. With Slenderman this is very clear, since the stories place action as a means for building story. After the original story, it was reader engagement and practice that shaped what the story would become. It is important to note however that

Slenderman is fairly unique in its popularity. It inspired masses of action and play not typically seen on that scale. It is additionally one of the few Creepypasta to be popular enough to have video games made in order to act out the story in a much safer form. For the folklorists, this seems to be a major defining point of Creepypasta, when how it presents in smaller stories can differ. The more singular stories, or smaller stories don't have the same scale of play as Slenderman, but they rarely get none. Usually, fanart is something that most moderately successful stories can hope to achieve, but that might be the extent to "practicing" these stories. Further, the acting of the stories falls more in line with fandom than it does actual folkloric belief. Someone chanting bloody Mary 3 times in a dark room with a mirror is practicing folklore in a very different way to someone dressing as Slenderman or Laughing Jack for Halloween, or photoshopping a Creepypasta monster into an old photograph. The kinds of activities are well known to be interactions in fan culture and fandoms, as "creatively, fans publish written stories ('fan fiction'), sew costumes of their favorite characters' outfits ('cosplay'), design different types of games, and make visual art and videos, among other outlets" (Lamerichs 13). In terms of ostension, the orientation of the term into ostensive practice is perhaps better than the singular action, but further these practices have to be understood as an extension of the fandom practices already inherent to many online communities. These practices are certainly tied to community.

Beyond ostension in folklore, folklorists also discuss belief, and with things like Creepypasta this is important. When the Waukesha case sparked public awareness of the existence of the genre of Creepypasta, it also carried the fear of pervasiveness of belief. If these two girls believed in this story so much that they killed, what is stopping someone

else from believing? Especially because ostension seems to imply some belief, acting out parts of the legend lead one to assume the people acting it believe. This is not necessarily true, but of course the next question is do people believe in these stories, and why.

Mikel J. Koven in his chapter 5 "The Emperor's New Lore" discusses the results of a survey run to gather data from readers of Slenderman. Using this data, Koren discusses belief, finding that the majority of the readers of such a story expressed "overwhelming disbelief in the story" (Koven 116). People are on the whole aware of the fiction of the story, even younger readers, as Koven found 79% of his participants didn't believe in Slender Man as a real entity, but rather a fictional creature (116). Ultimately, Koven concludes that people engage in these narratives less because they believe in them, but rather that it is a way to safely indulge in fear (120). Though this survey did only poll readers of Slenderman, it is not unreasonable to apply those results to the genre wider since the people familiar with Slenderman likely participate and interact with other stories from the genre of Creepypasta.

Despite there being little real belief in Creepypasta outside of the bounds of fiction, the play at belief is still very real in the context of the genre. In chapter 3 Andrea Kitta discusses the belief of Creepypasta and how it ties to exploring a common experience. Kitta says that though readers "never admitted any real experience… feels real to their audience" (81). So, though the belief isn't in the story, it is in a "core spiritual experience… turned into a narrative. It is a convenient way to discuss an untellable experience" (80). This connects to the survey by Koven, showing the disbelief but further tapping it into a more shared experience that may lead to the interest in stories like these. These experiences she notes are often unacknowledged, and varied from the

feeling of being watched, in real life or online, or that it might tap into a fear of random violence (87). In any case, belief isn't necessarily made by these experiences, rather the story thrives because people play with the idea of the story tapping into these experiences, in a community setting that they might not have had the ability to access in terms of discussing these experiences. For Creepypasta and belief, it is clear that people don't traditionally believe, but instead play at belief, allowing themselves the spaces to tie it to their own experiences but not necessarily taking the story as fact.

Tolbert in chapter 4 discusses the traditions of belief that might predate Slender Man, thus leading to his interest, and these center back on the purported realness. He says that "by forging connections to real-world belief traditions and thereby attributing the possibility of belief… adds another dimension of 'realness'" (Tolbert 93). This realness, coupled with the shared experience encompasses the important aspects of Creepypasta and belief. While people may not believe in Creepypasta as a reality, Creepypasta functions in the realm of belief. It asks people to consider its reality, and to tie it to personal experiences of fear. With Creepypasta, it is of note that lack of belief does not affect the consumption, production, or shareability of a piece of fiction. All of this is specifically about Slender Man, the largest and most well-known Creepypasta, and even the results here demonstrate that peoples' lack of belief definitely has not stalled the spread of this monster.

Throughout all the ties to folklore, a continual thread is the community. It is clear that the authors are trying to explain how ostension works in regard to Creepypasta, and orient the terms to highlight the communal aspect, either through reverse ostension or ostensive practice. And in belief, while the individual may not believe in the reality of the

story presented, they engage partially for a way to explore a shared experience, or that it ties to real world experience in order to add an air of realness with which one can play. But further, there is another connection one can make that will solidify the understanding of the folkloresque and community, a certain author whose name appears in multiple of the chapters presented: Lovecraft.

While multiple of the essays talk about folklore and Creepypasta, there is a recurring reference to Lovecraft. In multiple of the chapters discussing folklore and Creepypasta, Lovecraft is mentioned. This includes chapter 2 "The Cowl of Cthulhu: Ostensive Practice in the Digital Age" by Andrew Peck and chapter 6 "Slender Man, H.P. Lovecraft, and the Dynamics of Horror Cultures" by Timothy H. Evans. Recalled in the two of the chapters in the book, the connection between modern Creepypasta and Lovecraft is evident in how they are interacted with. In the first of these chapters, talked about a touch earlier with the conversation on ostension, Peck emphasizes the community aspect of ostension for the "nascent Lovecraftian horror" (53). While the chapter does not discuss in depth the connections between Lovecraft and Creepypasta, it hints towards a community aspect shared between the two. This is part of how the chapter discusses this notion, that it is "not just about sharing; it is about taking part in a culture of sharing… discussion, comet, critique, recirculation, one-upmanship, homage and play, and is enabled by the affordances of networked communication" (Peck 57). This community aspect is a huge portion of how Creepypasta works in Lovecraftian ways. This will be furthered greatly in chapter 6.

Timothy H. Evans perhaps makes the most important folkloric connection between Lovecraft and Creepypasta as he discusses horror communities. For Evans, he

defines horror culture as being comprised of "not only fans of the horror genre but its creators, producers, scholars, and even, more peripherally, those who don't consider themselves fans but who have casual acquaintance with the genre" (129). He also explicitly includes not only the serious aspects of horror communities, like stories, movies, and other creative outlets, but also "parody and comedy that draws on horror narratives" (Evans 129). Of interesting note is the appearance of "Crappypasta", a sort of subgenre of stories deemed lesser, either intentionally or not. We saw this early in discussing the forms of Creepypasta, and the parody that comes from that, specifically the ritual form. But Crappypasta can mimic any number of Creepypasta styles. For example, the Crappypasta stemming from the contemporary urban folkloric story of The Hook is parodied in one of the most iconic offshoots. Simplifying the short campfire story, and using improper grammar seemingly intentionally, the Crappypasta version ends with "Hand hook car door man" (Trevor Blank and Lynne McNeill page 13). This kind of parody is tied to the community aspect of horror communities. It belies a shared understanding of the form, and the nuances of it. Because the Crappypasta is designed to be comedy, parody, mocking of the worst traits of this horror sub-genre. This works in the realm of horror communities additionally because it works in the realm of parody and comedy that was explicitly included in the definition of horror cultures.

Further, this gets tied to Lovecraft, since his writings inspired a very active and lively interaction, as "Lovecraft's mythos was developed through what amounted to a game, a kind of playful interaction with his writer friends" (Evans 133). This connects to Creepypasta, because these stories are built by multiple people, adding to the narrative, and changing it with their additions. This kind of collaborative effort was made possible

"because Lovecraft was willing to share his mythology, the Cthulhu Mythos has remained a living work, with contemporary authors… continuing to write and publish new Mythos stories" (Mullis 514). Thus, his mythos is able to be expanded and added to, into modernity and well past H.P. Lovecraft's lifespan. Comparing this to how the Lovecraftian mythos was molded, with contributions from fans and friends of Lovecraft, the similarities are striking. Creepypasta can be built by communities, as described with reverse ostension. The actions build the stories, and so the stories thrive and grow so long as there are those willing to build them.

Extending back to the idea of ostension, this framing of it as "play" perhaps makes the most sense to understand the majority of those actions. People dress as Creepypasta monsters to play with the story, and not necessarily to practice the legend, but that kind of play can be understood as participating in fan culture. Beyond that there are also the extensive fan-made projects that work not only to further the original story, but oftentimes serve as an extension of the creators' playful interest in it. These can include art, comics, and videos. For example, the Creepypasta figure of Jeff the Killer has multiple online webcomics published on the platform Webtoons, one titled "Jeff Woods the Killer" and one being "Jeff's Disorders". Both are published by creators that did not write the original story, and thus are expanding the premise of the story, giving Jeff the Killer romantic interests or tragic backstories to explain or deepen his character.

Throughout the discussion of folklore, whether talking about ostension or belief, or working through the variety of authorial perspectives in *Slender Man is Coming*, one aspect which is returned to again and again is community. Ostension is reworked in the context of Creepypasta to try and hit this collaborative nature, either by framing the

collaborative action as creating the story with reverse ostension or orienting the term to the community practice in shifting the term from ostensive action to ostensive practice. Horror cultures is the final aspect of that, tying the creation of Creepypasta and the kind of play it inspires to more traditional horror cultures surrounding Lovecraft.

FINAL DEFINITION

Creepypasta is a genre of online horror short stories. There is a sharable and community aspect, and it is this piece that most clearly identifies what is and is not part of the genre. It is up to the community to decide if a story is a part of Creepypasta canon, generally by identifying either the form or the source of the story. Creepypasta in general plays with folklore and presents itself in folkloric ways, inviting practice and interplay with the story. It further demands questions of authenticity, as a defining feature of the genre is the fact that the stories claim to be true, universally. This is implicit in the text or implied in the form. It can take a variety of forms, with four main categories being ritual, diary/logs, forum post/message chains, or a recounting of a childhood memory.

Now that we understand the genre of Creepypasta, and what identifies a story as a Creepypasta, we will now lead into an analysis of a single work more closely. This analysis will apply the definition to the work, and further evaluate the thematic connections between Creepypasta and the more classic genre of the gothic. Starting after the summary of the text, I will give a sample of theories of horror to build off of in the analysis, and then explore the horror in the text, in connection to more canon texts and lineages. Furthermore, I will then apply the definition set up in the first part to the text, demonstrating how the text is fulfilling the genre of Creepypasta.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS

Moving into the next step in understanding Creepypasta, the text that will serve as the analytical example will be *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, published originally in a serial form by the user Wendingus. For *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, the story is built in the Reddit forums, specifically the largest horror subreddit r/NoSleep. Updates for the story reached anywhere from 560 or upvotes to 219[4]. The story *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station* is presented in the diary/log entry format and is a longer running serial in the style of entries from the main character detailing the events of the story.

Each part is told there by the user Wendingus, whose account's posts are largely written in character and solely focused on this story. The story is split into two large chunks, made of the different serialized parts. I will be referring to both parts as being the whole of "Account from a Lonely Broadcast Station" (AFALBS) though the second is titled "We're Always on the Air at 104.6" (WAOA). Both parts are written in continuation, with the same characters and plot that continues chronologically. The author writes in the first person to deliver the account of Evelyn, a woman running from her past by taking a very demanding job as a 24/7-disc jockey and radio host in a remote tower overlooking the forest. The broadcast she puts out is only received by the nearby town, secluded like the station is by the ominous tree line and towering mountain landscape. Evelyn is writing down her accounts of life in isolation because she has

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[4] Of note is that this total is a sum of how many people "upvoted" the content, subtracted by how many people "downvoted" the post

noticed some odd goings on; Like a bird with eyes too human for its species, or a constant weeping coming from the drain, amongst a myriad of creepy calls from listeners. This is where the story begins, but it soon weaves a tale of terror and the unknown, all told with Evelyn's strikingly snarky but weighty commentary.

The first post mainly serves to set up the world, especially the isolation of the tower. Evelyn works alone at this point, scheduling music to constantly play even when she is asleep. She remarks quickly how if the broadcast stops at any point, she almost immediately gets a call from some angry supervisor demanding the station start playing again, calling simply to scream at her to "Turn the radio back on, now!" (AFALBS Part 1). The first post is unnerving but sets up the rules that Evelyn, and thus the story must abide by. The first is that the broadcast must be always playing, the second to keep the equipment in working order, presumably to assist the first rule. Third, record all suspicious calls; finally, if the fog rolls in do not leave the tower. The horror of the fog is realized when Evelyn is outside one day when it begins to creep in from the tree line, and there is a distinctly disturbing moment when, as she ascends the tower, something slithers over her arm. She signs off the post with her name and the station frequency, adding in a snarky quip to round out the first episode of the series, about how "maybe, if you're driving through looking for a place to stop, you might hear me. Oh, and if you are … don't bother with the rest stop. The plumbing is still broken and their coffee tastes like gasoline. It probably is gasoline." (AFALBS Part 1).

Pretty soon, among all the weird goings on, we are introduced to the rest of the cast. A part-time new hire from the town named Daniel, who Evelyn finds endearingly obnoxious, and a hard-nosed cop named Finn who is more knowledgeable about the

strange occurrences than either Evelyn or Dan. The story moves quickly, as each update has enough creepy material to satisfy the audience, but also fleshes out the characters and town. It is revealed in the story that the forest is inhabited by some nasty creatures, who make a habit out of taking parts off of other creatures or any humans who are unfortunate enough to die in the woods. The smaller creatures aren't the true danger, even if a bird with human eyes is unsettling. The scale of the problem is made clear quickly, as it is the larger amalgams that pose the biggest threat to the town and the beloved characters within it. The story balances the humor and day-to-day life of Evelyn and Dan, subjected to horrors, and bonded because of it, with the genuinely visceral body-gore and supernatural terror of the woods. There are charming moments and comedy in the commentary of Evelyn, as she often says things like "let me tell you the definition of pain. I've lost people dear to me, watched my future slip out of reach from a pit of failure, but none of that holds a candle to being kicked squarely in the pancreas by a guy going record speeds in a rolling chair" (WAOA Part 1).

Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station plays with authenticity both in form and in the content of the story. Being posted on a forum, this story follows closest to the forum post form, but in function it actually falls into the diary/log format. This is particularly evident because of the sign off that Evelyn and characters do in the writing of the logs. The post is where Evelyn tracks the events, building the posts into a log that builds over time. The forum that the author also chose to post on is one that is dedicated to horror short stories, so the comments have no pretense of reality to them. From the first post, we see commenters comparing the story to other works of fiction, for example "The fog pushing the trees reminded me of the Smoke Monster from Lost" (ImAK93). So, the

readers are interacting with this as a singular entry into a larger narrative, and all of this solidifies the form of the story as a diary or log, building over time.

Furthermore, in the actual writing of the text, the author is continuing to play into the purported authenticity of the story. The characters write as though the situation is unfolding in real-time as the story updates, and they write in first person. Of interest is the fact that it is not only Evelyn who writes the logs, but also her coworker, who takes over when Evelyn is whisked away in the story after the discovery of parts of her friend's body in the forest. When Evelyn is unable to write the story, her coworker Daniel snoops on her laptop she left behind and picks up the torch where she left off, keeping up two updates of the story before Evelyn comes back. This is referenced in the story as well, as when Evelyn returns, she punishes Dan for sneaking through her private property. During the 9th part of the story, she brings it up again before heading into danger, expressing to her coworker in the log of her tale "Daniel, if you're reading this, you snooping bastard … thank you." (AFALBS Part 9). All of this helps ground the story in a sense of reality that furthers the authenticity of the text. The story calls attention to the hand writing it, justified it in the narrative, and builds it into the characters all in a way to tie the story to reality. This is furthered by different points of the text where Evelyn speaks directly to the readers, as early on in some comments where she replied to the audience, to say things like "I've got to log off though, the Wi-Fi spot is in the bathroom today (ugh) and Dan's mom is calling again" (Wendingus). Though Evelyn will eventually stop responding to comments directly, the writing does make it clear she reads and is aware of them.

For the analysis of *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station,* a great place to start is the workings of the content, namely the horror, so as to see how it as a singular work functions, but also to touch on how some of the other stories share aspects of their content. Part of what to break down in a horror subgenre is understanding the conventions through which horror is built. In analyzing the function of horror in Creepypasta, it is beneficial to build a base of theory to branch out from and connect to. Theories here will be applied to the genre of Creepypasta and specifically *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*. The term horror is very central to this discussion and will be generally understood in the accepted academic definition of being made of terror and revulsion (Kawin 4). The central horror, the pull of the genre, is a deeply important aspect to understand the origins of and the similarities between the horror here in this singular example and in the other stories in the genre.

Something that *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station* shares with the majority of the stories in the genre of Creepypasta is its use of a monster. Monsters and creatures are a pretty common source for horror in a wide variety of subgenres but are the most used source of horror in Creepypasta. There is of course Slenderman, who is the monster poster child for the genre. Alongside him there is a whole host of monsters who stem from stories in the genre. These include what are named monsters, creatures who are humanoid but distinctly "other". They typically have names, such as Laughing Jack from the story of the same name. He is a black and white jack in the box figure, a clown who lurks in his box to torture the unsuspecting child who dares to open it (Aikins). He talks which is a characteristic not every monster shares. To compare, there are also unnamed monsters, not so much in that they have no name, but rather no proper name. One

example would be The Rake, a humanoid monster who can mimic human voice but doesn't have conversation, rather just uses this ability to lure its prey into the woods. If one were to sort the amalgams from the forest into one of these categories, they would find their home in the latter.

As a start, no understanding of horror can come without broaching the topic of Freud's uncanny. However, the article "Familiar Horror" by Paolo Virno and translated by Alessia Ricciardi presents a perspective on the uncanny that is more handily applied to Creepypasta. It pulls from Freud's idea of the uncanny: "Freud interprets the terror that grips us in confronting the 'uncanny' (of phantasms, for example) in terms of a traumatic reaction to the 'familiar' that, unexpectedly, returns in disguise. The perceptual content of the ancient familiarity and the present horror is the same, with the exception that the idyll has become a nightmare" (13). Virno further works to contextualize Freud's ideas in terms of modernity and capitalism, but the very clear depiction of the uncanny is helpful in starting our horror analysis. In Creepypasta, the stories often focus on the mundane, made horrific, twisted in order to impart this horror of the uncanny. This can be a childhood toy made into a macabre killer of children, as in the case of "Laughing Jack", or perhaps a familiar place turned on its head due to machinations of malevolent and evil forces as in *Tales from a Gas Station.* In *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station* this uncanniness is shown specifically in the monsters that lurk in the fog and the forest.

The monster figures that pervade the story and looms large in the function of the uncanny. Shrouded by the fog that emanates out of the forest heralding its arrival, the amalgam creatures pose a real threat to the characters in the story, while being literally twisted versions of the familiar: animals or people that the characters know/recognize as

formerly human. Near the start of the story, Evelyn finds the mutilated parts of her long time, but estranged, friend shoved into a knot in a tree. These parts will later come back to haunt her, as her friend's body is brought back to life by the amalgam and made to serve its ends. The first time Evelyn sees he friend Jennifer as one of the amalgams, she remarks "She had changed. In the crack of her neck where the skin was broken, the beginnings of a fifth limb was growing out of her throat, but through the mask of fog I couldn't tell you if it was human or animal" (WAOA Part 2). This is quite literally the known coming back as the unfamiliar, in the most straightforward representation of it. It is clear very quickly that the threat of the beings in the forest are real and ever-present, especially from how Evelyn experiences the creatures up close and personal for the first time, describing "that whale-like groan again. It was followed by the strangest series of clicks, like a tongue against teeth rapidly popping in no real pattern. I wasn't prepared when it touched me." (AFALBS Part 4). The uncanny thrives in the descriptions of these creatures, with human eyes turning a normal bird into a harbinger of dread. However, this is not the only theory of horror that is demonstrated in *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, and the uncanny does not explain all the nuances of Creepypasta. A common theme, in both this story and others is mutation and degradation, which is another way to examine the horror of the story.

One other theory of horror is presented in the article "Moral Horror and the Sacred," by Robert Adams. This comes from the lens of religious studies but is applicable to Creepypasta because of how it builds its understanding following the literary definition of horror being revulsion and terror. Additionally, because Creepypasta is a newer genre, integrating more interdisciplinary work from the start will hopefully more lead to a

broader understanding of the genre. In the article, Adams is working from other literature in his field to explore the concept of moral horror, act that are both repulsive and terrifying. And it is doing horror that Adams is talking about, as opposed to being a horror, though not all immoral acts are horrific. He states that "actions can be bad, even very bad, without horrifying. Acts of great cowardice, for example, or gross intemperance in food and drink, as such, seem shameful, perhaps even disgusting, rather than horrible" (Adams 203). Here he is touching on the aspect that moral horror has to have the terrifying aspect as well as the revulsion, furthering his working in the literary definition of horror. He concludes that horror then specifically violates God's image and represent a violation against the person, with some of the horror Adams mentions specifically being are unconsenting sex, brainwashing, and defiling (Adams 205). Certainly, while not specifically about Creepypasta, it is an applicable theory to what is presented.

Defiling is the most appropriate name for the action the amalgam creatures do to their victims, and it is something that is definitely reviled in the narrative. Evelyn expresses at multiple points in the story her disgust with this idea that her body will be mutilated in the same way as the others who have lost their lives at the hands of the amalgamated beasts. In fact, Evelyn at one point loses an eye in the story and is certainly not happy that "now the forest had taken a piece of me for its own" (WAOA Part 4). The twisted bodies can be read as twisting of God's image, with one description of the bodies that Evelyn finds in the woods being "a man. The top half of him, at least. Nearby, the bottom half of another person… Both of them had been separated across the middle… The rest … where was the rest?" (AFALBS Part 6). So, it is a mix of the uncanny being and the ungodly action that one can read in the body horror presented by Wendingus.

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These are themes that are not uncommon in the horror of other Creepypastas or in other horror literature.

In looking at Creepypasta there is a clear influence from Lovecraft, which was discussed earlier in talking about the ties of the form of Creepypasta. But here, it is ties to his content that is most relevant to the influence of horror in Creepypasta. The presentation of the amalgam creatures harkens to a very Lovecraftian conception of horror. Like the cosmic terror of Lovecraft, here in the isolated mountains of the broadcast station the fog is huge, unknowable, the causes of its existence inscrutable. In *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, there is a pervasive use of dreams as omens, in the vein of Lovecraft in his story "The Call of Cthulhu". This famous entry into Lovecraftian horror begins with a recounting of a period of time during which there was a spike in odd dreams which the narrator is documenting. He finds that the people most affected were artists and creatives, who reported dreams of "Cyclopean cities of titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths… from some undetermined point below had come a voice that was not a voice; a chaotic sensation which only fancy could transmute into sound" (Lovecraft). This can be tied to part of *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station.* Here, Evelyn gets calls from listeners at the station, and they often share their dreams in an uncomfortable and foreboding way. One caller explains that "Well … I've had a bout of strange dreams, dear, and I'm wondering if anyone else has had the same. You see, last night, I had a dream in which the forest split in two" (AFALBS Part 2). This dream happens early, before Evelyn is aware of the truth about the station. Both stories share dreams as a foreboding warning, a brief look at the unfolding horror to come. But this is

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just one small way in which the horror of *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station* harkens back to H.P. Lovecraft's work.

Furthermore, there are the actual descriptions and appearance of the monstrous in both the work of Lovecraft and in the story by Wendingus. Lovecraft's monsters are famously informed by the many phobias he suffered from in life, and his anxieties over cultural loss "in the face of growing moral, racial, and scientific chaos" (Evans 138). His visceral fear of the ocean also informed much of the appearance of his monsters. If one looks at the Lovecraft story "The Shadow over Innsmouth" one can see a connection between the description of the fish people and the description of the monsters in *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*. He described his monstrous creations as "flopping, hopping, croaking, bleating – surging inhumanly through the spectral moonlight in a grotesque, malignant saraband of fantastic nightmare" as they hunt the narrative protagonist (Lovecraft). It is easy to compare this description to how "the amalgamates…parasites eating off of one another and groaning in some constant pain. The ones that didn't moan and cry in their torment were voicing aggressive growls or rattling breaths as they searched through the fog for another living thing to tear apart and add to their collection of stolen bodies" (AFALBS Part 9). There is a focus on the grotesque in both sets of imagery, as well as the sonic presentation of these monsters. While they differ in imagery specifics, one being distinctly oceanic and the other being made of a mixture of humans, animals and the forest, the effect is much the same. It is a visceral, humanesque horror. They both take something human and distort it into uncanny ends, emphasizing the guttural nature.

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Moving beyond Freud's uncanny, and Lovecraft's style of monstrousness, or moral horror, one can look more to the other details of Creepypasta to understand aspects of its horror. Specifically, its ability to spread. In their article, "'Spread the word': Creepypasta, Hauntology, and an Ethics of the Curse" Line Henrikson discusses the workings of Creepypasta in terms of a haunting. They posit that "teletechnologies have not done away with ghosts but, rather, have enhances their abilities to haunt through the reproduction, copying, and circulation of images, text, and voices across time and space" (Henrikson 273). So, in this way, it is possible for the haunting of a ground to be spread, far outside the reaches of the physical land. This idea, this spreading, is perhaps closest to what gets at the heart of horror in Creepypasta.

The largest connecting thread of horror between all the stories is the threat of the story becoming reality. It works in traditions of the uncanny, or the morally terrifying, but its horror lingers beyond. Despite shifting monsters, styles, content, and form, Creepypastas are almost all connected by this threat upon the reader. Most Creepypastas imply or state that the horror contained within either started long before the story took place proper, or that the situation will continue long past the narrative proper. For Evelyn and Dan, in the story they are made aware that they are number 28 and 29 to be working at the station, and at the close of the story they are more than aware that they will likely lose their life to it like their predecessors did, having lost hearing, an eye, and an arm between them. The story explicitly extends itself when Evelyn is informed that "in the last five years, we've hired *twenty seven* different people to speak over that radio" (AFALBS part 8). This demonstrates not only the danger of what they are engaged in, but also that the horror will outlast everyone in the story. As their friend Finn will later say

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"sometimes you can't fight to win… you just fight until you can't fight anymore" (WAOA Part 5). It isn't hard to see the extending of the story, past the characters, past frames of fiction, as being tied to larger media trends, especially the phenomenon of found footage horror films.

While using a different medium, the similarity in claim between found footage film and Creepypasta is striking, as is the fact that both rose to prominence around the same time. In Cecilia Sayad's article on "Found Footage Horror and the Frame's Undoing" she discusses the function of found footage horror and how it breaks down the frame separating reality from fiction. Looking primarily at the Paranormal Activity franchise but pulling from the larger genre trends as a whole, Sayad analyzes how found footage destroys the frame of fiction, as "the horror movie is thus presented not as a mere artifact but as a fragment of the real world, and the implication is that its material might well spill over into it" (Sayad 45). Found footage positions itself as reality, thus blurring the boundary between reality and fiction and holding them in tension. Creepypasta holds this same tension, tying it to this subgenre of horror movies.

In *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, the author extends past the frame deliberately, replying to comments and positioning the radio station as something one could really tune into. This possibility for spillover is played with extensively in the form of the Creepypasta, as discussed in defining Creepypasta's authenticity. Stories posit a reality where the forum posts pose threat to the readers, where the monsters could creep from the internet into reality. This constitutes "threats to the main characters worldview and well-being, and the threat to the audiences' worldview" (Jets 430). For *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, this threat is presented as the possibility of the town

really existing, the forest lurking just waiting to spread should the radio tower fall, and the town be overtaken. This is really clear in the text, as we are told "the fog has stretched all across the town before and we think that, potentially, it could keep going as far as we let it" (AFALBS Part 8). These monsters loom at the edge of the frame, just waiting for a crack in the narrative to slither out and into the world of the reader. Beyond found footage though, these ties can be seen in some of the earliest forms of the gothic.

Looking briefly towards the older traditions of the gothic for example, one can see this same functional threat, the horror extending past the story. The expanse of the gothic tradition is vast and has plenty of connection to Creepypasta, but it is the genre's claims of horror extending past the frame that is most relevant. The gothics roots lie in anti-enlightenment sentiment, emphasizing emotion, thus using horror for that end (Smith 2). Out of all the stories, perhaps Bram Stroker's *Dracula* is most interesting to tie to the online genre. The gothic has many different traditions that play to its form, and particularly is known for its "formulas or formula-like constructions" (Aguirre 104). In much of the literature surrounding the gothic, this formulaic nature is mentioned, especially as the form is "reliant on particular setting, such as castles, monasteries, and ruins" (Smith 3). This reliance on setting is so eponymous with the gothic that in fact it is how the name of the gothic came about, resulting from the architectural "revival… of a medieval aesthetic" (Smith 2). With regards to *Dracula* then, this reliance on setting allows a departure in the story from standards, making it an interesting entry into gothic tradition with respect to two aspects of it: the narrative built through documents, and the horror following the protagonist's home. The narrative having been built through documents, snippets of diaries and newspaper clippings ties to Creepypasta's purported

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authenticity quite well, mirroring the diary/log format or messages sent back and forth to one another. But then, deeper in the narrative, there is further the idea of the horror, Dracula, following the protagonists outside the accepted frame of the gothic.

Because of the formulaic nature of the traditional gothic, departures from the conventions are noteworthy in gothic texts. In this vein, Bram Stroker's *Dracula* departs from gothic formula by having the horror follow the protagonist home, something not standard for the time, and "when Dracula appears in Piccadilly at high noon, the characters react initially with disbelief and a kind of horrified vertigo at discovering that the monstrous is real and walking the streets of their ordinary modern city" (Spencer 199). This is an important note, bringing the gothic horror from the distant reaches of the past, like Radcliffe and early gothic fiction did, and instead centering it on modern cities, modern contexts in which the monstrous can arrive. Part of the fear is the horror coming abroad, threatening the world of the audience rather than being the safe way to engage in their horror, as it is hard to "try to imagine Jonathan Harker imprisoned in Count Dracula's suburban Cape Cod" (Bailey 4). But there the horror is, Dracula in England, ready to spread his menace.

One point to note is how the text describes Dracula coming to England from his traditionally gothic castle. He lands ashore from afar on a ship with a dead crew, heralded by a storm and how "masses of sea-fog came drifting inland- white, wet clouds, which swept by in a ghostly fashion, so dank and damp and cold that it needed but little effort of imagination to think that the spirits of those lost at sea were touching their living brethren with the clammy hands of death" (Stoker 66). One can draw parallels between the imagery and function of this section of the text to *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast*

Station. The way the fog roles in is strikingly similar, alongside the function of the fog in both bringing forth the horror coming home to threaten the characters. They work on this same level, continuing this connection of having the threat follow people home. It is similarly threatening when "trees quaked and branches cracked, the fog swirling around our heels as it grew ever closer and quickly abandoned the limits of the woods" (WAOA Part 2). The fog can spread, can overtake more towns, can reach the audience if only they travel close enough. Dracula, like found footage, can break the frame to reach out and shake the shoulder of the reader.

There is much more to explore in tying the traditional gothic to Creepypasta, and this analysis only is putting forward comparisons as example and not definitive and isolated links. This idea is presented here to demonstrate how this threat of extending past the narrative is tied to older roots and is an important way in which Creepypasta and more traditional forms connect to one another. There is plenty of work to still be done in this regard, and this is merely a demonstration of the applicability of Creepypasta for academic study.

The horror of *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station* is evident from the first post. Applying some theories, including an understanding of Freud's uncanny, ideas about moral horror, or more specific ideas pulled from the text, the horror culminates in the threat is poses to the reader, outside the frame. There is more to be done here, but one can understand the horror of *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station*, and Creepypasta more generally, as being tied to persistent threat to reality. Additionally, there are ties to both Lovecraft and Dracula in aspects, which is a part of analysis far riper than is available to be analyzed here.

In terms of fitting into the definition of the genre of Creepypasta, *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station* meets the vast majority of the requirements. It appeals to authenticity to build horror, as well as being published in forums and engaged with as a Creepypasta. Breaking away from the text content, I will return to what I said was the marked feature that identifies Creepypasta: the community. Community is the aspect that truly is the singularly defining characteristic of the genre of Creepypasta, and it is something that has been brought up at multiple points thus far. With the roots of the genre, it is clear that part of how it defines itself based on sharing, spreading stories around the internet, harkening back to the "copy paste" root of the name Creepypasta. Beyond the name, Creepypasta being shared on platforms like Reddit and YouTube specifically invite interaction between poster and audience, fostering this community. In discussing folkloric ties to Creepypasta, many of the authors had to orient the ideas of belief and ostension to include this community aspect that Creepypasta has. It is baked into every aspect of what it is.

Mentioned in brief, the YouTube readings of Creepypasta is a really fantastic peek into the community, and I want to return to it in order to here to return, full circle, to the defining characteristic of the genre. My discovery of the story of *Accounts from a Lonely Broadcast Station* came with the reading by Mr. Creepypasta on YouTube. Peaking at the comments, one can see the community identification of the story as an entry into the genre of Creepypasta, and Mr. Creepypasta's reading of it furthers that idea. The story plays into genre conventions and follows the definition set at the start of this analysis, but it is impossible to divorce the genre from the community that engages with it.

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