

More Than Simple Plagiarism: Ligotti, Pizzolatto, and *True Detective's* Terrestrial Horror

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ABSTRACT

Of course, *True Detective* is neither a philosopher's bedtime story nor supernatural horror, and yet there remains a productive affinity between Ligotti's work and the HBO series. Where Ligotti provides substantial portions of the hallmark character's identity and dialogue, *True Detective* puts Ligotti's thought experiment to far more practical uses than does Ligotti himself. By intertwining hurricanes and flooding alongside industry and pollution into the background and negative space of the setting, the series implicates the urgent material reality of climate change and environmental collapse into the setting: "all of this is going to be under water in thirty years" ("Long Bright Dark"). In doing so, the series employs Southern gothic conventions to look forward rather than backward in time. Rather than the decay and degeneration of the landscape as reflective of the past, such squalor points forward to a time, rapidly approaching, when the setting will itself be swallowed by the sea. Hence, *True Detective* enacts a more practical approach to Ligotti's horror, one I'm calling terrestrial horror.

Keywords: True Detective, Terrestrial Horror, Thomas Ligotti, Pessimism, Ecocriticism, Cosmic Horror

It is no secret that Nic Pizzolatto, the writer of *True Detective*, “borrowed” sections of Thomas Ligotti’s *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*. Whether this use of Ligotti’s text constitutes plagiarism or merely allusion caused a minor furor in the media during the first season. Pizzolatto acknowledges that “in episode one there are two lines in particular (and it would have been nothing to re-word them) that were specifically phrased in such a way as to signal Ligotti admirers” (Calia 2). Mike Davis and Jon Padgett see Pizzolatto’s “signaling” as far more problematic. Davis points out that, “writers work hard to produce original ideas, stories, and dialogue, and it is unfair for another writer to pawn off those ideas as their own. Pizzolatto has been nominated for an Emmy for writing *True Detective*, while Thomas Ligotti labors in near obscurity” (1). Padgett explicitly addresses Pizzolatto’s claims that his use of Ligotti is a kind of homage to the writer:

‘Homage’ suggests that Pizzolatto was honoring Ligotti or showing him respect of some sort. Lifting Ligotti’s work without permission or attribution may have or may not have been a consciously malicious decision, but in any case it was neither honorable nor reverential.” (Davis 4)

While it seems dated to pass judgement on Pizzolatto’s use of Ligotti, Padgett is undeniably right when he claims, “in no uncertain terms, the pessimism and anti-natalism of Rust Cohle as articulated by Ligotti is the hallmark element of the show” (Davis 5). Given this, we should be further exploring the implications of such close affinity between the series and Ligotti’s work.

Ligotti’s project, in *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, is quite simple on its face: he considers the possibility that being alive is NOT necessarily better than being otherwise: “For thousands of years a debate has been going on in the shadowy background of human affairs. The issue to be resolved: ‘What should we say about being alive?’ Overwhelmingly, people have said, “being alive is all right” (20). While conversational in tone, even flippant, Ligotti’s target is nothing less than humanity’s ontological positivism about itself. Ligotti takes seriously the notion that being alive is not “all right;” in fact, being alive may be tantamount to “inhabit[ing] a nightmare without hope of awakening to a natural world, to have our bodies embedded neck-deep in a quagmire of dread, to live as shut-ins in a house of horrors” (216). In short, Ligotti’s project explores the stakes of considering human existence as a burden rather than a blessing.

Ligotti grounds his considerations in the earliest stirrings of human consciousness: “For ages they had been without lives of their own. The whole of their being was open to the world and nothing divided them from the rest of creation. How long they had thus flourished none of them knew” (19). A species without self-awareness and without history, Ligotti paints pre-humans as inseparable from the natural world: “Then something began to change. It happened over unremembered generations. The signs of a revision without forewarning were being writ ever more deeply into them” (19). Citing a “change” toward consciousness, Ligotti marks this occurrence as itself outside of pre-humanity; as something that happened to them and not something they initiated or controlled. Furthermore, this change was ontological; it would become a constitutive property of what would later become human. As early humans “moved forward, they begin crossing boundaries whose very existence they had never imagined. After nightfall, they looked up at a sky filled with stars and felt themselves small and fragile in the vastness. Soon they begin to see everything in a way they never had in older times” (19). The ontological change overtaking early anthros, the very change that, in part, would make them human, also changed the way they perceived the reality within which they lived.

They begin to take bodies that were stiff and still to distant places so they could not find their way back to them. But even after they had done this, some within their group did see those bodies again, often standing silent in the moonlight or loitering sad-faced just beyond the glow of a fire.” (19)

Ritual and symbolism crept into the world alongside temporality, which, in turn, spawned self-consciousness:

Everything changed once they had lives of their own and knew they had lives of their own. It even became impossible for them to believe things had ever been any other way. They were masters of their movements now, as it seemed, and never had there been anything like them. (19)

Consciousness separates humans from the rest of existence. Humanity then becomes, by definition, that which is outside of nature, that which is unnatural. “The epoch had passed when the whole of their being was open to the world and nothing divided them from the rest of creation. Something had happened. They did not know what it was, but they did know it as that which *should not be*” (19-20). From its inception, the conditions of possibilities for human consciousness place humanity outside of the natural order, as a kind of violation of how existence otherwise functions.

Aside from clearly providing fodder for Rustin Cohle’s rambling monologues, Ligotti’s conception of human consciousness, and subsequently, of humanity, is that which “Because of consciousness, parent of all horror, became susceptible to thoughts that were startling and dreadful to us, thoughts that have never been equitably balanced by those that are collected and reassuring” (27). In such a conception, Pandora’s Box is the human mind itself:

One minds now begin dredging up horror, flagrantly joyless possibilities, enough of them to make us drop to the ground in paroxysms of self-soiling consternation should they go untrammelled. This potentiality necessitated that certain defense mechanisms be put to use to keep us balanced on the knife-edge of vitality as a species. (27)

In order to set up defenses against our own consciousness, Ligotti offers an ontologically paradoxical version of humanity:

What we do as a conscious species is set markers for ourselves. Once we reach one marker, we advance to the next--as if we were playing a board game we think will never end, despite the fact that it will, like it or not. If you are too conscious of not liking it, then you may conceive of yourself as a biological paradox that cannot live with its consciousness and cannot live without it. And in so living and not living, you take your place with the undead and the human puppet. (28)

Limiting our own consciousness becomes crucial for survival. Setting insignificant goals for our lives, we must deceive ourselves into believing that these goals define our lives. Hence our consciousness of our lives must be turned to the task of obscuring our state of existence from ourselves. This state of “living and not living” results in human existence as a kind of dark parody of itself made manifest as the undead or the human puppet.

Ligotti’s use of horrific figures for conceptualizing humanity’s existence is no accident. He accords “supernatural horror” a privileged place in the diagnosis of the human condition: “we are crazed mimics of the natural prowling about for a peace that will never be ours. And the medium in which we circulate is that of the supernatural, a dusky element of horror that obtains for those who believe in what should be and should not be” (222). And within this medium of the supernatural is where we must exist,

one thing we know is real: horror. It is so real, in fact, that we cannot be sure it could not exist without us. Yes, it needs our imaginations and our consciousness, but it does not ask or require our consent to use them. Indeed horror operates with complete autonomy. Generating ontological havoc, it is mephitic foam upon which our lives merely float. And, ultimately, we must face up to it: horror is more real than we are. (182)

A far-reaching claim to be sure, but once granted, Ligotti’s project then privileges the literature of supernatural

horror as a site wherein we can contemplate our true plight of existing.

Of course, this contemplation can only be fleeting and fragmented. Closing his book, Ligotti remarks, “The hell of human consciousness is only a philosopher’s bedtime story we can hear each night and forgot each morning when we awake to go to school or to work or wherever we may go day after day after day” (226). In the end, Ligotti’s project is a thought experiment; in fact it cannot be anything else, since human consciousness paradoxically creates and cannot abide the horror of human existence. Certainly, Ligotti conceives of supernatural horror fictions as privileged sites of ontological insight. Yet, the book ends with humanity’s own inability to act on the only conclusion left:

...might we not bring an end to the conspiracy against the human race? This would seem the right course. [...] Overpopulated worlds of the unborn would not have to suffer for our undoing [...] that said, nothing we know would have us take that step. What could be more unthinkable? We are only human beings. Ask anybody. (228)

Still, *True Detective* is neither a philosopher’s bedtime story or supernatural horror, and yet there remains a productive affinity between Ligotti’s work and the HBO series. Where Ligotti provides substantial portions of the hallmark character’s identity and dialogue, *True Detective* puts Ligotti’s thought experiment to far more practical uses than does Ligotti himself. By intertwining hurricanes and flooding alongside industry and pollution into the background and negative space of the setting, the series implicates the urgent material reality of climate change and environmental collapse into the setting: “all of this is going to be under water in thirty years” (“Long Bright Dark”). In doing so, the series employs Southern gothic conventions to look forward rather than backward in time. Rather than the decay and degeneration of the landscape as reflective of the past, such squalor points forward to a time, rapidly approaching, when the setting will itself be swallowed by the sea. Hence, *True Detective* enacts a more practical approach to Ligotti’s horror, one I’m calling terrestrial horror: “it’s all one big gutter in outer space” (“Long Bright Dark”).

It is worth noting that several television critics and scholars have cast *True Detective* into the traditional “cosmic horror,” and that I’m further refining that distinction with the label, “terrestrial horror.” “Cosmic Horror” has come to refer to a body of horror fiction related to and stemming from the work of H.P. Lovecraft, but also including other late 19th and 20th century writers, most noteworthy of them for discussions of *True Detective* being Robert Chambers and his *The King in Yellow*. The label originates, at least loosely, in the two editions of Lovecraft’s own essay, “Supernatural Horror and Literature.” As Vivian Ralickas explains, drawing on the work of Bradley Will, “the force of cosmic horror is based upon Lovecraft’s presentation of the unknowable rather than merely the unknown in his fiction” (“Cosmic Horror” 364). Elsewhere, Ralickas continues,

it has become commonplace in Lovecraft scholarship to affirm that his antihumanistic creation narrative asserts that our social bonds, religious beliefs, and cultural achievements are not only irrelevant if considered from outside the limited scope of human affairs, but are based upon a false understanding of the cosmos and of our place in it. (“Art” 297)

Donald Burleson echoes this sentiment: stories of cosmic horror “form a sort of conceptual web, interlacing to provide a potential for expression of the one major idea that always emerges; [...] self-knowledge, or discovery of one’s own position in the real fabric of the universe, is psychically ruinous” (137). To think of Cthulhu is to risk one’s sanity. To read even a short passage from “The King in Yellow,” the fictional play occupying the negative space in the center of Chamber’s volume of the same name, is to lose one’s mind. Cosmic horror focuses on human limitations and irrelevance and traffics in questions of scale. From a cosmic perspective, both in terms of sheer size and in terms of deep time, humanity does not meaningfully exist at all.

There are obvious reasons why critics and scholars have aligned *True Detective* with cosmic horror: Cohle's pessimistic soliloquies; the various ruminations about time circular and otherwise; the primeval imagery of death, and Cohle's cosmic hallucination in his final encounter with Billy Childress. However, because cosmic horror positions humanity as irrelevant, it also relieves humans of any real culpability towards the conditions of its existence. Not so with *True Detective*, and therefore, the series needs a more precise set of terminology for codifying the elements of horror at work.

Terrestrial horror offers three things: (1) it employs the gothic setting so common to horror to look forward rather than backward, thus repurposing gothic conventions to the service of foreshadowing; (2) it implicates all of humanity in corruption rather than an individual or group; and (3) it changes the setting's echo of the physical, mental, and moral corruption of the inhabitants from the symbolic to the literal. The end game of terrestrial horror is simple. It opens a space wherein humans must confront the end of humanity. This confrontation is not softened by a comforting conceptual veneer (i.e., theoretically humanity will end as all species must), nor does the terrestrial horror dilute its posthumanism with safe temporal space (i.e., of course humanity will end in the distant future). Moreover, terrestrial horror blames human corruption for the demise of humanity. Unlike Cosmic horror, wherein humans are irrelevant, terrestrial horror implicates human activity directly in the destruction of the environment and the horrors that ensue. Terrestrial horror uses the traditional conventions of gothic horror to confront the real and immediate end of humanity as we have known it. Human life will discontinue as it has been existing within a generation or two. Terrestrial horror takes up the intellectual project of horror fiction more generally by forcing its audience to consider a radical and immediate posthumanism.

Gothic Conventions Look Forward

Certainly, *True Detective* offers traditional elements of gothic horror and of the Southern gothic more specifically: dusky swamp scenes, labyrinthine structures and neighborhoods, uncanny primitive symbols and markings, and erotized violence and death. In fact, the two central confrontations of the entire season are thoroughly encoded as gothic encounters. We get a rather heavy-handed preview of the first showdown, wherein Hart kills Reggie Ledoux and the Dora Lange case is supposedly solved. As "The Locked Room" concludes, Cohle offers a gothically inflected rumination on the comforts of death: "It was all the same dream, a dream that you had inside a locked room, a dream about being a person and like a lot of dreams there's a monster at the end of it" ("The Locked Room"). As he talks, the scene cuts to Ledoux and his compound. The compound is literally the center of a labyrinth set into the Louisiana low country. Complete with concealed traps and cryptic, primitive stick made "devil nets," the labyrinth contains a compound of decaying structures at its center, as a kind of perverse mad scientist's lab containing captive children and the chemistry of 21st degeneration. Ledoux himself first appears in this scene as the monster at the end of humanity's collective dream. Cohle's lengthy voiceover, offering the audience the monster incarnate, the dissonant music, the striking body of the "monster itself" dangle at the end of the episode inviting speculation on Ledoux not as human but as monster.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen reminds us that the physicality of monstrosity, the body of the monster itself is a primary node of meaning:

The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns," a glyph that seeks a hierophant. (199)

The monster's body is nothing but text; it exists only to convey. This machete wielding, tattooed, monster

at the end of humanity's dream in "a locked room" serves also as a critical turning point in the series' use of animality.

Wearing only a makeshift loincloth and gas mask, carrying a machete, Ledoux, at this moment, functions as lycanthrope, as hybrid, as a figure suspended between human and monster, between man and beast. The mask protrudes from his face offering the suggestion of a snout and deformed trunk swinging under glassy, impenetrable eyes. In a series filled with humans sporting animal heads, Regional Ledoux recalls both the antlers crowning Dora Lange's corpse, the paganized masks of the abusive collection of men driving the violence behind the plot, and enacts an important departure at the season's midpoint. His animality results not from the performance of biological hybridity between human and animal but from technological hybridity between human and pollution. His "animal face" looks not backward in time toward an ancient paganism but forward to a horrific, present and future industrialism. The labyrinth at the center of the season houses an avatar of terrestrial horror: a human/animal made hybrid by a piece of technology rendered necessary by the advent of chemical warfare, pollution, and the chemical/commercial reality of street drugs. While terrestrial horror employs traditional gothic images and themes, it is the industry, technology, pollution, and climate change of the 21st century that actually haunts the series.

Repeatedly, even insistently, images of industry: smoke stacks, commercial boats, nondescript industrial buildings silently manifest in the *mise en scene* of *True Detective* largely unnoticed by the characters themselves; the audience is often the only witness to these ghostly avatars of industry. As Andrian Van Young has observed, "This gorgeously dilapidated region—every year more worried away by hurricanes, the oil-drilling erosion of protective wetlands, and sinking clay foundations—is the perfect earthly limbo for staging *True Detective's* elemental drama" (2). The silent presence of these industrial sentinels embedded in the setting point to the presence and immediate future of the region, and consequently of the Earth itself. While the individual corruption of specific bodies and specific humans plays out, the harbingers of industry gesture to the global corruption that is underway marching toward the inevitable demise of the human race itself.

Only a few minutes into the pilot, Rust and Cohle visit the staging site of Dora Lange's body. As their car arrives, a series of massive power lines tower over the scene silently stretching away out of sight. Subtle and seemingly part of the background, this line of giant steel towers strung together by electrical lines appears again as Cohle walks away from the scene contemplating his daughter's birthday. Set in Erath, an obvious anagram for "Earth," these giants, recalling crucifixes and industrial "devil nets," themselves preside over the scene of a specific corrupted body but point towards the corruption of the planet itself as the cane still smolders under the industrial power that courses through the lines hanging above the entire scene.

The critical presence of industrial pollution and corruption in the setting of *True Detective*, recalls traditional gothic horror conventions but does so to different effect. As Sharla Hutchison and Rebecca Brown articulate, traditional gothic horror settings and monsters represent "repressed transhistorical fears," but they go on to elucidate the changing nature of horror fiction in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (1). "Monster" derives from *monstrum*, meaning "that which reveals" or "that which warns" (Cohen 4), and monstrous indeed is the industrial corruption seeping into nearly every aspect of the show. Unlike the traditional uses of the gothic setting, which look backward toward repressed cultural fears, and unlike cosmic horror which takes a temporal perspective measured in eons looking both to the impossibly ancient or the impossibly distant future, *True Detective*, as an example of terrestrial horror, uses its setting to look to the immediate future, to events just a generation or so away. The setting, then, of terrestrial horror is the ever looming spectre of environmental collapse brought about by industrial pollution and corruption. Not only is the series about posthumanism, it is literally set in the final days of humans living in industrial societies.

All of Humanity is Corrupt

Cohle further aligns the specific corruption of the murder with a general corruption of humanity itself.

Following their investigation of Dora Lange's body in the cane fields, Rust offers his version of pessimism casting doubts as to the tenability of humanity ontologically. Yet the scene ends not philosophically but again industrially: "I get a bad taste in my mouth out here. Aluminum, ash, like you can smell the psychosphere" ("The Long Bright Dark"). If we take psychosphere literally as the atmosphere of human thought or human consciousness, that atmosphere is itself permeated by the pollution of industry. Our collective destruction of the planet is seeping into the thoughts and consciousness of humanity as a whole.

While the corruption of the actual murders and local politicians remains at the center of the season, *True Detective* implicates every character in some degree of corrupt behavior. For example Tuttle, and his cousin the governor, using his position and relationship to steer the investigation away from the truth; Geraci and the boys "canvass[ing] the bars pretty good," or "a Man's game charg[ing] a man's price." ("Seeing Things" and "Haunted Houses"). Marty's philandering and murder of Reggie Ledoux, and their systematic cover-up of the true events surrounding their "big 419" implicate the detectives themselves in the corruption rampant throughout the series. In fact there are no "innocent" characters to be found in *True Detective*.

A particularly instructive example of this is Maggie. The long suffering wife of Marty Hart certainly has cause to be angry with her husband; however, even she is finally guilty of violence as she destroys the relationship between Hart and Cohle. Following Marty's final infidelity, Maggie takes matters into her own hands and attempts to reciprocate the infidelity. However she "couldn't do it:" couldn't "go home with a stranger" ("Haunted Houses"). Instead, she approaches a recently suspended Cohle, and they consummate her plans. She then explains, "Now, he'll have to leave. He won't stand for this" ("Haunted Houses"). Herself a victim of Marty's indiscretions, she perpetuates the degeneration of relationships.

Along with the absence of innocent characters, the series is rife with corrupted human bodies. Opening with the posed corpse of Dora Lange, the series parades various mutilated corpses across the screen, underscoring that the corruption of humanity (as represented by the bodies), is epidemic and largely manmade. The pitcher's "cerebral event" implies steroid abuse. However, the family was never told what really happened. Dora's mother's body has been wrecked by the chemical exposure associated with years in dry cleaning. Her ruined nails and tremors offer an outward sign of a damaged mental state made worse by the gruesome murder of her daughter. Burt did his time in Angola where he was mutilated due to "bad medicine." Cohle himself has hallucinations caused by prolonged drug use, and Billy Childress's oft remarked upon face results from his father's violence and is a permanent living reminder that the corruption of flesh in this series extends far beyond the actual murders driving the plot.

Traditional gothic corruption localizes itself around an individual, family or small group wherein the evil, alienated, or traumatized individual(s) become the nexus of the gothic horror of the narrative. For example Dr. Frankenstein and his creature, Lord Ruthven, The Usher family, or Count Dracula. The fascination of the traditional gothic works in the collapse of the individual human mind and body. María Negroni looks back to the original gothic narrative:

In 1748 [Walpole] begin obsessive constructing Strawberry Hill. For more than sixteen years, he labored at that collage, constantly tacking new structures onto his mansion. [...] One day, while fighting a fever, he dreamed of another castle and the Imperative to bring it to be. The second castle, *The Castle Otranto* (1764), is a book that he wrote in a single sitting, by channeling the excesses of his dream. And so, he finally built a house not for himself but for his desire and finally grasped the imagined--that is real-- form for his castle. (6)

Herein lies the individuality of gothic horror. One troubled mind, forging for itself an expression of that abnormality, the abomination residing within the singularly corrupted mind and body: "this episode is

crucial. It shatters, for the first time, the effective myth of the Enlightenment. Here its confidence wilts; night tinges its sunshine. His intuition was simple: if reality exceeds what is observable, then darkness is a gift, as is awareness of the darkness in the world” (6-7). As The Enlightenment and its handmaiden, Liberal Humanism, glorified the individual human and individual human accomplishments as central to existence. The gothic was ever the dark side of that equation. Wherein individuals could be exceptional, they could just as easily be exceptionally corrupt.

Cosmic horror alternatively positions the corruption on a cosmic scale, rendering questions of individual or communal human corruption mute. As Lovecraft himself explains,

The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part. (1)

Lovecraft’s Old Ones and his extraterrestrial beings exist so far from human experience that it is the very unknowing that renders them terrifying and generates the horror of cosmic horror.

True Detective falls between traditional gothic horror and cosmic horror. While the series offers the gothic cult of a few corrupt individuals at its center, by implicating every character in corruption, the series uses the convention of gothic horror to point to the general corruption pervasive throughout humanity. However, this is not horror on a cosmic scale. Industrial pollution has seeped into humanity twisting bodies and destroying communities. The horror of *True Detective* is not classical gothic, nor cosmic; rather, it is terrestrial.

Setting goes from Symbolic to Literal (haunted by real ships and industry)

Traditional gothic horror relies heavily on its setting to convey its terrifying meanings. The house of Usher is symbolically a representation of its inhabitant’s decaying mind. At the moment of Dracula’s death, it is his castle that draws attention: “The Castle of Dracula now stood out against the red sky, and every stone of its broken battlements was articulated against the light of the setting sun” (Stoker 325). Mr. Rochester’s attic becomes his mind locking away his first wife from the world and from his own thoughts. In America, lacking the long medieval history and architecture onto which writers could map their gothic visions,

the swamps helped solve the problem. American writers of the bizarre and macabre, such as Edgar Allan Poe, could utilize the dark fens of the new world--particularly in the South--to create the appropriate symbolic landscape upon which the quintessential gothic tale depends. (McIntyre 39)

Cosmic gothic, too, relies heavily on its setting to function symbolically. The very title of “The Mountains of Madness” foreshadows the connections between the alien, Antarctic landscape and the sanity shattering discoveries waiting under the ice.

While the setting of *True Detective* certainly contains the swamps and decaying structures of gothic fiction, these are not merely symbolic representations of moral or social corruption, but also literal markers of impending environmental collapse. The presence of hurricanes, for instance, prove central to the plot not as symbols but through the destruction of records and the disruption of social order. The entire pretense of bringing Hart and Cohle back after to rehash their “big 419” is that hurricane Rita destroyed the case files.

In fact, hurricanes figure prominently in the backdrop of the series. The swirling symbol left on the victims’ bodies recall the cyclonic storms. When Rust shows the minister of the “predominantly African American congregation” the symbol, he remarks that it “looks like something might be carved into the trunk of a tree, subtly suggesting human corruption of the natural world (“Seeing Things”). The swirling spiral repeatedly pops up throughout the season. Marty comes home and finds that Rust has mowed his yard, and a

paper plate hangs on his kitchen wall colored into the same spiral, presumably by one of his daughters. When the detectives come upon the burned out church, a flock of birds flies up from the marsh and assumes the same spiral shape momentarily. While these recurring spirals certainly allude to the cult markings of Carcosa's followers, they also, and more importantly, alert viewers to the literal coming horror of climate change and massive flooding via strong and more frequent hurricanes. The series achieves this through reference to famous storms of the recent past.

The storms provide opportunities for corruption to occur or erase the evidence of its happening. Hurricane Andrew apparently washed out the school Dora Lange attended, which was also no doubt attended by other victims of the Carcosa cult's violence. Flooding and hurricanes are repeatedly blamed for destroying files and evidence, covering up potential leads and erasing victims and predators alike. Hurricane Katrina figures perhaps most prominently, when Rust conjectures that the killer they pursue, "had a real good time after [Katrina]. Chaos. People missing and people gone. Cops gone. I think he had a real good year" ("Form and Void"). In many ways the literal setting of the series is the presence and effects of hurricanes.

Furthermore, the series implicates humanity and human action in the impending disaster. Rather than placing the horror of climate change at the feet of formidable Nature, red in tooth and claw, as Cosmic horror does, *True Detective* blames human industrial pollution, and it does this, in part, through the literalness of the industrial backdrop of the season.

Concluding by Looking Forward

This piece began with the affinity between Ligotti's *Conspiracy Against the Human Race* and *True Detective*, yet there is a broader conversation underway. Eugene Thacker, Thomas Ligotti, David Peak, John Gray, Maria Androni, and Michel Houellebecq, among others, have been, in various ways, sounding the call for approaching horror fiction as a research program. However, the parameters, scope and methodologies of such a program have yet to be determined. The humanities, as a collection of disciplines, contributing to the recent interest in horror fiction, must stop merely calling for horror as a research program and must formalize, theorize, and practice this research. The water is rising and time is literally running out.

The task of formalizing this research program is already underway performatively. That is to say, that horror fiction itself, defined broadly, is formalizing our research program for us, and we need to follow that lead and theorize our research program from there. For example, Victor Lavalle's *The Ballad of Black Tom* and Matt Ruff's *Lovecraft Country: A Novel*, both set Lovecraftian supernatural horror and mythos in Jim Crow era racism and productively connect the horrors of white supremacy and institutional racism with the supernatural terrors so emblematic of Lovecraft's mythology. In doing so, these authors have initiated the most productive engagement to date with the profound racism of Lovecraft and his writings and, more importantly, implicitly demonstrate how Western notions of monstrosity powerfully manufacture the demonized black, male body. These authors take the next logical step, and in so doing, point scholars in the humanities toward the formalizing of horror as research program: Horror fiction can be a powerful tool for undermining the demonized black male figure that institutional racism relies upon so heavily.

Similarly *True Detective*, and terrestrial horror more generally, perform the same kind of formalizing; in this case circulating around the cultural and social implications of climate change. While researching the scientific elements of climate change is best left to the STEM fields, horror as research program is particularly well suited for investigating the social and cultural changes that environmental collapse will bring. In this case, *True Detective* begins to lay the groundwork for the kinds of cognitive and practical preparations called for by the imminent collapse of social and civil order following the coming climatic changes.

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