

the other theatre

LOVE U LOVECRAFT

STUDY GUIDE



Photo: Michael Slobodian

This study guide consists of background information on H.P. Lovecraft's short story, *The Colour Out of Space*, which was the inspiration for our production of LOVE U LOVECRAFT.

The guide allows you to visit our creative process and to encourage discussion on themes and images in the play.

Encouraging new ways of creating is vital to developing young minds into well-rounded and engaged members of society. Showing that there is more than one model for creation encourages students to apply imagination and innovation to all aspects of their lives, both academically and personally. It builds their skills for listening to different sides of a conversation and teaches empathy, tolerance and cooperation. It also shows that thinking outside of the box can be fun!

Enjoy the show!

THE OTHER THEATRE
5826 AVENUE DU PARC, #9
MONTREAL, QC H2V 4H3
WWW.OTHERTHEATRE.COM

LOVE U LOVECRAFT

Photo: Michael Slobodian



A new creation from The Other Theatre

"The oldest and strongest emotion in mankind is fear. And the oldest and strongest kind of fear is the fear of the unknown."

- H.P. Lovecraft

*You're somewhere but you don't know where
People stare at you but you don't know who they are
You feel guilty but you don't know what you did
Something is hidden but you don't know what it is
You're afraid but you don't know why*

The Other Theatre presents a new bilingual creation inspired by the writing of H.P. Lovecraft, directed by Stacey Christodoulou. Channeling a little bit of horror, a little bit of fear, the company delves into Lovecraft's famous short story, *The Color Out of Space*. In the tale, an unnamed narrator pieces together the story of an area known by the locals as the "blasted heath" in the wild hills west of Arkham, Massachusetts. The narrator discovers that many years ago a meteorite crashed there, draining the life force from anything living nearby: vegetation grows large, but tasteless, animals are driven mad and deformed into grotesque shapes, and the people go insane or die one by one.

The Other Theatre is interested in new ways of theatrical presentation, seeking to bring elements from the arts "other than theatre" – physics, dance, film, architecture, and the visual arts – into the conversation to highlight the necessity and relevance of live performance. Using Lovecraft's famous short story *The Color Out of Space* as a point of departure, the company explores themes that speak to our subconscious, primal fears. Through image, text and movement, the company presents this new experimental work, a collage of associations, populated by small towns, strange characters, dark forests, rituals, weird ancestries, and dreams that are portals into other worlds.

Founded in 1991, The Other Theatre is dedicated to performance that explores the tension between the individual and the collective experience. The company examines how everyday acts of kindness and cruelty are reflected in the larger political and social context of our society. It aims to present work that is complex and engaging, through its adaptations, installations, theatre

texts, and collectively written material, seeing a dialogue with its audience that is free of political didacticism and easy solutions. The Other Theatre presents work in English, French and bilingually. Its collective creations have tackled subjects from fractals to fascism, physics to pop culture, television to terrorism and have taken place in theatres, warehouses, galleries, a shopping mall window and a moving elevator.

www.othertheatre.com

Director: Stacey Christodoulou | Set: Amy Keith | Costumes : Cathia Pagotto | Lights : David Perreault Ninacs | Stage Manager: Tania Dos Santos | With: Thomas Duret, Marc-André Goulet, Véronique Lachance, Dean Makarenko, and Anana Rydvald

Regular Tickets: \$29 | 30 years old and under: \$25 | Subscribers 3 or more shows: \$22 |
Groups of 10 persons or more: \$20

**the
other
theatre**

March 22 to April 2, 2016 at 8:00pm

Théâtre La Chapelle | Scènes Contemporaines

3700, rue Saint-Dominique, Montréal

514 843-7738 | billetterie@lachapelle.org



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Synopsis of *The Colour Out of Space* by H.P. Lovecraft



The story begins with an unsettling description of the farming community in the hills west of H.P. Lovecraft's favorite town, Arkham, Massachusetts.

The setting is in the early part of the 20th Century. Lovecraft, who was fascinated by science and its interaction with the supernatural often had a professional as his protagonist. In *The Colour Out of Space* the narrator is an unnamed surveyor tasked with cataloging the area near Arkham which would be flooded to make room for a new reservoir. He encounters a desolate area called "the blasted heath," and he inquires about the name. People of the village mention that the area was never settled since the "strange days" and our narrator is referred to the half-mad Ammi Pierce. "It all began," old Ammi says, "with the meteorite."

The story then goes back in time to the late 1880's. Something fell out of the sky onto Nahum Gardner's land. Professors from Miskatonic University called it a meteorite but there was something strange about it. For one, the longer it was exposed to the air, the smaller it got. It glowed in the dark, and it was too soft to be a rock. The inside was glossy, brittle and coloured, although the colour was impossible to describe. It was almost as if that colour was not even in our spectrum. Studies of the rock determined nothing of its composition and all the rock samples eventually disappeared. A lightning storm destroyed the remaining meteorite on the Gardner's land. Life in Arkham returned to normal.

Or almost normal. That fall, Nahum Gardner's harvest was huge -- abnormally huge -- but his fruit tasted strange and no one wanted to buy it. Wild animals that lived off the Gardners' land mutated subtly. The snow melted faster on Nahum's land than anywhere else, the trees budded earlier, and the skunk cabbages that grew in the spring took on a strange color exactly like the center of the meteorite. The milk went bad.



The entire Gardner family become affected as well, as they were drinking the water and eating the strange food. Nahum, his wife Nabbie, and their three sons never ventured from their land. They stayed there, watching and listening, waiting for something unnameable and horrible to happen.

Rumours soon circulated that Mrs. Gardner was mad. She could not describe what agitated her

Synopsis of The Colour Out of Space (continued)

so but began speaking strangely and walking on all fours. Eventually Nahum shut her up in the attic. She was shortly followed there by her son Thaddeus, and the family could hear them screaming at each other in the attic in a language that was unearthly. Eventually Thaddeus died.

By fall the horses had gone mad, too, and the vegetation had turned grey. The other farm animals' flesh was greyish when they were slaughtered, and obviously inedible. The youngest Gardner boy, Merwin, disappeared one night, followed by his only remaining brother, Zenas. At this, Nahum finally lost his mind. Finally, Ammi Pierce, Nahum's closest friend, went to the house to investigate. He found Nahum hollering at the empty air, asking his missing son to bring more wood for the fire. Ammi decided he should go upstairs and have a look around.

Ammi opened the locked attic door, and as he stood in the open doorway, a clammy vapor brushed by him. His eyes adjusted to the darkness, and he saw something horrifying in the corner, something that had mutated into the colours of the meteorite. It was the greying Mrs. Gardner who miserably flailed about before Ammi put her out of her misery.

Outside, he came upon a dying Nahum who had also turned a brittle grey and who described the strange force that the meteor unleashed. After Nahum crumbled away, Ammi covered him with a tablecloth and called the authorities.



Six men from the town came to investigate, eventually finding their way to the well. They emptied it of its stinking water, and found the skeletons of the two missing Gardiner sons, Zenas and Merwin, as well as that of a small deer, dog, and several small animals. Baffled, the men decide to go into the house to talk about the case. Was it the strange vegetables that lead to the crumbling sickness? The unknown disease of the livestock?

Suddenly, the trees began to tremble (although there was no wind) and tiny beads of coloured light danced at the tip of each branch. As they watched, a cloud of fluorescence, which at first hovered over the well, suddenly streamed upward toward the sky. At that, everything began to glow with an unholy color -- the barn, the sheds, the grass. The men escaped to a nearby hill, where they could look down on the luminous scene. They saw what seemed to be an explosion of colored light, and then peace.

Nothing remained except five acres of dusty grey desert - the very land that our narrator has come to Arkham to survey as the site of a future reservoir. Our narrator, the surveyor, concludes his chronicle by saying he does not plan to come back to Arkham and he warns future generations to never to drink the water there.

Biography of H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937)



Early Life

A master of fantastical horror stories, H.P. Lovecraft was born Howard Phillips Lovecraft on August 20, 1890, in Providence, Rhode Island. Lovecraft had an unusual childhood marked by tragedy. His traveling salesman father developed a type of mental disorder caused by untreated syphilis when Lovecraft was around the age of three. In 1893, his father became a patient at the Butler Hospital in Providence and he remained there until his death in 1898.

A sickly child, Lovecraft spent many of his school years at home. He became an avid reader, devouring works on a variety of texts. Lovecraft loved the works of Edgar Allan Poe and developed a special interest in astronomy. As a teenager, he did attend Hope High School, but he suffered a nervous breakdown before he could earn his diploma. Lovecraft became a reclusive figure for several years, choosing to stay up late studying and reading and writing and then sleeping late into the day. During this time, he managed to publish some articles on astronomy in several newspapers.

Writing Career

Lovecraft started out as a would-be journalist, joining the United Amateur Press Association in 1914. The following year, he launched his self-published magazine *The Conservative* for which he wrote several essays and other pieces. While he had reportedly dabbled in fiction early on, Lovecraft became more serious about writing stories around 1917.

The horror magazine *Weird Tales* bought some of Lovecraft's stories in 1923, giving him his first taste of literary success. The following year, he married Sonia Greene. The couple lived together in New York City for two years before splitting up. After his marriage failed, Lovecraft returned to Rhode Island and began work on some of his best stories. "The Call of Cthulhu" came out in 1928 in *Weird Tales*, and it perhaps best illustrated Lovecraft's efforts at creating an otherworldly type of terror.

Lovecraft introduced readers to the first of many supernatural beings that would wreak havoc on humankind. Elements of this story would reappear in other related tales—collectively known by

Biography of H.P. Lovecraft (continued)

many as the "Cthulhu Mythos." These later stories reflected Lovecraft's own philosophical ideals. According to *American Heritage* magazine, Lovecraft once wrote, "all of my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and emotions have no validity or significance in the cosmos-at-large."

Death and Legacy

In his final years, Lovecraft was barely able to support himself. He took editing and ghostwriting work to try to make ends meet. Lovecraft died of cancer on March 15, 1937, in Providence, Rhode Island. He left behind more than 60 short stories and a few novels and novellas. Lovecraft's passing was mourned by his devoted following of colleagues and aspiring writers with whom he corresponded and collaborated. Two of these friends, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, formed a publishing company called Arkham House to promote and preserve Lovecraft's work.

Since his death, Lovecraft has earned greater acclaim than he enjoyed during his lifetime. He has been an inspiration to such writers as Peter Straub, Stephen King and Neil Gaiman. His stories have also served as the inspiration for numerous films, including Ridley Scott's *Alien*. As Stephen King explained to *American Heritage* magazine, "Now that time has given us some perspective on his work, I think it is beyond doubt that H.P. Lovecraft has yet to be surpassed as the twentieth century's greatest practitioner of the classic horror tale."



Photo: Mothmeister

Dramatic Style Realism vs Non-realism

Realism and Non-Realism are two very different types of theatre. However, they both have their merits. They can be used to explore very similar things but in extremely different ways. The many different ways you can interpret these ideas and present them is the beauty of art.

Realistic Theatre	Non-realistic Theatre
The set is a photographic representation of a real location and objects. This includes settings like homes, workplaces, bars and restaurants.	The environment shown is suggestive and evocative. The setting can be minimalist, with a bare set and very few objects.
The set is meant to primarily suggest a concrete time and place, e.g. England in 1660	The set emphasizes the subconscious realities of the character or of a time and place, by using a design with dreamlike qualities
The characters act because they have reasons for their actions. They are in conflict with each other and society, as they would be in everyday life.	The characters do not have to be in conflict. The drama can focus on people trapped in a meaningless and impossible world, desperately trying to get through the illogical and absurd situations they are faced with.
The acting is naturalistic (Stanislavski method) with the characters speaking in complete sentences and mirroring accurately the language and style of the time when the story is set.	The acting can be non-realistic but still engaged. There can be more emphasis on a blend of images and movement to create a picture for the audience
The language is the language that you would hear in everyday life. There is no poetry, radical shift in style, or a direct address to the audience.	Language can be anything, including poetry/song, free association, and stylized language.
The stage events are logical and follow a logical, linear sequence of events.	The stage events are presented unconventionally so audience will ask questions. There may not be a linear sequence of events. Flashbacks, changes in mood or shifts in location can happen.
The subject matter deals with real events and social/political issues.	The subject matter takes these events and deconstructs them
Like a representational painting by Da Vinci	Like a Cubist painting by Picasso
	

Inspiration and Support Material

We have created a Dropbox folder that teachers can share with their students. The folder is located [here](#) and contains material that we researched for the creation of the show:

- the complete story of *The Colour Out of Space*, in English and French
- inspirational photos for our set
- different versions of our set design
- inspirational photos for characters and concept
- inspirational video for characters and concept

Questions:

1. How do the different set designs create a different mood? What is the detail that makes the difference? Does one design seem larger? Which one brings you closer to the action?
2. What photographs do you think have inspired how the characters behave?
3. What photographs or videos come closest to the mood of the show? Why?
4. The short story has been *deconstructed*. This means that we have taken parts from the story and scrambled them up to tell the story from another perspective. Name one example of where this happens.
5. LOVE U LOVECRAFT follows the principles of *non-realistic* theatre. Discuss how the elements of set, character, acting and stage events are different from how they would have been presented in a realistic play?
6. If the play was created as a realistic theatre piece, what might it look like? Would it be better served as a movie?