

The Devil's Library Episode 16.5 – “Songs of a Dead Dreamer and Grimscribe – Part 8”

[Intro Music]

Ligeia

Hail Satan, sinners, and people with great taste in books. I am here today with my great friend, Leraje.

Leraje

Hail Satan.

Ligeia

Hail to you. Hail to you too. So we are going to continue with, you guessed it, Thomas Ligotti.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Uh, we have 2 stories today.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

We wanna talk about. Um, these are from Dreams for Sleepwalkers. And so I chose one and you chose one.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Uh, do you remember which one you chose?

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

This is how it is. Okay. So you leave me alone in this. I see. I see how it is. Okay. So your story, your story that you are going to talk about in a second is called Les Fleurs.

Leraje

That's right.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

I just couldn't remember which one of the two I'd chosen, which one you chose.

Ligeia

Yeah. You wanted flowers.

Leraje

I did.

Ligeia

Like a diva. And I chose Dream of a Manakin.

Leraje
Right.

Ligeia
Okay. So, and I think With these 2, we are going to finish this, this part of the book.

Leraje
Yeah, we are.

Ligeia
The Sleepwalkers. So, yeah.

Leraje
Okay. Which one do you want to talk about first? Mine or yours?

Ligeia
Yours.

Leraje
All right, so let's flirt. So, uh, the way it starts is, uh, our protagonist—no, narrator, uh, is in a flower shop and he is getting some flowers because that's what you do in a flower shop, clearly. And he strikes up a conversation with the person behind the counter whose name is Daisy.

And he sort of insinuates through the prose that he's trying to kind of like, maybe not woo her exactly. Well, maybe woo her is the right, I don't know. But he's trying to sort of like win her over in terms of possibly dating her. But there seems to be a strange undercurrent to it that we're not quite aware of yet because we're only on the first or second page of the story.

It later transpires that he had a previous girlfriend, Clare, and that Clare has mysteriously disappeared.

Ligeia
Hmm.

Leraje
And, um, yeah, so that's That's the basic frame of the start of the story. Does that sound fair to you?

Ligeia
Yes. So what did you think about this story?

Leraje
Uh, I really enjoyed it. I thought it was really good. He just never ceases to surprise me, really. I think every time I think that I'm used to what he's going to do, or I'm kind of like maybe not expecting it, but I'm aware of his kind of like general direction, he surprises me and it turns out it's not what I thought it was at all.

And this story, and even more so the next one, are really prime examples of that. I thought it was very good. Did you enjoy it?

Ligeia
Yeah, it was fantastic, I think. Yeah, it was fantastic. So from what you just said, it sounds like simple story, simple plot. He goes there, he talks to her, they start dating, He comes to his home and she sees weird stuff there. I don't know how else to say it.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Like a sculpture.

Leraje
Yes. And weird stuff happens.

Ligeia
He doesn't explain this.

Leraje
Yeah. And the end. So next story was—

Ligeia
You don't want to talk about this?

Leraje
No, I'm joking.

Ligeia
Okay.

Leraje
Yeah, that whole— so during the course of the story, Ligotti makes the narrator say Cereus or Cereus or Cereus. I'm not quite sure how to pronounce it, a number of times, 2 or 3 times, I think. He makes— so the thing that you alluded to was, is it a sculpture? What is it?

Ligeia
We don't know.

Leraje
But that is also described as prickly and curly.

Ligeia
Prickly, and it looks like it has teeth, maybe nails or tongue, something. It is more—

Leraje
But the, uh, the Cereus, or the Cereus, I'm not sure how to pronounce it, is, uh, it's a cactus.

Ligeia
Yes.

Leraje
And some cultivars of this particular variety are called Queen of the Night, which I found quite interesting.

Ligeia
Well, basically that's me. Thorns and teeth. Sorry. Oh, how I saw this story. We still haven't said what, what actually happens, but I will just say that for me, this was like a failed love story of sorts.

Leraje
Right.

Ligeia
Well, we see, we see this strange structure, living thing, which is very weird to her.

Leraje
Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

And he, he, um, he says, or like, we know that he was thinking of hiding this thing before she came there, so she wasn't supposed to see it.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
But it was too late to hide it. And then also what happens is she, she's in some sort of a weird state of mind or like, um, trance, almost like drunk.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And she sees some vision, or how do we— vision, a garden.

Leraje
I think with Ligotti, I mean, we've said this before in other episodes, but he's always ambiguous. It's always—

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
You can't ever say—

Ligeia
It's hard to read him.

Leraje
Exactly. Yeah, you can't ever say this is definitely what happened or this is definitely what not happened. There's always some ambiguity there. But I do think you're right. It's kind of like a failed seduction. The whole— it's like—

Ligeia
I mean, the seduction worked, right? She's with him. They are intimate. They are having sex and they are together.

Leraje
But I don't think that's what he really— I don't think that was the point of the seduction.

Ligeia
No. No, no, no, no. What I'm saying is like the basic idea for me was a failed grotesque, um, story of a man that is searching for, for somebody who would understand his monstrous self, which he finds completely acceptable and normal and even beautiful.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And he is searching for somebody who would see the monstrosity and not— wouldn't be questioning it or anything, would just accept it and probably admire it.

Leraje
Mm-hmm.

Ligeia
And because these women are not seeing what he is showing them as, as beauty or anything that is good, Yeah. they need to go.

Leraje
So, Yeah, he's—

Ligeia
something happens to them, nothing good.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Right?

Leraje
Well, there was that scene midway through it when the narrator and Daisy, whose name he quite quickly shortens to Day.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
They're away on, I don't know what, like a holiday, I guess, or something.

Ligeia
I don't know where that was.

Leraje
Yeah, they were somewhere.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
And he sort of like said, can you smell The— was it roses? I think. I can't remember. And she pretended that she could, and they sort of like dived off into this kind of like the forest, woods, something.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
And he took her to this area that obviously he already knew about and she didn't. And it was kind of like, was this a different reality they entered? Was it a different dimension? What was it? It was— because she said there were different stars in the sky, or the sky looked strange.

Ligeia
Yeah. Yeah, I think it was just a metaphor or a symbol for him being monstrous. I don't have any other word. And I think it is an example of probably like a toxic relationship where this man is an abuser.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And he is bringing slowly, he is like testing how far she will go. in accepting anything he does. Like the question, like, okay, will you still be here if I, even if I show you this?

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And how about that?

Leraje
Yeah. Yeah. A bit like a serial killer trying to—

Ligeia

Yeah. Yeah. Like slowly introducing the evil parts of himself, which he probably being like psychopath or sociopath, he does not see anything wrong with himself.

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

And there is this secret society which is completely ambiguous. We don't know anything about it.

Leraje

The Brotherhood of Paradise.

Ligeia

Yeah. I don't really know what that was because there is no explanation to anything. If it's real or is it something he made up in his head?

Leraje

It's difficult to say. I mean, he does say at one point that they were annoyed that he'd done it again. By which I chose to believe that exposing their secrets to—

Ligeia

Yeah. Like he was bringing these, these complete strangers, these girlfriends into some secrets that were supposed to stay hidden. Probably they were like guarding it or something. And he keeps bringing these women and he's like, let me show you this. Let's see if you like it because I really, really, really want you to like it.

And if you like it, everything's fine. But they are unable to comprehend. It's not like they don't like it. It's so horrifying and absolutely they can't.

Leraje

No, I think they kind of like, in the best Lovecraftian tradition, they go slightly mad. And it's kind of like they kind of like break. A part of them breaks inside. They can't cope with what they're being shown.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Which is kind of understandable, really.

Ligeia

So what do you think about how he uses the botany and flowers?

Leraje

Well, I was kind of hoping to hear from you on that because this is something. But I think my basic— I mean, sure, daisy is a flower. So flowers are things that you plant in the ground, much like corpses.

Ligeia

Okay, you went there.

Leraje

If you're a serial killer, that's what you do with your victims, isn't it?

Ligeia

You don't have to, but yeah, it's a one-way.

Leraje

So I was wondering, are Les Fleurs, are Daisy or Day and Clare, are they the flowers that he's talking about? Are they the ones that have been planted?

Ligeia

I was thinking that, but can be it? Surely he chose these 2 names for a reason.

Leraje

Oh, I think so.

Ligeia

Clare and Daisy. So Daisy, That name's— that name to me is like almost like absurdly innocent.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

You know, it's the daylight. It's so like almost childhood memories, daisies, fields. I think it represents like the ordinary world.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Where, where the narrator doesn't feel at home.

Leraje

Right.

Ligeia

Yeah. And for Clare, obviously clarity. And she was able to see clearly.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

So probably she saw through something and that was dangerous, so she had to go. And I think he chose Daisy because that name was suggesting maybe she wouldn't be seeing that clearly.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

I don't know. I'm making this up, by the way. So that's just, just, I don't know, like, because with, with Clare, like, seeing clearly, this is solely Gothian. that he thinks, okay, knowledge is probably obtainable, but is it good?

Leraje

Yeah, much larger challenge.

Ligeia

It never brings anything good.

Leraje

No, no, you're right. No, I can completely see that. I also was intrigued by the Clare Daisy thing.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

And I thought Daisy, which he shortens to Day. So Daisy is the day. The story is called Les Fleurs, so already there's an emphasis on French.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
So, Clare. Clair de Lune?

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Clare of the Moon? Clare the Moon?

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
So maybe Clare was the night, Daisy is the day. Is the narrator turning the day into night via the method of sexuality and exposure of his own deviance, his monstrous nature?

Ligeia
I mean, yeah, he's using the garden the symbolism of the garden and flowers, which is obviously very sexual. This is where you wanted me to go, I know. So I'm here. Flowers and sexuality is something I can't leave alone. Because, yeah, because flowers and beautiful plants are usually representing of beauty, right?

Leraje
Yes.

Ligeia
Femininity, fertility, being, you know, the reproduction of life, life itself. It's, it's beautiful. It smells nice. It's something people enjoy and, you know, something that makes nature look absolutely stunning and beautiful.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
We like to look at it. Ligotti takes this, obviously. Again, he needs to take something that is so beautiful. And this reminds me of, yeah, like Charles Baudelaire and his, uh, Flowers of Evil.

Leraje
Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia
Taking something that generally in human psyche is— we all accept that this is beautiful, beautiful flowers, right? And he takes that and he asks, okay, but— so he asks, well, he doesn't care for flowers being beautiful. Okay? We know that. He's not explaining anything about this. So he makes us question why flowers ever seemed beautiful or innocent.

Why is that? Who said that? Who started this?

Leraje
Why? The comparison with himself as a cactus, a prickly spiky.

Ligeia
Right?

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia

And the whole garden and that structure, sculpture, whatever that was.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

And there was a description. It wasn't long, but It was almost really my mind saw that this is very erotic, like the description of that.

Leraje

Definitely.

Ligeia

Because, because the imagery of botany is very connected to eroticism and sensuality and how we react to the same things in people, you know?

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

Like, I don't know, lips, fingers, beautiful body parts, right?

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

It works. Smells, tastes. So we see that in flowers. And for, for this, this sculpture, there was like this strange organism that contained like openings and tongues and it was—

Leraje

Tongues. He, he specifically mentioned tongues.

Ligeia

It was a tongue and it was softness and like fleshiness to it. Mm-hmm. I don't know if it was even like moving a little bit. Like it was a really Suggestive.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Not in a like pleasant way, but it was there. No, it was there.

Leraje

It felt, it felt very kind of predatory in a way.

Ligeia

Yeah. So, so I saw this sculpture as like really uncomfortable, something like a territory between, um, I don't know, being a plant, being, uh, some other organism and with, with really like sexual, oversexual anatomy. That was not normal, not natural.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

So I don't know how it happened that this was— I don't know what he did. Was it made of people? I don't know. I don't know.

Leraje

We don't get enough of a description of it to really know for sure.

Ligeia

Just for a second, I saw Ed Gein. I saw the movie, um, The House That Jack Built, you know, the body parts that was like— I don't know, that was just for a second, like We don't know what, what they saw, what this sculpture was, but—

Leraje

But we do know they found it unnerving and unsettling.

Ligeia

Yes. Yes. It was like big red flag. So Ligotti doesn't like this conventional eroticism. Of course not.

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

So from, in my head, this happens like the, the sexuality of this whole thing.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Becomes Taxonomy went really wrong way because like there was a plant, there was a piece of like animal.

Leraje

I would say yes. Yeah.

Ligeia

Human and like sexual organ. And like we went to flowers and garden. Like it didn't go the way it usually goes.

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

And this is the weird fiction. It's so weird. You actually, like you are reading it and you are like, Well, what is happening? Because there is the, like, a flower should be a flower.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

Then you have a tongue, right? Should be inside a mouth.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

And a sculpture as a piece of art should represent something, right? Should be a representation of something, a 3D representation of emotion, an object, whatever. But he combines it, these 3 or even more things, and It becomes something so uncanny, but it is made of things that we know. But he takes the meaning of those things and he turns it so somewhere else that even such a small thing just creates this really tangible horror, right?

Leraje

Yeah. There's this brotherhood, the Brotherhood of Paradise. There's a reference to Eden. in that little section. And I think that very much touches on what you've just been saying about, you know, this kind of like Eden is a place where, you know, if you believe in that shit, then that's the place where innocence died, you know?

Sorry. Um, so I think there's a distinct through line between this group that the narrator is part of, this Brotherhood of Paradise, And this idea that maybe they are a corrupting influence on the very idea of sexuality, that they may be— they're called the Brotherhood of Paradise, so it's male. This sculpture is very male.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
It felt very male.

Ligeia
Phallic.

Leraje
Yes, phallic. But beyond that, in all the parts that it's made up of, it's It's things that are associated with men. The general feeling you get off it is male, or I did anyway.

Ligeia
Yeah, I agree.

Leraje
And then there's this kind of Daisy, Clare. These are very— they're floral names, but they're also very evocative of Daisy as a flower with a feminine name. These are very feminine people. And this sort of like corruption that he— maybe corruption is not the right word, but this desire that he has to sort of like make them into what he likes, or make them, or expose them to what he likes.

It feels kind of— it feels very kind of like masculine, corrupted, bad masculinity trying to take.

Ligeia
Mm-hmm.

Leraje
Rather than— or destroy rather than—

Ligeia
Yeah, destroy the innocence. I also was interested in— it's not just this story, but how Ligotti, he uses the person, the character of artist quite often. And like artists as people in his stories are not people who, you know, how we see them when we learn about art.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Artists are people who maybe have a better understanding of the world that is hidden to others, and they bring more knowledge or light. It's deeper, you know. But Ligotti, obviously he knows all this and he takes it. And for him, I don't know if this is completely right, but in this story, artist becomes more of a, like, a witness.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And or a medium, whatever, a translator. And, um, the character of artist in his stories usually is like a gate or a portal that brings the horror.

Leraje

Yeah, that's true.

Ligeia

Yeah, or opens the door for the horror to enter this world. So I don't know what that means in this story, but, but I saw it again, so I just wanted to point that out, like This is how I think he does it.

Leraje

Do you remember the Dr.

Ligeia

Thoss story that we read a few episodes ago? Yes, I thought about that one.

Leraje

And there was that part that we puzzled over at the time about the protagonist in that one wasn't an artist, but he did kind of like make— I don't know how to describe them. I think I used the word dioramas at the time, but that's not right.

Ligeia

Yeah, like collages.

Leraje

Yeah, and he self— that character self-describes what he does as plagiaristic.

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

Which I think is a good comparison to the artist in this particular story, or the art, the normal kind of artist that you're talking about there, that Ligotti usually does. Because in the Thoss story, he was— this character wasn't the creative person. He was the kind of victim, for want of a better word.

But in this one, yeah, that idea of the creator as a kind of like gateway to something else.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah, because this It comes back to how he uses, you know, usually it's like, okay, hidden knowledge. So let's go and find this knowledge, learn it, and that will create a situation where you are above the horror. You understand it, you know how to— what that means. But with Ligotti, it's the other way around.

You obtain knowledge and that is your— you are doomed.

Leraje

How do you think he sees his own role in that? Ligotti, I mean. Because he is an artist, he is a creator.

Ligeia

Well, he's famous with his philosophy of complete pessimism.

Leraje

Yes.

Ligeia

Almost like nihilism. And I am still not ready for the book, The Conspiracy of the God-Blaze. But I think these are roots. I think the book came after this.

Leraje

Right. Okay.

Ligeia

Not sure. This is like the '80s, what we are doing here. So I don't know. I don't know. I would like to hear him saying something about this, but I think it comes not just with that he's an artist, but he's obviously a genius in, in a way. It's like how the way he is seeing the world.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
The more you know, the more it hurts.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
To see how imperfect everything is, how we are trying to think that we mean something. There is this fundamentally impressive substance that is in humans that makes us so much better than anything else. And he knows that's freaking bullshit.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
There is nothing. Hey, we are animals and this is all a mistake. This is a mistake. We were not supposed to have this consciousness, you know? But that's, that's— I am reaching to the next story with this. So maybe we can talk about that later. But I don't know. I think people who are clever and understand science and philosophy usually become really pessimistic.

Leraje
I think you're right. I do think it's interesting that so many of his— again, I don't want to use the word protagonist, but main characters, let's say— so many of them are some kind of artist or creative person. And I do wonder how much of those characters, because they're not all the same, but there is a spirit of— there is usually a spirit of some kind of destructive tendency in them.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
And I do wonder how much of himself he puts into those, that aspect of himself he puts into those characters. Because I can't— I don't believe it's a coincidence. It can't all be coincidental.

Ligeia
It's not a coinkydink, I don't think.

Leraje
Say that again.

Ligeia
I don't think it's a coincidence.

Leraje
I prefer coinkydink to—

Ligeia
Coinkydink. Yeah.

Leraje
No, I don't think it is either.

Ligeia

No, no, but I mean—

Leraje

So, if you compared this story to the others that we've talked— not all the ones you've read, but the ones that we've talked about— where would you put this if you had to compile a list of Good to bad or good to not quite so good, maybe.

Ligeia

So you're asking comparing just to the next one or to all of them?

Leraje

To all of the ones we've read so far. Or maybe it's fair to say, would you put this nearer the top or nearer the middle or nearer the bottom?

Ligeia

I would put this one near to the top ones, but it's Like, I still have probably like 3 or 4 that are above this.

Leraje

Um, have you got anything else you wanna touch on with this story?

Ligeia

I'm back again with the flowers.

Leraje

Go ahead.

Ligeia

So, um, so the flowers are beautiful, but he uses them or sees them, uh, introduces them, takes them from this romanticised, uh, view, Where, where I think they ended up because of the aesthetic qualities of, of them, right? Flowers are beautiful.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

But when you look, look at what actually is going on, it's like just a reproductive, almost like machinery going on.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

It, it works. It works to, it has a aim.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

There is prey, there is alluring, there is attraction. But there is aim, and that is reproduction.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

So, uh, I just thought, again, like he takes this familiar picture that we have and he turns it around. And I, I just can't stop thinking about it because this is a topic that I really love. And I love this, this use of flowers and botany. And then it becomes this garden that she sees in that dream-like state, whatever that was.

And it, it's, it's like an, like a weird ecosystem.

Leraje
Mm-hmm.

Ligeia
There are colours, shapes. It's like, it's really vivid and it's, it's, it's a huge machine for reproduction.

Leraje
Mm-hmm.

Ligeia
When you look at it like via the lens of Ligotti, right? And that, then I thought, when you look, when you're looking at it this way, it's actually kind of, it, it binds back to the beginning in the florist shop because, because If we are seeing the beauty and, yeah, okay, it's a beautiful shop.

But if you look at it, it's just like a machinery of organisms that are trying to survive. The bouquet becomes just dead flowers.

Leraje
Brilliant.

Ligeia
That are rotting away in front of your eyes. Flower that is, you know, cut.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Is a tiny corpse.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And then you go back and you see how he met Daisy in a florist shop. which is full of dead flowers. It's almost like a funeral.

Leraje
Amazing.

Ligeia
Something, you know what I mean?

Leraje
Yeah, I do now.

Ligeia
I don't know what that means, but it just went back and forth and back, and I just— everything is binding together with the flowers and how I, how I think this works.

Leraje
I mean, that's the title of the story after all, so it's got to have a particular meaning.

Ligeia
Yeah, that's why I went crazy because I wanted to. I enjoyed it.

Leraje
Absolutely.

Ligeia

So, I don't know. Do you have anything to add?

Leraje

No, that's all my notes.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

A very good story. And again, utterly surprising. Okay, so the next one was your choice. Do you want to tell us about that one?

Ligeia

A Dream of a Manakin.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

I would start with, for those of you who haven't seen the book or pronunciation or what is it? Spelling. I found it. The spelling of the word.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Is, uh, different from how usually it's spelled, a Manakin with a Q, which is, uh, like a shop window figure that you dress for clothes. But this is the Manakin that is a dummy. It's like an anatomical dummy, right? For, I don't know, medical students, whatever.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

So it's a, it's, it's a nice choice there. So in this story, we follow this psychiatrist, a psychoanalyst. Who writes to a female colleague and probably a lover.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

About Amy Locher. Would you say is how you—

Leraje

I think so.

Ligeia

Locher. That's how I read it in my head.

Leraje

Me too. Yeah, that's how I read it.

Ligeia

She is experiencing a dream that keeps coming back to her. It's quite complex dream where she, she is, she's a woman. She's another woman working in a clothing shop. She's changing clothes for, for the Manakins that are in the shop, right? And this dream, this dream self has her real memories and her identity.

And like the dreaming person starts to dream and that person is dreaming a different dream.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
It's so many layers, but just bear with me. So as the psychiatrist investigates Amy's case, details from her dream or dreams begin to overlap with his own life and with the woman to whom he is writing, the colleague.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And Amy's identity and her dreams, childhood memories, and the possibility of hypnosis occurs there, I think. And everything becomes really entangled in one mess, chaos.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And the psychiatrist begins to suspect that the entire situation may have been like constructed or manipulated, but he can no longer like determine where it started, who, who is the person or people, or what is the reason, who is doing what, and who can be trusted. Right. And the story ends without providing a secure explanation.

Leraje
Yeah. Yeah, it certainly does.

Ligeia
It's leaving the relationship between Amy, the dream woman, the Manakin, the psychiatrist, and the lover. It's unresolved.

Leraje
Completely unresolved. Yeah.

Ligeia
We don't know anything.

Leraje
Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

Ligeia
So this is a story, right? What did you think?

Leraje
Oh, God, this was just brilliant. I loved it. I absolutely loved it.

Ligeia
Right.

Leraje
It's easily my favourite Ligotti story by a clear—

Ligeia
Completely!

Leraje
Oh God, yeah, of all the ones that we've read so far. Oh yeah, yeah, it's brilliant. I mean, I know I've said that 2 or 3 times now in each episode.

Ligeia
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Leraje

I just felt— this is just so good. It's so good. This hammered on all my David Lynch feelings and opinions, and the central— one of the central ideas of Twin Peaks, David Lynch's Twin Peaks, is this idea about we live inside a dream and this kind of like multi-layered dreaming quality of this short story, really.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

I sent you a clip, didn't I?

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

A very short clip from episode 14 of season 3, The Return of Twin Peaks, which touches— and in that clip, David Lynch plays the character of Gordon Cole. Gordon Cole has a dream himself in which he meets the actress Monica Bellucci and a couple of her friends in a café in Paris. And dream Monica says to dream Gordon, 'we are like the dreamer who dreams and then lives inside the dream'.

And then goes on to say, 'but who is the dreamer?' And that whole thing just resonates through this short story.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

It's like, whose dream are we actually in? Anyone? Does it change at various points? Who is the one who's dreaming? Who is the one who's kind of like, just a participant in the dream? Is it Amy's dream? Is it really her dream? Is it the character that she's dreaming who also has a dream?

Oh, I loved it. I loved all of it. Yeah, brilliant.

Ligeia

And the way it's written, it's really like it takes you on a ride. Yeah, I, again, I have the same question here. Who is dreaming who?

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

And it came to, you know, the old dreaming philosopher, problem or theory where thoughts also like solipsism, I came with that, which is, it's a, it's an idea or theory about how only your own self or in your mind, you can only be sure that that exists. Nothing else is certain. Right. Is that the idea?

Right.

Leraje

The narrator who, the one who's writing this story down, he mentions that. A couple of times.

Ligeia

Yes. Yes. So, and also, I like the whole story is based on the idea of there is no waking level in this. Does anybody even wake up ever?

Leraje

Right, exactly.

Ligeia

No, it's, it's like only dreams dreaming dreams.

Leraje
Yeah. We live inside a dream.

Ligeia
Right?

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
It was beautiful. It was absolutely beautiful.

Ligeia
It was. It was. And like, he takes the, the usual hierarchy I will only say it once. That was it. If you needed more, you just take that and copy. Okay. I'm not saying that word. And he like, it's, it's upside down or he just dismantles the whole thing. I love this about him.

He is not like flinching or anything. He just takes it and dismantles and he uses it and it works. And that's the horror.

Leraje
Oh God. Yeah. I mean, it's one of the most unsettling stories I've ever read.

Ligeia
Yeah, it is horrifying.

Leraje
I thought the first few pages are kind of like standard horror, you know? A young woman is suffering with a recurring dream that's disturbing her. She goes to a psychoanalyst to try and get to the root of it. Standard beginning. And then it just keeps unravelling and unravelling and unravelling and getting— is it going further into a dream?

Is it surfacing from one? It's impossible to know.

Ligeia
Yeah. It's the horror of consciousness again. And I think that is one of the worst, or for me, the most terrifying things because we will never know. We don't know. It makes you question everything you do. Am I actually awake now or am I awake when I sleep and I just think I'm sleeping?

Leraje
Yeah, because he mentions, the narrator of the story mentions that old Chinese story about The guy who fell asleep and dreamed he was a butterfly, and then he wasn't quite sure when he woke up whether he was a man dreaming about a butterfly or a butterfly now dreaming he was a man.

Ligeia
Right.

Leraje
And it's, oh, Christ.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Oh, no.

Ligeia

Yeah. It's the, you know, the explanation. There is no explanation to this. He doesn't bother explaining anything. He just leaves us with this whole chaos and it's like, okay, bye.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Do with it what you want.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

And it's just really horrifying because I found myself just sitting there and thinking, am I not getting this or is this supposed to be so chaotic? And I think probably both, a bit of both.

Leraje

I'm becoming increasingly of the opinion that there's what you get, the things to get with Ligotti, the things to take away from them is the feeling that it gives you, the sort of like uneasiness, the partially formed dread of something, but you're not quite sure what. Just the unsettling nature of everything.

I don't think it really matters that much if there's a kind of like coherent narrative to it.

Ligeia

So I thought the horror of consciousness.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

So he takes consciousness and creates And like, he says that consciousness creates an illusion which makes us believe that we are somehow independent selves. And when we are like the biological mechanism, mechanisms, you know, like that we are, right? You're with me?

Leraje

Yeah, yeah, I'm with you.

Ligeia

Like you, the puppet becomes alive, right? So the Manakin becomes alive.

Leraje

Wow, that's brilliant.

Ligeia

And that's where, like, there is the, there is actually the point where the mistake happens. We were never supposed to have the consciousness.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Because at that moment, the puppet realises, well, I have never moved by myself. Does it make sense?

Leraje

Yes, absolutely perfect sense.

Ligeia

Okay. It took me a while to get that out, but—

Leraje

Listener, I know I've said this before, but I'm going to say it again. If you enjoy these podcasts, then thank Ligeia because she has insight that quite a lot of the rest of us are missing. I never got that at all. And it's just so obvious now.

Ligeia

And you agree?

Leraje

I absolutely agree with you. Yeah, totally.

Ligeia

Yeah. And I think it's terrifying.

Leraje

You're amazing. Do you know that?

Ligeia

Thank you.

Leraje

I love doing these with you.

Ligeia

So, so what if the— what if being human is simply one of the costumes, right?

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

And this is why Amy is dreaming about dressing and undressing the Manakins. So we are just putting the identities, the personalities, the jobs, hobbies, whatever. We just create that artificially around us, around the doll, the puppet that we are, right?

Leraje

And she's literally inventing her own reality via a dream.

Ligeia

And so Ligotti, I think, was saying there was never anybody underneath the clothes or whatever other layers. There is nothing. Yeah.

Leraje

Right.

Ligeia

And the deepest horror for me was like, there is no death or monsters, usually isn't in Ligotti's work, but it's the possibility that the self experiencing the horror was artificial all along. So, and then I saw the connection to Freud's uncanny and the dolls and automata and Jung's anima and animus. I don't know.

I'm reaching probably here.

Leraje

No, I don't think so. And I think it speaks to the sort of quality of writing that Ligotti manages to generate, that we can have these thoughts about what they might be implying, the implications of a person's— the limits of a person's own understanding of their own reality. And how they, they sort of interact with that.

Yeah, I don't think he's saying that the dream is the reality. He's simply saying that there isn't really a reality.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. There is no reality.

Leraje

We create our own based on what it is we need or experience or whatever, but there is no objective reality to experience.

Ligeia

No, we are all puppets. Manakins with the mistake of having consciousness, and therefore we are stuck in this never-ending circle of creating weird sort of realities that we think are real.

Leraje

Well, yeah, and the Manakins might also be, you know, we are Manakins in somebody else's reality, maybe. You know, it's kind of like that part of the story when dreaming Amy is having a dream where There is, she notes she feels like there's something behind her and she can't quite bring herself to turn around and look at it.

Ligeia

She can't turn around, but she knows there is some entity, something, and it's malicious, it's bad, and she can't turn around full.

Leraje

And I think that's part of that. It's this idea that the thing that was behind her, I got the strong impression that it was a Manakin-like figure. 'Cause she describes it as kind of like, Ligotti describes the feel of the fingers as like being like crayons or something.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

It's not that hard. Yeah, I remember that. And I think maybe he was toying with the idea that possibly another reality was intruding on her reality, her dream reality. So what we were saying a minute ago about people creating their own reality, someone else was trying to break into that from their own reality.

Ligeia

Oh, I see.

Leraje

Yeah, maybe. I don't know.

Ligeia

Maybe. Yeah.

Leraje

If we, if we say that the idea of a Manakin is, or one of the possible interpretations of what these Manakins might be, is that they might be Surrogates for the other people that exist in our own realities.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Maybe. Oh my God. Mm-hmm. I see that. Oh, see, I oversaw that.

Leraje

That is fascinating. Well, I don't know that it's true.

Ligeia

It's just— Probably it could be. It could be. I don't think there is one way to understand this story. So—

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

This is how we understood it or didn't. I don't know. This is what I found interesting. Yeah.

Leraje

It's a brilliant story. I would urge if anybody only ever reads one Legati story, make it that one because it is supremely fucked up in many, many ways.

Ligeia

So I think both these stories that we talked today about have one thing that is kind of binding them together, and that is like they destroy the boundary between me and the other.

Leraje

Yeah, absolutely.

Ligeia

Which, like in The Flowers, Le Fleur human individuality conceals participation in something, right?

Leraje

Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia

And Manakin asks— that's just the question of—

Leraje

It's the direct question of the entire story.

Ligeia

Right. Does individuality exist at all?

Leraje

Can it exist in a world where we don't know what extends beyond the reach of our own senses? What did you think of the Manakin story in particular? Uh, what did you make of the final paragraph?

Ligeia

It was very brutal. It was also beautiful in a way. I, I have no words for that. I don't even know. It's exactly what I said, like, it takes you for a ride and like the, the end is a fucking orgasm. I have no words. It's not a good one.

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

But it's fucking horrifyingly gorgeous. It really is.

Leraje

Was there anything else you wanted to talk about in relation to this particular story?

Ligeia

I think that's all from me.

Leraje
Yeah. Okay.

Ligeia
I would just really suggest people read this.

Leraje
Yeah, it's great. It's good.

Ligeia
Yeah. Enjoy.

Leraje
Okay. So we only did 2 this time because there was only 2 left in that particular—

Ligeia
Yeah. So I think this was a good, tiny, short introduction to these 2 stories. I hope people will go and read.

Leraje
Yeah, both of them.

Ligeia
But like, if you only want to read one, please read A Dream of a Manakin. Please do.

Leraje
What a fucking story that is.

Ligeia
And we will be back with more stories by Tomás Ligotti.

Leraje
Yes, we will. All right, so until next time, I've been Leraje. Hail Satan.

Ligeia
I am Ligeia. Hail Satan.

[Outro music]