

The Devil's Library Episode 17.5 – “Songs of a Dead Dreamer and Grimscribe – Part 9”

[Intro Music]

Leraje

Welcome to a bonus edition of The Devil's Library. I'm Leraje. Hail Satan. With me tonight, I've got Ligeia.

Ligeia

Hail Satan.

Leraje

The only thing that we are more agreed upon than our mutual hatred of overly long, hot summers is the certainty of wanting to talk more about the existential, shadowy bleakness of Thomas Ligotti's words. So draw the curtains against the awful day, light a solitary candle, and listen in as we descend into depravity and the pleasures of the beautiful dark.

By which we mean we're doing 2 more Ligotti stories.

Ligeia

What a wonderful intro. Thank you, Leraje. It's hard to even add anything to that.

Leraje

So next time—

Ligeia

Okay, that was it.

Leraje

So 2 more Ligotti stories. Which 2 did we choose? Can you remind me?

Ligeia

You forgot again. So you chose the Spectacles In the Drawer. I'm not even sure if you say it like that. And I have, do you remember my story?

Leraje

Flowers of the Abyss.

Ligeia

Okay, we chose only these 2 because, why did we do that? Usually we have 3.

Leraje

We did 2 last time.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

That's our new thing. We're doing 2. For the benefit of the listener, Ligeia has lost it.

Ligeia

Because you are eating.

Leraje

What, I'm sucking a raspberry?

Ligeia

Yeah, it's okay. Because you were like, mm. I think they are good. Enjoy your raspberries. What's wrong with that? You can eat, you can do whatever you want. Uh Unless you don't leave me alone here talking about your story.

Leraje

Yeah, spectacles in the drawer. I mean, the basic outline of spectacles in the drawer. There is an unnamed, as ever, because it's a Ligotti, narrator to this story. This unnamed narrator is a traveller and dealer in esoteric and otherwise weird stuff. Every time he returns from um a trip, I guess like a buying trip or something, he is visited by a man named Plomb, P-L-O-M-B, m who is always desperate to see what new treasures the narrator has returned with this time.

However, the Narrator has got sick of the constant pestering by Plomb, and this time he hypnotises him and tells him that a random object he's got from somewhere, which in this case is a simple pair of glasses with no particular significance, and he tells Plomb that these glasses can open up new realities of pain and horror and understanding to him.

What the Narrator hopes to achieve with this is to make Plomb so saturated with fascination for this nothing pair of glasses that he stops harassing the narrator. But the power of Plomb's new certainty has other ideas.

Ligeia

Yes, so what did you think about this story?

Leraje

Uh, it was good. It was more kind of— I mean, it seems— it sounds weird to say about a story when one of the characters is not named, but it was quite character-driven, almost. It was very kind of uh like, to me, it centred upon the, the characteristics of the 2 people, the unnamed narrator and Plomb, and their, uh their kind of like different approaches to esotericism and the occult and stuff like that, and how they viewed it.

Ligeia

Did you find anything interesting in why these— like, in a relationship between these 2? Did you think anything about it?

Leraje

I did, but it sounds like you've got some thoughts on that.

Ligeia

Well, now I want to know what you thought.

Leraje

No, no, I want to know what you thought. You brought the subject up.

Ligeia

We can say it at the same time. 3, 2.

Leraje

They were fucking.

Ligeia

Oh, no. Oh, did you think that?

Leraje

I did. I did.

Ligeia

Yeah, I thought they were.

Leraje

I thought it was just like a failed relationship or something.

Ligeia

I thought it was the Plomb is like the younger self.

Leraje

Ah, that's a better idea.

Ligeia

But I thought, and there, that's where, you know, like he— uh this is how I thought that the whole story was about. What was the— how knowledge destroys the mystery, um, it desires. So the narrator lost, you know, that moment of being able to be fascinated by anything anymore because he never— he, you know, he just like became numb.

Yeah.

Leraje

Laozi about it.

Ligeia

And the younger self, Plomb, he— I will just say it like that. It's such a good name, Plomb. It is a good name. He represented all that the narrator has already lost, like that curiosity and that absolute fire and passion to still be looking forward to see these new objects and things and just like being so excited by just looking at them.

And every time he came there, he was just like a childlike joy.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Of the expectation of what he will see, whatever that was. He was just excited. And I thought that was just like some people when they get older and maybe they get deeper into their studies or whatever, they might become a little bit bitter. So I thought that was—

Leraje

And so that would also explain why the narrator was so pissed off about Plomb.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Because you could see this kind of like burning interest and things.

Ligeia

Yes, that's what I thought.

Leraje

That does make sense. That's a lot better idea than mine. I just thought they were fucking.

Ligeia

And it was the What kind of objects move with—

Leraje

Yeah, I brought this one back from a sex shop in Soho.

Ligeia

Oh my God, what are these spectacles for, mister? Okay, anyway.

Leraje

Mr. Plomb. So, I thought similarly that, you know, the narrator was very jaded and blasé about what he was doing, and Plomb was full of fascination. And, but I thought it was, um and to me, the name Plomb, it's very interesting.

Ligeia

Yeah, you have a theory.

Leraje

Uh I know. Well, I don't know if it's theory or just a kind of, I don't know.

Ligeia

Well, you went into a rabbit hole. I know.

Leraje

I did fall down a rabbit hole because I told you about it.

Ligeia

So, tell me, what did you find? I will also put my glasses on to see you better when you speak.

Leraje

So, the name Plomb, P-L-O-M-B, is very close to the word aplomb, the English word aplomb, which is exactly the same spelling as Plomb, but with an A in front.

Ligeia

And it's one word or is an article a?

Leraje

No, it's one word. It's all one word.

Ligeia

Never heard of that.

Leraje

So, and its meaning is self-confident, assurance, poise, all these kind of things. So, I was thinking, there's a character called Plomb, who is full of kind of like uh confidence about what he thinks about, um, the occult, the esoteric, and all this kind of stuff. And then there's a narrator who is not Plomb, has no aPlomb.

He has lost his aPlomb.

Ligeia

Okay. Okay.

Leraje

I like that. So, I don't know. M And yeah, I mean, as I'm saying it, it's—

Ligeia

So, what does that word mean?

Leraje

Aplomb. It just means something like self-confident assurance, poise.

Ligeia

Oh.

Leraje

By using that particular name as a shortened version of aPlomb, maybe Ligotti was saying that the narrator has lost all confidence in his own profession, what he believes, what he thinks. Maybe once upon a time he was like Plomb, like you said a few minutes ago, and he believed and he had all these assurances and belief about what he was doing, but now he hasn't.

Ligeia

He doesn't have that. That makes sense to me. I, this is also a new word for me. Never heard of that. I had my funny theory, but yours sounds much better. So.

Leraje

uh Well, I think they're kind of related. They're not, they're not very dissimilar from each other.

Ligeia

What? How do you know my theory?

Leraje

You've already told— well, you just said it.

Ligeia

What? No, about the name.

Leraje

Oh, I never told you. So sorry. No, you didn't tell me.

Ligeia

Go on then. No, no, no. Uh But it's funny. So, of course, it's spelled with an O, but it's almost the same sounding as Plomb, to Plomb or Plomb line, whatever. So I thought, because it's like the To Plomb, if I'm correct in English, also means like to explore something in like depth.

Leraje

Yes, that's right.

Ligeia

So I thought he was the— Mr. Plomb was able to descend into the depth without even thinking. He had that open-mindedness and curiosity and belief, maybe belief. So because for me, the story was all about disillusionment. I don't know. And also in French, Plomb means lead. So it was like maybe that object that you in English use for that, maybe there is something about that.

I don't know, but that name must have— it's not accidental. It's not accidental. No. But I like your theory a lot.

Leraje

It's also the fact that it sounds an awful lot like the word bomb. And he certainly throws a bomb into the narrator's life.

Ligeia

You said bomb, right?

Leraje

Bomb. B-O-M-B, as in explosive device. Did you think I said bum, as in arse? You did, didn't you? I just think the name explains so much about the relationship between the two of them and that kind of like, because I think you're right, it is a story about disillusionment. But it's also, I think, a story about the ceding or the giving away involuntarily, maybe, of power.

So the narrator kind of like gives away the power of his own belief.

Ligeia

But he doesn't believe in, in it, or because even with the spectacles, he was like, they have no actual value. He m told m Mr. Plomb that, okay, you will see blah blah blah. M And he believed it, so he did see. But we were told that none of these objects had any value.

It was just trash.

Leraje
It was all done via hypnosis.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
But Plomb um was still believing in these things, and he was able to see things that actually he couldn't leave that That world, that those visions, whatever that was, right?

Leraje
And the power, yeah, and Plomb's own certainty about what he was experiencing kind of reverse-contaminated the narrator because he started to experience it too.

Ligeia
He did.

Leraje
Maybe. Well, there was that scene towards the end when, um, the narrator is— he sees this vision of the body of Plomb all kind of like Giggly and laughing and, but cut up and sort of like—

Ligeia
Oh, right. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I thought that was like cruel, kind of cruel because this Plomb— well, I think the narrator wanted to destroy the capacity of Mr. Plomb to enjoy and see these things. I think he was trying to destroy that. Um, it didn't work. Right?

Leraje
No.

Ligeia
Instead, what happens is that Plomb stays in this, in this, this world, whatever, in the other dimensions for eternity. And he seems to be enjoying it. And he found a way how to stay there and how to haunt the narrator forever. You know what happened with the mirrors?

Leraje
Yeah. And the mirrors themselves were— might they be a reflection of Plomb's own certainty about, even though it was kind of like from the narrator's point of view, the whole situation was engineered by his hypnotic suggestion.

Ligeia
That's what he thought, yeah.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
What if he was wrong?

Leraje
Exactly.

Ligeia
Right?

Leraje

And then Plomb finds a way to use these mirrors to reflect that uh certainty back onto the narrator.

Ligeia

And like never-ending number of pieces of glass and mirror. So he was unable to even find a way out of that or like stop it somehow. It was projecting everywhere.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

So I— what do you think? Like, the spectacles, I thought it's like a um representation of a mode of consciousness. So maybe that, that's where the name comes into that picture. Like, like Plomb was maybe more conscious and the narrator was already checked out.

Leraje

The narrator, was he ever kind of like— was he always pretty cynical about the whole I don't think so.

Ligeia

Because he was saying, like, he remembers the days where he was uh also happy and he was excited about things.

Leraje

That's right.

Ligeia

But now he uses these spectacles, which is a sort of, as I said, like a representation of the mode of consciousness, which I think because what he did with the hypnosis and, you know, the blood. He said, like, look at your own blood. A little tiny drop of blood on his finger. And it's such a small thing, like, okay, you know, our normal conscious, real consciousness, whatever, is set up in a way that we don't pay attention to such details because we would go crazy, insane.

You can't see every single cell, every single atom, every single detail of your own blood or whatever.

Leraje

uh Yeah.

Ligeia

So we don't perceive every cell, every reflection, texture. We simplify what we see to survive because it's still a lot. But with the spectacles, what he did with the hypnosis, everything became significant.

Leraje

Mhm.

Ligeia

And that sounds like, to me, it sounded beautiful for a while. Like, oh, this is absolutely crazy. I want to look at my blood like that. But then, of course, Mr. Ligotti came in there. And he did something. It absolutely, if you like, if absolutely everything contains infinite significance, then attention becomes impossible to terminate, right?

There's like, you can't stop it. And there is no reason to stop looking. And that is horror, right?

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia
And there is no final secret.

Leraje
No, because it never ends.

Ligeia
Right. And there's no reason to stop looking and there is no final secret. And that was like the end for me. Like, oh God, okay, I um am good with not seeing what he saw, but I would still put those glasses on. Of course I would. So he— I think Mr. Plomb achieved something that the narrator wasn't able to achieve anymore.

Leraje
Yeah. It is strange how the Narrator never experienced any of—

Ligeia
Nothing. What's that?

Leraje
So, was it Plomb's hypnotic-induced certainty that he would experience something that made him experience something?

Ligeia
That's a good question.

Leraje
If that hypnotic suggestion had never been made, if the Narrator had just simply given him the pair of glasses and said, here, try these, would the same thing still have happened?

Ligeia
That's a good question. So I have a question for each story. So in the spectacles, what happens if we see more than I, if I normally can, right?

Leraje
Yeah. Yeah.

Ligeia
And the premise of m Mr. Plomb was, I want to see. He wanted to see. So the spectacles were like the knowledge. How do I say this? The knowledge you can see through the spectacles is like there is no bottom, there is no end, right? I, I would say the whole story. Why do I keep doing that?

I can't see anything here. I chose the smallest freaking size of letters, so I'm sorry, I can't see it now. So it's an absolute abyss without end. Mm-hmm. M And Ligoti, His final joke here is that there is no bottom.

Leraje
No.

Ligeia
Right. You agree with me?

Leraje
I do, yeah.

Ligeia
But like, I think the stories in this chapter of 4, whatever that is, it is, uh, again, like, not chronological. It's like it's layered, so each story progresses. And this one, I think, is, uh, about distorted perception. Which is a terrifying experience. And we will put a new layer on top of that with the next story, I think.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
I just wanted to say it here. And what—

Leraje
It's funny though that you're— I think uh you're right. It is partly about distorted perception, but it's kind of funny or ironic maybe that the thing that is used to distort that perception the glasses are usually things that clear up distortion.

Ligeia
That's, that's Ligotti's humour, I think.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
It's like, why not?

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Why not?

Leraje
You fucker, Thomas.

Ligeia
Yeah, I just loved it. Like, okay, you will see much more than you want.

Leraje
Mm-hmm.

Ligeia
Yeah. So I, I think this is a psychological horror still.

Leraje
Oh yeah, definitely.

Ligeia
Maybe even Is this ontological? No. Would you say it's ontological? It's more of —

Leraje
I think it could. You could easily argue that, I think.

Ligeia
Could it be? It could be ontological, but I don't know, psychological.

Leraje
You don't sound very convinced.

Ligeia
No, I think because I know that there are still these 2 more stories, so I'm thinking maybe that is more relevant to the next and the last story.

Leraje
Right. Yeah.

Ligeia

And this is more psychological and like something terrible happens uh to your consciousness.

Leraje

Well, maybe this is preparation for it.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

I think it's, it's, it's, there are a set of stories that can become ontological if um you choose to see it that way. And this story is preparation for that, maybe.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah. So it's the alteration of your perception, right? M Yeah, um this we can talk about when we talk about the story, the next story. I don't know.

Leraje

I guess we should say at this point that the 3rd story that Ligeia is referring to there is, oh Christ, I can't say it. What's the name of it?

Ligeia

Nethascrual.

Leraje

Nethascrual.

Ligeia

I can't see.

Leraje

No, neither of us can say it.

Ligeia

Nethascrual.

Leraje

Which we have done. Um I think it was one of the very first ones that we did, actually, in either episode 1 or 2. We did it. Yeah.

Ligeia

Which I don't know why we did it like that, but yeah.

Leraje

No, no. So, I think the plan is, because the 3 stories are related, I uh think what Ligeia and I are going to do with this particular episode is talk about the 2 stories that we've read. But we will also do another separate episode in which we discuss the links between all 3.

Does that sound—

Ligeia

Sounds right. I also finally remembered the word I wanted to say, not ontological, but epistemological. That's the word I wanted to say. I think this is more the horror of not knowing or knowing or around knowledge. Yeah.

Leraje

It's so difficult to say

Ligeia

We don't need to put a label on that. I just—

Leraje

I don't think ontological is necessarily— I don't think ontological is wrong.
No.

Ligeia
It's not wrong, but yeah.

Leraje
But I think that is also right.

Ligeia
Of course, I said it. It's right.

Leraje
There you go, listeners. Confirmation.

Ligeia
Is it bad?

Leraje
So, do we have anything else to talk about with ah this particular story?

Ligeia
I wanted to ask, would you have tried these on?

Leraje
Spectacles?

Ligeia
Ooh.

Leraje
Um, I probably would.

Ligeia
If you didn't know, you would?

Leraje
I probably would, yeah.

Ligeia
Yeah. Do you think you still have the excitement?

Leraje
I don't think I'm as bad as Plomb. You know, this kind of like incessant need to be there as soon as the guy comes back from his travels and sort of like harass him until—

Ligeia
That sounds like me.

Leraje
But I would still have an interest in— I would still have an interest in trying it. Would you?

Ligeia
I would. Yeah. Oh God. I think he didn't end up in a bad way. I would love to be in that uh other dimension and I would probably never come back.

Leraje
Should we move on to our next story? Your choice?

Ligeia
Yes, which was Flowers of the Abyss.

Leraje
Yes!

Ligeia
I absolutely love the name and the story and flowers and abyss, everything. So I think, not just I think, I have read somewhere that Mr. Ligotti's uh own words, he said that in uh, Grimscribe, he reached a point where he began to move further from— not um from, like, into symbolic landscapes and um narratives in general.

Leraje
Mhm.

Ligeia
But the landscapes are what I think defines this one as well.

Leraje
Mhm.

Ligeia
It's a really good example of where that move The switch in his writing is very prominent, I think. Even when you take this one and the previous, your story, I think it's quite obvious that there is a change happening.

Leraje
Oh God, yeah, they're 2 very different stories.

Ligeia
Yeah. Uh So what happens in this story is not that obvious. it's not that easy to follow. It's like almost nothing is happening.

Leraje
Mm-hmm.

Ligeia
It's— the narrator as well is not known to us. There is no name. Uh He's a schoolteacher and it's a small town and he is sent to a house to talk to or investigate a man that has taken up this mansion or residence after a family of Van Liewens used to live there.

And there was a huge, horrible tragedy surrounding the family of Van Liewens.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Which, if I understood correctly, uh they descended into sort of madness and murdered each other or something like that. That's how I understood. They kill each one another, so there was nobody left, and this mysterious man was now there, and the narrator was going there to talk to him and find out what, like, what happened, what is happening.

M So that's the basic story, right?

Leraje
Mhm.

Ligeia
And the whole story is about how they talk. They sit down, they talk. M It is very atmospheric. It's beautifully written. It's only 10 pages in my book, uh but it's— I just, I am in love with this story. I can't even— it is one of my absolute favourites.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Because how he is able to take this story that is like, there is no action. It's only talking of 2 men which we don't even know a name.

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

And I was, I am still uh like, he manages to make me so invested in it that I can't wait for another line or for another sentence. And I have never known anything about these people. And still he is able to do that in 10 pages. Um I'm like, What happened? I need to know what is going on.

I want to know. You don't know anything when you finish, but still.

Leraje

No, nothing, nothing gets resolved because nothing really happens. But no, it's, it's so for me, the first line of this story, I'll quote it. I must whisper my words in the wind, knowing somehow that they will reach you who sent me here. Now that line, because I know you quite well, I smiled when I read that line because I thought, that is— this is a story that Ligeia is going to love.

Ligeia

Yeah, I think you know me. I think you do, because that line is like tattooed in my heart. And there is one more.

Leraje

Right.

Ligeia

Right.

Leraje

Okay.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

um Do you want to share?

Ligeia

We'll get there, maybe.

Leraje

Oh, okay.

Ligeia

Yeah, we'll get there. But like, maybe, maybe you don't know when we get to maybe quotes of— I think you have some. Did you have any quotes for your story?

Leraje

No, not really. It wasn't that kind of story.

Ligeia

Okay. I didn't want to—

Leraje

Well, I didn't think it was, uh which is not to say it wasn't beautifully written because it was beautifully written.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje
And it was very, um, impactful.

Ligeia
Yes.

Leraje
But this one is like a quote machine of kind of like images.

Ligeia
It's like poetry, almost.

Leraje
Endlessly. It is like poetry. It reminded me in a way of, uh, Wax Child, uh, in that kind of like poetic dance of language that Ligotti employs, and Olga Ravn employed in The Wax Child as well.

Ligeia
Yeah. Oh God, yeah.

Leraje
And both books are equally— not a lot of actual events happen on a kind of like— they're not page-turners in the kind of like action-adventure type thing. They both evoke a mood.

Ligeia
Which is a page-turner for me. So, and to me, this one is more—

Leraje
Absolutely.

Ligeia
Po— poesque? Edgar Allan Poe.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
So there you go. I'm in love. Yeah.

Leraje
It is. I mean, I wouldn't describe it as Gothic in the sense that Poe would have used it.

Ligeia
No, but the way he works with the atmosphere and shadows and just little objects and how he's able to describe sounds. I am, yeah, I have my quotes ready. Listen, this will take for like ever because I always love stories.

Leraje
Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia
Right.

Leraje
There's a couple of oddities though, right at the start that I would be interested in hearing your opinion on.

Ligeia
Okay. Oddities?

Leraje

The narrator, who is a teacher, yeah, refers to his pupils as child citizens.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Now, that's an odd word.

Ligeia

It is odd.

Leraje

That's a strange way of describing children.

Ligeia

I don't know why uh that is.

Leraje

I read it and I thought, that's a very particular— and I was trying to think of a reason. Yeah. I thought maybe it was something to do— because when we, right at the start of the story, we're kind of like learning about what happens to the narrator rather than it happening to him as we read the story.

Mhm.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

So maybe he's already in a place where he doesn't think— he thinks of them as less than human, or himself as less than human.

Ligeia

Hmm. You think?

Leraje

I don't know.

Ligeia

I don't know. I don't know. There is like— I have read this story so many times and I still don't have answers to many things. I don't know. I think the townspeople, that part is freaking important for the whole story.

Leraje

Oh yeah.

Ligeia

And because the pupils are also probably a part of that, and what happened at the end, maybe the emotions were not very positive. I don't know.

Leraje

Yeah, could be.

Ligeia

Because well, we will probably get to that point. I think that's the end of the story, so I don't want to start with the townspeople. But, um, what do you think this story was about?

Leraje

It's to do with perception, but it's also to do— I mean, so many of Ligotti's stories about the kind of like subversion of his idea about reality and what reality isn't.

Ligeia

When your story was, as I said, like the question in there was what happens if we see more than we normally can? I think in this story, the layer up was what happens if what we see reveals the reality itself is wrong? Mhm So you see, it's progressing.

Leraje

It's a progression. Yeah.

Ligeia

Something worse. Yeah.

Leraje

And that's also a theme. M mhm Epistemological.

Ligeia

Yeah, theme.

Leraje

That's also a theme of Ligotti's work in general, I think, this idea that reality is not what we experience and that reality is relative to the person looking at it.

Ligeia

This is why this story is absolutely incredible. Incredible. Yeah. Again, In your story, Mr. M Plomb was saying, I want to see.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

In this story, the teacher, let's call him a teacher, I have seen. M Right? So, and the townspeople, they don't want to see. We don't want to see. We don't want to know. Denial. Oh no.

Leraje

Oh no. Oh no.

Ligeia

And from the distorted perception in your story, which was a terrifying experience, we continue to like, maybe accurate perception, we don't know. But it's a terrifying fucking reality now.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

So I think the horror is growing. Uh, for me at least, you know what I mean? Am I making sense?

Leraje

No, no, you make perfect sense. You always do.

Ligeia

No, I wouldn't say perfect, but thank you. So what is very Mr. Ligotti in this story is that the corruption isn't just like happening in the house. It's not like, oh, this house is all wrong, and once you enter the house the wrong is around you and you might be consumed by this wrongness.

No, that's not how it works with Mr. Ligotti. This house is, or the garden as well, is only like a simple— it's simply a place where—

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Where it's very easy to observe it as you enter, uh right? But the actual horror is much bigger because we are introduced the uh sentence of, The quote of this story is the madness of things, right?

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

And that's a key phrase. So for me, the narrator, the teacher, is he a narrator? The narrator of this story, uh, he discovers that beneath, underneath the door. So again, the mystery is there.

Leraje

Bap!

Ligeia

Yes. So, uh okay, whatever. This is very- this is a very Ligotian. Ligotian? How do you say it? Ligotian?

Leraje

Ligotian.

Ligeia

Ligotian. Okay. I don't see any ocean. It's Ligotian concept, which normally people assume, okay, humans can become insane while, you know, the whole reality around them remains sane, right?

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Ligotti takes it, reverses it. Of course he does. Oh God.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

And says, what if reality itself is insane? Insanity is just like our inability to perceive that fact, right? So a story- this story is obsessed with perception. So for example, the music box, which the whole paragraph is underlined like 55 times in my book. The music box begins this whole process. That sound As he describes it, it is like it carries the consciousness, uh right?

It brings the consciousness into the sound, right? It makes it real or whatever. Not real, like outward. It is terrible. It's horrifying already. M Something's wrong. Then we meet the flowers situation.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Which are all sorts of wrong, but somehow uh the darkness of the whole thing and the darkness of the flowers is not just in the flowers.

Leraje

No, it's actually being created. It's radiating out of the flowers.

Ligeia

It is radiating out of the flowers, but also I think we are present there. M And we're already inside of that. And you learn that you can't leave. You entered something and now it's inside of you.

Leraje

Yeah. Well, is that, I mean, one of the quotes that I, uh, saved was that description of when the music box first starts. And it's—

Ligeia

You want to read it?

Leraje

mhm Mm. Through the yellowed haze of the room and deep into the darkness that pressed at the walls, and then deeper into the darkness between the walls, and then through the walls and into the unbordered spaces where those silvery tomes ascended and quivered like a swarm of insects. There was still beauty in this vision, however tinged it was with the sinister.

It's just amazing.

Ligeia

Like, there are no words.

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

uh I don't even want to say anything after that because everything sounds like—

Leraje

Yeah. Yeah. It's difficult to follow the guy.

Ligeia

Like broken sounds.

Leraje

But it's that description of kind of like this music that just kind of like radiates outwards in the way that you were talking about, but also inwards into things. It kind of like, it's the unifying thing. Between the people and the objects. And everything is brought into this and altered by it at the same time.

Ligeia

Yeah, it's altered by it. Mhm Exactly.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

mhm You can continue, I just wanted to agree.

Leraje

So the two things are not necessarily, at some level, the two things are not necessarily separate. The people, the objects, everything, the room, the village. The world is not necessarily, like you said earlier, it doesn't really matter where these things took place. It could have been any house anywhere or any building anywhere or anything.

The difference, what makes it is, um, and it didn't even necessarily need to be this, a music box. It could have been the thing that alters and reveals what Ligotti calls the madness of things.

Ligeia

Mm-hmm.

Leraje

The, the unknowable. vastness and at the same time smallness of every detail that makes up this kind of like reflection, this inversion that again you were

talking about a minute ago. Uh What if it's everything else that's mad and we're also mad and everything's mad and nothing makes any sense?

Ligeia

Uh, Wow. My brain froze. That was excellent. No, that was excellent. Thank you. I also think it's possibly just like, you know, a haunted house. All these objects can be used if the house is haunted by something, by the darkness, by madness.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

These objects just serve as tools to m play with the minds, the consciousness of the people.

Leraje

Stephen King's got a great quote about that.

Ligeia

Hmm.

Leraje

Have you read Salem's Lot?

Ligeia

uh Audiobook, yeah.

Leraje

Right. So in Salem's Lot, there's a character called Father Callahan who's fighting off the vampires with a crucifix. And Stephen King essentially says, It doesn't have to be a crucifix. It could be like a head of lettuce or anything. It's not the thing. It's not the thing that's important. It's the power that you put um onto the thing that makes it work.

Yes.

Ligeia

Oh, God.

Leraje

It's that same idea, I think.

Ligeia

That's good. Yes. Yes, exactly. M And so, as you said, it is just at that moment when this person is in the house, it is trying to show him Whatever, you know. So it's a music box. M Next time it's going to be a mannequin. Next time it's going to be floorboard, whatever.

I don't know.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Grandfather's clock. Beautiful objects. Flowers. Hm Of course, we are getting there. Why flowers? Oh, why flowers again? Why is it always in my story? Why do I choose stories with flowers that are trying to in literature and in art, they are trying to represent something beautiful and innocent and gorgeous and sexually pleasing.

Leraje

Yeah. And Ligotti hates that.

Ligeia

And Ligotti takes it like, you know what, middle fingers.

Leraje

I took that personally.

Ligeia

I am going to corrupt your flowers and how you see them. So because we are only projecting this on the flowers, they don't know what we think about them.

Leraje

Which is true.

Ligeia

They don't grow to be pretty for us. They don't know anything. So it's our projection of the beauty and innocence. And we put flowers in people's hands or statues or whatever and think like, oh, this is such a nice symbol of royalty, lilies or whatever, roses. And oh, what a beautiful lady with flowers.

Leraje

Um But we do do that. And I think one of the things that Ligotti is trying to say in a lot of his stories that utilise nature and flowers in particular is that, and it relates to what I think his idea is about the sort of like rigidity of meaning.

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

They have meanings that we put on them. They don't have any intrinsic meaning.

Ligeia

Absolutely not.

Leraje

As you just said a minute ago, a flower is not beautiful. A flower is just a flower. We're the ones who think it's beautiful.

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

We've put that meaning onto it.

Ligeia

Exactly. That's what I'm saying. And I love that he is not uh chained with all these perceptions and cliché meanings. He is so free of these. He takes it and he puts it on its head, and it actually makes so much sense. And he makes you think, okay, wow. Okay, so Flowers, it doesn't mean, okay, Flowers of the Abyss, this is going to be darkly beautiful.

No. How about no? Uh Because Mr. Ligotti thinks beauty itself may be one expression of the actual abyss.

Leraje

Yeah, exactly. Exactly that. Yes.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

I mean, you can look at a title like Flowers of the Abyss and you can think, oh, some pretty flowers in an abyss. That's a nice contrast.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Then you can also think, no, it's not. These flowers grow in the abyss. These are likely to be pretty fucked up flowers.

Ligeia
They might be the abyss.

Leraje
They might be the abyss themselves.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Or a natural component of the abyss.

Ligeia
Exactly. So I'm saying how I understand this is beauty and horror in Ligotti's work is just like simply like 2 human interpretations Right? Of the same, whatever, phenomenon, whatever.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
It's beauty and horror can be the same thing. That's what I'm saying.

Leraje
Yeah. And his, the kind of like, um, the nihilism that runs through a lot of his work is reflected in that too.

Ligeia
Oh yeah.

Leraje
These are, like I said a minute m ago, these are interpretations we put onto what we think are beautiful things. So beautiful flowers, beautiful food, beautiful paintings, beautiful women, beautiful men, beautiful anything. What Ligotti, I think, is saying is that if you strip all that away, you're left with a reality that is only how each person interprets it.

Ligeia
Yeah. And probably if you were not raised in a society, you were just born and let's say you were just raised by yourself, whatever. You wouldn't know that flowers are supposed to look beautiful to you. Mhm If you have never heard that, it would be just something. We don't know what, but you know what I'm trying to say?

Leraje
Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia
It's these concepts. A lot of beauty is cultural. Yeah.

Leraje
What did you make about the whole thing about, because there seemed to be a line We talked a minute, uh a few minutes ago about the connection between these 2 stories, and you, you said you felt it was an escalation in terms of—

Ligeia
Yeah, I will get there.

Leraje

But I was, I was interested in one specific part of that escalation to do with eyes, to do with looking, because there's quite a lot of mention of— the start of this story mentions eyes and looking.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Excuse me. And he does at the end as well.

Ligeia

That's true.

Leraje

Do you have a theory? And the first story— I don't know that I do. The first story is about spectacles and uh is therefore also about eyes and looking. How do we— in the first story, we use— uh the story uses spectacles to draw attention to the fact that you can look. This second story seems to be more about what happens when you do look.

Does that sound Yeah. Hmm. You don't look convinced.

Ligeia

No, no, I am intrigued because I haven't realised that. So I was just thinking, wow, that's, that's kind of freaking cool. And I have no answer for that. Uh, I, yeah, the first story obviously is mostly about looking, mirrors, spectacle, using your eyes, uh which I guess is the first thing when you are trying to learn.

You read, you look, you use your eyes mostly. Of course, you can listen, but it's probably like what everybody would think. You read, you look, you travel, you see, you observe.

Leraje

We observe.

Ligeia

with your eyes. I don't know. In this second story, I think because it starts with the uh music box, I think he's trying to implement all senses.

Leraje

Right.

Ligeia

But you are right that there is a lot of looking and eyes, but there's also mention of scent. And I think there is a lot of like, not touch, but sort of sensation of touch or fog, mist around the flowers.

Leraje

So, so the reason I said eyes, so it's the 1, 2, 3rd paragraph into this story. Mm-hmm. Mhm The teacher says, you have seen the house and how approaching it from the road that leaks out, that leads out of town, sprouts suddenly into view. A pale flower and dark summer trees, now a ghostly flower at autumn.

At first, this is how it appeared to my eyes, and then— yes, my eyes, think about them, good people, dream about them.

Ligeia

That's true.

Leraje

And then one of the endish quotes towards the end is, um um, come then and close my eyes. Murder them beings into which they have been drawn.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
So there's this thing about eyes, and it seems to be linked in some way to the first story, maybe.

Ligeia
Mm-hmm. M Well, everything can be linked in his work. M uh Huh. So what would that mean?

Leraje
He's telling people to think about his eyes in the second story. Yeah. And in the second quote, he's saying, you close my eyes. So, somebody else closed my eyes for me.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
It's an appeal to other people. Mhm Why would that be? Uh It's not clear to me why. It just felt relevant to me.

Ligeia
I don't know.

Leraje
I'm not sure. It might not even be relevant.

Ligeia
Because this story ends, sort of ends with the townspeople, are upset, right? They are— they don't want, as I said, they don't want to see, they don't want to know. So we know that they have some sort of knowledge of what is happening or what happened, what this whole thing about the darkness and madness.

They are not completely oblivious, but uh they want to deny it. Mhm And they think by destroying the house, the person, maybe the family, I don't know.

Leraje
So, maybe the emphasis on eyes from the narrator is saying to the townspeople, you have to see, you have to open your eyes.

Ligeia
Yes. That's what I'm saying. And then if he wants, like, close my eyes or whatever, maybe It's their denial. Like, you are living with your eyes closed.

Leraje
Yeah. I mean, I mentioned to you earlier today that that aspect of it, this kind of on behalf of the townspeople, this kind of refusal, it reminded me quite a lot of the mystics of Muhlenberg.

Ligeia
Mhm, yes, that's true.

Leraje
Their kind of refusal to see, notice.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje

You know, these things getting incrementally smaller, ah wronger.

Ligeia
Yeah. Greyer.

Leraje
And just like, it's um fine, we'll just ignore it. Everything will be fine.

Ligeia
Everything was slowly um decaying or whatever that was.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
The sky was grey. The bell, the church bell stopped. There was no days, no nights. Oh, okay. We just continue.

Leraje
Nothing's wrong. This is fine.

Ligeia
No, it's okay. Yeah, yeah, that, that is exactly, I think. Well, these people were actually going and wanted to burn the house, so it was like, let's destroy this and that will destroy the horror, even though they knew. But this is how crowds function. It's the Yeah, it's uh the madness. Like, let's just do that even though we know it's not going to destroy anything, but at least we do something.

Leraje
The madness of things.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Hmm.

Ligeia
So I saw it. If we like look at the 2 stories, I thought that is like the comparison of how it progresses is um Plomb wants to see.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Townpeople don't want to see.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Then in spectacles, perception is artificially intensified, right?

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
In this one, the perception penetrates the ordinary world reality, which is awesome. In spectacles, mystery becomes Infinite, because, you know, he ended up in eternal somewhere. And in Flowers, reality becomes abyss or darkness or madness.

Leraje

There's that great line towards the end of the story, then shutter your minds as well as you can to the abyss that is home to the madness of things.

Ligeia
Oh yeah.

Leraje
What a fucking line that is.

Ligeia
What the fuck? What on earth? How do you write like this? How do you think like this? How is this the same language? Mhm It's like he creates his own universe, really, really.

Leraje
But I think that line does, it echoes what you've just said, this idea that in the first story, perception, the second story, denial.

Ligeia
The perception? Hm Yeah. Yeah, I think so. Yeah, and it is like, again, Plomb cannot stop looking. And in your story, fascination, you know, Mr. Plomb, destroys the individual.

Leraje
Yes.

Ligeia
Which I don't think he cared, but it did. And here, the revelation, your favourite word, threatens the community.

Leraje
Thanks for that callback of my stupidity.

Ligeia
No, nobody knows. And so horror in your story lies in the actual seeing.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
So we come back to your eyes, or not your eyes, but like the eyes. And I think when you take both stories, I think Spectacles and Flowers both serve as like lenses m of sorts. Would you agree with me?

Leraje
I think I know what you're saying, but can you—

Ligeia
Like, Plomb is looking through glass, right? It's spectacles, then it's mirrors and what's sort of glass. The teacher looks into the flowers, through them, whatever they look back, whatever. So they both discover that ordinary appearances are like really just very surface level or shallow.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
And that if you manage to see through, through that, so it's just a lens, you look through something and you see through that shallow first appearance, the layer, then you see something you might not be ready for. So is the abyssal or abysmal instability?

Leraje
Abyssal.

Ligeia

Abyssal instability of the existence itself. Will I say this today? I will say it again. Is the abyssal instability of existence So I think, like, Ligotti proposes that horror doesn't enter the world from somewhere else, but—

Leraje

No.

Ligeia

Horror is that the world was already like this even before. You, you just didn't know. And now you look through this lens and you see how it actually has been all this time. You just were completely unaware of that. So it's the perception.

Leraje

Yeah, the borderline message, I think, to a lot of Ligotti's stuff is that the world is fucking insane and makes no sense. And it's only the ideas and the concepts that we put onto it allow us to function within it with any degree of sanity.

Ligeia

Yes. And then the actual will to gain any knowledge might be the way to destroy yourself. I have a quote.

Leraje

Oh, go ahead.

Ligeia

No, but I wanted to read you that one that is also—

Leraje

Oh yeah.

Ligeia

Now I am a vagabond of the universe, a drifter among spaces where the madness of things has no limits.

Leraje

And goes back to that idea about there being no bottom from the first story.

Ligeia

Yes. M Yeah, but like this whole section about the flower Mhm. It says here, like, they almost look like flowers, don't they? Right? So brightly coloured as they shine in the night. And yet, when I first came upon them, not in this body, of course, almost everything was dark. But it wasn't dark as a house is sometimes dark, or as the woods are dark because of thick trees keeping out the light.

It was dark only because there were nothing to keep Because there was nothing to keep out the darkness. How do I know this? I know because I could see with more than my eyes. There's the eyes again. I could see with the darkness itself. With the darkness, I saw the darkness. It was immensity without end around me.

Unbroken expansions. Expansion. Dark horizon meeting dark horizon. And there were also things within the darkness, and I believe within my own form, so that if I reached out to touch them across a universe of darkness, I also reached deep inside of myself such as I was. Yet all I could feel were those things, the flowers.

To touch them was like touching light and colours and a thousand kinds of bristling and growing shapes. Just kill me! What is this? This is not from this world. You can't, you can't. I want to meet this guy because I don't think he's real.

Leraje

Do we think we're done with Flowers of the Abyss?

Ligeia

I think so, which I don't want to be, but please go, people, read that. Read.

Leraje

It is a great story. Until next time, I've been Leraje. Hail Satan.

Ligeia

I am still Ligeia. Hail Satan.

[Outro music]