Fear, Cosmic Horror and the Sublime in H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction

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Fear, Cosmic Horror and the Sublime in H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction

Mémoire présenté par Julian HENDRIKX
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Critères de qualité des travaux de fin d'études de la filière en Langues et lettres modernes

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1. Questions/thématiques de recherche

- La question de recherche est-elle clairement définie ?
- La question de recherche est-elle originale et/ou scientifiquement ambitieuse ?
- Dans quelle mesure contribue-t-elle à la littérature scientifique et à l'état des connaissances de la discipline ?

2. Mobilisation de la théorie

- Utilisation de sources pertinentes ?
  - Le travail contient-il des références solides et pertinentes ?
  - Le travail contient-il un nombre suffisant de références scientifiques ?
    - Le seuil minimum est fixé à *10 références scientifiques* (à savoir : ouvrage, monographie, article de revue scientifique, chapitre d'ouvrage, compte-rendu…) ; ne comptent pas comme références scientifiques : les articles de blogs et les pages issues de sites de vulgarisation.
- Utilisation pertinente et critique des sources ?
  - Les sources sont-elles mobilisées de manière adéquate dans le texte ?
  - Les citations sont-elles mobilisées de manière pertinente dans le texte ?
  - Les différentes sources sont-elles mises en relation ?
- Les concepts pertinents pour la question de recherche sont-ils clairement définis et maîtrisés ?
- La/Les questions de recherche (et les hypothèses éventuelles qui en découlent) sont-elles pertinentes, principalement en lien avec l'état de l'art ?

3. Méthodologie

- La méthodologie déployée permet-elle de répondre aux questions de recherche ?
- La méthodologie déployée est-elle décrite avec clarté et de manière complète ?
- Le cas échéant : la collecte des données (corpus, échantillon, questionnaire, sources textuelles…) a-t-elle été effectuée de manière rigoureuse ?
- Permet-elle d'apporter des éléments de réponse aux questions de recherche et aux objectifs du travail, et, le cas échéant, de confirmer ou d'infirmer les hypothèses de travail ?

4. Analyse/Commentaire/Résultats

- La présentation des résultats ou observations se base-t-elle sur des preuves textuelles, des citations, des analyses de corpus, des extraits d'entretiens… ?
- Le corpus de travail est-il analysé de manière complète et systématique ?
- Le cas échéant : la base de données a-t-elle été constituée avec rigueur et précision ?
- Les résultats sont-ils présentés de manière claire et précise ?
- Les résultats sont-ils présentés de manière logique, de façon à développer un raisonnement cohérent ?
- Les résultats permettent-ils de répondre aux questions de recherche et de vérifier les hypothèses de travail ?
- Le commentaire permet-il une analyse en lien avec le cadre théorique défini ?

5. Discussion, synthèse, perspectives

- Les observations principales du travail sont-elles résumées de manière claire et mises en relation avec la littérature scientifique ?
- Des pistes de développement sur la base des conclusions principales (pour des recherches futures) sont-elles proposées ?
- Un regard critique sur la démarche mise en œuvre dans le travail est-il proposé ?

6. Qualité de la langue

Il est attendu que le TFE soit rédigé en langue étrangère et que la qualité de la langue mobilisée soit conforme aux attentes académiques. Indépendamment du contenu, le jury a la possibilité de remettre en cause la réussite du travail s'il estime que la qualité de la langue est insuffisante.

- La langue utilisée dans le travail respecte-t-elle les normes orthographiques, grammaticales et syntaxiques ?
- La terminologie scientifique est-elle mobilisée de manière appropriée ?
- Le texte est-il structuré de manière cohérente ?
- Le document respecte-t-il les caractéristiques du style académique ?
- La qualité de rédaction est-elle de nature à remettre en cause la réussite du travail ?

7. Mise en page et typographie

- La présentation matérielle du mémoire (structure, mise en page, typographie) est-elle soignée ?

- La longueur du travail est-elle conforme aux consignes ?

8. Référencement bibliographique et citations

- Toutes les références traitées dans le texte sont-elles présentes dans la bibliographie ?
- Toutes les références présentes dans la bibliographie sont-elles traitées dans le texte ?
- Les normes de citation sont-elles respectées ?
- Les normes bibliographiques sont-elles appliquées de manière cohérente et systématique ?
- Le travail ne contient-il pas de plagiat ; tout propos ne relevant pas d'une réflexion personnelle de l'étudiant·e est-il référencé ?

9. Défense orale

La défense orale permet au jury de vérifier la maîtrise des sujets abordés dans le travail ainsi que l'appareil méthodologique déployé. Elle permet de vérifier les compétences de présentation des étudiant·es et leur aptitude à répondre à des remarques critiques. La défense est publique et se déroule dans la langue étrangère.

Lors de la défense orale, l'étudiant·e propose une synthèse du travail soulignant les résultats principaux, approfondit un aspect particulier de celui-ci ou exploite une thématique connexe. Cette présentation dure au maximum 10 minutes.

- Le contenu de l'exposé est-il présenté de manière concise ?
- L'exposé est-il présenté de manière cohérente ?
- L'étudiant·e répond-il/elle aux critiques et questions de manière adéquate et convaincante ?
- La maîtrise de la langue orale est-elle conforme aux exigences académiques ?
- La langue mobilisée lors de la défense respecte-t-elle les normes grammaticales et lexicales ?

10. Déclaration d'authenticité relative à l'utilisation de l'intelligence artificielle générative

- L'utilisation de plateformes d'intelligence artificielle générative est-elle conforme à ce qui est indiqué dans la déclaration d'authenticité ?

11. Longueur

*La longueur attendue pour un **TFE du master 120** (avec une fourchette de 10 % vers le haut ou vers le bas) est de **240 000 caractères espaces compris**, hors bibliographie et annexes. À titre indicatif, cela correspond à 36 000 mots, hors bibliographie et annexes.*

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- La longueur du TFE est-elle conforme aux dispositions réglementaires ?

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Déclaration d'authenticité

Je, soussigné·e Julian HENDRIKX…… déclare avoir rédigé le présent travail de fin d'études de manière autonome, sans l'aide non autorisée de tiers et ne pas avoir utilisé d'autres moyens que ceux indiqués. J'ai mentionné, en précisant la source, les passages de ce travail empruntés textuellement ou sous forme de paraphrase à d'autres ouvrages.

Je déclare avoir pris connaissance de la charte ULiège d'utilisation des intelligences artificielles génératives dans les travaux universitaires (https://www.student.uliege.be/cms/c_19230399/fr/faq-student-charte-uliege-d-utilisation-des-intelligences-artificielles-generatives-dans-les-travaux-universitaires) et des restrictions propres à ma filière d'étude, et je déclare que mon travail implique (cochez la case appropriée) :

- ▪ Aucun usage de l'IA générative
- ☐ Un usage de l'IA générative comme assistant linguistique (amélioration de la formulation, de la mise en forme de textes que j'ai rédigés ; cette utilisation est comparable aux correcteurs d'orthographe et de grammaire existants).
- ☐ Un usage de l'IA générative comme assistant à la recherche d'information (aide comparable à l'usage des moteurs de recherche existants qui facilitent l'accès à la connaissance d'un sujet).

Ce travail peut être vérifié pour le plagiat et l'utilisation des intelligences artificielles génératives à l'aide du logiciel approprié. Je comprends qu'une conduite contraire à l'éthique peut entraîner une sanction.

Lieu, date	Signature
Peer, Limbourg : 25/05/2025	Julian Hendrikx
_____	_____

Contents

1. Introduction:

Howard Philips Lovecraft can arguably be considered one of the most important American horror writers of all time. While his work was considered mediocre during his lifetime, Lovecraft himself even being very critical of his work and arguing that he was a bad writer (Smith 830), over the years, public perception has shifted. While he remains a controversial figure (for reasons that will be made apparent throughout this thesis), his work has had a massive influence on not only the horror genre, but also on science-fiction (Smith 830), and he is often considered the father of the cosmic horror genre, of which later parts of this thesis will go into further detail. His monsters, Cthulhu in particular, have become household names, and there are even real-life cults worshipping them (Luckhurst 13). His work has had such an impact on the horror scene, that whenever we describe a creature that cannot be understood, we employ the adjective "Lovecraftian" (Collins).

As such, one can only wonder what pushed Lovecraft to write the horrors he did. Where did the ideas for some of his themes come from and how are they utilized? How did the social environment of the time affect his work, and what traces of Lovecraft's beliefs and fears can be found within? This thesis will attempt to analyze Lovecraft's work and find a number of recurring themes throughout, before further analyzing said themes in order to find how they are typically handled, as well as attempting to see any connection with Lovecraft's worldview and phobias. After a short introduction to the concepts of fear and the sublime, this thesis will analyze the themes of race, religion/occultism and the unknown, ending with cosmic horror. In the final chapter, this thesis will also look at the relation between cosmic horror and the sublime, as the two genres are often believed to share a multitude of similarities.

2. Fear:

Before beginning any kind of analysis, it seems appropriate to first define two concepts which we will return to throughout the thesis, starting with the concept of "fear". The Cambridge dictionary defines fear as "an unpleasant emotion or thought that you have when you are frightened or worried by something dangerous, painful, or bad that is happening or might happen" (Cambridge). Similarly, Merriam Webster describes it as "an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger" (Merriam Webster). While these definitions do provide us with a starting point, they also raise a couple of questions. If fear truly is an entirely negative emotion, why do so many actively seek out horror media such as novels, movies, tv-shows, etc.? Furthermore, why would some people chose to write works meant to

incite such a negative feeling instead of something which, by definition, would bring us joy, such as comedic or romantic stories?

From a philosophical perspective, fear also appears to be a negative emotion we would be better off without. In her article titled "The Philosophy of Fear", Elizabeth Azide essentially differentiates two different types of fear. On one hand, there are "right fears", the fears that motivate us to be productive and to move forward, which is usually the result of deadlines or potential job interviews (Azide 2017). On the other hand, there is fear that handicaps us in our daily lives, fear that stops us from doing what we want to do, which is almost always a social type of fear, such as performance or social anxiety (Azide 2017). Inspired by the beliefs of the classical Greek philosopher Epictetus, Azide argues that fear should be fought with indifference. We should accept that there are a variety of things out of our control, such as the opinions of others, and therefore realize that worrying about said things would be completely useless (Azide 2017). Thus, from a philosophical point of view, while having some positive aspects, fear is largely a negative emotion that handicaps us, and should therefore be ignored as much as possible. However, this interpretation still does not explain why we actively seem to seek out such a negative and handicapping emotion for our entertainment.

A possible literary explanation comes from the famous horror author Stephen King. In a foreword to his short story collection *Night Shift*, King wrote an essay on the topic of fear. In said essay, he compares the allure of horror literature, or even horror entertainment in general, to that of a car accident we simply cannot turn away from (King qtd. in Constant Readers). These car crashes fill us with guilt, but also seem to help us deal with the horrors of life, as described in the following passage:

> The fact is […] that very few of us can forgo an uneasy peek at the wreckage bracketed by police cars and road flares on the turnpike at night. Senior citizens pick up the paper in the morning and immediately turn to the obituary column so they can see who they outlived. All of us are uneasily transfixed for a moment when we hear that a Dan Blocker has died […]. We feel terror mixed with an odd sort of glee when we hear Paul Harvey on the radio telling us that a woman walked into a propeller blade during a rain squall […]. […] Life is full of horrors small and large, but because the small ones are the ones we can comprehend, they are the ones that smack home with all the force of mortality. (King qtd. in Constant Readers).

Our entire life is surrounded by horrors and fear. We constantly hear news of people dying or gruesome accidents happening. Yet, we do not appear to be capable of looking away, and as King describes it, we even seem to feel some form of glee whenever such macabre topics are presented. King seems to argue that the reason for this weird attraction is that it reminds us of our mortality, and therefore we feel compelled to face it. This could serve as a possible explanation as to why many people tend to flock towards horror literature. While it does provide us with the negative emotion of fear, said emotion is a sort of therapeutic way of dealing with uncomfortable truths such as our mortality. It could even be argued that seeing fictional characters deal with horrors the likes of which we will never see in our lives, can allow the reader to feel more at ease with the smaller scale terrors of their daily lives.

King also explains his point of view on horror authors. According to him, everyone has a sort of "filter", which dictates how we view the world, and horror authors are therefore compelled to write about the macabre (King qtd. in Constant Readers). He demonstrates this notion by explaining that, if he and Western author Louis L'Amour were both to sit next to the same pond and feel inspired to describe it, they would go about doing so in vastly different ways: "His story might be about water rights in a dry season, my story would more likely be about some dreadful, hulking thing rising out of the still waters to carry off sheep . . . and horses . . . and finally people" (King qtd. in Constant Readers). It could thus be argued that part of the reason as to why people choose to write horror is simply that they have no other choice. Horror authors view the world in a different way than a comedy, Western or romantic writer would, their heads filled with a macabre projection of the world, and thus they simply project that point of view onto the pages of their novels.

Furthermore, King also states that horror writers have a sort of social role to play. He states that: "The horror-story writer is not so different from the Welsh sin-eater, who was supposed to take upon himself the sins of the dear departed by partaking of the dear departed's food" (King qtd. in Constant Readers). They write about horrific themes no one else would want to write about, because, as previously mentioned, the public wants to be confronted with supernatural horrors in order to feel a sense of catharsis towards the smaller scale horrors in their daily lives. King demonstrates this notion by comparing the rise of giant bug movies in the 50's, such as *Them*, with the increasing worry of the dangers of nuclear weapons, or *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* with the increasing fear towards teenage delinquency. King makes this even clearer by explicitly stating that: "great horror fiction is almost always allegorical; sometimes the allegory is intended […] and sometimes it just happens" (King qtd. in Constant

Readers). As will be seen throughout this thesis, this link between our daily lives and the supernatural horrors we see in fiction is very much so present in Lovecraft's work.

As such, while fear can be helpful in motivating us to push forward, it is, essentially by definition, a negative emotion that tends to handicap us in our daily lives. Yet, a lot of people are attracted to sources of fear, such as horror movies, novels, tv-shows, etc., for two main reasons. Firstly, similarly to car crashes, it appears to be in our human nature to possess a sort of morbid curiosity towards the macabre, which could be due to the fact that it confronts us with our own mortality in a relatively harmless way. Secondly, and somewhat linked with the first reason, confronting ourselves with exaggerated versions of everyday horrors give us a sort of catharsis. Being able to project society's common fears onto a supernatural monster or a single psychopathic individual allows us to confront said fears easier.

These explanations also allow us to discover why certain individuals would then choose to write about these topics. Not only do horror writers usually have a sort of unique filter that allows them to portray the world in a horrifying manner through their writing, they actively chose to do so to instill a certain sense of catharsis. They choose to describe their fears through these novels in order to appease their public's, and potentially their own, feelings towards certain topics. Some authors, such as King, are aware of this, others are not, but most great horror writers portray their fears and concerns through their work, as a sort of therapeutic method to deal with the anxiety and dread they bring.

3. The Sublime

The second concept which warrants a brief explanation is that of the sublime. Defining said concept however, can prove to be quite difficult, as it can not only apply to multiple fields, such as politics and literature, but it also has itself a long and complex history. The concept is thought to have its origin in the treatise *On Sublimity*, supposedly written by classical philosopher Cassius Longinus, though the authorship of said treatise is debated (Costelloe 11). Longinus never truly gives an outright definition of the sublime. Rather, he cites a couple of characteristics associated with the sublime:

> First, it is "a certain pinnacle and excellence of discourse." Second, it is the one thing that secures the preeminence and enduring fame of all the greatest writers of poetry and prose. Third, it can be recognized by its effect: it produces ecstasy; it astounds and does not (merely) persuade; it controls or irresistibly compels the audience. Fourth and finally, it is a local rather than a global effect: it comes at a

> single stroke, like lightning, and is not achieved by content or structure on a larger scale. (Costelloe 12)

From these characteristics, we can define Longinus' vision of the sublime as something great or excellent that gives fame and success to those creating it. Those who observe the sublime are hit with a wave of ecstasy and astonishment, presumably due to the greatness of the work, and this feeling is entirely local and happens quickly, similarly to a lightning strike. A shorter version of this definition can be found with Robert Doran, who states that "sublime, for Longinus, meant anything that is great and elevated" (qtd. in Mahmood 76).

After the classical period, *On Sublimity* and the concept of the sublime was essentially lost to time. This changed around the 16th century, when it was republished and later translated (Costelloe 3-4). This marked the start of the spread of the sublime across Europe, as many philosophers and writers reflected on or added ideas to the concept all throughout the 16th century to the modern-day (Costelloe 3-7). However, one of the most influential changes to the sublime, and the variants that will be focused on during the final chapter discussing the sublime, can be attributed to the 18th century Irish philosopher, Edmund Burke and German philosopher Immanuel Kant. It should be noted that, while there were a variety of differences in their interpretations of the sublime (some of which will be shown in a later chapter), they did share the main essence which will be relevant for this thesis: the combination of the sublime with negative feelings.

As mentioned above, previous interpretations of the sublime were vastly positive, seeing it as an ecstatic, almost godly feeling. Burke, followed shortly after by Kant, were some of the first to twist this vision, and associate mostly negative feelings with the sublime. This can best be seen in the definition Burke gives in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful:*

> "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. […] Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime". (Burke qtd. in Mahmood 77)

As is made apparent from Burke's description of the sublime, it is an experience that cannot be created without negative sensations or feelings. In order to attain the sublime, one must be confronted with pain, danger, terror, etc.

To be more specific, there are a couple of variables one needs to be confronted with in order to attain the sublime. According to Mahmood: "The sublime is directly occasioned by one's experience of objects and conditions such as vastness, obscurity and darkness, and most importantly, those forms of power that […] thrust danger and terror upon one's existence" (Mahmood 78). Terror refers to the feeling we feel when we are in a dangerous situation, or one that could cause us harm (Van Dyk). The catch, however, is that there needs to be distance between us and the object of terror, as only when our mind is guaranteed of our survival can it truly become an onlooker of the situation (Mahmood 79). Power also plays a major role, as vast displays of power, such as that of a king or even a god, can make us stand in awe and make us feel terror, especially if said god is cruel and tyrannous, as was often the case with Burke (Van Dyk). Finally, the concept of obscurity and darkness refers to certain concepts being hard to describe and shrouded in mystery. This is best seen with Milton's description of Death, which Burke was quite impressed by, as He is described as being formless and obscure, thus more terrifying (Van Dyk).

Based on these parameters, one could wonder why we would want to achieve the sublime if terror and uneasiness are prerequisites to do so. According to Burke's description, the positives of the sublime far outweigh the negatives. Being confronted with these horrors in a safe space will allow an individual to experience "delight", a similar feeling to the ecstasy described by Longinus (Mahmood 79). This view of the sublime could be linked with the definition of fear previously established. We want to be faced with some kind of terror because, while they provide us with negative feelings, these feelings are a sort of key to a feeling of catharsis or delight.

Concluding, the sublime, or more specifically, Burke and Kant's perception of the sublime, describes the process in which, through experiencing a form of terror, we are able to reach a sort of euphoric state, one which brings us delight. There are multiple possible conditions to reach this state, though they can generally be summarized as needing to be confronted with something dangerous, terrifying and/or unpredictable, though the subject who wishes to experience the sublime needs to be a safe distance away from any actual harm. When these conditions are met, one is rewarded with an ecstatic feeling which is much more similar to the original idea of the sublime proposed by Longinus.

4. Race

Whilst the end of the Civil War in America officially put an end to slavery, segregation was still very much alive and well, and African Americans were often still treated as second class citizens. Furthermore, a multitude of immigrants from all corners of the world headed for America, tempted by the promises of the American Dream, only to end up living in poverty. As was the case with the world at large, antisemitism was a common day occurrence. To put it succinctly, in the words of American writer Robert Bloch: "the term [racist] was not generally considered pejorative during his time [and] Anglo-Saxon superiority was virtually taken for granted not only in literature but in daily life" (qtd. in Frye 238-39).

This was also the time that eugenics truly started to spread, a racially motivated form of pseudo-science which sought to "improve" the human race, by selectively breeding those who had "desirable" traits, and getting rid of the "undesirable" traits. Whilst this movement is infamously associated with Nazi Germany, it is important to note that, at the time, some American states were already forcibly sterilizing handicapped individuals, as well as implementing restrictive regulation laws, which specifically targeted immigrants of "undesirable genetic backgrounds" (Frye 238), as it was believed that crossbreeding between Caucasians and other races could lead to the degradation of the "superior white race".

It is in these troublesome circumstances that Lovecraft lived, and the effect it had on him is quite apparent. Lovecraft did not try to hide his political opinions whatsoever. He called himself a eugenicist, or more specifically, a proponent of "eugenic control", who believed that the government should pass selective breeding laws for the "improvement of the human species" (Frye 238). He was also openly anti-Semitic, stating in a letter that "Repulsion was instinctive …. Just as some otherwise normal men hate the sight or presence of a cat, so have I hated the presence of a Jew" (qtd. in Frye 240), effectively linking his fear of others with some sort of instinctive reaction. Finally, his fear of any non-Caucasians can be made immediately apparent by simply reading most of his work, which, as will be highlighted later during the analysis, usually feature some sort of minority in an antagonistic role, the most egregious example of this being, without a shadow of a doubt, his short story "The Horror at Red Hook", a text most infamous for its portrayal of the immigrants living in the neighborhood of Red Hook as a bunch of fanatical cultists, worshipping a malicious foreign god.

It is for these reasons that Lovecraft is considered a quite controversial author, though the actual relevance of his racial views in his literature is often a hot topic for debate. Some critics, such as the previously mentioned Robert Bloch or S.T. Joshi, would argue that

Lovecraft's views were simply a product of its time, and that the constant use of derogatory terms were completely normal back then (Frye 241). Joshi even takes this one step further, and argues that most racist interpretations of Lovecraft's work were either "due to misinterpretations of his work or, at worst, effects of the reactionary worldview that Lovecraft had as a young men [sic] (and changed in his later years)" (Schuller 102). This perspective is further corroborated in Michel Houellebecq's biography of H.P. Lovecraft, where he claimed that Lovecraft's return to Providence after his stay in New York restored his "equanimity" towards other races[1] (126).

A final aspect that paints Lovecraft in a more positive light, is that those who knew him on an individual level spoke quite highly of him, being quite amicable and open-minded to those who knew him on a more personal level. For example, while he was anti-Semitic, he married a Jewish immigrant, and even though they filed for divorce two years later, they seemed to have parted amicably (Luckhurst 11). Similarly, despite holding what Houellebecq describes as a "scornful attitude towards humanity in general", he did correspond with a lot of fellow writers who were absolutely distraught when they heard of his untimely death (Houellebecq 49). Thus, an argument could be made that Lovecraft's disdain of other races stemmed from a fear of the masses, and that, had he formed individual connections with those of other cultures, his views might have radically changed.

Others, however, would argue that Lovecraft's views on race and eugenics are intrinsically linked with his work, and that his fear of minorities is unforgivable. As a matter of fact, a campaign was launched against the World Fantasy Awards, a prestigious prize for fantasy fiction, which featured a bust modelled after Lovecraft as an award (Flood). The campaign argued that he was an "avowed racist with hideous opinions" (Flood), and therefore did not deserve to have his name linked with the Awards. This eventually led to subsequent prizes dropping Lovecraft's likeliness.

It should also be noted that, while Lovecraft became more open-minded after his return to Providence, he did not completely shed his old opinions. Instead of wanting immigrants to be killed off, he simply preferred for them to be segregated from the white Anglo-Saxon part of

[1] Houellebecq for example emphasizes how Lovecraft's admiration for Hitler subsided, calling him a "clown" and opposing his extremist views. Similarly, Lovecraft no longer wished for other races to be exterminated, instead wishing for them to be separated and merely kept out of sight.

the population, at one point stating: “they can’t let niggers use the beach at a Southern resort – can you imagine a sensitive person bathing near a pack of chimpanzees?” (Houellebecq 126).

This thesis will not partake in the debate of whether Lovecraft’s racist ideologies are unforgivable, and whether they hamper the reading of his short stories. It will, however, go against Joshi’s claims, namely that any racist interpretation of Lovecraft’s work are no more than simple misinterpretations. Lovecraft’s fear of most non-Caucasian Anglo-Saxons is quite evident from his work, and often serves as the fuel for a lot of the horrific sights contained within.

On a mere surface level, the fear of foreigners is an omnipresent theme throughout Lovecraft’s work. Foreigners are often portrayed as mysterious, malicious figures, working in the shadows to further their sinister plots. In the short story “The Shadow out of Time”, the protagonist, Nathanial Peaslee, suffers from a bout of amnesia. He cannot recall anything from between 1908 and 1913, and his close ones comment that, during this period, his personality completely changed, as he became obsessed with learning as much as possible. One evening, after Peaslee dismissed the house-keeper and the maid, passerby notice that the lights kept burning till late at night, though more importantly, they noticed a “lean, dark, curiously foreign-looking man called in an automobile” (Lovecraft 388). According to the police, they later received a call by a “foreign voice”, which asked them to come get Peaslee out of a sort of trance (Lovecraft 388). This call was later traced back to a phone booth, but apparently “no sign of the lean foreigner was ever unearthed” (Lovecraft 388).

Lovecraft’s description of this foreigner is almost reminiscent of a form of ghost or boogeyman. A mysterious stranger who appears out of nowhere, whose actions cannot be understood, and finally disappears without leaving a single trace. We see something similar in the short story “The Call of Cthulhu”, in which the narrator, Francis Thurston, emits a theory on how his uncle met his untimely demise:

> One thing which I began to suspect, and which I now fear I *know*, is that my uncle’s death was far from natural. He fell on a narrow hill street leading up from an ancient waterfront swarming with foreign mongrels, after a careless push from a negro sailor. I did not forget the mixed blood […] of the cult members in Louisiana, and would not be surprised to learn of the secret methods and

> poison needles as ruthless and as anciently known as the cryptic rites and beliefs. (Lovecraft 42)

In a passage that, from a modern point of view, seems almost comical, Thurston claims his uncle must have been killed by a cult worshipping the titular Cthulhu, as he bumped into a group of immigrants shortly before his death. While this seems like some overly paranoid raving, Thurston truly seems to believe that foreigners are some form of dangerous organization plotting to awaken an ancient evil, a theory which is confirmed throughout the story, as it is revealed that the cult and Cthulhu truly exist.

This leads us to another interesting characteristic present in Lovecraft's work, namely that foreigners seem to possess some form of mystic or supernatural powers. This can be seen in the previous passage, in which Thurston mentions how the immigrants must have used "secret methods and poison needles", as well as "cryptic rites and beliefs" (Lovecraft 42). This isn't the only example, as we can see from the *Necronomicon*. This book, also sometimes translated as "the book of the dead", is a recurring motif in Lovecraft's work, and contains forbidden knowledge, such as the history of the "Old Ones", a group of powerful gods, as well as rituals to summon them (Lovecraft 94-95). It is almost always described in a fear inspiring manner, such as "the dreaded volume" or "the hideous *Necronomicon*" (Lovecraft 93), and simply reading it gives the uninitiated a feeling of fright (Lovecraft 94). Most importantly however, is that it is almost always credited to "the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred" (Lovecraft 93).

These descriptions seem to be exaggerated and uninformed readings of different cultures. The idea of an African immigrant using a form of poison and cryptic rites and beliefs bears a heavy resemblance to common depictions of "Voodoo", a group of African diaspora religions which are often associated with dark magic in the Western World. The *Necronomicon*, being a book written by an Arab, also serves to indicate the threat that Eastern cultures present to the "rational and civilized" Western culture (Ralickas 376).

While these examples may seem quite on the nose for a modern audience, they are, as a matter of fact, quite subtle in comparison to some other passages in Lovecraft's work. "The Call of Cthulhu" features a passage where a New Orleans police official named John Legrasse gets summoned by the habitants of the bayou after their wives and children got kidnapped by a cult. They immediately mention that the cultists used "voodoo, […] but […] of a more terrible sort than they had ever known" (Lovecraft 34), once more connecting the religions with an evil form of magic. The police proceed to head deeper in the "[region] of traditionally evil repute,

substantially unknown and untraversed by white men" (Lovecraft 35), following the "muffled beat of tom-toms" (Lovecraft 35), which gives the scene an effect reminiscent of a colonial novel.

The police eventually arrive at the cult's bonfire, where they spot a group of naked cultists (Lovecraft 36). The scene causes the police officers to feel a great sense of dread, with many either fainting or franticly screaming, yet interestingly, they stand still and watch, as if "hypnotized with horror" (Lovecraft 36). This confrontation with a religious scene causing the men a feeling of horror, yet being incapable of turning away from it, seems faintly reminiscent of Kant's perspective of the sublime, as his version was more focused on the respect towards a Godhead than Burke's.

After a shootout, Legrasse takes the time to meticulously describe the cult members in detail, in a passage that a modern-day audience would find shocking beyond belief:

> The prisoners all proved to be men of a very low, mixed-blood, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes and mulattos, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, gave a colouring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult. But before many questions were asked, it became manifest that something far deeper and older than negro fetishism was involved. Degraded and ignorant as they were, the creatures held with surprising consistency to the central idea of their loathsome faith. (Lovecraft 37)

In what can only be described as a typical racist introduction to a cult composed of people of color (Schuller 111), Lovecraft once more links voodooism (which he further goes on to describe as simple "negro fetishism") with a form of evil magic, before going on further to call them ignorant, going with the notion of the time that Western civilization is advanced, and any other culture are simply ignorant and uncivilized. He finishes the paragraph by no longer even recognizing the foreigners as human beings. To Legrasse, they are but wild creatures.

For a final example of Lovecraft's fear of others, it seems only fitting to focus on "The Horror at Red Hook", a story often pandered by critics for its openly racist and xenophobic themes (Lampe 182), even more so than the rest of his work.

The reasoning behind this sudden increase in racism and fear in Lovecraft's writing is no doubt a result from his personal life at the time. In 1924, Lovecraft suddenly announced his marriage with Jewish immigrant Sonia Greene, whom he had met during a United Amateur Press Association (APA) gathering (Luckhurst 6). He promptly left his home city of Providence to move in with her in New York. While they lived modestly, the two would quickly find themselves in financial difficulties, as Greene's haberdashery business (a store selling men's clothes and accessories) failed, while Lovecraft could not find anyone interested in his writing talents (Luckhurst 6). This eventually forced the couple to move to a cheaper housing, namely in the outskirts of Red Hook, an area in Brooklyn containing New York's busiest docks (Luckhurst 6), which also made it an area filled with immigrants, something Lovecraft found absolutely repelling (Schuller 103). These feelings of fear and repulsion fed into his writing.

The story, as is typical in Lovecraft's work, follows a Caucasian man by the name of Thomas Malone, who is tasked with investigating the recent goings on in Red Hook. Most notably, he tries to get to the bottom of the increase in kidnappings, which are potentially linked with one Robert Suydam, a recluse interested in the occult, who has suddenly started looking younger and younger. As is often the case in these stories, it is eventually revealed that all the events are linked with a cult worshipping elder beings.

We once more see the appearance of foreigners being linked with mysterious and dark forces. After Suydam and his newlywed wife mysteriously die, Malone sets out to investigate, trying to gather clues from the bodies. However, he suddenly gets interrupted by a "horde of swart, insolent ruffians", led by "an Arab with a hatefully negroid mouth" (Lovecraft 15-16). Malone points out the fact that, "for certain reasons [the group] were sure [Suydam] would die" (Lovecraft 15), immediately casting suspicion on them. The group then proceeds to take Suydam's body and drain his wife's blood without providing any explanation, before leaving to an unknown location. Before they leave, Malone mentions that he is not sure whether they were even truly considered "men" (Lovecraft 16).

As was the case with "The Call of Cthulhu" and "The Shadow out of Time", foreigners are once more represented as a form of boogeymen, appearing out of nowhere to do sinister deeds before disappearing just as suddenly. Malone doubting their humanity could be linked with the occult theme of the story, though keeping in mind the passage from "The Call of Cthulhu", one could wonder whether this could be an attempt to represent foreigners as "less than human".

"Horror at Red Hook" goes one step further than Lovecraft's other work however, as it also portrays foreign cultures as a looming danger that threaten to overthrow our society. This can best be seen in a passage early on in the story, where Malone describes Red Hook. As per usual, he comments on how the neighborhood is a "hopeless tangle" of a wide variety of foreign cultures (Lovecraft 6), though this was apparently not always the case:

> Here long ago a brighter picture dwelt […]. One can trace the relics of this former happiness in the trim shapes of the buildings, the occasional graceful churches, and the evidences of original art and background in bits of details here and there […]. Now and then a many-windowed cupola arises to tell of days when the households of captains and ship-owners watched the sea. (Lovecraft 6).

According to Malone, Red Hook used to be a much brighter and happier place, though now only a couple of traces of its former glory remain. Interestingly enough, those traces all pertain to white, Anglo-Saxon society (Schuller 104), such as the churches and the houses of captains and ship-owners. In simple terms, Red Hook was a better place when it exclusively housed a Caucasian, more specifically Anglo-Saxon culture.

This is no longer the case, as Malone comments on the "blasphemies of an hundred dialects" and the "hordes of prowlers reel shouting and singing" (Lovecraft 6) which have presently made Red Hook their home. These immigrants are once more connected to the occult, as Malone also mentions how they must be "the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the sharers of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than humankind (Lovecraft 7).

It could thus be argued that the cult and its dark rituals serve as an exaggerated view on the immigrants and their traditions. Just as the cult in the story serves as a mysterious group, who through their dark rituals have corrupted what used to be a bright neighborhood, Lovecraft seemed to fear the effects that an ever-increasing multiculturalism could have on his surroundings. This feeling of horror he felt can best be described as "the horror of modern life, of the dissolution of white supremacy […] through an all-encompassing circulation of commodities, human bodies, and cultures" (Schuller 105).

From this angle, the final paragraphs of the story can be interpreted as a rather nihilistic realization by Lovecraft: "Who are we to combat poisons older than history and mankind? Apes

danced in Asia to those horrors, and the cancer lurks secure and spreading where furtiveness hides in rows of decaying brick" (Lovecraft 23). To him, these foreign cultures are a form of primordial cancer, slowly spreading and taking over the "civilized" world, and there is nothing his characters can to prevent this spread.

From a mere surface level analysis of his work, we can therefore already get a pretty clear picture of Lovecraft's fears regarding racial interactions. Whilst he was not alone in this regard, as many Jewish and Italian immigrants were discriminated against in the early 20th century for their introduction of minority religions into America (Lampe 186-87), Lovecraft definitely seemed to go one step further. He fashioned himself as an "old Colonial" (Luckhhurst 8), which becomes quite apparent in his views on foreign cultures. While his main characters are always Caucasian, and Anglo-Saxon society is usually seen as "bright" and morally right, foreigners are in the best case seen as a group of suspicious individuals associated with the dark arts, and in the worst case a group of downright savages, kidnapping and murdering people and barely being considered human. It seems Lovecraft's lack of understanding of core aspects of their cultures, such as voodooism or Islam, led him to fear them, and worry that their spread in America would lead to the downfall of "civilized society".

These examples could be considered a form of warning from Lovecraft, warning his readers of the current situation. Some other stories however, take these themes to their extremes, and serve as a form of dystopic example of where this multicultural way of life may lead. It is also in these examples that Lovecraft truly takes inspiration from his belief in genetics.

A prime example of such a dystopia can be found in "The Shadow over Innsmouth". The story follows our main character, unnamed in the story but later given the name Robert Olmstead by Lovecraft (Frye 248), who decides to visit the titular town of Innsmouth. The town used to be a thriving port town during the colonial period, but has since completely deteriorated into an almost deserted town filled with dilapidated buildings.

Even more curious however are the inhabitants, who all share fish-like characteristics, such as a "narrow head, bulging, watery-blue eyes that never [seem] to blink [and] large and heavily veined [hands]" (Lovecraft 330). These features instinctively cause most who see the inhabitants to feel uncomfortable, such as the narrator who immediately feels an "evil impression" coming from a bus driver (Lovecraft 330).

As Olmstead continues to explore the town, he eventually stumbles upon Zadok Allen, an old drunkard who reveals the dark secrets of Innsmouth. According to him, Obed Marsh, a

local merchant who was responsible for the town's economic boom, discovered a tribe living on the Pacific island of Pohnpei, who seemed to be thriving even as surrounding islands were not. This is revealed to be because of their symbiotic relationship with the "Deep Ones", a group of immortal creatures with fish-like attributes. In exchange for the chance to breed with the tribe, as well as the occasional human sacrifice, the Deep Ones offered the tribe a large number of fish, as well wealth in the form of jewelry. After the tribe gets attacked by the surrounding islands' tribes, Marsh decides to strike a similar deal with the Deep Ones. This explains why the town suddenly became wealthy, and why the modern-day Innsmouth inhabitant bears fish-like characteristics.

The same night after discovering the truth, Olmstead gets chased by the townspeople. While he manages to escape and notify the authorities, he later discovers, to his absolute horror, that his grandmother was related to Marsh's family, making him a descendant of Innsmouth. What follows is his gradual transformation into a Deep One, a process not only marked by physical changes, as he slowly starts to acquire the "Innsmouth look", but also a mental one, as he accepts his heritage and vows to join his family in the sea.

From a first reading, the themes of heritage and genetics are already made quite apparent. These themes were quite important to Lovecraft, as stated by Roger Luckhurst; "Ancestral horrors lurked in the family trees of New England. This was the direct theme of Lovecraft's 'The Shadow over Innsmouth', because for him these inheritances were intensely personal" (8).

The townspeople's uncomforting appearance and the decline of Innsmouth are the direct results of Marsh's pact to breed with the Deep Ones. It would not be a stretch to consider the Deep Ones as a sort of crude allegory of foreigners, more specifically Pacific Islanders. This can be seen by their introduction in the story, as Lovecraft immediately associates them with the vile practices of a group of islanders, who performed human sacrifices in order to enrich themselves (Lovecraft 345). In typical Lovecraft fashion, this foreign culture is immediately presented as something vile and dangerous, reminiscent of colonial tales from European sailors claiming the natives of the New World were savages who often partook in cannibalism (Lampe 190). Seen through this lens, the story suddenly takes on the form of a warning tale about the dangers of crossbreeding with other races.

Another consequence of the crossbreeding is the degradation of the town's culture. After Marsh, with the help of the Deep Ones, managed to take over the town, he promptly forced the townsfolk to follow a new religion: the Esoteric Order of Dagon. The story makes it quite

apparent that the Order is evil, due to their association with human sacrifices (Lovecraft 348) and their direct correlation with the Devil, as seen in Zadok's frantic ranting: "I seen – Dagon an' Ashtoreth – Belial an' Beelzebub (Lovecraft 349).

As a result, just as the inhabitants' appearance has degraded, so too has the appearance of the Church:

> The structure's once white paint was now grey and peeling, and the black and gold sign on the pediment was so faded that I could only with difficulty make out the words 'Esoteric Order of Dagon'. This, then, was the former Masonic Hall now given over to a degraded cult. (Lovecraft 334)

As was the case in "The Horror at Red Hook", a beacon for Anglo-Saxon culture has been degraded, turned into an evil version of itself. This, no doubt, serves as an allegory for the town's culture, which has turned into "a total renunciation of orthodox Christianity" (Frye 250).

It is important to note that, while this may seem like a pro-Christian message about the dangers of other religions, Lovecraft, as will be discussed in a later chapter in this thesis, was quite famously an atheist. His terror at the situation has less to do with his religious beliefs, and more with his fears of the impact foreign cultures would have on his surroundings. Mitch Frye puts this best by saying "For Lovecraft, the villagers' ideological shift is simply a symbolic gesture, a comment on how foreign elements erode the culture of a country's majority" (250).

A final noteworthy element in the short story is the history behind the town's transformation. At one point Zadok recounts how Innsmouth was suffering from financial difficulties. Marsh promised the villagers that, by embracing the Order and renouncing the Christian faith, they could gain a lot of wealth and fish, allowing the town to thrive (Lovecraft 348). This bears heavy similarities to early 20th century America, a time where American businessman welcomed immigrants into the country as a form of cheap labor (Frye 250). By simply integrating these foreign elements into American society, they were essentially able to generate wealth for very little investment (Frye 250). As such, the current situation in Innsmouth can be analyzed as an exaggerated, dystopic vision of the American Dream, or to be more specific in this instance, the American Melting Pot, which Lovecraft himself described as a "grotesque fallacy [which] may yet be brought to the people in one of the most tear-stained pages of history (Frye 250).

For a final example of a story centered on the degradation of a society, albeit not as focused as "The Shadow over Innsmouth", we turn to "At the Mountains of Madness". The story follows a group of explorers on an expedition to Antartica. While there, they discover the remains of an ancient city, millions of years older than mankind. This city belonged to the "Old Ones", an alien race whose "scientific and mechanical knowledge far surpassed man's today" (Lovecraft 240).

An example of their scientific knowledge can be seen in the creation of the shoggoths, a race able to take on a wide variety of forms, specifically bred to act as "perfect slaves" for whatever project the Old Ones require at the moment (Lovecraft 240). It is the shoggoths who were responsible for all the heavy labor that went into the creation of the city.

The creation of this race, however, is what eventually lead to the Old Ones' downfall. The shoggoths became more intelligent, and even seemed to be able to communicate with the Old Ones through mimicking their voices (Lovecraft 253). Interestingly enough, William Dyer, the narrator of this story, claims that the art of the civilization started to decay around this time, compared to before: "The Old Ones had perhaps become satisfied with satisfied with their decadent art – or had ceased to recognize the superior merit of the older carvings" (Lovecraft 254). We eventually discover that the Old Ones were eradicated by the shoggoths, with only a few remaining who, by the end of the story, are also slain by a shoggoth.

Upon further inspection, it becomes quite evident that the Old Ones are meant to be a form of idyllic stand-in for humanity. We can tell as much from the way Dyer portrays them: "They [the Old Ones] were the men of another age and another order of being. […] They had not even been savages. […] Poor Old Ones! Scientists to the last – what had they done that we would not have done in their place?" (Lovecraft 273-74). They are clearly being humanized here, shown to be a poor civilization of scientist who did nothing that humanity would not have done as well. By seeing them as an allegory for humanity, this turns the story into a warning, in a similar manner as "The Shadow over Innsmouth".

This warning comes in the form of the shoggoth. If the Old Ones are a stand-in for humanity, or likely as Lovecraft saw it, "civilized society", the shoggoth being created as perfect slaves can quickly be connected to a racist vision of minorities in the colonial era. This can also be glimpsed from their appearance: "Described as 'shapeless congeries of protoplasmatic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes', the shoggoths […] are

emblems of the masses; they constitute ‘a mass presence, various, multicoloured, refusing to behave’ (Schuller 118).

With this connection, Lovecraft’s message becomes clear. The Old Ones’ society started to degrade around the time the shoggoths started becoming more intelligent, and communicating with their masters. Shortly hereafter, they staged a rebellion, and eventually wiped the prosperous civilization of the map. Lovecraft seemed to worry that this would be the case with American society as well. The themes of degradation were already present in other stories, but here he takes it a step further, and worries that our entire civilization could eventually fall, should we continue coexisting with others.

In conclusion, while it may be easy to write off Lovecraft’s racist opinions as only superficial in his writing, something that could easily be removed to make his stories more attractive to a modern-day audience, it is clear that these roots of fear run much deeper than what might seem at first glance. Lovecraft did not simply fear different cultures because they were different and he struggled to understand them. His belief in eugenics led him to believe that any foreign elements would lead to the degradation of society in the best case, and the complete eradication of it in the worst case. This can be seen in the threatening and antagonistic way foreigners are written in his stories, but also in the underlying theme of degradation which finds itself at the core of a substantial amount of Lovecraft’s work.

5. Religion and the Occult

America has always had a close association with religion. The country was founded by the Puritans, seeking to escape religious prosecution in England by migrating to the “New World” as it was known at the time. As such, a lot of the country’s history has been influenced by the religious beliefs of its people, which has led to a lot of important, though seen through a modern lens, equally controversial, events.

New England, Lovecraft’s favored stomping grounds, is no exception to this. The inheritance of the land, for example, can only be described as morally dubious. The Puritans sought to create the “kingdom of God”, though doing so required clearing the lands of Native Americans (i.e. slaughtering them) (Luckhurst 8). It is also in this region that the infamous Salem Witch Trials took place in 1692. The small town, which served as inspiration for Lovecraft’s fictional town of Arkham (Luckhurst 478), was beset by a wave of religious fanaticism, which turned a massive part of the community against each other in their search to

find the witches living amongst them (Luckhurst 8). This eventually led to the deaths of 19 people on the infamous Gallows Hill, before the paranoia eventually gave way (Luckhurst 8).

For a final example of America's symbiotic relation with religion, we need only turn to "Manifest Destiny". This phrase was primarily used around the middle of the 19th century, as a justification for America's rapid expansion westward. A majority of American's believed at the time that it was their divinely ordained mission to spread their way of life as far as possible, which once more led to the displacement and massacre of Native Americans, as well as a period of war with Mexico.

However, the 20th century saw a massive shakeup as far the country's relation with religion was concerned. While Christianity was (and still is to this day) the majority religion, its influence started to get contested on a multitude of fronts. This was the age of scientific development, and a multitude of ideas and theories that would have been considered blasphemous, such as the evolution of species, slowly started to gain traction. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this was also the time a wide variety of immigrants made their way to the States, and while Judaism and Islam were already established, this new wave of immigration gave them more significance than before.

This was also the time where brand new forms of spiritual beliefs, separate from the long established ones such as Christianity, Judaism or Islam, started sprouting. One of particular note, and which will be relevant later in the analysis, is occultism, a variety of beliefs that had been around for a while, but truly gained prominence in America around 1875, when Russian mystic Helena Blavatsky published the article "A Few Questions to Hiraf" (Sebayang and Kristianto 48-49). That same year, Blavatsky would also found the Theosophical Society in New York (Luckhurst 453), effectively cementing occultism's influence in America

While Lovecraft was obsessed with New England's colonial history, even signing off his letters with "God Save the King!" (Luckhurst 8), he did not share his ancestors' religious fervor. He called himself a "skeptic and analyst towards all religious claims (Zeller 3), and according to scholar of esotericism Wouter Hanegraaf, these feelings went even one step further: ""Contrary to many of his admirers, Lovecraft was a radical materialist who saw all religions (including esotericism or occultism of any variety) as self-evident delusions. He does not ever seem to have been tempted to embrace any kind of religious or spiritual belief" (qtd. in Zeller 2).

This relationship with religion is not only interesting due to Lovecraft's ancestry, but equally due to the genre he took heavy inspiration from. Early critics (and to some extent, even modern critics) often struggled with classifying Lovecraft's work. Many critics argued that his tales fit into the gothic horror genre, with some going even so far as to claim he only clumsily imitated the great authors of the past age (Smith 831). This is not surprising, as Lovecraft was a great admirer of Edgar Allan Poe, and his writing style and themes bear striking similarities to him (Smith 831). Lovecraft himself admitted as much in 1923, describing his work directly as gothic horror, and asserting that he was faithful to "invariably the older writers, especially Poe" (qtd. in Houellebecq 92).

His association with the genre, however, is rendered quite problematic in regards to its heavy associations with religion. The genre often featured a heavy amount of religious imagery, such as demons or characters committing grave sins, which is probably due to the genre's origins in anti-Catholicism (Smith 831). Lovecraft however, completely disregarded these typical characteristics:

> Crucifixes do no good against these creatures, who are not demons in any religious sense. The protagonists never sin against moral codes, instead suffering the catastrophe of too much knowledge. Gone are the trappings of tyrannical priests, virgins menaced in convents, or men tempted to Faustian trappings. (Luckhurst 14)

While he did take a heavy amount of inspiration from the gothic genre, it is quite evident that his religious beliefs had a massive impact on the way he adapted the genre.

A great example of this dichotomy can be found in his story "The Dreams in the Witch-House". At a first glance, the story bears heavy resemblances to classic gothic horror. The main character, Walter Gilman, rents a room in the titular Witch-House. The house belonged to Keziah Mason, a woman who was accused of being a witch during the infamous Salem Witch Trials, and is home to a variety of strange phenomena. Previous inhabitants claim to have felt her presence around the house, some claim to have irregular human tooth-marks left on them during the night, or to have heard children's cries around Hallowmas, an important night for Sabbaths (Lovecraft 286). Gilman even starts seeing Mason in his dreams, accompanied by a familiar with the body of a rat but the face of a human.

It should be noted that the short story's introduction is absolutely filled with references to Witch Trials. Other than the obvious examples, such as the direct mention of Mason being accused during the trials and the story being set in a fictionalized version of Salem, Lovecraft also added some smaller, more subtle references. Brown Jenkin, Mason's familiar, takes on the form of a rat. This was often thought to be the case with a witch's familiar, though it can also be a direct reference to the testimony of Elizabeth Weed, a British woman who testified that the Devil appeared in the form of a rat (Luckhurst 479). Lovecraft also specifically mentions a couple of key figures of the Salem Witch Trials, such as Cotton Marther (285), a prominent Puritan leader at the time, Judge Hathorne (286), one of the hanging judges of the Witch Trials and the Court of Oyer and Terminer, which presided over the Witch Trials.

A final noteworthy reference is Mason's claim that she was visited by "Black Man", which aligns with the belief that the Devil (or his emissaries) took on the form of a man in black to make a deal with humans (Luckhurst 478). All of these references serve to reinforce the religious undertones in the beginning of the story, as a typical with gothic horror.

On the surface, everything points to this being a classic gothic horror story, similar to Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The main character arrives at a location that is haunted, and comes into contact with the paranormal. The story even uses the Witch Trials as a backdrop for these supernatural events. As the story progresses however, the religious ground work of the story slowly gives place to something quite different.

Firstly, while Gilman specifically sought out the Witch House, his obsession with it had little to do with the supernatural. Gilman is a student of folklore and, more importantly, mathematics. He first got interested in the house when he heard an interesting detail about Mason's trial, that being that she seemed to possess some form of advanced knowledge on geometry, allowing her to move to "other spaces beyond" (Lovecraft 286). He seems to care less about the arcane knowledge, and more about the mathematical variety:

> [Gilman] knew he wanted to be in the building where some circumstances had […] given a mediocre old woman of the Seventeenth Century an insight into mathematical depths perhaps beyond the utmost modern delvings of Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein, and de Sitter. (Lovecraft 286-87)

Gilman's investigation into the room also quickly steers away from the previously mentioned paranormal events, such as the cries of the children or the presence of Mason. Instead, he begins

obsessing over the irregular form of the room, believing the odd angles of the room hold some kind of significance into his research (Lovecraft 288). This sudden shift from the typical gothic supernatural into a more scientific oriented story can seem quite jarring, as it immediately abandons any of the religious undertones the genre is typically known for.

As the story keeps goings, those supernatural elements are left completely behind. Gilman's dreams are filled "indescribably angled masses of alien-hued substance" (Lovecraft 289). Mason's powers had nothing to do with a deal with the Devil, instead having formed a pact with Azatoth and Nyarlathotep (Lovecraft 295), two of Lovecraft's Outer Gods, the latter of which is revealed to be the real identity of the "Black Man" who visited Mason.

The only real hint of religious presence in the story can be seen when Joe Mazurewicz, another inhabitant of the Witch House, recommends Gilman to acquire a crucifix for protection against the witch's influence (Lovecraft 298). This is offset, however, by the negative description given to Mazurewicz, who is described as a "superstitious loom-fixer", and whose religious prayers are described as "whining" (Lovecraft 293). This immediately paints a quite negative, and almost nihilistic, picture of his religious beliefs. Ironically, the crucifix does eventually end up defeating the witch, but instead of being the result of divine intervention, Gilman simply uses the crucifix's chains to strangle her to death (Lovecraft 313).

We can thus see that Lovecraft's atheistic worldview's influence on his writing, essentially stripping a gothic tale from most of its religious characteristics, and even going so far as somewhat mocking the religious beliefs of the characters. As Luckhurst put in: "There is no super-natural, only the super-normal, things as yet to be inscribed within natural law (14). The mystical is replaced with scientific concepts, which might explain why he is often associated with science-fiction instead of gothic horror (Houellebecq 92). It is probably due to examples such as these that most scholars of religion pay his stories little mind (Zeller 1).

However, while Lovecraft was by no means a devout believer of any established religion and his work often contained more scientifically oriented elements, upon further analysis, it is undeniable that religion and spiritual beliefs are a common occurrence throughout his work. As previously mentioned, while it quickly strayed away from most religious imagery, "The Dreams in the Witch-House" still used the Salem Witch Trials as a basis for its stories.

Furthermore, his stories often feature a group of celestial beings known as the "Outer Gods", such as the previously mentioned Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep and Azatoth. While these creatures are not gods in the traditional sense, as they are revealed to be alien creatures who

arrived on Earth long before humanity, they are often shown to possess god-like characteristics, such as Cthulhu's ability to communicate telepathically with his disciples (Lovecraft 27) or his immortality (Lovecraft 51). As such, these Outer Gods are often worshipped by cults, another recurring element in a lot of Lovecraft's work.

It might therefore seem quite contradictory for such religious themes to occur as often in the work of an atheist. Lovecraft himself commented on these contradictory elements:

> I should describe mine own nature as tripartite, my interests as consisting of three parallel and dissociated groups—(a) Love of the strange and fantastic. (b) Love of abstract truth and scientific logic. (c) Love of the ancient and the permanent. Sundry combinations of these three strains will probably account for all my odd tastes and eccentricities. (Lovecraft, qtd. in Matthews 5)

Despite his scientifically oriented mind, Lovecraft clearly also held a conflicting interest towards that which science cannot explain. This often leads to contradictory examples in his stories, such as a cultist or religious figure being described in a rather unsavory manner, yet still being proven to be right by the end of the story (Matthews 169).

This love towards the supernatural can also be seen in his upbringing. While he held no love for Christianity, Lovecraft admitted to having had a massive interest in paganism, such as classic Greek mythology (Zeller 4). He even claimed to have built altars for Apollo, Diana and Athena, as well as encountering satyrs in a forest, which he compared to a religious experience:

> Once I firmly thought I beheld some of these sylvan creatures dancing under autumnal oaks; a kind of 'religious experience' as true in its way as the subjective ecstasies of any Christian. If a Christian tell me that he has felt the reality of his Jesus or Jahveh, I can reply that I have seen hoofed Pan and the sisters of the Hespian Phaëthusa. (Lovecraft, qtd. in Zeller 4-5)

We can therefore conclude that, while Lovecraft claims to be an atheist, it is undeniable that religion has had a massive impact on his writing. According to Zeller, "his dismissive treatment of religion as quite literally horrible in his stories reveals his personal distaste towards religion, yet its continued presence in his writing indicates that he never quite got religion out of his

system" (5). As such, it is interesting to analyze how these religions elements appear in his work, in order to get a deeper understanding of how exactly they must have appeared to him.

Before truly analyzing his work however, it seems only fitting to try to pinpoint his exact spiritual beliefs. As previously seen, he cannot truly be considered an atheist, as he has had (or at least believes to have had) religious experiences as a child. He also seems to have held a deep sense of admiration towards Puritans, or more specifically, their nihilistic belief that the world was pure evil (Houellebecq 137). Yet, he did not share their hopes in salvation, nor belief in a benevolent deity (Houellebecq 137), and his view on other branches of Christianity can only be described as hostile, as can be seen when he called Christians a […group of "pious mossbacks, […] hopelessly bound to unfounded dogmata and traditions" (qtd. in Zeller 3).

According to Zeller, Lovecraft can most closely be associated to millennialism, which can be defined as "the audacious human hope that in the imminent future there will be a transition—either catastrophic or progressive—to a 'collective salvation" (5). Zeller goes one step further however, and believes Lovecraft followed what he dubbed "anti-millennialism", essentially the belief that the world would face a transition, but this transition is guaranteed to lead to something far worse (5).

This belief can easily be linked with Lovecraft's racial fears. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lovecraft saw the ever increasing multiculturalism present in America in the early 20th century as a sign of degradation, and seemed to fear that it could lead to the end of civilization as he knew it.

A perfect example of this can be found in "The Shadow over Innsmouth". As previously explained, the story heavily empathizes the theme of degradation. This can be seen in the town's inhabitants, who slowly turn into abhorrent fish monsters, the town's appearance, with beautiful white buildings turning grey, and the town's culture, as the sinister Order of Dagon has become the town's dominant religion.

While we have already analyzed this decay from a racial point of view, it is important to mention that the town's moral decay plays an equally important role. The Order of Dagon is immediately described as a form of "devil-worship", a "secret cult which had gained forced [in Innsmouth] and engulfed all the orthodox churches" (Lovecraft 328-29). From their first mention, they are described as a form of religious corruption, turning what could be described as the town's "genteel Puritan past" (Zeller 13) into a sinister force associated with the Devil.

This is further emphasized through the Order's religious practices. On a surface level, they bear striking similarities to what one could find in a Christian religion. The pastors (or at least what Olmstead associates with pastors) all wear ceremonial robes and headwear (Lovecraft 334). The Order primarily use churches as their place of worship (Lovecraft 336), and they even appear to have a form of choir that chants during religious ceremonies (Lovecraft 337). The Order does not appear to be some sort of radically different religion, instead seemingly being rooted in the customs that were already present. This can also be seen from the following quote from Olmstead, who points out that "the Order of Dagon had *modified* the ritual of the local churches" (Lovecraft 334; emphasis added). The use of the verb "modified" instead of "replaced", indicate that the Order's customs are, at the very least, based on Christianism.

However, despite these similarities, Olmstead finds himself discomforted at the presence of these elements. Upon seeing the pastor, he is immediately overcome by "an onrushing image of sharp intensity and unaccountable horror" (Lovecraft 334). Similarly, when first hearing the chants, he simply describes them as being "awful" (Lovecraft 337). We can therefore extrapolate from these reactions that the Order is a corrupted form of the town's previous orthodox religion. While it heavily resembles it on the outside, the sight of their customs seems to trigger an instinctive reaction of fear and discomfort, cementing it as a sort of sinister, regressive form of the area's Christian past.

These feelings of horror and discomfort are eventually proven to be warranted, as Old Zadok reveals to Olmstead that the Order is planning on expanding, spreading their influence to the rest of the world and doing what they have done in Innsmouth on global scale (Lovecraft 355). Olmstead manages to thwart their plans by escaping Innsmouth before contacting the army, who proceed to arrest a large part of the inhabitants and destroy their base of operations (Lovecraft 320).

This solution, however, is shown to only be temporary. After Olmstead discovers his shared lineage with Innsmouth, he is visited in his dreams by his great-grandmother, who reveals that their plans cannot be stopped: "The Deep Ones could never be destroyed […]. For the present they would rest; but some day […] they would rise again for the tribute Great Cthulhu craved" (Lovecraft 380). Olmstead wakes up the next day, having finished his transformation into the "Innsmouth look". While he briefly considers suicide, he instead opts to free his cousin from a sanatorium, before joining his "family" underwater, aiding them in their impending invasion. His fear towards the monster he is slowly turning into eventually

gives way to a sense of bliss, somewhat reminiscent of the sublime, as he states the "tense extremes of horrors are lessening […], I awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror" (Lovecraft 380).

He concludes the story in what can only be described as a sort of religious sermon, showing that his contact with the Order of Dagon has fully corrupted him:

> We shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to Cyclopean and many columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory for ever. (Lovecraft 381)

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" therefore seems to confirm Zeller's concept of anti-millennialism in Lovecraft's writing. Our world is faced with an imminent catastrophic event, namely a full on invasion by the Deep Ones. While their plans for their new world are never explicitly stated, from the claims of Olmstead's great-grandmother, stating that they "planned to spread" (Lovecraft 380), and the fact that they were mass-producing an army of shoggoths (Lovecraft 354), it can be assumed that they plan on enslaving, or potentially even wiping out, humanity in order to take their place. The end result is the same however, a world where the sinister corruption of Innsmouth spreads to the rest of the world, and as confirmed by Olmstead's great-grandmother, we are powerless to stop it.

The source of this plan lies with the Order of Dagon, a cult that uses their followers to do the bidding of the Deep Ones in exchange for wealth and immortality. One could wonder whether them being described as a sort of corrupted version of the Christian faith is mere coincidence, or whether they stem from Lovecraft's quite nihilistic views on organized religions. There is a possibility that Lovecraft feared that corruption within our established religions could eventually lead to a decline in society, which explains why they are a common occurrence in his stories (Zeller 14).

A similar scenario presents itself in "The Dunwich Horror". The story primarily centers on the Whateley family, who live in the titular town of Dunwich. The family has quite ominous reputation: "Old Whateley", the grandfather, is described as being "half-insane", and is accused of committing sorcery (Lovecraft 84), while Lavinia, the mother, is described as a "somewhat deformed unattractive albino" (Lovecraft 84). Oddest of all is Wilbur, Lavinia's son, whose father remains a mystery to the inhabitants of Dunwich (Lovecraft 84). Furthermore, he seems to grow at an uncanny rate, being able to walk at only seven months (Lovecraft 85), as well as

having goatish attributes (Lovecraft 86) and being despised by animals (Lovecraft 87). The family also seems to hide something in their shed, which requires an exuberant amount of cattle to keep fed (Lovecraft 87).

It is eventually revealed that Wilbur is the son of Yog-Sothoth, one of Lovecraft's Outer Gods, which explains his odd appearance (Lovecraft 120). After Wilbur gets mauled to death by guard dogs, an invisible creature, the titular Dunwich Horror, escapes from the shed, and starts rampaging the countryside, before finally being killed by a group of academics. It is also revealed that Wilbur and the Dunwich Horror were twins (Lovecraft 120).

While "The Dunwich Horror" has less of a religious focus than "The Shadow over Innsmouth", the themes of anti-millennialism are still quite present. Just as was the case with Innsmouth, Dunwich is described as a decadent village. The fields around the village are described as being barren (Lovecraft 80), while the village itself is described as having "houses [that] are deserted and falling to ruin, and [a] broken-steepled church" (Lovecraft 81). Furthermore, the town has an "impression of a faint, malign odour […], as of the massed mould and decay of centuries" (Lovecraft 81).

We once more see the signs of a society in decline, with the abandoned buildings serving as a reminder of what once was, while the stench of mold and decay indicate that the village is long past its prime. Interestingly enough, we also once more see a broken-down church being used an example of the town's corruption, possibly also indicating that the village has experienced moral decay as well.

This decay can also be seen in the inhabitants, who are directly described as being "repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New England backwaters" (Lovecraft 82). As mentioned before, the Whateleys are no exception to this, with Old Whateley being aged and half-insane, while Lavinia suffers from Albinism (Lovecraft 84). Whilst their deformities are, barring Wilbur, not as horrific as the inhabitants of Innsmouth (which one could theorize probably being the result of them not being the result of crossbreeding), it is quite obvious that the decay of the region has affected the inhabitants as well.

It is important to point out however, that as opposed to "The Shadow over Innsmouth", the decay of the region is not directly linked with the rituals taking place there. While the decline of Innsmouth and its inhabitants were the direct result of the hostile takeover of the Order of Dagon, Dunwich is already showing signs of decay long before the Whateleys summon Yog-

Sothoth. In one case, the decay is a direct cause, while in the other, it serves more as an instigator for the supernatural events, giving the Whateleys the perfect environment to conduct their sinister rituals. Ultimately, however, the results are the same: the decay in our environments, be they social, geographic or religious, will eventually lead to a catastrophic event, which will forever change our world (Zeller 14).

This religious decay can be seen in a couple of examples. Firstly, in the beginning description of Dunwich, mention is made of "talk of witch-blood [and] Satan-worship" (Lovecraft 81), while Old Whateley was often accused of "wizardry" (Lovecraft 84). These by now familiar, Puritanical themes once more harken back to the Salem Witch Trials, immediately associating the town with moral decline.

This can further be seen by the description of the infamous *Necronomicon*. As described in an earlier chapter, this book contains information on all of the Outer Gods, as well as on how to summon them. While its exact contents are usually left vague, in this case we get a small excerpt:

> The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. […] Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where man rules now. After summer is winter, and after winter summer. They wait patient and potent, for here shall They reign again. (Lovecraft 93-94)

What makes this passage quite remarkable, as pointed out by Zeller, is that it bears heavy similarities to translations of Exodus 3:14, in which God tells Moses: "I was, I am and I will be" (11). This, along with the fact that the Whateleys use the forbidden book as a sort of guide to honor and summon these deities, gives the *Necronomicon* similar characteristics as the Bible (Zeller 11). As was the case with "The Shadow over Innsmouth", the cult summoning eldritch beings is not shown as a completely foreign element, but more of a corrupted version of our already established traditions.

It should be noted however, that while "The Dunwich Horror"'s religious undertones do bear heavy similarities to Christian traditions, they are not as closely linked as was the case in our previous example. For starters, as pointed out by Zeller, while the *Necronomicon* does feature passages similar to the Bible, it also primarily serves as a sort of spell book (11), somewhat weakening it's direct connection to Christianity.

Furthermore, while there is a church in Dunwich, unlike the inhabitants of Innsmouth, the Whateleys do not use it to carry out their rituals. Instead, they opt for the hills outside the village, which feature a series of stone pillars (Lovecraft 83), which form a sort of altar. This could be connected to Celtic paganism, a theory which is somewhat reinforced by the passing resemblance of the stone altar to Stonehenge, being described as a "hill-crowning circles of stone pillars" (Lovecraft 83), as well as the fact that the Whateleys often carry out their rituals around Halloween (Lovecraft 86).

Alternatively, it could also potentially be a reference to the stone circle found at Mystery Hill in North Hampshire (ironically sometimes being referred to as "America's Stonehenge") (Luckhurst 460), which would be a closer fit to the story's setting of Massachusetts (Lovecraft 80). Seeing how some believe these stones have been around since prehistoric times (Luckhurst 460), it could therefore be a possible link to aboriginal Americans' practices. For full transparency however, it should be noted that more recent findings claim these stone circles actually originated from American settlers' activities in the 18th century (Luckhurst 461), though whether Lovecraft was aware of this fact or not is unclear.

We can therefore conclude that, while both stories primarily follow the same structure, there are some minute differences. Both show a region that has been corrupted and is on an intercept course with a cataclysmic event that will change our world forever. Furthermore, in both cases, this catastrophe is linked with a group of cultists, who believe this catastrophe will bring them a form of salvation.

The differences between the two stories can firstly be found, in the origin of the cult, as one is directly responsible for the corruption of the area while the other is merely a byproduct of it, and secondly in the impact of religion. The Order of Dagon appeared to be primarily inspired by Christianism, serving more as a dark reflection of it and warning of the dangers it could bring should it be corrupted, while the Whateleys are more of a melting pot of different ideas. The location of the story and their use of the *Necronomicon* carries heavy themes of Christianity, yet the use of spells and altars seem to be more inspired by paganism. This gives the story more of a generalist feeling, serving less as a warning against the dangers of a corrupting Church, and more of a general warning against all kinds of spiritual beliefs. Ultimately, any kind of organized system of belief could bring the world closer to an apocalypse.

This fear of spiritual beliefs being more generalist, as opposed to specifically targeted towards Christianism, can best be seen in "The Call of Cthulhu". As can (at this point) be

expected, the story features a cult, planning on releasing an Outer God in order to bring forth an apocalypse and reshape our world as we know it. Interestingly enough, this time we get a sort of manifesto from the cult, which explains in detail what their plan entails:

> The secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. (Lovecrat 38-39)

In what has to be the most direct link with anti-millennialism seen so far, it is revealed that the cult's reason for seeking to liberate Cthulhu is to unleash a "holocaust of ecstasy and freedom" upon the world, creating a form of apocalypse where they are free to slaughter others as they please, and any thought of morality gets thrown to the side.

As we have also come to expect by now, while the protagonists manage to temporarily hamper their plans, as the cult's activities in the swamps of New Orleans are curbed by the police (Lovecraft 37), and Cthulhu is even temporarily defeated by crashing a ship into him (Lovecraft 50), no one is truly capable of stopping the apocalypse. The cult has spread its influence all over the globe and cannot truly "die" (Lovecraft 38). Similarly, Cthulhu's defeat was only temporary, as after being blown to pieces, he simply regenerates on the spot shortly after (Lovecraft 51). As stated by Houellebecq: "The great Cthulhu is indestructible, even if peril has been temporarily thwarted" (65). Society as we know it is doomed to change, and nothing can be done to stop it.

What separates "The Call of Cthulhu" from our previous examples, is that the cult responsible for the end of the world is completely detached from Christianity. There does not seem to be any link with typical Christian imagery, and the story even goes to far as to explicitly state that the cult is "not allied to the European witch-cult" (Lovecraft 39), cutting of any connection to typical Puritan beliefs surrounding witchcraft.

Instead, the cult seems to primarily be based on occultism, a collection of esoteric spiritual beliefs which, as mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, started gaining

prominence in the United States around the time of the short story's release. This connection be seen early on, as we are introduced to the story by a quote from Algernon Blackwood, a British writer and, more importantly for this analysis, a vehement believer in the supernatural and the occult (Luckhurst 453).

Blackwood is not the only well-known mystic to feature in the story, as Lovecraft also added a couple of references to Helena Blavatsky. Shortly after Blackwood's quote, we are greeted by the following excerpt: "Theosophists have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents" (Lovecraft 24). This passages serves as a great introduction to theme of cosmic horror, something that will be addressed in a later chapter. More importantly for the current discussion, however, is the direct reference to Blavatsky's Theosophical Society (Luckhurst 453), once more highlighting the importance of their belief system for the story.

Lovecraft was not content with simply referencing and borrowing some ideas from esoteric groups for the sake of set dressing however. He goes on to directly connect Cthulhu's cult with the spiritual movement. After the police arrest the cultists in Louisiana, they interrogate an aged man by the name of Castro, who possesses a lot of knowledge about the cult and its activities. Most importantly however, he claims to have "talked with the undying leaders of the cult in the mountains of China" (Lovecraft 38). This is a direct reference to Blavatsky's beliefs, as she claimed that the esoteric knowledge that formed the basis of the teachings of the Theosophical Society came from the Mahatmas, a group of spiritually enlightened beings that reside in the mountains of Tibet (Luckhurst 456).

These connections seem to suggest that, as was the case with the Order of Dagon and Christianity, the cult of Cthulhu and the Theosophical Society are intrinsically linked. Under these assumptions, numerous elements of the story can be recontextualized, serving as corrupted, more sinister versions of occult activities and beliefs.

Take the underwater city of R'lyeh, for example. At first glance, the concept of an ancient city which has sunk to the depths of the ocean might trigger associations with the lost city of Atlantis. Early on in the story however, Lovecraft makes mention of W. Scott-Elliot's publication: *The Story of Lost Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria* (26). Lemuria was originally a concept developed by zoologist Philip Sclater, who thought it to be a lost continent somewhere in the Indian Ocean. This idea was eventually picked up by Blavatsky, who claimed Lemuria

was, as a matter of fact, the sacred homeland of the Mahatmas, an idea that was further explained by Scott-Elliot.

Another connection between Lemuria and R'lyeh can be found later in the story, when it is mentioned that "The great stone city of R'yleh […] had sunk beneath the waves" (Lovecraft 39). While this once more also bears similarities to Atlantis, it should be noted that this concept plays a major role in esoteric beliefs, as they thought that humanity was divided into different races, which would rise and sink overtime alongside the continents they resided on, such as Lemuria and Atlantis (Luckhurst 456).

As such, we can assume that R'yleh serves as a sort of corrupted version of the Theosophical Society's Lemuria, in a similar manner to how the Order of Dagon served as a dark reflection of Christian beliefs. What should be a form of paradise, a city filled with enlightened beings willing to take humanity to new heights, is described as a "nightmare corpse-city […], built in measureless aeons behind history by the vast, loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars" (Lovecraft 47). It is a city marked by decay, as made evident by the mention of mud, ooze and seaweed which have made their mark on its buildings (Lovecraft 47), which inspires an indescribable feeling of fear in those who glance upon them or, in the most extreme cases, causes one to consider suicide (Lovecraft 48). Finally, instead of housing Mahatmas willing to impart their wisdom, R'yleh houses a gigantic monster who immediately killed those who freed him, and as seen in his cult's beliefs, is planning on bringing humanity to a new moral dark age.

Another possible connection between the cult and occultism, albeit less explicitly as the previous examples, can be found in the cult's rituals. The cult is shown to be a secretive society that usually gather somewhere away from civilization in order to perform rituals to communicate with Cthulhu. As previously discussed, these rituals seem to usually involve performing human sacrifices around a carven idol depicting the Eldritch God.

We have already discussed the racist implications of this portrayal in a previous chapter, namely the fact that the cultists are primarily comprised of minorities, the multiple references to voodoo and the colonial belief of the wild savage who partakes in acts of cannibalism and human sacrifice. However, there is another possible angle to analyze this scene with, namely that of an exaggerated version of occultist rituals.

According to Sebayang and Kristianto, there are a multitude of similarities between the activities of the Theosophical Society and the cultists in the story. Occultists are no strangers to

rituals, which serve to prove their dedication to their faith (Sebayang and Kristianto 49). These rituals also often involved certain elements which may seem familiar, namely the drawing on the ground of a "magic circle", or the use of an altar (Sebayang and Kristianto 49), similar to the cultists, who are first seen "writhing about a monstrous ring-shaped bonfire; in the centre of which […] stood a great granite monolith some eight feet in height (Lovecraft 36).

Where these rituals differ from what is described in "The Call of Cthulhu" however, is their purpose. As mentioned previously, occultist rituals merely serve to prove one's dedication and reaffirm their faith. They do not enter into contact with any form of divinity, nor do they try to appease said divinity with any form of sacrifice (Sebayang and Kristianto 49).

A final connection between the two is made apparent by the use of art during the rituals. After the police raid, Legrasse picked up a statue that was previously mounted on top of the stone altar (Lovecraft 36). Said statue seems to be a depiction of Cthulhu, and its origin remains a complete mystery (Lovecraft 31). Furthermore, as is typical with Lovecraft's writing, the simple sight of this idol inspires feelings of tension in those who see it, due the fact that "this thing [the statue] […] seem[s] instinct with a fearsome and unnatural malignancy (Lovecraft 32).

According to Sebayang and Kristianto, the use of this statue bears heavy similarities to typical occult practices. Members of the Theosophical Society would sometimes include works of art in their rituals, as they believed them to serve as a sort of conduit for mystical powers (Sebayang and Kristianto 53). Their use was not very common however, due to the fact that there is a limited amount of them which are not always available to use (Sebayang and Kristianto 53), similar to a form of holy relics. Lovecraft seems to have taken this idea and exaggerated it, giving the idol a malefic aura surrounding it and making it fundamental to the cult's activities.

As such, we can see that the cult of Cthulhu bear a lot of similarities to the Theosophical Society, from their fundamental beliefs, to their practices, to the indirect inclusion of some key members of the movement into the story. One can wonder why Lovecraft took such heavy inspiration from this spiritual movement to create his evil cult. One possible explanation could be that, similarly to the ever increasing presence of foreigners in America, the sudden appearance and spread of this spiritual movement caused Lovecraft to worry that they might replace the traditional religious structures in American society. This was probably not helped by the fact that some esoteric branches, such as the Hermetic Order of Golden Dawn, were

known to be quite secretive (Sebayang and Kristianto 51), allowing Lovecraft's mind to run free with ideas as to what they might be up to behind closed doors.

Another possible explanation, more in line with his anti-millennialism and the previous examples in the other stories, is that they simply serve as another example of a spiritual movement having the potential to cause the downfall of society. In this regard, Lovecraft does not seem to be picky. What mattered was that a societal collapse was rapidly approaching, and the main perpetrators of said collapse would be a spiritual movement. He seemingly did not care whether said movement was pagan, part of a new spiritual belief, or even just a corrupted version of traditional Christian beliefs. In the end, they would bring the apocalypse all the same.

In conclusion, while Lovecraft could indeed be described as an atheist, at least in the sense that he did not believe in any typical religion's god, his work could not be described as completely areligious. His work shares roots with gothic literature, and as such often use religious imagery or events as a background for the current story being told, yet while these elements are often proven to really exist, they never quite match with the audiences expectations. In his stories, witches do exist, but instead of making a deal with the Devil, they instead collaborate with creatures from a distant planet. It is possible to enter into contact with a deity, but instead of being a benevolent god such as the Christian faith would have us believe, they are ancient and sinister creatures bent on changing society for the worst. Even occultists are correct in their belief of a mystic homeland for enlightened beings, yet the reality is much more sinister than they might expect.

This dichotomy could also be found in Lovecraft himself, as while he did not follow any particular religion, he did seem to truly believe in an oncoming apocalypse, curtesy of his anti-millennialism. This can be seen from how his work portrays a slowly corrupting world, nearing a breaking point which could cause an irreparable catastrophe to occur, with religious sects taking center stage in this transformation, as can be seen by their primarily antagonistic role in the short stories.

In his work, these secretive cults will cause the end of the world, and while it might be possible to temporarily halt their plans, a feat his main characters have been able to achieve, this only delays the inevitable. Our world is doomed to fall, and all Lovecraft's characters can do, is wait for the inevitable, or give in to madness and join the cult.

6. The Unknown and the Unsayable

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft 444). This statement, serving as the opening line to Lovecraft's essay "Supernatural Horror in History" (1927), is arguably his most famous quote. In the same essay, he would go on to expand on this idea:

> The unknown […], became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extraterrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part. (Lovecraft 445)

The passage evokes images of our prehistoric ancestors huddled in a cave around a fire, terrified of what may lurk outside in the dark, still ignorant of so many elements of our world, and solely relying on our fear to keep us safe. It also connects the unknown with the extraterrestrial, creating a link with alien planes of existence that mankind cannot fully comprehend, nor should it try to. This notion not only serves as a basis for this current chapter, but is also important for the notion of cosmic horror, as mankind is shown to be helpless against these outer forces. Finally, in a bit more of a positive spin, Lovecraft does apply describe the fear of the unknown as a boon, as it explains mankind's drive to figure out the secrets of our world in an attempt to conquer this primordial fear. Some of these answers, much to Lovecraft's chagrin, are found in faith, as he comments on how much mankind's "hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition" (Lovecraft 445) in our quest to drive back the unknown. Other answers are found in scientific pursuit, which were particularly prominent during the 20th century, for better or for worse.

Yet, despite our push to beat this ancient fear, we are still often left with more questions than answers:

> Though the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos, while a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings round all the objects and processes that were once mysterious, however well they may be explained now. (Lovecraft 445).

To this day many areas of our universe remain out of reach. While we are uncovering more of the secrets of our solar system, there are still many areas in outer space that we have next to no knowledge of. Furthermore, despite our scientific advancements, many elements of our life are still shrouded in mystery, either because we still have no explanation for it, or because the more mythical or theological associations surrounding them are too powerful. For one such example, we can look at death, another one of humanity's primal fears, which is often dubbed "the great unknown", as we still do not possess any solid answers on what awaits us after we leave this world. As such, most religions seek an answer to soothe our fears, such as a Heaven for our souls to go to, or the concept of reincarnation.

As we have already discussed in the previous chapters, this search for answers, as well as constant confrontations with changes in society leading to a feeling of uncertainty, were quite present during the turn of the century. The sprouting and rise of new spiritual beliefs and religions in America challenged Christianity's dominance, while the increase in immigration started to bring Anglo-Saxon superiority into question. As previously discussed, some critics, such as Houellebecq, would link these confrontations against traditions, against what he must have seen as the natural order of things, as the primary reason behind Lovecraft's fear of others, stating: "It seemed self-evident to him [Lovecraft] that Anglo-Saxon protestants were by nature entitled to the highest positions within the social order; as to other races, […] he only felt a distant and benevolent disdain towards them." (123). This idea of the natural order being disturbed, creating what one might call an unnatural state of affairs, seems to have had an effect on Lovecraft's writing, as the word "unnatural" is often used to describe his creatures, though what is considered natural or not often depends on an individual's worldview.

Furthermore, Lovecraft had already come into contact with death, and the questions the absence of life entails, numerous times, as by his thirties he had already lost both of his parents and grand-parents to a variety of diseases and mental health issues (Luckhurst 9). As he was an atheist, one cannot help but wonder if this exposure to the great unknown caused him pain, unsure of what happened to those who passed on.

As such, this constant contact with feelings of uncertainty might explain why the unknown is featured so heavily throughout the vast majority of his work. This does raise an interesting question however: how does one truly represent the unknown in literature? After all, if something is described in the story, we understand what it looks like. If we understand why a monster attacks humans, even if it is simply to sustain itself, we already feel more comfortable, as its "motive" is now known to us. While monsters can usually be used as stand-ins for

complex themes, the typical vampire for example often being a representation for sexual desire or the power of the aristocracy, the very nature of the unknown makes this quite difficult to achieve.

Horror media is aware of these restrictions, and as such, usually tries to obscure the creature for as long as possible, in order to instill as much dread in its audience as possible (Norris 192). However, this usually cannot last forever. Horror movies, being a visual experience, usually require showing the monster at the end (Norris 192), usually to either deal the finishing blow to the hopeless protagonist, or in order to be vanquished. Theoretically, horror literature should be free of these restrictions, yet many writers have found that "a body of work that consistently [refuses to reveal the monster] should bring with it a certain amount of opprobrium and dissatisfaction" (Norris 192).

This is not the case with Lovecraft however, as by utilizing a variety of different literary techniques, he manages to constantly feature the fear of the unknown throughout his work without running into the problem of potentially disappointing his readers. For a first example of this, we may turn once more to "The Call of Cthulhu", which may seem odd, as the titular creature is without a doubt the most well-known of Lovecraft's rogue gallery. Yet, upon closer inspection, a multitude of elements come together to keep the readers guessing as to what actually happened in the story.

A first example of this is the narrator. Technically speaking, the main character of the short story is Francis Thurston, seeking to investigate the mysterious circumstances surrounding his uncle's untimely demise. Thurston, however, never directly comes into contact with the cult for the larger part of the story. Instead, he reads through a multitude of notes and articles left behind by his uncle, as well as statements made by a variety of witnesses, trying to piece out important information after the events have already happened. This already complicates the situation, as stated by Norris: "We are further removed from the event, so less is revealed to us" (198), which already makes the reader feel less at ease. By giving us less information, we feel less in control.

This is not helped by the fact that the information we do get can be quite unclear. Take early on in the story, when Thurston interviews Joseph D. Galvez, one of the police offers who conducted the raid on the cult in the swamps. Thurston immediately notes that Galvez is "distractingly imaginative" (Lovecraft 36), making the reader wonder whether his account truly has any merit, or if it simply the result of an overactive imagination. Thurston even goes as far

as to brush Galvez's claims off as simply being the result of him "hearing too much native superstition" (Lovecraft 36).

However, for the best example of unreliable accounts, we turn to the climatic confrontation between Cthulhu and the Norwegian sailor Gustaf Johansen for example. For starters, as was the case with Galvez, a multitude of elements immediately make the reader question Johansen's version of the story. He decided to write his account of the encounter in English instead of Norwegian in order to protect his wife from finding out the horrific truth (Lovecraft 46), which already complicates the matter, as it is reasonable to suspect that he would struggle to be as precise and clear as he would be in his native tongue. Thurston goes on to describe the diary as a "simple, rambling thing – a naïve sailor's effort at a postfacto diary" (Lovecraft 46-47), indicating that the document is a far cry from a clear and concise report, as would be the case in academic writing (Norris 199). Thurston even concludes the paragraph by stating: "I cannot attempt to transcribe it [the diary] verbatim […], but I will tell its gist (Lovecraft 47). As such, we are presented with the summary of the accounts of a sailor, who wrote said accounts in a language foreign to him. As a result, we are more than likely going to lose a lot of details in translation, and the details we do get might not be accurate, further serving to distance the readers from the events.

To add to the unreliability, when we do finally hear Johansen's side of the story, Thurston immediately notes that he "did not know quite all, even though he saw the city and the Thing" (Lovecraft 47), and as noted by Norris, we also see that Johansen engaged in self-censorship, as after Cthulhu explodes due to Johansen ramming the ship into him, Thurston mentions "a sound that the chronicler would not put on paper" (Lovecraft 47). These elements once more prevent the reader from fully understanding the events that occurred.

This leads us to the elephant in the room, Cthulhu himself. As previously mentioned, Cthulhu is without a doubt Lovecraft's most famous creature, and many horror fans have probably, at some point, seen an artist's rendition of the iconic monster. Yet, in an interesting case of the Mandela effect, the original story is actually pretty vague as far as his description is concerned.

As mentioned earlier, due to a multitude of reasons, the reader is put at quite the distance from the events, forcing us to rely entirely on Johansen's account, which is not entirely reliable. Further complicating the matters, is that the first description we get of the creature is the following: "The Thing cannot be described – there is no language for such abysms of shrieking

and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order" (Lovecraft 49). Right from the start, Cthulhu is seen as an indescribable being. Our language does not possess the vocabulary to properly explain why those who see him feel such horror, and his entire existence is seen as a walking contradiction, going against the natural laws of our world.

This does not stop Johansen from *trying* to describe him, though we learn much less about Cthulhu's appearance than most would expect. We know he's gigantic, as he's described as being mountainous a multitude of times (Lovecraft 49), we know he's green (Lovecraft 49), has claws (Lovecraft 50) and that his head is shaped like a squid (Lovecraft 50). Most of the other elements typically associated with Cthulhu, such as his wings, his scaly body or his bipedal nature, actually stem from Legrasse's description of the idol he found at the cult's ritual site. Leaving aside the fact that this once more relies on the description of another character conveyed through a newspaper article, distancing the readers from the actual event, one could wonder why these elements did not feature in Johansen's description. Did he not find them important enough to mention? Was he so taken aback by the creature's appearance that he did not manage to fully describe it? Could the idol perhaps be simply an artistic rendition of Cthulhu, and as such not be an exact representation of him?

No matter how one chooses to interpret these inconsistencies, the end results are the same. By not giving a complete and accurate description, Lovecraft accomplishes a multitude of goals. Firstly, as mentioned previously, the reader does not possess a full image of Cthulhu, which, according to Houellebecq, is absolutely vital to make the reader feel uncertain. Due to the reader not fully understanding the Outer Gods' appearance and abilities, Lovecraft essentially manages to cement the idea that they fall beyond the grasp of the human mind (Houellebecq 101), creating something that we will never truly understand.

Secondly, as stated by Norris, due to us not possessing a full image of the beast, we are forced to fill in the blank spaces ourselves (201), not only allowing each reader to create their own personalized horrific version, but also making the creature seem more believable, as he has less of a chance of being given a characteristic that could potentially break the reader's belief (Norris 202). Lovecraft actually also employed a similar version of this technique earlier with Galvez's statement, as anything the reader deems unrealistic can simply be brushed off as the work of his overactive imagination (Norris 203).

This unreliability is not only present with our secondary sources however. Lovecraft also made sure that Thurston's account gave the readers a feeling of uncertainty, through what James Goho dubbed "fragmented language", which consists of featuring "disjointed language and structures […] to give readers a sense of the chaotic experiences of the characters in the stories (123).

The structure aspect of this description is quite obvious. As mentioned earlier, "The Call of Cthulhu" is not one simple, linear story, but a collection of different fragments, of different accounts from a variety of witnesses, that Thurston attempts to put together in order to discover the truth. The disjointed language is primarily seen towards the later part of the story. Thurston starts off the story with long sentences and almost philosophical ideas, something that could easily pass off as an academic essay. However, the more he investigates the cult, and the more he discovers about these eldritch forces, the more his narration becomes confused. Take these fragments from the end of the story for example: "What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men. A time will come – but I must not and cannot think!" (Lovecraft 52). The passage contains contradictions in the same sentence, sudden, almost jarring leaps from one theme to another, and it is quite clear that Thurston's emotions have taken over his writing style, producing something that feels erratic and chaotic. As a result, the reader feels as lost and confused as Thurston.

These elements are very important for Lovecraft's particular type of horror. He himself stated the goal of his fiction was:

> To achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis. (Lovecraft, qtd. in Kneale 110)

In other terms, Lovecraft tried to prod at the limits of what we consider possible and natural, by adding something completely alien that violates said natural laws, an effect that is achieved here by making the creature indescribable by those who see it, as no word in our human language is capable of describing such horror (Kneale 110). However, for this to work, Lovecraft wanted to make sure that the rest of the story felt believable (Kneale 110), which is why he essentially gave many aspects of the story an air of "plausible deniability", allowing us

to interpret them as misinterpretations of current events, the result of an overactive imagination fueled by superstitious legends, or a man letting his emotions het to his head.

As such, through a combination of not allowing us to directly see the events of the story, the use of fragmented language in Thurston's narration, and giving the readers multiple elements which put into question the reliability of the narration, Lovecraft manages to represent the fear of the unknown whilst nullifying the disappointment the reader might have experienced otherwise. While "The Call of Cthulhu" is arguably the best example of these techniques, they can be found throughout the vast majority of Lovecraft's work.

"The Colour out of Space", "The Whisperer in Darkness" and "At the Mountains of Madness", for example, all feature narrators who have to piece together the events of the story after they have already taken place. "The Colour out of Space" is the most obvious example, as it features an unnamed surveyor from Boston, tasked with finding a spot for a new reservoir. He discovers an unnatural area dubbed "the blasted heath", and has to rely on an old man named Ammi Pierce, who was friends with the previous inhabitants, to figure out how it came to be. The rest of the story is a summary of Pierce's account of the events, which is once more immediately problematized by the surveyor stating he "had to recall [Pierce] from ramblings, piece out scientific points which he knew only by fading parrot memory […], or bridge over gaps where his sense of logic and continuity broke down". As such, we once more do not get a complete view of the situation, only that which Pierce himself witnessed, and what we do get can be doubtful, as he no longer appears to be completely sane.

The other stories mentioned above differ slightly from this formula, as the protagonists actually do experience some of the horrific events directly, yet Lovecraft still managed to limit how much information the readers have access to. For example, while the protagonist of "The Whisperer in Darkness", Albert Wilmarth, flees the state of Vermont after having seen something horrific there (Lovecraft 174), a lot of details are left vague. Wilmarth even starts the story by stating "bear in mind closely that I did not see any actual visual horror at the end" (Lovecraft 174). This is made clear by the fact that Wilmarth never actually sees the Mi-Go, a sort of alien fungus creature who have invaded Earth, in person. Instead, most of our knowledge about them comes from newspaper clippings, recordings, and through his correspondence with Henry Akeley, a man who lives near where the Mi-Go have been sighted (Norris 208).

Similarly, what exactly Wilmarth saw that made him flee is not made clear. He claims that he saw a cylinder with Akeley's name on it (Lovecraft 179), and in an empty chair, his face

and hands, the rest of the body missing (Lovecraft 180-81). It is heavily implied that Akeley's brain was in the cylinder though this has been up to debate amongst Lovecraft readers since the story's release (Norris 209). Interestingly enough, according to Norris, Lovecraft had originally written six extra pages, which would have explicitly stated that it was indeed his brain in the cylinder, but he decided to remove them (209), making it so the reader would feel as uncertain and lost as Wilmarth.

Furthermore, it is not even made clear whether Akeley's statements can be trusted either. While Akeley seemed to get more and more terrified at the events unfurling near his doorstep, even ending a letter asking Wilmarth to contact his son and smash the recording of the Mi-Go (Lovecraft 148), when Wilmarth next hears from him, his composure has completely changed. In his letter, he mentions that his previous warnings were but "silly things" (Lovecraft 149), that he made contact with the aliens and that they simply misjudged them (Lovecraft 149), before inviting Wilmarth to come visit him (Lovecraft 152). This sudden change of tone is immediately noticed by Wilmarth, who states that the letter made him feel uneasy (Lovecraft 152). Wilmarth also states that he "refused to believe" some of the knowledge Akeley apparently learned from the Mi-Go (Lovecraft 166), further making the reader question the validity of his statements. Finally, after fleeing the location, Whateley deposits a couple of theories as to what truly happened, from the quite innocent idea that this was all a hoax devised by Akeley (Lovecraft 173), to the far more haunting idea that Akeley got killed and replaced (Lovecraft 178).

A similar logic can also be applied to "At the Mountains of Madness", as Dyer actually misses most of the big events of the story. He is not present when the advance team finds the remains of the Old Ones in the ice, nor when said Old Ones awaken and slaughter the inhabitants of the camp. He does see a shoggoth in person, though similar to Cthulhu, very few details are actually given about the creature, as Dyer states that he "cannot bear to be quite direct – in stating what we [the explorers] saw" (Lovecraft 278). Similarly, while flying away from the abandoned city, Danforth, another one of the explorers, turns around and sees something horrifying, yet Dyer never figures out what exactly he saw. The sight of whatever creature was there also traumatizes Danforth, as Dyer states he will "never be the same again" (Lovecraft 282), preventing both him and the reader from ever truly discovering what happened.

It should be noted, however, that some of Lovecraft's stories do feature a third-person narrator, though there are still limits put in place to keep the reader in the dark. "The Horror at Red Hook", for example, primarily centers on Malone, and as such we never learn more than

what he discovers. Furthermore, the story opens with him suffering a sudden panic attack, as he is seen "staring queerly for a second at the tallest buildings before him, and then, with a series of terrified, hysterical shrieks, breaking into a frantic run" (Lovecraft 3). As such, we can wonder whether what the horrific events of the story actually happened, or whether they are merely the result of his nervous demeanor.

Finally, "The Dunwich Horror" also features a third-person narrator, however in this case, we do not follow one particular person throughout the story. Yet, we are still kept an arm's length away from the important events, as our perspective often switches to what is seen by outsiders. We do not what Wilbur actually looked like, we have to contend with what little Dr. Armitage was able to write down (Lovecraft 98). We do not see the Dunwich Horror destroying a house, we simply hear from one of the villagers that the house was destroyed and massive prints were left on location (Lovecraft 100). Finally, we never truly see the Dunwich Horror, as it is invisible. The only one to get a brief glimpse at it before it is destroyed is one Henry Weeler, who not only observed it from far away through a telescope, but also goes completely insane afterwards, shouting a multitude of different characteristics to attempt to describe it. As said by Norrison: "We the readers are not given the primary information and sources, but rather a summation, extract, and interpretation of them" (207).

Furthermore, as was the case in "The Call of Cthulhu", the vast majority of Lovecraft's stories choose to not reveal the creature to the reader or, if the monster does appear, they only reveal part of it, forcing the reader to imagine the rest. We have already briefly touched on the shoggoth and the Dunwich Horror, but there are a multitude of other examples.

As mentioned before, Wilbur's true appearance in "The Dunwich Horror" is purposefully kept from us, with only a couple elements being revealed. The reader might not even realize they are looking at Wilbur at first, as the sight of him after being attacked by a guard dog is so horrific, that he is simply described as "the thing" (Lovecraft 97). Only after those who found the corpse list off some characteristics, such as him being nine feet tall, carrying a revolver and having goatish features (Lovecraft 97) can the reader clue together who the intruder was.

Furthermore, aside from only being able to describe Wilbur as "the thing", it is also noted that:

> No human pen could describe it, but one may properly say that it could not be vividly visualised by anyone whose ideas of aspect

> and contour are too closely bound up with common life-forms of this planet and the three known dimensions. (Lovecraft 97)

This quote goes hand in hand with Lovecraft's goal of "violat[ing] […] the limitations of time, space and natural law" (qtd. in Kneale 110), by creating a creature so otherworldly that it is simply impossible for a human (or at the very least a sane human being) to describe.

However, just as was the case in "The Call of Cthulhu", there is a valid attempt from the narrator to describe it. It seems to be in our nature as humans to make an attempt at fending off the unknown, to try and make sense of something that seems to fall completely outside the scope of what we think is possible. However, these attempts seem to be in vain, as while the narrator more or less manages to describe Wilbur's upper-half, once we arrive at the lower-half "all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began" (Lovecraft 98).

What is interesting, is that the narrator can never give precise information about Wilbur's appearance, only ever giving comparisons. The hips possess what "*seems* to be rudimentary eyes" (Lovecraft 98; emphasis added), the tail is a "*kind of* trunk or feeler […] with *many evidences* of being an undeveloped mouth or throat" (Lovecraft 98; emphasis added), and most tellingly, the tentacles are in an odd arrangement, seemingly "following the symmetries of some cosmic geometry unknown to earth or the solar system" (Lovecraft 98). Most elements of Wilbur's body can simply not be described in a precise manner, instead relying either on theories on what function they could serve, such as the eyes on the hip, or attempting to compare them to something a human might be familiar with, such as a trunk.

As such, the reader is incapable of accurately imagining what Wilbur actually looks like. Throughout this paragraph, Lovecraft seems to draw our attention to the fact that our language fails to describe, and consequently, to understand, the phenomena happening in front of the characters (Goho 121). This technique appears so often in his stories that it has even been dubbed "Lovecraft's approximate language", whose goal is to represent the "instability of our grasp of the world through ordinary language". (Goho 122). As a result, Lovecraft forces us to confront the void that is the unknown (Goho 123).

As stated before, this technique can be found in the vast majority of Lovecraft's work, another excellent example being in "The Colour out of Space". After a meteorite crashes near a farm in New England, a group of professors come to investigate. While breaking apart the meteorite, they stumble upon the titular color, though calling it as such is difficult, as it was "almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all"

(Lovecraft 58). Very similar to Wilbur's true appearance it is only through trying to compare it with something we understand that we can try to figure out the unknowable.

This "colour" then proceeds to mutate the farm and its surroundings. The crops grow to a tremendous size, but have such a foul taste that they wind up being inedible. Similarly, the trees and vegetation around the farm keep growing, and start producing the same mysterious color as in the meteorite, as well as a disgusting smell.

More interesting for this analysis however, is what happens to the residents of the farm, the Gardner family. They start getting more and more paranoid, increasingly frightened by the strange events surrounding their farm. They eventually start losing sleep, staying up at night to watch for "something – they could not tell what" (Lovecraft 62), and they lose more and more contact with the nearby village, until Ammi is the only person left who dares to visit the farm. This ends up taking a physical and mental toll on them.

This spiral into madness eventually reaches its conclusion with Mrs. Gardner, who is the first member of the family to completely get corrupted by the color's influence, leading to a series of interesting effects:

> The poor woman [Mrs. Gardner] screamed about things in the air which she could not describe. In her ravings there was not a single specific noun, but only verbs and pronouns. Things moved and chained and fluttered, and ears tingled to impulses which were not wholly sounds. Something was taken away – she was being drained of something – something was fastening itself on her that ought not to be – someone must make it keep off – nothing was ever still in the night – the walls and windows shifted. (Lovecraft 63)

This paragraph presents us with a multitude of interesting elements to unpack. Firstly, we once more see the link between language and the presence of the unknown. Mrs. Gardner apparently started screaming about something which she could not describe, a similar phenomenon as our previous examples, where Lovecraft represents the otherworldliness of the unknowable by the fact that it cannot be explained by our human language.

This is taken a step further here however, as instead of simply being incapable of describing something, Mrs. Gardner's way of talking actually starts changing. Her ravings no

longer contain nouns, only verbs and pronouns, which seems to serve as an indication of her future transformation into some sort of eldritch being, as a core human characteristic, in this case her language capabilities, start giving way to something completely alien.

This idea is somewhat cemented by what transpires later in the story. Instead of sending her to an asylum, Nahum Gardner decides to lock his wife up in the attic. About a month later, she goes completely silent (Lovecraft 64). She is eventually joined by Thaddeus, the middle-child of the family, who also goes mad, sometimes "lapsing into an inane titter or a whisper about 'the moving colours down there'" (Lovecraft 65), and as a result gets locked into the room across the hall from his mother. This eventually leads to the moment where Merwin, the youngest child, makes a frightening observation: "The way they screamed at each other from behind their locked doors was very terrible, especially to little Merwin, who fancied they talked in some terrible language that was not of earth" (Lovecraft 65). It therefore seems that the alien elements are not only impossible to describe, but equally impossible to understand. Should a human get fully corrupted and turn into an eldritch creature, as is the case in this story, they seem to slowly lose the ability to communicate in a human language.

Further traces of this can be seen in the previous long quotation, as there also seems to be some sort of linguistic regression present. Specific nouns give way to a barrage of "somethings" and "someones", the sentences get shorter and more erratic, following each other without much in the way of rhyme and reason, similar to the previously mentioned concept of fragmented language. We see another example of this towards the end, where the narrator describes the colors flying from the well into the sky: "That alien and unidimensional rainbow of cryptic poison from the well – seething, feeling, lapping, reaching, scintillating, straining, and malignly bubbling in its cosmic and unrecognizable chromaticism" (Lovecraft 76). Just as was the case with Mrs. Gardner, a large part of the quote lacks any nouns, being primarily a series of verbs following each other.

A possible explanation for these odd quirks in the narration could be that the unnamed narrator "has been polluted by Ammi […], by an experience so intense it has to be expressed from the perspective of its subject (Setiya 48)". This would make sense, as we know Ammi kept in touch with the Gardners. He was the only person to still visit them when the strange phenomena started occurring (Lovecraft 63), and he was the only one who actually saw the corrupted form the family had taken due to their close proximity to the meteorite (Lovecraft 68). Furthermore, as stated previously, the unnamed surveyor had to keep Ammi from rambling and try to bridge over any inconsistencies in his narration (Lovecraft 56). As such, we can also

assume that the instances of erratic narration are the result of Ammi, who has been heavily traumatized by his close encounter to the unknown, with the loss of his linguistic capabilities once more serving as a sort of mark of corruption from the eldritch beings.

When Ammi stumbles upon Mrs. Gardner in the attic, we are treated with a similar description as in previous Lovecraft stories:

> He saw something dark in the corner, and upon seeing it more clearly he screamed outright. […] Strange colours danced before his eyes. […] He thought only of the blasphemous monstrosity which confronted him, and which all too clearly had shared the nameless fate of young Thaddeus and the live-stock. (Lovecraft 68)

As usual, we are given very little information about the scene. Readers might not even realize that the monstrosity is Mrs. Gardner at first, as she is never addressed as such, with only the mention of the odd colors and the similar fate of Thaddeus allowing us to connect the dots.

Unlike Cthulhu, who had a couple of his features defined, or Wilbur, who we could at least compare with some characteristics from other animals, we get shockingly little concrete information to go off of. Mrs. Gardner is only described as "something dark in the corner" and a "blasphemous monstrosity". It is mentioned that she is actively crumbling (Lovecraft 68), which gives the impression that her form is no longer solid, and perhaps sand-like, but this is not explicitly stated. Furthermore, we do know that she exudes the same color as the one from the meteorite, but as stated in the beginning, we do not even know what that color actually looks like, or if it can even truly be described as a color. It seems that in this case, Lovecraft has opted to give as little information as possible about the creature, completely leaving the readers in the dark.

After dealing with Mrs. Gardner, it being very heavily implied Ammi put her out of her misery (Lovecraft 68), he heads downstairs to find Nahum, who similarly to his wife, is described with very few details:

> It [Nahum] had come to meet him, and it was still alive after a fashion. […] Death had been at it. […] Collapse, greying and disintegration were already far advanced. There was a horrible brittleness, and dry fragments were scaling off. Ammi could not

> touch it, but looked horrifiedly [sic] into the distorted parody of what had been a face. (Lovecraft 70)

Once more, the narrator no longer describes the creature standing before Ammi as Nahum, instead only being referred to as "it", just as was the case with his wife. It seems Lovecraft uses this switch to distinguish these eldritch beings from their previous forms. Human concepts like names do not apply here, as they have turned into something so bizarre and alien, that we are no longer able to describe them, and have to resort to the generic "it".

The quote also continues Lovecraft's tendency to divulge as little actual information as possible. Nahum, or whatever kind of creature he is now, is decaying, as indicated by multiple synonymous terms such as "collapse, greying and disintegration", as well as the idea that "Death had been at it". We also know that his face is horrifying, though why exactly that is the case is not made clear.

It therefore seems that, with these mostly humanoid creatures, Lovecraft decided to primarily avoid giving any details as to their horrific deformities. A possible explanation for this could be his goal to make his stories as realistic as possible to accurately represent the horror of the unknown (Kneale 110). Paradoxically, completely fantastical creatures, such as Cthulhu or the Chimera-like Wilbur, have a lot more liberty in how one chooses to describe them without breaking the reader's immersion. Norris compared this to the modern legend of Bigfoot, a creature that many people believed in due to the scarcity of the evidence (202). Belief in the cryptid was at its height around the time when we only had access to the famous feet prints and a couple of rough photographs, as "they provide just enough evidence to the willing to open the possibility of there being a creature such as Bigfoot" (Norris 202), while ironically the actual video "evidence" of Bigfoot had the complete opposite effect.

As such, it seems that we are more willing to accept the extraordinary, provided we are not given too many details that may break immersion. This could be why Lovecraft opted to give next to no details on these more humanoid creatures, as it is a form we are more familiar with than some of his other creatures, and as such, one where we are a lot more sensitive towards anything too out of place.

A further example of this phenomena is seen in the last description of the extraordinary in the short story. Interestingly enough, the sight of the colors leaving for space is a bit more detailed, and more in line with Wilbur's appearance, primarily done through comparisons and theorizing. Once we move away from more humanoid creatures, the narration is once again

more willing to give out details, now running less of a chance of ruining our immersion. Those who saw the colors described them as:

> A thousand tiny points of faint and unhallowed radiance, tipping each bough like the fire of St Elmo or the flames that come down on the apostles' heads at Pentecost. It was a monstrous constellation of unnatural light, like a glutted swarm of corpse-fed fireflies dancing hellish sarabands over an accursed marsh; and its colour was that same nameless intrusion which Ammi had come to recognise and dread. (Lovecraft 74)

The narration begins with a biblical analogy, comparing the light with a form of divine radiance and even directly referencing the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles from the New Testament, in which the Apostles were crowned by holy fire (Luckhurst 459-60). Furthermore, Acts 2 also stated that, after the Apostles were crowned, they "began to speak with other tongues" (Luckhurst 460), not only once more connecting language with the Eldritch, but also serving as another version of a religious element being corrupted, as discussed in the previous chapter. The rest of the quote falls more in line with previous examples. The terms "monstrous" and "nameless" are used to obscure as much detail as possible, while the rest of the information is given in the form of a comparison, stating that it is "*like* a glutted swarm of corpse-fed fireflies".

For a final noteworthy element in the short story, we return to the final confrontation between Ammi and Nahum, who by this point seems to have almost completely finished his transformation. When Ammi tries to ask for information behind the cause of the farm's corruption, he gets a series of bizarre answers from Nahum:

> Nothin'… nothin'… the colour… it burns… cold an' wet, but it burns… it lived in the well… I seen it… a kind o' smoke… jest like the flowers last spring… the well shone at night… Thad an' Merwin an' Zenas [the elder brother]… everything alive… suckin' the life out of everything… in that stone… it must a' come in that stone… […] Her [Mrs. Gardner's] face is gitting' to hev that colour sometimes towards night… an' it burns an' sucks…. it come from some place whar things ain't as they is here… (Lovecraft 70)

In yet another example of fragmented language, we get a paragraph with contradictions, as the color is at the same time capable of burning, yet also cold and wet, as well as sporadically changing the subject through seemingly randomly interconnected sentences, lacking any real sense or structure. We also see a direct connection between the color and the unknown, described here as simply being a place where things are not the same as here.

Shortly hereafter, Nahum finishes his transformation: “But that was all. That which spoke could speak no more because it had completely caved in” (Lovecraft 70). While he was spared his wife’s fate of having his mind corrupted completely, as he simply ceased speaking instead of starting to communicate in an unknown language, it is clear that his transformation into an eldritch being is complete, which is once more connected with the complete loss of language. Similarly to before, the narrator also does not refer to him as Nahum, instead simply describing him as “that which spoke”, and calling his remains “what was left” (Lovecraft 70), further cementing the idea that he is no longer human, as he not only cannot speak our language anymore, but can also no longer be described by it.

As such, “The Colour out of Space” seems to put a heavy emphasis on the relation between language and the unknowable. The story follows a group of characters who, through to their exposure to an alien color of unknown origin, slowly get corrupted. In the best case, as with Ammi, this only leads to madness, being forever traumatized by the events that unfurled at the farm. In the worst case, as with the Gardners, they turn into an eldritch abomination.

In both cases however this decline is linked with a loss of language. The characters afflicted with this alien disease slowly lose the ability to properly communicate, beginning with a more erratic way of speaking, before devolving into sentences containing only verbs and pronouns without proper nouns, until they are eventually no longer capable of speaking. Similarly, once they fully turn, they can no longer be described by humans, being labeled as a thing, or sometimes simply referred to by it, just like the color at the root of the issue, which could only be called as such by analogy.

This seems to have been an attempt by Lovecraft to truly communicate to the reader how alien and bizarre these creatures are. After all, “language determines how we characterize and experience the world” (Goho 115). By giving something a name, we essentially categorize it, allowing us to imagine something without needing to see it, which intrinsically links our language with our knowledge. As Goho put it “knowing, in part, is denoting, naming things” (Goho 116).

However, in “The Color out of Space”, as well as a large part of Lovecraft’s work, we are often faced with things that our language fails to describe, which can be referred to as the unsayable: “something that escapes words because it is ineffable, ungraspable, or unknowable” (Goho 116). This seems to be another reason why Lovecraft work often chooses to not go into details when describing his rogue’s gallery of horrific creatures and Outer Gods. By not doing so, he drives home the point that they are alien and bizarre, that they fall outside of our understanding. As said by Houellebecq: “Their [Lovecraft’s creatures’] exact nature is beyond the grasp of the human mind” (101), making any attempt at describing them futile. Similarly, communication with them is also impossible, as they speak a language unlike any found on Earth, and even former humans lose their ability to speak should they suffer the fate of turning into an eldritch creature.

In conclusion, Lovecraft’s work is filled to the brim with the fear of the unknown. This fear is, by its very nature, difficult to properly convey to an audience. Yet, through a multitude of tricks, Lovecraft succeeds in doing so. He shakes our faith in the narration, causing us to always doubt if what we are presented with is the truth. He does so either through distance, making the narrator miss vital moments of the plot and forcing them to piece the truth out later, or simply by instilling doubt in the current narrator’s reliability. This is primarily the case in stories with a first-person narrator, though even in stories with a third-person narrator, Lovecraft limits their view to a specific group of characters further away from the action.

Similarly, despite some of his creatures having made it into popular media, Cthulhu being the prime example of this, we never truly get an accurate and trustworthy description of their appearance, partially due to the above-mentioned distance and unreliability of the narration, but also due to the inherent vagueness of the description itself. With Lovecraft’s larger creatures, such as Cthulhu, we usually only get little tidbits of information at a time, making it difficult to accurately imagine what the creature actually looks like. With other eldritch beings, such as Wilbur or the swarm of unidentified colors, we get a little more detail, yet most of the information we get is through analogy, comparisons or theories as to the purpose of the body part described, making the reader question whether the information is correct. Finally, in some cases, such as with the Gardner family, Lovecraft simply opts to add little to no detail, relying on the shock of the narrator and the imagination of the reader to do most of the heavy lifting in creating fear.

The reason behind the use of these techniques is twofold. Firstly, Lovecraft believed that, to truly create the horror of the unknown that he wanted to instill on his audience, the story

needed to be as immersed in reality as possible (Kneale 110). As such, by being purposefully light on details and creating distance from the events, he mitigates the risk of adding details that could potentially break the reader's immersion, as well as giving them a certain amount of plausible deniability, allowing them to pass off anything to fantastical as merely the result of an overly imaginative or crazed mind.

Secondly, by limiting the amount of information the characters are able to convey, as well as the constant reminders that the creatures are "indescribable", Lovecraft truly cements the alien and unknowable nature of these eldritch beings. Seeing as they fall outside the scope of our human language, what we can describe as the unsayable, it also indicates that they fall outside the scope of our human knowledge, making it completely impossible for us to ever truly understand them and their intentions.

The end result is a body of work that manages to do the paradoxical: constantly featuring the unknown as one of its core themes, whilst at the same time never allowing the reader to make the unknowable known. Through his writing, Lovecraft managed to truly convey the fear of a changing world, one where humanity kept on discovering new knowledge, yet never truly being closer to being all knowing, as by our very nature, there will always be something that we cannot truly understand.

7. Cosmic Horror

As stated in the previous chapter on the unknown, Lovecraft's protagonists often come into contact with beings that are simply indescribable, whose appearance is so alien and bizarre that the narrators often simply cannot describe them. What is interesting about these encounters, is that in the vast majority of the cases, the protagonists make it out physically unscathed. There are definitely exceptions to this, as Gilman got killed by Brown Jenkins after the latter dug a hole clean through his body (Lovecraft 316), while Thurston was hunted by the cult of Cthulhu after learning too much (Lovecraft 52), as indicated by the fact that the diary we are reading was "Found Among the Papers of the *Late* Francis Wayland Thurston (Lovecraft 24, emphasis added). However, in most of Lovecraft's stories, such as "The Horror at Red Hook", "The Colour out of Space", "The Dunwich Horror" and many others, the protagonists usually make it out alive.

However, one may wonder if those who met their untimely demise should count themselves lucky, as those who live to tell the tale usually suffer a fate worse than death. They are forever haunted by their exposure to these eldritch creatures, becoming paranoid of their

surroundings, going mad and struggling to communicate the horrors they saw, or in some cases even giving in to the eldritch corruption and joining the ranks of these otherworldly creatures.

Furthermore, while the protagonists do survive, one could hardly say that they emerged victorious. As explained in a previous chapter on the concept of religion, as a result of Lovecraft's anti-millennialism, it is usually impossible to stop the Outer Gods from bringing their plans to fruition. While lesser creatures, such as the inhabitants of Innsmouth or the transformed Gardner family, can be killed, the same does not apply to most of the eldritch creatures, such as the Deep Ones, Cthulhu or Yog-Sothoth. These beings are, by all accounts, basically immortal, and humanity is absolutely helpless to stop them.

These notions lead us to a concept that has become basically synonymous with H.P. Lovecraft: cosmic horror. This subgenre of horror stems from Lovecraft's philosophical (and similarly to his anti-millennialism, quite nihilistic) view, which he dubbed "cosmic indifferentism" (Luckhurst 22). The concept is best explained by Lovecraft himself, who went into detail in a letter written to the editor of *Weird Tales*, an American horror fiction pulp magazine that Lovecraft wrote for at the time:

> Now all of my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form – and the local human passions and conditions and standards – are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimensions, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind have any existence at all. (Lovecraft, qtd. in Luckhurst 22-23)

Mankind often places itself as the center of the universe. After all, the history of our species is quite the triumphant one. We evolved to the point that our intelligence far surpasses that of any other species of our planet, allowing us to become the apex predators of Earth. In addition, thanks to our technological advancements, we have managed to defy the limitations of our species, allowing us to soar through the sky, or venture deep underwater. Yet, according to Lovecraft, all mankind's achievements are, relatively speaking, meaningless. We are but one

tiny speck of dust when compared to the vastness of the unexplored cosmos, and our achievements and beliefs may not matter when compared to those of other worlds or other creatures. Furthermore, Lovecraft stresses the fact that mankind is but a temporary race. The history of our kind is but a small percentage of the history of Earth. Just as there were creatures who ruled the Earth before us, a day will come where mankind disappears, leaving only traces of our presence (a time which, as explained in the chapter on religion, Lovecraft seemed to believe would come sooner rather than later).

The confrontation with this realization serves a specific purpose. According to Lovecraft, cosmic horror is meant to evoke "a certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces" (Lovecraft, qtd. in Ralickas 367). Instead of more traditional horror, where the sense of dread a reader might feel comes directly from the events happening in the story, such as a confrontation with some kind of monster, the exploration of some eerie abandoned building or simply being fearing for the protagonist's survival, Lovecraft's type of horror is more indirect. The fear usually does not come from any immediate threat, but from the uncomfortable feeling that we are not alone in the cosmos, and that we are not as powerful as we believe we are.

One may call this belief quite pessimistic, but Lovecraft would go one step further in a later letter:

> I am *not a pessimist* but an *indifferentist* – that is, I don't make the mistake of thinking that the resultant of natural forces surrounding and governing organic life will have any connexion [sic] with the wishes or tastes of any part of that organic life-process. Pessimists are just as illogical as optimists… Both schools retain in a vestigial way the primitive concept… of a cosmos which gives a damn one way or the other. (Lovecraft, qtd. in Luckhurst 23)

To Lovecraft, pessimists fall in the exact same pitfall as optimists. While the two ways of thought are often seen as fundamentally opposed, they still, ultimately, share the idea that the world cares about them in some way. A pessimist may believe that the world is out to get them, or that some kind of deity is actively trying to make them miserable. Meanwhile, Lovecraft believes that the world does not care either way. Whether we are living a happy or depressive

life, the universe will simply go on without a care, putting his belief much closer to an idea of nihilism than that of pessimism.

What further separates this concept of cosmic indifferentism from the typical nihilistic beliefs is its reliance on the scientific advancement of the time. Lovecraft's work often stresses the fact that the Outer Gods, despite their name, are not actually gods, but alien creatures who arrived on Earth eons ago. They were here before us, and as will be discussed later, some stories even imply that our ancestors were accidentally created by them. These notions line up with the scientific discoveries of the time, such as our expanding awareness on the age of the universe, evolutionary theory and humanity's, relatively speaking, very recent arrival (Smith 835), all elements which caused us to reconsider our place in the infinitely vast cosmos.

For an example of this, we can turn to "At the Mountains of Madness". As explained previously, the group of explorers stumble across a long abandoned city which used to be inhabited by the Old Ones, who are explicitly stated to have visited Earth from another galaxy (Lovecraft 240). After exploring for a while, Dyer realizes just how old the city truly is, a realization that is framed to be quite horrific and shocking:

> It took only a brief study to give us the hideous truth […]. There could now be no further merciful doubt about the nature of the beings which had built and inhabited this monstrous dead city millions of years ago, when man's ancestors were primitive archaic mammals, and vast dinosaurs roamed the tropical steppes of Europe and Asia. (Lovecraft 237)

We can see that the confrontation with the truth, that being that there was an intelligent species on Earth long before mankind came into being, clearly has an effect on Dyers, who describes it as a hideous truth. By the mere existence of this ancient city, the story "revokes the human privilege of having been the first species of higher intelligence to populate [the Earth]" (Ralickas 369), which shatters mankind's pride and puts our superiority over the less intelligent creatures of our planet in question.

A more direct example of Dyer's reality breaking apart can be found near the beginning of the story, where he explains how the events he witnessed: "marked [his] loss […] of all peace and balance which the normal mind possesses through its accustomed conception of external nature and nature's law" (Lovecraft 207). Mankind's central place in the universe is taken for granted, to the point that, for any "normal mind", it is simply considered part of nature's law.

As such, by being forced to confront the truth about our place in the universe, our sense of reality falls apart, any "peace and balance" we had falls apart, as our minds cannot handle it.

This idea of mankind not being able to come to terms with the truth of the situation is not exclusive to "At the Mountains of Madness" and, as a matter of fact, is the typical response of most of Lovecraft's protagonists when faced with cosmic horror. This is where another recurring theme linked to cosmic horror comes in: the idea of "merciful ignorance" (Fawver 251). This concept can best be explained as the idea that "there are some types of knowledge only by the avoidance or suppression of which can humankind maintain a semblance of well-being" (Burleson, qtd. in Fawver 251). The best, and arguable most famous example can be found in Thurston's opening monologue in "The Call of Cthulhu":

> The most merciful thing in the world […] is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. […] Some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (Lovecraft 24)

According to Thurston, mankind is better off living in ignorance, as any knowledge about our true place in the cosmos can potentially make one go mad. When presented with such knowledge, it is better to flee from it and try to ignore, going into a dark age that, while ignorant, is associated with safety and peace, concepts that were taken away from Dyer's life after he learned the truth.

This idea of a scientifically-oriented and openly anti-religious figure such as Lovecraft featuring this kind of concept in the vast majority of his stories seems odd, as science's goal is usually to broaden our horizons by learning more about the world we inhabit. A possible theory is that, similar to ideas like optimism and pessimism, the main problem of scientific research is that it puts too much emphasis on humanity. In its quest of allowing us to surpass our natural limits, we start venturing into areas where we were never meant to go. As such, it might be more accurate to say that the idea of merciful ignorance, and as a result cosmic horror, is more about not venturing too far off the beaten path and knowing our limits, rather than being strictly anti-science. To take it a step further, it may also connect to Lovecraft's affection for the historical geography of Providence (Smith 836), which leads to a desire to keep the traditional

way of life unchanged. It is better for humanity to keep living the same way we have in the past, rather than try to change society, as the result of those changes may be catastrophic.

Cosmic horror is however anti-religious, a claim that should come as no surprise to anyone who is aware of Lovecraft's opinions on religions such as Christianity. For an example of this, we may return to "At the Mountains of Madness". Whilst analyzing the hieroglyphic murals of the old city, Dyer comes across a segment depicting a group of primate vertebrates being created as offshoots from the shoggoth, without the Old Ones realizing (Lovecraft 243). Upon closer inspection, Dyer makes a haunting discovery: "It interested us to see in some of the very last and most decadent sculptures a shambling, primitive mammal […], whose vaguely simian and human foreshadowings were unmistakable" (Lovecraft 244). It is very heavily implied that all life on Earth and, most importantly for this analysis, humanity, are but a mere byproduct of the Old Ones' experiments to create shoggoths.

If the knowledge of humanity not being the first intelligent species to inhabit the Earth was meant to shatter our pride, once could say that this reveal has broken it beyond all repair. Aligning itself with Darwin's famous theory from "On the Origin of Species", the story claims that mankind was not the result of a benevolent God creating us in his image, giving life to our species in order to accomplish some kind of great mission. Instead, we were created completely on accident. As stated by Ralickas: "Chance, and not divine grace, brought us into being" (369).

A potential counterpoint, which could be described as overly optimistic, is that while this reveal does go against our traditional religious beliefs in some ways, in some other ways it actually confirms them. While we were not created by a deity in the traditional sense of the word, we were brought into existence by a group of higher beings. After all, as mentioned before, the Old Ones, and by proxy most of Lovecraft's eldritch creatures, are often referred to as the Outer Gods. Similarly, as with any traditional kind of deity, there are those who worship them, believing them to be benevolent and willing to guide their devout worshippers to a brighter future. This can best be seen with the cultists of Cthulhu, who, as explained in the chapter on religion, believe Cthulhu would guide them to a future where they would be free to do as they pleased, as long as they honored him through ritual sacrifices.

However, it is quickly made clear that, to these Outer Gods, humanity is not seen as a group of devout followers, worthy of being guided to a brighter future. As explained in the chapter on race, Dyer feels a sort of connection with the Old Ones, describing them as "the men of another age" and "scientists to the last" (Lovecraft 273-74). As previously explained, this

comparison was done to further the story's warning of the future degradation of society and the dangers it brought with it, yet when viewed under the lens of cosmic horror, it can also produce a different effect.

The comparison between the Outer Gods and us is not an attempt to humanize them, but to explain their behavior and stance towards us. On the hieroglyphic murals that indicated that mankind was the accidental result of the Outer Gods' experiments, we learn that our ancestors were "used sometimes for food and sometimes as an amusing buffoon by the land dwellers" (Lovecraft 244). Unlike our traditional concept of a creator god, who birthed humanity to serve some sort of divine purpose, even if said purpose is as simple as worshipping the deity, the Outer Gods pay us very little mind, using us as the occasional food source, or even just a form of entertainment. Dyer calling them scientists is quite accurate, as "where aliens intervene in human affairs, their intrusion is motivated by the kind of cold and calculating scientific self-interest we display in our interactions with earth's "lesser" life-forms" (Ralickas 369). The Old Ones payed humanity little mind, in the same vein as how we would view a colony of ants, where we would usually ignore them unless we require something for them, in which case we unceremoniously take from them. Houellebecq put this best in his essay on the subject:

> What makes us think that these creatures […] will exhibit any kind of *spiritual* nature? […] It is ridiculous to imagine that at the edge of the cosmos, other well-intentioned and wise beings await to guide us towards some sort of harmony. In order to imagine how they might treat us were we to come into contact with them, it might be best to recall how we treat "inferior intelligences" such as rabbits and frogs. In the best of cases they serve as *food* to us; sometimes also, often in fact, we kill them for the sheer pleasure of killing. (41)

To believe the Outer Gods viewed humanity as anything noteworthy is an act of folly. To them we are completely insignificant and barely worth a thought. This realization allows us to reconsider the events of Lovecraft's other stories through a different lens, rendering the events more terrifying, as well as further increasing our feeling of hopelessness. For example, taking this information into consideration, it is entirely possible that some of the previously mentioned creatures, such as Cthulhu or the Deep Ones, had no greater plan for humanity such as enslaving us or twisting our society into a new and corrupted version. Instead, it is very possible that they simply viewed us as a sort of infestation that they needed to get rid of in order to reclaim their

territory, similar to how we might get rid of an infestation of insects in our fields. At best, they might see us as a potential food source, or simply something to hunt and kill to amuse themselves, though this only raises our status from insects to cattle.

This also changes the dynamic of the various cults worshipping their Outer Gods, going from terrifying hostile forces to something quite tragic, and arguably even slightly comical. These cults feature people who have decided to engage in sadistic, barbaric rituals, largely eroding their humanity beyond recognition (Ralickas 370), all to appease a god who they hope will lead them to salvation, to a life where they are free to do as they please. Yet these devout believers don't realize that the Outer Gods simply do not care about them, and as such any promise of a better life is simply a delusion. Furthermore, as discussed in a previous chapter on the subject of religion, these cults often serve as stand-ins for religious groups, from the more standard Christian examples to newer theological belies such as occultism. As such, one could make the argument that this aspect of cosmic horror goes hand in hand with the anti-religious sentiment often present in Lovecraft's work, as it makes a clear statement that these systems of faith wind up being pointless. Even if the cults are right and there truly is some form of deity, said deity will not necessarily care about their creations.

As such, Lovecraft's cosmic horror serves to make the reader feel a sense of dread not necessarily through the use of vile creatures and gore, but through the realization that mankind's anthropocentric vision of itself, one which we consider the absolute truth, is actually false. Not only were we not the first intelligent species on Earth, but our superiors, the Outer Gods, barely acknowledge our existence, and any attempt to gain favor with them is ultimately useless. Lovecraft's fiction is not content with simply shattering one of humanity's fundamental beliefs however, as it is also shown that our concept of time is but a human construct, something we created to try to shield us from the devastating truth (Fawver 248), and as such being another example of the concept of merciful ignorance.

For an example of this, we turn to "The Shadow out of Time". As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the protagonist of the story, Nathaniel Peaslee, suffered from a bout of amnesia, being incapable of remembering anything that happened between 1908 and 1913. It is eventually revealed that, during those 5 years, Peaslee's mind was actually swapped with that of a member of an alien race, simply referred to as "the Great Race". The reason they are called as such is apparently because "it alone had conquered the secrets of time" (Lovecraft 398). Peaslee discovers that the Great Race, similar to the Old Ones, actually arrived on Earth long ago,

apparently sometime after the Old Ones, as it is stated that they were a relatively late race "which had lived till only fifty million years before the advent of man" (Lovecraft 398).

Apparently, their minds were so powerful, that they were able to switch places with individuals from the far past or future. They would use their time in the host's body gathering as much information from the current time period as possible, adding to their vast library chronicling all of Earth's history. In the meantime, the person whose body was taken over would inhabit that of the member of the Great Race, and would then be further interrogated. Interestingly, they would not be treated as a hostage, and were permitted to walk around and study their new environment as much as they please. Once the member of the Great Race learned enough, they would simply build a device allowing them to switch back. Interestingly, the host's memories of their time among the Great Race would be wiped clean, with the actual reason being quite vague. We only get a passing mention that there are "certain troublesome consequences inherent in the general carrying forward of knowledge" (Lovecraft 401), with the equally vague statement that "the few existing instances of clear transmission had caused […] great disasters. (Lovecraft 401).

At first, the situation we are presented with carries similar ideas to those found in "At the Mountains of Madness". As was the case in the previous short story, we learn that humanity was not the first intelligent species on Earth, an idea explicitly stated by Peaslee:

> Mankind is only one […] of the highly evolved and dominant races of this planet's long and largely unknown career. Things of inconceivable shape […] had reared towers to the sky and delved into every secret of nature before the first amphibian forebear of man had crawled out of the hot sea thee hundred million years ago. (Lovecraft 398)

Once more, a large part of the horror of the short story is the realization that mankind's anthropocentric world view is incorrect, and that we are, relatively speaking, insignificant in the cosmos at large. Furthermore, while in this case the Great Race is not shown to be our creators, as was the case with the Old Ones, there is still a hint of anti-religion in the story, as it is revealed that all of mankind's prophets were actually the result the Great Race's mind-switching experiments (Lovecraft 398), once more serving as a case of the truth undermining mankind's beliefs.

Where “The Shadow out of Time” differs from the previous short story covered is, fittingly, in its focus on the concept of time. Mankind has a very linear perspective of time, one need only look at a timeline for an example. The past, present and future follow each other in that specific order and are inherently interconnected. What happened in the past will have an effect on the present and the future, and it is entirely impossible for those in the future to have any control over the actions of those in the past. Furthermore, our actual grasp of time is quite limited. While our universe is billions of years old, our recorded history usually only goes back to around 3000 BC and we can often struggle to truly think ahead far into the future.

This is where the short story once more shatters our preconceptions about time, and pushes it away from our anthropocentric point of view. Firstly, as mentioned before, it is revealed that mankind was not the first intelligent species to inhabit Earth. The story goes one step further however, and indicates that mankind’s reign on the planet is far from eternal, as it is revealed that the Great Race (or at least a modified version of them) will take back control of the planet after mankind disappears from its surface (Lovecraft 408). What makes this fact all the most haunting is that it is never revealed how our kind eventually dies out. All we know is that we are eventually replaced by the Great Race, but whether this is due to a full on invasion by them, a case of mankind destroying itself through infighting or perhaps due to our planet become uninhabitable, is unknown. Not only does this cause a case of dread, as we are told our kind will disappear without any information as to how, but it further serves to underline mankind’s insignificance. We are simply a race that, at one point in time, ruled over the planet, before eventually disappearing and setting the stage for those who would proceed us, and there is nothing we can do to this eventual inevitability. As stated by Fawver: “The Lovecraftian world of both the past and the future is directed toward humanity's assured doom” (250).

Another interesting element of the story is how time is represented. During his time inhabiting the body of the Great Race, Peaslee comes to the conclusion that “there was no such thing as time in its humanly accepted sense” (Lovecraft 398). This is probably due to the ability of the Great Race to travel to and back from any point in time, as this goes completely against our linear vision of the concept. Fawver goes into further detail, stating: “The past, the present, and the future become one vast panorama without discrete junctures. There is no cause and effect, because there is no physical or objective temporal movement; in Lovecraft's fiction, time is a point, not a line” (251). As shown with the power of the Great Race, it is entirely possible for multiple points in time to coexist simultaneously, which can also be seen from the amount of humans and non-humans from different time periods who are present in the Great Race’s

city. Therefore, we are once more faced to confront the truth, that time as we know it is but a human construct to try to make sense of something we do not truly understand.

However, as is typical for cosmic horror, this knowledge was never meant to be uncovered by mankind, as doing so will have disastrous consequences on those who learn the truth. As mentioned previously, when the host is brought back to their body, the Great Race typically removes all of their memories to avoid certain "troublesome consequences" (Lovecraft 401). While these consequences are very vague, a possible explanation could be that the Great Race merely wishes to make sure that the host does not go insane once they return to their human body, as ends up being the case with Peaslee in his made search to uncover the truth of his years of amnesia.

When Peaslee returns to human society, he struggles to truly get back to business as usual. One part of this is obvious, missing multiple years of his life means that he needs to catch up with all of the events he missed (Lovecraft 389). What is abnormal however, is his conception of time: "My ability to distinguish between consecutiveness and simultaneousness – seemed subtly distorted" (Lovecraft 389). This abnormal feeling, which seems to be the result of Peaslee partially remembering his time with the Great Race, prevents him from truly being able to fit back into society. Not only does a disturbing feeling never leave him, but trying to tell other people, those who still live in merciful ignorance, results in uncomfortable stares directed at him, as the very notion of our perspective of time being incorrect is simply unfathomable.

What makes this situation more interesting is that Peaslee's loss of memories do not simply leave him with the desire to remember what happened during his bout of amnesia, as one would normally assume from someone in his particular state of mind. Peaslee himself comments on these memories, stating that "all such quasi-memories were attended with much pain, and with a feeling that some artificial psychological barrier was set against them" (Lovecraft 389). It is clear that the knowledge of his time with the Great Race seems to be subconsciously locked away, as those memories not only cause him pain, but it is explicitly stated that his mind put up a barrier around them, as to allow him to keep living in merciful ignorance with his fellow man. The story seems to indicate that Peaslee's own subconscious is aware that the information he lost is a sort of threat, something mankind should not be aware of, and as such it tries to prevent him from regaining his memories.

However, possibly due to humanity's innate curiosity, Peaslee cannot accept his lack of memories and begins a frantic search for the truth. Due to said search, he loses his job at the university (Lovecraft 389), and begins conversing with a multitude of specialists, such as "psychologists, historians, anthropologists and mental specialists of wide experience" (Lovecraft 390), to figure out what his mind is hiding from him.

As time goes on, he does start to remember what happened to him, and he even comments on the fact that the mental barriers in his mind were starting to get worn down (Lovecraft 404). However, most people around him are beginning to worry for his mental health (Lovecraft 403), and he is put in a constant state of terror whenever he remembers something: "I cannot hope to give any true idea of the horror and dread contained in such echoes" (Lovecraft 414).

Interestingly enough however, Peaslee starts to gradually get accustomed to this knowledge. As he himself states: "My studies gradually gave me a defence [sic] against these feelings in the form of rational, psychological explanations" (Lovecraft 414). As a result, while he still suffers from the occasional feeling of creeping terror, he is able to once more resume life as usual. While this may seem like a jarring revelation, as Peaslee is suddenly able to handle knowledge that is meant to be incompatible with our human minds, it is important to point out that Peaslee defends himself with "rational, psychological explanations". The mention of a rational explanation for something that goes against any kind of reason and logic, seems to indicate that these explanations are more so a form of excuse. As stated by Fawver: "[Peaslee's] mind must reestablish the psychological delusion of continuous time if he is to live normally" (252). Therefore, it seems that these psychological explanations are little more than Peaslee's mind attempting to handle the information he is confronted with in a way that does not fall outside of mankind's accepted vision of the world. While not perfect, this method seems to be a success, as Peaslee states that: "After 1922 I lived a normal life of work and recreation" (Lovecraft 414).

This peace of mind however, would not last. Peaslee eventually receives a letter from Robert Mackenzie, a mining engineer from Australia who recently discovered ancient ruins with striking similarities to Peaslee's accounts of the Great Race's architecture. Curiosity gets the better of Peaslee, who decides to investigate the ruins. As he does so, the feeling of terror starts to return, and his hands start trembling when he recognizes the decorative scheme of the buildings (Lovecraft 418). He even comments on the fact that he dreads what might be revealed should the crew excavate further, despite also proclaiming to be excited to discover more

(Lovecraft 419). This eventually comes to a head when Peaslee finds the exact part of the city from his memories, where he states that: “[he] was torn betwixt a longing to flee and a feverish mixture of burning curiosity and driving fatality” (Lovecraft 428). Once more, Peaslee’s mind attempts to protect him by steering him away from the truth, but his sense of curiosity gets the better of him, and he decides to investigate further.

He ultimately arrives at a library which contains a book that, as revealed at the very end of the story, was written by himself (Lovecraft 443), seemingly confirming the validity of his memories, and as such also confirming time’s true nature. The result of this is a feeling of dread so intense that Peaslee temporarily collapses (Lovecraft 437), as he is once more forced to confront a truth that a human’s mind is simply incapable of handling.

However, in an interesting twist of fate, Peaslee actually gets something akin to a happy ending. After finding the book, he is forced to flee from some sort of creature the Great Race kept prisoner. It is interesting to note that the creature, as is typical with Lovecraft’s way of implementing the fear of the unknown in his stories, goes undescribed, with our only information being that it creates a whistling noise “unlike anything on Earth, beyond any adequate verbal description” (Lovecraft 439), once more highlighting the link between language and the unknown.

During his chase with the creature, he loses the book. He also mentions the fact that, at some point, the entire situation started to feel like a dream, stating that: “at no time could [he] tell just where delirious dream left off and a true memory began” (Lovecraft 442). As such, when he finally makes it back to the rest of the excavation team, he is left with no proof of the events, but he can no longer even be sure if he truly experienced the events, or if there were little more than a hallucination. However, contrary to what one might think, he seems to be happy about this:

> If that abyss and what it held were real, there is no hope. Then, all too truly, there lies upon this world of man a mocking and incredible shadow out of time. But, mercifully, there is no proof that these things are other than fresh phases of my myth-born dreams. […] If the laws of the universe are kind they will never be found. (Lovecraft 443)

While he is left without any proof of the book or the abandoned city of the Great Race, the narration frames this loss as a form of mercy. After all, had Peaslee managed to prove that his

dreams were real, he and humanity would be confronted with a fate worse than death, a life of terror at the revelation that a fundamental concept such as time is nothing more than a man-made explanation (Fawver 255). Instead, by losing the book, Peaslee is able to live on as before. While he will no doubt always feel slightly uncomfortable, as long as he is able to convince himself that his experiences were no more than an odd dream that can be "rationally" explained, meaning explained in a way that does not go against our human perception of the world, he will be spared the gruesome fate of most of Lovecraft's protagonists.

As such, "The Shadow out of Time" presents us with two interesting aspects of cosmic horror. Firstly, most over the years usually hone in on the aspect of cosmic horror most prevalent in "At the Mountains of Madness", that being the idea that human life is insignificant compared to the greater and more powerful beings who exist in the wider cosmos and who barely notice our existence. "The Shadow out of Time", while containing some of those elements, also brings to our attention that a fundamental concept of our world, in this case the concept of time, can be incorrect. Time, at least our linear perception of it, is little more than a human concept, invented to protect us from a mind shattering truth, a sort of "pseudo-psychotherapeutic device" (Fawver 225).

This brings us back to Lovecraft's base definition of cosmic indifferentism, namely that "common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large" (Lovecraft, qtd. in Luckhurst 22). While the shattering of our anthropocentric worldview is often a result of Lovecraft's cosmic horror, to truly write this subgenre of horror, the writer needs to indicate to the audience that, what we see as a "common law", something often described as an obvious fact, may not necessarily be the truth. No matter how much we believe it to be the truth, our notion of time is incorrect in Lovecraft's universe, and humankind is simply incapable of handling this realization.

However, we do see an interesting, albeit bittersweet, manner to handle these cosmic horrors in the form of Peaslee. As stated before, most of Lovecraft's protagonists suffer one of three fates: "insanity, death, or the embracing of [their] miscegenated and no longer human condition" (Ralickas 365). For a large part of the story, it seems Peaslee will fall victim to the first of these fates, namely going insane as a result of his experience with the Great Race. His mind repeatedly attempts to protect him from this tragic end, but human curiosity will not allow him to let sleeping dogs lie. However, when the proof of the Great Race's existence and his time spent with them disappears, Peaslee feels a sense of relief. He seems to realize he will once more be able to return to living in merciful ignorance, his mind quickly jumping on the

opportunity to present the horrors he saw as little more than a hallucination. As such, Peaslee stands out as one of the few Lovecraft protagonists who was able to achieve something reminiscent of a happy ending, though he is only able to do so after figuratively turning his back on the reality shattering discovery he made, and pretending, or at least trying to pretend, that it was nothing more than a series of odd dreams and hallucinations.

In conclusion, cosmic horror can be seen as a combination of a multitude of factors discussed in previous chapters. The core ideals of the genre stem from the scientific advancements of the time, which gave us more insight into the actual size of the cosmos. This realization, alongside Lovecraft's already nihilistic tendencies, as seen in his anti-millennialism, created the idea that in an infinitely expanding universe, mankind's self-importance no longer had any place. We are, relatively speaking, a small and young species, and there is a possibility that there are greater beings out in the cosmos who could easily wipe us out should they choose to, as there is little we could do to stop them. Most horrifying of all though, is that the only reason these greater beings have not done so yet, might simply be because we are irrelevant to them. They do not pay any attention to us, in a similar way to how we do not pay heed to any "lesser species" on Earth.

Cosmic horror's dread does not simply stem from the threat posed by some kind of godly being however, but also from the realization that core concepts of our reality may ultimately be incorrect. From the religious beliefs of the existence of a caring deity, to our anthropocentric worldview and even our perception of time itself, nothing we take for granted is necessarily true, and this realization which forces us to completely reshape our view of the world is too much for mankind to handle.

As a result, most of the protagonists in cosmic horror suffer a similar fate. While some do simply die, most of them are confronted with knowledge that their mind cannot handle, driving them insane. While the rest of humanity can live on in merciful ignorance, these protagonists are forever doomed to a life of paranoia and dread, knowing the truth of the cosmos, yet incapable of doing anything to change it. Yet, as in a tragic play, it is in our human nature, our sense of curiosity that pushes us forward on a self-destructing path. Our hunger for knowledge, even when part of us knows that some things are best left undiscovered and unchanged, drives us to a fate worse than death.

8. The Sublime VS Cosmic Horror

To conclude this thesis, it seemed interesting to shift gears somewhat. The previous chapter all primarily focused on analyzing how Lovecraft's fears and beliefs shaped his horror into the iconic stories we have today. How his fears of other races and religion impacted his writing, on how he handled the iconic fear of the unknown, and how the combination of these elements resulted in what we now know as cosmic horror. For this chapter however, we may return to a concept brought up in the introduction, and that is equally often associated with Lovecraft's writing. Namely, the concept of the sublime.

A multitude of elements in the previous chapters may have jumped out at the reader as being very reminiscent of the sublime. For example, if we were to take Kant's perspective of the sublime, he would state that this feeling appears in a situation where a subject is faced with something much greater than itself. Due to this confrontation, the subject's senses get overwhelmed, and as a result, they fail to understand what exactly they are confronted with (Houston 162). This lines up with the ideas developed in the chapter on the unknown, most notably the repeated cases where the reader is left in the dark about the true appearance of a monstrosity due to the narrator's inability to properly describe it. From Johansen's climactic confrontation with Cthulhu, to Armitage's attempt to describe Wilbur's body, to Ammi's complete failure to describe the Gardner's transformed bodies, all of these elements seem to line up with the first phase of a subject's experience of the sublime.

Furthermore, some elements of Lovecraft's stories also seem to line up with Burke's perspective of the sublime. Burke's darker take on the subject seems to go hand in hand with Lovecraft's nihilistic form of horror, as he believed that the sublime is the result of a confrontation with anything that can be described as "in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects because terror is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of" (Burke, qtd. in Houston 161). Burke even provided some examples of what could instill such a marvelous combination of awe and horror, such as "obscurity, power, vastness, and, building off of vastness, the sense of infinity" (Houston 161).

As such, at a first glance, Lovecraft's work seems to fit neatly into this version of the sublime. Firstly, when we look at what usually triggers the feeling of the sublime, namely the confrontation with Lovecraft's eldritch beings, they seem to match the examples given by Burke. As discussed in the chapter of the unknown, we usually either do not get to see the creature in its entirety, or its appearance is so alien that we do not understand what it truly is, which aligns with the concept of obscurity. The idea of vastness is also well presented, not only through the

gargantuan size of some of the Outer Gods, such as Cthulhu, but also from the effect such a confrontation triggers. After all, cosmic horror often reminds humanity of how tiny it truly is compared to the vastness of outer space. Finally, the idea of power is also well presented, as these creatures are often confused for gods, are immortal, and Lovecraft's protagonists are always helpless to truly stop them.

Furthermore, some of Lovecraft's writing even seems to explicitly connect these feelings of wonder and horror. Take for example the final chapter of "The Shadow over Innsmouth". While escaping the inhabitants of Innsmouth, Olmstead finds himself near an abandoned railroad. As he hears something approaching, he decides to lie down in order to evade pursuit. As is typical in these stories, despite his mind telling him not to, Olmstead chooses to look at his pursuers, getting a full view of the Deep Ones and causing him such a shock that he faints on the spot. He does eventually make it to the town of Arkham, but the sight of the Deep Ones has changed him. Olmstead comments on the emotions going through his head after this traumatic experience, stating: "Perhaps it is madness that is overtaking me – yet perhaps a greater horror – or greater marvel – is reaching out" (Lovecraft 375).

This obviously serves as a first indication of Olmstead's transformation into a Deep One, but it also serves as an example of Lovecraft's combination of these two intrinsically opposite feelings. By experiencing sheer unadulterated horror at the sight of the Deep Ones, Olmstead was also able to feel to feel a sense of wonder, which will eventually push him to join his family underwater. The absolute terror of the situation served as a sort of catalyst for the experience of wonder he felt later, which seems to align perfectly with Burke's core principles for the sublime.

This is far from the only example however. In "The Colour out of Space", Ammi and the other men who came to investigate the remains of the farm witness the unexplained color rising out of the well, which seems to induce a shock-like state, as they are barely able to breath or move as they watch it happen (Lovecraft 74), going with Kant's idea of the senses getting overloaded. Furthermore, it is stated that "there was a general cry; muffled with awe, but husky and almost identical from every throat. For the terror had not faded" (Lovecraft 74). While a sense of terror has taken hold of them, there is still a hint of awe and amazement at the sight in front of them.

This sense of awe is further highlighted by the mention that the colors bear a similarity to "the fire of St. Elmo or the flames that come down on the apostles' heads at Pentecost" (Lovecraft 74), which, as mentioned in the chapter on the unknown, is a direct reference to the

Bible. As such, this encounter takes on an almost divine undertone, fitting with Kant's dynamic sublime, which requires the subject to be confronted with a "representation of a physical force incomparably greater than any [the subject] finds in herself (Merritt 40).

For a final example, one may look to "At the Mountains of Madness". During their flight over the Antarctic mountains, Dyer and his men spot the city of the Old Ones, with it and its surrounding scenery being described in a fantastical and sensual manner. For example, Dyer notes that the mountainous terrain is reminiscent of a "vague, ethereal beyondness far more than terrestrially spatial", further describing it as an "untrodden and unfathomed austral world" (Lovecraft 208). These descriptions give the mountains a very fantastical feeling, as if Dyer is not looking at an actual physical location but more so a dreamlike visage, reminiscent of what one might find in a painting. This connection with paintings is further highlighted by the direct comparison of the scenery with Nicholas Roerich's paintings (Lovecraft 208), an artist admired by Lovecraft for his ability to create fantastical sceneries which, to Lovecraft, felt like gateways to alien worlds (Luckhurst 472). Dyer, on the other hand, does not share Lovecraft's enthusiasm for the scenery, as he feels waves of unease wash over him (Lovecraft 208).

As they get a closer look at the city itself, we also get an example of its sheer scale: "These febrile structures seemed knit together by tubular bridges crossing from one to another at various dizzying heights, and the implied scale of the whole was terrifying and oppressive in its sheer giganticism" (Lovecraft 209). This is very reminiscent of Kant's idea of the mathematical sublime, which is the result of a subject attempting "an aesthetic estimation of [an object's] magnitude and finds that it is beyond her capacity" (Merritt 39). A combination of the city's height as well as its sheer range overload the senses to the point we feel dizzy, while the idea that we have not even seen all of it yet gives it a terrifying and oppressive feeling.

As such, through a multitude of such examples, it should come as no surprise that many associate Lovecraft's cosmic horror with the sublime. The description of the protagonist's feelings, aesthetically at least, seem to line up quite well with Burke and Kant's view on the matter. This is further corroborated by how Houellebecq describes Lovecraft's portrayal of emotions throughout his work: "The only human sentiments he [Lovecraft] is interested in are wonderment and fear" (73), which should in theory make it a prime breeding ground for Burke and Kant's takes on the sublime.

However, upon closer inspection, the core principles between the sublime and cosmic horror simply do not fit together. While they share a multitude of similarities, if we truly look

not only at the finer details but equally the overall goal of cosmic horror, one may find that "to say that Lovecraft was aiming to convey a sense of the sublime within his works is to completely misunderstand his philosophical goals as a writer" (Houston 160).

To begin, we can turn to one of the more obvious issues in the connection between the sublime and cosmic horror: religion. Both Burke and Kant's vision of the sublime involved some requirement for the subject to turn to religion in order to truly feel the sublime. Burke believed that the terrifying power or the vastness of nature a subject may be confronted with served to shadow or symbolize some form of divine power. (Chignell and Halteman 187). It is through the contemplation of said divine power that a subject may experience the sublime (Chignell and Halteman 187). As for Kante, his interpretation of the sublime requires a subject to feel a sense of superiority from their encounter with a natural phenomenon, or more specifically "a superiority grounded in reason's participation in an ultimate moral or religious reality that is itself governed by an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God" (Chignell and Halteman 187).

In what should come as no surprise, considering the themes discussed in the previous chapters, Lovecraft's cosmic horror is in no way connected to religion, and one might even call it openly anti-religious. Lovecraft's eldritch beings are by no means "wholly good", and may arguably not even be considered as actual gods. Kant's reasoning relies on the assumption that the subject's superiority stems from a religious reality, that we are superior because a deity made us to be so. But as discussed in a previous chapter, in Lovecraft's universe, this is simply not the case. Humanity was not created by a loving deity, but by a race of alien creatures who barely acknowledge our existence. They did not create us to be superior in the hopes of us accomplishing some sort of divine mission, instead our current domination over the planet is merely the result of luck. Furthermore, Lovecraft's stories often hint at the fact that a multitude of religious elements, such as the existence of prophets or our creation at the hands of God, were merely our ignorant interpretations of these eldritch beings' activities.

As such, associating a concept relying on a form of religious belief such as the sublime with an anti-religious genre of horror seems quite odd. This is without addressing the elephant in the room, namely Lovecraft's openly anti-religious sentiment. As discussed at great lengths in the chapter on religion, Lovecraft, while having experienced some forms of religious experiences as a child, held very little love for religious movements. Therefore, from a conceptual level, Lovecraft's work seems ill-fitted to be associated with the sublime.

Another aspect of the sublime that does not line up with cosmic horror is the reliance on morals. Kant's perspective is marked by a focus on the necessity of morals in order to experience the sublime, claiming that "our appreciation of the sublime in the sensible world has its foundation in human nature, and, specifically, in our propensity to be affected by practical or moral ideas of reason (Merritt 38). According to Kant, mankind is a rational animal that, at its very core, is aware of moral laws and wishes to uphold them (Merritt 43). The problem however, is that even rational animals can be "affected by sensuous desire and inclination" (Merritt 43-44), which can lead to an inner conflict. It should be noted that these desires are not inherently bad, as they do not always necessarily go against moral law, and are what Kant describes as "self-love" (Merritt 44). The problem however, arises when an individual engaging in self-love convinces themselves that this act is objectively good, an illusion Kant called "self-conceit" (Merritt 44). This brings us back to the sublime, which takes place when we are humiliated by something which remind us of our moral inadequacies. An example proposed by Kant is the following:

> Fontenelle says, "*I bow before an eminent man, but my spirit does not bow.*" I can add: before a humble common man in whom I perceive uprightness of character in a higher degree than I am aware of in myself *my spirit bows*, whether I want it or whether I do not and hold my head ever so high, that he may not overlook my superior position. Why is this? His example holds before me a law that strikes down my self-conceit when I compare it with my conduct, and I see observance of that law and hence its practicability proved before me in fact. (Kant, qtd. in Merritt 44)

Most human beings act according to moral law, while occasionally letting their self-interest get the better of them. However, by meeting a humble common man who is morally irreprehensible, we experience something of a humbling reminder of our weaknesses, which not only allows us to feel a form of the sublime, but also pushes us to try and better ourselves. Kant claims that by meeting such a perfect example of the moral law, we feel a sense of respect which directly leads to the moral sublime (Merritt 47).

It would therefore be accurate to associate Kant's idea of the sublime, which is primarily focused on the betterment of oneself and the respect of the moral law, with the concept of humanism (Ralickas 365). Furthermore, by placing such a focus on morality, we can also link Kant's moral sublime with the culture and society it originated in. After all, what is or is not

considered moral usually depends on which time period or society we find ourselves in. Kant would even go on to explicitly indicate the importance of society to refine our sense of taste, stating: "taste is precisely the one which [...] is most in need of the examples of what in the progress of culture has longest enjoyed approval if it is not quickly to fall back into barbarism" (Kant, qtd. in Ralickas 368).

This, however, once more leads us to a problem when trying to associate Kant's moral idea of the sublime with Lovecraft's cosmic horror. Firstly, Lovecraft saw himself as a Decadent (Luckhurst 9) and is often seen as a misfit and recluse who abhorred concepts such as liberty and democracy (Houellebecq 135). As explained in previous chapters, he was someone who, in a certain sense, still lived in a colonial and Puritan past, and despised the modernization society went through in the 20th century (Houellebecq 135). As such, it seems quite odd to associate someone who so vehemently despised society with a humanistic oriented notion such as the sublime.

Furthermore, even if one were to try to separate the art from the author and focus solely on what is contained within Lovecraft's work, it would still be highly difficult to associate cosmic horror with the sublime. After all, as stated by Lovecraft, cosmic horror serves to remind the reader that the cosmos-at-large does not care one bit for humanity's sense of law or morality (Luckhurst 22-23). Lovecraft's protagonists do not feel a sense of respect towards the eldritch beings, and they are by no means examples of a moral law that we should follow. They are quite often the complete opposite in fact, creatures that are so alien from us that we are incapable of finding anything reminiscent of our understanding of the world within them. The cults who worship them, such as the cult of Cthulhu, also often "sadistic and barbaric practices" (Ralickas 370) in order to appease their "gods', going completely against the Kantian idea of the sublime.

So far, the majority of the flaws in the comparison between cosmic horror and the sublime have centered on more theoretical concepts, such as why fundamental beliefs of the sublime do not apply in Lovecraft's work. However, should one prefer to focus on more practical examples, such as how the experience of the "sublime" is portrayed in the stories, it will quickly become apparent that there are a multitude of inconsistencies present there as well.

Firstly, the sublime is meant to be a brief experience: "once the subject's sense of awe fades, the sublime experience ends" (Houston 163). As such, if the subject wishes to regain the sense of the sublime, they must do so continuously. Burke even compared this experience with the idea of a daily workout, stating that a subject needs to be confronted with a source of terror

on a daily basis in order to keep our mind and body sharp to reach a form of delight (Gasché 28).

Cosmic horror on the other hand is somewhat akin to a traumatic experience, resulting in the subject remaining affected long after its encounter with the object has ended. As stated by Houston: "Cosmic horror […] remains with the subject past the initial moment of awe and terror; it is an effect that does not end, as the memory is just as powerful as the moment that first generated the horror" (163).

This can be seen in the vast majority of Lovecraft's work. After having caught a glimpse of the Dunwich Horror through a telescope, Curtis Whateley, a distant relative of the family, experiences a moment reminiscent of the sublime, as his emotions clearly get the better of him while he tries, in vain, to describe the horrific creature, before promptly losing consciousness (Lovecraft 116). However, even after the titular beast has been slain, Curtis' mind does not return to normal. Upon waking up, he immediately goes back to his seemingly insane rant about the creature's appearance, the story explicitly stating that "memory seemed to pick itself up where it had left off, and the horror of the sight that had prostrated him burst in upon him again" (Lovecraft 119).

These memories are shown to never truly fade away, as can be seen with Zadok from "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and Ammi from "The Colour out of Space". Both came into close contact with cosmic horror, and even though years have gone by since, both are still shown to be heavily effected by their encounters, with Zadok having turned into a rambling drunkard (Lovecraft 344) and Ammi into a social recluse who struggles to accurately explain the horrors he saw (Lovecraft 56). Cosmic horror is therefore far from a fleeting experience, and therefore does not align with the typical sensation of the sublime.

It should also be noted that the sublime can often inspire a sense of superiority in the subject experiencing it. Kant claimed that, by contemplating something that inspires terror yet resisting the urge to flee from it, a subject may feel like they have become "independent of" the threat or even superior to it (Merritt 40). This idea is also shared by Burke who mentioned how our confrontation with something dangerous could "[raise] a man in his own opinion, [and] [produce] a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind" (Burke, qtd. in Gasché 31), a swelling that is at its most powerful when "without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates" (Burke, qtd. in Gasché 31). In other words, our

confrontation with the object is meant to, in a certain sense, allow the subject to feel a sense of superiority, as a sort of representation of mankind's dominance over nature.

However, as should be made clear by now, the point of cosmic horror is the exact opposite. Those experiencing it do not feel superior, they instead realize that their lives and their struggles are insignificant. Johansen watched in horror as the monster he thought he managed to slay simply regenerates in front of his eyes, the narration claiming the ordeal had "taken something out of his soul" (Lovecraft 51). Dyer and the rest of his men are so shocked by the realization that the Old Ones' city predates humanity that they struggle to put the discovery into writing, still clinging to the hope that they are mistaken (Lovecraft 237). Finally, Peaslee, similar to Dyer, tried on multiple occasions to convince himself that the revelation of time's true nature was but some wild dream, before quite literally being brought to his knees when discovering the book that proves his time with the Great Race was not imagined (Lovecraft 437). At no point do Lovecraft's protagonist feel superior to the object causing the experience of cosmic horror, as said object usually serves to humble them, either through its sheer power and strength, or by undermining some of humanity's core anthropocentric beliefs.

A final important element to note is the subject's role in the sublime. Both Kant and Burke's versions of the sublime fixate on the relation between the object and the subject (Houston 163). For an example, one need only look at Kant's moral sublime, which primarily hinges on the subject's sense of morality and respect for the law, as well as the idea of self-improvement which comes with it. The subject is absolutely central to the execution of the sublime (Ralickas 367).

This becomes problematic however, when one realizes that Lovecraft's protagonists simply do not fulfil the narrative requirements to take on a central role in the process. A common critique directed at Lovecraft's writing is that his protagonists are almost indistinguishable from each other (Houellebecq 85). Not only are they all Caucasian males, but they almost always have similar research reliant jobs, such as detectives or academics. They also always follow the same narrative beats, as their field of work usually alerts them to something odd or alien-like in nature, which their sense of curiosity pushes them to investigate further, until they learn too much and have to deal with the consequences, which in the most cases sees them turning insane after having their sense of reality shattered. Theoretically, one could switch out Dyer with Peaslee, and the story would change very little. Barring some exceptions, we never truly learn more about their backstories, their hopes and dreams, or even any core personality traits with which to distinguish them.

This is very much by design. As stated by Houellebecq: [Lovecraft's] characters no longer required [psychological differentiation]; all they needed was functional sensory equipment. Their sole function, in fact, would be to perceive." (86). The protagonists of the stories are not truly meant to be actual characters. They are more so stand-ins for the readers, allowing them to be more immersed in the story, while the eldritch beings take on the central role in the story. As stated by Lovecraft: "The true 'hero' of a marvel tale is not any human being, but simply a set of phenomena" (Lovecraft, qtd. in Houston 163). As such, by removing any sense of personality or individuality from the subjects and focusing most of his attention on the objects, Lovecraft's cosmic horror does not meet the requirements for Burke and Kant's ideas on the sublime.

In conclusion, it is clear why there exists a fair amount of confusion between the sublime and cosmic horror, as the basics of the two notions are quite similar, and the description of those affected by it are esthetically reminiscent of each other. They both deal with a subject being confronted by something horrific (especially with Burke and Kant's opinion on the sublime), and the overload of senses resulting from said confrontation. However, should one look closer at the fundamentals and the finer details, it would become quite apparent that they are vastly different. Lovecraft's nihilistic, anti-religious and anti-humanistic beliefs simply make him an ill-fit for a concept that relies on these notions to work. Furthermore, the way cosmic horror is written in the short stories also does not align with the sublime, as its effect is too long lasting, the protagonists do not feel a sense of superiority as the sublime is meant to inspire, and said subjects simply lack the amount of psychological complexity required to be the subjects of the sublime. As such, while the two concepts are very similar, the sublime simply cannot coexist in a world consumed by cosmic horror.

9. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the main goal has been to analyze how certain aspects of Lovecraft's personality and beliefs have had an impact on his recurrent themes and obsessions. As seen throughout the different chapters, Lovecraft's antagonists, be it the cults or the Outer Gods, usually served as either a sort of sinister reflection of an entity or group he actively worried about, or as a vehicle for a concept he wished to explore.

His racial beliefs created a universe where foreigners are usually depicted as either a direct threat, worshiping some kind of foreign deity in hopes to destroy the "civilized Western society", or, more in line with the belief in eugenics, posing an indirect threat, as crossbreeding

with other races is shown to lead to society's decline. No matter the case, the presence of foreigners in Lovecraft's work is usually associated with the corruption of what used to be a pure and superior civilization.

We could also see an interesting view on religion. On one hand, it is seen as a sort of fundamental pillar of Western society and a core part of its identity, whose loss of dominance due to the appearance of new beliefs is presented as a legitimate threat. On the other hand, in the best of cases, the belief in it is ridiculed as an ignorant world view, having no place in a modern, scientific world. In the worst of cases, a religious movement (albeit often a corrupted form of an already existing one) is shown to directly be responsible for triggering a catastrophic event that will forever doom our world as we know it, leading to a reality where debauchery and murder and common-day occurrences. Furthermore, there is very little that can be done about it. In Lovecraft's work, the apocalypse will come, and no human being will be able to stop it.

Lovecraft also often featured the fear of the unknown throughout his work, most often through the depiction of odd creatures that far surpassed our human comprehension. Lovecraft often utilized a variety of different techniques to instill as much confusion and uncertainty in his readers as possible, while keeping the actual details of his monsters vague possible. This effect is usually achieved by relying on unreliable narration, to create doubt as to whether the events actually took place and providing a sense of plausible deniability, or the unsaid, essentially showing that our human language, and by extension, our minds, are simply incapable of understanding these creatures, further showing how alien-like they are.

A combination of these themes resulted in the creation of the genre of cosmic horror, which thrives on the theme of human insignificance. Humanity is confronted with the realization that our anthropocentric vision of the universe is incorrect, and that there are creatures in the vast cosmos who far surpass us on a multitude of fronts. We are not the smartest creatures in the universe, nor the most powerful, nor even the first civilization to exist on Earth, and we will not be the last either, as we will eventually die out and be replaced. This realization is often too much for our human minds to handle, and those who are no longer able to live on in merciful ignorance are either doomed to die or to go completely insane. In the end, some things are best left a mystery, and our kind should accept our assumed place in the universe, lest curiosity gets the better of us, and we discover something we were never meant to know.

Lastly, in most of his work, these concepts are explored in a language quite similar to that of Burke and Kant's interpretation of the sublime, where characters experience a combination of dread and amazement at the horrors they are experiencing. While esthetically-speaking cosmic horror and the sublime have a remarkable amount of similarities, upon closer inspection they are simply incompatible. The near-nihilistic world view of cosmic horror does not fit well with the more humanistic and anthropocentric views of the sublime, and some of the finer details of the representation of cosmic horror, such as the long-standing effect it has on the subject, the end result, and the complexity of the characters, are an ill fit for the sublime. As such, while it is entirely understandable why the two are often associated, they ultimately oppose each other from a fundamental perspective.

In the last analysis, Lovecraft was, to put it mildly, a complex figure. He was racist and xenophobic, yet he married and had an amicable relation with a Jewish immigrant. He was a profound atheist, yet he seemed to cherish New England's Puritan past and lament its loss, while also claiming to have had religious experiences in the past. He was anti-democratic and a self-proclaimed outcast, yet those who knew him on a more personal level spoke very highly of him.

Human beings are complex, and we are often described as being the sum of our parts. While it can be easy to slim a person down to a couple of core personality traits or beliefs, there is often a lot more to them, and no guarantee that they will always adhere to said core personality traits or beliefs. We also tend to change over time, and an opinion we hold during one point of our life may be radically changed at a later date. It is therefore impossible to truly pin down someone's character, as not only will there are always some nuances missing, but as people change over their lives, what might be an accurate representation at one point, may be completely inaccurate the next.

As such, any essay, this thesis included, that attempts to analyze his writing in relation to his views, could in essence be considered the author's interpretation of Lovecraft. Both the critics who choose to paint Lovecraft in a more positive light (such as Joshi and Houellebecq) and those who have a more negative view of him can choose letters and anecdotes that support their view, while ignoring or reinterpreting those that do not. It is entirely possible to read Lovecraft's letters on topics such as segregation or his view towards Jewish people, and use that as evidence to support the presence of racist themes in his writing. It is also possible to interpret them as the ignorant writing of a young men who did not know better, and whose later actions, such as his condemnation of Hitler's racist ideologies or his decision to start travelling

outside of New England (Luckhurst 12), went against the hate-filled ideologies he used to hold. As is the case with any literature, there is no such thing as *the* objectively correct interpretation.

Therefore, this thesis is not some sort of definitive analysis of Lovecraft's character and themes because, as mentioned previously, it is impossible to definitively nail down someone's character. Instead, it is simply another interpretation of a complex figure, whose achievements and legacies continue to remain elusive and contentious.

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