

TESIS DOCTORAL

Communal Decay:  
Narratological and Ideological Analysis of  
H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction

JUAN LUIS PÉREZ DE LUQUE

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TITULO: *Communal Decay: Narratological and Ideological Analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's Fiction*

AUTOR: *Juan Luis Pérez de Luque*

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Campus de Rabanales  
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## **TÍTULO DE LA TESIS: Comunal Decay: Narratological and Ideological Analysis of H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction**

**DOCTORANDO/A: Juan Luis Pérez de Luque**

### **INFORME RAZONADO DEL/DE LOS DIRECTOR/ES DE LA TESIS**

(se hará mención a la evolución y desarrollo de la tesis, así como a trabajos y publicaciones derivados de la misma).

La tesis de Juan Luis Pérez Luque cuyo título es "Comunal Decay: Narratological and Ideological Analysis of H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction" constituye, a mi juicio, una contribución sólida y original a los estudios de la obra de H.P. Lovecraft, estudios que se sitúan en una encrucijada disciplinaria en la convergen la literatura gótica, la narrativa de terror, y la literatura modernista norteamericana. He tenido el privilegio de realizar un seguimiento exhaustivo del trabajo de Juan Luis Pérez durante los últimos cuatro años, y estimo que el resultado final cumple con creces los criterios de rigor académico, claridad metodológica, exhaustividad bibliográfica, honestidad científica, y originalidad que se exigen a los trabajos de esta naturaleza. La tesis constituye un esfuerzo enormemente valioso de síntesis entre la sistematización formal y la profundización teórica. De una parte, el doctorando ha elaborado un mapa narratológico de los relatos del escritor norteamericano, con el fin de obtener un patrón de recurrencias estructurales que le permiten inducir la existencia, en el inconsciente creador de Lovecraft, de diversos relatos-tipo, con situaciones, personajes y temas tratados de manera análoga. De otra parte, el doctorando ha tratado de explicar la existencia de dichos relatos-tipo mediante una descripción razonada de la naturaleza ideológica de las estructuras y temas identificados. En ambos casos, la aportación es original. Hasta el momento no existía un esfuerzo crítico de sistematización de estructuras narratológicas similar: el doctorando ofrece una convincente "morfología del cuento" lovecraftiano. Pero va más allá. Dicha morfología tiene causas que una mezcla equilibrada de psicoanálisis y la crítica marxista, en la línea de Ricoeur, Jameson o Žižek, pueden identificar. El análisis de la dimensión ideológica de la obra de Lovecraft, realizada en estrecha dependencia de los modelos teóricos del filósofo esloveno Sjavao Žižek, constituye, a mi juicio, una de las aportaciones más iluminadoras de este trabajo. El artículo sobre este tema que el doctorando ha publicado en la revista internacional *Lovecraft Annual* de estudios sobre Lovecraft dirigida por S.T. Joshi, constituye una prueba de la novedad de su propuesta. Asimismo, el capítulo sobre el simbolismo de la narrativa de Lovecraft publicado en el libro *Manifestations: Realities and the Imaginings of the Monster*, ed. Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bienkowska et al (Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2013), constituye asimismo una prueba de la excelencia del trabajo que ha desarrollado el doctorando.

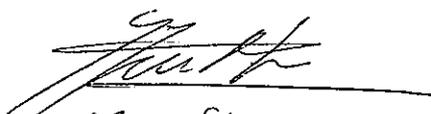
Considero, por todo ello, que estamos ante un trabajo que cumple rigurosamente con los requisitos exigidos a una tesis doctoral. El dominio de las fuentes primarias (obra narrativa de Lovecraft) es exhaustivo, como demuestra no sólo la lectura pormenorizada de los relatos seleccionados como representativos de los relatos-tipo, sino también el análisis esquemático que ofrece la tesis de todos los relatos del autor americano. Otras fuentes primarias de importancia menor, como las cartas o ensayos de Lovecraft, reciben en este trabajo la atención que merecen. La propuesta metodológica es rigurosa y está claramente justificada. La orientación teórica de la lectura se apoya claramente en obra crítica previa de Hammond y Joshi, pero conduce al doctorando a propuestas novedosas y clarificadoras.

La presente tesis doctoral se ha realizado en condiciones de investigación en muchos casos óptimas. A pesar de la dedicación docente del doctorando, Juan Luis Pérez ha podido acceder a fondos bibliográficos de universidades extranjeras (Wheaton Collage, University of Nottingham) y ha podido discutir su trabajo en foros académicos y congresos. Ello revela una madurez académica el sentido de un compromiso institucional que quedan reflejados en el trabajo que aquí se presenta. Por todo ello, mediante este informe doy mi respaldo a un trabajo que se encuentra en condiciones de ser defendido en lectura pública en el marco de la normativa de doctorado de la UCO.

Por todo ello, se autoriza la presentación de la tesis doctoral.

Córdoba, 26 de Septiembre de 2013

Firma del/de los director/es

  
Fdo.: J. L. Pérez Fdo.: \_\_\_\_\_





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**Communal Decay:  
Narratological and Ideological Analysis  
of H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction**

Tesis doctoral presentada por

**Juan Luis Pérez de Luque**

Dirigida por el

**Dr. Julián Jiménez Heffernan**

Vº Bº Dr. Julián Jiménez Heffernan

Director de la tesis doctoral

Fdo.: El doctorando

Juan Luis Pérez de Luque

Córdoba, 2013



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This study would not have been possible without my period of research at the Department of Critical Theory and Cultural Studies of the University of Nottingham (UK), in which I have been kindly welcomed.

A mis amigos, por el apoyo técnico y moral, y por su paciencia y sentido del humor ante mis frecuentes incursiones en lo Real. Por sacarme de allí y devolverme a esta dimensión.

A mis familiares, que han sido un pequeño ejército de cerebros, ojos, manos, oídos y bocas cuando más los he necesitado. Ya sea desde el lado del acá, desde el lado del allá, o desde otros lados.

A Pilar, por querer explorar la realidad conmigo.



## Resumen

La presente tesis doctoral se centra en el análisis de la obra narrativa del escritor norteamericano H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937). Lovecraft escribió principalmente relatos cortos, la gran mayoría enmarcados en el género fantástico en su concepción más amplia, con derivaciones hacia el relato gótico, la ciencia ficción o las historias oníricas.

El propósito del estudio es, empleando un marco teórico basado en las propuestas del filósofo Slavoj Žižek, interpretar las posibles constantes ideológicas que se filtran en la narrativa del escritor.

La propuesta de Žižek parte de la separación de los conceptos lacanianos de realidad y Real. La realidad, aquello que el ser humano es capaz de distinguir, aprehender y asimilar, comprende el mundo que nos rodea. Lo Real laciano, por el contrario, es aquello que se encuentra más allá de la realidad, que es incomprensible, demasiado terrible para ser asimilado por el género humano.

De acuerdo con la propuesta del Žižek, lo Real se divide en tres subcategorías fundamentales: lo Real simbólico, lo Real imaginario y lo Real real. Lo Real simbólico se corresponde en última instancia con nuestra realidad, a la que le damos forma gracias a concepciones de carácter religioso, ideológico, comunitario, etc. Lo Real imaginario aparece cuando hay alguna falla en el nivel simbólico, que hace que los esquemas de realidad se tambaleen. Lo Real real, por último, se corresponde con lo Real laciano, con la Cosa incomprensible e indescriptible.

La tríada de lo Real de Žižek proviene de una propuesta religiosa, en la que el filósofo compara cada elemento de la Santísima Trinidad con uno de los tres tipos de Real que formula. Así, lo Real real equivale a Dios, lo Real imaginario se corresponde con el

Espíritu Santo y lo Real simbólico con Jesucristo, emblema terrestre de la existencia divina.

La hipótesis que planteo es que en la obra de Lovecraft se pueden identificar los tres tipos de Real. Lo Real simbólico se corresponde con el mundo en el que habitan los personajes y que se encuentra normalmente amenazado por la presencia de monstruos de origen alienígena que, ajenos o completamente indiferentes a la raza humana, tienen potencial para destruir por completo el planeta. Lo Real imaginario se corresponde con los indicios narrativos que Lovecraft introduce en sus textos, que hacen pensar al lector que existe una verdad más allá del mundo en el que se desarrollan sus historias. Este Real imaginario se corresponde, en términos de la tradición gótica e historias detectivescas, con las pistas que se ofrecen al lector que le llevan a pensar que hay eventos sobrenaturales que acontecerán antes o después en la narración. Lo Real real en Lovecraft, por último, se corresponde con la ideología que el autor, inconscientemente, vuelca en sus relatos y que se filtra tras el análisis de los mismos.

Para completar el marco teórico, acudo a la teoría de los “huecos lingüísticos” propuesta por Harman, en la que plantea que Lovecraft, cuando presenta a alguno de sus monstruos, acude a dos recursos narrativos que hacen que la descripción del mismo sea fallida. Por un lado, el “hueco vertical” corresponde con los momentos de la narración en los que hay una profusión de palabras que aluden a la irrepresentabilidad del objeto. Así, se encuentran expresiones como “indescriptible”, “inimaginable”, “fuera de toda comprensión”, “más allá del entendimiento humano”, etc. Este tipo de campo léxico provoca que el proceso de simbolización de los eventos y criaturas sobrenaturales fracase, por lo que el ser humano es incapaz de asimilar en su realidad el componente fantástico que se le presenta.

Por otro lado, el “hueco horizontal” o cubista se produce cuando, en la descripción de una criatura, hay un abuso en el empleo de adjetivación y relato de las cualidades sensuales del objeto. La acumulación excesiva de información sobre el monstruo produce, una vez más, un relato fallido que hace que sea imposible adecuar al objeto al plano simbólico, ya que no es posible conjeturar cómo es el ente debido, paradójicamente, al exceso de descripción sobre el mismo.

Por último, señalo la importancia que tiene la ciencia en todo el corpus analizado. Lovecraft vivió una época de grandes descubrimientos científicos, que comenzaba medio siglo antes de su nacimiento con las tesis evolutivas de Charles Darwin, y se culminaba con la exposición de la teoría de la relatividad de Einstein. En el presente estudio se presta especial atención a cómo la ciencia es utilizada por Darwin como fuente de conflicto en sus historias y cómo, de la misma manera, tiene una importante repercusión ideológica en el análisis profundo de su obra.

Mi estudio se ha centrado en el análisis exhaustivo de seis relatos diferentes del autor. El corpus completo de Lovecraft está compuesto por 65 historias, por lo que la selección de textos representativos de toda la obra ha supuesto un reto a solventar. Para ello, he propuesto, inspirado por estudios formalistas como *Morphology of the Folktale* de Vladimir Propp, una categorización del relato de Lovecraft. He reducido a 30 las posibles situaciones, personajes y argumentos que pueden encontrarse en toda su narrativa, divididas en cinco categorías principales: personajes, localización, argumento, clímax y post-clímax. Tras computar las ocurrencias de cada una de las 30 sub-categorías, he podido inferir cuáles son los relatos prototípicos del autor. Este análisis me ha permitido seleccionar los seis textos a los que dedico los capítulos 6-11. En un capítulo final, hago una revisión más genérica de otros relatos del autor que aportan nuevas interpretaciones ideológicas y refuerzan las ya expuestas.

Para el análisis individual de cada texto, el aparato crítico utilizado me ha permitido ensamblar diferentes interpretaciones ideológicas de los relatos. Las historias examinadas han puesto de relieve cómo el uso de la ciencia posee dos vertientes diferentes. Por un lado, ciencia como conocimiento abstracto, que revela las inconsistencias del plano simbólico. Por otro, ciencias aplicadas, que en ocasiones resultan en la creación de artefactos tecnológicos, que consiguen atacar de lleno la realidad, pues permiten el acceso a nuestro mundo de las criaturas monstruosas que conforman el imaginario del escritor.

Cada relato individual ha resaltado diferentes aspectos ideológicos del escritor, que van desde su fuerte ideología racista hasta un evidente desdén por el capitalismo y la industrialización.

Las conclusiones alcanzadas en la presente tesis doctoral ponen de manifiesto que, tras textos pertenecientes aparentemente a la literatura de género, se esconden profundas ansiedades que apuntan a un escritor obsesionado con la pureza racial, con la tradición y con un pasado perdido al que desea aferrarse para restablecer un orden social que ha desaparecido. Todas esas preocupaciones convergen en el concepto que da título a la tesis, decadencia comunal, que, según la visión de Lovecraft, azota a la civilización occidental de principios del siglo XX.

“Art, like Nature, has her monsters,  
things of bestial shape and with hideous voices.”

- Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

“Una danza de muros agita las praderas  
y América se anega de máquinas y llanto.  
Quiero que el aire fuerte de la noche más honda  
quite flores y letras del arco donde duermes  
y un niño negro anuncie a los blancos del oro  
la llegada del reino de la espiga.”

- Federico García Lorca, *Poeta en Nueva York*



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

1.- The present study examines the narrative work of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. The corpus that has been used is made up of 65 stories, since I have avoided the texts which were written as collaborations or that Lovecraft reviewed and corrected. I will pay special attention to *At the Mountains of Madness*, “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, “The Dreams in the Witch House”, “The Dunwich Horror”, “The Quest of Iranon” and “The Moon-Bog”. A final chapter will be devoted to the collective analysis of some other stories, focusing my attention in three particular topics: communal decay, the Great War and science and technology.

H.P. Lovecraft (Providence, US, 1890-1937) is known as the creator of the so called Cthulhu Mythos.<sup>1</sup> This generic name, coined after Lovecraft’s death by August Derleth,

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of how the term was coined, see Schultz’s “Who Needs the Cthulhu Mythos?”. Lin Carter’s *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos* presents a detailed analysis of which Lovecraft’s texts can be considered as part of the Mythos and which cannot. See also Richard L. Tierney’s “The Derleth Mythos”. Mosig attacks the term due to the distortion Derleth made of Lovecraft’s literary legacy using the Cthulhu Mythos as an alibi (see Mosig’s “H.P. Lovecraft: Myth-

is used to designate a group of fictional texts written by several authors apart from Lovecraft himself, including Derleth, Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, Clark Ashton Smith, Arthur Machen and Robert E. Howard among others. These texts deal with the existence of alien races and god-like entities that dwell in our planet or dwelt in it millions of years ago, and how they are discovered by an individual character or, at most, by a reduced group of people.

In the particular case of Lovecraft, his texts are impregnated with a powerful presence of the past in different ways (family lineages, biological inheritance, geology, tradition, mythology, etc.), as well as a latent sense of menace provoked by the discovery of a truth which lies behind our reality. This truth, i.e. the existence of alien creatures living in our planet, is accessed in many occasions via science and its technological applications, and they normally reveal a cosmos which is completely indifferent to mankind, whose rules do not take humanity in consideration and that relegates us to an insignificant spot in the vastness of the universe.

The amount of tales written by H.P. Lovecraft makes it impossible to devote a comprehensive analysis to each text, so I have been forced to select a representative group of pieces of fiction. The main problem one encounters when approaching Lovecraft's narrative oeuvre is that he cannot be regarded as an author stuck in a particle genre. His tales move from the classic gothic tradition to science fiction, in a genre that was roughly defined by Lovecraft himself as "weird fiction", when he stated

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Maker"), and Robert M. Price discusses on the Lovecraft pantheon and the additional gods created by other writers in "Lovecraft's 'Artificial Mythology'". Tyson prefers the use of the expression "*Necronomicon* mythos" instead of "Cthulhu Mythos" (120).

that “There is no field other than the weird in which I have any aptitude or inclination for fictional composition” (*SL III* 395).<sup>2</sup>

In order to make a balanced selection of texts, I decided to develop a classification of the Lovecraftian tale. In spite of the different literary genres the writer experimented with during his life, it is also true that the amount of plots and outlines of the tales is very limited, as Joshi has noticed:

A case could be made that Lovecraft conceived –or, more precisely, executed– only a relatively small number of different plots or scenarios, and spent much of his career reworking and refining them. Even if this is the case, we ought to be grateful that in the end he did refine the plots so that many of them achieved transcendent levels of expression. (*I Am Providence* 253)

Considering this, building on Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*, I propose a list of categories that comprehensively determine most of Lovecraft’s tales. The set of 30 categories, divided into character, setting, plot, climax and post-climax, has allowed me to make a reduced selection of tales which dramatize the most common situations and themes within the categorization presumably subtending Lovecraft’s tales. Curiously enough, the selection of tales that I have used for the individual studies –*At the Mountains of Madness*, “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, “The Dreams in the Witch-House”, “The Dunwich Horror”, “The Quest of Iranon” and “The Moon-Bog” include two texts, the last two choices, which have been normally neglected by critics. Moreover, the last part of the study has been devoted to a more general analysis of other tales from the author, focusing my attention in some aspects that were worthy to be reinforced with more textual analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> S.T. Joshi has devoted extensive analysis to the weird tale, focusing in the delimitation of the concept and in the oeuvre of authors that fit this category. For an analysis on the classic weird tale writers (including Lovecraft, Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany and Ambrose Bierce among others) see *The Weird Tale*. For a detailed study on modern authors (Stephen King, Thomas Ligotti, Clive Barker and Ramsey Campbell among others) see *The Modern Weird Tale*.

Apart from the fictional work (and poetry, that falls out of the scope of the present study), Lovecraft developed his philosophic and metaphysical thought in his non-fictional writing, composed by a fair amount of essays and uncountable letters.<sup>3</sup> His most important essays have been collected and edited by S.T. Joshi in five volumes (2004-2006), devoting a volume to each one of the following categories: amateur journalism, literary criticism, science, travel and philosophy. The task of collecting, editing and publishing the letters is still in progress, but there are several volumes that have been released so far. The first collection was comprised by five volumes in the classical *Selected Letters*, edited by August Derleth under Arkham House publishing company (1965-1976), which included many abridged texts. S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz edited *Lord of a Visible World. An Autobiography in Letters* in 2000, gathering fragments of Lovecraft's letters on different topics. Recently S.T. Joshi is publishing the unabridged letters Lovecraft wrote to particular individuals, such as Alfred Galpin (2003), Reinhart Kleiner (2005), James F. Molton (2011) or August Derleth (2013).

In spite of centering my analysis in his fictional narrative oeuvre, I will also pay special attention to his letters and essays, in order to establish connections between the ideological background derived from his fiction and the philosophical background of the author. The references to letters and essays will be, then, constant all through the present study.

2.- The standard story by Lovecraft deals with the discovery of a reality beyond reality. With that premise, I will try to establish a theoretical framework that will help me to grasp the ideological implications that his narrative oeuvre might hide under the

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<sup>3</sup> Joshi ("A Look" 30) estimates in more than 80.000 the letters Lovecraft wrote, but the cipher drops to around 10000 when considering the surviving texts.

appearance of a mere horror or science fiction narrative. I will base my analysis on the ideas proposed by Slavoj Žižek, especially on the conception of the Real and reality, proposed in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). In this book, Žižek identifies reality (that will be defined later as the symbolic Real) as a pure ideological construction. Ideology is the “support for our ‘reality’ itself” (45), and offers us the way to escape from the traumatic real Real that cannot be tolerated. Later, the philosopher will propose a division of the Real in *On Belief* (2001). There, Žižek reformulates the concept of the Real proposed by Lacan, expanding it by creating a division into three new categories: the *symbolic Real*, the *imaginary Real* and the *real Real*. This division, originally used by the Slovene philosopher in religious terms in order to classify the Holy Trinity, perfectly fits with Lovecraft’s fiction, since it can be used to describe the reality in which the characters think they live (the symbolic Real), the moments in which this reality starts to shake and collapse (a symptom of the irruption of the imaginary Real), and finally the underlying truth behind the symbolic reality dominating the narration, which corresponds with the real Real itself. This real Real will be the final goal of each analysis, since my hypothesis is that Lovecraft tries to reflect his personal anxieties and worries in his literature, and that the symbolic level is unwittingly permeated by his fear of the immigrant, his elitist political views, his traditionalism and, above all, his pessimistic cosmicism.

So there are two different levels to be considered: on the one hand, Lovecraft’s own plexus of realities; on the other, the networked projection of realities existing at the literary level (symbolic-imaginary) of his fictional texts. The writer’s reality –the symbolic Real–, as proposed by Žižek, is pure ideology that shapes and comprises the values and conventions that determined Lovecraft’s mindset. It is shaped by New England and the surrounding historical events he experienced during the last years of

the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The real Real that the writer is unable to comprehend is a changing society which is dismantling his ideal perceptions of social order and civilization: the decadence of classic values that he supported, the arrival of democracy, technology and capitalism and the global melting pot, among other aspects that I will survey in my dissertation.

Moving to the fictional oeuvre, Lovecraft's characters have their own symbolic Real. It is partly marked by the traditions, social conventions and locations that the writer created for them, including real places (New England, the Antarctic, etc.), or invented locations (Arkham, Innsmouth, Dunwich, Miskatonic University, etc.) that were inspired most of the times in real places that Lovecraft knew. There is a moment in the narration in which the uncanny appears, and traces of the supernatural events to come are found. These moments are identified with the imaginary Real, which presents inconsistencies in the symbolic Real of the characters. Finally, the real Real haunting the fictional text is precisely what ideology (the symbolic level) seeks to repress.<sup>4</sup> Lovecraft, probably in a partially unconscious way, reflects his own ideological thoughts in his tales, and his own real Real underlies his narrative oeuvre.

Althusser considers that "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (*On Ideology* 36). Reading Lovecraft under the scope of this definition, the writer enhanced the imaginary dimension of his ideological

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<sup>4</sup> Jameson, in his ideological analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, puts forward how literature, especially modernist literature, represses older "content beneath the later formalized surface" (213). The critic asserts that "strategies of containment are not only modes of exclusion; they can also take the form of repression in some stricter Hegelian sense" (213). Lovecraft, who at first might be considered as a writer apart from the Modernist movement because of his supernatural and science fiction stories, shares nonetheless some common elements with the modernist literary movement. In this study, I will try to prove that Lovecraft also represses strong ideological content under the textual surface of his writings, and in that sense, he fits into Jameson's account of the Modernist writer. In chapter 10, I will discuss further connections between Lovecraft and the movement, and how he dismissed some landmarks such as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, probably ignoring that he shared many ideological proposals with other modernists.

representations through his fictional texts. The creation of his symbolic-imaginative literary universe allowed the writer to repress his reality, the reality of a socially, politically and economically changing country he was unable to assimilate. The country that Lovecraft lived in was undergoing a deep process of modernization, immigrant movements, acceptance of democracy and emergence of modern capitalism. The writer, who yearned for the almost aristocrat past of his family, provided by the wealth of his grandfather, did not accept his personal decay and the changes that were taking place in his country. Those changes, according to him, would result in the dismantling of a society that, in reality, was no longer compatible with the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He wanted to recover a past in which aristocracy hold the cultural heritage and production of society, in which races were completely separated, in which aesthetic principles ruled over economic goals.<sup>5</sup>

Lovecraft's misunderstanding and misconception of the surrounding reality led him to create an ideological shield that prevented him from reality's onslaughts. Paul Ricoeur defines the most basic, primitive concept of ideology as "dissimulating processes by which an individual or a group expresses its situation but without knowing or recognizing it" (1). Ideology as a "procedure of dissimulation" is, in the case of Lovecraft, the ultimate defense against a real level that was completely hostile towards him. The writer escapes from his reality by resorting to an already existing symbolic-ideological worldview and by enhancing it further through imaginative creation, However, traces of his ideological mindset are present and identifiable.

All the worries that the writer expressed –in a conscious or unconscious way– converge in the idea of *communal decay* present in the title of my study. Lovecraft's obsession

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<sup>5</sup> This unlikely regained past was Lovecraft's perfect conception of reality, but it was also spoiled by the scientific discoveries that exposed how the origins of mankind were common for all the races, how the whole varieties of human beings derived from a single, horrid, simian branch.

with the purity of the Teuton race is constantly threatened by the apparition of alien entities that intermingle with humans, provoking a chain reaction in the race. But the global degeneration is also present by means of social degradation, the disappearance of culture or the reappearance of obscure lineages. I will pay special attention to the moments in which those elements are present in the narration, and how they are represented in the text by means of processes of symbolization that hide an ideological real Real.

Lovecraft's ideological background has been already analyzed, and several texts that expose his ideology will be mentioned and used through my dissertation. However, my proposal will attempt to provide a systematic framework that allows to identify the traces of the ideological thoughts to be found in most of his fictional texts.

In addition to Žižek's triad of the Real, Graham Harman's proposal has been a landmark for the interpretation of the imaginary Real. According to Harman, Lovecraft shows a distinctive feature when he is trying to transmit the images of the creatures and aliens described in his oeuvre. This characteristic is that there is a latent impossibility of describing the monster that the narrator (normally a first person narrator, who is at the same time the protagonist of the story) is witnessing, usually in the climax of the story.<sup>6</sup> This impossibility is present at two different levels: what Harman calls the vertical gap and the horizontal gap of language. The vertical gap is represented by the use of words that refer to the impossibility of describing the object, such as "unnamable", "unspeakable", "indescribable", etc. The horizontal gap occurs when the accumulation and overuse of adjectives in a description avoids any kind of interpretation of the object

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<sup>6</sup> Jameson refers to the "realm of nonperception" as a valuable tool used by Conrad in *Lord Jim*. This realm of nonperception occurs when there is a "failure to perceive" (240) and, according to the critic, it "must be a heightened form of perception in its own right, a realm of heightened yet blank intensity" (240).

itself, since the language is so excessive that it completely distorts the sensual qualities of the entity under description. I will pay attention to these moments in which there is a linguistic fracture in the narration, presumably the outcome of the irrepresentability of the Real.

3.- Science is one of the cornerstones in Lovecraft's narrative. The writer showed interest in several scientific disciplines among his life, and many of the characters of his texts use science and technology to apprehend the truth hidden beyond their symbolic level or reality.

What science brings to those who acquire a higher level of understanding of reality in the Lovecraftian universe always has negative connotations. Madness, suicide, violent death or disappearances are the most common endings for the narrators and protagonists of Lovecraft's stories. They normally achieve advanced knowledge of reality via science, or thanks to forbidden and dark imaginary books that Lovecraft invented in his Cthulhu Mythos, such as the *Necronomicon*. According to Tyson, "the knowledge contained on the pages of these dangerous texts is the true science, beside which the science of mankind is but a plaything" (175-76).

Science, and its technological applications, is meaningfully connected with the triad of the Real. Science as pure knowledge usually appears as a threat to the symbolic level that comes from the imaginary Real. When Herbert West, the mad doctor from "Herbert West – Reanimator" achieves knowledge enough to start dealing with the afterlife, a threat appears in the symbolic Real of his friend and narrator of the story. Science exposes the contradictions that the symbolic Real builds around the main characters, since it reveals that death is something that, in theory, can be surpassed and overcome.

In a second level, the technological artifact produces a direct aggression against the symbolic level. This attack changes the structure of possibilities of reality, generally allowing for the existence of new entities. The researchers from the Miskatonic University that defeat the Dunwich horror in "The Dunwich Horror", prepare a special dust that, once sprayed over the invisible creature, allows humans to see and attack it. From the very moment the monster is made visible, it completely alters the symbolic Real, since the abomination is symbolized, it is made present, and from that point forward the conditions of existence in the symbolic level change. Something that was impossible to represent before the spray affected the alien, is now part of the reality.

Apart from the connections between science and technology and the triad of the Real I have proposed, Lovecraft was heavily influenced by some scientists that he read during his life. The first name to be considered is that of Charles Darwin. The evolutionist theses of the British naturalist were present in Lovecraft's fictional universe. The writer was also strongly biased by the theories proposed by some intellectual inheritors of Darwin, who adapted the British scientist's arguments in order to formulate a social theory of natural selection: eugenics and social Darwinism, contemporary to H.P. Lovecraft, are particularly meaningful when dealing with the writer's ideological background. The theses proposed by Francis Galton, Malthus or Ernst Haeckel gave Lovecraft a perfect scientific background supporting his racial/racist ideas. On the other hand, the discoveries made by contemporary physicists such as Albert Einstein, Max Planck, or Werner Heisenberg fostered the writer's materialistic empiricism, as well as his assumption on the insignificance of mankind in the vastness of the cosmos.

4.- Chapter 2 reviews the critical reception that Lovecraft's fictional oeuvre has received throughout time. He was almost unknown during his life, and it was not until the 70s when a group of scholars rediscover him, and a scholarly movement appears around his figure with the apparition of some of the canonical texts about the writer. After a new period of oblivion, during the last years a second wave of interest in the figure of Lovecraft has emerged, partially thanks to the publishing of his work in the Penguin Classics collection, which has granted him a place among the classical American authors.

In chapter 3 I present the theoretical framework that I will later use in the textual analysis. Departing from Lacan, I put forward Žižek's theories of the Real, and how they can be applied to Lovecraft's tales. A discussion about ideology and its implications is also included in this chapter, since the ultimate purpose of the present study is to disclose the ideological Real that lies behind Lovecraft's fiction. Departing from Marx and Althusser, the final step will be, once again, Slavoj Žižek's studies in ideology.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the overview of the scientific context under which Lovecraft wrote his narrative work. I fulfill an analysis of the different lines of thought, in scientific terms, that were predominant during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their impact in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Lovecraft wrote his narrative. Special emphasis has been given to the figure of Darwin, his supporters and critics, and the legacy he left among the scientific community.

Chapter 5 put forwards the classification of Lovecraft's tales I have already mentioned. It provides a detailed description of the categories and subcategories included, justifying the selection of each one of them. A computation of the matches between the Lovecraft

oeuvre and the list of categories is also provided. Thus, it is possible to extrapolate which are the most common features to be found in a tale by H.P. Lovecraft. This will allow me to justify the choice of the six particular texts I have selected for the in-depth analysis in the following chapters of the present study.

The analysis of *At the Mountains of Madness* is to be found in chapter 6. This text, the only novella Lovecraft wrote together with *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, provides a powerful framework to introduce the vast majority of concepts I want to deal with in my study. The triad of the Real, science and the past are three of the most significant elements that are going to be considered in this tale. The presence of two alien races, the Elder Ones and the shoggoths, provide the grounds to perform a deep ideological reading. The importance of science, due to the own goals of the main characters (scientists in a geological trip into the South Pole), is a major issue that serve to unravel the mysteries that they find in a hidden polar city. The study of the evidences that they find there will give access to the understanding of a remote past before the creation of life in the planet.

Chapter 7 is devoted to "The Shadow over Innsmouth". This text is suitable for the analysis of the concept of communal decay and degeneration. The invasion that the seaport of Innsmouth suffers by a race of creatures coming from the sea, the Deep Ones, leads to the intermingling with the inhabitants of the town. Lovecraft reflects the decay of the human inhabitants of Innsmouth by means of the descriptions of the village itself, emphasizing its ruinous buildings, the empty and dirty streets, the decadent façades, and the general rotten aspect of the whole place. Some concepts taken from the evolutionist theories, such as that of "regression" or "hybrid" play an important role in the portrait of the city, its citizens and the events that take place in the story. Once again the

importance of the past, this time a less remote past, more associated to family inheritance, is crucial for understanding the tale and Lovecraft's ideology behind it.

In chapter 8 I will analyze "The Dreams in the Witch-House". In this tale the protagonist accesses new planes of existence thanks to complex mathematical formulas, and he contacts with a witch, who was present in the Salem's Trials and who wants the main character to help her to perform a ritual. As in the case of the previous texts, this tale puts forward the idea of a past that haunts the present, and it provides a framework to explore Lovecraft's ideas about witchcraft and its social connotations. The role of mathematics as catalyst of the encounter between the witch that hides beyond reality and the protagonist is also relevant from the perspective of the influence science had in Lovecraft. In that case, the presence of ideas taken from Einstein, Planck and Heisenberg, and other contemporary scientists, is particularly relevant.

Chapter 9, focused on "The Dunwich Horror", discusses another interesting case of *communal decay*, but this time the original source of conflict is to be found in American native Indians and, again, in the family heritage of a secret that has to be kept hidden from the world. This tale is connected with "The Shadow over Innsmouth" as there is an oppressing atmosphere of menace and threat emerging from the location. However whereas in Innsmouth Lovecraft used architecture as the medium to depict the decadence of the town, in "The Dunwich Horror" this role is performed by nature and landscape. The animals, trees and hills that surround the village of Dunwich will be the main source of menace, being a completely degraded *locus amoenus* which has lost all the pastoral implications it might have had. "The Dunwich Horror" also raises some interesting questions related to religion as symbolic construction, and the relevance of science and technology in order to dismantle beliefs.

Chapter 10 is devoted to "The Quest of Iranon". This tale, clearly influenced by Lord Dunsany, presents a challenge for my theoretical framework, since there are no monsters, no alien entities threatening mankind and the sense of the uncanny or the weird is completely absent. The triad of the Real is complex to identify, since the presence of the imaginary Real is almost null and the real Real threatens the protagonist symbolic Real just at the very end of the tale. However the implications derived from the narration raise a discussion on the importance that Lovecraft paid to tradition and the dangers of neglecting the artistic side of mankind in favor of labor and a life devoted to work.

Chapter 11 is focused on the analysis of "The Moon-Bog". At first this narration is connected with the most classic gothic tradition. However, as the plot unravels, there is a turn associated with the nature of the monstrous creature of the tale, which is taken by Lovecraft from the classical Greek mythology. "The Moon-Bog" provides a background to discuss Lovecraft's rejection of certain strands of folklore, particularly those without classical origins. At the same time, the tale reinforces and expands some ideas already proposed in "The Quest of Iranon", such as the contrast between nature and civilization. The tale also puts forward an underlying criticism against the decadence of Lovecraft's contemporary aristocracy, more concerned with business and capitalism than with aesthetic production.

A more general survey of several tales is presented in chapter 12. This chapter deals with three different topics: communal decay, World War I and science and technology. The first and the third are key concepts for the whole study, and I have reinforced the analysis of the representation of these concepts in other Lovecraft's tales these sections. The Great War (which is not present in the rest of the study) is, nonetheless, a landmark to be considered. Lovecraft failed in joining the army during the war, but the presence

## Chapter 1: Introduction and objectives

of the conflict in his narrative is important in several tales, which contribute with meaningful ideological ideas about the struggle against Germany, considered by the writer as a racial civil war between the Teutons.



## **CHAPTER 2: LOVECRAFT'S CRITICAL RECEPTION**

### **2.1.- Introduction**

This chapter is aimed to be an overview of the main critical studies that have been published on Lovecraft's life and fiction. Several factors have to be considered when approaching Lovecraft's critical reception. On the one hand, Lovecraft has been neglected by the critics during the vast majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Kenneth W. Faig, Jr., there are two main obstacles to Lovecraft's literary recognition: "the specialized field of weird fiction and poetry in which he worked by necessity of artistic inclination" (11) and "the seriousness of his artistic endeavours, an issue intimately related to the apparent contradictions in his personality and beliefs" (12).

On the other hand, his texts remained unpublished several years after his death, and it is not until the 40s when August Derleth published Lovecraft's fiction in his Arkham House publishing house. These texts were reviewed and republished by S.T. Joshi in the

80s, correcting numerous misprints.<sup>1</sup> Joshi, in his introduction to *A Weird Writer in Our Midst*, remarks that Derleth is in fact the “guiding force behind the emergence of Lovecraft as a literary figure in the late 1930s and 1940s” (18). After that, a landmark in the English reception of Lovecraft's texts is located when S.T. Joshi edited and published three volumes of the writer's narrative fiction for Penguin Classics (1999-2005).<sup>2</sup>

A very global and historical analysis of the critical reception shows that there are two periods of relevance historically speaking: from 1969-1975 an increasing interest towards the figure of Lovecraft is noticeable, and the first academic works on the writer are published. After that, with the Penguin editions of his narrative in 1999, there is an outburst of essays and monographs about H.P. Lovecraft which lasts until today.<sup>3</sup> The period from 1975 to 1999 is characterized by the edition of scattered books about the writer. So it can be said that, nowadays, we are living in a moment in which Lovecraft is a subject of interest in the academic world. His figure is being claimed among the academia, and there is a clear proliferation of studies, conferences, articles... on his fiction and life.

Something problematic about the academic literature on Lovecraft is that many of the pioneering essays were published in amateur journals or magazines such as *Crypt of Cthulhu*, *Lovecraft Studies*, *New Lovecraft Collector*, *Studies in Weird Fiction*, *Fantasy Commentator* or *Miskatonic*, which had very limited printed issues. This has provoked that many up-to-date monographs include old classic critical texts that were difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> S.T. Joshi is probably the most important and prolific Lovecraft critic. His first published works, *An Index to the Selected Letters of H.P. Lovecraft*, *Lovecraft's Library: a Catalogue* and *H.P. Lovecraft & Lovecraft Criticism: an Annotated Bibliography*, are three extremely complete catalogues of references published by and on Lovecraft, and these works show an academic strictness that will be shown by Joshi in his entire career.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of Lovecraft's oeuvre reception in Spain, see Alberto Santos' “*Editar a Lovecraft*”.

<sup>3</sup> There are still 14 more stories that have not been published yet in Penguin Classics. Apart from that, up to date the collaborations and ghost-writings have not been published by Penguin.

access by modern critics. A paradigmatic example is Darrell Schweitzer's *Essays Lovecraftian*. This 1976 volume includes several essays by different scholars, among them some of the most interesting early approaches to Lovecraft's work. This book was published afterwards, in 1987, as *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, in a revised edition which corrected several errors and included the essay "Textual Problems in H.P. Lovecraft", by S.T. Joshi. A third edition of the volume was issued in 2001, adding a new introduction and the essay "H.P. Lovecraft: The Books", by Lin Carter.

I will divide the present chapter in several sections, each one devoted to a particular approach to the writer. In the first one I will survey early criticism and memoirs. The next section deals the biographical and psychological readings of Lovecraft's fiction. After that, I will overview the structuralist approaches that have focused their attention in formal aspects on the Lovecraftian narrative. A fourth section analyses the philosophical and ideological readings, whereas the last part deals with the works that examine Lovecraft in relation with sciences.

## 2.2.- Early criticism and memoirs

Considering that H.P. Lovecraft was not a successful writer during his life, it is surprising to discover that the first edited reports on his oeuvre were published very little after his passing. Many writers and friends tried to pay tribute to Lovecraft by means of letters, tales, memoirs, sketches... Most of these were published in amateur regional journals and pulp magazines, and some of them have been compiled and edited

by Cannon in *Lovecraft Remembered* (1998), and by S.T. Joshi in *A Weird Writer in Our Midst* (2010).<sup>4</sup>

The two volumes collect early criticism, comments from readers and fans sent to the different pulp magazines in which Lovecraft published his tales, recollections from friends and writers, and memoirs. The contents of both collections add almost nothing worthy to the academic study of the writer, but they are interesting from a historical perspective. The books edited by Cannon and Joshi prove that Lovecraft had a reduced but constant group of supporters who read his tales, and he was appreciated by a sector of science fiction fans during his life and afterwards. But he also had detractors among the readers, who opened discussions with Lovecraft's defenders via letters to the editors of the various pulp magazines (*Weird Tales* and *Astonishing Stories* mainly).

The literary criticism to be found in the two books is too amateur as to be relevant, but it offers a glimpse of the view that the pulp fiction movement had of Lovecraft's production.<sup>5</sup> The writer was compared, for instance, with Edgar Allan Poe (Paul Cook, 49; Orton) and Guy de Maupassant (Paul Cook, 49).

Something similar can be said about the memoirs published. The reports of Lovecraft given by his closest friends and colleagues offer a friendly image of the writer. They do not provide especially relevant information about him, but reinforce some aspects that were later analysed in depth by the critics. So, for instance, the interest that the writer

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<sup>4</sup> Conceding that Cannon's volume is the most complete volume on Lovecraft's memorabilia edited, it must be considered also that as early as 1945, Donald M. Grant edited a brief volume, *Rhode Island on Lovecraft*, including five different texts by five friends and neighbours of Lovecraft, depicting their impressions and remembrance of the writer. This same year, August Derleth also published the volume *H.P.L.: a Memoir*, a critical-biographical study of the Lovecraftian work. The amount of copies of each volume was very reduced, and I have been unable to have access to any of them. However three out of the five memoirs included in the volume by Grant are included in Cannon's *Lovecraft Remembered*.

<sup>5</sup> The criticism included in the two books is normally composed by very brief reviews of Lovecraft's tales that were published together with the text in the correspondent issue of the pulp magazine, or by brief texts published in amateur journals.

had on old architecture is reasserted by his friend Walter J. Coates (21) and by C.M. Eddy, Jr. (47-48).<sup>6</sup>

*Howard Phillips Lovecraft: Dreamer on the Nightside* is perhaps the most interesting volume in this category. In this memoir, Frank Belknap Long briefly analyses some of the key concepts of Lovecraft's life, such as the relationship with his mother and his wife, his literary and scientific influences and the cultural circles he was involved in. The text is half way between memoirs and biography, and Frank Belknap Long is quite biased by his friendship with H.P. Lovecraft. At the end, it is just a well written report of some biographical sketches which are connected with Long's personal appreciations about the writer from Providence. It does not provide any kind of deep analysis on the Lovecraftian tale or even about Lovecraft's ideology or philosophy, but Long seems to be the first one underlining aspects which later will be developed in depth by some other authors. The relationship with his mother (14-15), the influence of Darwin and Einstein in his texts (95) or the importance of the period he spent in New York for the development of some of his political and social ideas (66-75), are three aspects that Long anticipates in his study.

When reading *Dreamer on the Nightside*, the reader feels that it is even a *naïf* text, with very little rigour and scarcely academic and reliable. Sometimes Long does not even mention the title of the story he is making reference to (e.g. when talking about "The Outsider", pp.17-18), the book lacks a list of references, there are pages and pages devoted to trivial conversations between Lovecraft and Long –in theory, literally

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<sup>6</sup> For more memoirs on Lovecraft, see the pamphlet *The Private Life of H.P. Lovecraft*, written by the writer's ex-wife, Sonia H. Davis, and published in 1985, several years after her death. Considering that she lived with Lovecraft during one of the most intense periods of his life –the years he spent in New York–, a much more fruitful text could had been expected, but *The Private Life of H.P. Lovecraft* is little worth in terms of academic or even biographical value. The memoir looks more like a justification and defence from the attacks and commentaries saying that Lovecraft lived almost in poverty. Davis asserts that she economically supported the writer during the marriage years. Therefore Lovecraft did not have a single need which was not covered.

transcribed after more than 50 years!—... To sum up, Long's text is a friendly memoir of the writer, which adds some very general ideas about Lovecraft's character and personality, his circle of friends and very sketched reports of general topics and themes in his work.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3.- Biographical, psychological and psychoanalytical approaches<sup>8</sup>

Most of the existing texts on Lovecraft lie on biographical grounds. The use of psychological and psychoanalytical interpretations is also a common feature in many of the authors that has been reviewed in this study, and a mixture of the three approaches is the norm when talking about Lovecraft's biographers.

There are two main biographies that have to be considered when studying Lovecraft's critical reception. Sprague de Camp's *Lovecraft: a Biography* (1975) and S.T. Joshi's *Lovecraft: a Life* (1996).

Lyon Sprague de Camp's volume is the first independent Lovecraft's biography that was published. It was, for sure, the starting point for many readers who felt interested in Lovecraft. At the same time, it created a certain debate around the figure of the writer from Providence, which would derive in the publishing of some other books, such as Long's *Dreamer of the Nightside*. Because of these, *Lovecraft: a Biography* justifies its role in the literature about the writer.

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<sup>7</sup> The most interesting portrait given by Long is that of the members of the Kalem Club in New York. Long was himself part of this group of amateur writers.

<sup>8</sup> In 1981 S.T. Joshi writes the volume *H.P. Lovecraft & Lovecraft Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography*, a complete work that references all the editions of Lovecraft's texts (including fiction, non-fiction and poetry), in all the different languages they were translated up to 1981, as well as all the literary criticism that Lovecraft provoked.

What Sprague de Camp offers is an extensive biography which took him, according to Joshi, "three or four years" (*I Am Providence* 1036). The text is well-documented and profusely annotated. Sprague de Camp consulted the original sources at Brown University (letters, manuscripts, etc.) and interviewed several Lovecraft's friends and colleagues. *Lovecraft: A Biography* fulfils the requirements of a standard biography, that is, it is informative and explains the events which took place during Lovecraft's life.

However, de Camp's biography has been highly criticized because of the partial role of the author, who tends to make value judgements of most of the decisions Lovecraft took during his life, showing in many of them a complete lack of understanding of the person he is talking about. This happens, for instance, when de Camp wonders why Lovecraft did not write in a more fashionable style, more suitable for being published, without considering that Lovecraft himself rejected to change his style for editorial or economical reasons, and he remained loyal to his personal style until the end of his life. Joshi asserts (*I Am Providence* 1036) that the main problems in de Camp's biography are "its sketchiness: very complicated matters are passed over with misleading brevity" and "his treatment of Lovecraft's philosophical thought". In fact, the explanation given by de Camp of Lovecraft's philosophy is: "Lacking any supernatural belief, Lovecraft's own philosophy was an urbane, materialistic futilitarianism, incongruously combined with an austere asceticism of personal conduct"<sup>9</sup> (117).

So it is true that the value of this biography is undeniable for being a pioneering work and being the trigger of some other books on Lovecraft, and de Camp took the risk of

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<sup>9</sup> There are some other passages in which Sprague de Camp reflects on Lovecraft's philosophical background, but the references are so brief, weak and so scattered throughout the whole text, that they do not provide a solid portrait of Lovecraft as a thinker. For instance, the sole mention to Freud in the biography states that "Freud, he [Lovecraft] thought, was on the right track, albeit he had reservations about some of Freud's theories." (136).

writing a serious biographical text that Derleth was intended to do before his sudden death –as de Camp himself explains in the foreword–, but *Lovecraft: A Biography* errs in several key aspects and looks dull in comparison with Joshi's approach to the life of H.P. Lovecraft.

S.T. Joshi's *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life*, and its later re-edition *I Am Providence*, is the most complete biography of the writer available.<sup>10</sup> The volume is an exhaustive overview of Lovecraft's life, with extensive explanations supported by Lovecraft's own confessions in letters.<sup>11</sup> Joshi contextualizes the creation of each individual piece of fiction created by the writer, providing meaningful information of the process of writing, the influences that Lovecraft received, the experiences that influenced the texts, etc. The precise and rigorous approach to the life and work of the writer results in a text which can be used as a starting point for almost any kind of reading of Lovecraft. Joshi examines the relationship between H.P. Lovecraft and all the important persons in his life: his closest relatives (grandfather, mother, aunts, wife), friends (August Derleth, Reinhart Kleiner, the Eddys, the Kalem Club in New York, etc.). At the same time, he provides insights

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<sup>10</sup> *A Subtler Magick: The Writings and Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft*, published by Joshi in 1999, can be considered as an abridged version of the biography. In this volume, Joshi overviews Lovecraft's writings from a historical point of view, but he does not add much new information to that presented in *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life*. The book is a critical guide to the texts, which carries out a Structuralist analysis focusing its attention in recurrent themes, construction of characters, related topics, plot analysis, cross-references and so on. Joshi's commentaries on the different texts remark most of the topics that have been already mentioned in the biography. Thus, the book is a kind of abridged summary of the key topics studied by Joshi. It is an interesting book for getting a general picture of the narrative of the author, but it does not add anything really valuable to what Joshi already said in his other texts.

<sup>11</sup> Joshi provides further biographical exploration in the first set of essays from *Primal Sources. Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*. "A Look at Lovecraft's Letters" summarizes the correspondence of the writer and his addressees. "Lovecraft and the Films of His Days" is a brief overview of the films that Lovecraft watched and his cinematographic preferences. "Lovecraft's Library" outlines the main volumes and authors present in Lovecraft's personal library. "Autobiography in Lovecraft" analyses the different moments in which autobiographical elements can be found in some of the writer's pieces of fiction. In "Topical References in Lovecraft", Joshi analyzes the references to real life events that can be found in Lovecraft's fiction. "Lovecraft and the Munsey Magazines" explores how the magazines published by Frank A. Munsey provided Lovecraft with cheap fiction to read. "Lovecraft and Weird Tales" examines how the pulp magazine was a way for Lovecraft to publish his fiction, and how it might influenced his style. For further information on Lovecraft and the pulp magazines, see Will Murray's "H.P. Lovecraft and the Pulp Magazine Tradition".

about the philosophical, religious, scientific and metaphysical thought developed by the writer, connecting it with his readings and the age he lived.<sup>12</sup>

Faig's *The Unknown Lovecraft*, published in 2009, collects several articles dealing with obscure or secondary aspects related to Lovecraft's biography. Faig devotes four articles to the analysis of Lovecraft's ancestry and family, and he puts forward genealogies, family trees and studies on the businesses carried by Whipple V. Phillips, Lovecraft's grandfather.<sup>13</sup> The second part of the monograph focuses on the biographical aspects of some of Lovecraft's tales ("He", "The Silver Key" and *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*), and the final articles analyse the figure of Robert H. Barlow, Lovecraft's literary executor.<sup>14</sup>

Faig's volume, as in the case of Joshi's biography, approaches the topics under analysis with rigour and a solid research. However, monograph lacks of real interest for my analysis, since the issues under its scope are too specific and quite unrelated with the present study.

The last relevant biographical approach is Donald Tyson's *The Dream World of H.P. Lovecraft*.<sup>15</sup> Tyson proposes a much more general and popular biography of the writer, and the chapters of mere biographical information alternate with chapters that analyse

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<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless the key work to understand Lovecraft's philosophical development is *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West*, published six years before *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life*. I will come back to this volume later in this chapter. For a detailed catalogue of Lovecraft's personal library, see Joshi's *Lovecraft's Library: A Catalogue*.

<sup>13</sup> Faig provides further research on Lovecraft's parents in his study "The Parents of Howard Phillips Lovecraft".

<sup>14</sup> Another study, also by Faig, that explores the biographical connotations of a Lovecraftian tale is "'The Silver Key' and Lovecraft's Childhood".

<sup>15</sup> Other secondary biographical approaches to Lovecraft's oeuvre can be found in Haden's *Lovecraft in Historical Context: Essays* and *Lovecraft in Historical Context: Further Essays and Notes*. Haden also published a group of essays devoted to *At the Mountains of Madness* and its influences and inspirations, entitled *Ice Cores. Essays on Lovecraft's Novella At the Mountains of Madness*. The three volumes include several superficial essays connecting different texts by Lovecraft with his social and historical contexts. Eckhard also explores the events that could inspire Lovecraft when writing *At the Mountains of Madness* in his essay "Beyond the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft and the Antarctic in 1930".

how the most notorious events in his life affected his work as an artist and his personal development. The biographical chapters are too much based on the most conflictive aspects of Lovecraft's life, and Tyson frequently focuses his attention in events that are suitable to explore from the point of view of emotional traumas (family mental diseases and deaths, incapacity to develop an academic career, incapacity to join the army during the Great War, poor health, etc.).

Tyson's approach, however, is sometimes afar from the academic scope, and is connected with the realm of the esoteric. In fact, the critic's proposal is that he wants to study "how the mythology he evolved in his body of work became the basis for a system of modern esoteric practice" (1). In fact, there are moments in *The Dream World of H.P. Lovecraft* in which slightly psychoanalytic readings of the traumas the writer suffered during his life (such as the death of his parents and grandparents) are intermingled with esoteric hypotheses related to mediumship and "kundalini energy" (40-41) or astral projections (67). Nonetheless, when the critic analysis is focused on issues more literary than esoteric, Tyson puts forward meaningful ideas on the topics to be found in the Lovecraftian narrative. In fact, the eighth chapter, in which Tyson overviews the themes in Lovecraft, is a fine review of the different commonplaces to be found in his fiction. Tyson provides a well organized view of the anxieties that tormented Lovecraft, and how they were present in his oeuvre.

Yozan Mosig is a leading figure among the scholars who have performed a psychological approach to Lovecraft's oeuvre. *Mosig At Last: a Psychologist Looks at H.P. Lovecraft* is a collection of essays that, in spite of being published in 1997, contains the core texts of Mosig about the writer that the critic produced during the 70s. In fact, nine of the thirteen essays included in the volume were written from 1973 to

1980, and they are, by far, the most interesting texts of the book.<sup>16</sup> The remaining essays are not as energetic and focused as the old ones, and they are devoted to more secondary aspects of Lovecraft, such as his relation with the music of Sibelius, or Buddhism and Lovecraft's conceptions of reality and religion. Apart from its originality, these modern essays are mostly irrelevant for my discussion.

Being Mosig a psychologist, it is interesting to note his assertion in the preface of the book, when he states that "I have abstained at all times from attempting to use Lovecraft's literary output as the basis for any sort of clinical diagnosis or characterization" (9). In fact, the general impression after reading *Mosig At Last* is that Lovecraft is not suffering a psychoanalytic session, and that Mosig is more interested in the distinctions between reality and fiction, symbolism, dreams and, to a certain extent, the views that Lovecraft had about psychoanalysis. It is obvious that Mosig's tools for textual analysis are many times derived from psychology, but the results are, in many cases, much more interesting than the conclusions some other critics and writers reach when reading Lovecraft.

One of the most interesting aspects of his analysis is how Mosig anticipates some of the ideas present in Slavoj Žižek's theory. The psychologist puts forward the distinction between the world that mankind experiences and the existence of a reality beyond reality.<sup>17</sup> The Žižekian distinction between reality and the Real is present in Lovecraft, and Mosig talks about this distinction –without using Žižek's terminology, obviously–,

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<sup>16</sup> Including "The Four Faces of 'The Outsider'", probably the most intelligent approach to one of the peak tales of Lovecraft, and "H.P. Lovecraft: Myth-Maker", which is, according to S.T. Joshi, a "landmark essay [...] which received widespread dissemination both here and abroad" (*A Life* 646). Robert H. Waugh has also read "The Outsider" from a psychological perspective in two essays: "'The Outsider', the Terminal Climax, and Other Conclusions" and "Lovecraft and Keats Confront the 'Awful Rainbow'".

<sup>17</sup> In chapter 3 I will convey the theoretical framework to be used in the present dissertation. However, as an anticipated summary, it can be said that Žižek puts forward the distinction between the symbolic level (reality) and a real Real, a truth which cannot be normally apprehended.

more than a decade before Žižek publishes *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, in his article “H.P. Lovecraft: Myth-Maker”:

The Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth centers around a certain group of alien entities from “Outside” –from beyond the sphere of conscious human experience: the unplumbed abysses of space, other dimensions, other universes, and the nightmare depths of the unconscious. (24)

According to Yozan Mosig, for Lovecraft “complete awareness of reality would almost certainly result in mental disintegration and psychosis” (“Prophet” 32). From a Žižekian perspective, access to the truth beyond reality produces an encounter with “some traumatic, real kernel” (*Sublime Object* 45). Ignorance is a synonym of mental sanity, and following Mosig reasoning, science is the tool Lovecraft uses for accessing the Real:

Man hopes to find in Science the panacea for all evils and the path to a perfect, glorious future. Instead, the revelations of science bring him face to face with the intolerable abyss of reality. (“White Ship” 46-47).

Apart from this anticipation of Žižek's theories, Mosig also points at Lovecraft's fondness for the past, and how the writer rejected the society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thought of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the cradle of beauty and inspiration (“Four Faces” 59).

To sum up, Mosig's earlier essays are a landmark in Lovecraft criticism. His understanding of Lovecraft's views of reality and beyond and the anticipation of some theoretical ideas proposed later by Žižek make of *Mosig At Last: a Psychologist Looks at H.P. Lovecraft*, in spite of some anecdotic essays, one of the best monographs devoted to the writer from Providence.

Joshi's essay "'Reality' and Knowledge", included in *Primal Sources*, is undoubtedly interesting for the goals of my study. Joshi, as Mosig did previously, discusses the relationship between reality and the "reality beyond reality" depicted by H.P. Lovecraft in his narrative. It is possible to read the whole article by Joshi with the Marxist Lacanian framework I will introduce in the following chapter, by simply substituting this "reality beyond reality" by the Real. According to the author, Lovecraft did not believe in the existence of a reality beyond, and Lovecraft himself says so in one of his letters:

My big kick comes from talking reality just as it is –accepting all the limitations of the most orthodox science– and then permitting my symbolising faculty to build outward from the existing facts; rearing a structure of indefinite promise and possibility whose topless towers are in no cosmos or dimension penetrable by the contradicting-power of the tyrannous and inexorable intellect. But the whole secret of the kick is that I know damn well it isn't so"  
(*SL III* 140).

The ways in which this supra-reality (which "is "truer" than the illusory reality that we normally perceive through our senses" (68)) is accessed vary, and according to Joshi the narrative by Lovecraft can be interpreted as moments in which human beings have revelations about the existence of the reality beyond reality.<sup>18</sup> All the different doors driving to supra-reality have something in common: the use of knowledge. "Science then, is one of the major keys to the revelation of reality" (68), and Joshi rejects the possibility of Lovecraft despising knowledge and science for being dangerous to mankind. On the contrary Lovecraft rejects the misuse of this knowledge and considers that it has to be used, even if it provokes the destabilization of firmly established

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<sup>18</sup> Mariconda's "H.P. Lovecraft: Art, Artifact and Reality" sets a classification of art in relation with reality and the "reality beyond reality" depicted by Lovecraft in his narrative. For Mariconda, there are (a) human artifacts, which seem to be regular pieces of art but, at a certain point, are signs of the existence of a darker truth or reality, (b) Human artists, who are gifted with the ability to interact with the Real and (c) Non-Human Artifacts, which are no more than invasions of the Real into reality.

convictions and beliefs. These ideas, as I will show later in this dissertation, are firmly present in several of his tales, and configure one of Lovecraft's most remarkable characteristics.

In his foreword to the English edition of *H.P. Lovecraft: Contre le monde, contre la vie*, Michel Houellebecq confesses that he wrote this book as a kind of first novel, and because he was fascinated with Lovecraft's tales, even in spite of the fact that they were quite different from the literary genres he preferred. The result is a brief essay in which Houellebecq casts lights on the landmarks in the Lovecraftian narrative: pessimism, materialism, forbidden knowledge, primitivism, simple characters, architecture as tool for provoking atavism and horror...All is condensed in a visceral but at the same time extremely well constructed essay which is probably the best introductory book to Lovecraft that can be read.

For the particular purpose of my study, *H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life* is relevant because in spite of the introductory nature of the book, Michel Houellebecq adds some interesting reflections about Lovecraft's view of reality. For Houellebecq, Lovecraft rejected reality and, in general terms, the whole world surrounding him. Considering that, Lovecraft also thought that realism as literary genre was far away from beauty, and he tried to find shelter under the roof of the fantastic.<sup>19</sup> From the very title of the essay, a statement of principles in which Lovecraft is confronted with reality and life, Houellebecq disseminates the idea of a writer disgusted with reality and its crudeness, who aspires to create a universal, cosmic horror which would be valid not only for human beings but also able to scare any kind of thinking organism. This rejection of reality coincides with my own hypothesis that Lovecraft's oeuvre is loaded

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<sup>19</sup> However Houellebecq hesitates when ascribing Lovecraft to a particular genre, and he swings from science fiction to gothic horror and fantastic. For a detailed discussion on Lovecraft's genre, see chapter 5 in this dissertation.

with a powerful ideology, derived from a writer who was unable to understand his own civilization.

Apart from that, Houellebecq remarks that Lovecraftian characters are scientists and artists, meticulous observers, and also quite interchangeable one with another (probably because they are no more than autobiographic projections of the own writer). This, as I will discuss when examining Boerem's study on the gentleman narrator, reinforces my proposal of the categorization of the Lovecraftian tale that I will put forward in chapter 5.

Robert H. Waugh "At the Mountains of Madness: The Subway and the Shoggoth" is a landmark for understanding the racial implications behind Lovecraft's oeuvre. Waugh casts light, from a biographical/psychological perspective, to the figure of the monster as representation of the immigrant in the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft. Comparing the New York subway that Lovecraft experienced, packed with immigrants, with the underground monstrosities that the writer imagined in tales such as "Pickman's Model" or *At the Mountains of Madness*, Waugh reflects on the racial ideology underlying the texts. The shoggoth, the evil creature that is shown in Lovecraft's novella, represents the "dirty world" (94) associated with the subway. The underground is a cradle of filth and corruption and the shoggoth is a revealing slave that kills the master. Anti-Semitism and racial fear are channelled through incomplete descriptions of a creature associated with the more repulsive adjectives.

Waugh's essay is a basic text for my analysis on *At the Mountains of Madness* in chapter 6. It provides a perfect starting point for an interpretation of the ideological

reading of the text, and its connections with Lovecraft's own personal experiences reinforce the idea of an underlying fear of the immigrant.<sup>20</sup>

#### 2.4.- Structuralist approaches

Some authors have read Lovecraft from a classic, structuralist perspective. I will consider under this category all the studies which focus their attention in topics such as narratology, genre, semiotics, etymology, stylistics, etc.

The first analysis to be considered is that of Maurice Lévy, who published a seminal dissertation on the Lovecraftian style and fiction: *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*. Based on a genre study on the fantastic, Lévy transcends the biographical sketch, and after a brief overview of Lovecraft's life, he writes about the treatment of space and place and how Lovecraft uses both as a relevant part of his fiction. The critic remarks the importance of New England as the setting for most of his stories, a place of “*profound towns*, rooted in the homogeneous tradition of Puritanism and the culture of a single race” (36). On the other hand, the city is used as a source of horror (“The Music of Erich Zann”, “He”, “The Dreams in the Witch House”, “The Shunned House”), being “the fantastic site par excellence” (46).

Several chapters are focused on the importance of the Lovecraftian monster, and its relationship with human beings, as well as on the concept of heredity as a landmark in Lovecraft's fiction. Lévy remarks two basic concepts for our analysis: first, the monster is repulsive and frightening not only because its monstrosity, but because the contamination it produces over humanity, its hybridism –in Darwinist terms– with

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<sup>20</sup> Other psychological approaches to Lovecraft's individual tales are Buchanan's “The Music of Erich Zann”: A Psychological Interpretation –Or Two” and Worthington's “Sources of Anxiety in Lovecraft's ‘Polaris’”.

normal people (56). On the other hand, the monster is, perhaps, a representation of the foreigner:

Singular analogies seem to be established between the foreigner and the monster, between the immigrant Kurd or Chinese and the "outsider." For Lovecraft, fond as we have proven of pure blood –this Viking proud of his Aryan ancestry– the displaying of these execrable mutants seems perhaps, in an obscure and confusing way, a testimonial to the failure of America's politics of racial assimilation. (61)

*Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic* is one of the most interesting monographs on Lovecraft, since it is one of the pioneering studies outlining themes extremely relevant for this thesis: hybrids as contamination and monsters as foreigner, which are two topics closely connected to Lovecraft's ideology and Darwinism (in the case of hybrids).

As regards hybridism, Lévy asserts that Lovecraft's monsters

[...] are characterized above all by their *hybridism* –a hybridism that is not the simple juxtaposition of disparate elements as in some monsters of antiquity, but a result of a sort of contamination or collective pollution.<sup>21</sup>

This is a corrupted vision of the ethically neutral scientific hybrid, which is defined by Darwin as "the offspring of the union of two distinct species" (*Origin* 446). From the very moment Lovecraft gives a moral negative connotation to a scientific concept, the writer enters into the realm of ideology:

The monster is revolting not only because it escapes logic and constitutes a disturbance for the reason, but also because it is propagated and, little by little, corrupts the individuals of a healthy race. In a land of fantasy no one can be certain –and the reader least of all– that he will not someday be changed into a monster (Lévy, 57).

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<sup>21</sup> Lévy does not mention the category of *communal decay*, but it is very present when he states that the hybrid monsters are "a result of a sort of contamination or collective pollution" (56).

The same can be said about the concept of reversion, defined by Darwin as the process in which an individual is born with ancestral features (*Origin* 32). Lévy points out that

Lovecraft's characters are, indeed, *mutants*, but of a very different type from those with which science fiction presents us. Far from being determined by the *evolution* of the race, they are dominated by their familial *antecedents*. It is at the end of a *regressive* process that Pickman becomes a ghoul. (76)

Once again, Darwin never evaluates the process of reversion. He does not even mention if the “new old features” presented in an individual undergoing a process of reversion are a benefit or blemish for the survival of the individual, since his analysis is quite descriptive. On the other hand, reversion is a source of decadence for Lovecraft, as can be seen in tales such as “Pickman's Model”. For the writer, a process which drives an individual to a previous evolutionary stage is something terrible and wicked.

Finally, Lévy puts forward the connection between the different pagan cults present in Lovecraft's fiction and the degeneration of the non Aryan races. These non-whites are, according to Lévy, “heirs of prodigiously old traditions and are manifestly ill-adapted to modern civilization” (90), and they are a menace for the American society. This idea is especially relevant for the connection between witchcraft and immigration that I will examine in chapter 8.

Burleson's *H.P. Lovecraft, a Critical Study*, in spite of lacking a defined theoretical approach, casts light on many aspects of Lovecraft fiction.<sup>22</sup> To do so he claims to use theoretical frames such as Jungian criticism, biographical approaches, formalism, philosophy or mythic-archetypal criticism (ix).

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<sup>22</sup> In fact, Burleson states in the preface that “A blended variety of critical approaches will be employed here, in the belief that no single ‘school’ of criticism is capable of bringing out more than a fraction of the worth in an author's effusions.” (ix)

The truth is that *H.P. Lovecraft, a Critical Study*, is mainly a formalist text, and that is why I have decided to include this volume in this section. Burleson systematically analyses most of Lovecraft's tales, focusing his attention in topics such as narratological devices, point of view, reliability of the narrator, etc., devoting to each of them not really extensive but thoughtful commentaries, and in the final chapter he studies the authors who were a clear influence for Lovecraft. This volume has a problem I have detected as endemic in some other critic monographs written so far, such as Peter Cannon's *H.P. Lovecraft*.<sup>23</sup> Burleson tries to survey all the tales written by Lovecraft, and the result is that, due to length constraints, he is unable to convey a profound textual analysis of each individual story. The main consequence is that both volumes by Cannon and Burleson are more an introductory, general overview of the author's fiction than an in-depth criticism of the Lovecraftian oeuvre.

The main virtue of *H.P. Lovecraft. A Critical Study* is that it is a pioneering academic study, which anticipates the vast majority of the topics that other scholars (and Burleson himself) will examine in later monographs and articles. The critic remarks Lovecraft's mechanistic materialism (12), the Dunsanian influences (24-30, 46-53), his interest in family secrets (71) and local landscape (in the analysis of "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Colour Out of Space"), or, as many others will later do, the presence of an inaccessible reality beyond reality:

[...] the notion that hidden horrors lie just beneath the surface of everyday things, just eluding our perceptions. The notion, too, that human senses have access only to a narrow

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<sup>23</sup> Cannon fulfils a classical (and brief) individual analysis of each tale of the writer, and pays attention to some recurrent motifs, such as the concept of time, the sea, the importance of space distribution and buried places, or the opposition dreams vs. reality. *H.P. Lovecraft* can be considered a correct introductory essay on Lovecraft, but it is almost impossible to make a deep analysis of all the fiction of the author in just 150 pages. The final result is, then, too basic and old-fashioned in its theoretical framework. Other less relevant survey of Lovecraft's oeuvre is Teodoro Gómez's *Lovecraft: La Antología*.

interval on the spectrum of reality is an idea both intriguing and, up to a point, scientifically sound. (72)

Burleson also anticipates, in a very indirect way and secondary, Lovecraft's racial issues. When analysing "The Horror at Red Hook", the critic states that the tale reflects an area that "has been spoiled by the influx of foreign elements of great variegation" (102). However, Burleson does not mention anything related to Lovecraft's racial ideology when he explores tales such as "He" or "The Shadow over Innsmouth". The latter, as I will prove in chapter 7 in this dissertation, has strong racial connotations. The critic also anticipates the problematic religious interpretation in "The Dunwich Horror" (145-46), as well as the figure of the hero in the same tale (146-57).<sup>24</sup>

Donald Burleson concludes that the work of Lovecraft is, in its grounds, a mixture of several influences, with a style which borrows from Greco-Roman authors and 18<sup>th</sup> century writers. In terms of topics and themes, Lovecraft was influenced by Poe, Hawthorne, Lord Dunsany and Arthur Machen, and everything is mixed up with the talented mind of a thoughtful thinker and philosopher.<sup>25</sup> But Burleson defends that what makes Lovecraft's narrative so particular is that it is much more than a mixture of different influences due to the cement he uses for joining his textual inheritances together. This concrete is what makes his fiction "Lovecraftian". In Burleson's own words

Lovecraft, however, is no merely "derivative" writer. He is much more than the sum of these parts, for in reflecting the various influences, far from merely emulating his models, he assimilates them for his own distinctive purposes, transcends and transmutes them,

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<sup>24</sup> I will devote part of my analysis of "The Dunwich Horror" to both issues in chapter 9. Burleson himself explores the mythical figure of the hero in this tale in his article "The Mythic Hero Archetype in 'The Dunwich Horror'".

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis of the influences of Poe in Lovecraft's fiction, see chapter four in my study "The Influence of E.A. Poe in the Narrative Work of H.P. Lovecraft: A Narratological Approach".

blends them with the fecundity of his own imagination to produce works that are highly original and characteristic of Lovecraft. (229)

*H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study* is, at certain points, way too focused on performing a description of the plot of the particular story under analysis. It is especially disturbing when the scholar talks about some key tales, such as *At the Mountains of Madness*, where the vast majority of the chapter is devoted to a summary of the events that take place in the story. For a reader who is familiarized with the narrative of Lovecraft, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study* is a problematic book since for squeezing the reflections and critical approaches Burleson spreads all through the text, you have to deal with extensive passages in which the author explains plots of stories the reader has probably read prior to approaching the monograph.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to individual articles that examine Lovecraft's oeuvre from a structuralist perspective, there are some titles to be considered.

Donald R. Burleson, in "On Lovecraft's Themes: Touching the Glass", proposes five major themes in Lovecraft's fiction, summarized as follows:

1.- Denied primacy: humans were not the first on this planet, they will not be the last, and they are not even relevant.

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<sup>26</sup> In 1990, seven years after the edition of *H.P. Lovecraft: a Critical Study*, Donald R. Burleson published his second monograph on the writer, entitled *Lovecraft: Disturbing the Universe*. In this study, Burleson moves from a classic formalist approach to a deconstructive analysis. Thirteen different stories are deconstructed in this text, using the tools of the *reductio ad absurdum*, the classical deconstructivist analysis of binary oppositions or the study of etymology of some words found in the text –following Hillis Miller, according to Burleson himself-. *Lovecraft: Disturbing the Universe* is, as far as I can assert, the first post-structuralist approach to the writer from Providence.

It is disappointing to look at the conclusions reached by Burleson. The binary oppositions and themes depicted are far from being original in its discovery; in fact, they are the most recurrent topics in Lovecraft. Apart from that, the reflections on the masochistic nature of mankind in its relation with the universe is an original but very limited aspect in Lovecraft's narrative, with little further discussion about it. Burleson must be acknowledged for being the first author applying a deconstructive frame to the work of H.P. Lovecraft, but this particular study is probably more useful for readers interested in deconstruction than for those which are looking for some new ideas and thoughts on the writer.

2.- Forbidden knowledge, or merciful ignorance: there is some kind of knowledge which provides access to certain truths that should be maintained away from us.

3.- Illusory surface appearances: things are not as they seem, and there is a reality beyond reality.

4.- Unwholesome survival: there are things and events that, coming from the past, haunt the present.

5.- Oneiric objectivism: there is a thin red line dividing dreams and reality, and both realms sometimes intermingle.

Burleson is the first person that systematized the major themes in Lovecraft. Those five groups are, in fact, representative of the vast majority of subjects to be found in Lovecraft's narrative. This reductionist approach, as in the case of Boerem's study on the gentleman narrator (that I will examine later in this section), drove me to think that it is possible to reduce the Lovecraftian narratological tools to a reduced amount of items, something I will carry out in chapter 5.

Apart from that, the theme of illusory surface appearances is connected with the reality-Real framework that I will use in my analysis, and forbidden knowledge is closely linked with the concept of science and the access to the Real.

James Anderson fulfils a structuralist analysis of one of the most representative tales by H.P. Lovecraft in "Pickman's Model": H.P. Lovecraft's Model of Terror". Based on the theories of Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Todorov, Genette and Barthes, Anderson reads "Pickman's Model" in detail, trying to cast light on how Lovecraft transmits terror through literary devices. Anderson makes some interesting remarks on the nature of the Lovecraftian monster:

## Chapter 2: Lovecraft's critical reception

Lovecraft was one of the first writers of horror to depict his monsters in such realistic terms, and, in so doing, he established many of the conventions for those who followed him. [...] Lovecraft's monsters, rather than being "undead", are very much alive; they are freaks of nature that describe a world where evolution has gone wrong and produced sentient, amphibious creatures of unmistakable evil. (202)

According to Anderson, the realistic portrait of monsters performed by Lovecraft is very different from the classic Gothic tradition, where the monster is something ethereal, mythological, almost with no physical presence (or with no physical presence at all, like the figure of the ghost). This ethereal quality contrasts with the tremendous materiality of the Lovecraftian alien. This twentieth century creature is scary because it looks real, it can be touched, explained by means of science and rationalized. "Lovecraft's scientific horror creates evil that is not only realistic, but can be explained in Darwinian terms" (202). The Lovecraftian monsters "yet they are products of nature, not supernatural creatures".

The sensual nature of the Lovecraftian creature proposed by Anderson is closely related with the theory of the representation of the monster and the linguistic gaps proposed by Harman. The materialization of the creature undergoes a process of symbolization of an element that, a priori, could not exist.<sup>27</sup>

Boerem's "Lovecraft and the Tradition of the Gentleman Narrator" examines how the classic Lovecraftian narrator has noble origins or is part of the social elite. Boerem places the characters present in Lovecraft's fiction within the tradition of other writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Machen, Sheridan Le Fanu and Robert W. Chambers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Harman proposes that when Lovecraft describes his creatures, there is a fracture in language produced by the excessive use of adjectives or by the use of words that express the indescribability of the object, such as "unnamable", "unspeakable", etc. For a detailed explanation of this theory, see chapter 3 in the present study.

<sup>28</sup> Torres Oliver explores the connections between the classic Gothic tradition and Lovecraft's oeuvre in "Raíces góticas en Lovecraft".

The coincidence between narrator and main character is also remarked, and there are several characteristics common to all the featured authors: nobility, high education, taste for the arts and yearning for exploration and acquisition of knowledge are present in Lovecraft's narrators.<sup>29</sup> The writer adapted the tradition to his own interests, widening the scope with physicians, scientists and high-ranking military men.

Boerem's essay, which echoes the ideas proposed by Houellebecq, reinforces my proposal of the narrator and main character as one of the categories to be used in the narratological categorization of the Lovecraftian tale that I put forward in the fifth chapter. The systematic repetition of features in all the narrators described by the writer is basic for the suitability of this category as one of the five main groups proposed.

## 2.5.- Philosophical and ideological approaches

Several authors have tried to systematize and explain Lovecraft's philosophical thought and how is it present in his narrative. There are several articles and monographs that have studied particular aspects of Lovecraft's metaphysical ideas, and some others that explore his fiction, reading them from an ideological point of view.

The first text to be considered is S.T. Joshi's *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West*, published in 1990. This volume analyses in depth the philosophical, ethical and political views of Lovecraft, both in his personal life and the repercussion they had in their texts. I consider it as the key monograph to understand Lovecraft's ideological background. Joshi examines the different waves of thought and aesthetics Lovecraft underwent during his lifetime, starting with a taste for Classicism and then moving to a more

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<sup>29</sup> In the essay "The Outsider, the Autodidact, and Other Professions", Waugh explores the relevance that the autodidact has in Lovecraft's fiction, and the autobiographical connotations it might have.

decadent stage, which was finally rejected in the last years of his life. To do so, Joshi studies Lovecraft's letters, including numerous fragments in order to support his reasoning. S.T. Joshi maps the numerous scientific and philosophical influences that Lovecraft received, explaining how they were incorporated to Lovecraft's own ideology. The ideas put forward by Haeckel, Darwin, Einstein, Hugh Elliot or Nietzsche shape the writer's own views of the world and the universe.

In terms of metaphysical thought, Joshi claims that Lovecraft was a clear mechanistic materialist, as Lovecraft himself declares in one of his letters: "my philosophical position [is] that of a mechanistic materialist of the line of Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius –and in modern times, Nietzsche and Haeckel" (*SL II* 60). He did not believe in the existence of the soul, he was an atheist and used science – especially Darwinian theses– to reassert his religious position. Apart from that, Lovecraft changed, during his lifetime, his views on free will, moving to a deterministic metaphysical view of existence, "the most radical and full-fledged form of determinism it is possible to espouse" (Joshi, *Decline* 15).

The influence of scientific discoveries is also considered by Joshi in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West*. The shock of the theses of Einstein and Max Planck lead Lovecraft to think about the unpredictability of Nature:

The point Lovecraft is trying to establish is that the "uncertainty" of quantum theory is not *ontological*, but *epistemological*; that it is only our inability [...] to predict the behaviour of sub-atomic particles that results in uncertainty. (20)

Apart from that, the theories of a cosmos ruled by forces completely alien to mankind, together with the author's determinism, reinforce Lovecraft's idea of the insignificance

of human beings in the universe. Joshi also explores how Darwinism is present in Lovecraft's oeuvre.

In terms of ethics, Joshi remarks Lovecraft's taste for the past as the source of ethical values, and one of the main reasons to explain (never justify) his racialism.<sup>30</sup> Joshi selects a key passage from one of Lovecraft's letters, which casts light on this particular point:

No one thinks or feels or appreciates or lives a mental-emotional-imaginative life at all, except in terms of the artificial reference-points supply'd him by the enveloping body of race-tradition and heritage into which he is born. We form an emotionally realisable picture of the external world, and an emotionally endurable set of illusions as to values and direction in existence, solely and exclusively through our traditional culture-stream. Without this stream around us we are absolutely adrift in a meaningless and irrelevant chaos which has not the least capacity to give us any satisfaction apart from the trifling animal ones. Pleasure and pain, time and space, relevance and non-relevance, good and evil, interest and non-interest, direction and purpose, beauty and ugliness –all these words, comprising virtually everything within the scope of normal human life, are absolutely blank and without counterparts in the sphere of actual entity save in connexion with the artificial set of reference points provided by cultural heritage. Without our nationality –that is, our culture-grouping– we are merely wretched nuclei of agony and bewilderment in the midst of alien and directionless emptiness. (*SL III* 207)

With such a strict sense of tradition, nation, race and cultural heritage, it is not difficult to imagine the troubles Lovecraft had assimilating the constant changing society he was living in, including racial intermingling, immigration, access to decent jobs for non

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<sup>30</sup> In "'The Tree' and Ancient History", Joshi maps the classic references Lovecraft uses for this tale, and reflects on the importance ancient cultures had in the writer. According to Joshi, Lovecraft read all the classical writers and thinkers from Greece and Rome, including Ovid, Xenophon, Epicurus, Lucretius, Seneca, "Greek and Roman history, ancient literature from Homer to Juvenal [...], and even ancient art and archaeology" (163).

Aryans, etc. And Lovecraft, obviously, feels extremely proud of his New Englishness, considering himself as a straight successor of the glorious British people.<sup>31</sup>

The impact that social changes caused in Lovecraft is a cornerstone for my study and approach. Lovecraft was unable to cope with his reality, and this anxiety is represented in his fictional oeuvre. What Joshi concludes in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West* is that Lovecraft, inspired by Spengler ideas of cultural decadence, thought that Western society was in a clear process of decline. This hypothesis is firmly connected with the “communal decay” expression present in the title of my study, since there are traces of this cultural and social decadence all throughout the Lovecraft's oeuvre. These hints hide the ideological background of the author, as I will try to prove in my dissertation.

Guarde Paz's “Race and War in the Lovecraft Mythos: A Philosophical Reflection” studies the “anxiety of genetic impurity” and the “slim chance of decay” (4) present in Lovecraft's fiction. According to Guarde Paz, Lovecraft began as a mere racist, and then he moved to an ideological position worried about the collective social decay of his time. The critic pays special attention to the issue of war as struggle between races, and how the Great War was, for Lovecraft, a fratricide fight between members of the Teutons. I will support this argument in my study of “Herbert West – Reanimator” in chapter 12.

Guarde Paz is also concerned with Lovecraft's obsession with the latent evilness coming from the past and haunting the present. The critic studies its presence in tales such as “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, “The Dunwich Horror” and “The Call of Cthulhu”, and remarks that Lovecraft rejected some fairy traditions due to its non-Aryan

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<sup>31</sup> Joel Pace mentions how New England was a source of anxiety for Lovecraft, since he saw how it was losing its pure racial stock (119). Rebecca Janicker studies the representation of New England reproduced in Lovecraft's fiction. Marten's “Arkham Country: In Rescue of the Lost Searchers” discusses the topography and toponymy of Lovecraft's imaginary New England.

origins (32). This past can haunt our reality in different ways, but at the very basis they are all related with an initial process of decadence and degeneration that triggered the “original sin” discovered by Lovecraft's characters.<sup>32</sup>

## 2.6.- Thematic approaches: Studies on Lovecraft and science

There relevance that science has in my study led me to devote a specific section to those texts which have a particularly remarkable interest because the analysis of the relationship between Lovecraft and science.

A special place must be given to Oakes' *Science and Destabilization in the Modern American Gothic: Lovecraft, Matheson, and King*. According to Oakes, considering the unknown as a source of fear, science is supposed to be a weapon against it. But with the revelation of some secrets by means of science, thicker darkness falls over humanity. After a theoretical introduction, Oakes develops the individual analysis of the work by King, Lovecraft and Matheson, focusing his attention in particular texts of each one. *Science and Destabilization in the Modern American Gothic* is a very original approach to the genre, which gives a new point of view to the topic. Lovecraft “scientifically” and rationally explains the supernatural phenomena, and sinks humanity into darkness since science is used to assert Lovecraft's cosmicism, i.e. that human beings live in an uncontrollable and uncanny world, and we are nothing but a small spot in the middle of the universe. But Lovecraft's monster is not exposed and rationalized as in the Gothic tradition. There is no mystery to be solved, but a creature that is perfectly physical and tangible, and that disturbs the world of the protagonist. The monster is rationalized

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<sup>32</sup> A similar hypothesis of cursed origins is held by James Goho in “The Aboriginal in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft.” For other secondary readings on race, see Joshi's “What Happens in ‘Arthur Jermyn’”, Gavin Callaghan's “Blacks, Boxers, and Lovecraft” and Phillip A. Ellis' “The Construction of Race in the Early Poetry of H.P. Lovecraft”.

because it is made present in our universe, and the witnesses have to apprehend it. In a rather Freudian assertion, Oakes considers also that "Gothic fiction, furthermore, serves to remind readers of things that they may wish to suppress or ignore" (125). Is it better to know that, sooner or later, Cthulhu is going to destroy the world, or better to leave humanity in obscurity about this fact? For Oakes, Lovecraft's characters prefer to expand the truth.

According to Oakes, Lovecraft uses science focusing his attention in "concepts that can drastically change people's views of themselves or the world [and] provide far greater opportunities for writers to raise disturbing questions" (8).<sup>33</sup> He is able to develop classical concepts of the genre, such as witchcraft, under the perspective of mathematics and physics, as in the case of "The Dreams in the Witch House".

Oakes claims that the inability of the vast majority of people to understand science creates a fearsome aura around it which helps to connect it with the Gothic genre, and Lovecraft even "incorporates contemporary discoveries and events into the plot of a particular tale" (30), such as the discovery of Pluto, planet of relevance in "The Whisperer in Darkness", and the explorations which took place in the Antarctica during the 20s. Apart from that, his portrait of the rational 20<sup>th</sup> century man usually makes the character undergo a "deep emotional and psychological trauma as a result of their encounter with the fantastic". The process of destabilization is produced when science produces a sense of discomfort of strangeness in the character or, in a more dramatic way, when it produces a breach in the reality due to the apparition of a creature that should not belong to our world.

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Weinberg, in his brief essay "H.P. Lovecraft and Pseudomathematics", puts forward that Lovecraft was not accurate in some of his scientific theories proposed in "The Dreams in the Witch House". For Weinberg, Lovecraft's grasp of science "was not strong enough to present a convincing picture to the careful reader" (91), when he presented concepts related with physics and advanced mathematics. Matolsky shares Weinberg's opinion, but he is more condescending with the writer, considering that science accuracy is not indispensable when writing science fiction (166).

Oakes asserts that one of the main sources of destabilization for Lovecraft is the relation of the whole universe with the human race. The discovery that the universe does not care about humanity or planet Earth, the complete lack of moral of the cosmos, is one of the most valuable tools Lovecraft masters for provoking fear in the reader: “for Lovecraft the human race is simply an insignificant speck when set against the backdrop of an infinite cosmos” (33). Apart from that, science reveals secrets that will also produce destabilization in mankind, since we are not prepared to assimilate them. In Oakes' own words:

[Lovecraft] fiction focuses on the possibility that the search for knowledge shall lead to revelations that will forever change humanity's view of the universe and its place in it. That science and technology cannot explain the mysteries of the cosmos also serves as an important source of destabilization in his work. (29)

Oakes' proposal is fully compatible with my theoretical framework. The concept of “destabilization” produced by science is similar to the two effects I have identified that science provokes in reality. When, in a Lovecraftian tale, science is considered as pure knowledge, it acts as the forbidden knowledge that exposes the inconsistency of our reality. When this happens, humans get a glimpse of the reality beyond reality. The books present in Lovecraft's mythology, such as the imaginary *Necronomicon*, explain how it is possible to get access to other dimensions, how to open gates between two worlds, or how to bring back to earth alien species that once dwelt our planet.<sup>34</sup> This knowledge remarks that our reality is fragmentary and partial, and it does not cover all the aspects of the universe.

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<sup>34</sup> For a detailed index of the imaginary books mentioned all throughout the Cthulhu Mythos (including tales by Lovecraft and other writers), see Carter's “H.P. Lovecraft: The Books”. Antonio Molina Foix also indexes the imaginary and real books mentioned by Lovecraft in “Libros y personajes emblemáticos citados por Lovecraft”.

In my dissertation, the second way in which science is represented is by means of technological artefacts. The use of technology, once again, provokes a process of “destabilization” in our reality, since the devices that characters use in their adventures normally put into practice the knowledge previously acquired. This results in a process of aggression against reality, since the technological artefact triggers the apparition of the monster in our world, its symbolization. When this happens, the characters of the tale have to reshape their concept of reality, since new rules of existence have been established, and the impossibility has been made possible.

In his essay “Time, Space, and Natural Law: Science and Pseudo-Science in Lovecraft”, Joshi asserts that:

[...] science provides the intellectual backbone of nearly all his short stories; but at the same time Lovecraft seems to suggest that science will itself ultimately be a source of horror and destruction. (176)

This premise is the starting point to describe the uses that Lovecraft gives to science in his narrative and in his metaphysical thought. Joshi remarks that Lovecraft used the modern scientific theories in order to dismantle religious beliefs (174-75), something that the critic already anticipated in *A Life* (204-6). S.T. Joshi analyses the importance of the Darwinian theories as part of the inherent Lovecraftian conflict, and how processes of reversion –or devolution, as Joshi names them– are associated to communal degeneration: “unwholesome inbreeding, psychological trauma, cannibalism, and miscegenation” (178).<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, Joshi conveys that, sometimes, Lovecraft uses science to “enhance the *aesthetic* plausibility of the scenarios” (182), as a way of detaching himself from the

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<sup>35</sup> Massimo Berruti puts forward how human regression is also a source of conflict, derived from the “fusion between self and the other” (119-20). According to Berruti, Lovecraft's examples of intermingling with the other always have hideous consequences.

classic goblin or vampire, which is “no longer convincing to a sophisticated readership that has learned too much about biology” (182). This idea is shared also by Oakes, who considers that Lovecraft tries to create a realistic setting in order to produce a more shocking effect of destabilization when the uncanny is present.

According to Joshi, Lovecraft's extensive use of science is something that characterizes the weird tale as a genre, and the critic considers that, in the weird tale, scientific knowledge has to supplement rather than defy known natural law (191).<sup>36</sup> Joshi's conclusion has been already mentioned, since the critic suggests that Lovecraft does not think that science “as such, is dangerous, but that its results can produce *psychological* trauma in sensitive temperaments” (199).

Bennett Lovett-Graff's “Shadows over Lovecraft: Reactionary Fantasy and Immigrant Eugenics” backs the idea that Lovecraft was strongly influenced by the eugenics movements that took place during the writer's life. Using “The Shadow over Innsmouth” as the driving force for the whole essay, Lovett-Graff asserts that Lovecraft followed the ideas of social engineering promoted by several authors after the apparition of Darwin's theory of evolution. The critic's thesis is basic for the understanding of Lovecraft's ideology, and I will discuss the importance of eugenics in his fiction all throughout my dissertation. In chapter 5, however, I will establish the general scientific framework during Lovecraft's life, and how eugenics ideas intermingle with some other scientific discoveries and social formulations. Lovett-Graff's article is undoubtedly a landmark for my study, since it puts into context Lovecraft's racial ideas.

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<sup>36</sup> See chapter 5 in this dissertation for a detailed discussion on Lovecraft's literary genre.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### 3.1.- Lovecraft and Žižek's Real

In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft's study on the supernatural genre, the writer tries to detach his narrative from the most classical Gothic tradition. To do so, he states the following:

The true weird tale has something more than a secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain –a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (22-23)

This passage summarizes the kernel of my theoretical proposal for the present dissertation. Lovecraft's remarks on the weird tale anticipate the concept of the reality beyond reality –that I will associate with the Lacanian and Žižekian conception of the

Real—, but at the same time it also emphasizes the triad of the Real proposed by Žižek himself and that I will explain below. The “fixed laws of Nature” correspond with our symbolic reality, and the assaults of chaos and daemons are part of the real Real. The triad is completed with the “atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread”, which belongs to the imaginary Real.

As has been said, for the development of my study on Lovecraft's narrative, Slavoj Žižek is going to be a key thinker. His analysis and expansion of the Lacanian concept of the Real provides a powerful tool for approaching Lovecraft's ideas of reality beyond reality. When, in his tales, the protagonist apprehends a dark past in which the Earth was dwelt by evil and terrifying creatures, and understands that there are also other planes of existence for alien gods and creatures, he is accessing a new reality which can be read in terms of the difference between Real and reality.

For Lacan, the Real is a concept closely linked to the Symbolic and the Imaginary, since its own definition and nature is described in relation with the other two elements: the Real is what is not imaginary and cannot be symbolized. In *Seminar I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, Lacan says that “the real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolisation absolutely” (66). According to Dylan Evans, “[the real] is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way. It is this character of impossibility and of resistance to symbolisation which lends the real its essentially traumatic quality.” (187). The Real is something which escapes from language, which cannot be apprehended because its own irrepresentability, and it has to be distinguished from reality, which is the result of the different representations produced by symbolic and imaginary articulations.

Žižek goes a step further in the analysis made by Lacan, and he divides the Real into three different categories, which coincide with the imaginary/real/symbolic division:

There are thus THREE modalities of the Real, i.e. the triad IRS reflects itself within the order of the Real, so that we have the “real Real” (the horrifying Thing, the primordial object, [...]), the “symbolic Real” (the signifier reduced to a senseless formula, like the quantum physics formulae which can no longer be translated back into –or related to– the everyday experience of our life-world), AND the “imaginary Real” (the mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable “something” that introduces a self-division into an ordinary object, so that the sublime dimension shines through it) (*On Belief* 82).

From this subdivision of the real made by Slavoj Žižek, the three categories are of interest for my analysis, as I will discuss below. When reading H.P. Lovecraft one of the key points of his universe is the existence of a hidden truth, like one of his most famous creations, the sunken city of R’lyeh. In that city Cthulhu, the alien god-like entity, dwells in lethargy. The revelation of this new reality beyond reality is a shock for the character who, in general terms, cannot even symbolize with words the monster he is trying to depict. I will exemplify this aspect with two particular moments in Lovecraft’s narrative, where the narrator witnesses something horrible –a demonic landscape in the first one and an evil creature in the second text–.

In “The Music of Erich Zann”, the main character looks through a window where he was expecting to get a panoramic view of the city. Instead, what he gets is:

[...] only the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance to anything on earth. And as I stood there looking in terror, the wind blew out both the candles in that ancient peaked garret, leaving me in savage and impenetrable darkness with chaos and pandemonium before me, and the daemon madness of that night-baying viol behind me. (51)

*At the Mountains of Madness* offers the following description of a shoggoth, one of the alien monsters created by Lovecraft:

It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train –a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish light. (334)

I would like to remark a lexical aspect in Lovecraft's descriptions, anticipating Harman's proposal which I will discuss below. The use of adjectives such as indescribable, unnamable, shapeless, impenetrable... permeate all the descriptions of the monsters with a clear sense of something that cannot be represented, explained or symbolized. Lovecraft's Mythos are the representation of the Lacanian Real, they are something impossible to describe, which escapes language because its own frightening unknown nature. During the epiphanic moment in which the character contemplates the truth, he is having a glimpse of the Real, and there is no way he can explain it. According to Žižek, the Real is the starting point and precedes the symbolic order, and at the same time it is the leftover of this process of symbolization (*Sublime Object* 191). Considering that, in Lovecraft's mythology, his creatures have been living in planet Earth for eons of time, is not it possible to consider them also as the starting point of humankind? The "Great Old Ones", the enormous alien entities, are prior to dinosaurs and to any other living species.

As Noys points out, Žižek tries to approach the Real, in spite of its irrepresentability, by allusions to Gothic texts in different media, from cinema to literature (2). He treats the monster, the creature, as the Thing. What comes from the Real is the Thing. What cannot be described is the Thing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Žižek, in fact, uses a lot of popular cultural references to develop his philosophical thought. Constant references to science fiction films, Hitchcock, Ridley Scott, etc. can be found in his oeuvre. A perfect

Moving forward to the division of the Real made by Žižek, it is challenging to explore if Lovecraft's monstrous creations would fit into the realm of the imaginary Real, the real Real or the symbolic Real. Žižek raises this triad of the Real in relation to religion, and he gives the example of God the Father as real Real, as the primordial Thing (curiously enough, primordial is also a word used by Lovecraft to make reference to the alien god-like monsters), God the Son as the imaginary Real and the Holy Ghost as the symbolic Real:

[...] the Christian Trinity also has to be read through the lenses of this Trinity of the Real: God the father is the "real Real" of the violent primordial Thing; God the Son is the "imaginary Real" of the pure Schein, the "almost nothing" which the sublime shines through his miserable body; the Holy Ghost is the "symbolic Real" of the community of believers. (*On Belief* 82-83)

From the three different categories, the symbolic Real is the most cryptic. It is the futile attempt to symbolize the Real into reality, and the result is a "senseless formula". Would it be possible to link the symbolic Real to Lovecraft's monstrous creations? I suggest that a linguistic analysis of the descriptions made by Lovecraft results in this version of the Real. It is a metalinguistic Real which is reached from the lexical analysis of the text. When trying to figure out what is the nature of a particular creature of the Mythos, what the reader gets is just a linguistic barrier. The obscurity of the language used by Lovecraft is much more noticeable in his descriptions of monsters. The abuse in the use of adjectives, archaisms and the semantic field related to things which cannot be described or named, give an overall impression of confusion and chaos. It is very difficult to recreate a mental image of how Nyarlathotep or a shoggoth look like,

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example of this use of popular culture as the grounds for Žižek's thoughts is to be found in his documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006). In his article, Noys proposes that the Slovene philosopher uses the codes of the Gothic tradition himself when developing his ideas.

because the narrator that Lovecraft offers to the reader is unable to symbolize the Thing, and the result is a poor and dark description which is not reliable in its accuracy.

For my analysis and interpretation of the symbolic Real, I will follow Graham Harman's theory of the existence of two different gaps between language and reality in the texts of the writer:

And here we have the two major axes of Lovecraft's literary style: the "vertical" gap between unknowable objects and their tangible qualities, and the "horizontal" or "cubist" gap between an accessible object and its gratuitous amassing of numerous palpable surfaces. (31)

Any time we run across a passage in Lovecraft that is *literally* impossible to visualize we are dealing with this first kind of tension between a real object and its sensual qualities, so reminiscent of Heidegger's tool-analysis. At other times, there is the "cubist" tension between sensual or non-hidden objects and their sensual qualities that pile up in disturbing profusion. (34)

The "vertical" gap corresponds with the accumulation of "unknowable"-like words and expressions. The abundance of vocabulary filling paragraphs resulting in an unintelligible and void description configures the "vertical" gap. The "horizontal" gap, on the other side, is produced when there is an abuse of meaningful adjectives and lexical constructions which try to reproduce all the features and characteristics of the object-monster. When doing so, Lovecraft provokes a fracture in language, since the over-embellishment of the narrative through excessive use of adjectives does not allow the recreation of a proper image of the object. So the symbolic Real may be present as a "vertical" gap or as the cubist "horizontal" gap.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Berruti also explores Lovecraft's saturated language, in a framework of *outsideness*. According to the critic, the character's incapacity to describe the other is the result of an insufficient language which does "not possess the instruments suitable to *describe* the *Outsidness*" ("The Unnamable in Lovecraft" 7). Berruti's proposal is completely assimilated in my theoretical framework, since, as I will put forward all

The following passage exemplifies the “vertical” gap. It is an excerpt of “The Unnamable”, in which the impossibility to represent the Monster is discussed:

Manton remained thoughtful as I said this, but gradually reverted to his analytical mood. He granted for the sake of argument that some unnatural monster had really existed, but reminded me that even the most morbid perversion of Nature need not be unnamable or scientifically indescribable [...] if the psychic emanations of human creatures be grotesque distortions, what coherent representation could express or portray so gibbous and infamous a nebulosity as the spectre of a malign, chaotic perversion, itself a morbid blasphemy against Nature? Moulded by the dead brain of a hybrid nightmare, would not such a vaporous terror constitute in all loathsome truth the exquisitely, the shriekingly unnamable?  
(86-87)

The “cubist” gap is appreciated in the fragmentary descriptions of Cthulhu given “The Call of Cthulhu”. The most accurate ones are based on sculptures of the monster, having one of them “yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature” (141).

Curiously enough, Harman never refers to the distinction between reality and the Real in his book *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*. However, there are several references to Žižek and also to the existence of a reality beyond reality, “a real world outside all human contact with it” (51). The concepts and explanations he offers throughout his analysis perfectly match with the binomial reality-Real, but he seems to obviate the concept of the Real.

So the symbolic Real is physical, tangible, always terrifying and impossible to describe in its fullness. It is equivalent to the alien in Ridley Scott’s 1979 film *Alien*, described by Žižek:

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throughout my dissertation, what lies behind the Lovecraftian oeuvre, in many cases, is the fear of the immigrant, identified with the other. James Goho echoes Berruti’s ideas in “What is “the Unnamable”? H.P. Lovecraft and the Problem of Evil”.

The 'alien', the eight, supplementary passenger, is an object which, being nothing at all in itself, must none the less be added, annexed as an anamorphic surplus. It is the Real at its purest: a semblance, something which on a strictly symbolic level does not exist at all but at the same time the only thing in the whole film which actually exists, the thing against which the whole reality is utterly defenceless.<sup>3</sup> (*Sublime Object* 86)

The imaginary Real is a change in reality which modifies it. According to Žižek, it "forever distorts our perception of reality, introducing anamorphic stains in it, or the pure Schein (appearing) of Nothing that only "shines through" reality" (*On Belief* 81). The imaginary Real can be read as a trace of the Real itself, as a clue of the existence of something beyond reality. It is the uncanny feeling, the mysterious noise, the subtle evil glance, the small detail that drives to the Real.

Freud's "The Uncanny" reflects on this concept, and the psychoanalyst conveys that "the uncanny is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (123-24).<sup>4</sup> Freud links the uncanny with the residual memories of a past in which mankind was connected with an animistic view of the world:

[...] which was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with spirits of human beings, and by the narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes (such as the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, the magical practices based upon this belief, the carefully proportioned distribution of magical powers or 'mana' among various outside persons and things), as well as by all those other figments of the imagination with which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to withstand the inexorable laws of reality. (147-48)

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<sup>3</sup> Notice that Žižek did not develop his Real triad until 2001. In 1989 he just talked about the Real as a whole, and from this exemplification of what the Real is, it can be said that his idea of the Real at this time matches the real Real that he will stipulate later.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to contrast the Freudian "uncanny" with Heidegger's concept of "angst". According to Asma, Heidegger's "angst" is different from common fear, since it is "the response to an indefinite threat; the danger is nowhere in particular and yet everywhere" (185-86). Angst, then, is a suitable category for the fear of the unknown and is the emotion that Lovecraft provokes, whereas Freud's "uncanny" is the result of re-facing a long-time repressed source of uneasiness.

This animistic past is a constant presence in Lovecraft's oeuvre, a past strongly connected with superstitions, wizards, witches and supernatural events, like Keziah, the witch from "The Dreams in the Witch House". These fantastic elements are made tangible in the present, haunting the symbolic Real as part of the imaginary Real.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of literary language, the imaginary Real equals the moments of the narration in which the reader gets the impression that there is something weird undergoing the succession of events of the plot. The drops of blood falling from the ceiling in "The Picture in the House" which reveal that the kind old man hides a terrible truth are part of this imaginary Real.

The third element of the triad, the real Real, is the embodiment of the truth beyond reality, what the hero in the Lovecraft's narration discovers. My hypothesis is that Lovecraft's literary production hides a real Real which is closely linked with the writer's own ideology. Both the symbolic and the imaginary Real are representations of the anxieties the author is transmitting to his texts. The Real in his narrative is the set of social and cultural situations and problems Lovecraft is not able to understand and rationalize. Topics related with the past in general and the origins of humankind in particular, racial issues, New Englishness, immigration... will be in the background of many of Lovecraft texts, as I will analyze in the present study. Lovecraft, as his own characters, cannot cope with the truth he finds in his world, and it is projected into the the symbolic and the imaginary levels.

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<sup>5</sup> Jameson considers that history, in all its extension, is not a text, and "it is inaccessible to us except in textual form" (35). The critic compares history as part of the Real, and the process of textualization of the historical events are equal to the process of symbolization of history, the only way to apprehend it. According to his proposal, all texts are political, no matter their nature; "everything is, 'in the last analysis', political" (20). The present study follows Jameson's hypothesis, and tries to unveil the political (in its broader meaning, political as ideological) implications of Lovecraft's texts.

This idea of the defencelessness of reality against the Real proposed by Žižek is omnipresent in Lovecraft's tales. Most of the times the goal of the hero is either to warn humankind about the menace or to hide the Real in order to protect reality from it. A classical example to illustrate this is the opening of "The Call of Cthulhu", where the narrator reflects upon the nature of knowledge and truth:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (139)

Through the interaction of the symbolic Real with the imaginary Real, the real Real is re-symbolized in the narrative proposal of the writer, in an attempt to assimilate and reproduce it. The Real changes its shapes in those of the different elements appearing in Lovecraft's stories, as I will develop in the forthcoming chapters of the present study.

At this point, I would like to formulate and recapitulate the correspondences between the triad of the Real and Lovecraft's literary discourse:

- a) The symbolic Real is a lexical construction. According to Žižek, it is pure ideology, and shapes what is our known reality. When the Lovecraftian hero unfruitfully tries to depict the horror he is watching, the resulting failed symbolization, shaped as an obscure passage of text, full of adjectives, archaisms and imprecisions, is what constitutes the process of symbolization of the monster into the symbolic level. There are two main ways in which the

symbolic Real is present in Lovecraft's literary production in terms of the interference of monstrous or uncanny forces:

- i. The overuse of words from the semantic field of the unmentionable, defined by Harman as the "vertical" gap. Language fails in its basic communicative task, since the Real cannot be named or mentioned.
  - ii. The overwriting of the passages in which the Real is being depicted. The accumulation of adjectives trying to describe it creates what Harman defines as a "cubist" gap, which has the effect of blurring the object. The reader is unable to grasp the sensual qualities of the image because the saturation of the narration.
- b) The imaginary Real is a narratological resource. The tricks used by Lovecraft in order to slide the uncanny Real into the realm of reality are of different nature, but they are normally present in the tradition of the genre. Like clues for Doyle's Sherlock Holmes or Poe's Auguste Dupin, Lovecraft spreads details which reveal the existence of the Real both to his hero and the reader.
- c) Finally, the real Real transcends the narration. It is the result of the ideological background of the author in the text, which is represented by the other two elements of the triad.

### 3.2.- Ideology: a discussion

Apart from the representation of the Real, another important aspect for the present study is the analysis of the permeability of Lovecraft's narrative to his own ideology. Is it possible to detect signs and traces of Lovecraft's political and social thoughts through his fiction?

To be able to answer this question, it is first necessary to discuss the concept of ideology itself. For doing so, I will focus my attention in Marx and Althusser as the core of the development of theories on ideology, and the later reading and interpretations expounded by Paul Ricoeur in his *Lectures On Ideology and Utopia*. The final step of this Marxist reading on ideology will be Slavoj Žižek.

According to Ricoeur, there are two different stages in Marx's development of ideology. In his early texts, Marx asserts that ideology is a force whose main function is "its production of an inverted image" (Ricoeur 4). Ideology is clearly opposed to reality, and what it provokes is a process of reversion of this reality. Marx's attack targets religion as the primitive and essential example of what ideology is: a tool which reverses reality. But according to Marx, religion is just one of the possible ideologies, since philosophy, for instance, is another one. The concepts of reversion and distortion are remarkable, being the result of ideology filtering real life. This concept will be more or less constant over the different approaches to ideology in different authors and thinkers.

A second step arrives when Marxism is already developed as a theoretical frame. At this point ideology is opposed to science, not to reality. Everything which is not part of science, in its broader meaning, will belong to ideology.<sup>6</sup> This conception of ideology

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to make a clear analysis of what is the meaning of science for Marx. According to Ricoeur, "the word 'science' is typically not used in the empirical sense of a body of knowledge that can

comprises not only religion (or philosophy), “ideology becomes identical to all that is prescientific in our own approach to social reality” (Ricoeur 6).

There is a clear negative approach to ideology in these two pure Marxist conceptions. However Ricoeur tries to establish a more benign definition of ideology, linking it to the concept of utopia. Whereas for Marx utopia is also part of ideology, and thus is loaded with negative connotations, for Ricoeur it is possible to make a more positive reading. What Ricoeur proposes is to oppose ideology not to science, as Marx does in his mature stage, but to real social life. According to the scholar, ideology is important and a benefit from the very moment that:

If social reality did not already have a social dimension, and therefore, if ideology, in a less polemical or less negatively evaluative sense, were not constitutive of social existence but merely distorting and dissimulating, then the process of distortion could not start. (10)

Also Ricoeur, supporting Weber’s ideas, points out that ideology is used on every system of leadership in order to avoid the sole use of force for domination. “It is ideology’s role to legitimate this authority” (13). Finally, in contrast with Marx’s view of utopia, Ricoeur thinks that this ideological concept can have positive meanings as a way to escape from oppressive reality:<sup>7</sup>

The nowhere of utopia may become a pretext for escape, a way of fleeing the contradictions and ambiguity both of power and of the assumption of authority in a given situation. [...]  
This disjunction allows the utopia to avoid any obligation to come to grips with the real difficulties of a given society. (17)

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be verified or falsified [...] Instead, science is more a fundamental theory. Science is fundamental knowledge.” (103).

<sup>7</sup> Lévy remarks that Lovecraft suffered from this oppression, derived from the contact with real life. The critic asserts that “Human contact oppressed him, his contemporaries annoyed him, he regretted that he was not deaf. [...] He was happy only in the dark depths of unfathomable life. [...] He hated the level of clear, normal life” (25).

Althusser offers up to three different interpretations for ideology as a concept in his book *For Marx*. The first one is based on the classical Marxist opposition between science and ideology:

[...] ideology is a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society. Without embarking on the problem of the relations between a science and its (ideological) past, we can say that ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function. (231)

Curiously enough, Althusser attaches to ideology a historical role and existence. This discussion is out of the scope of this work, but it is interesting to notice that not all classical Marxist readings and interpretations on ideology coincide and share this historical role at all.

A second definition given by Althusser has its grounds in the difference between the real and the imaginary relation between human beings and their conditions of existence, which is strongly linked with the first stage of Marx:

In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an "imaginary," "lived" relation. Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their "world," that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence. In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will, a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality. (233-34)

A third definition connects ideology with reality, and claims the necessity of ideology in order to make sense of real life:

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So ideology is as such an organic part of every social totality. It is as if human societies could not survive without these specific formations, these systems of representations (at various levels), their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. Only an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies without ideology and accepted the utopian idea of a world in which ideology would disappear without trace, to be replaced by science. (232)

This definition is much closer to the one given by Ricoeur in his analysis, and it is linked to the view of ideology as something inherent in society. Apart from that, there is a curious recursive idea of the existence of a world without ideology. According to Althusser, it is impossible to think about a world without ideology if the starting point is not also ideological; that is, only utopia, which is ideology in its core, is able to think about a society detached from ideology. So it is impossible to fully eradicate ideology.

The last approach I am going to pay attention to is that of Žižek. Following Sloterdijk's thesis, Žižek claims that the origin of contemporary ideology is cynicism. Whereas in the past the distance between social reality and the distorted vision produced by ideology was an abyss the individual was not aware of, nowadays "The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask" (*Sublime Object* 25). At this point, Žižek introduces the concept of ideological fantasy, "the level on which ideology structures the social reality itself" (27). When the individual knows how things really are, but he insists on his ideologically distorted vision of reality pretending that he does not know, there is an overlooking of the process of distortion itself (the individual ignores the process of reversion of reality, in spite of being aware of its existence) which conforms with the concept of ideological fantasy introduced by Žižek.

Moving a step further, and linking those ideas with the Lacanian tradition, Žižek proposes a “positive” interpretation of the role of ideology, but adding the concept of the Real to the whole formula:

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’ itself: an ‘illusion’ which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel [...]. The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel. (45)

Comparing this proposal with Ricoeur's view of ideology, there is a clear contrast between the two of them. While Ricoeur asserts that ideology can be useful as a way to escape from hideous social reality, Žižek claims that ideology is a tool for constructing this social reality in order to escape from something even more terrible, the real kernel, the Real itself.

With those premises, I want to perform an analysis of the possible ideological connotations of H.P. Lovecraft's narrative. A global reading of his texts can be summarized as the representation of a parallel terrible and uncanny reality which is observed and experienced by the main characters. The existence of different species, alien gods and races that dwell somewhere in space and time is discovered by chance or due to scientific discoveries, research, exploration of remote landscapes or artistic chance (as in “The Music of Erich Zann”).

One of the most extended hypotheses of Lovecraft's ideological claims is that he had racist ideas that permeated his literary production. According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen:

From the classical period into the twentieth century, race has been almost as powerful a catalyst to the creation of monsters as culture, gender, and sexuality. [...]Narratives of

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miscegenation arose and circulated to sanction official policies of exclusion; Queen Elizabeth is famous for her anxiety over “blackamoors” and their supposed threat to the “increase of people of our own nation.” (10)

Several authors, more or less successfully, have analyzed this particular aspect in Lovecraft’s personality and literary production: Sprague de Camp, in his biography, portrays the evolution of a young recalcitrant and intransigent racist to a more moderate and even reluctant to the nazi regime Lovecraft during his last years of life. The main criticism that can be done to Sprague de Camp’s analysis is his childish explanation of the background behind this attitude. For Sprague de Camp, Lovecraft “He would have felt completely at home only in a milieu wholly populated by H.P. Lovecrafts” (252).

According to S.T. Joshi, for instance:

Lovecraft retained to the end of his days a belief in the biological inferiority of blacks and also of Australian aborigenes, although it is not clear why he singled out this latter group. In any event, Lovecraft advocated an absolutely rigid colour line against intermarriage between blacks and whites, so as to guard against “miscegenation”. This view was by no means uncommon in the 1920s, and many leading American biologists and psychologists wrote forebodingly about the possibility that racial intermixture could lead to biological abnormalities. (*I Am Providence* 936)

Joshi exemplifies several tales where this racism is evident (*Decline* 127-29), and he discusses Lovecraft’s racism in at least two of his essays (*Decline* 74-80; *I Am Providence* 936-43). His view is much more contextualized, and he links Lovecraft’s racism with a nostalgia for the lost bright past of the Anglo-Saxon race which once occupied New England, as expressed in Lovecraft’s “The Street”.<sup>8</sup> Joshi, unable to give

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<sup>8</sup> Joyce Carol Oates notices that Lovecraft was probably performing a very selective choice of past events, to create his own utopian view of history:

“To love the past, to extol the past, to yearn in some way to inhabit the past is surely to misread the past, purposefully or otherwise; above all, it is to select from the past only those aspects that accommodate a self-protective and nourishing fantasy. What is “past” tempts us to reconstruct a world rather like a walled

an explanation to this ideology other than stubbornness on the part of Lovecraft (ignoring the scientific theories claiming that there were no intellectual differences between different races) and the mixture of bad vital experiences during his stay in New York with this aristocratic past Lovecraft always missed, asserts that Lovecraft sinks his narrative into a powerful idea of decadence of Western society, being the intermingling of races one of its consequences.

Massimo Berruti develops an interesting analysis of Lovecraft representation of the Other. Without making reference to races or any kind of racist ideology, Berruti moves into the field of alterity and otherness, very much in the line of thought of the second chapter of Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (17-34). Berruti assimilates the concept of 'outsideness' –neologism created by Lovecraft and used in some of his theoretical essays– and matches it to that of otherness. The interesting kernel of Berruti's analysis is that he distinguishes two stages in Lovecraft's narrative. In a first initial period (from the first tales published in 1917 to the texts written while Lovecraft was living in New York), Berruti asserts that the way the writer depicts the other is as "the evil horror to be fought" ("Self, Other" 125). The other is negative, is the main expression of the Gothic:

[...] the irruption of the other was effected by supernatural entities (as in traditional Gothic and weird fiction), and especially had, as its protagonists, deities that were not subjected to physical, biological, or natural laws (they were indeed super-natural). And in that case, outsideness was to be fought and feared, and Lovecraft's approach was that of a writer of supernatural literature. (124)

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city, finite and contained and in the most literal sense predictable. For the writer, the (selected, edited) "past" is in itself a form of fiction, though the writer will set as his idealized task its "coming to life" and credulous readers will respond to its "authenticity".

This conception of otherness summarizes the main trend in most of the classic Gothic texts in their portrait of the monster or the supernatural element. The racial connotations of this approach are evident, since a racist reading can easily be made when the unknown is feared.

However there is, according to Berruti, a second stage of otherness for Lovecraft, with a significant twist on its implications. In this phase, which starts with “The Call of Cthulhu” and lasts until the end of Lovecraft’s production, the other is not something supernatural anymore, but something worthy of scientific interest and research:

The evolution of his characters’ perception leads them to consider the harbingers of otherness no longer as supernatural deities, but as extraterrestrial beings, i.e., non-supernatural creatures, simply non-terrestrial ones. This “ontological” shift leads Lovecraft’s art toward a non-supernatural, cosmic, and scientific discourse: since the harbingers of otherness are now extraterrestrials, they have to be approached and investigated through scientific tools. (124)

I think that, in spite of being a novel approach to Lovecraft, and a quite original point of view of otherness in his narrative, Berruti fails at the basis of his second stage proposal. It is true that in many occasions the access to the other is given by means of science, but it does not imply that this is made in an active way. Many times, the discovery of a hidden race, a monster or alien creature is the result of mere chance, and when science is the catalyst of this encounter, what results is normally a terrible end for the main character.

One of the things that most of the characters want to do during their adventures in this second stage tales is exactly to prevent others from investigating and find out this otherness. *At the Mountain of Madness*, one of the most representative texts of this period, begins with a warning from the narrator –a scientist himself– about the risks of

sending a new scientific exploration into the Antarctic. There is an explicit claim saying that science should follow his piece of advice and that hideous place should not be explored again.

Nonetheless the first stage period –which, in my opinion, is also applicable to the second stage–, reinforces the idea of the racist component of the other in Lovecraft. What is different has to be feared.

David Haden reflects on the racial reading of “The Rats in the Wall” in his brief essay “‘The Rats in the Walls’: Otherness and British Culture”. His point of view connects with the idea of reversion to ancestral types, that is, pure Darwinist terminology, and the corruption of the blood and once pure lineages. The use of blood corruption by means of interracial mingling is at the core of his analysis, since British Culture falls into decadence due to its own corruption. There are some other texts on Lovecraft's racism which reinforce this thesis, being some of them mentioned all throughout the present study.<sup>9</sup> But the premise that Lovecraft had strong racist ideas has been accepted by all the scholars who studied the topic.

Another important ideological point for his narrative is the importance of the past.<sup>10</sup> Tradition, inheritance, New Englishness, race... are concepts strongly linked to Lovecraft's ideas of gentlemanliness, and the writer seems to be fascinated with past

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<sup>9</sup> See Lévy (26-29), Joshi (“Alien Civilizations” 108-10), Waugh (“The Subway and the Shoggoth”) and Houellebecq (39, 102, 105-19).

<sup>10</sup> Notice that this interest for the past is an inherent characteristic of the Gothic tradition. As Ian Duncan puts forward, “Gothic names a broken historical descent, a cultural heritage grown balefully strange” (23). According to the critic, the Gothic is strongly rooted in “contaminated genealogies” and “decayed ancestral power[s]”, as well as in the “aesthetic effects of the uncanny and the sublime” (23). Duncan considers that the Gothic fiction “does not attempt a scientific depiction of past cultural stages under changing material conditions”, but “invokes historical contingency in order to dramatize its reduction under persistent forms of sexual and familiar identity” (26). This idea can be applied to Lovecraft himself, who tries to depict the pervence in his present reality of the contaminated intercourses that took place in the past, and also of the social problems drew from the past (as in the case of immigration of London scum to New England during the first colonizing processes –see the analysis on “The Dreams in the Witch House” in the eighth chapter of this dissertation–).

eras.<sup>11</sup> He is perfectly aware of this fascination, as it is expressed in the following excerpt from one of his letters:

So far as I am concerned –I am an aesthete devoted to harmony, and to the extraction of the maximum possible pleasure from life. I find by experience that my chief pleasure is in symbolic identification with the landscape and tradition-stream to which I belong –hence I follow the ancient, simple New England ways of living, and observe the principles of honour expected of a descendant of English gentlemen. It is pride and beauty-sense, plus the automatic instincts of generations trained in certain conduct-patterns, which determine my conduct from day to day. But this is not ethics, because the same compulsions and preferences apply, with me, to things wholly outside the ethical zone. For example, I never cheat or steal. Also, I never wear a top-hat with a sack coat or munch bananas in public on the streets, because a gentleman does not do those things either. I would as soon do the one as the other sort of thing –it is all a matter of harmony and good taste– whereas the ethical or “righteous” man would be horrified by dishonestly yet tolerant of coarse personal ways. (SL II 288-89)

H.P. Lovecraft yearns for past times and cultural heritage. His views are radical on this particular aspect, and they are closely linked to racist thoughts. This can be seen, for instance, in this celebration for the ties between England and the United States as they united to defeat Germany in World War I:

The strongest tie in the domain of mankind, and the only potent source of social unity, is that mystic essence compounded of race, language and culture; a heritage descended from the remote past. This tie no human force can break, whatever political revolution may by such an agency be effected. It may be temporarily submerged by the base prejudices of passion and the detestable contamination caused by alien blood, but rise it must when

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<sup>11</sup> Sometimes the past to be found in Lovecraft’s oeuvre is so remote that can be considered as part of the concept of “arche-fossil” proposed by Quentin Meillassoux. According to the philosopher, an “arche-fossil” or “fossil-matter” is “not just materials indicating the traces of past life, [...] but materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life” (10). These “arche-fossils” are, for instance, the frozen creatures found in *At the Mountains of Madness*. The Elder Ones found by the scientific expedition are the proof of events that took place aeons before humankind was present in the planet.

overwhelming stress calls out man's deeper emotions, and sweeps aside the superficialities of arbitrary modes of thoughts. ("Anglo-Saxondom" 33)

The writer sees the past as something glorious, something that gives us all the valid values that society needs to get rid of immigration, decadence and degeneration. Lovecraft is the figure of a gentleman who wants to belong to a period which has been already overcome, and who cannot stand a reality which distorts his ideal visions. That is the reason why in many of his stories he plunges his narrators "[...] not merely to the eighteenth century but into a prehistoric world hundreds of millions of years ago" (Joshi, *I Am Providence* 31).

According to Joshi (*I Am Providence* 28) it is the figure of the grandfather, Whipple Van Buren Phillips, the one who substitutes the parental figure during Lovecraft's childhood.<sup>12</sup> It is the grandfather the one who introduces the young Lovecraft into the *Arabian Nights* when he is five years old, and into classic Greek and Roman literature one or two years later. As a clear proof of this fascination for ancient times and civilizations, Lovecraft wrote an adaptation for children of Homer's *Odyssey* when he was seven years old.

In practical terms, this fascination with the past is shown in Lovecraft's narrative in many of his tales. "The Shadow Out of Time", for instance, describes the history of the alien race of the Yithians, which inhabited the Earth eons ago, and which are able to travel in time and switch bodies with other species. In "He", the narrator witnesses views of New York's past and future, due to some kind of spell coming from an unknown character who acts as his guide in the city. *At the Mountains of Madness* narrates the exploration of an ancient city discovered in the South Pole, and how the

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<sup>12</sup> Winfield Scott Lovecraft, the father, was hospitalized when H.P. Lovecraft was two and a half years old, and he died, probably due to syphilis, and completely insane, in 1898, being Lovecraft 8.

explorers investigate about the old races living there eons ago. “The Temple” is also connected with a discovery, but this time an ancient submerged temple, discovered by a German war submarine. The list goes on and on. For Salonia, Lovecraft includes his monstrosities through time as a symbol of their omnipresence:

Lovecraft’s overwhelming sense of the past led him to take great pains to invest his horrors with a shadowy omnipresence throughout history and in a variety of cultures, lending his fictional creations verisimilitude by subtly weaving them into known chronologies. He also sought inspiration in actual legends, to give his fiction reflected believability by imitating the forms of real myths handed down from preliterate cultures. (95)

H.P. Lovecraft is said to be reproducing some ideological concepts in his narrative. Racism and politics permeate his narrative, and there are several levels of interpretation of his texts.

In a political level, the writer also claimed the risks of democracy. Universal suffrage was something to be avoided, since, according to Lovecraft, lead to the decadence of society (*SL III* 78). Capitalism, at the same time, is a system that puts society apart from culture and the arts, and provokes the degeneration of Lovecraft’s most beloved social class, the aristocracy.<sup>13</sup> The capitalist aristocrat just shows an immense interest for money, and he dismisses the cultural values of life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bergland puts forward that the European Gothic tradition is composed by “radical stories about modern people fighting ancient regimes”, whereas the American branch of the Gothic shows “the formation of new power structures in the wilderness” (“Diseased States” 95). Lovecraft, to a certain extent, was showing the formation of these new structures, but he was far from defending them. Much on the contrary, the writer attacks the modern economical and social models established. His approach, ironically, is not even close to what Bergland considers the core of the European Gothic, since Lovecraft’s would love to restore ancient regimes.

<sup>14</sup> There are some remarkable political and economical readings of the Gothic tale. Franco Moretti, in his study “The Dialect of Fear”, compares Stoker’s aristocrat vampire, Dracula, with capitalism. On the other side, as good forces, Stoker describes a reduced group of people who fight the vampire using their own goods and knowledge. A similar comparison is made between Victor Frankenstein, the “productive inventor-scientist” and the monster, a “collective” and “artificial” creature, like the proletariat (69). Moretti, quoting Marx, puts forward that “Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (73). For an analysis on Ann Rice’s contemporary vampire and its connection with wealth, see Grady’s “Vampire Culture”.

My first interpretation is that Lovecraft's creatures are a distorted image of the other, the immigrant which "devastates" New England and scares Lovecraft. The writer's Mythos are no more than an extended metaphor of reality, and they are representations of the danger which comes from abroad, from distant unknown places. The other is feared because there is no possibility of knowing their way of thinking or their intentions. The corrupted Deep Ones of Innsmouth and their miscegenation with human beings are no more than a metaphor of interracial relations. Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep and the rest of the god-like aliens are the supreme evil coming from the outside, with the devastating capacity of destroying the world and civilization. Žižek's Real for Lovecraft is composed by a vast group of social and political factors that he is unable to understand, and he symbolizes and defines them with the shape of the monstrosities he creates.

In a Marxist framework, the Real here corresponds with a representation of the ideological world of Lovecraft. The Real is the distorted, reverted result of filtering reality through ideology. It is impossible to get anything positive from this point of view since this ideology does not lead us to a utopian world where everything is much better than in reality. Ideology here gives us access to total dystopia. There is no relief from reality into the Real. The Real is the future according to this reading, and this future looks horrid. But if we consider Žižek's concept of ideology, everything seems to be rather different. If ideology is a way of hide the Real and constructing our social reality, then the inclusion of alien deities and creatures is not even the Real itself, but ideology at its purest essence. Lovecraft's Mythos are no more than literary representations of his own ideology, and the Real does not show up at all, since there is no way human beings can apprehend it.

A second interpretation of Lovecraft's work develops as follow: what Lovecraft is really trying to do in his narrative is to create his own utopian (not dystopian) universe. The world of Mythos, creatures, alien entities and monsters is a better world for Lovecraft, his own utopia where he can escape from reality. Reality is hostile, the United States are under the siege of immigration which has spoilt the glorious past of Anglo-Saxon New England. But the imaginary world he recreates is a place where everything has its own place, where remote past is a glorious era for some races (such as the Old Ones).

It is significant to remark the role of science according to the two different readings. Considering that many of the discoveries made by the main characters in Lovecraft's tales are the result of scientific research, experimentations, explorations, etc, it makes sense to think that science is a powerful key for opening doors to Lovecraft's Mythos. But the point is: is science positive or negative for the writer? This view obviously changes depending on the approach. On the one hand, science has clear negative connotations in the first reading. If it gives access to dystopia, to a world which is a horrid metaphor of reality, science is not something useful or reporting benefits to mankind. What is more, the whole process can be considered as an expanded metaphor of the implications of science in the migrant movements which corrupt Lovecraft's beloved New England. During his life, Lovecraft witnessed the fast development of aviation, and the first commercial flights between Europe and America. Apart from that, he also lives the strongest movements of population from Europe to America via ocean liners from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Without progress and science, that would not be possible. Science favors people circulation around the world, and that is a tragedy for Lovecraft.

On the other hand, if we consider the utopian approach to the Mythos, science is undoubtedly something positive, a door to a better world. It is a door to the past, to an

idealized world which serves as shelter and paradise, a desirable Real which contrasts with reality.

When considering Lovecraft's personal opinions on science, it is not difficult to imagine his thoughts. In his introduction to the *Collected Essays Volume 3: Science*, S.T. Joshi depicts a young Lovecraft interested in Chemistry, Astronomy and Meteorology. According to him,

Lovecraft's devotion to science is exhibited more poignantly and profoundly in his weird fiction, and perhaps also in his general philosophy, than in his actual writings on science. His tales adhere rigorously to the scientific knowledge of their day, in some cases expanding upon it in a spirit of imaginative liberation. (11)

Lovecraft himself condemns pseudosciences such as Astrology, when saying that "it is an unfortunate fact that every man who seeks to disseminate knowledge must contend not only against ignorance itself, but against false instruction as well" ("Science vs. Charlatanry" 261). At the same time, he declares himself as a knowledge disseminator, as many of his own characters are.<sup>15</sup> In one of his letters, he makes a self-portrait as follows:

I should describe mine own nature as tripartite, my interests consisting of three parallel and dissociated groups – (a) Love of the strange and fantastic. (b) Love of the abstract truth and of scientific logick. (c) Love of the ancient and the permanent. Sundry combinations of these three strains will probably account for all my odd tastes and eccentricities. (*Kleiner* 184)

S.T. Joshi notices that these three aspects shape Lovecraft's narrative and his relationship with science and horror:

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<sup>15</sup> Something he was indeed. The whole third volume of his *Collected Essays*, edited by Joshi, is devoted to Lovecraft's texts on Astronomy. All these texts were published in different magazines and periodicals during his life.

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Several things now become clear, chiefly the fact that Lovecraft was already combining his “love of the strange and the fantastic” with his burgeoning interest in science: it was exactly because the world revealed by science was, potentially, a world of mystery and even terror that he became enraptured with the sciences. Science was, certainly, a way of penetrating those mysteries, but there would always be further mysteries to be explored, and perhaps many that could never be fully explicated. (“Time, Space” 173)

So the usefulness of science for Lovecraft, according to Joshi, is that it gives access to knowledge, but not to particular knowledge. It gives access to a mysterious world, one of the three main attractions for the writer. Lovecraft is fascinated with science because it opens the windows of his imagination and gives him paths to follow in order to explore and describe his Mythos.

When comparing this view of science with the previous overview on ideology, there is an interesting point of contrast when revisiting the whole topic under the glass of Žižek. If, according to the Marxist thinker, ideology is the way to escape from the horrid Real, can it be assumed that Lovecraft’s Real corresponds with reality, whereas his reality is what Žižek calls the Real? Lovecraft cannot cope with the world surrounding him, it is like the “traumatic kernel” referred by Žižek. In his process of dealing with it, Lovecraft creates his own world, his own parallel reality, which is presented in the form of alien civilizations and universes.

If ideology is positive for Žižek because it allows human beings to escape and hide the Real, it is possible to think that Lovecraft’s fantastic universes are his own reality, and literature is the way by which ideology makes him escape from his own Real, the world during the first four decades of the 20th century. What is more, science is the literary tool his characters use for getting access to this reality, and then getting away from the Real (again, our reality).

To sum up, two main interpretations of Lovecraft's narrative have been made. In the first one, the Real equals the ideologically distorted view of reality depicted by Lovecraft in his tales, with the shape of alien civilizations and conflicts. The second one reverts the process, and what we know as reality is transformed into Lovecraft's Real, and viceversa. Lovecraft feels comfortable in our scary kernel, our Real, which is reality for himself.

In this intersection, it is not an easy task to opt for one of the two choices. The first reading is highly plausible, but there is a discordant point, which is the role of science. As has been said above, Lovecraft considered science as something mainly positive. In this reading, since science is the door driving to the horrific Real, the connotations do not match with Lovecraft's personal opinions on science. However, to compare the Real with Lovecraft's ideological view of reality seems acceptable.

The second reading is much more risky. The possibility of considering Lovecraft's Real as our own reality and vice versa implies to give Lovecraft access to a category which, according to Žižek, is impossible to reach. It is possible to think that Lovecraft did not understand why society was collapsing around him, it is possible to think that he was not able to get adapted to his own time, and that he was the outsider depicted by himself in the homonymous tale, but this reading detaches the Žižekian Real from all the misterious and metaphysical aura it has. Apart from that, this reading means also that his writings depict Lovecraft's own desirable reality. This reality means that human beings are no more than a little stain in the middle of the universe, which coincides with the philosophical views of the writer.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lovecraft's idea of the insignificance of human beings in the vastness of the universe is connected with Kant and Burke's concept of *the sublime*. The dynamically sublime proposed by Kant comes from the observation of the overwhelming forces of nature: "clouds piled up in the sky; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation" (125). They all produce a mixture of

My proposal follows the first conception of the Real. Lovecraft's Real has to do with the fears and anxieties that worried him (racial issues, decadence of society, etc.), and this Real underlies his stories. The Lovecraftian monster is no more than an attempt to apprehend and symbolize what the writer was unable to understand. A process of careful reading and analysis of his stories will expose that his fiction hides Lovecraft's ideology. To confront the role of science, I back the theory that the writer considered science and knowledge as the only ways to reveal the secrets of the universe. However the immense scientific discoveries that he witnessed during his life (that I will explain in chapter 4), presented a scary scientific landscape, that probably Lovecraft was unable to grasp as a whole. Science brings benefits, but it also produces destabilization in our lives. I will propose two different approaches to science in the following chapter, from the perspective of science considered as pure knowledge, or the applied sciences that result in technological artifacts and devices.

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fear and pleasure, and "the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security" (125). Lovecraft surpasses the idea of the sublime, since there is only fear derived from the contemplation of our insignificance in the cosmos. In this sense, the writer is much closer to the sublime proposed by Edmund Burke: "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 conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*", says the philosopher in *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke's conception of the sublime is then much more accurate for the Gothic tradition than that of Kant. For more on the relation between the Gothic tradition and the sublime, see Botting (38-43).



## **CHAPTER 4: LOVECRAFT AND HIS SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT**

### 4.1.- Science in the years of Lovecraft

The importance of science in the whole literary creation of H.P. Lovecraft is remarkable. As I will prove in the analysis of categories that I propose in the fourth chapter, the majority of the Lovecraftian characters are scientists or intellectuals, and the most common plot deals with the discovery of a scientific or archaeological artifact, an ancient object, or with the revelation of a hidden truth. Tales such as “The Dreams in the Witch-House”, *At the Mountains of Madness* or “The Whisperer in Darkness” are just some archetypical examples in which science plays an outstanding role in the narration. “The Dreams in the Witch-House” puts forward the idea of visiting different dimensions, a theory grounded in advanced mathematical principles of non-Euclidean space and the geometry and curvature of space. *At the Mountains of Madness*, which will be analyzed in the fourth chapter, is grounded in archeology and geology. “The

Whisperer in Darkness", on the other side, is much more focused on alien extremely advanced technology.

Despite the fact that many of his characters have a scientific or academic background, and that the search for knowledge and truth motivates many of them, this is just the tip of the iceberg of an important source of inspiration for the writer, both in his life and texts.

Lovecraft himself, in a letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, defined his own interests as follow:

I should describe mine own nature as tripartite, my interests consisting of three parallel and dissociated groups—(a) Love of the strange and fantastic. (b) Love of the abstract truth and of scientific logick. (c) Love of the ancient and the permanent. Sundry combinations of these three strains will probably account for all my odd tastes and eccentricities (*Kleiner* 184)

Science and knowledge were, then, the second of the three chief interests in the writer's life. Lovecraft, who never attended university because of poor health, was however an avid reader. Joshi asserts that his personal library was composed of 1500 volumes or so (*Library* 8), covering different subjects, from classic literature to sciences and history. Apart from that, he frequently used Providence's public libraries.

From the scientific interests Lovecraft had, Joshi remarks that the writer put special efforts in learning astronomy, chemistry, biology, and meteorology, mainly during his youth. Astronomy was, however, his main field of interest, as the several studies in the field written by him prove. In fact, the vast majority of the third volume of *Collected Essays* by Lovecraft, edited by Joshi and containing texts on science, is devoted to astronomy articles published in several newspapers and magazines during Lovecraft's lifetime, and the writer himself admits his taste for this discipline:

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I made of astronomy my principal scientific study, obtaining larger and larger telescopes, collecting astronomical books to the number of 61, and writing copiously on the subject in the form of special and monthly articles in the local daily press. (“Confession of Unfaith” 147)

According to Joshi (*I Am Providence* 96-98), scientific curiosity was so important for Lovecraft that it eventually refrained him from committing suicide when he was still a teenager, after the passing of his beloved grandfather Whipple Phillips and the disappearance of the only pet he ever had, his cat Nigger-Man.<sup>1</sup>

The historical period that Lovecraft lived is particularly relevant in terms of scientific discoveries. Albert Einstein conveyed his theory of relativity in 1905, and it particularly affected some of Lovecraft’s philosophical views related to the position of mankind in the entire cosmic system. Traces of the influence of Einstein’s theory can be found in the already mentioned “The Dreams in the Witch House”, where Plank, Willem de Sitter and A.S. Eddington’s ideas of non-Euclidean spaces are present, as well as in the tale “The Shunned House”, where Lovecraft reformulates the myth of the vampire.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Einstein’s theories provided Lovecraft with a tool to defend his atheism. According to Tyson, Einstein’s studies about the relativity of time and space promptly spread among religious people, since they believed that Einstein was proving the existence of a “more basic reality of the intangible” to be found “behind the veil of the material world” (168). Lovecraft dismissed this idea, as he explained in a letter to Belknap Long:

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<sup>1</sup> As regarding the name of the cat, Joshi mentions that “it need hardly be pointed out, [its name] was not regarded as offensive at the time –or at least not as offensive as it would be now” (*I Am Providence* 97). Tyson supports the same idea (58). Lovecraft named Nigger-Man the cat of the protagonist in “The Rats in the Walls”.

<sup>2</sup> However, as Joshi puts forward, “Einstein runs through Lovecraft’s fiction like an elusive thread” (“Topical References” 173).

What these feeble-minded theists are howling about as a sudden victory for themselves is *really the materialist's trump card* [...] the *materialist*, now using that title in a historical sense only, emerges strengthened in his position as *an atheistical (or agnostic) monist*.  
(*Visible World* 215)

But in order to find the most remarkable scientist that influenced Lovecraft and his time, we must go back in time to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Charles Darwin publishes his two major studies, *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). It is important to notice that there are no clear evidences proving that Lovecraft read Darwin. Joshi states that

his books are not found in Lovecraft's library (but then, neither are Elliot's, Haeckel's, or Nietzsche's), and although Lovecraft does mention *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* in the *In Defence of Dagon* essays, I cannot sense any genuine familiarity with these works. In all likelihood, he absorbed evolution chiefly from Thomas Henry Huxley and Haeckel. (*I Am Providence* 322)

So it is possible that Lovecraft was not familiarized with the primary sources written by Darwin. The only reference in the writer's library concerning Darwin is the volume *Evolution in Modern Thought*, which contains several texts on Darwinism by Haeckel, Arthur Thomson, Lloyd Morgan and others.<sup>3</sup> However, the relevance of this fact for my study is high, since it is possible that Lovecraft learnt Darwin through the glass of another scholar or scientist, who probably belonged to a different trend of thought. The reference made in the *In Defence of Dagon* essays to the Darwinian volumes, mentioned by Joshi in the previous quote, is the following:

The exact details of organic progress as described in "The Origin of Species" and "The Descent of Man" may admit a correction or amplification; but to attack the essential principle, which alone is of universal importance, is pathetic. (52)

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of the volume, see the item #303 in Joshi's *Library* (60).

It might be possible that Lovecraft did not read the original Darwinian sources, as Joshi mentions. Nonetheless it seems clear that the writer was definitely aware of the implications of Darwinism and knew its main principles and consequences, and there is a clear influence of the Darwinian theses in some of his texts, as I will analyze in the forthcoming chapters of this study.

Before moving into the ideas suggested by Haeckel and other contemporary thinkers, it is necessary to trace the historical background of the scientists under analysis. The evolutionist ideas of Darwin produced a shock in the scientific community of his time, but it is important to describe the main thinking movements at the moment Darwin propounded his theses to fully understand this shock.

In 1846, several years before the publishing of *On the Origin of Species*, the Swiss paleontologist Louis Agassiz arrived to the United States, thanks to the patronage of the Prussian king, who awarded him a grant due to the mediation of the naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. Agassiz, who was Humboldt's protégé, secured several lectures in Boston, where he impressed the president of Harvard, who offered him a position at the university after the grant was over. Agassiz accepted the offer and remained in the United States until his death in 1873, just after the publishing of *The Descent of Man*, and seven years before H.P. Lovecraft was born.

At that time there were two main theories of racial difference. On the one hand, polygenists –the movement Agassiz backed– believed that races were different from the very beginning, having different features and attributes. That is, the races were created by God as completely separated groups, and they never shared communal ancestry. On the other hand, monogenists thought that all races had the same common origin, but there were differences due to the degeneration suffered throughout time. According to

Menand, the adscription of Agassiz to the polygenist ideas was caused by the influence of Samuel George Morton, American anthropologist who became friends with the Swiss paleontologist. The turn towards this movement was evident, Menand asserts, when comparing the different talks Agassiz delivered:

Agassiz delivered his inaugural Lowell lecture later that month, and in it he announced, for the first time in his career, that although Negroes and whites belonged to the same species, they had had separate origins. Ten months later he went to South Carolina and repeated the lecture to the Charleston Literary Club at a meeting attended by local scientists and theologians eager to hear Agassiz on just this point. Pressed by his audience, Agassiz now stated that Negroes were, physiologically and anatomically, a distinct species. (106)

According to the ideas of Agassiz, the differences between black and white people were evident, and based in the skull studies made by Morton, the Swiss scholar determined that the former were in the lowest stage of human development.<sup>4</sup> He also thought that it was impossible to have mutations from a lower to a higher state of evolution, and the action of God had a lot to do with the transit from marine creatures to human beings. Apart from that, the origins of the different races –that he considered already as different species– were in their own geographical areas. These conclusions were used by several polygenist authors who claimed interbreeding between different races was against nature, and claims were made to the government to ban interracial intercourse.

The first contact Agassiz had with the black community was in Philadelphia, when he paid the first visit to Morton. The black waiters of the hotel he was hosted in served dinner, and he was shocked by their physical appearance. The following passage, taken from a letter he wrote to his mother in 1846, narrates de first impressions he got from this encounter:

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to remark that, according to Menand (102), the skull analysis carried out by Morton was totally biased. The incidence of Peruan and Hindu skulls in his analysis, for instance, were so dissimilar that it probably affected the statistical results of the whole study.

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As much as I try to feel pity at the sight of this degraded and degenerate race, as much as their fate fills me with compassion in thinking of them as really men, it is impossible for me to repress the feeling that they are not of the same blood as us. Seeing their black faces with their fat lips and their grimacing teeth, the wool on their heads, their bent knees, their elongated hands, their large curved fingernails, and above all the livid color of their palms, I could not turn my eyes from their face in order to tell them to keep their distance, and when they advanced that hideous hand toward my plate to serve me, I wished I could leave in order to eat a piece of bread apart rather than dine with such service. What unhappiness for the white race to have tied its existence so closely to that of the Negroes in certain countries! God protect us from such contact! (Menand 105)

This passage, describing a real experience “suffered” by Agassiz, is surprisingly similar to some moments in the narrative of H.P. Lovecraft, those in which the writer describes the monstrous humanoid creatures that he imagined. The resemblances with the description of the Deep Ones that I will analyze in the chapter devoted to “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, for instance, are astonishing both in the language and the general tone. The naturalist’s portrait of the African-Americans has, to a certain extent, the qualities of the “cubist” linguistic gap proposed by Harman and that I adopted for my analysis in the previous chapter, i.e., the accumulation of adjectives in order to describe the qualities of the object. The overall description, extremely physical, has also some references to the decadence and degeneration that the waiters supposedly emanated. It is as if Agassiz was contemplating one of Lovecraft’s creations more than a human being.

It is important to bear in mind that Agassiz, Morton and some other prominent scientists were cultural icons of their age. They were immensely popular, and their opinions and ideas had a deep social impact. The description of Agassiz given by Desmond and Moore is that of a charming person, “erudite and ebullient”, who made “Boston society stood in awe of him” (230). The figure of the scientist gentleman was a fashionable one,

and the theories expressed by these celebrities were widely spread in the media and generated public opinion, reaching the vast majority of the Victorian bourgeoisie.

Some years before Agassiz was settled in the United States, Charles Darwin had arrived back to England from his five-year-long adventure with the *HMS Beagle*. Darwin joined the scientific expedition in 1831 thanks to John Stevens Henslow, his Botany teacher in Cambridge, who was originally invited by the *Beagle's* captain. Henslow rejected the offer and proposed Darwin as a candidate, being his main tasks on board to collect different samples from the animal and vegetal realms in the different places they visited. Darwin collected, indeed, many samples during the five years, but probably the most notorious events that he lived were not related with his original task. The *Beagle* was sending back to the Patagonia three natives from Tierra del Fuego, who had been living in the United Kingdom for a period of time, in an attempt to educate them under a western perspective. Once the vessel arrived at Tierra del Fuego, Darwin had the opportunity to observe the Fuegians and their primitive society. Besides that encounter, the trip of the *Beagle* exposed the English naturalist to other indigenous individuals from the Pacific Ocean. In the diary he kept from the journey, edited as *Voyage of the Beagle*, he described his first encounter with the Fuegians as follows:

It was without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I had ever beheld. I could not have believed how wide was the difference, between savage and civilized man. It is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal, in as much as in man there is a greater power of improvement. The chief spokesman was old, and appeared to be the head of the family; the three others were powerful young men, about 6 feet high. The women and children had been sent away. These Fuegians are a very different race from the stunted miserable wretches further to the westward. They are much superior in person, and seem closely allied to the famous Patagonians of the Strait of Magellan. [...] Their skin is of a dirty coppery red colour.

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The old man had a fillet of white feathers tied round his head, which partly confined his black, coarse, and entangled hair. His face was crossed by two broad transverse bars; one painted bright red reached from ear to ear, and included the upper lip; the other, white like chalk, extended parallel and above the first, so that even his eyelids were thus coloured.

(172)

The differences between the impressions both Agassiz and Darwin had of the black waiters and the Fuegians is remarkable. Darwin's portrait seems much more neutral, objective, scientific and curious than the almost gothic one given by the Swiss scholar. In spite of being younger and more inexperienced, the English naturalist demonstrated a much more impartial view of the native than that given by Agassiz with regard to his encounter with the black people.<sup>5</sup> However it is important to highlight that Darwin was very impressed by the Fuegian cruel and rough habits, and he would later embrace the idea proposed by Alfred Russel Wallace, who predicted the extinction of natives due to processes of natural selection in his own theoretical proposal, which appeared parallel to that of Darwin.

The voyage of the *Beagle* gave Darwin food for thought and raised his awareness on the differences between human races, settling the grounds for his forthcoming books *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*.

*On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859. It is an atypical scientific book, since overall it is accessible for the general audience: in spite of not being a professional narrator, Darwin tried to do his best polishing the style, giving detailed explanations of all the facts and inferences he carried out in the volume. It is a book which targeted a very broad audience, both scientists and general readers.

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<sup>5</sup> It is also true that the context under which the two texts were written is completely different. Agassiz was writing a private letter to a close relative, whereas Darwin was writing a scientific report. The style of both reports cannot be compared on an equal footing, but nonetheless the description made by Agassiz is very revealing of the ideas that some people shared about black people.

There are several landmarks in the text as regarding the scientific shock it produced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century society. Darwin, who scarcely mentioned mankind in this work, used a lot of information and samples that he collected from the *Beagle* expedition. From his observation and experimentation he was able to infer the principle of the natural selection or survival of the fittest, i.e. “preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations” (81).<sup>6</sup> The most capable individuals of a species will normally survive and reproduce, passing their genetic codes<sup>7</sup> to the following generation. The less capable individuals will perish and will not be able to reproduce. This principle of natural selection is closely linked to that of sexual selection, also advanced by Darwin. According to him, sexual selection is based “on a struggle between the males for possession of the females” (86).

As I have already mentioned, *On the Origin of Species* does not deal with mankind. Most of the examples given in the text belong to the realm of plants and non rational animals. It will not be until *The Descent of Man* when Darwin surveys the origins of humanity in depth. The reasons for this absence in *Origin* have been discussed by Moore and Desmond in their introduction to *The Descent of Man*, and one of the most probable reasons is that Darwin needed some more time to marshal more evidence to support his evolutionist theories. However *On the Origin of Species* raised a deep social, religious and scientific debate worldwide. Even without implicitly talking about the origins of mankind, the volume denied the divine intervention in the creation of humanity, considering it as an act of natural selection. Thus, there was definitely an

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<sup>6</sup> The expression survival of the fittest was not coined by Darwin. It was Herbert Spencer the one who used it for the first time in *Principles of Biology* (1864). Darwin first use of this expression was in the fifth edition of *On the Origin of Species*, five years later.

<sup>7</sup> Notice that the use I am doing of the term “genetic codes” is highly anachronical. Genetics was not a discipline until the 20th century, when the famous studies of Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) were rediscovered by Carl Correns, Hugo de Vries and Erich von Tschermak. Mendel was completely unknown during his lifetime. The notion of “gene” is also modern, but Darwin talked about “gemmules”, some kind of particles of inheritance carried in the bloodstream.

important metaphysical fracture caused by Darwin's hypotheses. One of the key issues of the discussion around the scientific origins of mankind was, then, its strong religious component. The polygenists, supported by the Southern slavery states, were against the ideas hinted by Darwin in his book. The immobility of species promoted by Agassiz and the polygenists was irreconcilable with the natural selection and evolutionist theses of the British scientist. Black people were created by God inferior to the Caucasians, and it was not possible to admit any kind of evolution from a common root that could lead to equalitarian treatment of the different races. In the years previous to the American Civil War, slavery was a crucial issue in the United States, and the conclusions drawn from the Darwinian text favored the abolitionist side of the American society, giving them scientific background for their arguments. As Menand remarks

The purpose of *On the Origin of Species* was not to introduce the concept of evolution; it was to debunk the concept of supernatural intelligence –the idea that the universe is the result of an idea. (121)

God does not use natural selection in order to modify living creatures, as some religious scholars argued. Darwin postulated that natural selection was blind and random, conditioned by environmental factors, “organisms don't struggle because they must evolve; they evolve because they must struggle” (Menand 123).

It is at this point when the figure of Asa Gray acquires relevance. Gray was an American botanist and Darwin's correspondent. He shared Darwin's evolutionist views, and was the American Darwinist ambassador. He publicly debated with Agassiz in 1859, refuting his polygenists ideas about the independent origin of races, by using his botanical studies on the worldwide spreading of plants in different continents. He was, then, the most notorious person introducing Darwinism in the U.S.

Gray's counterpart in the United Kingdom was Thomas Henry Huxley, known as Darwin's bulldog. Huxley, specialist in comparative anatomy, was a fervent defender of Darwin's ideas, as he demonstrated in an Oxford debate with Bishop Wilberforce shortly after the publication of *On the Origin of the Species*. In that debate, Huxley defended the ideas proposed by the naturalist, and tried to dismantle Wilberforce's arguments against evolution. These scientific debates, both in Europe and in the United States, were extremely useful to increase the social notoriety the scientist gentlemen had, since the results were then reported in the newspapers.

After a period in which the contents and implications of *On the Origin of Species* were discussed all around the globe, Darwin published his second revolutionary study, *The Descent of Man*, in 1871. The impact that the book had in the scientific community was softened by the fact that many colleagues were already aware of the lines of investigation Darwin was developing, due to their conversations and discussions about them. *The Descent of Man* was, on the contrary, a very controversial text in social and political terms. Darwin applied his evolutionary theories to human beings, and he also developed his sexual selection theory in this study. Darwin's introduction to the book specifies, without hesitation, the main concerns and goals he had:

The sole object of this work is to consider, firstly, whether man, like every other species, is descended from some pre-existing form; secondly, the manner of his development; and thirdly, the value of the differences between the so-called races of man. (19)

A book that explicitly analyzed the core of human sexual relations (conceding the woman the role of choosing her companion), and its importance in the development of races and species, was particularly delicate for the social standards of the Victorian era.

From the point of view of my analysis, the most important movement that emerged after the publishing of *The Descent of Man* is the so-called social Darwinism. The term appeared shortly after Darwin's death, and it was used to bring together the different sociological theories which supported that the evolutionist principles of natural selection could be applied to society and economy. Before the emergence of the term "social Darwinism", all the social theories which applied natural selection principles to economy or politics were regarded plainly as Darwinist. But as Moore and Desmond remark, there is a very important difference between the two disciplines, since "Darwinism was science, social Darwinism ideology" (lv).

In order to understand the social implications derived from Darwinism, it is necessary to remark the influence that the proposals made by Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) had on Charles Darwin himself, and how they were presented in *The Descent of Man*. Malthus, a British cleric and scholar, suggested in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* that population was affected by different factors:

- a) Population is limited by the primary resources available.
- b) The more primary resources are available, the more population grows, unless it is restrained by external forces that increase the death rate, and that he called *positive checks* (wars, catastrophes, etc.), or internal measures that decrease the birth rate, that is, *preventive checks* (marital control, celibacy).

The concept of preventive checks of population, then, would straightly drive to birth control. According to Malthus, population would grow out of control mainly because the poor, possessed by lust and irresponsibility, would not care about having many children without being able to maintain them. That would lead to the impoverishment of society and mankind.

The second important influence Darwin had in this matter was his cousin Francis Galton. Between the publishing of *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, Galton wrote *Hereditary Genius* (1869). Convinced that abilities were hereditary, he proposed that it was possible to improve the human race by means of social engineering, selecting the most capable individuals for breeding and avoiding the overbreeding of the less fit members of society. He did not specify the particular methods that had to be adopted, but he was convinced it was the way to improve humanity.

A third scholar that should be considered is Herbert Spencer. However the limits of the reciprocal influence among Spencer and Darwin are not clear. According to Bynum, "Darwin did not use the philosopher Herbert Spencer's phrase 'survival of the fittest' in the first edition of *Origin*, although he later rather reluctantly adopted it" (xxxiv). Spencer, in fact, is regarded by Bynum as the main precursor of social Darwinism, and puts forward that the two scientists worked separately on the same evolution issues:

Working independently of Darwin, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) used evolution as the basis of a whole series of works in philosophy, psychology, sociology and anthropology. What became known as 'social Darwinism' was really 'social Spencerianism', since it was Spencer who pushed his doctrine of survival of the fittest to its limits, in social and national life. (xlvi)

It is obvious that the ideas proposed by Malthus and, to a lesser degree, Galton were adapted by Darwin to his natural selection theory, and can be traced in *The Descent of Man*. The importance the encounter Darwin had with the savages he met in Tierra del Fuego is essential in the analysis of this volume. The primitive state of the savages helped the naturalist to reflect upon the processes of natural selection applied to modern society. For Darwin, in modern society natural selection was not as strong as it was in our previous evolutionary steps:

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Thus the weak members of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man. It is surprising how soon a want of care, or care wrongly directed, leads to the degeneration of a domestic race; but excepting in the case of man himself, hardly any one is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.

The aid which we feel impelled to give to the helpless is mainly an incidental result of the instinct of sympathy, which was originally acquired as part of the social instincts, but subsequently rendered, in the manner previously indicated, more tender and more widely diffused. Nor could we check our sympathy, if so urged by hard reason, without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature. The surgeon may harden himself whilst performing an operation, for he knows that he is acting for the good of his patient; but if we were intentionally to neglect the weak and helpless, it could only be for a contingent benefit, with a certain and great present evil. Hence we must bear without complaining the undoubtedly bad effects of the weak surviving and propagating their kind; but there appears to be at least one check in steady action, namely the weaker and inferior members of society not marrying so freely as the sound; and this check might be indefinitely increased, though this is more to be hoped for than expected, by the weak in body or mind refraining from marriage. (159-60)

According to these ideas, it might be said that Darwin himself was already sharing some of the first social Darwinist principles.<sup>8</sup> It is at this point when moral and ethics play a main role moving him away from the core of social Darwinism, since Darwin thought that our own positive feelings toward other individuals lead us to permit the survival of the less capable members of society. By allowing them to die, we would degrade our human race as a whole. This empathetic instinct towards the other is the product of natural selection but, paradoxically, it can be a problem for the evolution of the species.

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<sup>8</sup> Was Darwin a social Darwinist? The debate is still open today and there are supporters on the two sides. Answering this question is totally out of the scope of my study, but it is important to overview the different ideas he and his scientific circle were discussing in order to understand the different lines of thought that reached Lovecraft's times.

Darwin shared Malthus opinion about the quick spread of the lower classes due to their excessive breeding, and considered the possible consequences of this principle, i.e. that the human race would suffer a process of degradation due to the spread of the less qualified. He did not supply any kind of solution to the problem, limiting his notes to the scientific descriptive analysis of it. Bynum considers that Darwin tried to keep him apart from social Darwinism:

Darwin himself was never very political, and once cautioned himself against writing 'higher' and 'lower' when discussing plants and animals. He always insisted that natural selection did not produce a perfect world, merely a world in which those organisms which survived were better adapted than those which had perished. (xlvi)

There were many groups which tried to adapt the Darwin's theses to their interests and principles. As Diane Paul points out in her analysis, social Darwinists found a biological and scientific justification for economical laissez-faire, war and colonialism. But it was also useful for justifying the ideas of socialists, anarchists, peace biologists, anti-militarists and feminists. The impact that the theories of the British naturalist had (and still have) in different disciplines is immense. And according to Paul, that is the reason why social Darwinism is very difficult to define and summarize.

There is a discipline, closely linked to social Darwinism, which is particularly important for my analysis because it was in the public domain during Lovecraft's life: eugenics. The word was coined by Galton in 1883, and he used it to name the social engineering idea of stimulating reproduction of the most valuable elements and discourage that of the less worthy. But whereas Galton preferred the use of positive eugenics, i.e. to enlarge talented families, the problem in Europe and North America was to reduce reproduction among the less physically, morally and mentally qualified individuals, that is, negative eugenics.

The American eugenics movement resulted to be particularly strong. Many states forbade marriage to those who had mental insanity, sterilization laws were passed in several states during the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 was based in the supposed racial superiority of white Americans over immigrants. Apart from restricting the amount of immigrants that could enter into the United States, the Immigration Act also reinforced laws against interracial breeding. According to Black, there were also some minor isolated cases of euthanasia programs in asylums and mental institutions (2).

The most dreadful and radical eugenic practice was developed, as is well known, in Germany during the Nazi regime. Hitler took eugenics as far as he could, resulting not only in the murdering of mentally and physically disabled, but in the extermination of Jews, gypsies and any kind of political dissidents.

The figure of Ernst Haeckel is especially relevant in the formation of the German eugenics movement. Biologist and naturalist, Haeckel was “Darwin’s great champion of evolutionary theory in Germany” (Richards 500).<sup>9</sup> He proposed that each embryo goes through different stages in which it moves from the most basic forms up to the advanced forms of the species it belongs to. So a mammal embryo would undergo a fish-like stage, bird-like stage, etc.<sup>10</sup> Apart from that, Haeckel presented a tree diagram of the different human races, in which verticality dictated how advanced was each one. The upper branches were occupied by the Caucasian, and curiously enough, as Richards claims, “Jews were placed by Haeckel on the same vertical level of advancement as the

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<sup>9</sup> Haeckel was also the author of a series of magnificent lithographic plates in which he represented specimens from the animal and vegetal realms, published between 1899 and 1904 under the generic title *Art Forms in Nature*. I will come back to this particular volume in detail in the chapter devoted to *At the Mountains of Madness*, since in spite of not being a book remarkable in terms of scientific proposals, it was probably a major artistic source of inspiration for Lovecraft.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed analysis of the different stages of the embryo that the German scientist proposed, see Haeckel (*Riddle* 43-57).

Germans" (245, 503). The lower branches belonged to the black races from all around the world.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.2.- Lovecraft's assimilation of scientific theories

I have just put forward a brief summary of the scientific background Lovecraft was immersed in. Not all the names referred were contemporary to the writer, but they shape the historical scientific framework H.P. Lovecraft talked about and was familiarized with.

The influence that some of the authors mentioned above had in Lovecraft's philosophical and ideological development can be traced in some of his non-fiction writings. In April 1915, he wrote an article for the *Conservative*, arguing that the Great War was terrible since it confronted people from the same race, which was, at the same time, the most evolved:

That the maintenance of civilization rests today with that magnificent Teutonic stock which is represented alike by the two hotly contending rivals, England and Germany, as well as by Austria, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Holland, and Belgium, is as undeniably true as it is vigorously disputed. The Teuton is the summit of evolution. That we may consider intelligently his place in history we must cast aside the popular nomenclature which would confuse the names "Teuton" and "German", and view him not nationally but racially, identifying his fundamental stock with the tall, pale, blue-eyed, yellow-haired, long-headed "Xanthochroi" as described by Huxley. ("Crime" 13)

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<sup>11</sup> The place in which Lovecraft situated black people in the evolution scale can be inferred from this quite insulting poem he wrote in 1912, entitled "On the Creation of Niggers":

When, long ago, the gods created Earth  
In Jove's fair image Man was shaped at birth.  
The beasts for lesser parts were next designed;  
Yet were they too remote from humankind.  
To fill the gap, and join the rest to Man,  
Th'Olympian host conceiv'd a clever plan.  
A beast they wrought, in semi-human figure,  
Filled it with vice, and called the thing a Nigger.

Apart from the direct reference to Thomas Huxley, the identification of a superior race among mankind clearly follows the ideas of various degrees of evolution between the different human races, something which was present in the stem-tree of humanity presented by Ernst Haeckel. In that tree the upper branches of the Indo-German side belonged to the German, Romanic, Slavs and Aryan. At the same level, but in the Semitic side, Haeckel presented the Berber, Jews and Abyssinians. Considering his ideas as regarding other races different from the Aryan, it seems that Lovecraft definitely neglected the latter side of the tree. There are some other clear examples in which Lovecraft conveys his thoughts on Teuton superiority, based on the polygenist and eugenistic theories of race separation:

I can sympathize with Morton in many ways. I am not an orthodox disciple of religion, but I deem it dangerous to tamper with any system so manifestly beneficial to morality. Whatever may be the faults of the church, it has never yet been surpassed or nearly equalled as an agent for the promotion of virtue. And the same thing applies to our present social system. It has its defects, but is evidently a natural growth, and better fitted to preserve an approximate civilization than any Utopian scheme conjured up over night by some artificially thinking radical. As to races, I deem it most proper to recognise the divisions into which nature has grouped mankind. Science shows us the infinite superiority of the Teutonic Aryan over all others, and it therefore becomes us to see that his ascendancy shall remain undisputed. Any racial mixture can but lower the result. The Teutonic race, whether in Scandinavia, other parts of the continent, England, or America, the cream of humanity, and its wanton and deliberate adulteration with baser material is even more repulsive to consider than the elaborately staged racial suicide now being conducted, wherein Germanic and Britanic Teutons are striving to annihilate each other instead of uniting against the Mongol-tainted Slav or menacing Oriental.<sup>12</sup> (*SL I 17*)

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<sup>12</sup> The Morton Lovecraft is making reference at the beginning of the paragraph is not George Morton, the American polygenist, but James F. Morton, Lovecraft's friend and correspondent.

Lovecraft translated this highly elitist view of humanity to his political thought. For him, democracy was a failed system since the average citizen is unable to understand the scope and extent of the different policies or operations the government carries out (*SL III* 346). The solution he proposed was to restrict the right to vote just to the educated minority:

Today the "man in the street" casts his vote for things he actually knows nothing about. [...] Obviously government by the people is now a joke or a tragedy, although government for them remains as the most logical goal. [...] Laymen of slight education and low intelligence are wholly useless and potentially harmful as determiners of the national course, and even laymen of wide education and high intelligence can do no more than roughly (and often erroneously) judge the general executive caliber of certain administrators from watching their performances in a few fields which may happen to be familiar [...] Accordingly we must expect any adequate government to be of the sort now generally called "fascistic" –forming, as it were, an oligarchy of intelligence and education. Office-holding must be limited to men of high technical training, and the franchise which elects them must be granted only to those able to pass rigorous educational examinations and scientific intelligence tests" ("Some Repetitions" 93)

As has been mentioned above, Lovecraft seemed to neglect Haeckel's positioning of the Jews in the top branches of his tree. The writer's anti-Semitism is something reasserted in many of his texts and he still considers the Teuton as the superior race. He registers his impressions about the Jews since he was young:

I hardly wonder that my racial ideas seem bigoted to one born and reared in the vicinity of cosmopolitan New York, but you may better understand my repulsion to the Jew when I tell you that until I was fourteen years old I do not believe I ever spoke to one or saw one knowingly. My section of the city is what is known as the "East Side" (nothing like New York's "East Side"!!!) and it is separated from the rest of the town by the precipitous slope of College Hill, at the top of which is Brown University. In this whole locality, there are

#### Chapter 4: Lovecraft and his scientific context

scarcely two or three families who are not of original Yankee Rhode Island stock—the place is as solidly Anglo-American as it was 200 years ago. Over on the “West Side”, it is very cosmopolitan, but the East Side child might as well be in the heart of Old England so far as racial environment is concerned. Slater Avenue school was near my home, and the only non-Saxons were niggers whose parents work for our families or cart our ashes, and who consequently know their place. Imagine, then, my feeling on entering high-school and being confronted with the offscourings of Judea! True, some of the Jews were intelligent; in fact there were some very brilliant scholars among them; but how could a child used to other children like himself find anything in common with hook-nosed, swarthy, guttural-voiced aliens? Repulsion was instinctive—I never denied the mental capacity of the Jew; in fact I admire the race and its early history at a distance; but association with them was intolerable. Just as some otherwise normal men hate the sight or presence of a cat, so have I hated the presence of a Jew. Then, all apart from this instinctive feeling, I very soon formed a conviction that the Oriental mind is but ill adapted to mingle with the Aryan mind—that the glory of Israel is by itself. Oil and water are both desirable, but they will not mix. And the more I study the question, the more firmly am I convinced that the one supreme race is the Teuton. Observe the condition in the British Isles. The English are wholly Teutonic, and therefore dominant. The southern Scotch and eastern Irish are also of that blood—they certainly surpass their fellows to the north and west. The Welsh, who have no Teutonic blood, are of little account. Had it not been for the Teutonic infusion at the beginning of the Dark Ages, southern Europe would have been lost. Who were these early “French” kings and heroes that founded French civilisation? Teutons, to a man! It was the Teutonic might of Charles Martel that drove the Saracen Semite out of Gaul. Who were the Normans? Teutons of the North. It is pitiful to me to hear apostles of equity pipe out that other races can equal this foremost of all—this successor to the Roman race in power and virility.

*(Kleiner 27)*

Lovecraft supported racial segregation in order to preserve the cultural heritage of the Teutonic. After his stay in New York, where he unfruitfully tried to find a job as a writer, he began to straightly blame the Jews, considering them as the lobby that

decided the Aryan writers that had to be published and publicized (*SL IV* 230-31). From his perspective, Jewish publishers controlled the American cultural tendencies. As stated in the previously reproduced paragraph, he thought that the Jews were intelligent and with an admirable history, but the association with them was indefensible. In words of Sprague de Camp “foreigners were all right in their foreign lands and should be left alone to go their own exotic ways” (252). His clear anti-Semitic ideology led Lovecraft to write some “acutely embarrassing” (Joshi, *I Am Providence* 940) commentaries supporting Hitler's ideas of racial-cultural continuity (Lovecraft, *SL IV* 257).

For Lovecraft, one of the first consequences of the arrival of immigrants to the United States was their sexual activity. In words of Lovett-Graff:

Immigrants served as the perfect post-Darwinian symbol of the thin line dividing human being from animal. The fundamental menace for Lovecraft was the proof the immigrant provided of the uncontrollable animal sexuality needed to make natural selection operate. As lesser organisms on the eugenic chain of being, Lovecraft's immigrants were naturally more reproductive than their Nordic counterparts. And it is their rate of reproduction that stands as the central threat to the purity of America's racial stock. (184)

As far as Lovecraft considered immigrants less evolved than Aryans, the spreading of an inferior race was exactly the opposite to be expected from his eugenics perspective and something to worry about:

No settled & homogeneous nation ought (a) to admit enough of a decidedly alien race-stock to bring about an actual alteration in the dominant ethnic composition, or (b) tolerate the dilution of the culture-stream with emotional & intellectual elements alien to the original cultural impulse. Both of these perils lead to the most undesirable results –i.e., the metamorphosis of the population away from the original institutions, & the twisting of the institutions away from the original people... all these things being aspects of one underlying & disastrous condition –the destruction of cultural stability, & the creation of a

hopeless disparity between a social group & the institutions under which it lives. (*SI IV* 249)

Lovett-Graff points out that Lovecraft had a certain degree of eugenics anxiety derived from the mental problems his family suffered (178).<sup>13</sup> Winfield Scott Lovecraft, the writer's father, died when he was eight years old most probably due to syphilis. Winfield spent his last five years in a mental asylum in Providence, where he was institutionalized in 1893 after suffering a mental breakdown produced by the disease. In 1919, Lovecraft's mother, Sarah Susan Phillips Lovecraft, was also committed to the same asylum after suffering depression and hysterical attacks. She spent there two more years until she died due to a bladder surgery. Finally Lovecraft himself repeatedly had strange nightmares when he was a child, as well as some kind of unidentified nervous condition that made his family drop him from high school.<sup>14</sup> In fact he suffered from a weak health during his whole life.

A strong metaphysical aspect in which science took an important role in the life of Lovecraft was religion. A declared agnostic (and during some periods atheist), he used the theories of several scholars to formulate and assert his religious disbelief and materialism. According to Joshi (*I Am Providence* 316-23), Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe* and Hugh Elliot's *Modern Science and Materialism* were two key volumes in the writer's religious development.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lovecraft himself confessed this: "As for physique –I didn't inherit a very good set of nerves, since near relatives on both sides of my ancestry were prone to headaches, nerve-exhaustion, and breakdowns." (*SL III* 368).

<sup>14</sup> "I began to have nightmares of the most hideous description, peopled with things which I called "night-gaunts" [...] In dreams they were wont to whirl me through space at a sickening rate of speed, the while fretting & impelling me with their detestable tridents" (Lovecraft, *SL I* 34).

<sup>15</sup> Elliot has not been referred before in the present chapter, since he was not a scientist. In fact, Hugh Elliot (1881-1931) was an obscure thinker who, according to Joshi, "was never held in much esteem as a philosopher, since he was merely a populariser of the subject and not a pioneer" (*I Am Providence* 316). However, as Joshi points out ("Time, Space" 174-75), Lovecraft's rejection of religion happened during his early adolescence, years before he read the texts of Haeckel or Elliot.

The use Lovecraft did of both thinkers was mainly to reaffirm his own atheism. From Elliot he took his denial of the soul and teleology –i.e. the universe follows the plan of a superior entity–, and the mechanistic background of cosmos, that is, the whole universe is ruled by the universal rules of Nature. For his denial of the existence of the soul, he also followed Haeckel's ideas on the different evolutionary stages experienced by embryos before becoming living creatures:

One might ask, to the confounding of those who aver that men have "souls" whilst beasts have not, just what the difference may be betwixt the effect of music on man and on beast; and also just how the evolving organism began to acquire "spirit" after it crossed the boundary betwixt advanced ape and primitive human? It is rather hard to believe in "soul" when one has not a jot of evidence for its existence; when all the psychic life of man is demonstrated to be precisely analogous to that of other animals –presumably "soulless". But all this is too childish. When we investigate both ontogeny and phylogeny we find that man has both individually and racially evolved from the unicellular condition. Every man living was at the beginning of his life a single protoplasmatic cell, whose simple reflex sensitiveness is the source of all the neural and psychic activity which later develops through increasing from the irritability of the simple cell-wall through various intermediate stages of spinal and ganglia activity to the formation of a true brain and finally to the manifestation of those complex functions which we know as intellect and emotion. This development occurs both pre-natally and post-natally in the individual, and can be followed with much exactitude. In the species, we can follow it hardly less exactly by means of comparative anatomy and biology. ("Defence of Dagon" 64)

Following Haeckel, Lovecraft reasons that it is impossible to have a soul if the human embryo is, at a certain point during its development, equal to that of a soulless animal.

There is a strong link between the scientific advances and the ideological and ethical background Lovecraft had. As Joshi puts forward in his introduction to *An Epicure in the Terrible* (22), the theories about the cosmic indifference towards human beings lead

him to situate tradition as the center of his ethical thought. This is clearly exemplified in the following excerpt from one of Lovecraft's letters:

In a cosmos without absolute values we have to rely on the relative values affecting our daily sense of comfort, pleasure, & emotional satisfaction. What gives us relative painlessness & contentment we may arbitrarily call "good", & vice versa. This local nomenclature is necessary to give us that benign illusion of placement, direction, & stable background on which the still more important illusions of "worthwhileness", dramatic significance in events, & interest in life depend. Now what gives one person or race or age relative painlessness & contentment often disagrees sharply on the psychological side from what gives these same boons to another person or race or age. Therefore "good" is a relative & variable quality, depending on ancestry, chronology, geography, nationality, & individual temperament. Amidst this variability there is *only one anchor of fixity* which we can seize upon as the working pseudo-standard of "values" which we need in order to feel settled & contented -& that anchor is *tradition*, the potent emotional legacy bequeathed to us by the massed experience of our ancestors, individual or national, biological or cultural. Tradition means nothing cosmically, but it means everything locally & pragmatically because we have nothing else to shield us from a devastating sense of "lostness" in endless time & space.<sup>16</sup> (*SL II 356-57*)

This positive ethical value that the writer attributes to tradition is extremely conservative, and comes from the necessity of establishing some kind of rational order into life after science refuted that the universe turned around humanity and that we were created by some kind of divine intervention. The connection between this tradition and the Anglo-Saxon origins Lovecraft had and was proud of is more than evident. The past, that should be the place to find solace and calmness, will be a relevant source of conflict

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<sup>16</sup> In chapter 10, I will overview the connections and ideas to be found between Lovecraft and the Modernist movement, especially his fierce criticism against T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. However, after reading this passage, it is impossible not to think about Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", where he puts forward the importance of tradition and the influence that it has on new artistic creations, and vice versa. In words of Eliot: "the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career." (47)

in his literary production when it clashes with the Darwinian theories of evolution: the idea that, in a remote past, we all shared the same origins, was for sure something difficult to assimilate for a person who strongly believed in the differences among races, and this conflict between an aristocratic near past and a hideous remote past permeate his texts.

#### 4.3.- Science and Lovecraft's fiction

At this point it seems evident that Lovecraft was strongly influenced by the different scientific sources he had access to. Social Darwinism, and its radicalization in the eugenics movement, was contemporary to Lovecraft, and the writer slid their proposals in his literary corpus, as I will analyze in the following chapters in this study. My goal now is to elucidate the role science had in the global narrative of the author, and the connection it might have with the Žižekian approach I presented in the previous chapter.

The importance of science in the Gothic/weird tale tradition is far from being Lovecraft's innovation. Classical texts such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) lay upon strong scientific grounds. Similarly, the figure of Abraham van Helsing, the Dutch professor and physician of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), is the arch-enemy of the vampire and a key character in the fight against the Count. Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" also relies on scientific advances and experiments.

However it is during the 20<sup>th</sup> century when science acquires a more relevant role. As Oakes highlights, "Many of the dark aspects of society reflected by American Gothic fiction in the twentieth century stem from science and technology" (1), and he uses the corpus of H.P. Lovecraft, Richard Matheson and Stephen King to exemplify his thesis.

For Oakes, the use of “extraordinary science” is a key resource in the modern Gothic story. The revelation of a revolutionary scientific discovery tends to be scary

because radical ideas are more frightening. Concepts that can drastically change people’s views of themselves or the world provide far greater opportunities for writers to raise disturbing questions. (8)

The tremendous advances experienced in the last two centuries by science have derived in the development of highly specialized fields of knowledge which require long educational training to master. Science has become a dark field that sometimes is too far away from the average citizen. This has created “an atmosphere of suspicion and fear concerning these subjects” (9). In the particular case of Lovecraft, there is a tendency to present science as the key that reveals a hidden truth which will produce enormous suffering to the observer and probably to all humanity. The Faustian leitmotiv of the forbidden knowledge which leads to the damnation of the protagonist has cosmic dimensions in the narrative of the writer since the consequences of the discovery do not reach just the character, but threatens all humanity. In fact, Lovecraft’s materialistic view of humanity conceives it as just an accidental event in the immensity of the universe, “an insignificant speck when set against the backdrop of an infinite cosmos” (33). The universe (impersonated in the figure of the alien Elder Gods) is unaware of our presence or, at best (or worst), does not care at all about our presence and science’s revelations “will forever change humanity’s view of the universe and its place in it” (29).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In 1899 Stephen Crane wrote a brief poem, “A Man Said to the Universe” which anticipated much of Lovecraft’s cosmicism:

A man said to the universe:  
“Sir, I exist!”  
“However,” replied the universe,  
“The fact has not created in me  
A sense of obligation.”

The prototypical Lovecraftian (anti)hero is a scholar, adventurer or man of science. As will be proved in my category analysis in the following chapter, the vast majority of the protagonists follow this profile. The scientific community was so relevant for Lovecraft (who never attended the university) that he even created the fictional Miskatonic University, first appearing in “Herbert West-Reanimator” in 1922 and set in Essex County, Massachusetts. Miskatonic University is the place where most of his scholarly characters work, from Herbert West himself to the expedition presented in *At the Mountains of Madness*, and it is clearly based on the Ivy League group, including Yale, Harvard, Cornell and, obviously, Brown University.<sup>18</sup>

The use of technology is closely linked to science. The alien creatures Lovecraft created are many times presented as highly technologically developed. The Mi-go race appearing in “The Whisperer in the Darkness”, for instance, is able to transport humans to Pluto by moving their brains into a brain cylinder. The Elder Things from *At the Mountains of Madness* also have advanced technology, and they are even able to create new forms of life –the hideous shoggoths–. The use of advanced technology is, however, mostly restricted to the Mythos. The human characters in Lovecraft's fiction do not normally have access to fantastic science-fiction artifacts. There are some further exceptions, such as the machine created by Crawford Tillinghast in “From Beyond”, which gives him access to parallel planes of existence. As Oakes mentions, science and technology are used by Lovecraft in order to unsettle the reader. To that end, it is more

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<sup>18</sup> It is possible that Lovecraft had a complex due to his lack of formal education. In a letter to Reinhart Kleiner, in 1918, the writer confesses that:

“I no more visit the Ladd Observatory or various other attractions of Brown University. Once I expected to utilize them as a regularly entered student, and some day perhaps control some of them as a faculty member. But having known them with this “inside” attitude, I am today unwilling to visit them as a casual outsider and non-university barbarian and alien (*Kleiner 152*).”

The academic ambitions Lovecraft had –faculty member at Brown, which is set in Providence– were definitely high, and together with his strongly curious and avid for knowledge personality he had, the feeling of frustration that he might suffered is evident.

According to Leiber, “the Miskatonic faculty constitutes a kind of Lovecraftian utopia of highly intelligent, aesthetically sensitive, yet tradition-minded scholars” (16).

effective to give the monsters the ability to design and manipulate strange artifacts than to allow human beings to do so. When the Mythos are the owners of the machines, the feeling of “destabilization” comes from the strangeness produced by science and the mysterious alien artifacts.<sup>19</sup>

In the previous chapter I presented the Žižekian framework I am going to use in the forthcoming analysis of Lovecraft’s corpus. The triad of the Real is composed by the symbolic Real, the imaginary Real and the real Real. The symbolic Real is a lexical construction resulting from the unfruitful attempts to represent the Real, and according to Graham it can be presented as a vertical gap (overuse of words with empty meaning such as “unspeakable” or “unmentionable”) or a horizontal gap (produced by the attempt to simultaneously describe the different sensorial qualities of the object, overusing adjectives and creating a blurring effect in the description). The imaginary Real, on the other hand, is a narratological resource in which the presence of the uncanny slides inside the narration. Finally, the real Real is the result of the ideological background of the author in the text, and it is represented by the other two elements of the triad.

In my view, science is a key element in the process of symbolization of the Real performed by H.P. Lovecraft in his literary corpus. The “destabilization” proposed by Oakes can be also considered in terms of the dichotomy reality-Real, since this process can be compared with the representation of the symbolic and the imaginary Real. For example, the people from Innsmouth in “The Shadow over Innsmouth” have been

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<sup>19</sup> The use of advanced technology in his narrative moves Lovecraft towards the science-fiction genre. It is not easy to include him in a particular literary movement, since his *oeuvre* moves from the Gothic to science-fiction, from the weird tale (category proposed by S.T. Joshi in *The Weird Tale*, but already anticipated by Lovecraft himself in *The Supernatural Horror in Literature*) to the fantastic narration. For a more detailed discussion on genre, see chapter 5 in this dissertation.

intermingling with the Deep Ones and their blood is now corrupted.<sup>20</sup> This is clearly connected with the eugenics theories since the result is the communal decay of the town. To anticipate the ideological reading I will propose in the corresponding chapter, one may say that “The Shadow over Innsmouth” attacks the immigrant invasion and intermingling with the Teutons of New England. The Real, the Thing Lovecraft cannot understand, is the arrival of immigrants and their mixing with the Americans during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lovecraft is unable to assimilate the consequences of the social movements that take place during his life, but at the same time he also seems to be strongly shocked by the Darwinian and post-Darwinian theories that have been summarized previously in this chapter. The consequences of the eugenistic hypotheses scare him because they menace his own reality. Science, as pure knowledge, threatens the symbolic Real of Lovecraft, since it comprises the fear of heredity and dissolution of the Aryan blood purity. Then knowledge, in its Faustian sense, is a menace that comes from the imaginary Real, since it offers glimpses of the fragility of the symbolic level: Science highlights the inconsistencies of reality, and it becomes a source of discomfort and uneasiness.<sup>21</sup> It acts as a mechanism that reveals the contradictions of the symbolic Real.<sup>22</sup>

On the contrary, applied scientific knowledge, represented by technological devices and field studies, plays a different role. When applied sciences are present in Lovecraft's

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<sup>20</sup> I will put forward an extensive analysis of this tale in chapter 7.

<sup>21</sup> Matolcsy puts forward the following statement about the breach produced in the symbolic Real by science:

“In the Lovecraftian text the central anomaly is not concentrated. It is scattered around the text, and, most importantly, the various elements are built up gradually toward a climax. [...] The anomalous phenomena—facets of the central anomaly—ultimately reach the stage where some fundamental natural law or scientific theory is contradicted to the point of intolerance.” (172)

Matolcsy, in spite of not mentioning the triad of the Real, is depicting the process of the imaginary Real distorting reality through science, and the final rupture of the symbolic level when the laws of reality are no more correct.

<sup>22</sup> In words of Tyson:

“All that can be achieved through our sciences is the destruction of our comforting illusions, one after another, until we have nothing to support us in a black void of despair through which we must fall for eternity.” (170)

narrative, they normally produce a direct strike against the symbolic level.<sup>23</sup> What this attack provokes is the restructuration of the conditions of reality, since it normally allows the apparition of new entities that were previously unknown (aliens, monsters, etc.). The expedition that goes to the South Pole in *At the Mountains of Madness*, firmly holds to science in order to explain the creatures frozen in the ice. The necropsy made to an Old One (analyzed in depth in the corresponding chapter) is the perfect example of the “cubist” gap of language produced by the imaginary Real, defined by Harman. The long and objective report made by the scientist is so detailed and tries to depict the creature so profusely that the final result is almost unimaginable. This process of failed symbolization of the creature is the attack against the symbolic order. The incapacity of describing the object implies that there is an alien creature that should not exist in reality, but it is there, it is made present, and it has to be symbolized sooner or later. Reality has to change in order to adopt this new structure.

So it is not easy to fix science into a singular and defined role in the internal structure of the Lovecraftian tale. It is a key leitmotiv, relevant in most of his tales, but its function varies from one text to another, and it can be present as part of the imaginary or real Real, depending on the particular story, and it will always act as a menace for the symbolic level (in the case of science as mechanism that reveals the contradictions of reality), or as an aggression against reality (in the case of applied sciences, that change the conditions of the symbolic order). The importance it has is unquestionable and has to be carefully examined in order to draw its relevance in the ideological background of the particular tale which is being analyzed.

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<sup>23</sup> Lovecraft was not especially fond of technological devices. As a sample, see the almost comical defense of handwriting over the use of typewriter in one of his letters (*SL III* 337)

#### 4.4.- Conclusions

Lovecraft lived in a period of important scientific discoveries. His curious personality, intelligence and interest for the sciences were the perfect bases for the assimilation of the different scientific tendencies he was influenced by into his fictional work. In spite of his lack of formal education, he was however an avid reader and studied several disciplines in depth, being especially interested in astronomy among others, as proved by the many articles he wrote in this field.

The contemporary scientific theories that Lovecraft read and studied were the result of the evolution of the Darwinian principles of evolution and natural selection. Social Darwinism and eugenics movements were lively present during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Lovecraft wrote all his literary production. Scientists such as Ernst Haeckel, contemporary to the writer, or Charles Galpin, precursor of eugenics, were among the intellectual figures that Lovecraft admired, cited and followed in his non-fictional writing –essays and letters–. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that their ideas are liable to be found in his literary corpus as well.

The influence science had in Lovecraft's life goes beyond the literary use he presented. Science gave the writer a way to explore his own anxieties and worries. Using science as a starting point, Lovecraft defined his own views in topics as unlike as religion, democracy or immigration. Science, as Tyson puts forward, is not evil, but it is able to elevate us to a certain state where no happiness is possible (171-72).

I propose that science is present in the Lovecraftian tale in two levels of the Real – imaginary and real–, and depending on its position, it will act as a threat for the symbolic Real –science as Faustian knowledge, exposing the failures of reality– or as an aggressive mechanism –applied science that changes the quality of reality–.

## **CHAPTER 5: CLASSIFICATION OF THE LOVECRAFT TALE**

### 5.1.- Some notes on genre

The selection of the texts I am going to analyze, using the framework that has been described in the previous chapters, was made considering several aspects, some of them related to the genre in which the stories can be included. Before moving on with my exposition, I would like to devote some pages to the discussion and explanation of some points on the issue of genre, and how it is not an easy task to label Lovecraftian narrative under a particular one. Lovecraft's stories combine elements of the Gothic tradition with science fiction, fantasy and even some details that could be recognized in detective stories. Thus, the overall corpus does not seem to match a single group.

The writer himself mentions the weird tale, a troublesome category which is still under debate, in his introduction to the *Supernatural Horror in Literature* essay:

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted

form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space (22-23).

This text, “the finest historical treatment of the field” according to Joshi (“Preface” 7), is an overview of the literary tradition of supernatural literature, but it also includes some hints about Lovecraft’s theoretical thoughts on horror tales.

Joshi considers that Lovecraft is not a Gothic writer, and he defends the weird tale category per se. However, he seems unable to give a clear definition of what the weird tale is, but mentions some genres to be considered:

As I see it, the weird tale must include the following broad divisions: fantasy, supernatural horror, nonsupernatural horror, and quasi science fiction.<sup>1</sup> All these categories should be regarded as loose and nonexclusive, and there are some other subtypes that are probably amalgams or offshoots of those just mentioned. (*The Weird Tale* 6-7)

Torres Oliver, in his essay “Raíces góticas en Lovecraft”, also analyzes Lovecraft from the point of view of genre, and he tries to establish a distance between the classic Gothic tale and the Lovecraftian corpus. He mentions three main points in which Lovecraft moves away from the Gothic: the cosmic dimension of his tales, which contrasts with the close environments of the Gothic; the absence of religion, clearly different from the religiosity of many Gothic stories; and the lack of the feminine factor in most of his tales, avoiding the female heroine, and women in general terms (103-05). Oliver ambiguously concludes that Gothic traces can be found in Lovecraft, but that the overall

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<sup>1</sup> Joshi considers quasi science fiction these stories where “the implication is that we may someday be able to account for “supernormal” phenomena, but cannot do so now”. (*The Weird Tale* 8)

impression is that he is detached from this genre, and writes under a different –and unspecified– category. He thinks that it is the cosmic dimension of the Lovecraftian tale what provokes the most notorious distance from the Gothic:

En cualquier caso, Lovecraft, movido por el deseo de elevar el horror a su más alto grado, le atribuye dimensiones inmensas; y este gigantismo de lo horrible se convierte muy pronto en uno de los rasgos definitorios de su estética. Maturin se propuso superar al autor del Monje en el terreno del miedo, al que quería arrebatarse la lámpara mágica con todos sus genios. Lovecraft se propone superar a todos sus antecesores dilatando el horror hasta el infinito, para lo cual lo dota de dimensiones cósmicas, e incluso ultracósmicas. Con todo, sus raíces siguen siendo genuinamente góticas. (118)

Little light has been cast yet on the concept of the “weird tale”, and to add some more confusion, Maurice Lévy considers Lovecraft as a fantasy writer. Lévy’s definition of this genre is broad enough to cover anything that “is born from the divorce produced between the perfect lucidity of the characters and the dream-images that they encounter” (13). This conception of the fantastic genre embraces science fiction, the traditional Gothic, ghost stories, medieval fantasy, horror stories, mythological tales or even folklore popular stories, and Lévy himself recognizes the vastness of it: “It will always be impossible to define the fantastic universally, which is too rich, too basic to be encompassed definitively by any discourse” (119).

The fantastic was also analyzed, from a structuralist perspective, by Tzvetan Todorov. He considers it as a genre that is defined “in relation to those of the real and the imaginary” (25). According to him, when the character experiences the encounter with something that cannot be explained by our own reality, there are two ways to follow; either the encounter is a trick, an illusion, or it is something belonging to our reality.

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the

other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

Todorov explicitly mentions Lovecraft in his analysis as a writer who belongs to this genre. For the Russian scholar, Lovecraft's fantastic lays on the reaction of the reader when facing the text, in the fear this reader must suffer (34).

It seems that there is no clear agreement to the genre to which Lovecraft belonged. Hesitation between broad categories –fantastic, Gothic, supernatural– and some other more specific –weird tale– is noticeable in the literature about the issue.

I consider that it is difficult to label the writer within the limits of a particular genre, and it would be more suitable to include him in the field of the fantastic, or a quite broad conception of the Gothic. But this latter choice requires the clarification of the concept of Gothic literature itself. Horace Walpole, who wrote what is considered as the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, tried a first definition of what the Gothic genre should be in the preface to the second edition of his novel:

[...] was an attempt to blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life. (43)

According to Jacqueline Howard (12-18), this conception of the genre as a blending of several influences is still valid today. Howard reasons that there is a general group of elements which are associated to the Gothic tradition (castles, monasteries, vampires, inheritances, prosecuted heroines, found documents...), but the genre must be seen “as a plural form, that is, a novelistic genre which draws on and recontextualizes or transforms prior discursive structures” (16). This idea is supported also by Maggie

Kilgour (3-5), who compares the Gothic tradition with one of its icons, Frankenstein's monster: a genre which brings together folklore, romance, Shakespeare, ballads, the sublime, Milton... The same arguments are used by Botting (24), Stevens (46, 56-57) and Hogle (1-2). The latter reinforces, however, the unity of the genre through the existence of the commonplaces considered by Howard.

At this point, the question arises: Is Lovecraft a Gothic writer? My personal interpretation is that he cannot be considered solely as a pure Gothic writer, in the same way we cannot consider Poe as a totally Gothic author.<sup>2</sup> I share Oliver's view in the sense that I also support that Lovecraft was influenced by the Gothic tradition, but that he was also able to renew the tradition, adding certain features which were original and were never seen before in horror histories, such as all the science fiction ingredients visible in his oeuvre. Lovecraft replaced ghosts with aliens, and haunted castles with strange cities. There are some cursed families, such as Arthur Jermyn's in "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family", but Lovecraft seems to be more interested in how damned and corrupted the whole human species is. The weird tale has not been defined yet, and it is out of the scope of my analysis to define it, but it seems clear to me that the existence of this *genre* –if it is so– is closely linked in its origins to the Gothic tale itself. So I acknowledge that Lovecraft goes a step beyond the Gothic tradition, but considering his proximity to the genre, I will use some theories about Gothic literature in the next section, which will be useful for choosing the texts to be explored and analyzed.

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<sup>2</sup> Poe, apart from his most famous Gothic texts, also cultivated some other genres such as comedy ("The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether", 1845) or texts which were close to science fiction ("The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall", 1835).

## 5.2.- Selection of texts

In the forthcoming sections, I am going to focus my attention in several key tales by the author. The selection of texts has been done based on my previous narratological analysis of the author, to be found in “The Influence of E.A. Poe in the Narrative Work of H.P. Lovecraft: A Narratological Approach”. Considering the impossibility of reviewing the whole corpus, I have tried to select a group of texts which are representative of the writer. For doing so, a narratological approach has been useful since it allowed me to reduce all of Lovecraft's texts to a limited amount of items – narratological categories: main character, setting, plot, climax and post-climax– shared by most of the tales shaping the corpus.

The whole corpus is composed by the 65 stories written by the author himself during adulthood, and signed by Lovecraft.<sup>3</sup> Considering that Lovecraft actively participated in the writing of more than thirty more tales (including ghost-writings, revisions and collaborations), the decision for not including these texts in the corpus has been taken because of two main reasons. Firstly, it would be a hard task to elucidate which texts can be classified as mere revisions or pure collaborations, being almost impossible for the scope of this study to identify to what extent the art of Lovecraft is present in a particular text. As regarding ghost-writings, the only text which has been acknowledged as such is “Under the Pyramids” (also known as “Imprisoned With the Pharaohs”), which was written to be published under the signature of the magician Harry Houdini. It has been considered that any text having any kind of direct influence of any other writer –including a text written “as if it was written by” – might distort the analysis that has been carried out.

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<sup>3</sup> Notice that “The Beast in the Cave”, a tale I will make reference later in my analysis, is a piece of juvenilia written when Lovecraft was just 15 years old. Because of this, I have not included it among the main corpus of texts.

### 5.3.- The five categories

An intuitive idea that arises when reading the whole production of H.P. Lovecraft is that most of the stories repeat the same outlines over and over again. The main characters are stereotypical, there is just a limited group of situations which unravel in a more or less complex plot, and they lead to a reduced amount of endings. Inspired by Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Toolan's *Narratology*, Chatman's *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* and Genette's *Figures*, in the following lines I will put forward a synthetic diagram of the Lovecraftian tale.

The process of creation of the list consists in the abstraction of each single tale, reducing it to a group of key items. When subjecting each story to this analysis, the result was that, except for the tales that will be commented below, the vast majority of the Lovecraftian narrative fiction is synthesized in 30 different items. As I have already anticipated, the starting point for this process has been the selection of five main categories, which are shared by the vast majority of the tales written by Lovecraft. Each one of these five global categories includes a variable amount of subcategories, which make up the 30 items.

The choice of two out of the five main categories, <character> and <setting>, has been strongly biased by the concept of the Gothic itself. The hero and the place where the action takes place are common referents in the received definitions of the Gothic concept. Thus, it has been considered suitable to select these two categories in order to establish a possible connection between Lovecraft and this genre. The category of <character> is present in the third chapter of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Toolan (90), Chatman (112) and Genette . At the same time, the category of <setting> is also present in Toolan (103-106), Chatman (106-12) and, in an indirect way, in the

categories I, XI, XI-bis, XV, XV-bis, XX and XXIII in Propp. Considering these referents, the use of <character> and <setting> as main categories is, under my perspective, justified. At the same time, it is important to highlight that <character> sometimes will include not only the protagonist of the narration (which, most of the times, coincides with the narrator), but it will also make reference to another character who plays a leading role in the tale. A clear example is to be found in “Herbert West – Reanimator”, where the main character and narrator tells the adventures he lived with his friend, Herbert West, who is also a key figure in the plot. So both the anonymous narrator and West are included under <character>.

The other three categories (<plot>, <climax> and <post-climax>) are more problematic from the point of view of narratology. The term “plot” is not expressly mentioned by Propp, and his view of this concept is reduced to a sequence of actions and functions performed by characters. Toolan uses the term “story”, recursively defined as “a basic description of the fundamental events of a story” (9) and “the basic unshaped story material [which] comprises events, characters and settings” (12). It is Genette that provides Toolan with this terminology –avoiding recursive definitions– (83), and Chatman refers to the Aristotelian concept of *mythos* as an arrangement of events (42).

The category <plot> that has been used in this analysis is intended to be closer to the idea proposed by Aristotle –and re-elaborated by Chatman–; that is, the plot is a sequence of events. The creation of the categories <character> and <setting> makes incompatible the idea of story shared by Genette and Toolan with my study, since they both consider that characters and setting are part of the story.

The <climax> is the less accepted category from the five I have used. None of the authors make specific reference to this term, and it has been chosen for practical

purposes.<sup>4</sup> In the Gothic and fantastic tradition, the moment in which the supernatural event occurs is normally the most effective section in the text. When reading Lovecraft, this moment very often coincides with the apparition of the monster. The description of the creature is made in a way which follows the notion of the imaginary Real and the linguistic gaps described by Hartman, with profusion of words making reference to the indescribability of the thing (vertical gap), or with an excess of description of the sensual qualities of the object (horizontal gap). So I have considered this category as essential for my analysis due to the importance it has in the representation of the imaginary Real.

The <post-climax> is a categorical proposal of my own, since the effect of the anti-climax, which is to reduce the intensity of the climax, is not normally achieved in Lovecraft, due to the small length of the events happening after the climax is reached. So I propose the category <post-climax> to define the events which are consequence of the climax. The post-climactic events are not normally long enough to spoil the climax, but the importance they have in the narrative is remarkable. Sometimes, due to narrative techniques, the post-climax is presented at the beginning of the text, where the narrator anticipates the results of the climax, i.e. the whole narration becomes a flashback. It is not present in all the short stories under the scope of this analysis.

#### 5.4.- The subcategories

There are 30 subcategories or items which shape Lovecraft's tales. The list of these subcategories, grouped under their general category, is the following:

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<sup>4</sup> Prince defines the climax as "the point of greatest tension; the culminating point in a progressive intensification" (14).

**<character>**

1. *Intellectual/researcher*: the main character is identified with a teacher, doctor, scholar, scientific or, in general terms, a person eager for knowledge.

2. *Adventurer/traveller/explorer*: a person who is involved in the action due to a trip, an adventure in an uncommon place or the exploration of an area he does not know well. It does not necessarily mean that the place the main character explores is a unexplored spot, a place nobody has been before. It can just be a region, country or city he has never been to.

3. *Flaneur/bohemian*: sometimes the main character is depicted as a person with uncommon hobbies –genealogy, ancient cultures, lost books, forbidden knowledge, lonely places, art lover–. It is normally (but not always) associated with an elevated social status which allows him to devote all his life to his passion(s).

4. *Allegorical/abstract character*: it is a very unusual item in Lovecraft. The main character is not a real person but a metaphor of an abstract concept or entity, or a city. Lovecraft used it only in his tales “The Street” and “The Doom that Came to Sarnath”.

5. *Lonely person, outsider*: a person who avoids contact with other beings, and rejects socializing and any kind of human contact.

**<setting>**

6. *New England/North of the US*: the importance of New England in the life and narrative of Lovecraft is essential. Sometimes the exact location is not given, and it is just asserted that the action takes place somewhere in New England.

The following sub-classification is suggested when dealing with this first option:

A) *Seaside town*: a small fishing town, a village by the sea, a seaport.

B) *City*: a big metropolitan area (New York, Boston).

7. *A remote location*: Africa, East countries, Antarctica. They are normally linked to an adventurer main character.

8. *The sea/undersea*.

9. *Another world*: this subcategory is related to most of the tales located in the Dreamlands, in which Lovecraft portrays the imaginary planets and worlds his characters visit in dreams.<sup>5</sup> It is important to distinguish between this category and the category 11, since the imaginary locations to which the latter makes reference are settled in our real world, the planet Earth, whereas the worlds depicted under this epigraph have a much more marked sense of unreality.

10. *Old civilizations*: mainly Greek and Roman Empires.

11. *Imaginary location/city/town*: this item can be connected with any one of the items under the second category. Lovecraft created a set of imaginary locations and towns, most of them placed in New England (Arkham, Miskatonic University, Dunwich...), which are supposed to be inspired in real locations (Providence, Brown University, Salem...).

12. *Europe*.

13. *Isolated place*: a cemetery, a small villa, a rural cottage...

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Dreamlands, see the chapter devoted to “The Quest of Iranon” in the present dissertation.

**<plot>**

14. *A subtle event disturbs the main character:* The <character> notes some kind of strange event, and is bound to deal with it. Two different things can happen under this subcategory:

A) *The hero faces it alone:* the <character> decides to fight the threat on his own.

B) *The hero looks for/by chance finds help:* the <character> is able to recruit or convince a few more people to struggle against the menace.

15. *Discovery/acquisition of an archaeological deposit/ancient object/scientific artifact:* it can be a premeditated act (expedition, buying of a good), or the result of chance or fate (inheritance, casual finding).

16. *Arrival into a seemingly normal place which happens to be a source of conflict:* A haunted house or hostel, a town hiding a secret...

17. *Travel across an oneiric or fantastic spot:* Recurrent in the oneiric tales set in the Dreamlands, where Lovecraft depicts imaginary worlds and regions.

18. *Discovery of a source which narrates past events:* a message found in a bottle, a book, inscriptions in the wall of an ancient city...

19. *Arrival of a strange entity to a community:* the main character can be either part of the community or the arriving stranger.

20. *Quest to find an object:* a forbidden book, a magic artifact...

21. *Investigation of strange events:* the main character tries to find an explanation for strange happenings taking place in a particular setting. This item is different from 14

since in this case the <character> does not suffer the events himself, but he is a direct witness of them.

**<climax>**

22. *Revelation/discovery of a disturbing truth*: this revelation can be:

A) *About himself*. That is, about the narrator or main <character>.

B) *About another character of the story*.

C) *About Mythos*. i.e. about the whole imaginary creatures Lovecraft created.

This item binds the apparition/summoning of monsters, gods, creatures...

D) *About the past*.

23. *Back to reality*: the character awakes from a dream. This subcategory is strongly connected with the Dreamlands tales.

24. *Chaos and destruction*: a wave of violence and destruction razes the setting (and probably the characters). The source can be a creature, natural events –earthquakes, storms– or human action.

**<Post-climax>**

25. *Confinement* of the character into an asylum due to madness.

26. *Death/Suicide/Disappearance* of the main character.

27. *Fleeing*, running away from the source of conflict.

28. The main character is *arrested*.

29. *Destruction of the source of conflict*.

30. The character will suffer *tortured thoughts* for the rest of his life.

### 5.5.- Corpus analysis

The next step is the individual analysis of the 65 that are part of the corpus I am considering. The following list includes a description of the subcategories that each tale matches. Each <category> may match more than one different subcategory at the same time. When a tale does not include a particular <category>, I have noted N/A. This case happens in some unfinished tales, as well as in several complete stories which do not have any kind of <post-climax>.

#### **“The Alchemist”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, Antoine. Count, last survivor of his family. Lives alone with a servant (3).

<setting>: France. A ruined castle (12 + 13).

<plot>: inheritance of a family old document → cursed family. Antoine faces the damnation alone (15 → 14A).

<climax>: Revelation of the truth about the past. The alchemist has been killing Antoine's ancestors during 600 years. Antoine kills him (22D).

<post-climax>: Antoine is disturbed for the rest of his life (30).

#### **“The Tomb”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, Jervas Dudley. Rich and flaneur. Lives alone (3).

<setting>: New England. A cemetery (6 + 13).

<plot>: Discovery of a tomb which obsesses Jervas (15 → 14A).

<climax>: Revelation of a supernatural discovery. A tombstone with Jervas' name engraved on it (22A).

<post-climax>: Anticipated in the introduction. The narrator is confined into a mental asylum (25).

**“Dagon”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Sailor (2).

<setting>: The sea (8). Pacific Ocean.

<plot>: Travel across a fantastic land (17) and discovery of an ancient object (15).

<climax>: Discovery of Dagon (22C).

<post-climax>: Suicide. Anticipated in the introduction (26).

**“A Reminiscence of Dr. Samuel Johnson”** (The narrator explains some memories of his encounters with Samuel Johnson)

<character>: Not specified. Lovecraft? 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator.

<setting>: Inns and taverns in London. (12)

<plot>: Several meetings between scholars.

<climax>: N/A.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“Sweet Ermengarde”** (Brief comical play, belonging to a genre completely different to the supernatural/fantastic)

<character>: N/A.

<setting>: N/A.

<plot>: N/A.

<climax>: N/A.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“Polaris”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Very ambiguous information.

<setting>: Another world seen in dreams. (9). City of Olathoë.

<plot>: Travels in a dreamed city (17). The narrator has a task (20).

<climax>: The enemy attacks the city (24).

<post-climax>: Voices in his head. Tortured dreams (30).

**“Beyond the Wall of Sleep”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, a scientific (1). He narrates the story of Slater, a madman who suffers strange dreams (5).

<setting>: Asylum (13). Unspecified country, but probably US. Also dreamed worlds

(9).

<plot>: The dreams of Slater disturb the narrator. The narrator shares those dreams (14A).

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos. A creature lives inside Slater (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“Memory”** (Brief oneiric description of an undetermined place, and a conversation between Genius and Devil about human beings).

<character>: N/A.

<setting>: N/A.

<plot>: N/A.

<climax>: N/A.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“Old Bugs”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator who tells the story of Bugs, a drunkard beggar (5), and Trevor, a rich flaneur (3).

<setting>: Chicago (6).

<plot>: The arrival of Trever disturbs Bugs (19).

<climax>: Revelation of a truth about Trever's past. He is Bugs' son (22A).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Transition of Juan Romero”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, witness of Juan Romero's tragedy. Settler and miner (2).

<setting>: A mine in the US (13).

<plot>: Discovery of an abyss resulting in disturbance of Romero (15 →14B). Both characters face the problem. There is also an Indian magic ring (15) connected to the abyss.

<climax>: Partial revelation about Romero. The narrator faints in the middle of the chaos (22B).

<post-climax>: Tortured thoughts (30).

**“The White Ship”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, Basil Elton, a lonely lighthouse keeper (5).

<setting>: Another world (9).

<plot>: Travels across oneiric spot (17).

<climax>: The narrator comes back to reality (23).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Doom that Came to Sarnath”**

< character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Story of the city of Sarnath, which becomes the main character (4).

<setting>: Another world (9).

<plot>: Story of the city of Sarnath. They capture a cursed idol from the city of Ib (15).

<climax>: The city is doomed to destruction. Inhabitants of the sea attack Sarnath (24).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Statement of Randolph Carter”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, Carter, who confesses what happened to him and another person, Harley Warren. Both are tomb explorers (2).

<setting>: Unspecified. Probably police station, but talking about a graveyard (13).

<plot>: An Indian book drives them to the tomb (15 → 16).

<climax>: Revelation of ghouls (22C).

<post-climax>: Arrested. Anticipated at the beginning of the text (28).

**“The Terrible Old Man”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator talking about three robbers (2, in the sense that they ‘explore’ houses).

<setting>: Kingsport, seaside town (11 + 6B).

<plot>: Arrival into a normal house (old man’s), which results in being a source of conflict. The man is a terrible assassin (16).

<climax>: The three robbers killed by the old man (22B).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Tree”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Story of Musides and Calos, artists (3).

<setting>: Arcadia (10).

<plot>: Both friends work in a sculpture. Calos dies and a strange tree is planted in his tomb. This tree finally 'eats' Musides (15).

<climax>: Musides and his sculpture are destroyed (24).

<post-climax>: N/A.

### **“The Cats of Ulthar”**

<character>: 3rd person narrator telling the story of a couple of old persons feared in the town of Ulthar (5).

<setting>: Ulthar (6 + 11).

<plot>: Arrival of a stranger into a community (19).

<climax>: The cats of Ulthar ate the couple (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

### **“The Temple”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, crew of a German submarine (2).

<setting>: Undersea (8).

<plot>: Finding of a bust resulting in subtle events which disturb the crew (15 → 14A).

<climax>: Finding of an underwater temple (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

### **“Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Arthur is an adventurer, traveler and poet (2).

<setting>: Africa and England/US (6 + 7 + 12).

<plot>: Inheritance of a collection of African relics resulting in discovery of ancient object (15 → 15).

<climax>: 22A + 22D.

<post-climax>: Suicide. Anticipated at the beginning (26).

### **“The Street”**

<character>: The Street. Allegorical character (4).

<setting>: U.S. (not specified).

<plot>: A presence (black people) disturbs a community (19).

<climax>: Destruction of the street (24).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“Celephaïs”**

<character>: Kuranos, a writer (1).

<setting>: London and other worlds. (12 + 9).

<plot>: Travel across fantastic spots. (17).

<climax>: Kuranos is crowned as king in his dreamed world because he created it (22A).

<post-climax>: He is dead in real life (26).

**“From Beyond”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator telling the story of Crawford Tillinghast, a scientist (1).

<setting>: Providence (6B).

<plot>: Creation of a scientific artifact which connects with another world (15 → 17).

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos (22C).

<post-climax>: 30.

**“Nyarlathotep”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, telling about the figure of Nyarlathotep, a researcher (1).

<setting>: No clear references, but the narrator talks about a big, cruel and criminal city, maybe Boston. The option of New York is discarded since Lovecraft did not live in the New York until 1924, and “Nyarlathotep” was written in 1920 (6B?).

<plot>: A presence (Nyarlathotep) disturbs a community with his electrical experiments (19).

<climax>: Chaos and destruction (24).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Picture in the House”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, traveler (2).

<setting>: New England (6).

<plot>: 16.

<climax>: 22B.

<post-climax>: Destruction of the source of conflict (29).

**“Ex Oblivione”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person lunatic narrator (5).

<setting>: Dreamed worlds (9).

<plot>: Travels across oneiric spots (17).

<climax>: Back to reality (23).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Nameless City”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Explorer (2).

<setting>: Ruins in Arabia (7).

<plot>: Discovery of archeological deposit and strange happenings on it (15 → 14A).

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Quest of Iranon”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator talking about Iranon, a singer (3).

<setting>: Another world (9).

<plot>: Travel across oneiric spots (17).

<climax>: Revelation about the past of the character (22A + 22D).

<post-climax>: Suicide (26).

**“The Moon-Bog”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, telling his story and the story of Denys Barry, a flaneur (3).

<setting>: Ireland (12)

<plot>: Arrival into a normal place issuing in subtle event. The narrator faces it with his friend Denys (16 → 15B).

<climax>: Revelation of truth about Mythos (22C).

<post-climax>: Tortured thoughts (30).

**“The Outsider”**

<character>: Lonely character –a ghoul– (5).

<setting>: Ruins and rural area (13).

<plot>: 16.

<climax>: 22A.

<post-climax>: Fleeing (27).

**“The Other Gods”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator telling the story of an old scholar, Barzai (1), and his young friend Atal.

<setting>: Another world (9).

<plot>: Exploration of a fantastic mountain (17).

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: Death (26).

**“The Music of Erich Zann”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Metaphysics student (1).

<setting>: France. Rue d’Auseil (12).

<plot>: 16.

<climax>: (22C).

<post-climax>: Fleeing (27).

**“Herbert West, Reanimator”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, Herbert West’s friend and helper. Both are physicians (1).

<setting>: Arkham (6 + 11).

<plot>: Discovery of a scientific research, reanimation of corpses, which disturbs reality (15 → 14B).

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: 25.

**“Hypnos”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Lonely person (5) telling the story of a friend (Hypnos) and himself.

<setting>: Kent and London (UK) (12).

<plot>: Dream discovery of other dimensions and creatures resulting in weird events distorting reality (17 → 14).

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“What the Moon Brings”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, a walker (2).

<setting>: A garden (13).

<plot>: Ruins (15).

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: Suicide (26).

**“Azathoth”** (N/A) (Probably incomplete draft of the origins of Azathoth).

<character>: N/A.

<setting>: N/A.

<plot>: N/A.

<climax>: N/A.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Hound”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. He & St. John are the two lonely and bohemian characters (3 + 5).

<setting>: Holland (cemetery), UK (mansion) (12 + 13).

<plot>: Discovery of ancient object resulting in strange events. Both face the problem (15 → 14B)

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: Suicide (26). Anticipated at the beginning.

**“The Lurking Fear”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Explorer/researcher (1 + 2).

<setting>: Countryside in New England (6 + 13).

<plot>: Investigation of strange events (21).

<climax>: Revelation about the past of a family, resulting in revelation about Mythos (22D → 22C). The family became a gang of monstrous pseudo-apes.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Rats in the Walls”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, Nobleman who Lives alone with servants (5).

<setting>: UK (12).

<plot>: Buying of an old castle (15), resulting in strange events (15 → 14B). Faces it with little help.

<climax>: Revelation about the past of the family (22A + 22D).

<post-climax>: Madness (25).

**“The Unnamable”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Two talkers (3).

<setting>: Cemetery in Arkham (6 + 11 + 13).

<plot>: Conversation between the two characters in a cemetery (16).

<climax>: Apparition of the Unnamable, which attacks both speakers (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Festival”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Traveler (2).

<setting>: Kingsport (6A + 11).

<plot>: Inheritance of a task: attending the festival (15).

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: Tortured thoughts (30).

**“The Shunned House”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, who is the main character. Adventurer (2).

<setting>: New England (6).

<plot>: Investigation of strange events –the house– (21).

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: Destruction of the conflict (29).

**“The Horror at Red Hook”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Thomas Malone is the main character, a police detective (1).

<setting>: Red Hook (6 + 11).

<plot>: 14.

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“He”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Flaneur (3).

<setting>: New York (6B).

<plot>: A bohemian neighborhood in New York which seems to be conventional but is not (16).

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: Running away (27).

**“In the Vault”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator telling the story of Birch, an undertaker (5).

<setting>: A vault in a cemetery (13).

<plot>: The vault becomes a place of conflict (16).

<climax>: There is a corpse which is still alive (22C).

<post-climax>: Running away (27).

**“The Descendant”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Story of a lonely person (5).

<setting>: London (12).

<plot>: Discovery of the *Necronomicon* (15).

<climax>: Revelation about lord Northam, who studied the Mythos (22B).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“Cool Air”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, a writer (1), who tells us about his relationship with the doctor (1).

<setting>: New York (6B).

<plot>: A presence (the doctor) disturbs a community (the whole building) (19).

<climax>: Discovery about the doctor. He's been dead for 18 years (22B).

<post-climax>: Tortured thoughts. Narrated at the beginning (30).

**“The Call of Cthulhu”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Manuscripts belonging to his granduncle, Angell, who was a professor, left by Thurston. (1)

<setting>: Ocean, Australia, Oslo, New Orleans... Very varied. (8 + 7 + 12)

<plot>: Bust of Cthulhu drives to a research about its origins (15).

<climax>: Discoveries about Cthulhu and R'lyeh (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Pickman’s Model”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator (Thurber), friend of Pickman, who is an artist (3).

<setting>: Boston (6B).

<plot>: Pickman’s house (16).

<climax>: 22B.

<post-climax>: phobias (25).

**“The Strange High House in the Mist”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator who tells the story of Thomas Olney, philosopher (1).

<setting>: Imaginary place in New England (Kingsport) (6A + 11).

<plot>: Olney arrives into Kingsport and climbs the cliff (19 + 21).

<climax>: 22C.

<post-climax>: Amnesia (25).

**“The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator talking about Randolph Carter, a dreamer (3).

<setting>: Another world (9).

<plot>: Travel across oneiric spots (in dreams) (17).

<climax>: Back to reality (23).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Silver Key”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. The main character is Randolph Carter, a dreamer (3).

<setting>: Massachusetts (6).

<plot>: 15.

<climax>: Revelation about his own life and past (22A + 22D).

<post-climax>: Death of adult Carter (26).

**“The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Willett, a doctor (1), confronting the case of Ward, insane (5).

<setting>: New England (6).

<plot>: Willett investigates strange events, the disappearance of Ward (21).

<climax>: Discovery about the truth of Curwen, the necromancer (22B), and the past he lived (22D).

<post-climax>: Destruction of the conflict. Curwen's ashes are spread away (29).

**“The Color Out of Space”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. A surveyor (1).

<setting>: Arkham (6B + 11).

<plot>: The narrator discovers a blasted heath and tries to investigate it, finding an hermit, Ammi Pierce, who narrates the story if it (15 → 21 → 18).

<climax>: Disturbing truth about the past and Mythos (22D + 22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Very Old Folk”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. An educated dreamer in 1927, dreaming about the old Roman Empire (1).

<setting>: Pamplona (12).

<plot>: Investigation of Sabbaths (21).

<climax>: Chaos and destruction and back to reality (24 + 23).

<post-climax>: Destruction of the conflict (29). The city is still alive, reasons the narrator.

**“History of the *Necronomicon*”** (Brief imaginary description of the history of the *Necronomicon*, who wrote it and where).

<character>: N/A.

<setting>: N/A.

<plot>: N/A.

<climax>: N/A.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“Ibid”** (Short mock biography of Ibidus)

<character>: N/A.

<setting>: N/A.

<plot>: N/A.

<climax>: N/A.

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Dunwich Horror”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Story of Wilbur Whateley, a sorcerer (5), and Henry Armitage, a librarian (1).

<setting>: Dunwich (6A + 11).

<plot>: Wilbur’s quest to find the *Necronomicon* (20).

<climax>: Discovery about Mythos (22C).

<post-climax>: Destruction of the source of conflict. When Wilbur dies, university teachers kill his twin brother, the Dunwich horror (29).

**“The Whisperer in the Darkness”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Albert N. Wilmarth, literature teacher (1) and a farmer, Henry Wentworth Akeley (5).

<setting>: Arkham and Vermont farm (New England) (6B + 11) + (6 + 13).

<plot>: Investigation of strange sights in rivers (21).

<climax>: Akeley has been abducted by aliens (22B).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“At the Mountains of Madness”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, William Dyer, geologist and explorer (1 + 2)

<setting>: Antarctica (7+11) and an imaginary city found there (13)

<plot>: Discovery of ancient deposits, resulting in the investigation the of assassination of the second group of the expedition (15 → 21). The place, at first, seems quiet, but results to be the shelter of alien races (16), where the explorers find carvings that narrate the past of the planet (18).

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos and the past (22C + 22D).

<post-climax>: The survivors run away from the conflict (27) and will suffer *tortured thoughts* (30).

**“The Shadow Over Innsmouth”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Traveler (2) interested in genealogical research (3).

<setting>: Innsmouth (Massachusetts) (6A + 11), which is an isolated location (13).

<plot>: Narrator disrupts in Innsmouth (19 + 16 + 21).

<climax>: Deep Ones are intermingling with human beings (22C). He's descendent of an old one (22A).

<post-climax>: Running away, back to Innsmouth (27).

**“The Dreams in the Witch House”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator, telling the story of Walter Gilman, student (1).

<setting>: Arkham (6B + 11).

<plot>: Haunted house and in-dreams travels (16 + 17).

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos (22C).

<post-climax>: Destruction of the house (29).

**“The Thing on the Doorstep”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, Daniel Upton, telling his own story and Edward Derby's, both artists (3).

<setting>: Arkham (6B + 11).

<plot>: Upton investigates Edward Derby's strangement (14A).

<climax>: Discovery about Edward Derby's real fate, possessed by the spirit (22B).

<post-climax>: Destruction of the source of conflict. Anticipated at the beginning (29).

**“The Evil Clergyman”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Intellectual (1).

<setting>: Europe, probably UK (12).

<plot>: Use of a strange torch which narrates past events (15 → 18)

<climax>: The narrator has now the physical appearance of the clergyman (22A).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Book”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. Intellectual (1).

<setting>: Unknown + other worlds (9).

<plot>: Acquisition of a book (15) which results in travels to other dimensions (15 → 17).

<climax>: Back to reality from the trips (23).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Shadow Out of Time”**

<character>: 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator. University professor (1).

<setting>: Arkham and other worlds ((6B + 11) + 9).

<plot>: 4. Travels across fantastic spots (17).

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos. Existence of Yith and flying polyps (22C).

<post-climax>: N/A.

**“The Haunter of the Dark”**

<character>: 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Robert Blake, writer (1).

<setting>: Providence (6B).

<plot>: 2. Discovery of the Shining Trapezohedron which results in the arrival of the haunter of the dark (15 → 19)

<climax>: Revelation about Mythos (22C).

<post-climax>: Death of Blake, anticipated at the beginning, and destruction of the artifact (26 + 29).

With that classification, it is possible to extrapolate the main components a classical Lovecraftian tale should include, in order to obtain what would be a representative group of stories to be analyzed. The resulting global counting of subcategories is the following:

- <character>

1. *Intellectual/researcher*: 23 matches.

2. *Adventurer/traveller/explorer*: 14 matches.
3. *Flaneur/bohemian*: 14 matches.
4. *Allegorical/abstract character*: 2 matches.
5. *Lonely person, outsider*: 14 matches.

- **<setting>**

6. *New England/North of the US*: 13 matches.
  - A) *Seaside town*: 4 matches.
  - B) *City*: 11 matches.
7. *A remote location*: 4 matches.
8. *The sea/undersea*: 3 matches.
9. *Another world*: 11 matches.
10. *Old civilizations*: 1 match.
11. *Imaginary location/city/town*: 15 matches.
12. *Europe*: 12 matches.
13. *Isolated place*: 14 matches.

- **<plot>**

14. *A subtle event disturbs the main character*: 2 matches.
  - A) *The hero faces it alone*: 6 matches.
  - B) *The hero looks for/by chance finds help*: 5 matches.

15. *Discovery/acquisition of an archaeological deposit/ancient object/scientific artifact*: 25 matches.

16. *Arrival into a seemingly normal place which happens to be a source of conflict*: 13 matches.

17. *Travel across an oneiric or fantastic spot*: 13 matches.

18. *Discovery of a source which narrates past events*: 3 matches.

19. *Arrival of a strange entity in a community*: 8 matches.

20. *Quest to find an object*: 2 matches.

21. *Investigation of strange events*: 9 matches.

- **The climax.**

22. *Revelation/discovery of a disturbing truth.*

A) *About himself*: 9 matches.

B) *About another character*: 9 matches.

C) *About Mythos*: 30 matches.

D) *About the past*: 9 matches.

23. *Back to reality*: 5 matches.

24. *Chaos and destruction*: 6 matches.

- **Post-climax.**

25. *Confinement of the character into an asylum due to madness*: 5 matches.

26. *Death/Suicide/Disappearance*: 9 matches.

27. *Fleeing, running away* from the conflict: 6 matches.

28. The main character is *arrested*: 1 match.

29. *Destruction of the source of conflict*: 8 matches.

30. The character will suffer *tortured thoughts* for the rest of his life: 8 matches.

#### 5.6.- Selected tales

With that list of correspondences, it is possible to conclude that the most significant items all throughout Lovecraft's narrative fiction are 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 6B, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22C, 26, 29, and 30.

According to the matches previously proposed, the main <character> is, most of the times, science related. He is some kind of researcher or explorer –being his last will to get access to some kind of truth or knowledge–, and the importance of the character's solitude is remarkable.

Lovecraft sets his narrations mainly in New England, Europe or an unknown place, either an imaginary city, country or even planet and, as in the case of the main character, the factor of isolation of the setting from the rest of the known world is also relevant.

As regarding the <plot>, travels around dreamlands and the arrival to places seemingly normal but which finally turn to be a source of conflict are the most common situations, but also important is the investigation of strange events and the situation of a stranger

disrupting a community.

The most usual <climax> results in the revelation of a hidden truth, especially regarding Lovecraftian Mythos, and the <post-climax> scene will lead almost always either to the destruction of the source of conflict or to terrible consequences for the protagonist – death, suicide, madness, tortured thoughts... –.<sup>6</sup>

It is possible to conclude that the most significant items all throughout Lovecraft's narrative fiction are 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 6B, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22C, 26, 29, and 30.

Considering all of this, my selection began with the narration that fulfils the most varied amount of subcategories, which is the novella *At the Mountains of Madness*. Being one of his best known works, it fulfils the subcategories 1, 2, 7, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22C, 22D, 27 and 30. It is a prototypical Lovecraftian tale, which fits the most common categories described. Apart from that, science is omnipresent in the tale, and even considering that Darwinist theories are not that important in the text, science will have a leading role during the whole narration.

Another important factor that was considered when selecting this novella was the slightly abnormal depiction of the monster which happens at a certain point of the text, as will be seen in the forthcoming analysis. The treatment given to the two different alien races that are presented in the tale, the Elder Ones and the shoggoths, has strong ideological connotations that are of interest for my study.

The second choice is “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. This tale reunites the

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<sup>6</sup> This hidden truth, from the point of view of my own analysis, will match the concept of the Real as a whole. The discovery of something which goes beyond human understanding that constitutes the essence of the fantastic defined by Todorov, or the “unknown forces” mentioned by Lovecraft himself in his *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (23).

subcategories 2, 3, 6A, 11, 13, 16, 19, 22A, 22C and 27. In general terms, it fits with the prototypical tale of the lonely traveler who arrives in an unknown and hostile community and who is not welcome in that environment. The importance of post-Darwinist theories is basic to fully understand the narration and its underlying ideology. One of the most interesting aspects that led me to choose this text was the presence of extremely intense images related to *communal decay* and degeneration, which are very linked to the ideas of corruption and degeneration of society and humanity proposed by the eugenicists.

The third tale considered is “The Dreams in the Witch House”. It matches the items 1, 6B, 11, 16, 17, 22C and 29. The influence of physics and mathematics in the plot of this story provides a significant background for the analysis of the scientific implications of the tale. The relevance that witchcraft has in the story is an aspect to be considered, since Lovecraft showed a genuine interest in this issue.

The fourth text, “The Dunwich Horror”, adds the items 1, 5, 6A, 11, 20, 22C and 29 to the list. This story includes a mixture of magic and science, together with a sense of communal decay in a rural setting, and a landscape which is depicted as a constant source of menace and supernatural events.

The fifth narration is “The Quest of Iranon”, and matches the subcategories 3, 19, 17, 22A, 22D and 26. Considered a minor text, “The Quest of Iranon” is part of the Dreamlands cycle and is the most atypical text from all the pieces of fiction I have selected. There are no monsters or alien creatures, but it has been chosen to demonstrate that even the not typically Lovecraftian texts are suitable to have meaningful ideological connotations.

Finally, “The Moon-Bog” is constructed using the items 3, 12, 15, 15B, 22C and 30.

This tale has been also regarded as a secondary piece of fiction by Lovecraft. However, as in the case of “The Quest of Iranon”, it has important underlying issues to be discovered and analyzed, related to the destruction of tradition and industrialization among others.

These six texts fulfill all the most significant subcategories among the 30 I have proposed. The six stories are representative of the most canonical Lovecraftian tales, as well as the less well known part of his oeuvre. The selection, then, will allow me to extrapolate the conclusions I might get to the global fictional narrative written by H.P. Lovecraft during his life.

The stories that I have used in chapter 12 have not been selected following the criteria described in this chapter. They were chosen in order to reinforce the main aspects that I will be dealing with all throughout my dissertation. Since they have not been subject of an in-depth analysis, but included as part of a more general analysis, I have decided not to use their categorization in order to justify the reduced corpus of six tales to which I will devote an individual chapter.

### 5.7.- Conclusions

In the present chapter I have proposed a structuralist approach to the Lovecraftian tale, putting forward a classification of his narrative oeuvre. The reduction of all his texts to a group of 30 subcategories, which arise from five main categories, allows me to choose a reduced group of six tales that are representative of the whole corpus. These six tales I will analyze in separated chapters, and I consider that the global conclusions that might arise from their analysis can be taken as representative of Lovecraft’s fictional oeuvre.



## **CHAPTER 6: ON *AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS***

### 6.1- Carving the past

*At the Mountains of Madness* is one of the longest works by H. P. Lovecraft, together with *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. The novella was written in 1931, but it was not published until 1936, in three consecutive issues of the pulp magazine *Astounding Stories*. It is the second longest piece of fiction in Lovecraft's oeuvre, just surpassed by *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. Joshi tries to cast light on why Lovecraft wrote such a long tale in a moment in which he was producing the best pieces of short fiction in all his life. The critic considers that *At the Mountains of Madness* is the result of Lovecraft's disappointment provoked by the reading of Katharine Metcalf Roof story "A Million Years After". It was the lead story in a *Weird Tales* issue, and Lovecraft's frustration was derived from the fact that he had previously recommended his friend Frank Long to write a story set in prehistoric times, but Long never did it (*I Am Providence* 783).

There is general critical agreement as regards the quality of *At the Mountains of Madness*. Most of the critics consider it as one of the best (if not the best) pieces of literature among Lovecraft's fiction. According to Joshi, it has a "rich, detailed, and utterly convincing scientific erudition that creates the sense of verisimilitude so necessary in a tale so otherwise *outré*" (*I Am Providence* 782). Peter Cannon also remarks this sense of verisimilitude in the novella (*H.P. Lovecraft* 103). For Burleson, it is Lovecraft's "most powerful and conceptually fascinating novel" (*Critical Study* 165).

*At the Mountains of Madness*, considered from the perspective of the categorization proposed in chapter 5, provides the subcategories 1, 2, 7, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22C, 22D, 27 and 30. The main character and narrator is William Dyer, a geologist and explorer (subcategories 1 and 2). The action takes place in the Antarctica (subcategories 7 and 11) where the explorers find an enormous hidden city (13). The main plotline deals with the discovery of ancient archaeological deposits, which will derive in the slaughtering of part of the expedition, and the subsequent investigation of the events (subcategories 15 and 21). The process of investigation reveals events that took place in the planet aeons of years ago (18). The climax arrives with a revelation about the Mythos (the apparition of the shoggoth) and about the past (22C and 22D). The post-climax presents the survivors running away from the source of conflict (27), and the mental sequels that the events produced in the characters (30).

The novella is a first person report written by its main character, William Dyer, a geologist from the imaginary Miskatonic University. The whole text is written by Dyer in order to deter a forthcoming scientific expedition to the Antarctic. He was part of a previous expedition to the South Pole, and the text narrates the events that took place during the exploration.

Dyer's expedition arrives to the South Pole with an impressive deployment, including several aircrafts, planes, sophisticated technological devices to take samples of different rock and soil strata, dog sleds, etc. After the discovery of a particularly strange sample of slate, Professor Lake, biologist, decides to separate the expedition, creating a small prospecting group which will fly some miles to the west. Thanks to the radio reports sent to the base camp, it is known that Lake's group discovers eight frozen-fossilized creatures, identified as Elder Ones. When the base camp stops getting reports from the prospecting group, they decide to go to investigate what happened, and they find that the whole group has been slaughtered, several Elder Ones have been buried in ice and some others have disappeared, together with Lake himself.

Dyer decides to make a reconnaissance flight together with Danforth, a graduate student, member of the expedition, in order to find some clues about what happened to Lake and the rest of the group. The two adventurers find a huge and apparently deserted stone city, and they decide to land the plane and explore for a while. After interpreting many stone engravings made by the Elder Ones thousands –probably millions- of years ago, they learn that the Elder Ones are the creators of human life in the planet, and that they also created the horrifying shoggoths, enormous protoplasmic creatures used as slaves to build the city.<sup>1</sup>

When, due to the many findings pointing to it, Dyer and Danforth understand that some of the frozen Elder Ones that Lake found are still alive and that they probably are trying to find their way back to an unknown abyss located in the city, they try to make their

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<sup>1</sup> In 1936, a year after *At the Mountains of Madness* was published in *Astounding Stories*, the Czech writer Karel Čapek wrote the novel *War with the Newts*. The similarities between the plot of both stories is remarkable. In Čapek's text, mankind finds a new marine race, a kind of developed, intelligent breed of newts. Humans decide to enslave them, until the newts rebel and give rise to a war between the two races. In *At the Mountains of Madness* the relationship between the Elder Ones and the shoggoths undergoes the same process of slavery and later revolution and violent conflict between the two factions. I have not been able to find any comparative study between both texts but, considering the scope of *Astounding Stories*, it is unlikely that the Czech writer had access to Lovecraft's novella before he wrote *War with the Newts*.

way to that abyss. The horror which is awaiting them is bigger than expected, since what the two men find just before arriving to the abyss is a shoggoth, which chases them, but the explorers manage to escape and fly back to the camp, finishing their polar adventure, that will be kept silent to the world until the moment Dyer decides to write it down to avoid a new exploration to the places they found.

*At the Mountains of Madness* is, above all, a text about time, more exactly about the past. From the goal of Dyer's expedition (and the goal of the expedition he is trying to avoid) to the events that take place in the story, everything in the narration is past-related. There are references to the past in almost every single page, and what *At the Mountains of Madness* proposes as one of its final conclusions is the origin of humankind itself, the beginning of our existence in the planet. This obsession with exploring the origin of life is a feature present in many other Lovecraftian tales in several degrees of importance, but it is probably in this novella, together with "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn", where the presence of the past is more tangible.<sup>2</sup>

However, whereas the past is connected with Darwinian reminiscences in the other two texts, the links with Darwinism are not that clear in *At the Mountains of Madness*. According to the novella, the Elder Ones probably created the first living organisms on Earth:

The things once rearing and dwelling in this frightful masonry in the age of dinosaurs were not indeed dinosaurs, but far worse. Mere dinosaurs were new and almost brainless objects—but the builders of the city were wise and old, and had left certain traces in rocks even then laid down well-nigh a thousand million years... rocks laid down before the true life of earth

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<sup>2</sup> From the six tales that I analyze in depth in the present study (chapters 6-11), there is a remarkable importance of history (real or imaginary) in all of them.

## Chapter 6: On *At the Mountains of Madness*

had advanced beyond plastic groups of cells... rocks laid down before the true life of earth had existed at all. They were the makers and enslavers of that life. (297)

Lovecraft goes a step beyond Darwinism here, since he does not formulate ideas about human evolution or links between humankind and possible ancestors –apes in “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn”, fishy creatures in “The Shadow over Innsmouth” –. He moves several thousands of years back in time in order to formulate the origin of life in the planet, and how the Elder Ones are the responsible of it. There is no evolutionism, there is some kind of profane creationism, where alien creatures are Lovecraft’s particular gods.

*At the Mountains of Madness* never develops the means by which the Elder Ones are able to create life. They just create mankind, but the characters of the novella never find out (or explain) how do they do it when they read all the different inscriptions and bas-reliefs they study in the ancient city:

It was under the sea, at first for food and later for other purposes, that they first created earth-life—using available substances according to long-known methods. The more elaborate experiments came after the annihilation of various cosmic enemies. They had done the same thing on other planets; having manufactured not only necessary foods, but certain multicellular protoplasmic masses capable of moulding their tissues into all sorts of temporary organs under hypnotic influence and thereby forming ideal slaves to perform the heavy work of the community. (299-300)

This substitution of God for a race of alien creatures with a superior intellect reveals, however, the same worries and anxieties that Lovecraft shows in his other texts. When human beings look at their past in order to find some kind of order and security, what they find is a terrible truth. Our origins are horrid no matter the way we try to examine them: either primordial life was created by horrible aliens (as expressed in *At the*

*Mountains of Madness*) or we are straight descendants of strange apes or monsters (as shown in “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” or “The Shadow over Innsmouth”).

The archeological exploration performed by Dyer and the rest of the scientists puts forward a set of facts that threatens the symbolic Real of mankind. With the proposal of an alien race that created mankind, Lovecraft is provoking a destabilization of the kernel of reality.

The novella includes numerous examples of the three types of Real proposed by Žižek and the theoretical proposal I previously made.<sup>3</sup> The classical Lovecraftian narration usually moves in crescendo from a regular, daily situation, to the discovery of the monstrous entity. In the meanwhile, several signs and clues are given in the text, in order to prepare the climactic view of the alien or abomination. This structure is the reason why most of the times the imaginary Real will be present during the whole text. The failures in the processes of symbolization of the imaginary Real (the “indescribable” noise that the character listens, for instance), or the failed description of the alien creature, provoke the vertical and horizontal gaps proposed by Harman.<sup>4</sup>

*At the Mountains of Madness* has an exceptional structure since there are not one but two different monsters. This provokes that there are two climactic moments in which the encounter with the creature is present: first, the frozen and mummified Elder Ones

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<sup>3</sup> As a reminder, the symbolic Real corresponds with reality, with the ideological constructions that are created to symbolize our world. The imaginary Real is equivalent to the elements that disturb reality, exposing its weaknesses and inconsistencies. Finally, the real Real is a reality beyond reality, something which cannot be understood. According to my interpretation, this real Real that I try to grasp from Lovecraft's oeuvre is the author's ideology underlying his texts. See chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of the triad of the Real.

<sup>4</sup> The vertical gap, according to Harman, corresponds with the moments in which there is an evident use of words that imply the impossibility of describing the object (unnamable, indescribable, unspeakable...). The horizontal or “cubist” gap, on the other hand, arises when the description of the object accumulates an excess of adjectives. The over-description of the sensual qualities of the object provokes a wordy and blurred description which does not really account for the nature of the creature.

that Lake finds in the snow, in the middle of the narration; secondly, the shoggoth which chases Dyer and Danforth at the end of the novella, as the supreme horror hidden in the Pole. So there is a repetition of the schema during the whole text. This is an aspect worthy to explore.

As in most of Lovecraft's narrations, the first apparition of the imaginary Real is given very early in the text, when the narrator explains that there are strange things that he is hesitating to write down to the reader: "Doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible there would be nothing left" (246).

"Extravagant" and "incredible" are the first two words that connect *At the Mountains of Madness* with the realm of fantasy. They are two adjectives which do not match necessarily with a tale of horror, but make reference to some kind of fantastic elements. The second meaning the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* provides to the word "extravagant" is "exceeding the limits of reason or necessity".<sup>5</sup> "Incredible", according to the same source, is something "too extraordinary and improbable to be believed". Something extravagant and incredible points to the imaginary Real, and Lovecraft is giving an early glimpse of the forthcoming supernatural events to be found in the text. However if we compare this beginning with the starting passages of other Lovecraftian tales, such as "The Picture in the House", the difference of tone is clear: "Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places. For them are the catacombs of Ptolemais, and the carven mausolea of the nightmare countries" (34).

The first sentences of "The Picture in the House" introduce elements of the Gothic and supernatural tradition. The presence of mausolea and catacombs, together with the word

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<sup>5</sup> The first meaning, "obsolete, archaic", is not applicable in the context of the text.

“horror” itself, are immediately linked to the Gothic. Even the verb “haunt” (“to visit often”, but also “to visit or inhabit as a ghost”) has been carefully selected, with all the ghostly connotations it adds to the sentence.

In spite of the first warning given by the narrator of *At the Mountains of Madness*, which could make us think that it is a tale more within the realm of the fantastic than a horror/science-fiction tale, Lovecraft will not take long until he introduces the imaginary Real in a most explicit and uncanny way in the narration.<sup>6</sup> The first hints making reference to a possible undercover horror hidden at the Mountains of Madness is made clear when the expedition is arriving at their destination. At this moment, Dyer expresses his feelings towards the white desert he is contemplating:

Through the desolate summits swept raging intermittent gusts of the terrible antarctic wind; whose cadences sometimes held vague suggestions of a wild and half-sentient musical piping, with notes extending over a wide range, and which for some subconscious mnemonic reason seemed to me disquieting and even dimly terrible. Something about the scene reminded me of the strange and disturbing Asian paintings of Nicholas Roerich, and of the still stranger and more disturbing descriptions of the evilly fabled plateau of Leng which occur in the dreaded *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. I was rather sorry, later on, that I had ever looked into that monstrous book at the college library. (249-50)

The presence of the imaginary Real, being its source in the previous paragraph the disruption of the natural world, is presented in form of feelings, premonitions and ambiguous impressions. “Dimly terrible” sensations are wittily mixed and associated with real and imaginary pieces of art. The Nicholas Roerich Lovecraft mentions was a real Russian painter many of whose canvas represented dream-like mountain ranges,

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<sup>6</sup> Considering the fantastic here in the sense given by Lévy and Todorov, that is, not necessarily implying a component of horror in the tale.

with small stone cities in their foothills (such as the Tibet paintings) or even fantastic elements, as in the paintings *Nagarjuna, Conqueror of the Serpent* or *Issa and the Skull of the Giant*.<sup>7</sup> Abdul Alhazred and his book *Necronomicon*, on the contrary, are imaginary constructions of Lovecraft, a writer who never existed and a book that was never written. Both are, however, recurrent in Lovecraft's corpus.<sup>8</sup> The same can be said about the plateau of Leng, which never existed but is a typical location of the Lovecraftian imaginary universe (it is mentioned in at least 6 of his tales).

The symbolic Real, that is, the lexical construction which represents the incapacity of the narrator to describe the Real, is normally associated in the narration with the representation with the description of the monster itself. So it is frequent to find that, at the moment of the apparition of the creature, the observer's efforts to transmit an accurate picture of the monster fail, and the language used by Lovecraft gets saturated with vague and imprecise adjectives, something which matches the symbolic Real and Harman's theory of the vertical gap. If the description fails because of the excessive relate of qualities, then it is an example of the "cubist" or horizontal gap. However, it is interesting to notice that Lovecraft also slides the hit of the uncanny within the framework of the symbolic level. This happens, for instance, in moment in which the explorers analyze a print found in the soil: "He was convinced that the marking was the print of some bulky, unknown, and radically unclassifiable organism of considerably advanced evolution" (254). A seemingly normal moment of scientific research presents an element of weirdness. The scientific knowledge of the explorers results in the

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<sup>7</sup> Lovecraft, who attended an exposition by the painter in New York in 1930, said "There is something in his handling of perspective and atmosphere which to me suggests other dimensions and alien orders of being—or at least, the gateways leading to such. Those fantastic carven stones in lonely upland deserts — those ominous, almost sentient, lines of jagged pinnacles—and above all, those curious cubical edifices clinging to precipitous slopes and edging upward to forbidden needle-like peaks!" (letter to James F. Morton, March 1937). There are up to six references to Roerich in *At the Mountains of Madness*, "as if Lovecraft is going out of his way to signal the influence" (Joshi, *I Am Providence* 784).

<sup>8</sup> Particularly the *Necronomicon* will play a significant role in "The Dunwich Horror", studied in chapter 9.

discovery of an anomaly in the symbolic Real. The print does not seem to be part of our explored and known world. As I have proposed in chapter 4, here science is exposing an element of inconsistency in the symbolic level. An organism highly unclassifiable and unknown to human knowledge is something that cannot be apprehended by our intellect. The adjective “unclassifiable” itself contains the lexical connotation of something that escapes from analytic and scientific description, and which cannot be attributed to any rational classification. There is something which evades understanding in the South Pole.

There is a peak event during the second chapter which is of relevance for my analysis. Lake is communicating via radio about the discoveries he and his small advanced group made. They just found the frozen mummified Elder Ones and, with scientific enthusiasm, he is sending reports of the creatures to his colleagues in the base camp. There are two moments in these reports where the imaginary Real slides into the narration, making reference to the problems they are having with the dogs since the discovery. “Having troubles with dogs” and “[dogs] cannot stand the things” (262) are two very simple statements that seem even casual in the narration, but which are anticipating the forthcoming slaughter. Dogs play here an interesting role since they are the beings that “feel” the presence of the supernatural in the expedition. It is remarkable the fact that Lovecraft is giving such a relevant “sixth sense” to the pack of hounds, since dogs were animals far from being appreciated by Lovecraft. In fact, according to him, a dog “is a pitiful thing, depending wholly on companionship, and utterly lost except in packs or by the side of his master” (“Cats and Dogs” 191). I argue that Lovecraft, fond of cats –“Dogs, then, are peasants and the pets of peasants; cats are

gentlemen and the pets of gentlemen” (192) –, probably gave this special intuition to dogs just because of narrative reasons, since cat sledges would be simply nonsensical.<sup>9</sup>

The rest of the radio reports are notorious because they include a two pages description of an Elder One. What is really interesting about the description is the style. The report is made while Lake is biopsying one of the samples, and it is a scientific analysis of the anatomy, physiology and physiognomy of the being. There is no place for subjective appreciations in Lake’s words: everything is measured in inches and feet, described in shape and weight, color and possible functionality. The report is a clinical study of the sample, a meticulous analysis of the exterior aspect of the creature.<sup>10</sup> This passage is a landmark in terms of Lovecraftian literary scientifism. The cold analysis of the monster brings the alien down to the realm of reason. Scientific realism, which is present all through the narration, reaches here its higher peak.<sup>11</sup>

Chia-Yi Lee points out that this scientific realism can be used by Lovecraft for two different narratological goals. First, in order to “realize the possibility of the impossible—that is, to make happen what “could not possibly happen” within the realm of human episteme”, (6). Following the perspective of my theoretical approach that would be like saying that science will help the writer to introduce an element from

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<sup>9</sup> In the essay “Cats and Dogs”, H. P. Lovecraft fulfils a passionate defense of cats over dogs. For the writer, cats are superior in all senses (aesthetical, intelligence, autonomy, behavior, sensitiveness) to dogs. However he never connects pets with any kind of supernatural sense or issue in real life, something which is predictable, considering his rational and scientific mind. Nevertheless cats are used as supernatural elements in some of his fictional texts, such as “The Cats of Ulthar”. Lovecraft also used dogs as “supernatural-events detectors” in “The Dunwich Horror”. See chapter 9 in this dissertation for further discussion on this matter.

<sup>10</sup> Notice that Lake’s description of the Old One does not mention any kind of internal organs approach, something Lake wants to do later: “But I’ve got to dissect one of these things before we take any rest” (264).

<sup>11</sup> See Haden’s “Some Notes on the Current Events of October 1929-Spring 1931” for a description of some discoveries made during the years prior to the writing of *At the Mountains of Madness*, and how they influenced Lovecraft. See Eckhardt’s “Beyond the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft and the Antarctic in 1930” for a detailed description of the costs and materials needed by several expeditions to the Antarctic that Lovecraft read about during these years, which were clear source of inspiration for the writer in order to increase the reliability of the tale.

beyond the symbolic Real inside reality, making it plausible. Secondly, Lee thinks that another reason for this scientific realism used by Lovecraft would be “as a step in a larger process of maintaining momentum [...] using scientific realism to heighten the sense of suspense and the feeling of impending horror to come” (14-15). This second hypothesis by Lee coincides with the idea S.T. Joshi has. He asserts that Lovecraft uses science “to enhance the *aesthetic* plausibility of the scenarios, which remain overwhelmingly supernatural in their overall thrust” (“Time, Space” 182).

I put forward that in the necropsy of the Elder One, applied sciences are attacking the symbolic level. The process of symbolization of the alien entity is performed massing characteristics of the monster throughout a two-page long description. It is a prototypical case of Harman's horizontal or “cubist” gap, since the over-accumulation of information about the object produces the exact opposite effect. The description of the alien fails because it is excessive and it is difficult for the reader to create an image of it. The Elder One, a being that should not exist, is the target of a medical analysis in order to make it part of the symbolic Real.

The fragment is highly aseptic and objective, but the tone changes at the very end of it.

Lake reports the following to the base camp:

Complete specimens have such uncanny resemblance to certain creatures of primal myth that suggestion of ancient existence outside antarctic becomes inevitable. Dyer and Pabodie have read *Necronomicon* and seen Clark Ashton Smith's nightmare paintings based on text, and will understand when I speak of Elder Things supposed to have created all earth life as jest or mistake. Students have always thought conception formed from morbid imaginative treatment of very ancient tropical radiata. Also like prehistoric folklore things Wilmarth has spoken of –Cthulhu cult appendages, etc. (263)

After a tedious scientific analysis of the thing, Lake adds the previous commentaries. The fantastic appears to settle the tale again into its realm. The scientific analysis of the monster is a *rara avis* among Lovecraft's texts, since most of the descriptions of aliens and creatures found in his narrative are the result of fragmentary views, shaken states of mind in the narrator, confusing and vague in their tone (as will be seen later in this chapter when dealing with the description of the shoggoth). Here, on the contrary, Lovecraft gives Lake the chance to approach the monster without the menace or fear produced by the living alien, and the only plausible reason for that has to do probably with the lack of wickedness of the Elder Ones. In spite of being the authors of the massacre in Lake's work camp, Dyer even justify their reaction of the creatures after they wake up from their frozen sleep. According to the text:

Poor devils! After all, they were not evil things of their kind. They were the men of another age and another order of being. Nature had played a hellish jest on them. [...] They had not been even savages—for what indeed had they done? That awful awakening in the cold of an unknown epoch—perhaps an attack by the furry, frantically barking quadrupeds, and a dazed defence against them and the equally frantic white simians with the queer wrappings and paraphernalia... poor Lake, poor Gedney... and poor Old Ones!. (330)

This is the only moment in Lovecraft's corpus when he shows some kind of empathy towards his Mythos. The rest of his creatures are depicted as evil monstrosities to be feared. This glimpse of sympathy for the Old Ones, understanding the reasons why they probably killed Lake's expedition, make me convey that *At the Mountains of Madness* is designed to create the horrific effect of the shoggoths, not the Elder Ones.<sup>12</sup> Some lines after the previous passage, Lovecraft states that "Radiates, vegetables,

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<sup>12</sup> Joshi states that "although initially portrayed [the Old Ones] as objects of terror, they ultimately yield to the shoggoths in this regard. [...] It is not merely that the Old Ones become the secondary "horrors" in the tale; it is that they cease, toward the end, to be horrors at all" (*I Am Providence* 784). That is, from my point of view, the complete assimilation of the Elder Ones into reality. When they are not horrors anymore, they become part of the symbolic Real.

monstrosities, star-spawn –whatever they had been, they were men!” (330). This is the only moment when Darwinism shyly arises, since Lovecraft equals Old Ones to other times' men. But as has been said above, the creationist proposal in *At the Mountains of Madness* is that Old Ones created life. Therefore, this statement should be considered either as a contradiction in the narration or just as a metaphorical description of what Old Ones represented in the past.

So if these creatures, which dwelt the planet several thousands of years ago, do not have a wicked nature, and can be compared to humans, it is logic to think that finally they are part of the symbolic level. Lake has been able to apprehend them, describe them and he was able to formulate some ideas about the way they lived. When Dyer and Danforth explore the city, they also learn a lot about the history of the Old Ones, reading the paintings and bas-reliefs in the walls like a history book. Thus, Lovecraft draws up a clear tale of that particular aliens. From the very moment the Old One is “understood” by human beings, they are perfectly symbolized. The fantastic –in Todorov's terms– disappears and we get into the realm of the marvelous.

The horror at the Mountains of Madness are not, then, the Old Ones. It is the shoggoth. The shoggoth is the frightening monster, the aggressive entity which threatens humans. Had not Dyer and Danforth found it, they would have probably kept on exploring the city.

The immense presence of the uncanny, in form of the imaginary Real, holds the main characters when they move from their base-camp to Lake's advanced camp: “There came a point, though, when our sensations could not be conveyed in any words the press would understand” (269), with waves of “uneasy consciousness” (270). The

unexplainable sensations produce a horizontal gap in language, as they cannot be described or conceived.

The amount of references to what cannot be described or explained increases when the tale unravels; there is a correspondence between the narrative appearance of the shoggoth and the importance the symbolic Real takes in the descriptions, and expressions very similar to the given in the previous paragraph are found later (“Our sensations [...] can hardly be described on paper” (282), “...not to be explained in literal words” (282), “secrets beyond human penetration” (286), etc.)

By the end of the tale the atmosphere gets more and more oppressive. The closer Dyer and Danforth are from the abyss where the Elder Ones were supposed to dwell at the end of their civilization, the more evident the presence of the imaginary Real is. There are several passages where the sense of threat, that something strange and terrible is about to happen, is mixed with the uncanniness of what cannot be described and assimilated. Dyer and Danforth explore the underground passages of the ancient city, following the signs which drive them to the abyss, and they start to notice a strange stench in the air, “The nameless scent was now curiously mixed with another and scarcely less offensive odour –of what nature we could not guess” (326).

The climax is presented after the explorers find the slaughtered corpse of one of the Elder Ones which escaped from Lake’s base. The scents of this carcass are mixed with the scents of the killer, a shoggoth which starts chasing the two shaken explorers:

It was the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist’s “thing that should not be”; and its nearest comprehensible analogue is a vast, onrushing subway train as one sees it from a station platform—the great black front looming colossally out of infinite subterranean distance, constellated with strangely colored lights and filling the prodigious burrow as a piston fills a cylinder. [...] It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway

train—a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and un-forming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the frantic penguins and slithering over the glistening floor that it and its kind had swept so evilly free of all litter. (334-35)

The whole novella unravels towards the apparition of this being “that should not be”, “indescribable” and “shapeless”. Reality —embodied in the two explorers and, to a certain extent, in the Elder Ones— collapses under the unbearable presence of the intruder, something that should not exist but which breaks the mirror which separates the Real from reality into small fragments.

The only thing Dyer and Danforth can do is run away. After they manage to escape and come back to their country —reality at its purest form—, the two of them decide to hide what they saw to the world. Reality will not cope with the shoggoth. It is not until some other adventurers decide to organize a new expedition to the South Pole that Dyer breaks the silence to prevent humanity to confront the monster again.

The vertical linguistic gap derived from the indescribability of the object that is observed can be found somewhere else apart from the vague description of the shoggoth. The unnameable is also present in the architecture of the city, in a way which is even more powerful and more evident than when describing the Mythos. The giant city of the Elder Ones has a core of “no architecture known to man or to human imagination” (271), and it is composed by

[...] extravagant shapes which this masonry took in its urban manifestations *were past all description*. [...] geometrical forms for which *an Euclid could scarcely find a name* —cones of all degrees of irregularity and truncation; terraces of every sort of provocative

disproportion; shafts with odd bulbous *enlargements*; broken columns in curious groups; and five-pointed or five-ridged arrangements of mad grotesqueness.<sup>13</sup> (289)

When Dyer remembers in the tale the time he spends with Danforth exploring the city, he remarks that “How to account for such things in this place was frankly beyond me” (281), since he is in a place that “can hardly be described on paper” (282), with “The touch of evil [...] not to be explained in literal words” (282), full of “underground secrets beyond human penetration” (286). As regarding the bass-reliefs and art they find, “It is useless to try to compare this art with any represented in our museums” (295).

The importance of architecture as imaginary Real is a recurring issue in Lovecraft, as Massimo Berruti states. The critic, using “The Call of Cthulhu” as a starting point and its descriptions of the imaginary city of R’lyeh, considers that Lovecraft uses architecture as a way of depicting *outsideness*, “a bold gesture of defiance against human rationality” (“The Unnamable in Lovecraft” 5). According to Berruti’s proposal, who considers that Lovecraft develops certain tools that provoke the indescribability of the other, the alien architecture presented in some of his tales is impossible to reproduce, as non understandable artefact that belongs to the other.<sup>14</sup> This theory is no more than a different perspective of the same problem, perfectly compatible with my current analysis. As I will prove in my dissertation, the underlying ideology –the real Real– to be found in Lovecraft’s oeuvre is, in many cases, related to the fear of the other.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> My Italics.

<sup>14</sup> William Burns puts forward an analysis of the representation of the other in Lovecraft via cultural artifacts. I will explore his proposal in the analysis of “Dagon” in chapter 12.

<sup>15</sup> “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, analyzed in chapter 7, also features a very interesting use of architecture. In that tale, the decadence of the whole seaport is reflected in the buildings and streets of Innsmouth. See the corresponding chapter for a complete analysis on this subject.

### 6.3.- What the Antarctic hides

Robert H. Waugh puts forward a very interesting ideological reading of *At the Mountains of Madness*. In his essay "The Subway and the Shoggoth", the critic considers the shoggoths as elder siblings of human beings, since they are the first creation on Earth made by the Old Ones. According to Waugh, this creates a

sibling rivalry, along with the complex dialectics of the master/slave relationship, informs our understanding of the shoggoth and the loathing with which Lovecraft surrounds it, a resentment against that which is enslaved and against that which is prior. (101)

This pattern of envy of the older child for the younger leads to a racial reading of *At the Mountains of Madness*: the shoggoth, says Waugh, is the personification of the outsider, the immigrant that Lovecraft met in New York. It is not by chance that the creature is compared to a subway train, says the scholar, since it is in the New York's subway where Lovecraft saw crowds of immigrant workers going and coming from their jobs. Waugh constructs a deep analysis of Lovecraft's racism and anti-Semitism considering this particular monster as the foreigner itself. This opinion fits with the idea that the Lovecraftian monster is, many times, the personification of the immigrant, not only in the case of the shoggoth, but also the deep ones appearing in "The Shadow over Innsmouth".

Oakes supports a very different interpretation of the tale. For him, the Old Ones are the personification of order, of a healthy society, whereas the shoggoths are the incarnation of chaos and "represent what Lovecraft sees as the ultimate fate of advanced civilizations, a decline into chaos" (52). This idea of the shoggoth as chaos is connected by Oakes to the unknown creature, to a force which "embodies the unknown, symbolizing the threatening secrets that wait to be uncovered" (54). This embodiment

of the unknown, of “an entity with no definable shape” (54) is, on the one side, the imaginary Real and, on the other, the real Real itself, which escapes human sciences and understanding.

The ideological connotations when confronting the two creatures presented in the tale, the shoggoths and the Elder Ones, seem to be clear if we follow Waugh’s ideas. The racist conclusions of *At the Mountains of Madness* would be too evident to be avoided. The Elder Ones, equaling humans for Lovecraft, are destroyed by the inferior shoggoths, the slaves, the strangers.

For Oakes, however, the reading is not focused on racial issues but in science. Science destroys civilizations, science is a source of destruction. The Elder Ones were able to achieve immense power thanks to science, getting access to the creation of life, and this power turned against them.

I consider that the two different approaches proposed by Waugh and Oakes are valid. *At the Mountains of Madness* is, following Waugh’s reading, a tale with a strong ideological real Real underlying the text. The shoggoth, as the critic conveys, is the symbolization of the immigrant. The images of the subway used by the writer to describe the creature evoke Lovecraft’s visions of the New York crowds of foreigner workers in the underground.<sup>16</sup> He was unable to assimilate the multicultural city he lived for a couple of years, and the constant contact with the immigrant population shocked and disgusted him.

On the other side, Oakes’ proposal of science as revealer of problematic issues that affect civilizations is the matches my idea of how science threatens the symbolic Real when it exposes the fragility of reality. At the same time, it also attacks the symbolic

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<sup>16</sup> In chapter 10, devoted to “The Quest of Iranon”, I will analyze Lovecraft’s views of the metropolis, in contrast with rural areas.

level when applied sciences are able to symbolize a reality which completely changes the structure of the symbolic Real itself. Lovecraft lived a period of enormous scientific discoveries, and it is likely to think that *At the Mountains of Madness* is putting forward a warning against the risks of science.

When exploring artistic inspirations for *At the Mountains of Madness*, Ernst Haeckel is a key author has to be kept in mind. Apart from his evolutionist ideas, discussed at length in the chapter devoted to science, Haeckel also published a book of plates, *Art Forms in Nature* (1904). Haden mentions that volume as source of artistic inspiration for Lovecraft:

Could this have led Lovecraft to seek out other later works by Haeckel? And might he have found the *Kunstformen der Natur* easily to hand, in the library of his uncle? Perhaps Lovecraft had the pick of his uncle's Library shortly after his death in 1915? Or even in the reference section of the Providence public library? ("Of Penguins" 71)

There are no evidences that Lovecraft had access to this book, but Haden's suspicions are reasonable. *Kunstformen der Natur* is a book of lithographic prints, being the subjects of them different species belonging to the animal and vegetal realm. It was originally published in sets of ten plates, and then in two volumes in 1904 (Kreinik 232), and it was more than likely an expensive volume, but Haden's hypothesis of Lovecraft getting access to it via his uncle, a well-paid doctor, or in public library, seems plausible enough. Considering all of these, and the fact that Lovecraft showed a remarkable interest in Haeckel's work, I accept that hypothesis.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the lithographs made by Haeckel represent individuals which have remarkable Lovecraftian features: tentacles, polyp-like shapes, appendixes, bulbs, conic trunks...

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<sup>17</sup> S.T. Joshi mentions the importance Haeckel had at a certain point during Lovecraft's life. See *I Am Providence* (316-23) and *Decline* (7-12). He argues, however, that Lovecraft's major concerns as regarding Haeckel's ideas were related to his own justification of atheism.

When reviewing the account Lake gives of the necropsied Elder One, it can be easily imagined a lithography of the creature included among Haeckel's work.<sup>18</sup> If we accept that the writer had access to *Art Forms in Nature*, and maybe some other Haeckel's artistic works, it cannot be denied that it was a clear source of inspiration not only in the description of the Elder Ones, but also in many other Lovecraftian creatures that dwell in his narrative.

From the hundred plates composing *Art Forms in Nature*, only the very last one is devoted to a mammal, an antelope. The inspiration for the rest of them is sea life (jellyfish, sea horses, anemones, fish, different kind of shells, tube sponges, starfish...), insects, amphibians, carnivorous plants, and molluscs. Lovecraftian monsters, at the same time, are most of the times described as living creatures not resembling mammals at all, but as sort of amphibious or sea creatures.<sup>19</sup> In *At the Mountains of Madness*, Lake is unable to include the Old One in a fixed category, and he declares that he "cannot yet assign positively to animal or vegetable kingdom, but odds now favour animal" (263). Later on in the text, when Dyer examines the creature, he will say that

One could hardly hesitate to call the thing animal; but internal inspection brought up so many vegetable evidences that Lake was left hopelessly at sea [...] It was partly vegetable, but had three-fourths of the essentials of animal structure. (265-66)

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<sup>18</sup> Actually there are two volumes, *Petersen's Field Guide to Cthulhu Monsters* and *Petersen's Field Guide: Creatures of the Dreamlands*, published by Sandy Petersen in 1988 and 1989, which describe, with profuse notes and drawings, most of the creatures imagined by Lovecraft in his fiction. Imitating the style of a scientific field guide of nature, but considering that all the creatures it depicts are imaginary – the books even include introductions by an imaginary Professor of the imaginary Lovecraftian Miskatonic University –, *Petersen's Field Guides* constitute an interesting visual approach in order to recreate images of some of the most shocking Lovecraft's creations.

<sup>19</sup> A remarkable exception can be found in "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family". This tale turns around the monstrous figure of a white ape goddess. In fact, apes and monkeys have certain relevance for Lovecraft –as shown in his juvenilia "The Beast in the Cave"–, which is interesting from the Darwinian point of view.

#### 6.4.- Conclusions

*At the Mountains of Madness* is a tale which exemplifies, in a quite clear way, the tripartite division of the Real proposed in the third chapter of this study. The discovery of the Elder Ones, and the final apparition of the shoggoth, reveals a metaphor of mankind and the menace of the slave and the immigrant. Lovecraft is sympathetic to the Elder Ones, considered as a sage ancient race. The shoggoth, on the contrary, is the personification of evil and chaos. Waugh's ideological proposal establishes, from my theoretical perspective, the hordes of immigrants that lived in New York as the real Real behind the novella. The city, Lovecraft once said, "is no longer American" (*Kleiner* 53).

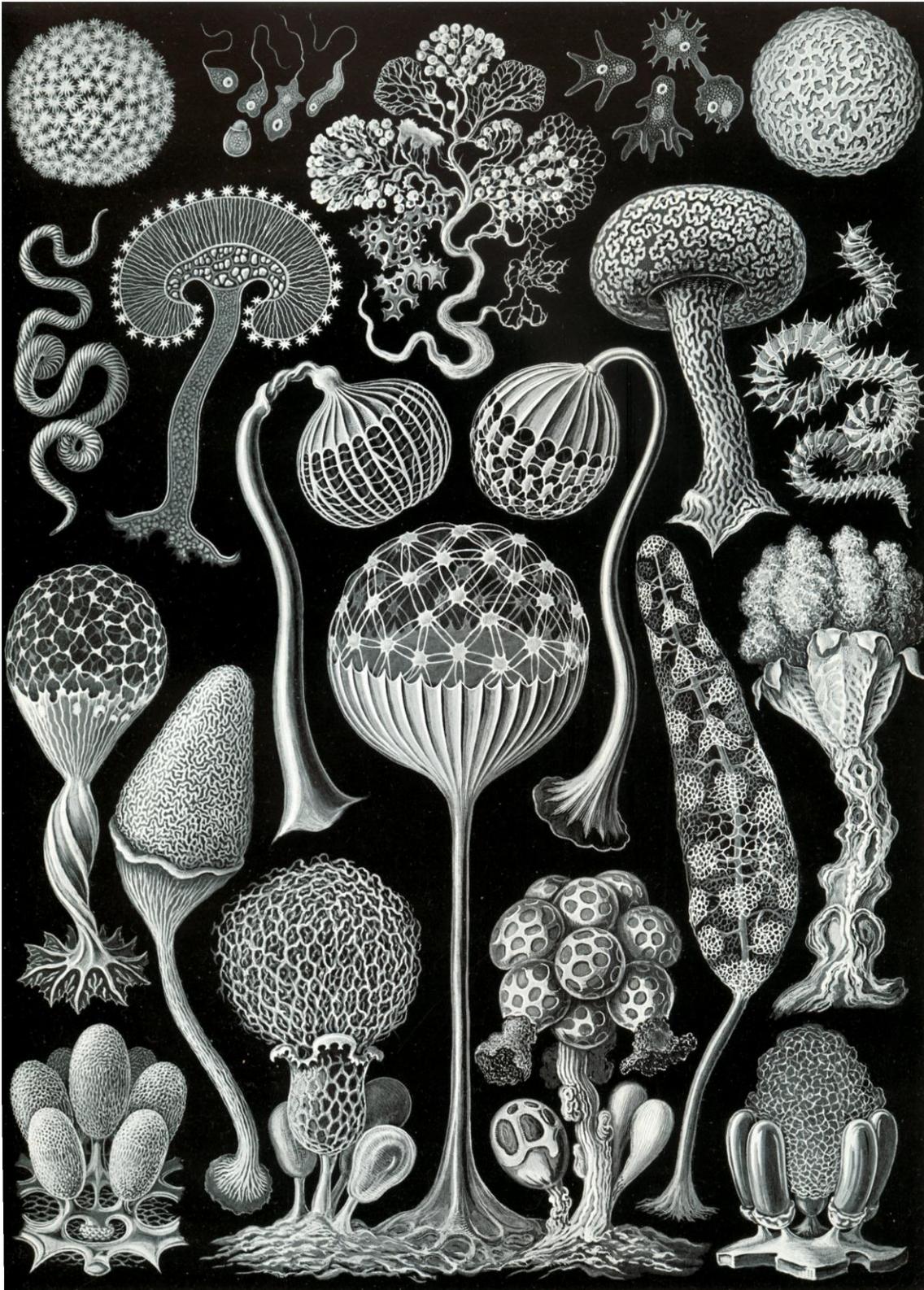
The imaginary Real has a palpable presence that firstly appears in subtle commentaries, and grows as the appearance of the shoggoth is closer. The elements that point at the supernatural events of the tale are more evident as the plot unravels and the atmosphere thickens. The description of the city, which plays an important role in the imaginary Real, is according to Berruti a way of identifying the other with a cultural artefact. The monstrous, gigantic town, was designed by the Elder Ones and constructed by the slaves, the shoggoths, and its architecture is impossible to describe. The linguistic vertical gap produced when the shoggoth is shown, contrasts with the horizontal gap that provokes the necropsy of the Elder One. The two witnesses of the abomination are unable to articulate a reasonable description of the shoggoth, whereas Lake's report of the dead Elder One is saturated with information. The two different approaches obstruct the process of symbolization of the foreign element.

Science plays two different roles in *At the Mountains of Madness*. First, the applied knowledge of the scientists exposes a truth which attacks the symbolic level. This happens, for instance, when the necropsy of the Elder One is done. The creature is

studied thanks to the scientific techniques learnt and applied by Lake, and the result is a failed process of symbolization of the creature. The assimilation of the existence of the Elder One creates a fracture in the symbolic Real that is difficult to repair.

On the other side, science considered as pure knowledge exposes the inconsistencies and problems that our symbolic Real has. The first discovery of a fossilized print at the beginning of the narration, for instance, triggers the apparition of the uncanny, of the imaginary Real, since the knowledge of the scientist who examines the fossil puts forward that the print belongs to something that is not known.

The importance of time in *At the Mountains of Madness* will be a constant feature in all the Lovecraftian oeuvre. However, in this particular tale the past narrated by the writer is so ancient that goes back to the times before mankind dwelt the planet. In other tales by Lovecraft, the past will be present in more recent periods of time, but the conflict with the haunting entities that come from the past and haunt the characters will be a landmark.



[Ernst Haeckel. *Kunstformen der Natur*. Plate 93: Mycetozoa]

## **CHAPTER 7: ON “THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH”**

### 7.1.- The fall of the house of Olmstead

“The Shadow over Innsmouth” was written between November and December 1931, but it was not published until 1936, when Visionary Publishing Company run 200 copies of the text. It was the only book of Lovecraft’s fiction to be published in his lifetime, and he was not even happy about it, since he disliked both the story and the quality of the edition. As regarding the edition, Joshi explains the problems Lovecraft found:

The illustrations, in the end, proved to be perhaps the only worthy item in the book, for certainly the text itself was seriously mangled. [...] Lovecraft did not receive a copy of the book until November –a point worth noting, since the copyright page of the book itself gives the date of April 1936 (the title page supplies Crawford’s new imprint, Visionary Publishing Co.). Lovecraft claimed to have found 33 misprints in the book, but other readers found still more. He managed to persuade Crawford to print an errata sheet –whose

first version was itself so misprinted as to be virtually worthless— and also found the time and effort to correct many copies of the book manually (*I Am Providence* 998-99).

In a letter to August Derleth, H.P. Lovecraft reflects upon the failures and handicaps he finds in this tale, most of them related to style and plot:

I don't think the experimenting came to very much. The result, 68 pages long, has all the defects I deplore —especially in point of style, where hackneyed phrases & rhythms have crept in despite all precautions. Use of any other style was like working in a foreign language —hence I was left high & dry. Possibly I shall try experimenting with another plot —of as widely different nature as I can think of— but I think an hiatus like that of 1908 is the best thing. I have been paying too much attention to the demands of markets & the opinions of others —hence if I am ever to write again I must begin afresh; writing only for myself & getting into the old habit of non-self-conscious storytelling without any technical thoughts. No —I don't intend to offer “The Shadow over Innsmouth” for publication, for it would stand no chance of acceptance (*Essential Solitude* 419-20).

Curiously enough, there has been unanimous agreement among critics when defining “The Shadow over Innsmouth” as a landmark in Lovecraft's oeuvre or, at least, as a remarkable piece of narrative. For Joshi, “Lovecraft achieved a greater atmosphere of insidious decay” (*I Am Providence* 797). Sprague de Camp thinks that it “is not Lovecraft's best; but it still —despite Lovecraft's blunder of putting the climax in the middle— a good, rousing yarn and central to the Cthulhu Mythos” (354). Burleson defines it as a text which “starts out, upon casual reading, looking “normal” and grows more anomalous, more teratological as time goes on, more monstrously complex with every reading” (*Disturbing the Universe* 146), a work “rich in symbolism, imaginery, and suspenseful plotting” (*Critical Study* 172).

It has been selected in the process of categorization presented in chapter 5 since it matches the subcategories 2, 3, 6A, 11, 13, 16, 19, 22A, 22C and 27. The narrator and

protagonist is a traveler (2) interested in genealogical and architectural exploration (3). The core of the narration takes place in Innsmouth, an isolated imaginary seaport located in Massachusetts (6A, 11 and 13). The narrator arrives into the town, which, at first, seems to be a normal place (16, 19). In the climax of the story, the narrator discovers the truth about the hidden secret that is kept in Innsmouth (22C), and about himself (22A). He finally runs away from the village and, probably, even from the known world (27).

“The Shadow Over Innsmouth” is a first person narration in which the main character, an anonymous traveller, is celebrating his “coming of age by a tour of New England – sightseeing, antiquarian, and genealogical–” (269-70).<sup>1</sup> When he decides to explore the seaport of Innsmouth, he first makes some research into it in the city of Arkham, where he discovers the hostility and superstitious fear that surrounding communities feel towards the town and inhabitants of Innsmouth. The once prosperous seaside town, the main character is said, is now a decadent isolated place, inhabited by sinister people, and hostile to foreigners. The traveller also knows about some remarkable pieces of jewelry which have been seen in Innsmouth, and he gets access to one of them, a tiara, in the Arkham museum. The artifact, described as a fine but very strange and uncanny piece of art, is probably the result of trade agreements, part of the Pacific routes established time ago by the Marsh family. It is the most notorious family in town, owners of the Marsh’s gold refinery, the only remains of the industrialized past Innsmouth had. The narrator also knows about the “Innsmouth look”, a very particular physical look featured in the inhabitants of the isolated seaport. The last weird element

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the protagonist is never made explicit in the tale, but Joshi states that in the surviving Lovecraft’s notes on the text, he is named Robert Olmstead. (*The Call of Cthulhu* 410).

is the mysterious Esoteric Order of Dagon, a cult or sect which is now present in Innsmouth.<sup>2</sup> It has dark origins and there is very little information available about it.

Robert Olmstead decides to do a one-day visit to the town, using the bus which goes from Arkham to Innsmouth. Once in the seaport, he starts exploring the area, until he finds a drunk beggard, Zadok Allen, who tells him the terrible truth the town hides. The story involves miscegenation with monsters coming from the sea –the origin of the “Innsmouth look”–, plans for invasion of the town on the part of the monsters living under the Devil Reef and how the Marsh family was the responsible of contacting the sea creatures, the Deep Ones. They were contacted in one of the commercial journeys made by Obed Marsh, a sea captain and founder of the Esoteric Order of Dagon.

After the talk with Allen, and still skeptical about the whole mistery surrounding the town of Innsmouth, the protagonist tries to go back to Arkham, but he finds out that the bus is broken and he has to stay overnight in the only hotel in town.

When during the night he listens to some threatening sounds in the corridor, and confirms that somebody (or something) is trying to get into his room, he manages to escape through the window and runs away from Innsmouth, using an abandoned railway line. In his way out of the seaport he manages to see a group of barely human swimming figures coming from the Devil's Reef to the coast.

At the end, when Robert Olmstead finds out that there are several groups of villagers chasing him, and a large group is passing next to his location, he hides in the bushes and discovers that the expedition is composed by monstrous creatures, the Deep Ones, and he faints after contemplating them.

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis on the pagan and religious implications of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, see Reynolds (100-3)

During the post-climax, the narrator confesses that he has been doing some research about his own family after the events that took place in Innsmouth, and he has discovered that his own family blood is mixed with the blood of the Deep Ones. Obed Marsh, who established dark pacts with the creatures, had intercourse with them. By doing so, he was the first in several generations corrupting the New England blood with that of the monsters.

In the previous chapter I put forward how *At the Mountains of Madness* is mainly concerned with the past. “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, to a certain extent, turns around the importance of time as well. But whereas the former tale deals with a broader range of time (the narration goes back very far in time, millions of years before human beings dwelt the planet), the latter presents a more Gothic idea of time, with a much more reduced scope involving just three or four generations of the Marsh family. The Gothic influence comes from the fact that the presence of a cursed lineage is the central axis of the plot, and the main character finally discovers that he is part of that family.<sup>3</sup>

In words of Lovett-Graff:

The narrator of “Shadow”, in his trip from fictitious Newburyport to the mythical Arkham, is caught up in a quest for answers far more intimately linked to his past than either he or the reader at first suspects (180).

Far from being an Usher-like family, which ends up with its own destruction in Poe’s tale, Lovecraft’s House of Marsh is not a menace for themselves, but for human beings as a whole. Their relationships with the monstrous Deep Ones and the marriages between humans and monsters, result in the spreading of the loathsome genetic charge of the creatures. The “Innsmouth look” is, obviously, the result of this intermingling,

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<sup>3</sup> As Botting points out in his analysis of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolfo*, “ghosts of past family transgressions become the major source of awful emotion” (69). The transgressions committed in the past by the Marsh family affect the narrator and main character of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”.

and the human-like babies grow up and become too *deponized* to live in society. Therefore, they come back to the sea, to join the colony of monsters under the Devil Reef. In fact, the last words expressed by the narrator in the tale, once he has discovered that soon he will be a Deep One as well, show those plans:

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 (335)

Before Robert Olmstead reaches Innsmouth, everything related to the town has a halo of mystery and superstition. All the references the narrator finds about the seaport are obscure, inhabitants of the neighboring villages evade it and its people, “people don't like it” (270), “Animals hate ‘em” (273), and whenever the protagonist finds somebody who is not reluctant to talk about Innsmouth, the information given does not unravel the mystery but embroils it even more.<sup>4</sup> The seaport is modeled upon the principles of the symbolic Real and, especially, the imaginary Real. The reader gets soon the impression that something strange is happening in the town, when in the first lines of the tale Lovecraft narrates how the government and the police took some special actions in the seaport, dynamiting many buildings and arresting several citizens. The presence of the uncanny, the imaginary Real that warns the reader about the presence of a hidden truth in the plot, is evident because no clear explanation of what the government was doing in Innsmouth is given. Harman remarks the difference between this situation –the governmental interference into the Mythos– and the typical Lovecraftian tale:

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<sup>4</sup> Notice the mythical image of animals being afraid of the Innsmouth people, as happened with the dogs in *At the Mountains of Madness*. According to Lovett-Graff, “This moral ‘sixth’ sense capable of distinguishing good from evil thus becomes a dramatic device to accentuate the difference between socially constructed appearances and biological (read ‘natural’) realities” (180-81). Something similar will be analyzed in “The Dunwich Horror” (chapter 9), where dogs attack Wilbur Watheley.

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In most of Lovecraft’s stories, the terrible truth is known only to a small number of people, and is either purposely shielded from the public for their own good, or offered to the public and met with disbelief. [...] In the case of Innsmouth things work in reverse: the authorities already know too much, and prefer that the public should continue to know very little. (174-75).

As the story continues, the atmosphere around Innsmouth thickens, and it is described as an “ill-rumoured and evilly shadowed seaport of death and blasphemous abnormality” (269). When the protagonist visits the museum to examine the tiara, he discovers an object he “can hardly describe” (276). The tiara, as will be known later in the tale, is an artifact taken from the Deep Ones, belonging to the realm of the Real, engraved with patterns “all hinted of remote secrets and unimaginable abysses in time and space” (276-77). This sentence joins together the imaginary Real and the symbolic Real: on the one hand, the remote secrets that give the impression that there is something obscure and latent in the origins of the tiara will spoil the reader’s imagination to think that there is the uncanny underlies the general plot, becoming a reference to the imaginary Real. It is a clear hint that supernatural things are to come. On the other hand, the unimaginable abysses are the example of the narrator’s incapacity to recreate the reality he is contemplating. He is not able to fully and accurately describe the bas-reliefs and engravings of the tiara, because language is not enough for this task; the apparition of an object which belongs to the Real into the domestic world of the narrator is reflected on the adjective “unimaginable”. The symbolic Real is present at the very moment this word –lexically related to the incapacity to reproduce reality– is used by Lovecraft in the description.

The narrator is both fascinated and disturbed when observing the item, and in spite of giving a more or less comprehensible description of it, Lovecraft introduces the stream

of the symbolic Real when his character mentions how indescribable the tiara is, but also when he points out that he is unable to attribute the workmanship which produced the piece of jewelry to any “known racial or national stream” (276). The lack of a clear origin for the tiara, as well as its manufacturing, which seems “that of another planet” (276), put the object beyond our daily reality. In words of Harman:

We encounter objects that are utterly startling in their novelty, yet which are nonetheless recognizable as belonging to a distinct and otherworldly style. Our attention is thereby shifted from the surface content of such objects to whatever barely detectable regularities in its structure alert us that they belong to a settled tradition. (178)

So even before the narrator arrives at Innsmouth, the text is already hinting at the existence of the Real, by means of the incapacity to reproduce the qualities of the tiara – the symbolic Real– and the elements which make the reader (not the protagonist) think that something uncanny is happening in the seaport. At the same time, the references Robert Olmstead gets from the Arkham inhabitants are also disturbing. Somebody mentions that during a night spent at the Gilman House, the only hotel in Innsmouth, a third person heard “voices in the other rooms [that] sounded so unnatural –slopping-like, he said–“ (273). Lovecraft keeps on spreading traces of the weird, identified with the imaginary Real. The unnatural voices, that the narrator will hear himself later in the tale, together with the alien manufactured tiara, make us think that some kind of inhuman creatures dwell the seaport.

Another two disturbing elements are subtly introduced in the plot with almost unnoticed, just veiled mentions to them. These two elements, as will be seen later, will have a key role in the development of the story. The first one, the Devil Reef, is said to be

## Chapter 7: On “The Shadow over Innsmouth”

[...] well above water a good part of the time, and never much below it, but at that you could hardly call it an island. The story is that there's a whole legion of devils seen sometimes on that reef - sprawled about, or darting in and out of some kind of caves near the top. It's a rugged, uneven thing, a good bit over a mile out, and toward the end of shipping days sailors used to make big detours just to avoid it. (271)

The reef is said to be shelter of devils in this very early reference. The narrator seems to be skeptical about it, and the whole stories he hear about Innsmouth just “add an acute anthropological zeal” (278). This zeal is also increased when the protagonist knows about the existence in Innsmouth of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, a “debased, quasi pagan thing imported from the East” (277). This sect, according to him, is the obvious result of the pagan idea that fish abundance in the seaport has some magical origin.

Robert Olmstead never believes a word of what he is told, and his rational mind discards the presence of the Real, creating an envelope of accessible reality. “Clearly, in the eyes of the educated, Innsmouth was merely an exaggerated case of civic degeneration” (274).

As has been said before, the concept of degeneration and degradation is omnipresent in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, and the curator of the Newburyport Historical Society, Miss Anna Tilton (another rational scientific character), shows an “attitude towards Innsmouth [...] of disgust at a community slipping far down the cultural scale” (276).

The first encounter with the bus driver, the first from the Innsmouth folks to appear in the story, provokes a “wave of spontaneous aversion which could be neither checked nor explained” (278) in the narrator. Before introducing any kind of physical description, Lovecraft remarks the abnormal and indescribable repulsion this character causes: once again, the symbolic Real and the imaginary Real come together.

Following this first wave of aversion, the physical description reinforces the sense of monstrosity derived from the man. He is presented as a figure with “deep creases in the side of his neck”, with “narrow head, bulging, watery blue eyes”, “long, thick lip and coarse-pored, grayish cheeks” and whose “hands were large and heavily veined, and had a very unusual grayish-blue tinge”. To complete the portrait, his “inordinately immense” feet produced a “peculiarly shambling gait” (279). Once again, the narrator tries to find a scientific explanation for such a deformed being, and the arguments he weighs have some interesting racial connotations:

Just what foreign blood was in him I could not even guess. His oddities certainly did not look Asiatic, Polynesian, Levantine, or negroid, yet I could see why the people found him alien. I myself would have thought of biological degeneration rather than alienage.<sup>5</sup> (279)

The main character cannot associate the strange physical characteristics of the bus driver to any known race because the physical degradation he has makes it impossible. Harman states that “Sargent would appear to belong to a known earthly race in a state of inbred genetic decline” (183). However the narrator’s rational mind preserves him from the Real –that the bus driver goes beyond normal and rational humanity– and imputes the particular odd features to biological degeneration. By doing this, the corruption that has been mentioned as being omnipresent in “The Shadow over Innsmouth” is now readily attached to living creatures. This detail will have an important role for my analysis, since it will be strongly linked with the Darwinist reading that can be made from the tale.

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<sup>5</sup> Notice that, according to the protagonist, the Esoteric Order of Dagon is probably something “imported from the East” (277).

7.2.- Monsters that came from afar: a Darwinist nightmare

At this point of the narration Lovecraft has already introduced, in a more or less evident way, some references to Darwinist concepts or theories. The reader knows that Innsmouth is an isolated place, surrounded by “wide salt marshes, desolate and unpeopled” (269), and the seaport is referred as “the habitat of such a man and his kinsfolk” (278). When formulating hypotheses about Captain Marsh’ businesses during his travels in Asia, it is said, making reference to foreign people coming to Innsmouth from distant places, that “Marsh must have brought home some odd specimens” (272).

Words such as “habitat” or “specimens” configure a subtle scientific framework throughout the text. The analytic mind of Robert Olmstead and narrator tries to give rational explanations to all the events and rumors he witnesses, and it will not be until almost the end of the tale when he finally succumbs to the evidences of the supernatural.

When the bus approaches the seaport, another paragraph reminds the reader how isolated the place is:

The day was warm and sunny, but the landscape of sand, sedge-grass, and stunted shrubbery became more and more desolate as we proceeded. Out the window I could see the blue water and the sandy line of Plum Island, and we presently drew very near the beach as our narrow road veered off from the main highway to Rowley and Ipswich. There were no visible houses, and I could tell by the state of the road that traffic was very light hereabouts. The small, weather-worn telephone poles carried only two wires. Now and then we crossed crude wooden bridges over tidal creeks that wound far inland and promoted the general isolation of the region. (280)

Innsmouth is a place with no contact with the rest of the civilization, and this is something that Lovecraft is trying to specify clearly.<sup>6</sup> The seaport is a kind of genetic laboratory where the Mythos are intermingling with human beings, and the fact that it is isolated from the rest of humankind is a useful defensive barrier. A close community will allow a safer “blood invasion” by the Deep Ones, since there are no foreigners that could disrupt the process. The introduction of a strange agent –Deep Ones– that can modify species –human beings– in an isolated place multiplies the chances of success of the invasion, as will be explained later in this chapter, when analyzing the Darwinist framework.

The feelings resulting from the first look at the inhabitants of the place are not much different from those expressed when the narrator observed the bus driver. He asserts that he “instinctively disliked [certain peculiarities of face and motions] without being able to define or comprehend them” (282). Again, the instinctive dislike towards Innsmouth folks is related to the imaginary Real, and the feeling of strangeness emanating from the inhabitants of the town warns the reader. At the same time, the narrator expresses his own incapacity to describe or understand this rejection, making the symbolic Real present at this moment as well.

It has been anticipated that Innsmouth is depicted by Lovecraft as a synonym of corruption and degeneration. The town has reached a level of decadence that permeates the whole narration in its descriptions and general tone. The text is rich in adjectives and expressions such as “biological degeneration”, “wormy decay”, “hateful”,

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<sup>6</sup> Janicker remarks that, in spite of being a fictional location, “Innsmouth is situated near such genuine Massachusetts locations as Ipswich, Rowley and Newburyport. Lovecraft thus adds authenticity to his fictional communities [...] placing them within identifiable, real-world spaces” (58). See Marten for further analysis on the imaginary places created by Lovecraft and its identification with New England.

“isolation”, “degraded”, “fishy smell”, “disgusting”, “repulsive” (279-87)... The first sight of the seaport that the narrator has exemplifies this:

The vast huddle of sagging gambrel roofs and peaked gables conveyed with offensive clearness the idea of wormy decay, and as we approached along the now descending road I could see that many roofs had wholly caved in. [...] I saw the rusted, grass-grown line of the abandoned railway, with leaning telegraph-poles now devoid of wires, and the half-obscured lines of the old carriage roads to Rowley and Ipswich.

The decay was worst close to the waterfront, though in its very midst I could spy the white belfry of a fairly well-preserved brick structure which looked like a small factory. The harbor, long clogged with sand, was enclosed by an ancient stone breakwater. [...] Here and there the ruins of wharves jutted out from the shore to end in indeterminate rottenness, those farthest south seeming the most decayed. (281-82).

The degeneration is present not only in the organic bodies of the deformed townsfolk, but also in the buildings themselves. As Janicker points out, “its crumbling physical state unmistakably mirrors the biological and social corruption” (67). The houses, buildings, factories and streets of Innsmouth are a metaphor of the hidden truth that its inhabitants know. The seaport is a giant pathetic fallacy framework for the events happening inside its houses and churches, an effect which has been described by Janicker (67) and Morgan. According to the latter:

In the gothic framework, deteriorating place speaks emphatically of organic deterioration in general. In literary horror, places often enable the trope of languishment and lethargy discussed, mainly in terms of people, in the preceding chapter. Images expressive of the dissolution of architecture, infrastructure, and spatial ordering, resonate in our psycho-physical imaginations, eliciting a sense of a generally dissolving integrity, an objectified schizophrenia. (184)

The two elements that were subtly introduced in the first pages of the tale, the Devil Reef and the Esoteric Order of Dagon, are regained during the bus tour. The reef is

simply described as a “black line scarcely rising above the water yet carrying a suggestion of odd latent malignancy” (282). This suggestion of malignancy is connected, again, with the portrayal of the imaginary Real performed throughout the whole narration; there is something strange and odd emanating from the reef.

The “degraded cult” (283) of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, on the other hand, is established in an old Masonic Hall that the narrator observes through the bus window. The cult is professed in an old church in front of the Hall, and it is through a door of this church how the protagonist is shocked by the view of the pastor, who is wearing a tiara very similar to the one he examined in the Historical Society. This image causes him “the touch of bizarre horror” (284), but soon he recovers and finds again a rational explanation for the coincidence:

Was it not natural that a local mystery cult should adopt among its regimentals an unique type of head-dress made familiar to the community in some strange way –perhaps as treasure-trove? (284)

After leaving the bus, the first person the protagonist is able to talk to is a non native boy who works in a grocery. He supplies the narrator with a map, some food for the day and some information about the town and its people. It is at this point when an important discovery is made. The kid says that most of the people that can be seen around are the youngest, since old people are not shown up in public. Again, reason prevails and a scientific/clinical explanation is conjectured to explain this strange absence: the “Innsmouth look” is the result of a disease which increases its hold as years advance (287). The second interesting reference he makes is about the Esoteric Order of Dagon, with some obscure references to a cult which provides immortality and to strange nocturnal ceremonies carried on in different local churches. The mysterious

atmosphere deepens, but the narrator keeps on his rational explanations and considers the whole thing as an “exaggerated example of communal decay” (289).

Short after leaving the grocery, the second important encounter happens. Zadok, an old drunk who does not present the “Innsmouth look”, narrates the explorer a hallucinated and horrific story with all the events that took place in the seaport during the previous decades. The long drunk speech will unravel the whole plot, as he explains how the merchant Obed Marsh came to an agreement with the Deep Ones in order to have enough fish and treasures in Innsmouth. In exchange, he would allow intermingling with his own family, and would offer certain sacrifices to the creatures, that would take humans to the depths of the Devil Reef, where they have a nest. The impious practices performed by Obed Marsh are later imitated by other neighbors in order to get fish enough for a living, and spread throughout the village after Obed creates the Esoteric Order of Dagon. This results in the whole seaport invaded by hybrids. In exchange, valuable jewelry and fish are always available to the inhabitants.

After hearing the story, the narrator feels a bit unnerved, but still rationalizes the whole thing as the product of Allen Zadok’s insanity:

Puerile though the story was, old Zadok’s insane earnestness and horror had communicated to me a mounting unrest which joined with my earlier sense of loathing for the town and its blight of intangible shadow. (307)

The implications of what is happening in Innsmouth, as has been mentioned before, have a strong scientific and ideological background. In short, the Deep Ones, alien marine creatures, are intermingling with human beings.

Lovett-Graff asserts that Lovecraft was a belated eugenics supporter. By writing and publishing “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” in 1932, eight years after the passing of the

Immigration Restriction Act of 1924, the writer was still giving his support to a social stream that was already “losing members as the Great Depression swept up citizens with more pressing issues” (176).<sup>7</sup> According to Lovett-Graff, the association between Deep Ones and immigrants is too obvious to be avoided in this tale of biological horror. The references made in the tale to the trips of Obed Marsh to “Africa, Asia the South Sea, and everywhere else” (272) overtly point to several groups of immigrants, since “there must be something like that back of the Innsmouth people” (272). Zadok explains that the Deep Ones live in underwater nests all around the globe, but the allusions to Africa and Asia are clearly expressed, and the two continents are the source of the “Innsmouth look”. The intercourse between the monsters and human beings is the beginning of the process of blood degradation and degeneration.

This comparison between the monster and the foreigner has been well noticed and remarked by Lévy:

For Lovecraft [...] the displaying of these execrable mutants seems perhaps, in an obscure and confusing way, a testimonial to the failure of America's politics of racial assimilation, a deliberate rejection of the notion of the “melting pot,” which forms so integral a part of the American dream. In this man, ever faithful to the ideologies of the past, any infringement of the strictest segregation ends in disastrous, in *monstrous*, consequences. [...] Thus the monsters, fruit of repugnant matings of humans with “outsiders,” represent the ultimate level of degeneracy that lies in wait for American civilization if it continues to encourage, or simply to tolerate, the mixture of bloods and races; hybridism, cross-breeding are at the source of the monstrous. (61-62)

Hybridism and cross-breeding as source of *communal decay* are rooted into the poligenist tradition –followed by Louis Agassiz– which supported that the different

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<sup>7</sup> This federal law limited the amount of immigrants that could be admitted in the United States to 2% of each foreign-born group living in the country in 1890.

human races where completely different and separated species. Louis Menand quotes a very revealing paragraph by Agassiz himself, who condemned the mixture of races:

It is immoral and destructive of social equality as it creates unnatural relations and multiplies the differences among members of the same community in a wrong direction [...] While I believe that a wise social economy will foster the progress of every pure race according to its natural dispositions and abilities [...] I am convinced also that no efforts should be spared to check that which is abhorrent to our better nature, and inconsistent with the progress of higher civilization and a purer morality. (114-15)

So “The Shadow over Innsmouth” is likely echoing the ideas that the poligenists put forward as regards the race intermingling. Lovecraft rendered extreme the possibility of this intercourse, transforming it, as Lévy conveys, into a source of supernatural, monstrous events.

Maurice Lévy also highlights the concept of invasion, which is the ultimate risk that has to be avoided for Lovecraft. The monster has the ability to corrupt, and

[...] is revolting not only because it escapes logic and constitutes a disturbance for the reason, but also because it is propagated and, little by little, corrupts the individuals of a healthy race. (57)

For Lévy, the formula Deep One equal immigrant is clear, as it is for Lovett-Graff. The inherent racism of Lovecraft is reflected in his writing, and the Puritan New England tradition triggers it, playing the same role “as medieval myth did in the Gothic novels” (119).<sup>8</sup>

In his study *Science and Destabilization in the Modern American Gothic*, David A. Oakes does not focus his attention in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. Curiously enough, most of his efforts are centered in the most technological side of science, and he

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<sup>8</sup> See Lévy (27ss) for a detailed explanation on this matter.

neglects the more biological issues of the Lovecraft narrative. However what he discusses about in his work is also of interest for the text I am discussing now:

His fiction [Lovecraft's] focuses on the possibility that the search for knowledge shall lead to revelations that will forever change humanity's view of the universe and its place in it. (29).

Oakes explores a much wider scope, and has a cosmic and global view of the texts he examines. This point of view is very suitable for texts such as the one analyzed in the previous chapter, *At the Mountains of Madness*, where the narrative evokes events as important as the creation of humanity. At first, it might not be so tight when dealing with apparently more local and domestic situations. But when considering the potential consequences that the events happening in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" may have, in its strictly fantastic scope, it can be seen that the range they reach is as big as can be imagined. A future big scaled invasion of Deep Ones would probably mean the end of humanity, and mankind would simply disappear.

Thus, Oakes' view of search for knowledge as source of horror in Lovecraft remains a valid argument. The narrator in "The Shadow over Innsmouth", as most of the protagonists in his stories, finds the hidden truth by chance. But when something is found is because somebody is searching, and he is really looking for knowledge. His tour, as has been quoted before, has genealogical and antiquarian aims, and he mentions several times the anthropological and architectural interest the seaport awakes in him. What starts as a pleasant research will drive to the discovery of the intermission of the Real into reality.

In the framework of the Darwinist theories, it is important to highlight the figure of the hybrid. The concept of hybrid is defined by Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*

as “the offspring of the union of two distinct species” (446). The most striking difference between the hybrid found in Lovecraft’s Innsmouth and the hybrid described by Darwin is related to sterility. Darwin devotes the whole eighth chapter of *On the Origin of Species*, entitled “Hybridism”, to the analysis of the sterility (or not) of hybrids. After analyzing the major studies carried out by Gärtner and Herbert on vegetal hybridization, as well as some minor studies on animal hybridization, Darwin raises some interesting conclusions.

The general one is that “first crosses between forms sufficiently distinct to be ranked as species, and their hybrids, are very generally, but not universally, sterile.” (246) Hybrids, as a general rule, tend to be sterile. But Darwin admits the existence of noticeable examples where this law fails. In a general basis, “Hybrids from two species which are very difficult to cross, and which rarely produce any offspring, are generally very sterile” (230). However this second statement has also exceptions, since

There are many cases, in which two pure species can be united with unusual facility, and produce numerous hybrid-offsprings, yet these hybrids are remarkable sterile. On the other hand, there are species which can be crossed very rarely, or with extreme difficulty, but the hybrids, when at last produced, are very fertile. (230)

So the Darwinist norm is that hybrids will be sterile, but with exceptions.

On the other hand, the hybrids found in Innsmouth are definitely not sterile. According to Zadok’s narration, the Marsh family has been interbreeding with Deep Ones for several generations, being Captain Obed Marsh the first one mixing his blood with that of the monsters. He had three offsprings, and the family lineage continues down to the time of the narration. At the end it will be known that the protagonist himself is the

great-great-grandson of Obed Marsh. Apart from that, it is known that most of the villagers have corrupted genealogies.<sup>9</sup>

The contrast between the general sterility of the Darwinist hybrid and the remarkable fertility of the Innsmouth people has, in my opinion, an ideological implication. As Lovett-Graff puts forward, if Deep Ones and humans can mate, it is because they are “branches on the same evolutionary tree” (187). The Deep Ones, under an ideological perspective, are not alien creatures, but a degenerated, inferior branch of the inhabitants of New England. The real Real hidden behind the creatures is related to the intermingling between the immigrant and the New English Aryan. As Berruti conveys, the events that take place in Innsmouth (miscegenation, cross-breeding, merging of different races...) “are employed by Lovecraft to show the destructive consequences of the fusion between self and other” (“Self, Other” 119-20).

When the “Innsmouth look” is too grotesque to be shown in public (it worsens with aging), the specimens are hidden in the many seemingly empty houses that can be found in the seaport, and there is a moment in which the individual moves to the sea and disappears under the Devil Reef. It seems as if the hybrid suffers a process of Darwinist reversion and moves several steps back in his genetic track, reaching the state of the Deep One who first corrupted his lineage. In the field of genetics, this is known as the principle of reversion to ancestral characters, and according to Charles Darwin:

I have stated that the most probably hypothesis to account for the reappearance of very ancient characters, is –that there is a tendency in the young of each successive generation to produce a long-lost character, and that this tendency, from unknown causes, sometimes prevail. (154-55)

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<sup>9</sup> These corrupted lineages are represent the Gothic obsession “with fragmented and contaminated genealogies” that, according to Ian Duncan, constitute the kernel of the Gothic tradition (23).

Darwin studied this process using different breeds of domestic pigeons, which differs from the case proposed by Lovecraft, since the writer is concerned with reversion in hybrids coming from different species. However Lovecraft applied the ideas postulated by the British scientist neglecting the differences between breed and species. Lévy is aware of this reversion process, and the use Lovecraft makes of it in order to reflect his personal anxieties and prejudices. When talking about the mutants/hybrids, Lévy states that

It is at the end of a regressive process that Pickman becomes a ghoul, or another such hero, a Deep One, a process that must be placed in the perspective of a manifestly decadent esthetic, inspired –or aggravated– by the author’s personal phantasms. (76-77)

Geographically speaking, Innsmouth is a frontier between the sea, where the Deep Ones come from (in fact, they meet humans in the Devil's Reef, located near the coast) and the rest of the world. It is a gate opened for corruption to enter the civilized world. Apart from that, it is a small town, and the number of inhabitants/hybrids is also reduced, “there can't be more'n 300 or 400 people living there now” (272). This clearly follows Darwin principle on minorities:

[...] varieties linking two other varieties together have generally existed in lesser numbers than the forms which they connect, then, I think, we can understand why intermediate varieties should not endure for very long periods. (162)

So according to Darwin, Innsmouth inhabitants are the intermediate variety between Deep Ones and humans, and their future is not clear at all. Darwin goes on in his reasoning, saying that “the more common forms, in the race for life, will tend to beat and supplant the less common forms, for these will be more slowly modified and improved.” (163). Inasmuch as most of the people from Innsmouth suffer the process of reversion and disappear under the sea, Lovecraft seems also to be following Darwin's

ideas about the intermediate varieties. Future of the Innsmouth population is uncertain, since they are being phagocytised by one of the original species, the Deep Ones. The community of Innsmouth has no real future.

This process of progressive invasion and degeneration carried out by the Deep Ones over the community of Innsmouth is analyzed under the scope of the Lovecraftian fantastic by Lévy: "The bizarre does not fall from space to terrify or confound, but to corrupt. It is a type of gangrene that gnaws, wears away, and finally rots the familiar world through and through" (38). From my theoretical perspective, the organic metaphor of gangrene used by Lévy is perfectly suitable for the events happening in the seaport. Reality, in a Lacanian sense, is under the menace of the gangrene of the Real. The real Real, the fear that Lovecraft had of the miscegenation with immigrants and the subsequent *communal decay* of the Aryan race, is what threatens the symbolic Real of the writer. Gangrene is no more than the interference that the real Real is provoking in the symbolic level.

The fourth chapter of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" lacks of interest for this study until the final paragraphs. After being forced to spend the night in the Gilman House Hotel and being harassed and chased by several menacing groups (always described from a distant security), the protagonist is able to escape from downtown and hides behind some bushes to observe one of the groups parading in front of him. What he contemplates is a group of Deep Ones.

The description of the group of creatures is long, but it is worthy to reproduce it here in order to discuss it and its implications:

And yet I saw them in a limitless stream - flopping, hopping, croaking, bleating - urging inhumanly through the spectral moonlight in a grotesque, malignant saraband of fantastic

## Chapter 7: On “The Shadow over Innsmouth”

nightmare. And some of them had tall tiaras of that nameless whitish-gold metal ... and some were strangely robed ... and one, who led the way, was clad in a ghoulishly humped black coat and striped trousers, and had a man's felt hat perched on the shapeless thing that answered for a head.

I think their predominant colour was a greyish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad that they had no more than four limbs. Their croaking, baying voices, clearly wed tar articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked.

But for all of their monstrosity they were not unfamiliar to me. I knew too well what they must be - for was not the memory of the evil tiara at Newburyport still fresh? They were the blasphemous fish-frogs of the nameless design - living and horrible - and as I saw them I knew also of what that humped, tiaraed priest in the black church basement had fearsomely reminded me. Their number was past guessing. It seemed to me that there were limitless swarms of them and certainly my momentary glimpse could have shown only the least fraction. In another instant everything was blotted out by a merciful fit of fainting; the first I had ever had. (328-29)

The grotesque parade is described with an emphasis on the most physical aspects of the creatures. The accumulation of adjectives to provide an over-elaborated portrait of the sounds, movements, colors, shapes... that the narrator is witnessing, follows Harman's idea of the cubist description, with a profusion of “sensual qualities that pile up in disturbing profusion” (34). This I have assimilated as symbolic Real, because of the disruption and interference it produces in language, similar to that produced by the use of unspeakable-like adjectives. The description is so excessive that it obstructs the representation of the object.

In spite of being monstrous, the figures still keep a somehow humanoid shape. As Lévy highlights, “They keep its general [human] aspect, but are endowed at the same time with attributes that belong to a different animal species” (56). At this particular case, the creatures have some characteristics taken from aquatic animals, mainly frogs and fish. The eyes, gills, colors and webbed paws, as well as their hops and croacking voices, are strongly linked to the sea.

The group is defined as a malignant saraband. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* the saraband or sarabande is a dance, probably originated in Central America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was derived from a Spanish-Arab dance. It was forbidden in Spain due to its obscenity.<sup>10</sup> The noun used to define the group of creatures condensates two decadent aspects for Lovecraft: eroticism and non-Aryan races –Hispanic and Arab–.<sup>11</sup> Lovett-Graff proposes that the sexual connotations of the whole tale are closely related to Lovecraft's prejudices against the supposedly vigorous and more active sexual activity immigrants had, which would lead to the complete corruption of the pure blood and race he belonged to (186-89). At the same time, sex was as a completely degenerated issue for Lovecraft, as he confessed in one of his letters:

I have opposed eroticism for several reasons, (a) because of the acknowledged repulsiveness of direct erotic manifestations, as felt by all races and cultures and expressed in reticence to a greater or less degree, (b) because of the obvious kinship of erotic instincts

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<sup>10</sup> Probably the most famous sarabande was the one composed by Georg Friedrich Handel for his *Keyboard suite in D minor (HWD 437)* between 1703 and 1706.

<sup>11</sup> As regards the Arab world, Egypt is a source of conflict and supernatural forces in several tales by Lovecraft. The narrator in “The Outsider”, who is a ghoul, finally moves with other ghouls to the “valley of Hadoth by the Nile” (49). Nyarlathotep, one of Lovecraft's mythological god-like entities (he will have a relevant role in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, analyzed in chapter 8), is described in “Nyarlathotep” as someone who “came out of Egypt. Who he was, none could tell, but he was of the old native blood and looked like a Pharaoh” (31). “Under the Pyramids”, ghost-written by Lovecraft for Harry Houdini, takes place in the catacombs of a pyramid. Finally, the writer of the *Necronomicon*, one of Lovecraft's hideous sources of knowledge, was written by a mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred. Out of Egypt, “The Nameless City” is set somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, and it is a city that was inhabited by a strange race of reptiles.

It is clear that the Arab world was used by Lovecraft as inspiration for exotic locations and as the homeland for some of his creatures.

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to the crudest and earliest neural phenomena of organic nature, rather than to the phenomena resulting from complex, and advanced development (i.e., purely intellectual phenomena), (c) because of the apparent connexion betwixt ages of erotic interest and national decadence, and (d) because so far as I could judge erotic interests are overrated; being in truth mere trifles which engross crude minds. (*SL I* 29-30)

The physical repulsion emanating from the description of the monsters reflects, according to Morgan, “the biological transgression involved in their begetting” (94). In the same way the decadent ruinous buildings of Innsmouth depict the degeneration of the hidden secret, the physical appearance of the creatures is a metaphor of the blood corruption present in the seaport.

During the time Lovecraft lived in New York, he had the opportunity to observe the masses of immigrants overcrowding the underground, and he felt repulsion against them, as he states in a letter written in March 21, 1924. In that letter, the writer says that immigrants could not be called human but “monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal” (*SL I* 333). Lovett-Graff develops further analysis (182-83), comparing the description of the Deep Ones with that made of the immigrants by Lovecraft in the quoted letter. Apart from the resemblances in the use of decadent and repulsive adjectives, he also pays attention to the sounds produced by the monstrous speech, concluding that

In spite of the fantastic form he gives "Shadow," Lovecraft's personal disgust with immigrant speech is barely contained by the "babel" of sound that threatens to overwhelm the pure English of his Nordic America. (183)

The croaking, baying voices they produce are, for Lovett-Graff, no more than a transposition of the different languages spoken by the immigrants living in the United States.

The final chapter of the narration, where the protagonist discovers that he is a descendant of Obed Marsh and he is starting to acquire the "Innsmouth look", ends with the narrator planning his escape to the depths of the sea. This final twist is comparable to that of "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family", another piece of fiction by Lovecraft in which the main character discovers that he is the descendant of an African white ape goddess. However the resolution of both revelations is different, since Arthur Jermyn, after discovering the family secret, commits suicide, whereas the narrator of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" decides to accept his fate and embraces it.

It is important to remark, in terms of ideology, the differences between Jermyn and Robert Olmstead. The story of Arthur Jermyn has a much more evident Darwinist reading than Innsmouth's. Arthur Jermyn discovers that his ancestor was an ape, which is one of the most relevant theses postulated by Charles Darwin. Olmstead is, in terms of ideology, the result of immigrant miscegenation. He is the offspring of foreigners coming from distant places, and when he discovers that, he decides to come back to the sea, the place his ancestors came from to spread their degenerated blood in Lovecraft's New England. Whereas Arthur Jermyn clearly represents the shock that science probably provoked in many people when Darwin published his studies, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" has, in my opinion, several social Darwinist readings, which are related to the real Real hidden behind the story. Arthur Jermyn's story is a more basic, direct portrait of the Darwinist theories of evolution. Jermyn is a descendant from an ape, and the revelation is so shocking for him that he immolates himself in order to wipe out his corrupted, cursed genealogy. "The Shadow over Innsmouth", on the other hand, is concerned with the social implications of the miscegenation between immigrants and New England inhabitants. The result of the mating between the Deep Ones and the humans is the *communal decay* of the Aryan race as a whole. Jermyn's reaction is

provoked by the discovery of a truth he cannot understand and bear. Here the role of science as pure knowledge is a menace for the symbolic level, since the notion of pure ancestry is questioned. The ideological implications of “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” have to do with science as revelator of truths that cannot be bear by mankind. The ideological reading of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” goes a step further, since it includes the reporting of what Lovecraft considered a social threat. We cannot avoid our apish origins, but we can prevent from *communal decay* coming from inter-breeding.

The narrator of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, a scientific and rational mind, a curious young person with intellectual and cultural interests, is also corrupted by the blood of the monster. In the context of the horror tale, that would be one of Lovecraft’s more hideous nightmares. Actually in one of his letters to Frank Belknap Long, in 1927, after digging in his family tree back until the times of George III, he admits that his great-great-grandmother was a “Welsh gentlewoman of unmixed Celtick blood!” (*SL II* 181), and his great-great-great-grandmother was a “Full-blooded Celt” (183). But, probably half-serious, half-joking, he asserts that “the Celtick taint hath not reached my rural Saxon heart!” (182). The idea of not having a clear and clean lineage obviously obsessed the writer, and making his protagonist fall into the decadent spiral depicted in Innsmouth can be read as the ultimate failure of America in the immigration control policies (Lévy 61). It is true that when Lovecraft wrote “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, during the Depression years, the amount of immigrants arriving to the United States was almost insignificant in comparison with previous years (1.200.000 in 1914 and 23.000

in 1933, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security).<sup>12</sup> However they were already in the country and it was something disturbing for him.

My second reading of Olmstead's assimilation of his origins is related to a possible underground proposal that Lovecraft might be providing: the solution to avoid the degeneration of the American nation is to expel the immigrants, forcing them to come back with their fellow beings in their native countries. Robert Olmstead escapes and moves back to his origins, with his fellow alien creatures, and that would be, for Lovecraft, a balanced way of restoring the social equilibrium, a positive process of restoring the previous state of things. In words of Joshi:

What he wanted was simply *familiarity* –the familiarity of the milieu in a racially and culturally homogeneous Providence that he had experienced in youth. In stating that even art must satisfy our “homesickness... for the things we have known” (“Heritage or Modernism”), Lovecraft is testifying to the homesickness he himself felt when, as an “unassimilated alien” in New York or even in latter-day Providence, he witnessed the increasing urbanization and racial heterogeneity of his region and his country. (*I Am Providence* 942)

Olmstead is not the only character who, after discovering that he is a creature, finds his own monstrous community and escapes with them. The return to the monstrous community is then a recurrent subject in Lovecraft's narrative. The protagonist of “The Outsider”, after the traumatic moment of looking at himself in a mirror placed in the ballroom he bursts into, understands that he is a ghoul and moves to Egypt where “I ride with the mocking and friendly ghouls on the nightwind, and play by day among the catacombs of Nephren-Ka” (49).

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<sup>12</sup> Complete statistics of persons obtaining legal permanent resident status from 1820 to 2011 can be found at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security website.

Pickman, the painter from “The Pickman’s Model”, also disappears after having some kind of encounters with monsters that he uses as models for his paintings. The narration does not explain what really happened to the artist, but it can be understood that he moves with the creatures he was painting, or perhaps he is kidnapped by them.

### 7.3.- Conclusion

At this point it, I have already analyzed the presence of the symbolic Real and the imaginary Real all throughout “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. As has been said the presence of elements which subtly suggest the existence of uncanny events are linked to the representation of the imaginary Real. On the other hand, the moments in which language is fractured or obstructed, via the incapacity for describing reality or the over exaggerated descriptions are the ways in which that imaginary Real invade the symbolic level of the textual reality. The previous discussion about the ideological background behind the tale tries to elucidate the real Real hidden in the decadent Innsmouth. The imaginary Real points to the processes of miscegenation and immigration observed by Lovecraft in his reality, and it matches with the intermingling between monsters and humans. The unnamable creature, points to the immigrant. The real Real underlying “The Shadow over Innsmouth” is Lovecraft’s idea about the miscegenation produced between Aryan people and immigrants, which would lead to the degeneration and *communal decay* of the Teutons. According to Morgan, “such writers much project and objectify their suffocating biological anxiety in order to survive” (101).

As in the case of *At the Mountains of Madness*, the setting, the city of Innsmouth, plays an important role in the imaginary Real. By means of the description of the decayed and

rotten buildings of the seaport, Lovecraft is reflecting the processes of *communal decay* that are taking place within the community.

“The Shadow over Innsmouth” presents some of the most noticeable obsessions Lovecraft had in terms of social ideology. There is a fear of the immigrant and the decline of the purity of races due to miscegenation underlying the story, and science is used as a way to transmit this anxiety. The writer is applying his knowledge of sciences to portray the reality he is observing and experiencing in the 1920s and 1930s New England, following some of Darwin's most spread ideas and, according to Lovett-Graff, also the principles of eugenics.

The constant presence of the symbolic Real and the imaginary Real, together with the general decadent and degenerated tone of the narration, are the means by which Lovecraft exposes his ideology in the text. This ideology, the underlying real Real of Innsmouth, results from the social movements that the writer observed during his life. Immigration and the sexual intercrossing between Aryans and non-Aryans was a reality that Lovecraft was unable to assimilate, and this tension filters through the text of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. This fear is summarized by Lovecraft's himself in one of his letters:

In order to preserve the character of the population, and to avoid that deterioration of manners and morals which is ever consequent upon mongrelism, it is absolutely essential to erect an impassible barrier against the disgusting Italians, Jews, Slavs, Armenians, and other nondescript offscourings of Southern Europe and Asia. In a word, the only immigrants who are real acquisitions, and who can well enter wholly into an American race are those of older type –Germans and Scandinavians as Teutonic elements, and Irish as the Celtic element. (*Kleiner 52*)

## **CHAPTER 8: ON “THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH HOUSE”**

### 8.1.- The vices of witchcraft

Lovecraft reformulated some of the classical Gothic monsters in his texts. The figure of Victor Frankenstein and his monstrous creation were reshaped as Herbert West and his abominations in “Herbert West-Reanimator” (1922), which is probably one of the few author’s attempts to recreate some kind of humoristic tone in the story. The result was neither comical nor remarkable from a literary point of view. The classical vampire was also re-adapted by Lovecraft in “The Shunned House” (1924), where the undead creature haunts the basement of a house and is depicted in a very different way from that of the stereotypical fanged monster. “The Dreams in the Witch House” (provisionally entitled “The Dreams of Walter Gilman”), to which the present chapter is devoted, re-elaborates the figure of the classical witch, by giving her the capacity of performing inter-dimensional travels thanks to mathematics.

The story was written in 1932, and first published a year later in *Weird Tales*. According to Joshi (*I Am Providence* 824), Lovecraft was not happy with the text, and it seems August Derleth was of the same opinion. For Derleth, it was the typical text that perfectly suited pulp magazines. Actually he sent the manuscript to *Weird Tales* without Lovecraft knowing it, and it was immediately accepted.<sup>1</sup> The writer was paid \$140 for it, a more than reasonable amount of money considering the general quality of the text.

“The Dreams in the Witch House” is, from a literary point of view, the frustrated attempt of recreating a number of wonderful ideas. In words of Mariconda, “This story is best thought of as Lovecraft’s Magnificent Failure –its uneven execution is not equal to its breathtaking conceptions, which are some of the most original in imaginative literature.” (200). Joshi shares Mariconda’s opinion:

The imaginative scope of the novelette is almost unbearably vast; but it is utterly confounded by slipshod writing and a complete confusion as to where the story is going. Lovecraft here lapses into hackneyed and overblown purple prose that sounds almost like a parody of his own style. [...] There are countless unresolved elements in the tale. What is the significance of the sudden appearance of the Old Ones in the story? To what purpose is the baby kidnapped and sacrificed? How can Lovecraft the atheist allow Keziah to be frightened off by the sight of a crucifix? Why does Nyarlathotep appear in the conventional figure of the Black Man? In the final confrontation with Keziah, what is the purpose of the abyss aside from providing a convenient place down which to kick Brown Jenkin? How does Brown Jenkin subsequently emerge from the abyss to eat out Gilman’s heart? Lovecraft does not seem to have thought out any of these issues; it is as if he were aiming merely for a succession of startling images without bothering to think through their logical sequence or coherence. (*I Am Providence* 823)

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<sup>1</sup> The letter to *Weird Tales* from a reader proves that Lovecraft’s text suited the audience’s preferences: “I have just finished reading H.P. Lovecraft’s ‘The Dreams in the Witch-House’ in your July issue. I’m still shivering. Allow me to say it is a masterpiece of weird fiction. Lovecraft very, very closely approaches the ultimate, shuddery horror of Poe or Blackwood.” (Joshi, *Weird Writer* 75-76).

For Houellebecq, on the contrary, this tale is part of the core stories that constitute the best group of texts written by Lovecraft (41). Peter Cannon coincides with Joshi in the lack of cohesion of the text, but he admits that “it yet contains stretches of strong prose, notably the accounts of what Gilman sees in his otherworldly flights” (*H.P. Lovecraft* 113).

In my opinion, it is true that from a narrative point of view “The Dreams in the Witch House” is a deficient text. However, it is very interesting for this study because of the “breathtaking conceptions” Mariconda talks about. The tale includes some references and images that are worthy to be taken into consideration.

Walter Gilman is a student of traditional folklore and mathematics at the imaginary Miskatonic University in Arkham. He rents the upper room, just under the attic, in a house which is said to be haunted by the spirit of Keziah Mason, a witch arrested during the Salem witch trials of 1692 and who inexplicably disappeared from her cell, and her rat-like bearded familiar Brown Jenkin.

Gilman thinks that, thanks to non-Euclidean geometry and advanced mathematics it is possible to take profit of the curvature of the universe and travel between different planes of existence, dimensions and even perform journeys through time. When he starts suffering from strange fever attacks, he becomes obsessed with the weird angles of the walls, corners and ceiling of his room, and is dream-pursued by an old woman and her familiar, soon identified with Keziah and Brown Jenkin. In his dreams, Gilman is moved into oneiric landscapes where he is chased by the witch, and he meets Nyarlathotep, learns about Azathoth, the God of Chaos, and helps the witch in the kidnapping of a baby for a later sacrifice during the Walpurgis Eve.

Gilman starts to suspect that the supposed dreams are actual lived experiences when he wakes up with some physical hints that he apparently experienced during his oneiric travels (an Old One miniature, muddy feet and pajamas, bites in his wrist...), and confirms it when the newspapers echo the disappearance of a baby in the city the night he dreamt about it.<sup>2</sup>

In his very last dream, Gilman tries to avoid the sacrifice of the baby, defeats the witch and her familiar and comes back to reality. However the following night Brown Jenkin devours Gilman's heart in his own bed, in the presence of the other tenants, and escapes through a hole in the wall.

The post-climax of the story explains the events that take place years after Gilman's death, when the house is demolished. The workers find in the attic strange artifacts from different periods of time, the mortal remains of an old woman, of many children and of a rat-like creature.

"The Dreams in the Witch House" is one of Lovecraft's texts in which the presence of the "vertical" gap of language is more evident.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the narration is so profusely filled with constructions warning that the depicted object cannot be described that, as Joshi mentions in the previous quotation, "sounds almost like a parody of his own style". When the narrator talks about the abysses Gilman observes during his dream travels, everything seems to be "beyond human experience" (68), "totally beyond description or even comprehension" (70), "indescribably" (70), "unspeakably

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<sup>2</sup> I have avoided any kind of Freudian approach to this text. Lovecraft was aware of psychoanalysis (but Joshi is not sure about the writer having read him [*I Am Providence* 469]), but I am following Mosig's argument, supporting that "Lovecraft denied his dreams –and dreaming in general– any psychological significance" ("Dissonance Factor" 89). The writer once expressed:

"As for the nature of dreams –I think there is no question but that they consist of dissociated scraps of previous impressions (some utterly forgotten and ordinarily deeply buried into new and sometimes utterly unfamiliar forms. Their surface aspect is strange, yet every basic ingredient is something the mind has picked up at one time or another... from books, pictures, experiences, etc." (*SL IV* 413)

<sup>3</sup> The "vertical" gap proposed by Harman corresponds with the abundance of words and expressions which transmit the unrepresentability of the object on the part of the narrator.

menacing” (70), “past all analysis” (70), “indefinite” (71), “unmentionable” (77), “not correspond to anything on earth” (77), “too horrible for description” (78), ruled by laws “he could not comprehend” (84), or “laws unknown to the physics and mathematics of any conceivable cosmos” (90).<sup>4</sup> It seems as if the symbolic level of Gilman’s sleeplessness periods suffers of distortion and blurring due to the interferences provoked by the imaginary Real. The hints of the presence of the witch and her familiar, which are the symbolization of the real Real, are at the same time the causal elements of the “unmentionability” of the symbolic level. Keziah and Brown Jenkin are two entities which haunt the house, producing a white noise screen in the reality Gilman experiences. At the beginning of the story, Gilman’s dreams seem to be just strange nightmares pretty much grounded on the imaginary Real:

Gilman’s dreams consisted largely in plunges through limitless abysses of inexplicably coloured twilight and bafflingly disordered sound; abysses whose material and gravitational properties, and whose relation to his own entity, he could not even begin to explain. [...]  
The abysses were by no means vacant, being crowded with indescribably angled masses of alien-hued substance. (69)

However these oddly sensorial dreams do not include the presence of the witch or Brown Jenkin, since “that shocking little horror was reserved for certain lighter, sharper dreams which assailed him just before he dropped into the fullest depths of sleep” (71). It is during those particular moments when the line dividing the oneiric realm from reality narrows and the imaginary Real is tangible into the realm of the symbolic. At first, Gilman just sees the rat-like creature:

He would be lying in the dark fighting to keep awake when a faint lambent glow would seem to shimmer around the centuried room, shewing in a violet mist the convergence of

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<sup>4</sup> One of the oddities in the present tale is that Lovecraft wrote it by using a third person narrator. The vast majority of his fiction is written in first person, but it is possible that the writer selected third person for this tale to be able to omnisciently narrate the bloody death of Gilman.

angled planes which had seized his brain so insidiously. The horror would appear to pop out of the rat-hole in the corner and patter toward him over the sagging, wide-planked floor with evil expectancy in its tiny, bearded human face –but mercifully, this dream always melted away before the object got close enough to nuzzle him. (71)

As nights go by, the figure of Brown Jenkin starts to be accompanied by “the nebulous blur which grew more and more to resemble a bent old woman” (72). Little by little, interaction with the two figures starts, and they “had been urging him to go somewhere with them and to meet a third being of greater potency” (72).

There is another important element which reinforces the dream-like tone of the narration, and it also helps to increase the importance of the imaginary Real in the text. Gilman is also experiencing auditory hypersensitivity, and he can hear noises which normally should be unnoticed:

His ears were growing sensitive to a preternatural and intolerable degree, and he had long ago stopped the cheap mantel clock whose ticking had come to seem like a thunder of artillery. At night the subtle stirring of the black city outside, the sinister scurrying of rats in the wormy partitions, and the creaking of hidden timbers in the centuried house, were enough to give him a sense of strident pandemonium. The darkness always teemed with unexplained sound –and yet he sometimes shook with fear lest the noises he heard should subside and allow him to hear certain other, fainter noises which he suspected were lurking behind them. (63)

The magnified senses allow Lovecraft to slide the presence of sounds which creep in the room, warning the reader that Gilman is not just suffering from fever and nightmares, but that there is something stalking somewhere. The imaginary Real takes profit of Gilman's augmented perception of reality.

The figure of the witch is basic for understanding the implications of the tale. Lovecraft was not fond of including female characters in his narrations, and actually just a few

women have a relevant role in his literary oeuvre. The three most important are Asenath in “The Thing in the Doorstep”, Lavinia Whateley in “The Dunwich Horror” and Keziah the witch. Lovecraft himself said that women

are by Nature literal, prosaic and commonplace, given to dull realistik Details and practical Things, and incapable of vigorous artistick Creation and genuine, first-hand appreciation. (*SL I 238*)

Indick points out, however, that there are “several dozens” of female characters in Lovecraft’s literary production, but that most of them are just named as part of genealogies and family trees (63-64).

Considering that Lovecraft lived in New England during most of his life, it is reasonable to think that the influence of Salem’s witch trials has to be considered when talking about Keziah. Actually she is presented in the text as “old Keziah Mason, whose flight from Salem Gaol at the last no one was ever able to explain. That was in 1692” (64). Salem, in the state of Massachusetts, is mentioned by Lovecraft as an ideal source of inspiration for anyone who needs ghostly architecture when he talks about Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*:<sup>5</sup>

Of these old gabled Gothic houses scarcely a dozen are to be seen today in their original condition throughout the United States, but one well known to Hawthorne still stands in Turner Street, Salem, and is pointed out with doubtful authority as the scene and inspiration of the romance. Such an edifice, with its spectral peaks, its clustered chimneys, its overhanging second story, its grotesque corner-brackets, and its diamond-paned lattice windows, is indeed an object well calculated to evoke somber reflections; typifying as it

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<sup>5</sup> Notice that Lovecraft explicitly mentions Hawthorne’s ancestor, John Hathorne (1641-1717), as the man in charge of the Salem trials: “She had told Judge Hathorne of lines and curves...” (65). He was a historical figure who in fact served as magistrate during the interrogations.

does the dark Puritan age of concealed horror and witch-whispers which preceded the beauty, rationality, and spaciousness of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> (*Supernatural Horror* 48)

The writer connects Keziah with the Salem trials, and Lovecraft himself talked about this historical event in a very revealing passage of one of his most interesting letters, addressed to Robert E. Howard in 1930. He reflects on the Puritan tradition and its ancient obsession with the manifestations of the devil:

To me, this background seems to explain all the New England witch trials (the first was in 1648) up to the time of the Salem scare. The witch-cult was not here, but its echoes and traditions were. Trials were by no means numerous, and executions very few. Then came Salem with its 50 trials and 19 executions, and with the strange parallelism of testimony in many cases, which profoundly impressed some of the most scholarly men in the Province. [...] Miss Murray, the anthropologist, believes that the witch-cult actually established a "coven" (its only one in the New World) in the Salem region about 1690, and that it included a large number of neurotic and degenerate whites, together with Indians, negroes, and West-Indian slaves. Of this coven, she maintains, the Rev. George Burroughs was probably the leader or "Black Man". [...] For my part –I doubt if a compact coven existed, but certainly think that people had come to Salem who had a direct personal knowledge of the cult, and who were perhaps initiated members of it. I think that some of the rites and formulae of the cult must have been talked about secretly among certain elements, and perhaps furtively practiced by the few degenerates involved. I would not be surprised if Burroughs were concerned –and also the West-Indian slave woman Tituba. [...] Most of the people hanged were probably innocent, yet I do think there was a concrete, sordid background not present in any other New England witchcraft case. (*SL III* 182-83)

The Miss Murray referred by Lovecraft is Margaret Alice Murray (1863-1963), a British anthropologist. In her book *Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921), that Lovecraft read, she used the term "coven" to name a group of thirteen acolytes that performed

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<sup>6</sup> The description of the Witch House from the tale I am analyzing is vague as regarding its façade and general aspect, but it is not difficult to think that Lovecraft's model was probably a house similar to the one he described in this passage, which he supposes also inspired Hawthorne.

Black Sabbaths devoted to a male horned god. According to Murray, the witchcraft trials were in fact an alibi to dismantle this pagan cult that existed all throughout Europe. Apart from that, Murray’s studies were remarkable because her interest in rationalizing and demystifying the supernatural elements of witchcraft. It is understandable that, specially because of this, Lovecraft showed particular sympathy towards her proposals. The book is mentioned in three of his tales: “The Horror in Red Hook”, “The Whisperer in Darkness” and “The Call of Cthulhu”.

The writer obviously did not believe in witchcraft and black magic, but he had an interesting opinion on witches and covens. Lovecraft considered that the covens were a real menace for society, because of the “degenerates involved”. Murray straightly pointed to the existence of “degenerate whites” and foreign races of Indians, West-Indians and negroes among the members of the covens. Lovecraft partially admits this hypothesis when he considers that the West-Indian slave woman as well as the puritan Rev. Burroughs, were probably part of a secret cult settled in Salem.

The racist attacks are not surprising at this point, but it is interesting as well to notice how Lovecraft blamed the Puritan reverend as a member of the cult. The same letter provides some revelations that clarify why Lovecraft targeted the Puritan community at this particular point. Waugh claims that before reading Murray’s book, the writer held the theory that “witchcraft was related to the repression of a narrow religiosity” (“Margaret Murray” 115). This idea is expressed by Lovecraft himself in the same letter:

The very preponderance or passionately pious men in the colony was virtually an assurance of unnatural crime; insomuch as psychology now proves the religious instinct to be a form of transmuted eroticism precisely parallel to the transmutations in other directions which respectively produce such things as sadism, hallucination, melancholia, and other mental

morbidities. Bunch together a group of people deliberately chosen for strong religious feelings, and you have a practical guarantee of dark morbidities expressed in crime, perversion, and insanity. This was aggravated, of course, by the Puritan policy of rigorously suppressing all the natural outlets of exuberant feeling-music, laughter, colour, pageantry, and so on. (175)

But according to H.P. Lovecraft, the religious Puritan restrictions brought to New England were not the only problems that arrived with the *Mayflower*. There was a second even greater menace that created the perfect ground for the expansion of crime through the area:

But there was still another reason for Massachusetts crime and abnormality –a reason rather embarrassing to many upholders of the myth that Mass. blood is a kind of unofficial patent of nobility. This was the rapid importation, after 1635, of a vile class of degenerate London scum as indentured servants. We escaped this in R.I. since at first we were too poor to have many servants at all. (177)

Therefore apart from being guilty of provoking witchcraft, the Puritans were also the cause of the Social-Darwinist catastrophe of bringing the lowest social classes from London to Massachusetts. The gathering of social and religious repression and low educated people straightly issued in something that Lovecraft feared, and that according to Waugh, he discovered thanks to the study written by Murray. Lovecraft himself explains it in the same letter:

Another and highly important factor in accounting for Massachusetts witch-belief and daemonology is the fact, now widely emphasized by anthropologists, that the traditional features of witch-practice and Sabbat-orgies *were by no means mythical*. It was not from any empty system of antique legendry that Western Europeans of the 17th century and before got their *significantly consistent* idea of what witches were, how they made their incantations, and what they did at their hideous convocations on May-Eve and Hallowmass. *Something actual was going on under the surface*, so that people really stumbled on

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*concrete experiences* from time to time which confirmed all they had ever heard of the witch species. In brief, scholars now recognize that all through history a secret cult of degenerate orgiastic nature-worshippers, furtively recruited from the peasantry and sometimes from decadent characters of more select origin, has existed throughout northwestern Europe. (178)

So witchcraft summoned three of the things Lovecraft firmly rejected: the hindrances of religion, the degeneration associated to low social classes and the filthy and obscene moral decadence of communal sex among these Londoner peasants during the Sabbaths.<sup>7</sup>

There are no clear references to the origins and history of Keziah the witch, but considering what Lovecraft learnt about witchcraft, it is reasonable to think that the woman represents all the negative values and connotations that have just been mentioned. The physical description of the woman reinforces the image of decay and degeneration, since Keziah is described as a woman with “bent back, long nose, and shriveled chin”, with a “hideous malevolence” and “a croaking voice” (77). The menacing portrait of the woman is completed with her rat-like familiar Brown Jenkin.

This fully supernatural creature is described as follows:

Witnesses said it had long hair and the shape of a rat, but that its sharp-toothed, bearded face was evilly human while its paws were like tiny human hands. It took messages betwixt old Keziah and the devil, and was nursed on the witch’s blood –which it sucked like a

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<sup>7</sup> Guarde Paz mentions Lovecraft’s repulsion towards sex, and remarks that “the superior races he created had no sex and reproduced through seeds or spores –i. e., the Old Ones and the Great Race of Yith” (32). Lovecraft himself confesses this repugnance in his letters:

“Eroticism belongs to a lower order of instincts, and is an animal rather than nobly human quality. For evolved man –the apex of organic progress on the earth –what branch of reflection is more fitting than that which occupies only his higher and exclusively human faculties? The primal savage or ape merely looks about his native forest to find a mate; the exalted Aryan should lift his eyes to the worlds of space and consider his relation to infinity!!!” (*SL I* 106).

“When I contemplate man, I wish to contemplate those characteristics that elevate him to a human state, and those adornments which lend to his actions the symmetry of creative beauty. ‘Tis not that I wish false pompous thoughts and motives imputed to him in the Victorian manner, but that I wish his composition justly apprais’d, with stress lay’d upon those qualities which are peculiarly his, and without the silly praise of such beastly things as he holds in common with any hog or stray goat.” (*SL I* 283)

vampire. Its voice was a kind of loathsome titter, and it could speak all languages. Of all the bizarre monstrosities in Gilman's dreams, nothing filled him with greater panic and nausea than this blasphemous and diminutive hybrid. (69)

Brown Jenkin is referred to as a "blasphemous and diminutive hybrid". It is interesting to consider the use of the word "hybrid" here, since Jenkin is a monstrous creature which does not fit with the Darwinian concept of hybrid, defined as the offspring of two different species (*Origin* 446). Lovecraft was perfectly aware that it is impossible to get a hybrid from a human being and a rat. Thus, in my opinion the use of this category to describe Brown Jenkin has some ideological connotations. When defining the evil creature as a hybrid, Lovecraft is transferring the wickedness and degradation of Brown Jenkin to the Darwinian concept of hybrids, something he already did a year before when he wrote "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and that has been analysed in the previous chapter.

Keziah and her monstrous familiar haunt the house where Gilman is hosted, and they seem to be part of the distorted reality the student is experiencing. The two of them are the personification of the past that obsessed the writer, and as in the case of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and *At the Mountains of Madness*, this past is not the peaceful shelter Lovecraft expected, but a source of decay and vice derived from witchcraft and Black Sabbaths. In words of Timothy H. Evans, "In Lovecraft's fiction, the experiences that were his greatest source of pleasure transmute into sources of despair, as rottenness is uncovered at the core of tradition" (114). These positive experiences can be summarized in Lovecraft's impressions when visiting the small town of Marblehead in Massachusetts:

I account that instant –about 4:05 to 4:10 pm., Dec. 17, 1922– the most powerful single emotional climax experienced during my nearly forty years of existence. In a flash all the

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past of New England –all the past of Old England– all the past of Anglo-Saxondom and the Western World –swept over me and identified me with the stupendous totality of all things in such a way as it never did before and never will again. That was the high tide of my life. I was thirty-two then –and since that hour there has been merely a recession to senile tameness; merely a striving to recapture the wonders of revelation and intimation and cosmic identification which that sight brought. (*Visible World* 115)

But this almost epiphanic moment contrasts with what Keziah represents in “The Dreams in the Witch House”:

There was a faint suggestion behind the surface that everything of that monstrous past might not –at least in the darkest, narrowest, and most intricately crooked alleys– have utterly perished. (66)

However there is an interesting difference between the two stories examined in the previous chapters and “The Dreams in the Witch House”. In the present story the events from the past have an active role in the haunting process. The expedition that goes to the South Pole and finds the Old Ones and shoggoth in *At the Mountains of Madness* is the active object, and the same can be said of the narrator who visits Innsmouth. Gilman, on the other hand, is studying the possibility of moving to different dimensions via mathematics and geometry, but it is Keziah and Brown Jenkin the ones who actively visit him during the night. They are the menace from the past that shape the imaginary Real. All the clues provided in the text lead us to think that there is something uncanny underwriting the plot, and what Gilman misconstrues as dreams, are in fact real experiences.

But why Gilman? The narration explains that there are several witnesses who have seen Brown Jenkin and the witch wandering and stalking in the streets of Arkham, but it is Gilman the one who has the closest contact with the two inter-dimensional travelers.

There are two evident reasons for that. The first one is the room where the student lives, “for it was this house and this room which had likewise harboured old Kezia Mason” (63-64). At the end of the story the mortal remains of the witch, Brown Jenkin and many babies (more than likely sacrificed during Black Sabbaths through several centuries) are found in the attic when the house is demolished, just overhead Gilman's room, and it is suggested that the attic was the refuge the witch used for her spells, rituals and conjurations (66).

The second reason has to do with the intellectual profile of Gilman. He is studying advanced non-Euclidean mathematics and folklore, and it is due to the connections between the two fields of knowledge that he is able to establish contact with the witch (or perhaps it is the witch the one contacting the student). Gilman seems to be obsessed with the angles of the room, and he suffers from stress and anxiety. As in the case of the narrator in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, the student tries to explain these symptoms from a rational perspective, and imputes them to a partial mental breakdown. At several moments during the tale he is determined to visit “the nerve specialist” (88) in order to be examined and treated; Gilman thinks that “the fever alone was responsible for his nightly phantasies” (72). It is at the beginning of the story when the reader gets a warning of the dangers of the disciplines:

Possibly Gilman ought not to have studied so hard. Non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics are enough to stretch any brain; and when one mixes them with folklore, and tries to trace a strange background of multidimensional reality behind the ghoulish hints of the Gothic tales and the wild whispers of the chimney-corner, one can hardly expect to be wholly free from mental tension. (64)

This time mathematics is the scientific discipline which has a leading role. There are several passages in “The Dreams in the Witch House” conveying the theoretical

framework Lovecraft used for his inter-dimensional travel proposal. There is an explicit reference to the scientists that inspired Lovecraft: Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein and de Sitter (66).<sup>8</sup>

According to Weinberg, Lovecraft was unable to produce a coherent mathematical thesis for inter-dimensional journeys. His analysis asserts that the writer committed several basic mistakes in his reasoning and

while his grasp of science and mathematics might have been greater than the average layman, it was not strong enough to present a convincing picture to the careful reader. Further, Lovecraft made the cardinal mistake of speculation of the impossible. (91)

In fact for an average, non-specialized reader, it is difficult to draw any conclusion about the verisimilitude of the mathematical hypotheses put forward in “The Dreams in the Witch House”. The passages where Lovecraft explains the pseudoscientific theories about multidimensional journeys are too generic and sometimes ambiguous to assert that the writer was even trying to propose a serious hypothesis in the text:

One afternoon there was a discussion of possible freakish curvatures in space, and of theoretical points of approach or even contact between our part of the cosmos and various other regions as distant as the farthest stars or the trans-galactic gulfs themselves –or even as fabulously remote as the tentatively conceivable cosmic units beyond the whole Einsteinian space-time continuum. (73)

But if we trust Weinberg, we must admit that Lovecraft definitely was not able to fully understand the ideas proposed by the scientists he mentioned in the tale, and/or he did

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<sup>8</sup> Max Planck (1858-1947) was a German physicist who supported and enriched Einstein’s theory of relativity. He is considered as the promoter of the quantum theory and won the Nobel Prize in 1918. Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) was a German physicist who formulated the uncertainty principle, which defies the limits of precision when dealing with measurements in the field of quantum physics. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1932 for the creation of quantum mechanics. Willem de Sitter (1872-1934) was a Dutch physicist and astronomer who proposed the existence of dark matter in the space. Lovecraft attended one of his lectures in 1931 (*SL III* 437). For further biographical information on the three scientists, see Thewlis et al.

not accept the consequences of these theories, since they threatened his mechanistic materialism.<sup>9</sup> In a letter written in 1930, the writer asserts that quantum theory does not violate “the basic principle of causation” (*SL III* 228). Joshi considers that Lovecraft was at first (during the first half of the 20s) reluctant to accept the theory of relativity, but he finally accepted it, adapting Einstein's proposal to his own metaphysical ideology:

Lovecraft fairly quickly snapped out his naïve views about Einstein and, by no later than 1929, actually welcomed him as another means to bolster a modified materialism that still outlawed teleology, monotheism, spirituality, and other tenets he rightly believed to be outmoded in light of nineteenth-century science. (*I Am Providence* 486)

In fact, following Joshi's argument (767), Lovecraft discovers that Einstein's theory is still compatible with the Newtonian traditional physics for our immediate surroundings, as the writer himself states in a letter: “we can rely on the never-failing laws of earth to give absolutely reliable results in the nearer heavens” (*SL II* 265).

What seems clear is that mathematics is the wire which joins together the dimension dwelt by Keziah Mason and Brown Jenkin and reality. It is important to notice that the approach both the witch and the student have to the discipline is completely different. Whereas Keziah is depicted as a “mediocre old woman of the seventeenth century” (65),

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<sup>9</sup> Sprague de Camp defends Lovecraft use of non-Euclidean calculus in the tale: “Literal-minded critics have protested that there is no such thing as “non-Euclidean calculus.” Of course there isn't, since Euclid flourished nearly two thousand years before calculus was invented by Newton and Leibniz. Lovecraft, I am sure, knew this and merely used the term as science-fiction writers often use pseudo-scientific terms, to “give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative.” (357)

As can be seen, de Camp's legitimate defense is based on criteria more related to literary genre than to scientific criteria. This moves the debate to the discussion between “hard” and “soft” science-fiction, and how accurate the writer should be when describing technological devices or scientific discoveries.

According to Matolcsy:

“Lovecraft certainly was knowledgeable enough to use the pseudoscientific concepts as mere tongue-in-cheek references to science fiction proper rather than seriously intended references to natural science, and therefore reproaching Lovecraft for not having used the right terminology with their proper denotations misses the mark.” (166)

Gilman is a brilliant student. Connors proposes a very interesting perspective about this matter, as he remarks that

Keziah’s worldview predisposed her to view the entities and phenomena with which she had come into contact in terms of what she had learned about witches and the devil from childhood. [...] understanding was not required, only obedience. [...] She was incapable of distinguishing an advanced technology from magic. (79)

Walter Gilman, on the contrary, experiences the inter-dimensional journeys under the rational perspective of sciences. Again, the intellectual superiority of the Teuton scholar over the “scum” is reasserted, confirming Lovecraft’s elitist ideas.

But it is necessary to analyze the consequences of using mathematics as the transmission channel. The constant menace of the witch is channeled through science, the horror comes from the past and haunts the present via geometry, as it did in “The Shadow over Innsmouth” via biology or in *At the Mountains of Madness* via geology. Science is, without hesitation, a double-edged weapon for the writer. On the one side, he is an avid rational and scientific mind but, on the other hand, science produces the process of destabilization mentioned by Oakes. And this process is more evident, even more physical (due to the blurring of the borderline between reality and dreams present in the story) in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, probably because Lovecraft is dealing with a field of knowledge that he was far from mastering. Darwin’s theories were easy to understand, but as already noted, the advanced mathematical and physical theories developed by Heisenberg, Einstein, Planck... were not so accessible for Lovecraft. The writer, however, once confessed that he was aware of the boundaries he was breaking in his narrative, and that he knew that fiction was fiction. So it is reasonable to expect that he did not believe in the proposals he made in his fiction:

## Communal Decay: Narratological and Ideological Analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's Fiction

My big kick comes from *taking reality just as it is*—accepting all the limitations of the most orthodox science— and then permitting my symbolizing faculty to *build outward* from the existing facts; rearing a structure of *indefinite promise and possibility* whose topless towers are in no cosmos or dimension penetrable by the contradicting-power of the tyrannous and inexorable intellect. But the whole secret of the kick is *that I know damn well it isn't so*. If I let the process interfere with my *intellectual* perceptions and discriminations in the theistic manner, I'd have no fun at all but merely feel like a damned ass. (*SL III* 140)

The second discipline Gilman is studying, folklore, completes de circle. The study of the New England folklore is not a scientific discipline but, as part of the humanities, it is strongly connected with geology or biology from the point of view of history and heritage. The study of the traditional beliefs and customs is, again, a process of digging in history and the consequence, once again, is the emergence of the Real. Keziah and Brown Jenkin are the personification of the obscurity of a particular period during New England's history, a moment when the vicious practices of degenerated men and women coming from Londoner scum resulted in the witch trials. According to Evans

For Lovecraft tradition was a meaningful illusion, important for everyday life but significant only in a relative sense, not in a cosmic or scientific one. Traditions, he thought, won't protect us from an indifferent cosmos or from the evil within ourselves, but their familiar forms and symbols are a source of comfort and continuity. Since they are illusory rather than inherently and universally true, we can reinvent traditions whenever necessary, creating meaning by "imagining realistically" within the boundaries set by tradition. Traditions, then, become aesthetic constructs that guide the creation of new cultural forms. (126)

So looking back in history will reveal that evil is something innate to mankind, and at the same time none of it matters when considering the cosmic indifference of the universe towards human beings. Keziah and the rat-familiar are the representation of this human evil, which is ideologically attributed to a hybrid and to a woman

presumably coming from the lower classes. But “The Dreams in the Witch House” also includes references to the principles of cosmic mechanicism. In order to find them, we must explore another character that is present during Gilman’s dream experiences: Azathoth.

As the plot unravels (or, as some might think, muddles up), it seems as if Keziah wants Gilman to help her in some kind of ritual devoted to Azathoth, by signing with his own blood in the *Book of Azathoth*. This god-like alien is a “mindless entity [...] which rules all time and space from a curiously envired black throne at the centre of Chaos” (91). In the context of the Lovecraftian pseudo-mythology, Azathoth is the “daemon-sultan” (106), and is considered as one of the most important figures that Lovecraft created. Apart from this tale, Azathoth is present also in “The Thing in the Doorstep”, “The Whisperer in Darkness”, “The Dream-Quest of the Unknown Kadath” and “The Haunter of the Dark”. According to the description given by Pearsall, “Around his throne [Azathoth’s], musicians with thin flutes play mindless, monotonous rhythms, and all manner of strange beings disport themselves” (71). There are two main hypotheses about the inspiration for the name, having one of them strong religious connotations, as Pearsall highlights:

It has been suggested that the name “Azathoth” came from HPL’s conscious or subconscious mind as a combination of “Azoth”, an alchemical term for mercury (or alternately “Aza” as a form of “Assur”, the principal god of the ancient Assyrians), and “Thoth”, the Egyptian god who was the patron of writing and learning. In the absence of firm evidence, it seems just as possible and does not multiply complications as much, to surmise that Azathoth occurred to him as a slight change from “Anathoth”, the name of a town a few miles from Jerusalem, which is mentioned as such more than a dozen times in the Old Testament, and in two other places as a Hebrew clan name in the tribe of Benjamin

and the name of one of the "chiefs of the people" at the time of the restoration of the Temple at Jerusalem in the 5th century B.C. (71-72)

Azathoth is, then, the center of the universe, and the monstrosity in charge of ruling time and space. It is, at the same time, the ruler of entropy and order. So he is the personification of Lovecraft's mechanicism. Keziah serves him, and wants Gilman to be his disciple and acolyte as well. From the perspective of metaphysics, Lovecraft is proposing the subordination of tradition and science to the immovable rules of the universe.<sup>10</sup>

Lovecraft considered that Einstein's theory of relativity fully changed the conception of the universe, and Azathoth fits with the conception of the indifference of the universe towards humanity. As the writer confesses in one of his letters:

There are no values in all infinity –the least idea that there are, is the supreme mockery of all. All the cosmos is a jest, & fit to be treated only as a jest, & one thing is as true as another. I believe everything & nothing –for all is chaos, always has been, & always will be. Ease, amusement –these are the only relative qualities fit to be classed as values.

*(Morton 45)*

The fragmentary narration of the tale suggests that Keziah is trying to get Gilman into witchcraft, and as the Walpurgis Eve is getting closer, their encounters are more interactive until they finally kidnap the baby under the supervision of Nyarlathotep. This figure appears on the tale as Azathoth's deputy, and he is also a very important entity inside Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology. He features in several other tales, and has a vaguely Egyptian inspired name. During his appearances in the different stories, he

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<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Lovecraft's mechanistic cosmicism supplied him with the necessary theoretical background that the writer needed in order to dismantle religion and reinforce his agnosticism: "A mere knowledge of the approximate dimensions of the visible universe is enough to destroy forever the notion of a personal godhead whose whole care is expended upon puny mankind, and whose only genuine and original Messiah was dispatched to save the insignificant vermin, or men, who inhabit this one relatively microscopic globe. Not that science positively refutes religion –it merely makes religion seem monstrously improbable that a large majority of men can no longer believe in it." (*SL I 44*)

presents various avatars, and in “The Dreams in the Witch House” he adopts the shape of “the real Black Man of so much witchcraft lore, the master of Keziah Mason had her familiar Brown Jenkin” (Pearsall 307).<sup>11</sup> Nyarlathotep is described in the story as

a tall, lean man of dead black colouration but without the slightest sign of negroid features; wholly devoid of either hair or beard, and wearing as his only garment a shapeless robe of some heavy black fabric. (89)

The negritude of this figure is strange, since he does not share physical negroid features and colour is most concerned with evil than race. The figure of the Black Man is a constant in the history of witchcraft and Black Sabbaths. The testimonies gathered by Murray (1921) profusely talk about this figure, and it is sometimes associated with the Devil, some others with the leader of the coven. Considering that Lovecraft was an atheist, it is reasonable to follow Pearsall’s proposal, i.e. the writer gave Nyarlathotep the role of the coven master for this particular tale.

## 8.2.- Superstitious immigrants

“The Dreams in the Witch House” has another important aspect that deserves attention. Walter Gilman is not the only tenant in the haunted house; there are three more people sharing the building: Frank Elbood (Gilman’s best friend and university classmate), Joe Mazurewicz the loomfixer, and Dombrowski the landlord. The figure of the loomfixer is particularly relevant for this study, since he provides an interesting immigrant profile.

Mazurewicz is a representative of the proletariat. There are no clues about his origins, and the only information provided (mainly his surname and the fact that he is Catholic),

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<sup>11</sup> In 1984 Stephen King re-formulated the figure of the classical witch in his short story “Gramma”. Witchcraft in this tale is associated to Hastur, another important deity used by Lovecraft and his circle of writers.

make us think that he is probably coming from some center-European territories such as Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Apart from that, his most remarkable feature is that he is extremely superstitious:

Mazurewicz had told long, rambling stories about the ghost of old Keziah and the furry, sharp-fanged, nuzzling thing, and had said he was so badly haunted at times that only his silver crucifix –given him for the purpose by Father Iwanicki of St. Stanislaus' Church– could bring him relief. Now he was praying because the Witches' Sabbath was drawing near. May-Eve was Walpurgis-Night, when hell's blackest evil roamed the earth and all the slaves of Satan gathered for nameless rites and deeds. [...] Joe knew about such things, for his grandmother in the old country had heard tales from her grandmother. It was wise to pray and count one's beads at this season. (75-76)

The loomfixer fights his superstitious beliefs with religion and devotion. Whenever he is present in the narration, he is normally praying in his room, or discussing supernatural events and apparitions with the landlord. At a certain point, Mazurewicz provides Gilman with a crucifix that, in the climax of the story, will scare Keziah, giving the student the chance to defeat her. Joshi notices the incongruity of the role of the crucifix against the witch (*I Am Providence* 823), considering Lovecraft's atheism, and he blames the poor elaboration of the text.

The figure of this tenant is a strong counterpart for that of the student and his friend, Frank Elwood. He witnesses strange lights through Gilman's window during the night, coinciding with the apparition of the witch, and he is also one of the persons who sees, at the end, how Gilman is devoured by “a large rat-like [that] suddenly jumped out from beneath the ensanguined bedclothes and scuttled across the floor to a fresh, open hole close by” (109).

Mazurewicz can be considered as a benign temporal projection of what the witch represents. He comes, as the witch, from Europe, and his character is strongly marked by religiousness. The two of them, at the same time, share humble social origins. Considering that Keziah is partly the result of the Puritan restrictions of her time, I think that Mazurewicz can be the personification of Lovecraft’s impressions towards religion during his life. According to the writer, religion was an outlet for some sensitive men who needed some expansion from reality:

My point is, that a highly organized man can’t exist durably without mental expansions beyond objective reality. I said it before, and I say it still. You yourself get such expansions though your lingering belief in the religious myths of cosmic purpose, values, and governance; myths which you can accept without ignominy because an early theological environment has enabled you actually to imagine that such things are real. I, repudiating the obsolete faiths from the start, can have no such residual illusions –hence if I want to think of the cosmos as a significant thing in which man has no important and symmetrical part, I have to “roll my own”. (*SL III* 140-41)

Mazurewicz has the “early theological environment” that allows him to be a strong believer and, at the same time, to be superstitious. The two qualities are inseparable, since the first conditions the second: to believe in the ghost of the witch requires a previous recognition of the existence of the soul. He escapes from the “objective reality” thanks to religion, as a counterpart of Gilman, who gets access to other dimensions via science. In spite of his religiosity, the loomfixer is presented from a friendly perspective.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The closing lines of the story extend the religiousness of the immigrant to the whole working classes: “The workmen crossed themselves in fright when they came upon this blasphemy, but later burned candles of gratitude in St. Stanislaus’ Church because of the shrill, ghostly tittering they felt they would never hear again.” (114)

The internal coherence of the tale is, once again, weakened because of the religious halo. The global reading, including Keziah's fright at the sight of the crucifix, would lead us to think that the witch is a devil-acolyte, but Lovecraft reformulates the principle of witchcraft by placing Azathoth and Nyarlathotep in the center of the cult, and it is difficult to believe that he wanted to equal them with the Christian devil. Considering that Azathoth represents the rules governing the universe, he should be considered as an entity with a complete lack of ethical commitment. For Lovecraft –and he made it explicit–, the universe's behavior is indifferent towards us, but this does not mean that we should not develop a certain degree of ethical thought:

The cosmos... is simply a perpetual rearrangement of electrons which is constantly seething as it always has been and always will be. Our tiny globe and puny thoughts are but one momentary incident in its eternal mutation; so that the life, aims, and thoughts of mankind are of the utmost triviality and ridiculousness. We are conscious by accident, and during the unfortunate instant that we are so, it behooves us only to mitigate our pain and pass our time as agreeably as we may. Since good sense shows us, that pleasure is but a balance betwixt desire and fulfillment: 'tis the part of reason to avoid needless labour by having as few wants as possible, and gratifying them in a manner so quiet as not to encroach on the pleasure of others and stir them up against us. (*SL I* 260-61)

Gilman's fate is terrible. After defeating the witch –actually he strangles the woman with the chain of the crucifix provided by Mazurewicz– and Brown Jenkin, while they were performing a ritual including the sacrifice of the kidnapped baby, the rat-familiar comes back to reality, the following night, to literally eat Gilman's bowels. Elwood, Mazurewicz, the rest of tenants and the landlord witness the bloody scene in amazement.

The hideous past, the vices of witchcraft, impersonated in the revolting monstrosity of Brown Jenkin, literally devour the scientific spirit of the present. But, simultaneously, it

has to be considered that Keziah and the familiar serve a bigger purpose, that of Azathoth. So to a certain extent mechanism is what really rules mankind, no matter the moral attitude or the way in which the individual approaches his environment. Gilman dies while the rest of tenants can just contemplate the scene, in the same way as it is impossible to fight against the rules of nature. The religiousness of Mazurewicz and the scientific mind of Elwood and Gilman cannot do anything to avoid the action of Brown Jenkin, Azathoth’s servant.

Nonetheless there is a second ideological reading. “The Dreams in the Witch House” is one of the few Lovecraftian texts in which the horror that threatens the symbolic dimension is completely eradicated. The mortal remains of the witch and her familiar will be found later when the house is demolished, and they will not be seen around Arkham anymore. Gilman, the scholar, has been able to reject the menace coming from the past, which is also the threat of the low classes. Keziah is the representation of vice and scum, and is part of the original seed of corruption which arrived to New England. She is the one who causes the destabilization of the symbolic Real, by using science. But at the same time she represents Lovecraft’s incapacity to cope with the consequences of examining the past. Gilman has to pay a high cost, but science has been able to defeat what science itself brings, i.e. the corruption of the past, under the indifferent sight of Azathoth and his universal rules. Mathematics and physics allow Gilman to contact the hideous presence of the witch (or vice versa), and they are also the tools used by the student to travel to her parallel universes and defeat her malignant figure.

Social Darwinists such as Galton, or precursors of social engineering, warned about the risks of social degeneration that could be produced by the excessive expansion of the uneducated members of our civilization. Lovecraft makes Keziah come from the past to

remember that the seed of decay arrived from Europe and provides Gilman with the power of science to eradicate the threat.

### 8.3.- Conclusions

“The Dreams in the Witch House” is a tale which, at first, seems to fail in its attempt to provoke any kind of reaction when examined in detail. However, after overcoming the structural problems of the narration, the core and implications of the text arise. Once again, the past menaces the symbolic dimension of reality, and science plays a two-ways role in the process. Mathematics and geometry are the tools the imaginary Real (represented by the distortion produced by Keziah and Brown Jenkin) uses to access Gilman's dimensional plane, but it is also because of Gilman's mastery of both disciplines –and folklore– that he is the chosen one for the visits of the witch. The three of them, at the same time, seem to be insignificant in comparison with the figure of Nyarlathotep and then Azathoth. The demonic god Azathoth represents the mechanistic principle, and the whole narration converges on the Black Sabbath devoted to his figure during the Walpurgis Night.

So a first ideological reading puts Azathoth at the center of the plot, relegating the evilness and decadence of the witch and the scientific efforts of Gilman to a secondary role, subjugated to the inviolable laws of the universe. Lovecraft raises metaphysics over science and ideology. No matter how terrible the scientific discoveries can be, no matter how decadent the first Puritans were, everything fades before the universal rules of cosmicism. As Houellebecq remarks:

The universe is nothing but a furtive arrangement of elementary particle. A figure in transition toward chaos. That is what will finally prevail. The human race will disappear.

## Chapter 8: On “The Dreams in the Witch House”

Other races in turn will appear and disappear. The skies will be glacial and empty, traversed by the feeble light of half-dead stars. These too will disappear. Everything will disappear. And human actions are as free and as stripped of meaning as the unfettered movement of the elementary particles. Good, evil, morality, sentiments? Pure “Victorian fictions.” All that exists is egotism. Cold, intact, and radiant. (32)

The second interpretation revolves around the relationship between Gilman and the witch. Gilman is able to eradicate the social threat that Keziah represents. Her degenerated cult, full of vice and evilness, is dismantled thanks to the determination of the student, and citizens can return to their inoffensive religiousness and superstitions without fearing the curse of the past. The menace of the invasion of the lower and morally perverse people has been neutralized by science, in the same way the social engineering proposals made by Malthus and Galton would save modern civilization from the corruption promoted by the social scum.

Immigrants are also part of the equation, and the depiction provided by Lovecraft is, again, biased by the writer’s ideology. Mazurewicz is a strongly religious and superstitious person, but benign when compared with the other character linked to religion, the witch.

In short, “The Dreams in the Witch House” can be easily dismissed due to its obvious defective narration, but it hides some interesting aspects that reinforce my analysis. In spite of being written in a style too oriented towards the pulp fictions of his time, Lovecraft impregnated it with some of his constant obsessions: the past, immigration, metaphysics and science wrap up the tale with an ideological quilt that has to be considered.



## **CHAPTER 9: ON “THE DUNWICH HORROR”**

### 9.1.- A pastoral nightmare

In 1928, a few years before creating the biological nightmare of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” and the mathematical reinterpretation of witchcraft presented in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, Lovecraft wrote “The Dunwich Horror”, a piece of fiction in which he anticipated some of the elements that were present in the two other texts. Far from being repetitive, “The Dunwich Horror” tells a story of corrupted families, witchcraft and hidden secrets in a rural area which, at first, should be considered as a peaceful natural landscape. However, it is in the deformation of this bucolic environment, and in the interesting autobiographical and religious references, were the most remarkable virtues of the tale lie.

The story, published in the April 1929 issue of *Weird Tales*, is one of Lovecraft's best known texts.<sup>1</sup> However Joshi admits that he "cannot help finding serious flaws of conception, execution and style in it" (*I Am Providence* 716). He remarks how naïf the characters are, the innocence of the dichotomy evil-good, and the numerous ideas taken from other stories by different authors, which create a kind of pastiche. On the other hand, for Joshi the portrait of the decadent rural Massachusetts is the best argument in favour of the narration. In contrast, for Sprague de Camp the story "is one of Lovecraft's best stories, powerfully imaginative and suspenseful" (302). He criticizes, however, "Lovecraft's use of phonetic re-spelling to indicate dialect" as "excessive by modern standards" (302). Burleson (*Critical Study* 149; "Mythic Hero") makes an interesting reading of the tale, to which I will come back later in this chapter, analyzing the implications of the archetypal hero of the tale. He considers that what at first looks like an innocent evil versus good fight, results in a more powerful interpretation.

Like "The Shadow over Innsmouth", "The Dunwich Horror" presents a clear example of *communal decay*. The source of this corruption is probably found back in time, in some rituals performed by the American Indians who dwelt in the spot. This story is of interest for my study from the perspective of the representation of the imaginary Real, since the sense of uneasiness and discomfort will come from the landscape, natural elements and animals. The importance of the different characters and the way they are constructed will be notorious, and they will be the starting point for part of my analysis. The autobiographical connotations of the story add more valuable details to this piece of fiction, which brings together recurrent topics in the oeuvre of the writer (science, the past, corruption, knowledge, cosmicism), as well as some new relevant aspects that I

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<sup>1</sup> According to Joshi "Lovecraft received \$240 for it, the largest single check for original fiction he had ever received" (*I Am Providence* 721).

will highlight, such as the already mentioned aggressive landscape and the religious references.

The narratological structure of the story rests on a third person narrator telling the story of both Wilbur Whateley, considered as an outsider (category 5), and Professor Armitage, a researcher (category 1). The setting, Dunwich, is an imaginary New England village (categories 6 and 11). The plot is a combination of Wilbur’s quest to get a copy of the *Necronomicon* and Armitage’s investigation of the events that are taking place in Dunwich after Wilbur’s death (categories 20 and 21). The structure of the tale provokes the existence of two different climactic moments, coinciding with the death of each of the Whateley twins, when each of them reveals their monstrosity (category 22C). The post-climax coincides with the destruction of the source of conflict, since all the members of the Whateleys that were hiding the Dunwich Horror die (category 29).

The setting of the tale, crucial for the narration, was inspired by the visit Lovecraft paid to Edith Miniter, a friend who lived in Wilbraham, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> There the writer spent eight days, according to Joshi “being charmed by the vast array of antiques collected by Beebe, the seven cats and two dogs [...], and especially by the spectral local folklore” (*I Am Providence* 713). Lovecraft, in his article “Mrs. Miniter – Estimates and Recollections”, remembered his pleasant visit as follows:

I saw the ruinuous, deserted old Randolph Beebe house where the whippoorwills cluster abnormally, and learned that these birds are feared by the rustics as evil psychopoms. It is whispered that they linger and flutter around houses where death is approaching, hoping to catch the soul of the departed as it leaves. If the soul eludes them, they disperse in quiet

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<sup>2</sup> In a 1931 letter to August Derleth, Lovecraft expressed that “there is no “Dunwich” –the place being a vague echo of the decadent Massachusetts countryside around Springfield –say Wilbraham, Monson, and Hampden” (*SL III* 432-33).

disappointment; but sometimes they set up a chorused clamour of excited, triumphant chattering, which makes the watchers turn pale and mutter –with that air of hushed, awestruck portentousness which only a backwoods Yankee can assume –“They Got ‘im!”. On another day I was taken to nearby Monson to see a dark, damp street in the shadow of a great hill, the houses on the hillward side of which are whispered about because of the number of their tenants who have gone mad or killed themselves.

I saw the haunted pasture bars in the spectral dusk, and one evening was thrilled and amazed by a monstrous saraband of fireflies over marsh and meadow. It was as if some strange, sinister constellation had taken on an uncanny life and descended to hang low above the lush grasses. And one day Mrs. Minitter shewed me a deep, mute ravine beyond the Randolph Beebe house, along whose far-off wooded floor an unseen stream trickles in eternal shadow. Here, I am told, the whippoorwills gather on certain nights for no good purpose. (384)

In “The Dunwich Horror”, the whippoorwills are presented as described by Lovecraft in the above fragment, that is, as heralds of death with their synchronized chants: the source of inspiration is evident (and confessed: see note 2 in this chapter).

The narrative structure in “The Duwich Horror” divides the tale in two clearly differentiated parts. The first one tells the story of Wilbur Whateley, a man who is born from an albino woman and an unknown father. He lives in a farm in Dunwich with Lavinia, his mother, and Old Whateley, his grandfather. Wilbur develops an abnormally fast maturity and, because of this, the awful smell he gives off and the way animals are scared of him, he raises the superstitions of the neighbours, who always thought that the family had connections with the world of witchcraft, especially the old grandfather. Wilbur reaches manhood when he is just ten years old, and is instructed by Old Whateley, who also renovates the farm, in order to “sequester” a mysterious presence which occupies the upper floor of the building.

The family starts buying cattle frequently, but it just disappears without trace. After the grandfather dies, the Whateley farm is avoided by most of the surrounding families, and shortly after that, Wilbur’s mother disappears in strange circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

After that Wilbur consults the Miskatonic University librarian, Dr. Henry Armitage. He is looking for a forbidden book, the *Necronomicon*, and when Armitage sees the passages Wilbur is studying, he thinks that the farmer (who is abnormally tall already, due to his uncontrolled growing process) is preparing some kind of ritual to allow outer space creatures to reach our planet. Because of this, the librarian forbids Wilbur to borrow the book, and some weeks after that, the farmer creeps into the library to steal it and is killed by a guardian dog. When Armitage and other scholars arrive to the place, they see how what seemed to be just a disproportionately tall man hid a monstrous shape under the clothes, full of tentacles and deformities.

The second part of the narration describes how Armitage uncovers Wilbur’s plans, and he thinks that there is a hidden monstrosity in the farm. At the same time, the inhabitants from Dunwich discover immense prints in the hills, and several heads of cattle disappear. One night, a whole farm and the owners are completely razed. When the Miskatonic University professors arrive, they start pursuing and chasing the Dunwich Horror which, according to Armitage, is invisible. They bring with them a special dust in order to spread the creature with it, in order to make it visible for some minutes. After a couple of nights, the group of scholars is able to find the huge monster and they defeat it on the top of a hill, presumably using the arcane knowledge Armitage studied before leaving Arkham.

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<sup>3</sup> Indick remarks the lack of interest Lovecraft showed towards women with the treatment he provided to Lavinia: “before long, without pathos, love, or sympathy, Lavinia simply vanishes” (65). However Waugh remarks the important negative role given to Lavinia Whateley in this particular tale, as “the gate for the entrance of horror” (2011:240).

At the end of the story, the librarian reveals the secret truth of the Dunwich Horror: it was Wilbur's brother, and its father was Yog-Sothoth, an alien entity to which the monster asks for help before it dies.

As has been mentioned above, "The Dunwich Horror" anticipates some of the ideas and topics –witchcraft, corrupted genealogies– that Lovecraft will develop in later tales. But it is interesting firstly to explore the way in which the writer presents the rural area of New England.<sup>4</sup> The tale opens with a description of the landscape where Dunwich is located. Were it not for the presence of the imaginary Real, it could be said that it is a travel book rather than a horror story:

Gorges and ravines of problematical depth intersect the way, and the crude wooden bridges always seem of dubious safety. When the road dips again there are stretches of marshland that one instinctively dislikes, and indeed almost fears at evening when unseen whippoorwills chatter and the fireflies come out in abnormal profusion to dance to the raucous, creepily insistent rhythms of stridently piping bullfrogs. The thin, shining line of the Miskatonic's upper reaches has an oddly serpent-like suggestion as it winds close to the feet of the domed hills among which it rises.

As the hills draw nearer, one heeds their wooded sides more than their stone-crowned tops. Those sides loom up so darkly and precipitously that one wishes they would keep their distance, but there is no road by which to escape them. Across a covered bridge one sees a small village huddled between the stream and the vertical slope of Round Mountain, and wonders at the cluster of rotting gambrel roofs bespeaking an earlier architectural period than that of the heighouring region.<sup>5</sup> [...] it is hard to prevent the impression of a faint, malign odour about the village street, as of the massed mould and decay of centuries. It is

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<sup>4</sup> Joshi points out (*I Am Providence* 720) that Lovecraft referred this tale as part of the "Arkham cycle". This is an expression which he did not use frequently, and Joshi concludes that: "It at least suggests that Lovecraft is by now aware that some of his tales (he doesn't say which) form some sort of pattern or sequence. The term is clearly topographical in connotation, as if Lovecraft believes that all the tales of his fictitious New England geography (including such things as "The Picture in the House") are linked; or perhaps it refers to the fact that Arkham is the defining point for the other mythical towns. One simply does not know."

<sup>5</sup> Washington Irving also included the image of a covered bridge in the surroundings of Sleepy Hollow in his 1820 short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow".

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always a relief to get clear of the place, and to follow the narrow road around the base of the hills and across the level country beyond till it rejoins the Aylesbury pike. Afterward one sometimes learns that one has been through Dunwich. (207)

The New England softly molded countryside should be a source of peace, comfort and colours. However what the traveler finds in Dunwich is a hostile nature that threatens the walker. The hills turn to be suffocating figures, the whippoorwills and fireflies give a sense of unreality, and even the river acquires the menacing image of a snake. The bucolic landscape is complemented with some stone formations placed on the hills:

Oldest of all are the great rings of rough-hewn stone columns on the hill-tops, but these are more generally attributed to the Indians than to the settlers. Deposits of skulls and bones, found within these circles and around the sizeable table-like rock on Sentinel Hill, sustain the popular belief that such spots were once the burial-places of the Pocumtucks; even though many ethnologists, disregarding the absurd improbability of such a theory, persist in believing the remains Caucasian. (209)

The landscape is so threatening that it even menaces the courage of the characters in the story, when combined with the right environmental conditions:

Courage and confidence were mounting; though the twilight of the almost perpendicular wooden hill which lay toward the end of their short cut, and among whose fantastic ancient trees they had to scramble as if up a ladder, put these qualities to a severe test. (239)

The description of the claustrophobic landscape calls to mind the techniques of the expressionist movement. There are, in fact, several aspects that lead me to think that Lovecraft might have been influenced by some expressionist authors. The first source of inspiration can be found in cinema.<sup>6</sup> There were several movie releases from the

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<sup>6</sup> Joshi analyses in depth the relationship between Lovecraft and the movies in his article “Lovecraft and the Films of His Day”. He reviews not only the German expressionist films Lovecraft admired or criticized, but also other movies that he particularly appreciated, such as DeMille’s *Cleopatra* (1934), Whale’s *The Invisible Man* (1933), or Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Darrell Schweitzer studies

German expressionist movement that Lovecraft watched or talked about in his letters.<sup>7</sup>

A distinctive feature of expressionist cinema is the setting, which is characterized by the oppressive and impossibly shaped buildings and landscape. Deformed trees, houses, walls and scenery are included in the set (sometimes as props, some others as paintings in background murals) in order to encapsulate actors as in a nest in the middle of the stage. Thompson and Bordwell, analyzing Expressionism as a movement and its influences in cinema, convey that:

German Expressionism was one of several trends around the turn of the century that reacted against realism. Its practitioners favored extreme distortion to express an inner emotional reality rather than surface appearances. [...] Expressionists often used large shapes of bright, unrealistic colors with dark, cartoonlike outlines. Figures might be elongated. [...] Buildings might sag or lean, with the ground tilted up steeply in defiance of traditional perspective. [...] Some claim that the true Expressionist films resemble *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in using a distorted, graphic style of mise-en-scène derived from theatrical Expressionism. (104-6)

This matches the conception of the landscape presented in “The Dunwich Horror”, with its menacing hills, bending trees, gorges and narrow roads.<sup>8</sup>

Lovecraft watched Wegener's *The Golem*, released in the United States in 1921, and he disliked the film in comparison with Meyrink's 1914 original novel. For Lovecraft, the film was “a mere substitute using the name –with nothing of the novel in it” (*SL V* 138).

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the influence that Lovecraft's favorite film –*Berkeley Square*– had in his narrative in “H.P. Lovecraft's Favorite Movie”.

<sup>7</sup> There are two landmarks from German Expressionism that Lovecraft probably missed: Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). According to Joshi, “he would have appreciated the nightmarish futuristic visions” (“Lovecraft and the Films” 45) of the former. Joshi makes no reference to Murnau's movie, and it is not mentioned by Lovecraft neither (however he did watch Browning's *Dracula* in 1931, and left the room before the film ended due to boredom).

<sup>8</sup> Lovecraft was not a pioneer in the use of nature as the cradle of the uncanny. In “Wordsworth and Hölderling”, Paul de Man exposes the darkest side of Nature described in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, where a seemingly pastoral landscape hides sources of discomfort and anxiety. Dunwich echoes and amplifies the menacing Nature revealed by de Man in his study.

*The Golem* features mainly urban spaces, but the oppressive atmosphere of the houses and streets of the Jewish ghetto of Prague follows the typical pattern of German Expressionism. In a letter to August Derleth from 1926, he mentioned that “the settings were semi-futuristic, some of the ancient gabled houses of Prague’s narrow streets being made to look like sinister old men with peaked hats” (*Essential Solitude* 56). The writer was probably not impressed by the film as literary adaptation, but it is clear that the scenery powerfully called his attention.

Lovecraft did not watch a key film from the movement, Wiene’s *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1921), and he regretted it in the same letter to Derleth:

Too bad we both missed “Dr. Caligari”, for it was by all accounts the best fantastic cinema ever produced. I have heard that the original negative is in such poor condition that no fresh prints can be made, but hope that its fame may some day lead to its reproduction with new actors & duplicate scenery. (56)

The fact Lovecraft missed the movie did not discourage him. He hoped to enjoy a future reproduction of the film “with new actors and duplicate scenery”. Interest in a duplicate scenery leads me to think that he probably saw posters, brochures or any kind of image in which the setting was present, or read reviews about the film which remarked the importance of the scenery. It is obvious that Lovecraft was interested in the settings of the films he watched, and in this regard the expressionist movement was particularly relevant for him.

A different source of landscape inspiration is presumably the Russian modernist painter Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947). As I already mentioned in the chapter devoted to *At the Mountains of Madness*, Roerich was an important influence for Lovecraft’s descriptions of the hidden Polar city in that story. Roerich’s paintings tend to show an impressive natural landscape, with overwhelming mountain chains and sometimes oneiric elements

which embrace the human figures present in the scene. The writer attended a Roerich exposition in New York in 1930.

Moving back to the tale, nature is aggressive all throughout "The Dunwich Horror" not only via landscape. Animals are also relevant: the whippoorwills are an important presence during the death of Old Whateley, Wilbur and the monster, and they seem to synchronize their chirp with that of the moribund, "a seemingly limitless legion of whippoorwills that cried their endless message in repetitions timed diabolically to the wheezing gasps of the dying man" (216-17); the dogs in the farms behave in an aggressive and scared way against Wilbur Whateley, and a dog attacks and kills him; cattle is slaughtered by the Dunwich creature; the earth seems to produce "strange hill noises" (217) which are repeated, with different degrees of intensity, all throughout the text and which are "a puzzle to geologists and physiographers" (208). All these details configure an oppressive atmosphere in which the imaginary Real comes, most of the time, from the landscape and natural elements of the setting.

Another element thickens the magical and threatening atmosphere. The hills surrounding Dunwich, adorned with some ritual stones and altars, are said to be of Indian origins:<sup>9</sup>

No one, even those who have the facts concerning the recent horror, can say just what is the matter with Dunwich; though old legends speak of unhallowed rites and conclaves of the Indians, amidst which they called forbidden shapes of shadow out of the great rounded

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<sup>9</sup> In 1787, Philip Freneau wrote the poem "The Indian Burying Ground". The poet reflects upon the permanence of the Indian spirits after their ritual burials are performed. In words of Bergland, "he constructs the literary figure of the Indian ghost that will haunt and trouble American letters for centuries" ("American Enlightenment" 42). The last stanza, according to Bergland, shows the triumph of shadows over reason, with the supernatural Indian spirit defeating a rational *poetic persona*:

And long shall timorous fancy see  
The painted chief, and pointed spear,  
And reason's self shall bow the knee  
To shadows and delusions here.

hills, and made wild orgiastic prayers that were answered by loud crackings and rumblings from the ground below. (208)

Apart from the stories and legends about the ceremonials, “deposits of skulls and bones, found within these circles [...], sustain the popular belief that such spots were once the burial-places of the Pocumtucks” (209). The spot was the home of Indians, then, and they performed “unhallowed rites and conclaves” and “wild orgiastic prayers”, very much in the line of the Black Sabbaths performed in Salem and studied in the chapter devoted to “The Dreams in the Witch House”. They probably anticipated and performed the same rituals the Whateleys will perform in the story, establishing the grounds of the aggressive nature that surrounds the village.

The negative connotations that Lovecraft ascribes to the Indians are not surprising. When describing the weird tradition in America in his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, he talks about the landscape that was the perfect soil for the American Gothic:

The vast and gloomy virgin forests in whose perpetual twilight all terrors might well lurk; the hordes of coppery Indians whose strange, saturnine visages and violent customs hinted strongly at traces of infernal origin...<sup>10</sup> (46)

According to Goho, in the work of H.P. Lovecraft “the aboriginal is defined as essentially inferior to white Europeans, as demonic or unclean, as savage, as primitive” (“The Aboriginal” 56). In the middle of this hostile nature, the peasants and farmers of Dunwich contribute their own history of degeneration to the global description. The

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<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Lovecraft’s hostility towards American Indians, see Goho’s “The Aboriginal in the Work of H.P. Lovecraft”. Goho develops an extensive analysis of the presence of references to Indians throughout Lovecraft oeuvre, pointing out all the different moments in which they are used as a source of degeneration, evil, magic or troubles. Pace devotes some lines to remark that, by using Indian ruins, Lovecraft was probably trying to “overwrite the New England wilderness and remove all traces, save the name, of specific American Indian presence” (117).

most relevant family in the tale is the Whateley family, but the general consideration of the backcountry people is that of *communal decay*:

The natives are now repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New England backwaters. They have come to form a race by themselves, with the well-defined mental and physical stigmata of degeneracy and inbreeding. The average of their intelligence is woefully low, whilst their annals reek of overt viciousness and of half-hidden murders, incests, and deeds of almost unnamable violence and perversity. The old gentry, representing the two or three armigerous families which came from Salem in 1692, have kept somewhat above the general level of decay; though many branches are sunk into the sordid populace so deeply that only their names remain as a key to the origin they disgrace. (208)

## 9.2.- Families and heroes

Moral, social and biological decay are the three features that Lovecraft uses to represent Dunwich's neighbors, people who live "the general life of a morbid community" (215). In a clear anticipation of Innsmouth, Dunwich is full of decadence and sin, a place with evident "signs of wholesale regional decadence" (215). But whereas in Innsmouth these negative values were reinforced by the architecture of the place, with its abandoned houses, ruinous buildings, worm-eaten roofs and façades, in "The Dunwich Horror" this role has been given to nature.

Whenever one of the Whateleys is referred in the narration, Lovecraft explicitly mentions if he or she belongs to the "undecayed Whateleys" (211) or, on the contrary, is part of the "decadent Whateleys", as in the case of Lavinia, Wilbur's mother, "a

somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of thirty-five”.<sup>11</sup> So Lovecraft seems to avoid the damnation of the whole town of Dunwich, and claims that there are still innocents among them.

Albinism and anomalous whiteness is a recurrent topic in the Lovecraft corpus.<sup>12</sup> “The Beast in the Cave”, a piece of juvenilia written in 1905, when the writer was only 15, includes a pale creature dwelling in a cavern. The reality hidden in the grotto is that the ape-like monster was a lost explorer who, due to the lack of light and contact with other humans, derived into the creature that appears in the story. The same genetic mutation is suffered by the giant penguins living near the abyss in *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931). A third example of strange whiteness, and perhaps the most relevant one, is that of the ape-goddess in “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” (1920). In this tale, Arthur Jermyn commits suicide, being the last of his lineage, after knowing that his great-great-great-grandfather, Sir Wade Jermyn, married a white ape-goddess from a secret city somewhere in the Congolese jungle.

It is interesting to notice how albinism has, in the four examples, strong connections with animality. The connotations that Lovecraft might attribute to albinism are diffuse. The penguins and the degenerated human living in the cave suffer it probably due to scientific speculation on the part of the author. The penguins suffer albinism as a congenital pathology due to a process of evolution in the underground. The ape-human of the cave, on the other hand, obviously was not born an albino, but his paleness is the

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<sup>11</sup> In the Roman mythology, Latinus, king of the Latins, gives Lavinia in marriage to the Aeneas. For further information, see Grimal (239-40).

<sup>12</sup> The connections between whiteness and evil are not new. Ishmael, *Moby Dick*'s narrator, states that “It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me” (189). He also makes reference to albinism, wondering “what is it that in the Albino man so peculiarly repels and often shocks the eye, as that sometimes he is loathed by his own kith and kin!” (192). Frankenstein's creature disappears on an ice raft, in the middle of a white vastness, an immense abyss of whiteness that is repeated in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. According to Jiménez Heffernan, Poe's final snowy whiteness is a source of *indeterminacy*, “closely linked to the unreadability both the hieroglyphic gorges and the ‘indentures in the surface of the marl’” (“Heading South” 124).

result of the lack of exposition to the light, something hardly difficult to explain in a single individual. However it is difficult to consider the beast an evil creature, since it is described just as a savage animal, and the same can be said about the penguins living under the giant city in the South Pole.

The white ape, ancestor of Arthur Jermyn, may have different connotations. The goddess was the ruler of a whole tribe of white simians, however the tale never uses the term "albino" to refer to the creatures. In reality, there is just a family of lemurs which have white fur, the sifakas, and in spite of being described by the naturalist Alfred Grandidier in 1871, it is hard to think that Lovecraft knew about the existence of these Madagascan primates. So it is within reason to consider that Lovecraft was reinforcing the whiteness of his apes as a distinctive anomalous feature, and not making reference to a particular species. In fact, the tale makes reference to a "mummified white ape of some unknown species" (22). There is no moral judgment of the apish tribe, but they are described as a primitive civilization that fought against other tribes and was finally exterminated by a rival group.<sup>13</sup> Again, what terrified Arthur Jermyn was that his ancestor intermingled with an ape. Thus, a suitable lecture is connected with interbreeding and brutal ancestry.

The case of Lavinia Watheley seems different to the rest. Her albinism is just another feature added to her physical oddity and deformity. She is the mother of two monsters and the daughter of a sorcerer, and her role is merely testimonial in the tale. However she undoubtedly is part of the most degenerated core of the family, as her own physical aspect confirms.

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<sup>13</sup> According to Joshi:

"The real implication of the story, I believe, is that this city (erected by the "White Congolese civilization") is the true fount of all white civilization. For someone of Lovecraft's well-known racist bent, such a thing would be a horror surpassing any isolated case of miscegenation." ("What Happens in Arthur Jermyn" 160)

Albinism and atypical whiteness are then always linked by Lovecraft to the irrational, degenerated, animal or evil side of the narration. This mutation is never present in a clearly good entity. But the reasons for the obsession the writer had with this anomaly are not clear. Thus I just can conjecture a hypothesis about it: my idea is that Lovecraft connected albinism with degeneration for the mere fact of abnormality. The possibility of being white without really being white-skinned seems a reasonable source of discomfort for him. In the particular case of Lavinia, as I said, her albinism is a way of completing her strange physical appearance and, following my reasoning, a mark of being part of the decadent and degenerated side of the family. She also wears the sin of having “no known husband” (210), something that Lovecraft surely censured, and her lifestyle is described as atypical for the standards of a woman of her time and (low) social position:<sup>14</sup>

Lavinia was fond of wild and grandiose day-dreams and singular occupations; nor was her leisure much taken up by household cares in a home from which all standards of order and cleanliness had long since disappeared. (210)

Old Whateley is the less physically deformed member of the family. He is, however, “an aged and half-insane father about whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth” (210). Although he does not suffer any kind of physical deformity, Old Whateley is insane and he will die due to aging during the narration, accompanied by the whippoorwills crying out of the farm. However, it seems as if his soul escapes from the birds: “Lavinia sobbed, but Wilbur only chuckled whilst the hill noises rumbled faintly. “They didn’t git him,” he muttered” (217). Old Whateley

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<sup>14</sup> Lavinia is one of the most tragic figures in Shakespeare’s extremely macabre play *Titus Andronicus*. She is Titus’ daughter and, as in the case of Lovecraft’s character, is mutilated –in its most physical sense, being raped and cutting out her hands and tongue– by three male figures (Chiron, Aaron and Demetrius). It is not clear what happens to Lovecraft’s Lavinia, but she is probably devoured by the Dunwich horror or sacrificed by her son. In any case, the two women are victims of a brutal and monstrous masculinity.

transcends nature during his lifetime (by helping and taking care of the aberration) and after his death, by avoiding reuniting his soul with the whippoorwills.

The main roles of the old man are two. On the one hand, he will renovate the farm in order to fit there the increasingly immensity of the Dunwich Horror, his most deformed grandson. Secondly, he is in charge of educating Wilbur, introducing him into the ancient magic books inherited by the family.

The autobiographical connotations of Old Whateley as a portrait of Whipple Van Buren Phillips (1833-1904), Lovecraft's grandfather, are clear. After Old Whateley passes, the events rush due to the incapacity of Wilbur to control his monstrous brother. In spite of the advices given by Old Whateley before his death, the creature escapes from the farm during Wilbur's absence to the Miskatonic University Library, and this will alarm the neighbors about the existence of the monstrous entity. The death of Whipple Phillips, on the other hand, meant the end of the economically prosperous childhood Lovecraft enjoyed, apart from the loss of his best friend and literary tutor, who took the paternal role after H.P. Lovecraft's father passed away in 1898. The writer described the traumatic death of his grandfather as follows, in a 1916 letter to Reinhart Kleiner:

On March 28th of that year my beloved grandfather passed away as the result of an apoplectic stroke, & I was deprived of my closest companion. I was never afterward the same. His death brought financial disaster besides its more serious grief. As President of the Owyhee Land & Irrigation Co., and Idaho corporation with Providence offices, he had struggled hard to achieve vast success in the reclamation of Western lands. He had weathered many calamities such as the bursting of his immense dam on Snake River; but now that he was gone, the company was without its brains. He had been a more vital & important figure than even he himself had realized; & with his passing, the rest of the board lost their initiative & courage. The corporation was unwisely dissolved at a time when my grandfather would have persevered –with the result that others reaped the wealth which

should have gone to its stockholders. My mother & I were forced to vacate the beautiful estate at 454 Angell Street, & to enter the less spacious abode at #598, three squares eastward. The combined loss of grandfather & birthplace made me the most miserable of mortals. (*Kleiner* 76)

Wilbur Whateley is one of the key figures in the narration, being Professor Henry Armitage his counterpart. The anomalously developed Wilbur is born the second of February of 1913, a date recalled “because the noises in the hills had sounded, and all the dogs of the countryside had barked persistently” (209).<sup>15</sup> Since his birth, it is made explicit in the tale that Wilbur will be an important part of the imaginary Real. The barking dogs and the noises rising from the hills reinforce the feeling of menace coming from the Whateleys, especially from the newborn baby. The boy has some remarkable features, being a “dark, goatish-looking infant who formed such a contrast to her own [Lavinia’s] sickly and pink-eyed albinism” (210). The goatish-looking of the man will remark his animality, and it also has some religious connotations, since the goat has been traditionally associated to earthly incarnations of the Devil.

The abnormal growing process experienced by the baby, at first, passes unnoticed by the neighbors, and “no one bothered to comment on the swift development which that newcomer seemed every day to exhibit” (211).<sup>16</sup> Wilbur dies at the age of fifteen, being

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<sup>15</sup> Joshi notes that this date corresponds with the commemoration of the presentation of Christ in the Temple. (*The Thing on the Doorstep* 412, n.22)

<sup>16</sup> There are also interesting autobiographical details in the figure of Wilbur. Lovecraft had a quick intellectual development. According to Sprague de Camp, “He knew his letters at two, was reading at three, and was writing at four” (3), and was able to compose “a 44 line poem of internally rhyming iambic heptameter by the age of seven” (Martin, 13). Apart from that, the particular ugliness of Wilbur (“he was exceedingly ugly” [212]) probably depicted Lovecraft’s own physical complex, something encouraged by his own mother, who said to his relatives that he was an ugly boy during the writer’s childhood. Mosig remarks that the mother “succeeded in making him feel ugly and distorted (a feeling that he was never able to overcome completely)” (“Four Faces” 57). A third important autobiographical element is the autodidact component of the Whateleys in general and Wilbur in particular. The importance of the library of Whipple’s library, that Lovecraft started reading as a boy, parallels to the family library of the Whateleys. Waugh proposes an interesting analysis of the figure of the autodidact in the fiction of Lovecraft in his essay “The Outsider, the Autodidact, and Other Professions” (162-98).

around two and a half meters tall and with an apparent adult human shape in the exposed parts of his body. However the rest of it belongs to the realm of the monstrous:

Above the waist it was semi-anthropomorphic; though its chest, where the dog's rending paws still rested watchfully, had the leathery, reticulated hide of a crocodile or alligator. The back was piebald with yellow and black, and dimly suggested the squamous covering of certain snakes. Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began. The skin was thickly covered with coarse black fur, and from the abdomen a score of long greenish-grey tentacles with red sucking mouths protruded limply. Their arrangement was odd, and seemed to follow the symmetries of some cosmic geometry unknown to earth or the solar system. On each of the hips, deep set in a kind of pinkish, ciliated orbit, was what seemed to be a rudimentary eye; whilst in lieu of a tail there depended a kind of trunk or feeler with purple annular markings, and with many evidences of being an undeveloped mouth or throat. The limbs, save for their black fur, roughly resembles the hind legs of prehistoric earth's giant saurians; and terminated in ridgy-veined pads that were neither hooves nor claws. When the thing breathed, its tail and tentacles rhythmically changed colour, as if from some circulatory cause normal to the non-human side of its ancestry. In the tentacles this was observable as a deepening of the greenish tinge, whilst in the tail it was manifest as a yellowish appearance which alternated with a sickly greyish-white in the spaces between the purple rings. Of genuine blood there was none; only the foetid greenish-yellow ichor which trickled along the painted floor. (223-24)

This brief description (in comparison, for instance, with the descriptions of the Deep Ones at the end of "The Shadow over Innsmouth", or the post-mortem examination of the Elder Ones in *At the Mountains of Madness*), offers, however, one of the clearest portraits of a creature ever built by Lovecraft. Unlike most of the apparitions of Lovecraft's monsters, Wilbur is described in a more concise, precise and clear way. There is no presence of the "cubist" gap of language proposed by Harman, there is no failure in the process of symbolization of the Real.

There are three differentiated levels in the description of Wilbur: human, animal and monster. The hands and goatish face are the human component of the hybrid. The two only visible parts of his body are perfectly symbolized for the standards of our reality. The second layer belongs to the animal realm, starting with the crocodile-like chest, and the back resembling the skin of a snake. It is as if the wild surroundings of Dunwich are personified as well in the monstrous collage, reinforcing the animist background of the place. These animal parts resemble reptiles, powerful atavistic species which connect with the most dangerous side of the animal realm, but at the same time with primitivism and, in the case of the snake, biblical references to the Devil in the Garden of Eden. Finally, the monstrous stratum shapes the lower body parts. Tentacles, alien symmetries, frenzy changing colours, deformed mouths... assemble the most irrational part of Wilbur. It is here where the description becomes a little bit rambling, but not enough as to produce a language gap. The Miskatonic faculty that witnesses the dying entity is able to rationalize and symbolize it.<sup>17</sup>

The organic puzzle that casts Wilbur brings together the three elements in conflict in the narration: mankind, nature in its most irrational and aggressive form, and the monstrous. Wilbur is made of a third of humans, that is, the already corrupted and degenerated branch of the Whateleys, including his albino mother and Old Whateley, the sorcerer; a third of aggressive nature, present in the barking dogs, menacing hills and uncanny New England landscape, and finally a third which belongs to the Lovecraftian Mythos, which is made tangible in the body of Wilbur. At the same time, this can be read as the representation of the Real in its three forms: human as symbolic, animal as imaginary –

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<sup>17</sup> Notice that, as in the case of “The Dreams in the Witch House”, “The Dunwich Horror” is also narrated using a third person narrator, so the subjectivity that affects the symbolization of the real Real into reality is less noticeable than in the case of a first person narrator who is affected by the events taking place in the text.

it is by means of animals and nature that the imaginary Real is represented in “The Dunwich Horror” – and monstrous as the real Real, the Thing itself.

The ideological connotations behind this character seem evident at this point of my study. Wilbur is the result of degenerated intercourse, an exaggerated vision of interbreeding in which one of the parts is not even human. Following Lévy's analysis, Wilbur is also depicted as a hidden threat for society. He is even more dangerous than the isolated population of Innsmouth, since Lavinia's son “come[s] and go[es] amid men without usually being bothered” (58). Lévy also points out, without looking deeply into the matter, the psychoanalytical connotations the monstrosity of the lower parts of Wilbur's body might have:

Without pretending to enter into a detailed discussion of matters about which we are admittedly ill-prepared, we can at least venture to suppose that a being like Wilbur, whose monstrosity is localized below the waist, is a carrier of very precise meanings. A psychoanalyst would clearly have much to say about these anomalies. (60)

From the ideological perspective, according to what I have said so far, it is not necessary to be a psychoanalyst to consider this particular feature as a rejection of the supposedly more active sexuality of immigrants and people with lower education proposed by the eugenicists. Lovecraft probably covered this sexual nightmare, part of the real Real he could not apprehend, with the symbolism of tentacles and monstrosity.

The last member of the Whateleys that has to be considered is the Dunwich Horror itself. The monster remains hidden in the farm during most of the narration, and only escapes in the last chapters, and hides in the Cold Spring Glen, a ravine located near the village. But apart from that, it is an invisible creature, so there is just a moment in the story when it is made visible, thanks to a strange dust that the investigators from Miskatonic University spray on him. When the creature escapes from the farm, it leaves

a track of destruction and prints, leveling the ground, bending and breaking trees and scrub, and slaughtering cattle.

In the microcosm of Dunwich, Wilbur’s brother is, from the perspective of my analysis, the perfect representation of the real Real. It is the invisible thing that cannot be apprehended, but it exists, and leaves its traces in the symbolic Real in form of destruction. These elements –the prints and destroyed trees– are the signs corresponding to the imaginary Real, the pieces that slide into reality and warn the observer that there is something beyond the symbolic.

At a certain point of the narration, the Dunwich Horror is exposed thanks to the skills of the scholars. The real Real undergoes a process of symbolization and enters into the level of the symbolic Real. The observers can, more or less accurately (however there is a clear fragmentation of the text, connected with the linguistic gap proposed by Hartman, that leads to the imaginary Real), describe the creature and make it tangible and sensible.<sup>18</sup> The monster follows the typical Lovecraftian pattern of amorphous shaped entity, and Curtis, the farmer who observes the creature through a telescope, narrates what he sees:

Bigger’n a barn... all made o’ squirmin’ ropes... hull thing sort o’ shaped like a hen’s egg bigger’n anything, with dozens o’ legs like hogsheads that haff shut up when they step... nothin’ solid abaout it –all like jelly, an’ made o’ sep’rit wrigglin’ ropes pushed clost together... great bulgin’ eyes all over it... ten or twenty maouths or trunks a-stickin’ aout all along the sides, big as stovepipes, an’ all atossin’ an’ openin’ an’ shuttin’... all grey, with kinder blue or purple rings... *an’ Gawd in heaven –that haff face on top!*... (241-42)

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<sup>18</sup> There is, however, a clear fragmentation of the text in the description of the creature. The hesitations of the narrator difficult a little bit the symbolization of the monster, so there is a certain break in language, as proposed by Harman in his theory of the vertical and horizontal gap. At this particular description, the gap corresponds to the cubist or horizontal axis, the “gratuitous amassing of numerous palpable surfaces” (31).

Oh, oh, my Gawd, that haff face –that haff face –that haff face on top of it... that face with the red eyes an' crinkly albino hair, an' no chin, like the Whateleys... It was an octopus, centipede, spider kind o' thing, but they was a haff-shaped man's face on top of it, an' it looked like Wizard Whateley's, only it was yards an' yards acrost...<sup>19</sup> (244)

The monster, once it is symbolized, seems to be like an amplified, deformed and chaotic version of Wilbur. The description blends animal comparisons (octopus, centipede, spider, hen's egg) with an ocean of colored tentacles. There is still place for a minimal part devoted to humanity, the half-face which features some of the typical traits of the Whateleys.

The scholars defeat the creature on the top of one of the hills, near to a stone altar, after using a powerful spell to expel the horror from our world. The climax of the story, observed in the distance by the farmers, summons several natural elements that increase the sense of menace coming from the landscape:

Suddenly the sunshine seemed to lessen without the intervention of any discernible cloud. It was a very peculiar phenomenon, and was plainly marked by all. A rumbling sound brewing beneath the hills, mixed strangely with a concordant rumbling which clearly came from the sky. Lightning flased aloft, and the wondering crowd looked in vain for the portents of storm. [...] From some farmhouse far away came the frantic barking of dogs.

The change in the quality of the daylight increased, and the crowd gazed about the horizon in wonder. A purplish darkness, born of nothing more than a spectral deepening of the sky's blue, pressed down upon the rumbling hills. Then the lightning flashed again, somewhat brighter than before. [...] The whippoorwills continued their irregular pulsation, and the men of Dunwich braced themselves tensenly against some imponderable menace with which the atmosphere seemed surcharged. (242-43)

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<sup>19</sup> The use of dialectal backwater English in "The Dunwich Horror" is, sometimes, excessive to the point of obstructing the reading of the tale. It is not the only tale in which Lovecraft uses a strong accent for the dialogues of his characters. In "The Shadow over Innsmouth", the long soliloquy by Zadok Allen has also strong dialectical features.

All the natural elements that were part of the imaginary Real throughout the tale are included in this climactic scene: the barking dogs, the whippoorwills, the noisy hills..., and they have been reinforced with an apocalyptic sky, with almost tangible darkness and a storm. The end of the monstrous Wilbur’s brother is about to come thanks to the knowledge of the professors, and on the top of the hill, just before disappearing under the force of the spell prepared by Henry Armitage, the Dunwich Horror emits the following sounds: “Eh-ya-ya-ya-yahaah-e’yayayayaaa... ngh’aaaa... ngh’aaa... h’yuh... h’yuh... HELP! HELP!... ff-ff-ff-FATHER! FATHER! YOG-SOTHOTH!...” (243), and then dies, leaving a profound mark of corruption in the ground: “The vegetation never came right again. To this day there is something queer and unholy about the growths on and around that fearsome hill” (244).

Now the religious parallelism is completed: Lavinia is the humble albino virgin who has been fertilized by the alien entity Yog-Sothoth. The result has been the birth of two creatures, Wilbur and the Dunwich Horror. The former tries to complete his learning in order to perform some kind of ritual to bring his father back to Earth, whereas the latter is too big to dwell among humans. After the failure of Wilbur, the monster is hunted by the scholars from Miskatonic University and, surrounded by the fury of nature, is killed in its own Golgotha, while asks for help to its absent alien father, which was trying to come to our planet to destroy humanity. In words of Lévy, “the final scene can be read as the replica, in the horrific mode, of the story of the Passion” (96).

For Houellebecq, however, this mockery of Jesus Christ passion has mainly a racial reading:

Lovecraft goes back to a very ancient source of horror where Evil is the product of a carnal union against nature. This idea fits his obsessive racism perfectly; for, to him, as to all racists, it is not one particular race that represents true horror, but the notion of the half-

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breed. Using both his knowledge of genetics and his familiarity with sacred texts, he concocts an explosive synthesis of abject, unprecedented force. To Christ, the new Adam come to regenerate mankind, Lovecraft opposes the “negro” who has come to regenerate humanity through bestiality and vice”. (112)

Religion did not seem to be something that particularly worried Lovecraft. He was a declared agnostic and, sometimes, even referred to himself as an atheist: “In theory I am an agnostic, but pending the appearance of radical evidence I must be classed, practically and provisionally, as an atheist” (*SL IV 57*). Nonetheless Guardé Paz puts forward that Christianity might have had some racial side effects that Lovecraft probably considered:

Penetration of (Christian) pacifism into the Teutonic blood allowed Europe to immerse itself in an ignominious alliance with alien people, fragmenting nations otherwise bound together by common ties of religion, literature, culture, or blood. (14)

The religious background in “The Dunwich Horror” is so evident that it cannot be dismissed. It is obvious that Lovecraft moves the religious parallelism to the side of the evil characters, and Tyson proposes that

Lovecraft intended to make the point that all the world's religions are no more true than the idle speculations of magazine fiction writers, and that all of them should be regarded as mere fantasies; however, we may turn his conclusion around and observe that, in his opinion, his Old Ones are no less real than the angels described in the Torah, the New Testament, and the Koran. (134)

Tyson's proposal leads me to consider that “The Dunwich Horror” hides the conviction that religion is no more than a threatening structure that can be uncovered and revealed by science. The backwaters are frightened of events they cannot explain, both in nature and in the core of the Whateley's family, and their less developed intellect does not allow them to even see the monster, and it is because the arrival of the scientist, rational

minds that the whole plot is revealed and the threat is defeated. Religion, then, is a source of fear for the low educated, and it is by means of rational and scientific methods that it has to be disproved. Paradoxically the results of this process of demystifying of religion have negative connotations. In words of Tyson:

All that can be achieved through our sciences is the destruction of our comforting illusions, one after another, until we have nothing to support us in a black void of despair through which we must fall for eternity. (170)

So it might be said that Lovecraft, in the process of mocking religion, and proposing that science should dismantle any kind of mythical belief, is also leaving mankind detached from anything that provides transcendental value.<sup>20</sup> Following the writer’s metaphysics, we are just a spot in the middle of a universe indifferent to us.

The last relevant character is Henry Armitage, the professor who avoids Wilbur from getting the *Necronomicon* to perform the ritual of opening a gate for Yog-Sothoth to get into our planet and who, with the help of some other colleagues, defeats the monster of Dunwich. Lovecraft “found [himself] psychologically identifying with one of the characters (an aged scholar who finally combats the menace) toward the end” (*Essential Solitude* 158). The scholar is supposed to be the hero of the story (something Burleson will disprove, as I will discuss in the following lines), and it is by means of hard study and pure intellectual efforts that he is able to fulfill his tasks.

Armitage, who is the librarian of the Miskatonic University library, discovers Wilbur’s plans when he reads the passage of the *Necronomicon* that the monstrous Whateley is studying. The narration includes a fragment from the mythical book created by Lovecraft, which exposes the plans Yog-Sothoth might have:

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<sup>20</sup> As Lovecraft himself mentioned in one of his letters: “A great part of religion is merely a childish and diluted pseudo-gratification of this perpetual gnawing toward the ultimate illimitable void.” (*Visible World* 259)

Nor is it to be thought, that man is either the oldest or the last of earth's masters, or that the common bulk of life and substance walks alone. The Old Ones were, the Old ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but *between* them. They walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. *Yog-Sothoth* knows the gate. *Yog-Sothoth* is the gate. *Yog-Sothoth* is the key and the guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in *Yog-Sothoth*. He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again. He knows where They have trod earth's fields, and where They still tread them, and why no one can behold Them as They tread. [...] The wind gibbers with Their voices, and the earth mutters with Their consciousness. They bend the forest and crush the city, yet may not forest or city behold the hand that smites. [...] Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where Man rules now. (219-20)

When the text declares that the Old Ones live *between* spaces, this idea openly connects with the mathematical witchcraft analyzed in "The Dreams in the Witch House". The biblical, prophetic tone of the passage reinforces the religious dimension of the tale, as the implications that can be deduced from what the *Necronomicon* says have been studied by Burleson. In his essay "The Mythic Hero Archetype in 'The Dunwich Horror'", he analyses the narration from the point of view of the mythical representation of the hero, and concludes that there is an inversion of roles in the text. The supposed hero of the story, Henry Armitage, is in fact a mock representation of heroism, and the role of heroes falls on the twin brothers, Wilbur and the monster. The two of them, according to Burleson, fulfill all the requirements to be considered as representative of the Twin Cycle of the Hero Myth proposed by Henderson.<sup>21</sup> So "The Dunwich Horror"

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<sup>21</sup>Henderson proposed the Twin Cycle of the Hero Myth in the frame of Jungian psychoanalysis, as part of the collective unconscious and which will also appear in our dreams. One of the characteristics of the Twin Heroes, in words of Henderson is that:

"For a long time these two heroes are invincible: Whether they are presented as two separate figures or as two-in-one, they carry all before them. Yet, like the warrior gods of Navaho Indian mythology, they eventually sicken from the abuse of their own power." (114)

Wilbur and his brother are defeated, then, because their own fault. Wilbur is killed in the middle of his quest, when he tries to creep into the library to get the *Necronomicon*, whereas the Dunwich Horror is defeated after slaughtering several farms and destroying an important extension of landscape.

is, for Burleson, a twisted tale since the deep interpretation that can be inferred from the text is exactly the opposite of the most superficial one:

The story appears to have a kind of “good versus evil” flavor. [...] A more thoughtful reading casts some doubt on the real significance of Armitage’s victory. But, more importantly, a reading with attention to mythic or archetypal detail shows that in terms of the hero archetype, Lovecraft –consciously or otherwise– has in “The Dunwich Horror” fictionally underscored his personal view of man’s insect-like position in the cosmos by presenting a mythic *inversion* of what a more casual, sub-mythic reading would suggest. Not only does Armitage fall decidedly short of the characteristics of the archetypal hero – these characteristics, indeed, one discerns only in Armitage’s alien adversaries, Wilbur Whateley and his twin brother. (206)

Burleson proves that the Whateley twins fulfill the eight characteristics proposed by Henderson for the Twin Hero Myth, leaving Armitage’s victory “virtually meaningless in cosmic terms” (212).<sup>22</sup> He considers that the role of the Old Ones in the tale is that of Azathoth in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, i.e. the embodiment of chaos. With that premise, within the framework of mythical interpretation, the scholar concludes that the result of the Dunwich quest is, once again, the reinforcement of Lovecraft’s cosmicism, instead of a merely “good vs. evil” tale:

Lovecraft’s Old Ones are symbolic of chaos –of the blindly indifferent forces of nature, the forces of an impersonal and purposeless cosmos– “The Dunwich Horror”, by its association of the hero archetype with these forces, gives fictional articulation to a view that happens to correspond to Lovecraft’s personal *Weltanschauung*: the view that man is but an evanescent

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<sup>22</sup> The seven characteristics are: a) miraculous conception, b) childhood and initiation of the hero, c) hero’s preparation, meditation, and withdrawal, d) trial and quest, e) hero’s death because the quest, f) descent to the underworld, g) resurrection and rebirth, and h) ascension, apotheosis, and atonement. In words of Henderson:

“Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero’s miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant struggle with the forces of evil, his fallibility to the sin of pride (*hybris*), and his fall through betrayal or a “heroic” sacrifice that ends in his death.” (110)

mote in the universe of stars, a universe that neither blesses nor damns him, unless to be ignored is to be damned. (212)

From my particular ideological approach, the inversion of the mythical hero proposed by Burleson implies the triumph of miscegenation, hybridism and corruption over society, no matter how hard science fights against it. For Lovecraft, the Whateleys are just the tip of the iceberg. They wanted to bring the alien forces, their degenerated families represented by the Old Ones mentioned in the *Necronomicon* and Yog-Sothoth (the parental entity, and the original focus of decay and infection), into the core of New England. But they are probably just one of many depraved families trying to spread their decline among Lovecraft's beloved Teutons, and according to the mysterious book, the Old Ones "shall rule where Man rules now".

Science in "The Dunwich Horror" has a different role from that of the rest of the stories I have analysed so far. Concepts such as miscegenation or hybridism are present in this tale as well, and some ideological connotations are probably related with social Darwinist theories of corruption of society. However it is interesting to see that Professor Armitage, the hero (or antihero/villain, from the perspective of Burleson), uses science and arcane knowledge to defeat the threat of the Whateleys, something which never happened in the previous stories.<sup>23</sup>

After Wilbur's death, his diary is sent to Dr. Armitage (due to his "wide linguistic learning [231]) in order to decipher it, since it is written in an alphabet "unknown to any available authority" (231). Armitage spends several days trying to decode the symbols,

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<sup>23</sup> It is true that in "The Dreams in the Witch House" Gilman is able to perform inter-dimensional travels thanks to mathematics, but he cannot do it in an active way. Apart from that, he defeats the witch and her familiar with very conventional physical acts in a fight.

using old treatises to cast light on the text.<sup>24</sup> This time the important discipline is linguistics, and after revealing the contents of the diary the scholar discovers “some plan for the extirpation of the entire human race and all animal and vegetal life from the earth by some terrible elder race of beings from another dimension” (234). After the discovery of this frightening complot, Armitage summons two other colleagues and the three of them start preparing the expedition to Dunwich, to defeat the hidden horror that dwells in the village:

Strange and terrible books were drawn voluminously from the stack shelves and from secure places of storage; and diagrams and formulae were copied with feverish haste and in bewildering abundance. [...] The task in hand required an infinity of research and experiment. (234-35)

The three Professors are preparing the arms they will need to fight and defeat the Dunwich horror. These weapons are not guns and dynamite, as the tale will reveal in the climax of the battle against the creature, but a strange dust to spread over the monster and make it visible and certain spells and rituals to send it back to the dimension it belongs. Lovecraft, in a similar way to what he did with witchcraft in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, is rationalizing spells and magic, making them just as an extension of scientific knowledge understandable just for the most outstanding minds.

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<sup>24</sup> Joshi, in a note to the text, describes all the treatises and authors that Lovecraft named in “The Dunwich Horror”:

“These authors and titles are all cited, in this order, in the entry on “Cryptography” by John Eglinton Bailey in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which HPL owned. The *Polygraphia* of Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516) was first published in Latin in 1518 and translated into French in 1561. The treatise concerns kabbalistic writing. *De Furtivis Literarum Notis*, a work on ciphers by Giovanni Battista della Porta (1535?-1615), was first published in 1563. *Traicté des Chiffres ou Secrètes d’Ecrire* by Blaise de Vigenère (1523-1596) was first published in 1586. *Cryptomenysis Patefacta*; or, *The Art of Secret Information Disclosed without a Key* by John Falconer was first published in 1685. *An Essay on the art of Decyphering* by John Davys (1678-1724) was published in 1737. Philip Thicknesse (1719-1792) published *A Treatise on the art of Decyphering and of Writing in Cypher* in 1772. William Blair wrote a lengthy article on “Cipher” for Abraham Ree’s *Cyclopaedia* (1819). G. von Marten published *Cours diplomatique* in 1801 (4th ed. 1851). *The Kryptographik* of Johann Ludwig Klüber (1762-1837) dates to 1809.” (*The Thing on the Doorstep* 418, n.60)

Up to this point, science is featured as the revealer of menaces coming from the imaginary Real. The causes of all the uncanny references to nature and what is the secret the Whateleys might hide in the farm are discovered and the imaginary Real is symbolized thanks to the research performed by Armitage. This approach to science, using it as a menace to the symbolic order, has been already analysed in other tales. But the novelty comes from the fact that the scholars make an active use of science to overcome the danger at the end of the tale.

Two variants of science can be recognized in "The Dunwich Horror". On the one hand, a theoretical approach which is that of the pure analytical research to decipher Wilbur's diary. On the other hand, coinciding with the new approach to science I am proposing, there is a more practical application of scientific knowledge. The creation of the dust to make the monster visible, as well as the learning of spells to defeat it, can be read as processes of "technification" of the sciences, using them not in order to reveal the contradictions of the symbolic level in a more or less theoretical way, but a practical and active use of knowledge. But the use of technique has a different framework from that of pure knowledge. When using the dust, the monster is made visible in the symbolic level. The process is no more the discovering of a particular fact that is revealing instabilities in the symbolic Real, but a physical aggression to the stability of the symbolic Real itself. The apparition of the monster in the middle of the hill changes the rules of nature, since it brings into reality an entity that goes against traditional nature. The Dunwich Horror is a creature that should not exist for it contradicts the basic rules of nature, but the dust created by the scientists reveals the monstrosity.

The defeat of the Dunwich Horror brings, in theory, peace to the small town. An ideological interpretation of this leads to the consideration of science as a way of avoiding the menace of social degeneration. Once again, as in the case of Keziah the

witch from “The Dreams in the Witch House”, science discovers the problem (the plot to bring the alien creatures to invade our planet) and provides the solutions (the dismantling of the Whateleys clan). From a historically scientist approach, social Darwinism described the threat of *communal decay* and eugenics provided the ways to avoid it. This idea, again, is present in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, where the menace of the witch, symbolization of the scum and uneducated classes which came from London with the first colonizers, disappears thanks to Gilman, the mathematics student. But what happens if we attend Burleson’s inversion of the mythical heroes? If Armitage’s victory is just a tiny anecdote in the middle of countless manifestations of *communal decay* and vice, the pessimistic connotations that Lovecraft might intended arise. As Burleson asserts, “Armitage has merely put down a local manifestation of a horror that can be repeated elsewhere, at other times, with more effect” (“Mythic Hero” 207). The battle against the degeneration of New England Teutons is lost, since there are too many front lines to fight and it is impossible to avoid the spread of decadent blood through the streets of the cities.

### 9.3.- Conclusions

“The Dunwich Horror” presents several ideological layers that make of it one of the most powerful tales in all the Lovecraftian oeuvre. The story anticipates some of the ideas that the writer will develop later in his work, presenting the concept of the degenerated past that haunts the present, this time in the form of the degraded blood of the Whateleys family, who perform magic rituals to bring Yog-Sothoth and its alien retinue to Earth. The origins of these rituals are to be found in the American Indians tribes that dwelt the spot. Therefore, they are the “original sin” of New England.

The presence of classical Darwinist ideas is represented in the hybrid figure of Wilbur, whose body is composed by three different parts: human, animal and monstrous. The three of them can be associated with the three different types of Real within the framework of the story: The human Wilbur belongs to the realm of the symbolic. The animal Wilbur symbolizes the imaginary Real, which is present in the narration mainly by means of menacing animals and landscape. Finally, the monstrous third of the hybrid embodies the real Real, the fear of the unknown, of the degenerated Other.

The superficial reading of “good versus evil” leads to the ideological interpretation of Armitage as the savior of the Teuton race, since he avoids the invasion of the degraded blood of the Whateleys and the aliens they were planning to bring. The discovery of the menace of the ideological Real against the symbolic Real is made through science (linguistics in that particular story). This reading is similar to the one made in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, where Gilman defeats the menace that comes from the past –Keziah the witch and Brown Jermin, her familiar–, and the path from the imaginary Real to the symbolic Real is made via mathematics.

Burleson's analysis of the text, however, reverses the roles of heroes and villains, and he demonstrates that the Whateley twins –Wilbur and the Dunwich Horror– are in fact the mythical heroes in the story. This different interpretation allows me to develop another ideological proposal for the tale, in which Lovecraft's pessimism about the chances of overcoming the problem of *communal decay* and degeneration is highlighted. If the case of Dunwich is just one among thousands, the chances of cancelling the menace are minimal and the corrupted blood of the degenerated aliens will reign.

I have read the religious references of the text as a reinforcement of Lovecraft cosmicism. Wilbur’s monstrous twin is a deformed and distorted version of Jesus Christ, and the triumph of Armitage over it is the triumph of reason over belief, of science over religion. Lovecraft’s proposal is clear: the role of science is to unmask any kind of irrational belief, even if that means the fracture of the symbolic Real. Religion provides symbolization for many aspects of the Real that mankind cannot apprehend, and the fight of Armitage is the fight of an atheist to dismantle any kind of creeds. The consequences are not trivial, since that would open a breach into the symbolic Real. But Lovecraft believed that the rules of the universe do not consider humanity in their flow, and that there is no divine intervention in our creation. By proposing this, he repaired the fracture created by his atheism/agnosticism in his own symbolic Real.

Finally, “The Dunwich Horror” presents a new approach to science, by means of technology. The technological side of science is no more useful to discover the menaces that, coming from the imaginary Real, are harassing reality. On the contrary, the use of artifacts and applied science brings a direct attack to the symbolic Real. The apparition of the monster thanks to the spells and dust created by the researchers breaks the established laws of nature and life. The monstrosity is an aggression against the symbolic level since it breaks the rules, allowing the existence of new monstrous entities among us.



## **CHAPTER 10: ON “THE QUEST OF IRANON”**

### 10.1.- The Epicurean approach to life

“The Quest of Iranon” provides a perfect starting point for analyzing and discussing Lovecraft’s obsession with the past. Whereas the past is tangible in all the tales I have studied so far, the novelty presented in this piece of fiction is that looking back in time has a clear positive meaning this time. The exploration of the past in the previous texts always led to horrific discoveries, related with curses, genetic degeneration, degradation or monstrous entities controlling the fate of humanity. “The Quest of Iranon”, on the contrary, yearns for a utopian past (at least until the very end of the story), where the protagonist, Iranon, was the prince of the marvelous city of Aira.

The tale is a short story written by Lovecraft in February, 1921. However it was not published until 1935, in the *Galleon* magazine, and posthumously reedited in *Weird Tales* in 1939. According to Joshi, Lovecraft intended to publish the tale in the

*Conservative*, but the following issue did not appear until 1923, and by this time the writer probably had lost interest (*The Thing on the Doorstep* 375-76).

The first impressions that Lovecraft has about “The Quest of Iranon” are, however, very positive. In a letter to Reinhart Kleiner, some weeks after finishing the story, he confesses that:

I am picking up a new style lately –running to pathos as well as horror. The best thing I have yet done is “The Quest of Iranon”, whose English Loveman calls the most musical and flowing I have yet written, and whose sad plot made one prominent poet actually weep –not at the crudity of the story, but at the sadness. (*Kleiner* 202)

During the time the manuscript was lost among Lovecraft's documents, the writer drastically changed his opinion on the tale, as can be seen in several letters to August Derleth. In 1927 he still seems to be somewhat condescending with the tale, considering it as a precursor of a more refined style he would develop later:

“Iranon” is not among my best things, but embodies a mood and manner definitely obsolete with me. It is too directly Dunsanian –one really ought to consider such imitative things as mere exercises incident to the incorporation of a new influence into one's style. “The Silver Key” & “Strange High House” show this element in its finally absorbed state. (*Essential Solitude* 106)

It is some years before the publication of the manuscript in the *Galleon* when H.P. Lovecraft starts to be openly contemptuous towards his creation, talking about a “typical product of my 1921 phase of Dunsanity, & I doubt if I would even wish to see it printed under my own signature” (*Essential Solitude* 387). Finally, just after the text is selected by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, editor of the *Galleon*, Lovecraft mentions it in a brief postscript to August Derleth: “Our friend Eshbach is letting down standards. He

took that mawkish “Iranon” thing which you once typed for me” (*Essential Solitude* 694).

“The Quest of Iranon” is one of the stories that Lovecraft sets in the imaginary Dreamlands, a realm that is accessed just by means of dreams. Some passages of the already analyzed “The Dreams in the Witch House” are located in the Dreamlands, but in “The Quest of Iranon” all the action takes place there. All the texts written by Lovecraft and set in the Dreamlands are supposed to be part of the Dream Cycle. The extension and definition of both concepts –Dreamlands and Dream Cycle– are, however, confusing. The titles that are considered as part of the Dream Cycle vary depending on the scholar or editor. In 1995, Del Rey Books published a volume under the generic title *The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft. Dreams of Terror and Death*, with an introduction by Neil Gaiman. This book included up to 25 different titles in which there is a direct or indirect presence of the Dreamlands.

Pearsall defines the Dreamlands as “a kind of vast parallel world, reachable by some humans in their dreams” (155). With this definition, he reduces the tales related to the Dreamlands to four of them: *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, “The Other Gods”, “The Cats of Ulthar” and “Celephaïs”. Joshi also puts forward a reductionist approach to the problem of the Dream Cycle. According to him, many of the tales that have been traditionally considered as part of the Cycle, are in fact located in a remote, prehistoric past. However he remarks that there are several inconsistencies when the different stories are compared, and that it is difficult to elucidate the reach of the Dreamlands. With regard to the particular story I am analyzing, Joshi asserts that:

The sites in “The Quest of Iranon” must also be in the prehistoric world; although Iranon’s city of Aria exists only in his imagination. [...] Here the whole crux of the tale depends on

the poignant distinction between a prosy real world (Teloth, Oonai, etc.) and the magical dream world imagined by Iranon. ("Dream World" 92)

So according to Pearsall, then, "The Quest of Iranon" would not be part of the Dream Cycle. For Joshi, however, there might be some relation with the Dreamlands because of the dream world created by the protagonist, Iranon. Nonetheless Joshi remarks that "the results of this investigation are, inevitably, tentative and confused" ("Dream World" 102).<sup>1</sup>

In the categorization from the Lovecraftian tale I presented earlier in this study, I have included the setting as part of another world (category 9), and I have considered the plot as travels across oneiric spots (category 17). I decided to use a broad category—closer to the Del Rey edition than to Pearsall or Joshi's conceptions—to define the Dreamlands, considering all the tales which had clearly imaginary locations in a Dunsanian dream-like style.<sup>2</sup> I include also tales in which the role of dreams is relevant. Thus, I read "The Quest of Iranon" as part of the oneiric stories, since Iranon seems to daydream with the city of Aira, which is probably part of the Dreamlands.<sup>3</sup> The climax of the story is a revelation about the past of the character (categories 22A + 22D), and the post-climax

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<sup>1</sup> "The Quest of Iranon" has been regarded by most of the authors as a minor story among the Dream Cycle, and it is normally dismissed in favor of longest works such as "The Silver Key" or "The Dream-Quest of the Unknown Kadath". The result is that there is an evident lack of deep analysis of this brief text, which is normally just a secondary reference when dealing with the other oneiric stories.

<sup>2</sup> The influence of Lord Dunsany in the Dream Cycle tales has been highlighted by many authors, and Lovecraft himself acknowledged Dunsany as one of his favorite writers in the essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*:

"Unexcelled in the sorcery of crystalline singing prose, and supreme in the creation of gorgeous and languorous world of iridescently exotic vision, is Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, Eighteenth Baron Dunsany, whose tales and short plays form an almost unique element in our literature. Inventor of a new mythology and weaver of surprising folklore, Lord Dunsany stands dedicated to a strange world of fantastic beauty, and pledged to eternal warfare against the coarseness and ugliness of diurnal reality" (67)

For a more detailed analysis of the influence Lord Dunsany had in the oeuvre of H.P. Lovecraft, see Joshi (*I Am Providence* 332-40), as well as his introduction to *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, and Schweitzer's "Lovecraft and Lord Dunsany". For Lovecraft's criticism on Dunsany's oeuvre, see his essay "Lord Dunsany and His Work".

<sup>3</sup> However, the importance of the delimitation of the Dream Cycle is secondary for my analysis, and it does not really represent a major issue to include the whole story in the realm of the Dreamlands or in a prehistoric past. When required during the present chapter, I will expand my explanation and readings of the text from the Dreamlands to the supposition of a prehistoric setting.

scene represents the suicide of the protagonist (category 26). The categorization is completed with the figure of Iranon himself, a lonely singer who wanders through different imaginary cities and places (category 3).

“The Quest of Iranon” is completely different in tone and style to any other text studied so far in the present analysis. In a very poetic way, it narrates the story of Iranon, a young minstrel who arrives to the city of Teloth, singing about the beauties of Aira, the city he was prince many years ago. However his art is not appreciated by the inhabitants of Teloth, and he is asked to get a job and be productive or leave the city. Shortly after that, he meets a boy, Romnod, who tells him that Oonai might be the city of Aira with a new name. Therefore, the two of them head to that mysterious city, to discover if it is the one Iranon should reign over.

They spend several years traveling towards Oonai, and during this time Romnod grows, but Iranon does not age at all. When they reach the city, Iranon finds out that although beautiful, it is not the city of Aria. Nonetheless they are welcome and spend many years there. During this time Iranon’s stories and songs entertain the citizens and the court of Oonai, and Romnod keeps on aging until he dies, whereas the protagonist is still as young as the beginning of the quest.

After visiting Romnod’s grave, and tired of the decadence of the city, Iranon departs again and finds a humble shepherd’s hut. He talks to the owner, and asks him about the wondrous city of Aira. The old man tells him of a childhood friend, Iranon, son of a beggar, who always daydreamed of a city with that name. This boy left because everybody mocked at him, and he never saw him again. When Iranon discovers the truth, he suffers of instant aging, becoming an old and decrepit figure that commits suicide in nearby quicksand.

As has been said, the first thing to highlight is that “The Quest of Iranon” is different to all the stories written by Lovecraft that are included among the genre of the Gothic, horror, science fiction or weird tale. There are no monsters in “The Quest of Iranon”, there are no secret forbidden books, no aliens, no witches, no madness (at least with its frightening side), and no sense of the weird or the uncanny at all. The tale is a poetic story, full of sadness, with an unhurried rhythm, free of all kind of monstrosity or terror.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Darrell Schweitzer mentions that “The only thing Lovecraftian at all about “The Quest of Iranon” is that the hero is seeking beauty and comfort found in the past, in the glittering lost land of his childhood” (“Lovecraft and Dunsany” 81).

This style and narrative are problematic for my analysis, since they fail in having a clear presence of the imaginary Real. Since there are no Mythos harassing our symbolic reality, there are no fractures at this level. So the present chapter will mainly focus on the exploration of the ideological connotations –the real Real– that the text might provide. As regarding science, there is a complete absence of it in the tale as well. No matter if we consider the setting as a prehistoric reality or an alternative place located somewhere in the Dreamlands, there are no scientific references. The general impression transmitted by the narration is that of a period similar to the ancient Greek or Roman empires. However, there are important indirect connotations, derived from the analysis of the relevance of the past in the life of Lovecraft that will connect with science and, more particularly, with technological progress.

The figure of Iranon is the cornerstone of my analysis. The man is described as a “youth, vinecrowned, his yellow hair glistening with myrrh and his purple robe torn with briers of the mountain Sidrak” (39), and he introduces himself as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Notice that “The Quest of Iranon” is not the only Lovecraftian tale which is constructed upon these narrative principles. Other tales such as “The White Ship”, “The Silver Key” or, to a lesser degree, “The Dream-Quest of the Unknown Kadath”, also share this slow rhythm and lack of action.

## Chapter 10: On “The Quest of Iranon”

I am Iranon, and come from Aira, a far city that I recall only dimly but seek to find again. I am a singer of songs that I learned in the far city, and my calling is to make beauty with the things remembered of childhood. My wealth is in little memories and dreams, and in hopes that I sing in gardens when the moon is tender and the west wind stirs the lotos-buds. (39)

The troubadour is a white, blond bohemian person whose main ambitions are beauty, the arts and the quest to find a beloved, almost forgotten city.<sup>5</sup> His life is devoted to aesthetic principles, and he rejects a life of work.<sup>6</sup> When he is told to find a job as a cobbler apprentice, he reasons as follows:

Wherefore do ye toil; is it not that ye may live and be happy? And if ye toil only that ye may toil more, when shall happiness find you? Ye toil to live, but is not life made of beauty and song? And if ye suffer no singers among you, where shall be the fruits of your toil? Toil without song is like a weary journey without an end. Were not death more pleasing?  
(40)

Iranon has an almost hedonist view of life, based on aesthetic grounds and search for pleasure. According to Joshi’s analysis of Lovecraft’s ethics (*Decline* 30-45), the writer experienced a process of adaptation of his own worldview through his life. By the time this tale was written, Joshi asserts that “Lovecraft came to adopt the (genuinely) Epicurean position that, given the relativity of values, each person should pursue whatever gives him the greatest pleasure” (33). So it is possible to think that Lovecraft is talking through Iranon’s words, and that he is defending artistic pleasure over imposed work. In fact, Lovecraft did not enjoy an economically solvent living because

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<sup>5</sup> Boerem connects Iranon with the tradition of the gentleman narrator. “The Quest of Iranon” is written using a third person narrator, but Boerem highlights the fact that Iranon belongs to a noble family (or at least this is what the character believes). This is a recurrent character in the early works of Lovecraft, such as “The Other Gods”, “The Temple”, “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” or “The Rats in the Walls”.

<sup>6</sup> Iranon’s artistic facet is not connected with the access to reality beyond reality, or forbidden knowledge. However, Lovecraft used artistic talents in other tales as a way to produce an attack against the symbolic level. Steven J. Mariconda explores the relationship between the arts and the apprehension of a hidden truth in his essay “H.P. Lovecraft: Art, Artifact, and Reality.”

he did not subdue his production to the aesthetical standards of his times, and he preferred to write a story he enjoyed rather than a narration that would please editors, jeopardizing his own personal welfare by doing so. This Epicurean philosophy, according to Joshi, is derived from cosmicism, as Lovecraft himself highlights in a letter:

The cosmos... is simply a perpetual rearrangement of electrons which is constantly seething as it always has been and always will be. Our tiny globe and puny thoughts are but one momentary incident in its eternal mutation; so that the life, aims, and thoughts of mankind are of the utmost triviality and ridiculousness. We are conscious by accident, and during the unfortunate instant that we are so, it behooves us only to mitigate our pain and pass our time as agreeably as we may. Since good sense shows us, that pleasure is but a balance betwixt desire and fulfillment; 'tis the part of reason to avoid the needless labour by having as few wants as possible, and gratifying them in a manner so quiet as not to encroach on the pleasure of others and stir them up against us. (*SL I* 260-61)

Lovecraft also connects pleasure to a certain degree of asceticism.<sup>7</sup> To have “as few wants as possible” reduces the economical and material needs, and that is something that Iranon also seems to share. He has no material needs, he lives from singing and reciting his stories to the audience, and is happy when “those who listened to the songs [...] tossed him flowers and applauded when he was done” (42). Social and artistic recognition are Iranon's rewards.

The second important aspect of Iranon's wishes is his obsession with the lost city of Aira. This longing for the lost past, for a time and place that was full of beauty and happiness, is something not frequent in Lovecraft's fictional corpus. Up to this point,

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<sup>7</sup> Notice that the asceticism proposed by Lovecraft is not connected with Epicurean philosophy but with Stoicism. At the same time, Iranon cannot be connected with the Stoic *apatheia*, since he is moved by strong passions derived from the arts. He feels comfortable and rewarded when his artistic production is appreciated, so he is fully Epicurean in this aspect. For further analysis on the sources of pleasure for Epicureans and Stoics, see Sharples (82-115).

the past has been always a source of conflicts. In *At the Mountains of Madness* the expedition discovers the Elder Things, a race that dwelt the planet million of years ago and probably even created us. The shoggoth, on the other hand, is the malefic presence that comes from the past and brings chaos to the symbolic Real. “The Shadow over Innsmouth” has strong biological connotations related to family inheritance and family degeneration. In “The Dreams in the Witch House” the past brings the decadence of the low classes that arrived to New England and derived into witchcraft and Satanism. “The Dunwich Horror” points to the past as the moment when the American Indians started the rituals that would bring the Old Ones back to earth, a tradition that was later followed by the Whateleys.

But “The Quest of Iranon” looks back in time with nostalgia and melancholia. Iranon misses his home city whose “beauty is past imagining, and none can tell of it without rapture” (43). He wants to come back and “reign over thy groves and gardens, thy streets and palaces, and sing to men who shall know whereof I sing, and laugh not nor turn away” (40). There are two main sources of comfort in the past for Iranon. The first one is his royal ancestry, which I will discuss later in this chapter. On the other hand, the musician finds pleasure in the memories of the city itself. The protagonist claims its beauties all throughout the text, and we know that Aira is a city that has

[...] palaces of veined and tinted marble, with golden domes and painted walls, and green gardens with cerulean pools and crystal fountains. Often I [Iranon] played in the gardens and waded in the pools, and lay and dreamed among the pale flowers under the trees. And sometimes at sunset I would climb the long hilly street to the citadel and the open place, and look down upon Aira, the magic city of marble and beryl, splendid in a robe of golden flame. (40)

The virtues of the city of Aira contrast with what the main character finds in the different cities he visits. In Teloth hardly anyone appreciates his artistic gifts, because everybody seems to be too busy working, and they prefer Iranon to become another worker rather than a minstrel. The protagonist also mentions that he once visited Sinara, since he wanted to sing for the dromedary-merchants, "But when I went to Sinara I found the dromedary-men all drunken and ribald" (41). In spite of feeling more or less comfortable in Oonai, he discovers that men there "were pale with reveling and dull with wine" (42), and he is sure that "welcome shall await me only in Aira" (41).<sup>8</sup>

Oonai, which at first seems to be a sort of substitute for the lost city, finally is revealed as a place that corrupts its citizens with vice and alcohol. After the years spent there even Romnod, Iranon's friend, "grew coarser and redder with wine, till he dreamed less and less, and listened with less delight to the songs of Iranon" (43). To complete the portrait,

one day the King brought to the palace some wild whirling dancers from the Linarian desert, and dusky flute-players from Drinen in the East, and after that the revelers threw their roses not so much at Iranon as at the dancers and the flute-players. (43)

It is hard to believe that this particular passage is not intentionally biased with racial ideas. The wild whirling dancers who dance to the rhythm of flutes are probably inspired by the religious order of the Mevleves or Turning Dervishes. There are no evidences that Lovecraft knew about them, but it is not unlikely that he read about the Persian dancers. In 1868, for instance, John P. Brown published a treatise on the Dervishes, entitled *The Dervishes; or Oriental Spiritualism*. In this volume, quoting the

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<sup>8</sup> Lovecraft firmly expressed his opinions against alcohol. In the essay "Liquor and Its Friends", he supported William Jennings Bryan's ideas on banning alcohol, asserting that: "Bryan, with the same will that made our administration ridiculous in its foreign policy, made it glorious in its freedom from vicious intemperance. His abolition of wine from tables of state was the first [step] toward giving the American people a high governmental example of decency." (16)

book *Shekaik Numânieh*, Brown described the ritual turning dance performed by the Persian religious dancers:

The Mevleves are those who join together as brethren, and by the love of Allah, worshipping Him in a house of love, to the melodious sound of the flute, which expresses the harmony of His creation, and revolve round like His empyrium, dancing for joy, and uttering the soft sounds of affectionate sighs and lamentations, the result of their ardent desire to be united to Him.<sup>9</sup> Revolving round and round the Semâ`Khâneh of sinful abandonment and spiritual isolation, they free themselves from all unworthy passions, and are detached from all the subtle minutiae and associations of religion. (203)

The “dusky” artists coming from the desert overthrow Iranon’s position as the leading artistic figure in Oonai, and this is one of the reasons why the singer leaves the city. The attack against the Eastern immigrant is clear even in the prehistoric setting (or the Dreamlands).<sup>10</sup> The protagonist, who represents some of the values Lovecraft more admired –Aryan look, taste for beauty and the arts– is displaced by a group of unknown foreign artists who start to be the center of attention in the court and the city.

#### 10.2.- Yearning for an illusory past

So the present is depicted as an unsatisfying period for the main character. The flâneur troubadour feels that life in the modern city will, sooner or later, corrupt even the most candid and innocent soul, such as that of his friend Romnod, who is also presented as

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to remark the importance of the flute as a mystical instrument, closely linked to Allah. Azathoth, the alien entity that seems to be the representation of universal chaos and which appears in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, is first mentioned in *The Dream-Quest of the Unknown Kadath* and depicted as a creature that “gnaws hungrily in an inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time and space amidst the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums and the thin monotonous whine of accursed flutes” (156-57).

<sup>10</sup> It is impossible to avoid the echo of Edward Said’s words in *Orientalism*: “On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things.” (49)

somebody who “yearn daily for the warm groves and the distant lands of beauty and song” (41). However Iranon is still uncorrupted, since he seems to keep his youth, no matter how long he stays in a particular place. The memories of Aira and Iranon's glorious royal past are powerful enough to keep him enchanted and in the mood for keeping the quest.

Lovecraft anchors the character's fate to his missed past, and it is interesting to consider the writer's conceptions about it. From his much-quoted “tripartite nature” remark, the third aspect that he mentioned was the “love for the ancient and the permanent”.<sup>11</sup> There is a very revealing letter from 1929 in which he reflects upon this issue. Lovecraft compares the three temporal sectors (past, present, future), and concludes that:

The past is *real* –it is *all there is*.<sup>12</sup> The present is only a trivial and momentary boundary-line –whilst the future, though wholly determinate, is too essentially unknown and landmarkless to possess any hold upon our sense of concrete aesthetic imagery. (*SL III* 31)

The past is then a secure place to hold, for it lacks the triviality of the present and the uncertainty of the future. Leiber points out one of the reasons why Lovecraft was so fond of the past. According to the critic, “the universe of modern science engendered a profounder horror in Lovecraft's writing” (9). The writer, then, suffered when science fractured the symbolic Real he was able to apprehend, since “man fears the universe revealed by materialistic science in that it is a purposeless, soulless place” (9). The

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<sup>11</sup> From a letter from 1920 to Reinhart Kleiner:

“I should describe mine own nature as tripartite, my interests consisting of three parallel and dissociated groups –(a) Love of the strange & the fantastic. (b) Love of the abstract truth & of scientific logick. (c) Love of the ancient & the permanent. Sundry combinations of these three strains will probably account for all my odd tastes & eccentricities.” (*Kleiner* 184)

<sup>12</sup> Since *Requiem for a Nun* was written in 1950, it is impossible that Lovecraft's read William Faulkner's novel. However it is interesting to notice how similar his assertion about the past is to Faulkner's celebrated lines: “The past is never dead. It's not even past.” However Lovecraft did read, at least, the short story “A Rose for Emily” (1930). He owned two different editions of the text, both of them included in collections of horror fiction (see items #394 and #395 in Joshi's *Lovecraft's Library. A Catalog* for a detailed description of the two volumes). This tale triggered a debate about the concept of the weird between Lovecraft and August Derleth (see *Essential Solitude* 403-5). Joshi also mentions this discussion in the introduction to *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (18-19).

adoption of cosmicism as his own metaphysical view of life and the universe provoked a certain degree of anxiety in Lovecraft, and he was able to cope with it thanks to “the ancient and the permanent”, since it existed and was fully symbolized. In words of Leiber:

In his personal life Lovecraft met the challenge of this hideous realization by taking refuge in traditionalism, in the cultivation of mankind’s time-honored manners and myths, not because they are true, but because man’s mind is habituated to them and therefore finds in them some comfort and support. Recognizing that the only meaning in the cosmos is that which man dreams into it, Lovecraft treasured beautiful human dreams, all age-worn things, and the untainted memories of childhood. (9-10)

This is exactly what Iranon does. The artist cannot cope with the decadence he finds in the cities he visits. Nobody seems to hold his art in high esteem, and humanity is driven by the nastiness of vice –in form of the alcohol that degenerates the dromedary sellers and the inhabitants of Oonai– and alienating jobs –personified by the citizens of Teloth– which has nothing to do with pleasure, arts and aesthetic values. In order to survive, he strongly holds the false memories of his childhood, when he was the prince of the wondrous Aira. This idealism, according to Schweitzer, is what keeps Iranon “artificially youthful” (81).

But a certain degree of stability is not the only thing Lovecraft looks for in the past; there are clear aesthetic principles behind his belief. When talking about literature, for instance, the writer is firm. In his essays on poetry, he is an ardent defender of the verses of the past, in contrast with his contemporary modernist movements. The beginning of “The Allowable Rhyme”, an article published in the *Conservative* in 1915, is categorical:

The poetical tendency of the present and of the preceding century has been divided in a manner singularly curious. One loud and conspicuous faction of bards, giving way to the corrupt influences of a decaying general culture, seems to have abandoned all the proprieties of versification and reason in its mad scramble after sensational novelty; whilst the other and quieter school, constituting a more logical evolution from the poesy of the Georgian period, demands an accuracy of rhyme and metre unknown even to the polished artists of the age of Pope. (13)

Lovecraft considers the new literary tendencies not just as failed, but decadent, and thinks that the authors to be praised in terms of “polished metre” (12) are Pope, Thomson, Swift, Gray, Sheridan, and Moore.<sup>13</sup> The attacks that Lovecraft levelled against the Modernist movement were frequent, and can be summarized in his review of Eliot's *The Waste Land*:<sup>14</sup>

A glance at the serious magazine discussion of Mr. T.S. Eliot's disjointed and incoherent “poem” called “The Waste Land”, in the November Dial, should be enough to convince the most unimpressionable of the true state of affairs. We here behold a practically meaningless collection of phrases, learned allusions, quotations, slang, and scraps in general; offered to the public (whether or not as a hoax) as something justified by our modern mind with its recent comprehension of its own chaotic triviality and disorganization. And we behold that public, or a considerable part of it, receiving this hilarious mélange as something vital and

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<sup>13</sup> The writer insisted in the same idea of decadence and degeneration of Modernist poetry in another essay, “Metrical Regularity”, published three months before “The Allowable Rhyme”:

“Of the various forms of decadence manifest in the poetical art of the present age, none strikes more harshly on our sensibilities than the alarming decline in that harmonious regularity of metre which adorned the poetry of our immediate ancestors.” (11)

<sup>14</sup> However, it would be a mistake to summarize Lovecraft's relationship with the movement as a simply rejection of it. Sean Elliot Martin, in his Ph.D. dissertation *H.P. Lovecraft and the Modernist Grotesque*, develops a new genre category, the Modernist Grotesque, which is a blending of features from both the Modernist and the Grotesque movements. According to him “Lovecraft works with the genre of the modernist grotesque in his use of the concepts and devices of alienation, subjectivity, and absurdity to better communicate his idea of ‘cosmic disinterestism’” (65). Gayford also explores the connections between Lovecraft and modernist authors and his appreciation for Yeats, and he remarks that the writer probably misunderstood Eliot, an author with whom he shared, among other things, a deep disgust with modern civilization.

## Chapter 10: On “The Quest of Iranon”

typical; as “a poem of profound significance”, to quote its sponsors. (“Rudis Indigestaque” 64)<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to notice how, in the two previous excerpts, Lovecraft connects the decadence of the literary movement with the social degeneration of the period. The writer gave some clues to what were the causes of the *communal decay* he observed in the civilization of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In one of the longest letters (more than 70 pages) he wrote, in 1929, he reflected on this matter:

I think the old culture with its idea of quality versus size is worth fighting for –perhaps the only thing on earth worth fighting for –but I don’t think it’s going to win. I have as much belief that a blighting barbarism of machinery & democracy is inevitably coming, as has any imaginationless sausage-trust financier of ethics-drunken parlour socialist.<sup>16</sup> I hate it like poison, but I see it ahead. (*SL III* 78)

Democracy and machinery are, then, the reasons why society is sinking. It is important, at this point, to consider that “The Quest of Iranon” is, on the one hand, set in a period (if we consider the temporal period located in prehistoric era) or environment (if we consider it set in the Dreamlands) in which technology is completely absent. On the other hand the protagonist of the tale is –or dreams of being– the inheritor prince of the most beautiful city of the time. Both things are strongly opposed to the concept of machinery and democracy. Is Lovecraft’s text somehow a utopian proposal? I would not go so far in my interpretation, but I think the two aspects need to be explored.

For an elitist mind such as Lovecraft’s, democracy was obviously something to be avoided. This is a matter that he discussed in his essay “Nietzscheism and Realism”;

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<sup>15</sup> Lovecraft himself wrote a parody of *The Waste Land*, entitled “Waste Paper”. Barton St. Armand and John H. Stanley, in their introduction to “Waste Paper”, highlight that the poem by Lovecraft was “in many aspects, more similar to the original, unimproved version of Eliot’s poem” (41). The two scholars were also pioneers pointing out the connections between Eliot and Lovecraft’s disdain for modern society, an idea that will be echoed by Gayford.

<sup>16</sup> Notice that universal suffrage was approved in the United States in 1920, just some months before Lovecraft wrote “The Quest of Iranon”.

according to him “Aristocracy and monarchy are the most efficient in developing the best qualities of mankind as expressed in achievements of taste and intellect” (69). The writer thought that democracy was indebted to aristocracy, and that it actually held retains the system it overthrows:

I believe in an aristocracy, because I deem it the only agency for the creation of those refinements which make life endurable for the human animal of high organization.

Since the only human motive is a craving for supremacy, we can expect nothing in the way of achievement unless achievement be rewarded by supremacy.<sup>17</sup>

We cannot expect justice –justice is a mocking phantom– and we know that aristocracy has many undesirable features. But we also know –sadly enough– that we can never abolish the evils without abolishing everything of value to civilized man.

In an aristocracy some persons have a great deal to live for. In a democracy most persons have a little to live for. [...]

Aristocracy alone is capable of creating thoughts and objects of value. Everyone, I fancy, will admit that such a state must precede democracy in order to build the original culture.

Fewer are willing to admit the cognate truth that democracies and ochlocracies merely subsist parasitically on the aristocracies they overthrow. (70)

Iranon is the personification of this aristocracy which is able to create valuable artistic products with his artistic gift.<sup>18</sup> According to Joshi (*Decline* 61), this is highly Nietzschean, and the scholar considers what the philosopher said in *Human, All Too Human*:

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<sup>17</sup> This “craving for supremacy” echoes Hobbes’ ideas of mankind longing for power and the nature of power itself, expressed in *Leviathan*: “I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death” (61). The philosopher also discusses the aristocratic heritage in the last section of Chapter X (58-60).

<sup>18</sup> This elitist idea of culture contrasts with the classical Matthew Arnold’s proposals in *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold puts forward that culture “seeks to do away with classes” since its ultimate goal is to “make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, -nourished and not bound by them” (70).

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A higher culture can come into being only where there are two different castes of society: that of the workers and that of the idle, of those capable of true leisure; or, expressed more vigorously: the caste compelled to work and the caste that works if it wants to. (162)

The city of Teloth presents the two castes described by Nietzsche. Iranon is representative of the idle one, he is the producer of culture (in form of music, stories and ballads), whereas the rest of the citizens belong to the working cast. Iranon, when impelled to get a job, straightly rejects it since it would neglect his gaining of pleasure. Leisure seems to have been long forgotten in Teloth, and Iranon decides this is not a place for him.

The reference to machinery as one of the causes of social decadence made in the previously mentioned letter is interesting. Lovecraft, as shown throughout my analysis, did not dismiss science. Quite the contrary, he was an ardent defender of rational truth, with all its consequences, even the destabilization of the symbolic Real. But it seems that he had some reservations over the technical side of science due to its social consequences. For him, technological advance would lead to the impoverishment of the cultural heritage and production of civilization, mainly due to an excess of urban concentration. According to Lovecraft, the lack of contact with rural and natural environments produces a process of dehumanization and loss of artistic values. This is what he states in June 1927, just a couple of months after coming back from his two-year-long stay in New York:<sup>19</sup>

That is why I see nothing but unmitigated artistic decadence in modern “civilization” with its polyglot urban concentration. New York would no more produce art than Carthage or Alexandria. Just as Alexandrian art was affected, superficial, and pedantic, so is that of

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<sup>19</sup> Apart from the mere attack against the dehumanization of the big metropolis, it is necessary to remember that Lovecraft also considered New York as a source of communal decay due to the amount of immigrants that lived in the city: “New York is no longer American. It does not belong to the Aryan civilization of the Western world at all.” (*Kleiner* 53).

New York today. The old N.Y. is dead, and this hybrid mass of parvenu and traditionless glitter has no relation whatever to the lives and dreams and aspirations of any one people or stream of culture.<sup>20</sup> [...] He who would create must return to some scene which is truly his, and which truly possesses roots reaching into the past. But more and more the drift is townward, and more and more the progress of mechanical invention removes life from the natural routine sanctified by the acts and thoughts of uncounted generations of our forbears. Familiar forces and symbols –the hills, the woods, and the seasons– become less and less intertwined with our daily lives as brick and stone horizons and snow-shovelled streets and artificial heating replace them, and the quaintly loveable little ways of small places die of inanition as easy transportation fuses all the surface of a great country into one standardized mould. Craftsmanship and local production are dead. [...] Quantity and distribution are the watchwords in an age where factories and syndicates reign supreme; and all sectional manners and modes of thought are obliterated in the universal exchange of workers and teachers, luxuries and utilities, books and magazines, which complete industrialism and unimpeded access produce. The result –although an inevitable consequence of the advance of knowledge, which must be lamented impersonally rather than condemned hysterically – is an almost unmitigated loss to artistic life, for beauty comes only when life is closely attuned to its scene. [...] Factory labour and the widespread dissemination of rudimentary knowledge produced an unstable emotional equilibrium wholly destructive of traditional forces of life.<sup>21</sup> (*SL II* 131-32)

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<sup>20</sup> This reflection about the loss of values in modern society, due to the excessively impersonal metropolis, is highly rooted in the tradition that criticizes the triumph of capitalism over human relationships. Ferdinand Tönnies' *Community and Civil Society* (1887) is a key study that, according to Jiménez Heffernan, articulates "the contrast between organic (living) and the mechanical (aggregational)" ("Togetherness and its Discontents" 16). In words of Tönnies himself:

"The communal life of the small town persists within the community of family and provincial life, doubtless too in agriculture, but devoting itself particularly to the *art* and handicrafts based on those natural needs and attitudes. Expansion from small town into great city, however, creates a sharp contrast – those basic activities coming to be viewed and used only as means and instruments for the city's purposes." (252-53)

<sup>21</sup> According to Frank Belknap Long, making reference to Lovecraft's stay in New York:

"What Lovecraft missed most was his removal from all aspects of the past that were intimately associated with the city of his birth –not only with his ancestral heritage, but with every cherished memory that went back to his earliest childhood. No longer could he take long, solitary walks through the streets which he felt could be found only on the Ancient Hill; no longer could he watch the play of sunlight and shadow on ancient steeples and sequestered churchyards where "dead leaves whisper of departed days, longing for sights and sounds that are no more," or pause occasionally to pat a stray cat before returning home." (17)

So Lovecraft draws a line connecting science, technology, urban areas, workload, devaluation of artistic expression and, finally, decay of culture. When science is applied, it produces enormous cities with modern transportation, factories and skyscrapers.<sup>22</sup> Those cities are a cage for workers, who are focused just in manufacturing and producing goods, spending hours commuting and trapped in a grey jungle of bricks.<sup>23</sup> The lack of contact with rural landscape and nature produces an increasing disinterest in the arts and beauty, and the final result is the fall of cultural production of civilization. The imaginary city of Teloth, again, seems to match those cities devoted to “quantity and distribution”. Lacking any kind of industrialization, it is however the metaphor of a civilization hindered by its excessive workload. The result proposed by the writer, as has been said, is that they do not appreciate Iranon’s artistic performances and the bard has to leave the town.

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This longing for the natural landscape is strongly linked with the idea of the depreciation of the aesthetic values that Lovecraft attributed to the big metropoli.

<sup>22</sup> By the time Lovecraft wrote this letter, the golden age of Manhattan skyscrapers was at its peak period. Just to mention some relevant buildings, The Chrysler was finished in 1929, the Trump Building construction ended in 1930, and the Empire State Building was inaugurated in 1931, four years after Lovecraft wrote these lines. For more information about the boom of the Manhattan skyscraper projects during the end of the 20s and the first years of the 30s, see Korom’s study on the American skyscraper. According to him:

“By the dawn of the Coolidge administration the skyscraper was accepted by the public as an element of the urban landscape just like the automobile, airplane, and electric toaster. During this decade one saw the select destruction of America’s first generation of skyscrapers to be replaced by yet another; a taller, more technologically advanced, and visually robust generation appeared –but not until the end of the twenties.” (323)

<sup>23</sup> In “Pickman’s Model” (1926), the protagonist has an apparently irrational dislike towards the underground (the events will reveal how there are creatures living in the tunnels). Lovecraft describes one of the canvas produced by the Pickman, the painter, which represents a hellish vision of the subway:

“There was a study called “Subway Accident”, in which a flock of the vile things were clambering up from some unknown catacomb through a crack in the floor of the Boylston Street subway and attacking a crowd of people on the platform.” (85)

For an analysis on the racial connotations and Gothic inspirations that Lovecraft might found in the subway, see Waugh’s “*At the Mountains of Madness: The Subway and the Shoggoth*”. David Haden, in the first half of his book *Walking with Cthulhu: H.P. Lovecraft as psychogeographer, New York City 1934-26*, fulfils a deep urban analysis of the New York Lovecraft visited and lived in the mid 20s.

The city of Oonai is completely different to Teloth. It has certain characteristics that make of it a place much more suitable for the arts. In spite of not being as beautiful as Aira, it is a town that welcomes the songs of Iranon:

The lights of Oonai were not like those of Aira; for they were harsh and glaring, while the lights of Aira shine as softly and magically as shone the moonlight on the floor by the window where Iranon's mother once rocked him to sleep with song. But Oonai was a city of lutes and dancing, so Iranon and Romnod went down the steep slope that they might find men to whom songs and dreams would bring pleasure. And when they were come into the town they found rose-wreathed revelers bound from house to house and leaning from windows and balconies, who listened to the songs of Iranon and tossed him flowers and applauded when he was done. Then for a moment did Iranon believe he had found those who thought and felt even as he, though the town was not an hundredth as fair as Aira. (43)

But just after that, what is probably the only slip of the imaginary Real into the narration appears. Iranon discovers that "the domes of Oonai were not golden in the sun, but grey and dismal" (43). This is a subtle anticipation of the events to come, since some time later the protagonist will leave the city because of the arrival of the desert dancers and the corruptive power of the town that has affected Romnod to death. Iranon seeks "still for his native land and for men who would understand and cherish his songs and dreams" (43), and he finally arrives to the shepherd hut. And after questioning him about Aira, the answer he gets will rush the end of the minstrel:

I have indeed heard the name of Aira, and the other names thou hast spoken, but they come to me from afar down the waste of long years. I heard them in my youth from the lips of a playmate, a beggar's boy, given to strange dreams, who would weave long tales about the moon and the flowers and the west wind. [...] Nor was there ever a marble city of Aira, nor those who could delight in strange songs, save in the dreams of mine old playmate Iranon who is gone. (44)

With this sudden revelation, Iranon discovers that the memories of Aria and his childhood are just a creation of his dreams, and that he has been looking for an imaginary place during his whole life. After this revelation, we know that “there walked into the lethal quicksands a very old man in a tattered purple” (44) and “that night something of youth and beauty died in the elder world” (44). The man, who according to Schweitzer is “kept artificially youthful by his idealism” (“Lovecraft and Dunsany” 81), loses all his youth and cheerfulness in a moment. Iranon, now an old man, finds in suicide the only possible way to escape from a reality he cannot cope with anymore. The enchantment that kept him young disappears, and the strength and hopes of the young Iranon are gone.

Olmedo Morell proposes a mythical interpretation of Iranon and his fate. According to him, “The Quest of Iranon” parallels the myth of the Garden of Eden, being that of Iranon “a fall from grace, a passing from a state of innocence to a state of experience, which leads the main characters to their misery” (169). According to him, the permanent state of youth and happiness experienced by the troubadour equals that of bliss possessed by Adam and Eve, and the dreams of Aira are what produce this state of happiness, so they correspond with Eden. The fall from the state of innocence that Adam and Eve suffer due to knowledge is the same fall Iranon will experience after his dreams are dismantled. Olmedo Morell finishes the comparison with the point that, at first, looks more distant, that of the original sin. Adam and Eve fall in disgrace because of sin, but Iranon does not deserve punishment since apparently he is not guilty.

Olmedo Morell states that:

The taking of the apple by Adam and Eve could be considered as a moment of *anagnorisis*.

It is not exactly the fact that they ate the apple that caused the fall, but the fact that, in doing so, God recognized them as 'traitors', as people ambitious enough to try to be like him. In

this act of taking the apple, God recognized Adam and Eve's nature as one of greed and deceitfulness or, at the very least, of disobedience. Thus, it was this act of *anagnorisis* from a higher authority (God) that made the individuals (Adam and Eve) fall. In this analogy, we can call God the Super Ego and Adam and Eve the ego, if we like.

In "The Quest of Iranon", these actors are all concentrated on one individual: Iranon. It is not the committing of a sin that causes his downfall, but also an act of *anagnorisis*: when the old man tells Iranon that he was but a beggar's boy who spouted all that nonsense about Aira, he recognizes the truth, that is, that his state of blissfulness was one based on lies. Then, his Eden crumbles before the higher authority: himself, his very own reason, the understanding of the fact that what the old man is telling him is true when he looks at himself in the waters of the lake. His reason (which could be identified as the Super Ego in as much as it is related to a external 'factual truth', i.e., the old man's testimony and the lake's reflection) makes his individual (ego) self falls, and so he finally sees himself as an old man in rugged clothes. His state of innocence has turned into one of experience and demise because of an act of recognition. (172)

This final interpretation, substituting sin for *anagnorisis* is, in my opinion, flawed. The rest of the parallelism proposed by the critic is solid, but when the original sin is eliminated from the myth, its core meaning is completely distorted. Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden because they tried the apple from the Tree of Knowledge, not because God (an almighty entity who would always know their acts) recognizes their real nature in that act. This reading raised by Olmedo Morell seems quite strained to match the global mythical interpretation of "The Quest of Iranon". Nonetheless, the idea of the fall of the state of bliss due to knowledge is perfectly valid, and is once again linked to Lovecraft's preconceptions about the risks of approaching the truth. This time science and technology have nothing to do in the revealing of the past, but the results are catastrophic as well. The scientific curiosity shown by the Miskatonic University expedition in *At the Mountains of Madness* or the genealogical and antiquarian interest that the narrator of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" had are here represented by the

innocent daydreams Iranon has. But when the past is explored, once again, things fall apart and the symbolic Real shakes.

The main contrast between “The Quest of Iranon” and other Lovecraftian tales which deal with the past is that the global interpretation in the former has a much more personal and “minimalist” scope. Whereas the results of the archeological explorations made in the South Pole and the visits to Innsmouth or Dunwich trigger a physical menace for humanity, what Iranon discovers is that there is no anchor in the past, that his utopia is lost and the idealism that kept him young is no more than a dream. Society is losing its artistic interest due to an excess of urban areas and vice, and the aristocratic past is lost forever among the hordes of vulgar common people.

Without having a clear presence of the Real triad in the tale, it is possible to produce a reading suitable for my theoretical framework. Iranon has constructed a symbolic Real which isolates him from the real Real he –and Lovecraft– is not able to symbolize or understand. This real Real is the degenerated civilization that he finds in the cities, the lack of interest for aesthetic and artistic issues everybody seems to have, and the corrupting results of vice and alcohol that turn men into shadows of what they used to be, as in the case of his friend Romnod.

As has been pointed out previously in this analysis, this latent corruption provoked by the city is subtly mentioned just once in the tale, when Romnod and Iranon arrive to Oonai, when the protagonist observes the “grey and dismal” (42) domes of the town, which have nothing to do with the golden city of Aira. This brief remark about the grayish tone of the city anticipates the hidden corruptive power that it will exert over the citizens. The grey domes are the imaginary Real for the real Real lying in the dulling properties of the town.

### 10.3.- Conclusions

In spite the fact that it has been considered as one of his minor texts, “The Quest of Iranon” has proved to be a powerful metaphor of Lovecraft's views of progress, the past and the importance of the arts in the cultural heritage of civilization. Compared with the rest of the stories analyzed so far, the action in this text is located in an imaginary setting and time, perhaps part of the Dreamlands or maybe, as Joshi pointed out, just in a prehistoric era.

The figure of Iranon personifies the melancholy of the past Lovecraft is unable to recover but loves so much. Iranon, like Lovecraft, is a rejected artist who does not fit in a world that is losing its artistic essence in favour of an excessive urbanization, spoiled by technological devices that convert the metropolis into a place devoted to manufacturing and work. This idea is much deeper than the analysis proposed by Sprague de Camp, who regarded “The Quest of Iranon” as a “self-pity” tale in which the writer is “arguing that persons of his exquisite artistic sensitivity should be allowed to spend their lives in idle reverie and be supported while doing so” (150). Lovecraft, as Iranon, believed that artistic production should not be linked with money. As Pearsall points out

He argued the principle that his writing should be a gentlemanly, amateur pursuit, indulged in primarily for his own pleasure, secondly perhaps for the entertainment of his circle of friends to whom he might show his work, thirdly, if at all, for filthy lucre. (16)

Probably the daydreamer was, for Lovecraft, the ideal member of the missed aristocracy that was overthrown by democracy, the political nightmare the writer had to tolerate. Lovecraft, who thought that a reduced selected group of people should be in charge of

the nation and of artistic production, voiced these ideas in the figure of Iranon the minstrel.

The fatal destiny of Iranon, with the revelation about the illusions he created about his past, can be seen as another example of Lovecraft’s pessimism. This time there are no alien invasions, but an already rooted sense of degeneration provoked by vice and lack of artistic inspiration and production. Iranon, who was unable to cope with that Real, symbolized his own reality thanks to a glorious past that has to be recovered. The discovery of the truth dismantles his symbolic Real, strongly anchored to the construction of a past that never existed. Iranon cannot cope with the realistic revelation, and the only honorable end he is able to find is in the depths of quicksand. With the exception of the sinful component, Iranon’s discovery has been compared with the loss of innocence of Adam and Eve, and the troubadour is expelled from his own Eden, from his imaginary principedom in the city of Aira.

Lovecraft’s own principality, his artistic talent and old-fashioned aristocratic putting on airs, also collapse in a 20<sup>th</sup> century in which universal suffrage, skyscrapers and factories rule over verses and royal heritages.



## **CHAPTER 11: ON “THE MOON-BOG”**

### 11.1.- The call of nature

“The Moon-Bog” has been defined by Joshi as “a very conventional supernatural revenge story”. In fact, the tale has a very Gothic tone, in the line of classic genre writers such as Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>1</sup> Apart from aptly showing the Gothic roots of Lovecraft’s fiction, it includes some of his constant fixations, especially those related with the curse of the past. “The Moon-Bog” also raises interesting questions about classic Greek mythology and its relation with the writer’s oeuvre, and the importance that Lovecraft gave to folktales and its connections with culture and tradition. Apart from that, nature plays an important role in the narration, and there is a strong contrast with the nature presented in “The Dunwich Horror”. As in the case of “The Quest of

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<sup>1</sup> There are, in fact, many classic elements from the gothic tradition that can be found in “The Moon-Bog”: an unreliable narrator, a lonely nobleman asking a friend to pay a visit (which reminds of the triggering events of Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”), the action set in Europe, the old, medieval and isolated castle, family heritage, a lonely bog that hides a secret, the ancient ruins in the rural, green landscape, the events taking place during the night... For more information on the typical gothic setting, see Botting (38) and Duncan (20-50).

Iranon”, there is not explicit scientific background in the tale. However some ideas related to progress are undoubtedly presented in the text. Finally, due to its classical Gothic style, the analysis of the Real triad becomes totally relevant. In spite of not including an alien presence that could be considered as part of the Mythos, the enchantment over the Moon Bog is strong enough to penetrate into the symbolic level and distort the narrator and all the inhabitants of the castle and village presented in the tale. There are no alien invasions, but haunted spirits inspired in Greek mythology that take care of the bog, and the effects, in terms of narration, produced in the tale, are the same as in the case of the characteristic amorphous Lovecraftian creature.

As regarding the narratological structure of the tale, and as has been mentioned above, the story has a highly traditional Gothic tone, and it is narrated by a first person narrator. There are two main characters. The first one is the narrator himself. The second is his friend Denys Barry, a lonely flâneur (category 3) that moves to Ireland (category 12) in order to restore a family castle. Barry asks his friend, the narrator, to visit him, and strange events start happening in the nearby marsh (category 16). Both Barry and his friend try to unravel the mystery (category 15), and as a result they make a terrible discovery about the spirits inhabiting the bog (22C). The post-climax, anticipated at the beginning of the story, includes the disappearance of Barry (category 26) and the tortured thoughts that the narrator will have to cope with for the rest of his life (category 30).

As in the case of “The Quest of Iranon”, this tale has been dismissed by some critics as a “mediocre story of supernatural horror” (Sprague de Camp, 151), or “unusually trite and commonplace” (Joshi, *A I Am Providence* 384).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Burleson extols

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<sup>2</sup> In 1931, Lovecraft himself considered the tale as “insufferable maundering”. (*SL III* 296)

“The Moon-Bog”, remarking Lovecraft’s efforts in “displaying some of his erudition by making artful use of some relatively little-known Irish legendry” (78). Burleson adds that

[...] although lacking the vast cosmic scope of the later and more significant tales, the work manages to portray a “local” horror sufficiently rooted in antiquity to make it ponderous and haunting. Lovecraft’s descriptive prose and mood-sustaining narration in the tale are quite worthy of him. (*Critical Study* 77)

The events surrounding the creation of the text are quite different from the vast majority of Lovecraft’s production, since it was written for an especial occasion: the celebration of 1921’s Saint Patrick’s Day by a group of amateur writers, a party to which Lovecraft was invited and asked to write a tale to be read aloud for the audience in a literary contest. He mentioned the event to Reinhart Kleiner in a letter:

Then I have written another hair-raiser, “The Moon-Bog”. This was concocted half to order for the Hub Club. They invited me to their meeting of March 10, which was supposed to be in honour of the not unknown Sanctus Patricius –the Scotsman who drave from Hibernia all the snakes save the Sinn Fein. For this meeting they wished me to read some contribution pertaining to Hibernia, & not having any ready-made, I perpetrated “The Moon-Bog”. I read it aloud, inserting all the shivers I could, & hope two or three of the auditors understood it in part. (*Kleiner* 202)

Five years after the party, “The Moon-Bog” was published, as usual, in *Weird Tales*, in its issue of June 1926.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Curiously enough, Joshi (*I Am Providence* 384-85) remarks that Lord Dunsany wrote in 1933 *The Curse of the Wise Woman*, a novel which shares almost the same conception of “The Moon-Bog”, but it is very improbable that Dunsany ever read “Lovecraft’s harmless little story”.

Drew Barry, an American with Irish origins, moves back to the European country in order to restore his father's castle and live there. When he decides to drag the nearby marsh, all the peasants that were working for him flee the castle and village, scared by superstitious tales about the hidden secrets of the bog. Barry hires northern men to do the job, and he asks his friend, the narrator, to pay him a visit in order to lighten his solitude among so many unknown people.

When the unnamed narrator arrives to Ireland, Barry tells him about the superstitious stories held by the villagers, who think there are spirits dwelling the marsh, ghostly remains from the time of the Greek invasions to the island. Some surrounding ruins are said to be cursed and there are legends about an underwater city located in the depths of the marsh. The two friends do not pay attention to the local folklore and Barry keeps on his plans of dragging the marsh.

The narrator starts experiencing strange events during the nights in the castle. He sees ghostly lights and hears the sound of flutes and drums in the marsh, and he observes what he thinks are the figures of the foreign northern workers, wandering near the marsh. The following night the events precipitate, and the narrator contemplates from his window how the workers, accompanied by the rhythm of the flutes and drums, follow some ghostly figures down the waters in the bog. They all die drowned, and scared, he runs away from the castle after hearing the inhuman screaming of his friend. From the distance, he witnesses how hundreds of frogs appear in the marshes, and the shocked narrator sees how the figure of his friend is raising up to the skies following the path of a moon beam.

The first thing that is made explicit soon in the tale is the aristocratic origins of Denys Barry. Those origins are the reason why he comes back to Ireland, in an attempt to

reconstruct his ancestral heritage, which is embodied in the immensity of the family castle:

It was from Kilderry that his father had come, and it was there that he wished to enjoy his wealth among ancestral scenes. Men of his blood had once ruled over Kilderry and built and dwelled in the castle, but those days were very remote, so that for generations the castle had been empty and decaying.<sup>4</sup> (42)

Once again, the use of the word “decay” is present, in order to make reference to the castle, but probably also to the aristocratic Barry family itself. It is said in the tale that Denys Barry “had grown rich” in America, but it is logical to think that he was unable to keep his noble perks in the United States. So after his arrival back to the place where his ancestors ruled in order to restore the castle, “the peasants blessed him for bringing back the old days with his gold from over the sea” (42). Barry is symbolically trying to start a process of restoration of his aristocratic past, as a welcomed new lord with a retinue of workers and peasants who bless him for reviving the old good times.

However it is also soon when the imaginary Real, prelude of Barry’s fail, appears in the tale. When the narrator arrives to Ireland he is said that the village of Kilderry is “accursed” (43). Following this piece of advice, the narrator faces this scene:

Barry’s motor had met me at the Ballylough station, for Kilderry is off the railway. The villagers had shunned the car and the driver from the north, but had whispered to me with pale faces when they saw I was going to Kilderry.<sup>5</sup> (43)

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<sup>4</sup> According to Pearsall, “Kilderry is occasionally encountered as an Irish surname, which is how HPL may have heard it.” (246)

<sup>5</sup> This scene, with the arrival of the narrator, the pickup car and the superstitious commentaries of the locals, is an abridged imitation of the first steps Jonathan Harker takes before visiting the castle of Dracula in Stoker’s novel. Just when he departs in the coach, the reaction of the people from the inn is that of blessing and making the sign of the cross over:

“When I got on the coach the driver had not taken his seat, and I saw him talking with the landlady. They were evidently talking of me, for every now and then they looked at me, and some of the people who were sitting on the bench outside the door came and listened, and then looked at me, most of them pityingly.” (14)

The breach produced by the imaginary Real, initiated with the superstitious commentaries of the villagers, is enhanced during the talk both Barry and the narrator have during the first evening. When Barry explains the reasons why the peasants are scared of the drain project, he tells the narrator that according to them “there were secrets which must not be uncovered; secrets that had lain hidden since the plague came to the children of Partholan” (43). Barry goes on in his explanation, saying that

In the *Book of Invaders* it is told that these sons of the Greeks were all buried at Tallaght, but old men in Kilderry said that one city was overlooked save by its patron moon-goddess; so that only the wooded hills buried it when the men of Nemed swept down from Scythia in their thirty ships.<sup>6</sup> (43)

This is the first reference to Irish-Greek mythology made in the text. According to Peter Berresford Ellis, Partholan (or Partholón) was “the leader of the third mythical invasion of Ireland”, and he came from Greece (300). As in the case of “The Dunwich Horror”, there is an ancient source of conflict in “The Moon-Bog”. But this time the origin is not to be found in the American natives, but in the mythological, fictitious Greek invaders of Ireland who were buried in an unknown magical city, protected by a moon-goddess. Some elements of the Greek mythology will play the role of the ghostly entity of the tale, as I will explain later.<sup>7</sup> It is important to remember that Lovecraft was extremely fond of Greece and its mythology since a very early age, as he confesses –referring to himself in third person– in the essay “Idealism and Materialism –A reflection”:

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<sup>6</sup> The *Book of Invaders* is a real book, comprising several narrative and lyrical texts, and it gives an account of the mythical history of Ireland. It is said that Partholan invaded Ireland in 1240 B.C., and several centuries after this invasion his people died due to a plague, and they were buried in Tallaght. Nemed, on the other hand, invaded Ireland in 910 B.C. and had a battle with the Fomorians where most of the two sides were annihilated. For more information, see *Lebor Gabála Éirenn. The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, parts 2 and 3, which narrate the events of the Partholonians and the Nemedians.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed description of the Greek influences in Lovecraft's narrative, see Wetzel's “Genesis of the Cthulhu Mythos”.

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Then, at an age not much above six, he stumbled on the legends of Greece—and became a sincere and enthusiastic classical pagan. Unlearned in science, and reading all the Graeco-Roman lore at hand, he was until the age of eight a rapt devotee of the old gods; building altars to Pan and Apollo, Athena and Artemis, and benignant Saturnus, who ruled the world in the Golden Age. And at times this belief was very real indeed—there are vivid memories of fields and groves at twilight when the now materialistic mind that dictates these lines *knew absolutely that the ancient gods were true*. Did he not see with his own eyes, beyond the possibility of a doubt, the graceful forms of dryads half mingled with the trunks of antique oaks, or spy with clearness and certainty the elusive little fauns and goat-footed old satyrs who leapt about so slyly from the shadow of one rock or thicket to that of another?  
(44)

The presence of Greece in the tale continues the first night. After observing some distant ruins in an islet in the bog, the narrator hears “faint sounds from the distance” that trigger strange visions in his dreams, the imaginary Real is made explicit again. Barry’s friend talks of dreams “more wonderful than any sound of wild pipes in the night” (44) where his mind

Had in slumber hovered around a stately city in a green valley, where marble streets and statues, villas and temples, carvings and inscriptions, all spoke in certain tones the glory that was Greece. (44)

The Gothic tone of the narration is now clearly invaded with Greece and its history. The old superstitious stories about the buried Greek invaders and the dreams of the narrator start to shape what moves “The Moon-Bog” away from the purest Gothic tradition.

The second night the sound of flutes is intensified, a “monotonous piping from afar; wild, weird airs that made me think of some dance of fauns on distant Maenalus” (45).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Mons Maenalus (Mount Mainalo) is a mountain located in Arcadia, and it was supposed to be a place frequently dwelt by the god Pan. Notice that Pan and the fauns are normally represented playing a flute, an instrument whose relevance has been discussed in the chapter devoted to “The Dunwich Horror”. According to Salonia, “It is possible that Lovecraft intended the drums-and-pipes imagery to portray a

The narrator looks through the window and recognizes the workers, dancing near the bog, but with the dawn he “became sure that there was no reality in what I thought I had seen” (46). Nonetheless he feels uneasy and “for some unknown reason I dreaded the thought of disturbing the ancient bog and its sunless secrets” (46). At this point the narrator is feeling a breach in the symbolic level due to the constant irruptions of the imaginary Real into his reality. He starts to be dubious about dragging the marsh: “that these secrets should be brought to light seemed injudicious, and I began to wish for an excuse to leave the castle and the village” (46).

The rationality of the narrator, proved at the beginning of the tale in the first talk with his friend, when the two of them laughed at the superstitions of the peasants, is shaken due to the interferences of the imaginary Real, which are starting to disturb his apparently solid symbolic level. At this point he shares the idea of keeping the truth underwater, without having any rational explanation for this change of mind, apart from the noises and dreams. He now embraces an epistemological point of view radically different from that of Lovecraft himself, who was in favor of knowledge even if it might reveal truths that would dismantle our reality.<sup>9</sup> This idea will be made explicit some years later by the writer in one of his most celebrated passages, the opening of “The Call of Cthulhu”, published in 1928:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piercing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful

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sort of musical migraine” (94). However Wetzel relates the sound of these instruments to the “music that surrounds Azathoth in the Mythos” (62), for instance in the description of the god-like alien in “The Dreams in the Witch House”.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the discussion about religion in the chapter devoted to “The Dunwich Horror” in this dissertation.

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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. (139)

It is during the third night when the strangest events take place. When the narrator refers to them, he presents them with a clear vertical gap in his words.<sup>10</sup> According to him, these events “transcend anything we dream of in Nature and the universe; yet in no normal fashion can I explain those disappearances” (46). When he looks through the window, and sees the islet, the vertical gap emerges again, since “the aspect of that ruin I cannot describe” (47): they now look “undecayed” and “splendid”. The sounds of flutes and drums appear again, and the vertical gap is made present again when the narrator sees “a procession of beings in such a manner as none ever saw before save in nightmares” (43). After the workers drown in the bog, he hears the shrieks of his friend, and they attain “a magnitude and quality which cannot be written of” (48).

The vertical gap and general sense of breach in the symbolic Real is amplified by several passages in which the narrator doubts about the events, wondering if he is awake or dreaming:

Whether the events of that night were of reality or illusion I shall never ascertain. (46)

My condition was now one of indescribable chaos. Not knowing whether I was mad or sane, sleeping or waking, I was saved only by a merciful numbness. (48)

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<sup>10</sup> According to Harman, the vertical gap of language is produced when the narrator is unable to describe the object and instead he uses words related to the unnamable. The “horizontal or “cubist” gap is produced when there is a “gratuitous amassing of numerous palpable surfaces” (31), that is, an excessive description of the object, which leads to the impossibility of representing it.

## 2.- Greek mythology in Ireland

The source of conflict in “The Moon-Bog”, lies in some kind of ancient Greek mythological elements. The key passage that exposes what is the real nature of the enchantment is the following:

I noted amidst my fear that half of these tireless, mechanical dancers were the labourers whom I had thought asleep, whilst the other half were strange airy beings in white, half indeterminate in nature, but suggesting pale wistful naiads from the haunted fountains of the bog. (45)

The naiads, also known as water-nymphs, ondines or undines, are creatures from the Greek mythological tradition.<sup>11</sup> Jenny March defines them as:

Female spirits of nature, either immortal or very long-lived, who dwelt in a particular place or natural phenomenon, usually in the countryside (though not always: there was, for instance, a fountain house sacred to the Nymphs in the Agora at Athens). They were visualised as beautiful young girls with an amorous disposition. There were several categories of nymphs, depending on where they dwelt. Oreads were mountain-nymphs (*oros*); Alseids were nymphs of groves (*alsos*); and Naiads were water-nymphs, living in springs, lakes or streams, and were often the daughters of the god of the river in which they lived. (537)

The naiads are then a subcategory of nymphs.<sup>12</sup> According to the description provided by March, the naiads present in the tale by Lovecraft were probably daughters of the

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<sup>11</sup> In his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft mentions the novel *Undine* (1811), by Friedrich Heinrich Karl, Baron de la Motte Fouqué, considering it as the “most artistic of all the Continental weird tales” (38).

<sup>12</sup> The importance of nymphs among the folklore tradition has been immense. They have been part of most of the classical mythologies worldwide. According to Silver, it was Paracelsus the first one who studied in depth the categorization of nymphs:

“The association of the elements with guardian or governing spirits was probably first made by the third-century Neoplatonists, but the first full account of them was in the work of Paracelsus, the fifteenth-century alchemist and mystic. He detailed the nature and power of the inhabitants of the four elements: the sylphs of air, the salamanders of fire, the undines or nymphs of water, and the gnomes of earth. His elementals occupied a position between humans and pure spirits.” (38)

"patron moon-goddess" (43) mentioned in the story, and their task is to defend the bog they are so strongly attached to.

The dancing ritual performed by the workers, perhaps under the enchantment of the nymphs and the sound of drums and flutes, is deeply rooted into the Greek tradition. Dodds studied the importance of frenzy dancing in the traditional folklore, and its connections with the classical mythology:

In the extraordinary dancing madness which periodically invaded Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, people danced until they dropped, and lay unconscious, trodden underfoot by their fellows. Also the thing is highly infectious. [...] The will to dance takes possession of people without the consent of the conscious mind. [...] This last fact suggests the way in which in Greece the ritual *oreibasia* at a fixed date may originally have developed out of spontaneous attacks of mass hysteria. By canalizing such hysteria in an organized rite once in two years, the Dionysiac cult kept it within bounds and gave it relatively harmless outlet.

There are, further, certain resemblances in points of detail between the orgiastic religion of the *Bacchae* and orgiastic religion elsewhere, which are worth noticing because they tend to establish that the "maenad" is a real, not a conventional figure, and one that has existed under different names at widely different times and places. The first concerns the flutes and tympana or kettledrums which accompany the maenad dance in the *Bacchae* and on Greek vases. To the Greeks these were the "orgiastic" instruments *par excellence*: they were used in all the great dancing cults, those of the Asiatic Cybele and the Cretan Rhea as well as that of Dionysus. They could cause madness, and in homoeopathic doses they could also cure it. (272-73)

This idea of musical frenzy, "without the consent of the conscious mind", has also important sexual connotations that have to be considered in the interpretation of the frog scene that I will mention below.

Lovecraft intermingles some other references to the nymphs throughout the tale. The apparition of the Mons Maenalus mentioned above, as well as the music of the pipes, are two elements strongly connected with the god Pan.<sup>13</sup> And Pan, as Ovid narrated in *Metamorphoses*, falls in love with Syrinx the nymph. According to March:

she wished to keep her virginity and so she fled from him until she reached the River Ladon. Here she could go no further. Desperately she prayed to the river-nymphs to transform her, and just as Pan thought he had at last caught hold of her, he found that instead of the nymph's body he was holding a bunch of marsh reeds. He sighed with disappointment, and the air blew through the reeds, producing a thin, haunting sound. Enchanted by so sweet a music, he cut the reeds into different lengths and joined them into the first set of panpipes, giving them the Greek name of syrinx after his lost love. Such panpipes are still played by shepherds. (715)

Finally, when the narrator escapes from the castle, he sees that the bog is crowded with “a horde of slimy enormous frogs which piped shrilly and incessantly” (49). This particular moment is quite obscure, since there are no other references to frogs or any other animal in the text and the appearance of the animals in the middle of the climax seems, at first, quite out of context. There is, however, a reference which connects the nymphs with frogs in the Greek mythology. Pothius' *Bibliotheca of Myriobiblion* includes a summary of Ptolemaenus Chennus' *New History*, a lost collection of six volumes. According to Pothius' records (codex 190), the fourth book of *New History*

recounts that Helen was the first to imagine drawing lots with the fingers and that she won at chance with Alexander; she was the daughter of Aphrodite. There was born of Helen and Achilles in the fortunate isles a winged child named Euphorion after the fertility of this

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<sup>13</sup> At this point, it is impossible not to mention Paul de Man's analysis of Wordsworth's poem “Composed by the Side of Grasmere Lake”, included in “Symbolic Landscape in Wordsworth and Yeats” (125-133). De Man deconstructs the poem, which includes meaningful references to Pan and the peaceful landscape by a lake, in order to grasp the tensions between tranquillity and excitement derived from Wordsworth's text. The two contrasting feelings are impersonated in the Roman deities of Venus and Mars, love and war.

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land; Zeus caught him and with a blow knocked him to earth in the isle of Melos, where he continued the pursuit and changed the nymphs there into frogs because they had given him burial.

Zeus, then, punished the naiads from Melos because they buried Euphorion, son of Achilles and Helen, after his death.

There is a most extended piece of mythology in which frogs have an important role, again as punishment, but not directly connected with the naiads. According to March, Leto, daughter of the titans Phoebe and Coeus, converted some peasants into amphibians:

Leto herself could sometimes be driven to vengeful anger: soon after her children's birth she was travelling with them in Lycia when, hot and weary, she tried to quench her thirst at a lake. Some peasants not only refused to let her drink, but threatened and insulted her, so she turned them into frogs. (461)

The only coherent interpretation that I can draw from Lovecraft's text is that the Irish nymphs living in the bog are also punished by the moon-goddess because they drown the workers instead of letting the goddess take revenge on them.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the end of Denys Barry is different from that of the northern workers, since at the end of the tale the narrator sees his figure following a moon beam up to the skies, instead of perishing in the marsh. The moon, in the Greek mythological tradition, is the symbol of Selene, which is probably the referent of the moon-goddess named in the text. According to March (695), Pan was one of her lovers, thus, this might round up the mythical connections in “The Moon-Bog”, with the references to the flutes and the Maenalus. However it is important to consider that the figure of Selene as the moon-goddess was

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Cannon puts forward that the frogs are not the nymphs but Barry's workers (*H.P. Lovecraft* 18). This interpretation seems also legit, but it is somehow blurred by the fact that the workers are supposed to be drowned, “vanished amidst a tiny vortex of unwholesome bubbles” (48).

later replaced by that of Artemis, who can be also strongly connected with Lovecraft's text, since

Artemis was believed to roam the mountains and forests with a band of attendant nymphs, all of them delighting in the hunt and vowed to a determined chastity. If this were violated, they would be sternly punished. (March 135)

This would lead to another strong moral reading of the presence of frogs in the tale. If the moon-goddess of the bog is identified with Artemis, and the naiads are her chaste fairy retinue, the procession of dancing workers towards the marsh might have a sexual interpretation. The subsequent punishment on the part of the moon-goddess against the nymphs, transforming them into the amphibians that are presented at the end of the narration, is then produced because the nymphs have broken their chastity vows. The dancing performed by the men is described as clumsy and lurching –that of the nymphs resembles “some ancient and solemn ceremonial dance” (37)–, but the general impression is that the men are completely under the control of the nymphs and the rhythm of flutes and drums:

[...] a throng of lurching labourers who followed dog-like with blind, brainless, floundering steps as if dragged by a clumsy but resistless daemon-will. As the naiads neared the bog, without altering their course, a new line of stumbling stragglers zigzagged drunkenly out of the castle from some door far below my window. [...] The flutes piped horribly, and again I heard the beating of the drums from the direction of the island ruin. Then silently and gracefully the naiads reached the water and melted one by one into the ancient bog; while the line of followers, never checking their speed, splashed awkwardly after them and vanished amidst a tiny vortex of unwholesome bubbles. (48)

So Lovecraft weaves a net of crossed references between the nymphs, Artemis, Pan and the use of flutes to present his Gothic fiction. Historically, the Gothic tradition has not been completely detached from classical mythology. In that sense, this cannot really be

considered as Lovecraft’s innovation. There are three capital examples illustrating this point. Mary Shelley’s most famous work, *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), is obviously inspired in the legend of Prometheus.<sup>15</sup> Two years later, her husband Percy Shelly wrote the dramatic poem *Prometheus Unbound*. The third reference that has to be considered is the bust of Pallas Athena present in Poe’s “The Raven” (1845), which decorates the narrator’s library.

However, the active use of the Greek mythological tradition is quite interesting, since the haunting presence in the tale is the figure of the undine or naiad, instead of the classical ghost or typically Irish banshee.<sup>16</sup> Under the scope of my theoretical framework, the presence of the imaginary Real detaches from the typical monster or alien. The symbolic level of the narrator and Barry is attacked by an imaginary Real which, again, is deeply rooted in the past; but this time its origins are found in the classical antiquity rather than in some kind of genealogical decay, or in a period located million of years prior to the appearance of humanity.

There are some good reasons for Lovecraft to mix the Gothic with the classical mythology, instead of using the powerful magical Irish folklore. In a 1930 letter in

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<sup>15</sup> According to March, Prometheus is:

“One of the Titans and the champion and benefactor of mankind, whose most important gift to mortals was that of fire. When gods and men were about to share a meal at Mecone (later Sicyon), it was given to Prometheus to serve them by dividing the meat of a great ox into two portions. He produced one portion consisting of the choice meat and entrails, but covered with the ox’s stomach so that it looked unappealing, and another of the bones, but covered with rich and appetizing fat. He told Zeus to choose which of the two portions would be the gods’ share, and Zeus, completely taken in, chose the fat-covered bones. (This set a precedent for the division of the meats in all later sacrifices, where men always took the best part for themselves and burned the bones for the gods.) Zeus was angry at being tricked and punished mankind by withholding from them the gift of fire. But Prometheus stole fire from heaven and carried it secretly down to earth in a fennel stalk.” (664)

<sup>16</sup> Monaghan asserts that the term “banshee” was initially used to define any woman coming from the Other World. The term evolved up to “a spirit who announced forthcoming death” and she appears: “Either as a hag or as a lovely woman. The banshee often has red hair (a common signifier of fairy blood), or wears white or green clothing, or sports bright red shoes. Sometimes she combs her hair with a golden comb as she wails in anticipatory grief, usually at noon.” (34)

which he discussed about the witchcraft tradition, the writer explored the racial origins it had. At a certain point he asserts that:

It is true that the Celts share most vigorously the myth-cycle of fairies, gnomes, and little people, which anthropologists and all over western Europe (in a distinctive form marking it off from the general Aryan personification system which produced fauns, satyrs, dryads, etc.) and attribute to vague memories of contact with the Mongoloids which was wholly prior to their invasion of Britain.<sup>17</sup> (*SL III* 162)

According to Guarde Paz, Lovecraft dismissed the Celtic tradition due to its likely Mongoloid origins, far from the Aryan mythological tradition (30). This might be an interesting ideological point of view in order to consider why Lovecraft preferred to use an obscure Greek connection in his Irish tale rather than assimilate the local folklore. The writer, in spite of knowing the strong Celtic folklore, is aware that the origins of the weird are to be found in the classic texts. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature* he explains it:

Just as all fiction first found extensive embodiment in poetry, so is it in poetry that we first encounter the permanent entry of the weird into standard literature. More of the ancient instances, curiously enough, are in prose; as the werewolf incident in Petronius, the gruesome passages in Apuleius, the brief but celebrated letter of Pliny the younger to Sura, and the odd compilation *On Wonderful Events* by the Emperor Hadrian's Greek freedman, Phlegon. It is Phlegon that we first find that hideous tale of the corpse-bride, "Philinnion and Machates", later related by Proclus and in modern times forming the inspiration of Goethe's "Bride of Corinth" and Washington Irving's "German Student". (25)

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<sup>17</sup> Prior to that letter, in 1927, he already focused his attention in this issue in his *Supernatural Horror in Literature*:

"Much of the power of Western horror-lore was undoubtedly due to the hidden but often suspected presence of a hideous cult of nocturnal worshippers whose strange customs –descended from pre-Aryan and pre-agricultural times when a squat race of Mongoloids roved over Europe with their flocks and herds –were rooted in the most revolting fertility-rites of immemorial antiquity." (24)

To complete the dismissal of the Irish tradition (and in fact of most of the cultural artifacts which are not straightly derived from the classical heritage) in favor of the Greek mythology, Lovecraft provides the following enlightening passage in one of his letters from 1931:

The civilizations of Egypt, Persia, Greece & Rome undoubtedly excelled ours –in fact, virtually everything of value in ours was borrowed or inherited from Greece & Rome, so that it is really a prolongation of the Graeco-Roman stream rather than a new & separate affair. Probably the next civilization will be a sort of continuation of this as this is of the Graeco-Roman.<sup>18</sup> (*SL III* 384)

It would be a strong mistake to think that Lovecraft rejected all kind of folklore and tradition. As can be seen from the previous quote, he supported any cultural artifact that was straightly connected with the Greco-Roman heritage. In fact, Timothy Evans supports the theory that Lovecraft tried to reinforce America’s tradition by borrowing ideas from others and incorporating them to his own texts. This characteristic, according to him, approaches the writer to postmodernity (127).<sup>19</sup> In words of Salonia:

Lovecraft’s overwhelming sense of the past led him to take great pains to invest his horrors with a shadowy omnipresence throughout history and in a variety of cultures, lending his fictional creations verisimilitude by subtly weaving them into known chronologies. He also

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<sup>18</sup> In the 1935 essay “A Living Heritage: Roman Architecture in Today’s America”, Lovecraft reinforces the idea of how everything worthy in modern Western society has its origins in the ancient Greek and Roman tradition, throughout the analysis of architectural influences of the classical arts in contemporary buildings: “Whether the radicals admit it or not, our genuine stream of art and civilization is still the ancient western one which took its general form in Greece and Rome” (124).

<sup>19</sup> Fritz Leiber Jr. considers that Lovecraft, after realizing that “the universe revealed by materialistic science is a purposeless, soulless place” (9), had to find a shelter from these discoveries: “In his personal life Lovecraft met the challenge of this hideous realization by taking refuge in traditionalism, in the cultimation of mankind’s time-honored manners and myths, not because they are true, but because man’s mind is habituated to them and therefore finds in them some comfort and support.” (9-10)

Salonia shares Leiber’s ideas about Lovecraft’s intellectual acceptance of universe’s indifference towards mankind and his emotional rejection of it:

“The past became the haven of security, of ordered things; the present, the inescapable crumbling, the breaking-down; the future, the inevitable downfall into complete collapse. Out of this conflict between bleak intellectual conviction and blazing emotional rejection was born his compelling literary works.” (100)

sought inspiration in actual legends, to give his fiction reflected believability by imitating the forms of real myths handed down from preliterate cultures. (95)

The consequences of the events that take place in the bog and castle have been described by Joshi as a quite basic moral: “the spirits of Nature avenging or warding off desecration by human beings” (*I Am Providence* 384). However it is interesting to explore a little bit further this aspect. The portrait made of Denys Barry, the man who tries to drain the Moon-Bog, is poor. It is known that “he had grown rich” in America (42), and that he does not care about the superstitious rumors about the marsh told by the peasants. He is depicted as the typical Lovecraftian rational mind, who “gave his resounding laugh” (46) when told about the narrator’s suspicions and uneasiness. The most enlightening observation about Barry is mentioned when the narrator explains the motivations his friend has for draining the bog, “for all his love of Ireland, America had not left him untouched, and he hated the beautiful wasted space where peat might be cut and land opened up” (43).

The wealthy Barry represents the decadent aristocracy of the United States. This plutocracy was well described by Lovecraft in his 1933 essay “A Layman Looks at the Government”. After drawing a timeline of the history of aristocracy in that text, the writer reaches the 1920s, when the tale is probably set.<sup>20</sup> From this particular fragment of history, Lovecraft remarks:

But the plutocrats were, by the second decade of the twentieth century, manifestly in decadence. Greed had become utterly paramount, and the sense of responsibility toward weak dependents which the aristocrats had possessed was largely atrophied save for sporadic cases of capricious and often well-advertised philanthropy. Callousness and oppression toward the masses became exaggerated to the point of murderous grotesqueness—egged on by a steadily increasing mechanization which made the resource-holders more

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<sup>20</sup> I will discuss later in this chapter on the temporal setting of “The Moon-Bog”.

## Chapter 11: On “The Moon-Bog”

and more independent of their slaves and victims. All the ability of the competent class became canalized in the one sterile channel of grabbing increased material resources for those already holding them, and inventing new material luxuries for the trivial and meaningless pleasure of the few resource-holders and their larger but still limited penumbra of essential higher employees. Meanwhile the natural growth of mechanization made more and more persons become permanently unemployable and dependent on grudging and capricious charity to save them from starvation, whilst the suffering from cyclic depressions became acuter and acuter. (107)

This attack against modern aristocracy might be surprising at first, considering Lovecraft’s own political ideas. However, it should be recalled that Lovecraft’s ideal aristocracy is far from the conception that was contemporary to him. In fact, he appreciated the classic concept of plutocracy, the one that “made possible the evolution or refinements which colour the lives of increasing numbers of people today” (104).

For Guade Paz, “Barry must travel to Ireland to confront his past” (25). As a result of the plans for draining the bog: “the killing of beauty leading to some nameless horror of past naiads in the bog transforms the transgressor into ‘a nauseous, unbelievable caricature’” (26). So both Guade Paz and Joshi share the idea that the tale’s moral connotations are related to the revenge of the wild against human profanation of the natural environment and beauty. In my opinion, “The Moon-Bog” has a deeper reading that transcends the mere ecologic interpretation, but which is still compatible with this reading of defending itself from mankind’s onslaught. There is a deeper social and political reading of the tale, which connects it with the previously analyzed “The Quest of Iranon”. When the narrator asserts that Barry has been touched by America, due to his hatred against the wasted space that might be used for labour, the criticism to America’s excessive focus on production is explicit. The protagonist of “The Quest of Iranon” could not understand the inhabitants of Teloth, since they devoted their whole

life and energies to work, and when he was asked to get a job instead of singing songs, Iranon decided to leave the city. Lovecraft's attacks against excessive urbanization were clear, as in the case of this 1931 letter:

Now it is perfectly possible that the norm of a mechanized future may be so impersonal & objective that mechanical stresses will be, for that future, a truer & more artistic form of expression than the humanly felt stresses of oral speech & its hand-written transcript. Very well & good. But the man who practices the methods of that future belongs to it -& not to the traditional past. As for city apartments –who ever said Grandpa was *blaming* you for living in one? I merely said that the accidents of fortune which have so reared you have unalterably changed your relationship to the soil & landscape from that relationship which was your grandparents'. It may be all in the normal direction, if mechanized urban life is the norm of the future. But how can you fancy yourself a traditionalist if you do not long constantly for the sweep of green fields & delicate spring odours & the sight of cottage roofs embowered among blossoming orchards? As we were environed before the age of seven, so are our tastes for the rest of our lives. The lack of access to the green fields & cycle of rural nature would simply drive me mad... an apartment out of reach of Nature would be simply the antechamber to a still more cramped padded cell. Thus I belong to the early-American setting in a way that urbanites cannot belong. (*SL III* 336)

For Lovecraft, the benefits of the rural life, or at least of a life apart from big metropolises such as New York, were evident.<sup>21</sup> As remarked in the chapter devoted to “The Quest of Iranon”, he considered that direct contact with Nature was essential in order to produce artistic artifacts, and that this was the task of the aristocratic class that should rule over a majority of workers.<sup>22</sup> So the triumph of the nymphs and the moon-

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<sup>21</sup> According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Providence's population in 1930 was 252,981 inhabitants, and New York City's was 6,930,446. Providence was the 37th most populated city in the United States, being a medium-to-small sized city, very different from the New York in which Lovecraft lived for two years.

<sup>22</sup> For the sake of convenience, I reproduce here some very enlightening passages by Lovecraft that were already quoted during the analysis of “The Quest of Iranon”:  
“I believe in an aristocracy, because I deem it the only agency for the creation of those refinements which make life endurable for the human animal of high organization.

goddess over the plans of Barry symbolizes not only Nature overcoming mankind, but something deeper: the defeat of industrialization against tradition and, ultimately, the defeat of machinery and work in favor of pastoral landscape.<sup>23</sup> There are no time references that place the action in a very specific period, but considering the fact that he owns a car that picks the narrator up in the station, it is clear that the text was intended to be set at a time contemporary to Lovecraft, in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So nature reigns not just over mankind, but over science and progress, and the attempts to domesticate it fail and bring terrible consequences for men.

In a second level of analysis, “The Moon-Bog” also shows Lovecraft’s preferences regarding the mythical tradition. As has been already explained, the writer neglected the rich Irish folklore and preferred to expand a brief Greek mythical reference in order to reproduce the haunting atmosphere of the tale. This cultural disdain, provoked by the Mongoloid origins of the Celtic tradition, also arises from the text. However this is more a meta-textual reading: since there are no elements of the Irish (or American, considering the origins of the main characters) folklore in the narration, there is no straight conflict between the two traditions in the text. Denys Barry and the narrator personify rationality rather than a particular modern Western folklore tradition.

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Since the only human motive is a craving for supremacy, we can expect nothing in the way of achievement unless achievement be rewarded by supremacy.

We cannot expect justice –justice is a mocking phantom– and we know that aristocracy has many undesirable features. But we also know –sadly enough– that we can never abolish the evils without abolishing everything of value to civilized man.

In an aristocracy some persons have a great deal to live for. In a democracy most persons have a little to live for. [...]

Aristocracy alone is capable of creating thoughts and objects of value. Everyone, I fancy, will admit that such a state must precede democracy in order to build the original culture. Fewer are willing to admit the cognate truth that democracies and ochlocracies merely subsist parasitically on the aristocracies they overthrow.” (“Nietzscheism and Realism” 70)

<sup>23</sup> There are no references in the text to the means Barry was going to use to perform the draining of the bog, but we must assume that, apart from human force, the use of machinery and technology was necessary to this task. In spite of the obvious differences, the historical pictures of the working progress of the Panama Canal show extensive use of machinery. For a collection of old Panama Canal photos, see < <http://www.canalmuseum.com/photos/index.htm>>.

Nonetheless these interpretations of the text have two conflicting features. If we consider "The Moon-Bog" in those terms, that would be, from an ideological point of view, one of the few Lovecraft's tales with a positive reading.<sup>24</sup> It is hard to find, among all the pessimistic Lovecraft's oeuvre, a piece of fiction in which the results are clearly positive from the ideological perspective of the writer. His cosmicism impregnates most of his work, and as a result the general tone of his fiction is that of defeat or malfunction of the arts ("The Quest of Iranon"), religious beliefs ("The Dunwich Horror"), analytic sciences ("The Dreams in the Witch House"), geological exploration (*At the Mountains of Madness*), biological inheritance ("The Shadow over Innsmouth"), etc. But the triumph of the naiads is a concession to Lovecraft's taste for the ancient Greek culture over his contemporary materialistic human beings. Five years before writing "The Moon-Bog", the writer was pessimistic about the future of the contact with the pastoral side of mankind, as he himself expressed in 1916:

Much has been said of "the sheer joy of living", an ebullient sensation enjoyed by those in close communion with Nature. This feeling undoubtedly exists, but it is in itself a sinister thing, since it is but an atavistic delight in prehistoric things which the intelligent are leaving behind. It is, indeed, a sort of warning against the continued progress of mankind; a finger beckoning us back to the simpler ages we have survived. I have often wondered if mankind would not be happier for a deliberate destruction of learning and civilization –an absolute and unqualified return to the happy pastoral barbarism of our legendary ancestors!

(*Kleiner* 38)

A second troublesome aspect has to be considered too: there is an anomalous balance in the relationships within the triad of the Real. The imaginary Real comes from the naiads, the moon-goddess and the superstition of the villagers, since they are the

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<sup>24</sup> "The Cats of Ulthar" (1920), in which the cats of the imaginary city of Ulthar take revenge on a peasant and his wife for mistreating them, also has a rather optimistic reading, considering Lovecraft's taste for felines.

elements that disrupt into the symbolic Real of the narrator and Barry. A superficial reading of the text would consider that the real Real underlying in the text is, once again, a past that haunts the present, represented by the fairy entities. However, as has been proved in my analysis, the discordant element for Lovecraft is not the Greek tradition but Denys Barry himself. He represents the decay of the aristocracy that Lovecraft is unable to accept, an aristocracy that has changed its taste for refinement and the arts by the greed of capitalism. So in “The Moon-Bog”, in contrast with all the fictional works that have been analyzed so far, the source of the imaginary Real does not coincide with the source that hides the real Real. The Deep Ones of Innsmouth were the causers of the decadent aspect of the city, and it was their intermingling with humans that caused the “Innsmouth look”. At the same time, the real Real arising from “The Shadow over Innsmouth” had to do with the fear of miscegenation and the arrival of immigrants that New England was experiencing during Lovecraft’s life. Therefore, the Deep Ones were the symbolization of the latent conflict. According to my analysis, the events in “The Moon-Bog”, on the contrary, raise Barry as the symbol of the real Real, whereas the nymphs are the benign elements of the tale, always from the perspective of Lovecraft’s ideology.

Nonetheless this change in the triad of the Real does not affect the global reading of the tale, and it is basically provoked by the unraveling of the plot and the ideological background of the author. There is still a clear division of the imaginary Real, the symbolic Real and the real Real, but with a twist in the narrative presence of two of the elements.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Something similar can be said about “The Outsider”, a tale in which the narrator and protagonist is a ghoul, and the source of apparent conflict is the ball of humans in which he abruptly bursts into.

### 11.3.- Conclusions

“The Moon-Bog” owns some features that make of it a typical Gothic tale for a casual reader. However the Greek component of the narration summons different layers related to profound ideological issues and give the story some characteristics that move it away from a the classic Gothic tradition.

The few readings that have been made of the text propose a quite superficial analysis that I have tried to refute in the present chapter, proving that the tale has several levels of analysis that go beyond the mere ecological reading. The triumph of the Greek myth over contemporary men is different from any other horror coming from the past in other Lovecraftian pieces of fiction, since this time the past invoked by the author is deeply esteemed and valued by him. So the tale is a landmark among all the oeuvre by Lovecraft from the point of view of the positioning and sympathy of the author towards the fairy and monstrous world.

The naiads not only reign over men, but also over the traditional Irish folklore, which is fully neglected in a tale that would had been perfect for its use. The Mongoloid origins of the Irish popular tradition forestall its value in the eyes of Lovecraft, since the most valuable cultural artifacts must be derived from the ancient Greek and Roman traditions.

The real Real in “The Moon-Bog” seems to be very different to that found in other tales by Lovecraft. There are no racial issues or sexual anxieties (apart from the possibility of the sexual intercourse between the naiads and the workers they drowned), and this time the unspeakable artifact is probably not present in the fairy or monstrous world but in the human character. Barry, with his attempts to destroy the natural landscape in order to create a vastness of land to be exploited, is the personification of Lovecraft's fears of the aristocratic decadence of his age. At the same time, the attack that Barry is leveling

at the natural landscape is an assault on the natural order. Draining the Moon-Bog, he is trying to reformulate the rules of nature. This is at the same level than the processes of miscegenation taking place in Insmouth or the aggressive nature to be found in Dunwich. The three of them are against the established reality, and are attempts to reorganize the symbolic Real.

Whereas in “The Quest of Iranon” the inhabitants of Teloth were the personification of the overworked who devote their whole life to work, neglecting their artistic facet, in “The Moon-Bog” the human counterpart of the monster is depicted as the negative force in action. The naiads and the moon-goddess are not the symbolization of foreign elements, detached from Lovecraft’s beloved Teuton’s origins; more on the contrary, they are the origins of modern civilization and culture. The conflicting element this time is Barry, who arrives to the pastoral landscape with American ideas of industrialization and capitalism. He is the personification of the excesses of the decayed aristocracy and the growing technological advances that Lovecraft attacks when referring to architecture:

They claim that the Athenians who conceived the Parthenon, the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, and the Olympian Zeus, the mediaeval Nordics who conceived the cathedrals of Chartres and Lincoln, and the Georgian cabinet-makers who conceived the magnificent furniture of two centuries ago, were precisely on a par with the depression-age theorists who laboriously reared the steel-and-glass horrors of the late Chicago “Century of Progress”, and who continue to plan and perpetrate nightmares in chromium, bakelite, glass, concrete, and other media –calling upon corkscrews, factory refuse, gas-tanks, oil derricks, chicken-coops, radio masts, and other “typical forms of our twentieth-century machine ‘civilization’” as models for what they ironically term chairs, tables, buildings, and the like. (“Living Heritage” 120-21)

The decay of the higher classes of his society was undoubtedly another source of conflict for the writer, and "The Moon-Bog" offers an underlying idea that exposes it and punishes Barry for his greed. In fact, at the end of the narration Barry transcends the symbolic Real, and the breach of language appears when the narrator sees that, while his friend is raising up to the moon, he has become "a nauseous, unbelievable caricature – a blasphemous effigy of him who had been Denys Barry" (49). The decadent aristocrat is now the "unbelievable" creature that breaks the symbolic Real. The order is reestablished again for Lovecraft.

## **CHAPTER 12: GENERAL OVERVIEW**

The previous chapters have been devoted to the exhaustive analysis of individual pieces of fiction among the narrative work of H.P. Lovecraft. The chosen texts are representative of his whole oeuvre, and they cover the most used narratological categories that I proposed in the classification of Lovecraft's tales.

In the in-depth analysis of his six tales, some of them have been considered as part of the most canonical texts of the writer (*At the Mountains of Madness*, "The Shadow over Innsmouth", "The Dreams in the Witch House" and "The Dunwich Horror"). The other two ("The Quest of Iranon" and "The Moon-Bog") have been regarded as minor works, but they have been proved to have enough ideological bearing on the issues unveiled in the analysis.

The comprehensive analysis of each one of the 65 texts that compose the complete corpus under the scope of the present study would not be functional at all, but the

present chapter tries to overview some aspects that are relevant for the ideological dimension I am exploring in my study. I am going to carry out a different outline in this chapter, since each section will be devoted to a particular issue, and I will globally review several tales that are connected with that particular subject.

### 12.1.- Communal decay

The racist background of H.P. Lovecraft has been largely described so far in this study. The fear of the immigrant, of anybody who was not Aryan, the constant fear of the invasion of the non-Teutons, is something that obsessed the writer, as can be seen in most of the tales studied in the previous chapters. For Lovecraft, the decline of his civilization and race was an obsession, and there are many examples in his oeuvre where a process of communal decay is reproduced, due to the action of foreigners. The clearest example is "The Street". Written in 1919 and published a year later, "The Street" is probably the most straight-forward attack against black people that Lovecraft ever wrote in his fiction. The tale is a short allegorical account of the history of The Street, embodiment of New England, and how it grew prosperous thanks to the "Men of strength and honour" (343) that "came from the Mother Land" (344). With the arrival of the "swarthy, sinister faces with furtive eyes and odd features, whose owners spoke unfamiliar words" (346), the process of decay begins. This decadence is described, as happened in "The Shadow over Innsmouth", through the "shaky houses" (347) and buildings of The Street, but also as a pure evil environment, since "there was in the eyes of all a weird, unhealthy glitter as of greed, ambition, vindictiveness, or misguided zeal" (346). At the end of the tale the immigrants plot against America, and a terrorist attack is finally dismantled.

It is interesting to notice that Lovecraft's racial ideas go beyond the mere pseudo-scientific eugenics hypotheses of the superiority of the Aryan race over the rest of the mankind. He is proposing that the inferiority of the black people is, above all, moral related. The depravity of the immigrants in "The Street" is the non-monstrous version of the evilness of the Deep Ones from Innsmouth. In a 1923 letter to Frank Belknap Long, he explained his views with regard to this issue:

There are many elephants more human than many Bantu niggers. I know that the tendency is to give a separate classification to the Neanderthal-Piltdown-Heidelberg type using the flashy word "Eoanthropus" –but in truth this creature was probably as much a man as a gorilla. Many anthropologists have detected both negroid and gorilla resemblances in these "dawn" skulls, and to my mind it's a safe bet that they were exceedingly low, hairy negroes existing perhaps 400.000 years ago and having perhaps the rudiments of a guttural language. Certainly, it is not extravagant to imagine the existence of a sort of sadistic cult amongst such beasts, which might later develop into a formal Satanism. It is all the more horrible to imagine such a thing, on account of the intimations of extraphysical malignancy in such a thought. (*Visible World* 122-23)

"The Street" lacks any kind of presence of the imaginary or real Real. Its nature is not that of a horror tale, rather a pseudo-historical narration in which there is no place for the mystery or the uncanny.

"The Festival", on the contrary, links the communal decay of the imaginary seaport of Kingsport to the ancient customs that have been kept alive by its people. The imaginary Real appears soon in the tale, when the references to the origins of the festival:

It was the Yuletide, that men call Christmas though they know in their hearts it is older than Bethlehem and Babylon, older than Memphis and mankind. It was the Yuletide, and I had come at last to the ancient sea town where my people had dwelt and kept festival in the elder time when festival was forbidden; where also they had commanded their sons to keep

festival once every century, that the memory of primal secrets might not be forgotten. Mine were an old people, and were old even when this land was settled three hundred years before. And they were strange, because they had come as dark furtive folk from opiate southern gardens of orchids, and spoken another tongue before they learnt the tongue of the blue-eyed fishers. And now they were scattered, and shared only the rituals of mysteries that none living could understand. I was the only one who came back that night to the old fishing town as legend bade, for only the poor and the lonely remember. (109)

The arrival of the anonymous narrator to the town (who has never been there), in order to participate in the festival as representative of his family, is preceded by imprecise fear, “perhaps because of the strangeness of my heritage, and the bleakness of the evening, and the queerness of the silence in that aged town of curious customs” (111). When he gets into his family house, he feels that “the past was vivid there” (111) due to its furniture and peculiar architecture. The past is made tangible, and it opens a breach in the symbolic level of the narration, increased by the apparition of ancient forbidden books in the house, such as the *Necronomicon*. The reason of the communal decay of Kingsport has to be found in their traditions:

I thought the room and the books and the people very morbid and disquieting, but because an old tradition of my fathers had summoned me to strange feastings, I resolved to expect queer things. (112)

When the anonymous narrator attends the ritual, he finds out that there are monstrous flying creatures living in the underground, and that the person who is guiding him in the ceremonial, hidden behind a wax mask, is probably one of his ancestors, who died centuries ago. He manages to escape and, in the safety of a hospital in Arkham, he reviews again the pages of the *Necronomicon*, where he discovers that the people from Kingsport performed some kind of daemonic pact which would provide them with blasphemous immortality.

Lovecraft wrote some sketches on the sources of inspiration for this tale, and he talks about “the survival of some clan of pre-Aryan sorcerers who preserved primitive rites like those of the witch-cult –I had just been reading Miss Murray’s *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*” (*SL IV 297*).<sup>1</sup> So again, as in the case of “The Dreams in the Witch House”, the cradle of corruption has to be found in witchcraft, being Murray’s book a landmark among the sources of inspiration for the tale.<sup>2</sup>

In “The Horror at Red Hook”, written in 1925 and published two years later, the book of Margaret Murray is explicitly mentioned, in a very different environment, but in the context of the same decadent and degenerated collective background. The depiction of Red Hook, a slum from Brooklyn, uses architecture (as happened in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”) to expose the decay of the place, which is full of immigrants:

Red Hook is a maze of hybrid squalor near the ancient waterfront opposite Governor’s Island, with dirty highways climbing the hill from the wharves to that higher ground where the decayed lengths of Clinton and Court Streets lead off toward the Borough Hall. [...] The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth, and sends out strange cries to answer the lapping of oily waves at its grimy piers and the monstrous organ litanies of the harbor whistles. Here long ago a brighter picture dwelt, with clear-eyed mariners on the lower streets and homes of taste and substance where the larger houses line the hill. 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 detail here and there –a worn flight of steps, a battered doorway, a wormy pair of decorative columns

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<sup>1</sup> According to Joshi

“This landmark work of anthropology by Margaret A. Murray, published in 1921, made the claim (now regarded by modern scholars as highly unlikely) that the witch-cult in both Europe and America had its origins in a pre-Aryan race that was driven underground but continued to lurk in the hidden corners of the earth.” (*I Am Providence* 463)

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter devoted to “The Dreams in the Witch House” for an expanded analysis on the racial and social influences of witchcraft in Lovecraft’s oeuvre.

or pilasters, or a fragment of once green space with bent and rusted iron railing. The houses are generally in solid blocks, and now and then a many-windowed cupola arises to tell of days when the households of captains and ship-owners watched the sea. (119)

The glorious past of Red Hook was linked, according to the writer, to the “clear-eyed mariners”, Aryan examples of a bright civilization that was able to develop a great neighborhood and buildings.<sup>3</sup> However, the arrival of the new population, composed by immigrants, is the source of the communal decay of the place, where “visible offences are as varied as the local dialects” (120). There is a more than evident process of Darwinist reversion in the given description, where the patterns of behavior are those of “primitive half-ape savagery”. The decay of the immigrants falls to pre-human stages. This degeneration has a social explanation, according to the text. The theory of Malone, the police who is studying the weird events that take place in Red Hook, is clear:

He was conscious, as one who united imagination with scientific knowledge, that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances. [...] They must be, he felt inwardly, the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the sharers of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than mankind. [...] He had not read in vain such treatises as Miss Murray's *Witch-Cult in Western Europe*; and knew that up to recent years there had certainly survived among peasants and furtive folk a frightful and clandestine system of assemblies and orgies descended from dark religions antedating the Aryan world, and appearing in popular legends as Black Masses and Witches' Sabbaths. That these hellish vestiges of old Turanian-Asiatic magic and fertility-cults were even now wholly dead he could not for a moment suppose, and he frequently wondered how much older and how much blacker than the very worst of the muttered tales some of them might really be. (120-1)

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<sup>3</sup> According to Joshi, the tale “is nothing but a shriek of rage and loathing at the “foreigners” who have taken New York away from the White people to whom it presumably belongs” (*I Am Providence* 589). Eckhardt shares a similar opinion, and claims that the story “is mostly a shriek of rage at New York's immigrants and modern, bustling character, and its horrors are textbook demons” (“Cosmic Yankee” 91).

The uncanny element of the tale, once again, is derived from the hordes of immigrants. The imaginary Real that breaks the symbolic Real comes, as in the case of “The Festival”, from pre-Aryan traditions that have been inherited by the non-Aryans and kept alive in form of rituals and hideous customs. It is interesting to notice that the mix of nationalities in the Red Hook slum described by Lovecraft is not restricted just to black people, but also to different European nationalities, such as Spanish and Italian. This refusal of other nationalities, some of them even clearly Aryans (there is a reference to Scandinavian settlements), has to do more with the idea of degeneration of the United States as a nation rather than the racial degradation of its people. The underlying Real, which is much more evident in the texts I am referring in the present chapter than in other pieces of fiction analyzed in previous sections, was symbolized by Lovecraft himself in one of his letters:

No settled & homogeneous nation ought (a) to admit enough of a decidedly alien race-stock to bring about an actual alteration in the dominant ethnic composition, or (b) tolerate the dilution of the culture-stream with emotional & intellectual elements alien to the original cultural impulse. Both of these perils lead to the most undesirable results –i.e., the metamorphosis of the population away from the original institutions, & the twisting of the institutions away from the original people [...] all these things being aspects of one underlying & disastrous condition –the destruction of cultural stability, & the creation of hopeless disparity between a social group & the institutions under which it lives.<sup>4</sup> (*SL IV* 249).

The differences between the immigrants and the well established Americans were for Lovecraft an unbridgeable gulf that should not and could not be overcome, since “there

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<sup>4</sup> The idea of the population separated from the institutions and vice versa is connected with the conceptual division between “Gemeinschaft” (community) and “Gesellschaft” (civil society) proposed by Ferdinand Tönnies. The destruction of the community, an entity that favors the close relations between individuals who fight for the common benefit, derives in civil society, in which individualism and personal profit are the two main gears that move the whole system.

is no such thing as the assimilation of a stock whose relation to our own history is so slight, whose basic emotions are so antithetical to ours" (*Visible World* 181).

"The Call of Cthulhu", published in 1928, is another key tale in which there is an example of communal degeneration. The text, throughout the research of a professor from Brown and the reports of the police inspector Legrasse, portrays a hidden cult to the alien entity Cthulhu.<sup>5</sup> The members of the cult, "all proved to be of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type", are reported to be "a sprinkling of negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands" (153). The racial connotations given to the cult are, again, conspicuous. But according to the text, "it became manifest that something far deeper and older than negro fetichism was involved" (153).

There are some references to African voodoo in the text, when trying to explain the origins of the cult. But the ritual performed by the cultists is, however, much more similar to a Black Sabbath:

On this now leaped and twisted a more indescribable horde of human abnormality than any but a Sime or an Angarola could paint. Void of clothing, this hybrid spawn were braying, bellowing, and writhing about a monstrous ring-shaped bonfire; in the centre of which, revealed by occasional rifts in the curtain of flame, stood a great granite monolith some eight feet in height; on top of which, incongruous with its diminutiveness, rested the noxious carven statuette. From a wide circle of ten scaffolds set up at regular intervals with the flame-girt monolith as a centre hung, head downward, the oddly marred bodies of the helpless squatters who had disappeared. It was inside this circle that the ring of worshippers jumped and roared, the general direction of the mass motion being from left to right in endless Bacchanal between the ring of bodies and the ring of fire. (152)

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<sup>5</sup> For Dennis Quinn, the cult of Cthulhu is inspired in the Roman cult of Bacchus, "this deranged cult that honors a god was dangerous to the stability, moral tenets, and very existence of the Roman world" (189). The cult of Bacchus is a menace for the social stability of the Romans, so does the cult of Cthulhu.

Later events involve an armed yacht, ruled by “a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes” (161), coming from the Pacific Islands. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Kanakas were “any of the South Pacific islanders employed in Queensland, Australia, on sugar plantations or cattle stations or as servants in towns”. The target of the racial attacks of Lovecraft is this time located in the Pacific, as it happened in some brief commentaries made in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, where it is said that the Marsh family established the first contacts with the Deep Ones in the Pacific.

The dislike of aboriginals has, according to Goho, an implicit fear of evolutionary reversion:

In Lovecraft’s fiction there is often a loathing of the aboriginal or primitive and a pathological aversion to and fear of regression to a primitive state, sometimes expressed through a fear of miscegenation and sometimes in a fear of the regression of isolated populations or in the fear of finding out one’s own origins. (58)

So according to Goho the underlying fear of the aboriginal is grounded on the fear of the past, more than in any kind of pseudo-scientific connotations. For Lovecraft, then, indigenous people were inferior but the real problem was that they could lead Teutons to degeneration. It is a fear more related with the possible consequences of intermingling than the fright of the aboriginal per se.

The cult of Cthulhu appears as an internationalized version of the witchcraft covens mentioned in the analysis of “The Dreams in the Witch House”. The main difference is that whereas the traditional New England coven, according to Lovecraft, was composed by the scum that arrived from London, the cultists in “The Call of Cthulhu” are depicted as belonging to mixed races or West Indians. The source of degeneration and decay was social in the covens, and it is racial in the cult.

## 12.2.- World War I

The Great War (1914-1918), that Lovecraft lived during the beginning of his career as a writer, has passed almost unnoticed so far in the present study. However this event had some relevance in the writer's work, in two of his early texts, and sometimes it can be seen as a trigger for communal decay as well.

In order to understand the impact that WWI produced in Lovecraft, it is necessary to provide an overview of his reactions during the conflict. The Great War was for Lovecraft an even that fuelled his racial passions and provoked several reactions in his non fictional writings. The outbreak of the War, according to Joshi, spoiled Lovecraft's rage since "his country was not about to enter it anytime soon to stand with his beloved England" (*I Am Providence* 209). According to the critic:

Lovecraft's immediate reaction to the war, however, was a curious one. He did not care what the actual causes of the war were, or who was to blame; his prime concern was in stopping what he saw as a suicidal racial civil war between the two sides of "Anglo-Saxondom". It is here that Lovecraft's racism comes fully to the forefront. (212)

A war between England and Germany was then a landmark for the decay of the Teutons.<sup>6</sup> As William F. Burns remarks, the writer "saw World War One as a

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<sup>6</sup> Lovecraft himself tried to enlist into the army, as he explains to Reinhart Kleiner in a 1917 letter: "Some time ago, impressed by my entire uselessness in the world, I resolved to attempt enlistment despite my almost invalid condition. I argued that if I chose a regiment soon to depart for France; my sheer nervous force, which is not inconsiderable, might sustain me till a bullet or piece of shrapnel could more conclusively & effectively dispose of me. Accordingly I presented myself at the recruiting station of the R.I. National Guard & applied for entry into whichever unit should first proceed to the front. On account of my lack of technical or special training, I was told that I could not enter the Field Artillery, which leaves first; but was given a blank of application for the Coast Artillery, which will go after a short of preliminary period of defence service at one of the forts of Narragansett Bay. The questions asked me were childishly inadequate, & so far as physical requirements are concerned, would have admitted a chronic invalid. The only diseases brought into discussion were specific ailments from which I had never suffered, & of some of which I had scarce ever heard. The medical examination related only to major organic troubles, of which I have none, & I soon found myself (as I thought) a duly enrolled private in the 9th Co. R.I.N.G.!" (*Kleiner* 108-9)

However, Lovecraft continues narrating that her mother interceded with the family doctor, who declared that the writer had a "nervous condition" that annulled his enlistment.

cataclysmic battle of cultures, threatening to weaken and eventually destroy” (15) them. The annihilation between members of the supposedly superior race was “The Crime of the Century” for Lovecraft, as he states in the essay with that title:

That the maintenance of civilisation rests today with that magnificent Teutonic stock which is represented alike by the two hotly contending rivals, England and Germany, as well as by Austria, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Holland, and Belgium, is as undeniably true as it is vigorously disputed. The Teuton is the summit of evolution. That we may consider intelligently his place in history we must cast aside the popular nomenclature which would confuse the names “Teuton” and “German”, and view him not nationally but racially, identifying his fundamental stock with the tall, pale, blueeyed, yellow-haired, long-headed “Xanthochroi” as described by Huxley, 1 amongst whom the class of languages we call “Teutonic” arose, and who today constitute the majority of the Teutonic-speaking population of our globe.

Though some ethnologists we have declared that the Teuton is the only true Aryan, and that the languages and institutions of the other nominally Aryan races were derived alone from his superior speech and customs; it is nevertheless not necessary for us to accept this daring theory in order to appreciate his vast superiority to the rest of mankind. (13)

The second claim made by Lovecraft as regarding WWI was that the conflict would also mean the rising of inferior races, such as Slav and Mongolian, due to the weakening of the Teutons:

Englishmen and Germans are blood brothers, descended from the same stern Woden-worshipping ancestors, blessed with the same rugged virtues, and fired with the same noble ambitions. In a world of diverse and hostile races the joint mission of these virile men is one of union and cooperation with their fellow-Teutons in defence of civilization against the onslaughts of all others. There is work to be done by the Teuton. As a unit he must in times to come crush successively the rising power of Slav and Mongolian, preserving for Europe and America the glorious culture that he has evolved.

Wherefore we have reason to weep less at the existence or causes of this stupendous fray, than at its unnatural and fratricidal character; at the self-decimation of the one mighty branch of humanity on which the future welfare of the world depends. (14)

“Dagon” written in 1917, “only a month or two after American forces actually entered the conflict” (Joshi, *I Am Providence* 251), is the record written by a sailor who is captured by a German vessel, but manages to escape and, adrift in a boat in the middle of the sea, sees a monstrous creature, Dagon, next to a gigantic monolith, in the middle of a sea of death fish and mud. According to Burns, whose reading of “Dagon” I am going to follow closely, “the consequences of the world war become the catalyst for the narrator’s journey into unknown” (19). His main thesis is that the tale is a metaphorical description of the Other (Dagon, the non-Teuton), which menaces and threatens the protagonist. The encounter with the Other is caused by the collision between the Germans and the Americans, and the narrator gets into the realm of the unknown due to the fact that he has been taken prisoner by the German vessel.

This reading made by Burns is perfectly compatible with the triad of the Real in my reading. The beginning of the tale promptly offers the imaginary Real to the reader, since the narrator, the American sailor himself, declares that he run out of morphine and that he will die soon: “I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more” (1).

The events surrounding the capture and escape of the narrator of “Dagon” are briefly explained, with no traces of the Real. But after he spends some nights lost in the sea, the waters disappear and an uncanny landscape surrounds him:

The change happened whilst I slept. Its details I shall never know; for my slumber, though troubled and dream-infested, was continuous. When at last I awaked, it was to discover myself half sucked into a slimy expanse of hellish black mire which extended about me in

## Chapter 12: General overview

monotonous undulations as far as I could see, and in which my boat lay grounded some distance away.

Though one might well imagine that my first sensation would be of wonder at so prodigious and unexpected a transformation of scenery, I was in reality more horrified than astonished [...]. The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things which I saw protruding from the nasty mud of the unending plain. (1-2)

There is a slight linguistic vertical gap when trying to explain the “other less describable things”, and the sense of menace thickens with this interference of the imaginary Real in the symbolic level of the narrator.<sup>7</sup> The sea is not a sea anymore, for it has become a smelly muddy surface.

After the mud is solid enough as to be walkable, the narrator starts exploring the area, until one night he finds an abyss and a monolith on the other hillside. This monolith, according to Burns, is a cultural artifact of the Other. He states that “the appearance of the Other is often precipitated by the discovery of a cultural artifact” (23).<sup>8</sup> The carved stone is described following the principles of the imaginary Real, opening a breach with a vertical linguistic gap:

I was conscious of a distinct impression that its contour and position were not altogether the work of Nature. A closer scrutiny filled me with sensations I cannot express; for despite its enormous magnitude, and its position in an abyss which had yawned at the bottom of the sea since the world was young, I perceived beyond a doubt that the strange object was a well-shaped monolith whose massive bulk had known the workmanship and perhaps the worship of living and thinking creatures. [...] on whose surface I could now trace both

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<sup>7</sup> According to Feu Guijarro and Ballesteros González:

“La atmósfera opresiva del relato tiene su origen en el “locus”, donde el mundo de la alteridad presenta un estancamiento superlativo, viscoso y repulsivo, no lejos del entorno descrito por el poeta romántico inglés Samuel Taylor Coleridge en su famosa “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798). [...] Así el paisaje infernal del *Paradise Lost* de Milton también halla eco en “Dagon”.” (600)

<sup>8</sup> Burns is right with his assertion, as can be proved in *At the Mountains of Madness*, when the explorers find the strange star-like stones before finding the monsters, or when the narrator of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” observes the tiara prior to the discovery of the Deep Ones.

inscriptions and crude sculptures. The writing was in a system of hieroglyphics unknown to me, and unlike anything I had ever seen in books.

It was the pictorial carving, however, that did most to hold me spellbound. [...] I think that these signs were supposed to depict men –at least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shown disporting like fishes in the waters of some marine grotto, or paying homage at some monolithic shrine which appeared to be under the waves as well. [...] They were damnably human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes, and other features less pleasant to recall.<sup>9</sup> (4-5)

Soon after the contemplation of the monolith, the monster itself goes on stage. The description of Dagon is quite disappointing in comparison with Lovecraft's standards. It is brief and almost nonexistent:

Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.<sup>10</sup> (5)

The creature is simply compared with Polyphemus, the Cyclops.<sup>11</sup> The linguistic gap is so enormous that there is not even an attempt to symbolize the creature. Thus, it does

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<sup>9</sup> "Dagon" is a clear anticipation of "The Shadow over Innsmouth". The description of the creatures carved in the monolith is very similar to the Deep Ones from Innsmouth. Apart from that, in the hidden cult that grew in the seaport was the Esoteric Order of Dagon. The origin of the Fish-God Dagon, as Lovecraft himself mentions in the tale, has to be found in the Philistine tradition.

<sup>10</sup> A general description of the creature can be imagined considering the descriptions of the Philistine deity in Cheyne and Black's *Encyclopaedia Biblica*:

"It was natural, therefore, to imagine that the god was represented in the form of a fish. From IS. 54 we learn, however, that the idol of Dagon at Ashdod had a head, and hands which projected from the body; by its fall these were broken off, leaving only the trunk of the image. The Hebrew text, by some corruption, reads, 'only Dagon was left on him,' which David Kimhi (*ob. circa* 1235 A.D.) ingeniously interprets, only the form of a fish was left, adding, 'It is said that Dagon, from his navel down, had the form of a fish (whence his name, Dagon), and from his navel up, the form of a man, as it is said, his two hands were cut off. [...] The prevailing opinion that Dagon was sea monster, upward man and downward fish, has no other foundation than these very doubtful etymological and mythological combinations.'" (984)

<sup>11</sup> However the association with Polyphemus does not seem to be random at all, since the Cyclops was son of Poseidon, the God of the Seas. For a detailed description of the mythological entity and his background, see March (647-50).

not provoke any vertical or horizontal gap in language. According to Burns, the narrator has been trying to establish a process of mythification, considering that all the weird signs and traces he has found belong to old civilizations. However, when Dagon appears, the strategy fails: “The encounter with the Other confirms all of the latent horror found in the artifact, and as myth has failed the narrator, only madness can save him” (29), says Burns.

This can be reformulated in terms of symbolization. All the hints that the sailor has found, which are moments in which the imaginary Real enters into the symbolic level, have been assimilated as part of tradition and myth. This has prevented a breach of reality, since the process of symbolization of the uncanny has been successful and all the threats have been neutralized. The apparition of Dagon, however, produces a fail in this process and the creature cannot be symbolized; indeed it cannot be even described, and the result is madness. The confrontation with an alien, strange force, which is completely different from the narrator, and probably more powerful, has been the outcome of the fight between Germans and Americans.

After this terrible vision, the narrator is found and taken back to his home city, San Francisco, where he is writing the record. The end of the narration, “God, *that hand!* The window! The window!” (6), is open to interpretation, but it seems that Dagon, or perhaps one of his worshippers (a Deep One, maybe), has come back to kill him. The reading of this event, no matter who is the owner of the hand, is clear for Burns: the Other is in San Francisco, in America:

The divisions of culture which Lovecraft found so horrid in World War One result in the destruction of the familiar and the conquest by the Other, a situation which could have been avoided if human cultures (specifically, England, Germany and the U.S., Teutonic brethren and defenders of the Aryan race) could unify against a common, alien threat. Interestingly,

the ascension of the Other as prophesied in "Dagon" brings about an overturning of not only cultural beliefs and values, but also of the very environment in which they find meaning and are expressed. In a sense, what human beings once thought of as familiar (the land and its cultures) will become alien, and what was alien (the sea and its cultures) will now become familiar. [...] The intrusion of the Other into the familiar setting of the narrator turns out to be much more horrid than experiencing the Other in its own environment. (33)

Dagon, the monster that is almost impossible to describe, has reached the core of the United States, and is ready to strike the narrator. Dagon is, perhaps, the oversized strength of the non-Teuton races that, profiting from the war between Germany, the United States and England, have been able to grow unnoticed until they have become a threat too huge to handle.

"The Temple", written in 1920, two years after the end of the Great War, also uses a German war ship as the main source of conflict. This time, however, the craft is a submarine, and it plays a much more active role in the narration, since it will be the setting for the whole plot. Joshi considers that "The Temple" fails in its satirical attempt to ridicule the German commander, protagonist of the text:

Like "Dagon", "The Temple" is aggressively contemporary in its World War I setting; this might have been considered a virtue were it not for the extraordinarily crude and clumsy directed against the German commander, who in his first-person account makes himself ridiculous by referring constantly to "our victorious German exploits", "our great German nation", "my own German will", and the like. Why Lovecraft, nearly two years after the war was over, felt the need to carry out this sort of vicious satire is inexplicable, especially since the commander actually proves to be quite admirable for his courage and undaunted facing of the unknown. (*I Am Providence* 362)

The narration is the written report of the commander, left in a bottle in the middle of the sea. After sinking an American ship, the German U-52 submarine of the protagonist gets a small and ancient ivory bust representing “a youth’s head crowned with laurel” (27). Little by little, the crew starts to go mad saying that the ivory head is cursed, and the soldiers either commit suicide or are killed by the commander and officer. At the same time, the boat starts to malfunction and sinks into the sea, completely unsteerable. At the end, when only the commander is still alive, the submarine rests in the middle of the mythological city of Atlantis, where the last survivor is irrationally attracted towards a nearby temple. That temple seems to be devoted to a god whose face is that of the carved piece of ivory that the crew brought on board. He finally decides to explore the temple using a deep-sea diving suit, knowing that he will die in the middle of the submerged city.

The connections between “The Temple” and “The Moon-Bog”, written a year later and examined in depth in the previous chapter, are evident. A very ancestral latent force, closely linked to water, and taken from the mythological tradition, curses and destroys a group of people. However, whereas the supernatural forces in “The Moon-Bog” come from the Greek tradition, “The Temple” is focused in the city of Atlantis. Lovecraft had the opinion that Atlantis was a fully mythological city, as he explains in a letter from 1936:

Probably both have an origin in pure mythology –the notion of a glorious western land of happiness (after death or otherwise) arising from the glories of the sunset– although I suspect they were coloured by prehistoric rumours of both America and such islands as Iceland, the Canaries, the Madeiras, and the Cape Verdes. It would have been almost odd of such navigators as the Phoenicians and Carthaginians had not heard of these regions or perhaps come across them. Aristotle and Diodorus assume that the Carthaginians were in free communication with the western continent. There is very little possibility that any

western land has sunk beneath the sea since the period of man's existence began. (*SL V*  
268)

The crime committed by the protagonists in "The Moon-Bog" is the attempt to drain the lagoon, imposing the American progress and disdain for the landscape, and they are punished for it. The crime of the German submarine is being the enemies of America during the war, taking part in a racial civil war that should not take place.

### 12.3.- Science and the dangers of technology

The legacy of the eugenic ideas is present throughout Lovecraft's work. The theses of Galton and his intellectual inheritors have been traced in the tales that I have analyzed in the previous chapters. At the same time, the purest ideas of Darwin's evolutionary thesis play an important role in the fictional oeuvre of Lovecraft as well, and concepts such as evolution, regression and the idea of interbreeding are landmarks in some of the tales I have gone through. The use of science as a revealing mechanism usually threatens the symbolic level of reality with a menace that comes from the imaginary Real, since it exposes the contradictions that have been hidden by the different layers of symbolization that compose reality. The discovery of the hybrid nature of the narrator of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" shakes the symbolic Real, since it means that he is not free of corruption and degeneration, and he will soon become a Deep One.

The applied side of sciences, that is, technology, is the second source of conflict to be reviewed in this section. When technological artifacts appear in Lovecraft's tales, they normally have a different role from that of pure science as knowledge. These artifacts produce an aggression against the symbolic level, since they change the conditions of the symbolic Real, allowing for the irruption of the real Real. When the scholars from

“The Dunwich Horror” spray the monster with the dust they create, the creature is made tangible and symbolic, and a new entity, impossible in the symbolic level up to that moment, is shown to the spectators. Something that was, in theory, unable to exist, is made real and alters the laws of nature of the symbolic level.

“From Beyond”, written in 1920, conveys the anxiety derived from the use of technology and the breach it opens in the symbolic Real. In the story, the scientist Crawford Tillinghast creates an artifact that allows people to access different planes of existence. The machine is referred to as “that accursed electrical machine” by the narrator, Tillinghast’s best friend, at the beginning of the narration. The opening of the text explains how the scientist, obsessed with his discoveries, is suffering uncanny changes:

Horrible beyond conception was the change which had taken place in my best friend, Crawford Tillinghast. I had not seen him since that day, two months and a half before, when he had told me toward what goal his physical and metaphysical researches were leading; when he had answered my awed and almost frightened remonstrances by driving me from his laboratory and his house in a burst of fanatical rage. [...] I had not thought that a brief period of ten weeks could so alter a stout man suddenly grown thin, and it is even worse when the baggy skin becomes yellowed or greyed, the eyes sunken, circled, and uncannily glowing, the forehead veined and corrugated, and the hands tremulous and twitching. [...] a will disorder of dress, a bushiness of dark hair white at the roots and an unchecked growth of pure white beard on a face once clean-shaven. (23)

The sense of menace in the story is firstly derived from Tillinghast’s seclusion in the laboratory, researching and working with the electrical machine. The imaginary Real arises when it is known that strange events are happening to Tillinghast, due to his research. He is not a man anymore, but a “shacking parody on man” (25). Science is

starting to threaten the symbolic level. Briefly after that, an important reflection is presented to the reader:

That Crawford Tillinghast should ever have studied science and philosophy was a mistake. These things should be left to the frigid and impersonal investigator, for they offer two equally tragic alternatives to the man of feeling and action; despair if he fails in his quest, and terrors unutterable and unimaginable if he succeed. (23)

This key passage summarizes Lovecraft's thoughts and view of scientific discoveries. Science is a necessary tool, but it also can destroy our symbolic Real with its discoveries.<sup>12</sup> The "unutterable and unimaginable" terrors to be discovered are the linguistic vertical gap that knowledge introduces in the symbolic level, proving that reality has fissures and is not a perfectly closed system. In words of Tyson:

All that can be achieved through our sciences is the destruction of our comforting illusions, one after another, until we have nothing to support us in a black void of despair through which we must fall for eternity. (170)

Those who achieve knowledge, says Tillinghast's friend, have to be "frigid and impersonal" since the discoveries will provide deep horrifying feelings owing to the nature of the truth itself, which will contradict the symbolic level surrounding us. Knowledge, according to Tyson, reaches a point "when no happiness [is] possible, and indeed when life itself [become] unendurable" (172).

The narrator visits his friend, and after noticing the mental and physical decay he has suffered, the scientist confesses that there are other planes of existence that cannot be apprehended through our five senses, and he has "found a way to break down the

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<sup>12</sup> In a 1917 letter to Reinhart Kleiner, Lovecraft puts forward the same ideas that he expresses in his fiction: "Certain scientific & philosophical developments have been marvelous, yet they have been conjoined to a brutality & narrowness of vision which threaten the development of civilization." (*Kleiner* 124)

barriers” (24).<sup>13</sup> These barriers are a suggestion, coming from the imaginary Real, that there is a real Real beyond our symbolic level. Tillinghast has reached a level of knowledge that allows him to challenge reality, and the text conveys this sense of menace. More importantly, he will use technology (the “accursed electrical machine”) to attack the symbolic Real in the climax of the story. In order to explore these other dimensions, the machine will “generate waves acting on unrecognized sense-organs that exist in us as atrophied or rudimentary vestiges” (25).

When the narrator contemplates the technological device, it is described again as a “detestable electrical machine, glowing with a sickly, sinister, violet luminosity”, a luminosity which “was not electrical in any sense that I could understand” (25). It is impossible to describe the object itself, or at least the way it works. The machine is strange, and so technically advanced that the narrator is unable to understand how it works. Therefore, the vertical gap of language during the process of symbolization of the artifact appears attached to it. The same happens with the colors it emits shortly after that: “meanwhile the luminosity increased, waned again, then assumed a pale, outré colour or blend of colours which I could neither place nor describe” (25). The machine is transformed into a source of what Oakes calls “destabilization”. At this point of the narration technology is the central point of the uncanny, the breach between the

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<sup>13</sup> Roger Elliot, in *Modern Science and Materialism* (1919), debates the perception of the universe mankind gets through the senses:

“Men have five or six different senses only, and these are all founded on the one original sense of touch. Of these five or six senses, the three of most importance for the accumulation of knowledge are those of sight, hearing, and touch. By these senses we are able to detect three separate qualities of the external Universe. Now, supposing that we happened to have a thousand senses instead of five, it is clear that our conception of the Universe would be extremely different from what it now is. We cannot assume that the Universe has only five qualities because we have only five senses. We must assume, on the contrary, that the number of its qualities may be infinite, and that the more senses we had, the more we should discover about it.” (2-3)

The discourse in which Tillinghast mentions the ideas about the senses, as Joshi points out (*Witch House* 405, note 3), mirrors Elliot’s text. For more information on Elliot’s influence in Lovecraft’s metaphysical thought, see Joshi (*I Am Providence* 316-23) and Joshi (*Decline* 7-16).

symbolic Real and the imaginary Real. It cannot be described, but it also looks like the artifact that will destroy reality as we know it.

When the two of them are submerged into a chaos of parallel universes, the scientist reveals to his friend that he wants to offer the narrator to some entities from another plane that will devour him. The narrator, frightened, shots his revolver and destroys the machine, and Tillinghast dies apparently due to apoplexy.

The discovery of another reality beyond reality drives the scientist mad, and the narrator only gets a glimpse of the abyss, which will provide him with tormented feelings for the rest of his life:

It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me. I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am weary. (29)

The technological device has changed the narrator's view of his reality, since he has discovered that there are other creatures dwelling in different planes. During the story, the symbolic Real has suffered two different aggressions. First, the imaginary Real derived from the decadence that Tillinghast suffered due to his immersion in advanced sciences, slid the idea that there was something horrible beyond the narration. Secondly, the narrator's symbolic Real has been attacked and reformulated by the exploration of the new spaces and beings that he discovers through the use of technology, and the result is that he will suffer from anxiety for the rest of his days.

“Herbert West – Reanimator ”, written and serially published between 1921 and 1922, can be seen as Lovecraft's own reinterpretation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*.<sup>14</sup> However

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<sup>14</sup> Lovecraft, in a statement that straightly contradicts his vision of the artistic creator as a figure who cannot be subordinated to money, confessed the following about “Herbert West –Reanimator” in a letter:

the tale acquired, after the publishing of the first chapters, a kind of humorous tone. In words of Joshi:

No one would deem “Herbert West –Reanimator” a masterpiece of subtlety, but it is rather engaging in its lurid way. It is also my belief that the story, while not *starting out* as a parody, *became* one as time went on. In other words, Lovecraft initially attempted to write a more or less serious, if quite “grewsome”, supernatural tale but, as he perceived the increasing absurdity of the enterprise, abandoned the attempt and turned the story into what it in fact was all along, a self-parody. (*I Am Providence* 413)

The narrator of the story, West’s best friend, tells the story of Herbert West, a physician who has created a serum that brings corpses back to life. The text describes the different episodes and experiments that West and his friend develop in order to improve the formula, and the setbacks they get, since the dead people that come back to life seem to be idiotic and “zombified”.

“Herbert West –Reanimator” links the scientific background of Doctor West with the imaginary Real, proposing that everything related to him is weird and uncanny. In the first lines, the narrator confesses that his friend is dead, and just after that he describes his first steps at the medical school:

[...] where West had already made himself notorious through his wild theories on the nature of death and the possibility of overcoming it artificially. His views, which were widely ridiculed by the faculty and his fellow-students, hinged on the essentially mechanistic nature of life; and concerned means for operating the organic machinery of mankind by calculated chemical action after the failure of natural processes. (50)

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Now this is manifestly inartistic. To write to order, to drag one figure through a series of artificial episodes, involves the violation of all that spontaneity and singleness of impression which should characterize short story work. It reduces the unhappy author from art to the commonplace level of mechanical and unimaginative hack-work. Nevertheless, when one needs the money one is not scrupulous –so I have accepted the job! (*SL I* 158)

In the first contact with the mad doctor, the imaginary Real emanating from his figure produces a sense of menace derived from the fact that he is working with hypotheses about resuscitating corpses. West, at the same time, is described as “a small, slender, spectacled youth with delicate features, yellow hair, pale blue eyes, and a soft voice” (51), which fits with the Teuton profile.

Soon they become body snatchers, and the first corpse they get provides the conditions for science to be captured in the nets of technology:

We had at last what West had always longed for –a real dead man of the ideal kind, ready for the solution as prepared according to the most careful calculations and theories for human use. (53)

The perspective of reaching a truth that should not be discovered makes the narrator uneasy, and he “felt an awe at the secrets that might be told by one returning from the dead” (54). The secrets beyond death are the mysteries to be revealed, the final goal of the scientist and his collaborator, but the prospect of revealing that truth provokes fear in the narrator. The serum is the device that allows the possibility of accessing a knowledge that would completely destroy the symbolic order. However he confesses to be a strong materialist, and has doubts about the possibility of any especial even after passing away:

I wondered what sights this placid youth might have seen in inaccessible spheres, and what he could relate if fully restored to life. But my wonder was not overwhelming, since for the most part I shared the materialism of my friend. (54)

As in many Lovecraft stories, the protagonist tries to overcome the sense of the weird provoked by the imaginary Real holding strongly to his rational perspective of life. The symbolization of every discordant element in the environment, rejecting it from a

scientific point of view, stabilizes again the symbolic level. But after providing the corpse with the serum, it triggers the first reaction in the dead body:

[...] from the pitch-black we had left there burst the most appalling and daemoniac succession of cries that either of us had ever heard. Not more unutterable could have been the chaos of hellish sound if the pit itself had opened to release the agony of the damned, for in one inconceivable cacophony was centred all the supernal terror and unnatural despair of animate nature. Human it could not have been –it is not in man to make such sounds–. (54)

The screams of the revived body are described as non human, opening a vertical gap of language due to the impossibility to symbolize them. The result of the experiment is never seen by the doctors, since they flee and, in the rush, they break a petrol lamp and the fire destroys the house and (probably) the corpse. The contact with the results of the experiment is delayed, and the onslaught of science on reality is not complete yet.

But the aggression coming from the real Real arrives when in another experiment with the serum, the living dead violently escapes and kills a watchman. The man was “clawed to death in a manner not only too hideous for description, but raising a doubt as to the human agency of the deed” (59). The action of the zombie is, once again, beyond description. The serum fuels the aggression against the symbolic level, and the monster physically attacks a member from the community. In the following night, the creature kills more people, and some witnesses describe it as a “white and like a malformed ape or anthropomorphic fiend” (59).

The association of the monster with an ape puts forward again the Darwinian concept of reversion. The zombie, that was a human being before, has moved steps back in the chain of evolution and is now considered an ape.

The next important body that they use is that of a clandestine black boxer.<sup>15</sup> The description of the corpse agglutinates Lovecraft's racial repugnance. It is important to remark that the passage is presented before the corpse is reanimated:

He was a loathsome, gorilla-like thing, with abnormally long arms which I could not help calling fore legs, and a face that conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eerie moon. (63)

Since the serum seems to fail with the boxer, the two doctors decide to bury him. But the night after the disappearance of a child, somebody knocks on West's door, and when they open it, what they find is the zombified black man, holding the child's arm in his mouth:

Looming hideously against the spectral moon was a gigantic misshapen thing not to be imagined save in nightmares –a glassy-eyed, ink-black apparition nearly on all fours, covered with bits of mould, leaves, and vines, foul with caked blood, and having between its glistening teeth a snow-white, terrible, cylindrical object terminating in a tiny hand. (65)

After this vision, West immediately shoots the zombie. In description, the black zombie undergoes the opening of a sort of linguistic gap, since it is a "thing not to be imagined save in nightmares". The creature, which is bringing them a trophy in its mouth, has been degenerated again. It is no more a "gorilla-like thing", but a dog-like entity which asks for the approval of the Aryan doctor by bringing him a terrible present. The main problem that the scientists find is that they "could not get bodies fresh enough to shew any trace of reason when reanimated" (67). The zombies, who have been in contact with the Real after death, come back turned into idiots without reason or humanity.

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<sup>15</sup>Gavin Callaghan puts forward an analysis on the relation between Lovecraft and boxing, and how the writer probably rejected this sport due to its sexual connotations, as well as to the fact that it allowed black people to outstand among whites in the discipline. For more information, see Callaghan's "Blacks, Boxers, and Lovecraft".

As the story advances, the figure of West becomes more and more a source of strangeness and fear for the narrator, due to his research and experiments, portraying a classical mad doctor. For example, at a certain point the narrator asserts that “West was more avid than I, so that it almost seemed to me that he looked half-covetously at any very healthy living physique” (67). The physician, because of his experiments and lust for knowledge is depicted as a clear source of the imaginary Real, an evident menace for the symbolic level of the narrator. In the process of refinement of his treatments and experiments, West creates a system too complex to be understood by the narrator, who is “impressed by the vast intricacy of the new experiment; an intricacy so vast that he could trust no hand less delicate than his own” (68). The narrator is unable to apprehend the science West is dealing with, a science which breaks the symbolic Real with its revelations. West’s friend is so obsessed with the afterlife, that when they inject the serum to another corpse, and they see that it is coming back to life, he acts as follows:

In a moment of fantastic whim I whispered questions to the reddening ears; questions of other worlds of which the memory might still be present. Subsequent terror drove them from my mind, but I think the last one, which I repeated, was: “Where have you been?” I do not yet know whether I was answered or not, for no sound came from the well-shaped mouth; but I do know that at that moment I firmly thought the thin lips moved silently, forming syllables I would have vocalized as “only now” if that phrase had possessed any sense or relevance. (70)

The anxiety to discover the secrets beyond reality, what lies after death, motivates the two protagonists in their search for answers. However the only answer they get from the zombie is the last memories he got before dying, therefore no concluding response to his question is given by the creature.

West's methods turn more and more macabre, and the narrator has to witness "sights that no human tongue could repeat" (72). There is a point in which West becomes the primal source of horror, and his friend "came to find Herbert West himself more horrible than anything he did". The search for knowledge is cursing the scientist, and at the end:

His interest became a hellish and perverse addiction to the repellently and fiendishly abnormal; he gloated calmly over artificial monstrosities which would make most healthy men drop dead from fright and disgust; he became, behind his pallid intellectuality, a fastidious Baudelaire of physical experiment –a languid Elagabalus of the tombs. (72)

The acquisition of knowledge has turned West into a monster himself. The next step he takes in his research is to animate isolated body parts, and he enters the Great War as a physician to obtain samples for his experiments. In Flanders he reanimates a beheaded corpse, and the result is that the head also comes back to life.

Back in the United States, the end of West arrives when the abominations he created come back to look for him and rip him up. The final scene is a gory festival, very much in the line of modern zombie screen performances and textual representations, with the creatures destroying a wall in the basement of West house, which connects with a nearby graveyard:

I saw outlined against some phosphorescence of the nether world a horde of silent toiling things which only insanity –or worse– could create. Their outlines were human, semi-human, fractionally human, and not human at all –the horde was grotesquely heterogeneous. They were removing the stones quietly, one by one, from the centuried wall. And then, as the breach became large enough, they came out into the laboratory in single file; led by a stalking thing with a beautiful head made of wax. A sort of mad-eyed monstrosity behind the leader seized on Herbert West. West did not resist or utter a sound. Then they all sprang at him and tore him to pieces before my eyes, bearing the fragments

away into that subterranean vault of fabulous abominations. West's head was carried off by the wax-headed leader, who wore a Canadian officer's uniform. (80)

The scene is so extremely different from the normal climaxes proposed by Lovecraft, that it shocks the reader with its rawness and bloody images. The results of West's experiments, the creatures that his applied knowledge has created, come back from the past and from different parts of the world in order to destroy him and capture his remains.

The ideological reading of "Herbert West – Reanimator" is not novel. The consequences of West's disproportionate longing for knowledge driving him to damnation, the idea of cursed knowledge, long established in the literary tradition, is well grounded in Lovecraft's narrative work. Most of the stories analyzed so far include a certain degree of forbidden knowledge that, when accessed, spells terrible consequences for the explorer or researcher.

However there is an interesting aspect that deserves analysis, which is the representation of the Real in this particular tale. The imaginary Real of the tale emanates from the figure of West himself, and it is intensified as the plot unravels. The more extravagant his research and experiments are, the thicker becomes the menace against the symbolic level that the doctor represents. The figure of the physician himself, a personification of knowledge, becomes more and more horrid for the narrator after each experiment, and the results of his applied knowledge –summarized in the serum as the technological object– open a breach in reality. The existence of zombies restructures the symbolic Real, and the possibility of bypassing the act of perishing changes the grounds of reality. Tyson reads the increasing madness as follows:

[...] the danger inherent in reviving and restoring the dead to life is more visceral. It is not the animators who go mad, but the reanimated corpses that run amuck and murder the

living. What they have glimpsed beyond the veil of death is too horrible to bear. The sheer unveiled reality of it unhinges their reason. Herbert West himself is at least half-mad with the passion of scientific discovery, and cares nothing for the carnage his research brings about.<sup>16</sup> (186)

West, then, begins the timeline of the tale as part of the symbolic Real, just as a student of medicine. Soon he will become the source of the imaginary Real, with his studies that threaten the realm of the symbolic, and the experiments that attack it. The increasing sense of menace derived from his figure will reach a peak at the end, when the monsters devour him and sequester his remains with them. At this point, the real Real, the certainty that knowledge will condemn mankind, absorbs him. The aggression that West himself provoked against reality backfires and attacks him, literally removing him from the symbolic level when the zombies take him to the underground passage connected with the cemetery. So West can be seen as an amplified version of Tillinghast, the scientist in "From Beyond". The latter emanates a certain degree of menace from the very beginning of the tale due to his madness, produced by the knowledge he has reached. But in the case of West, the reader can observe the evolution of the imaginary Real that the doctor brings about, until the climax when he disappears forever.

The case of the two narrators, both in "From Beyond" and "Herbert West – Reanimator", is very similar. The two of them have been exposed to the forbidden knowledge, but the ultimate consequences were suffered by the friends, West and Tillinghast, who die. The sequels of their adventure are the tortured thoughts that they will suffer for the rest of his life, the residual deposits that the experience with the real Real imprints on them. As West's friend states: "They imply that I am a madman or a

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<sup>16</sup> Tyson errs when he states that the zombies have glimpsed beyond the veil of death and have apprehended horrible knowledge, since it seems clear that the zombie to whom the narrator asks about the afterlife only remembers the events that took place just before he died. Death, then, is no more than a black veil with nothing else to offer, and what the zombies experienced was just a break in their existence.

murderer –probably I am mad. But I might not be mad if those accursed tomb-legions had not been so silent” (80). Something similar is suffered by the narrator of “From Beyond”:

I wish I could believe that doctor. It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me. I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am weary. (29)

The only moment in which a possible revelation about the afterlife is given, is unsatisfactory since the zombie just remembers the moments before he died, something that fits with Lovecraft’s own materialism and agnosticism (or atheism). The only consequences about the exploration of the limits beyond the symbolic Real are madness, paranoia and death.

#### 12.4.- Conclusions

The texts overviewed during the present chapter underpin the most significant concepts and notions examined so far in this dissertation. Communal decay has proved to be a concept that is related with many of the anxieties Lovecraft had during his life. The net of references that can be traced behind this category is long: sexual depravation, interracial sexuality, decayed architecture, fall of aristocracy, society focused in production more than in culture, immigration that corrupts New England, perverted and hideous traditions, witchcraft and voodoo, and the degraded lower classes of society are part of the real Real behind the symbolic portraits of *communal decay* described by Lovecraft. These issues were partly beyond Lovecraft’s understanding, and this anxiety is reflected in the underlying ideological readings that I am proposing all throughout my

dissertation. "The Street", "The Horror at Red Hook", "The Call of Cthulhu" and "The Festival" are part of this net that portray, in one way or another, different examples of communal decay.

The Great War supposed a serious inner conflict for Lovecraft. The struggle between England, the United States and Germany was no more than a fratricide fight that would exhaust the Aryan race, allowing the rising of other races that, in his opinion, were inferior. "Dagon" presents this conflict where the alien entity that breaks into the symbolic Real, according to Burns, is the personification of the Other. The monster is presented as a powerful being that, at the end, is able to reach the United States, striking its people. Lovecraft's fear of the uncontrolled strength of a different race due to the fight between the Teutons underlies the tale. "The Temple", on the contrary, reveals the resentment that the writer showed against the German nation, and the symbolic punishment from the past, from the mythological city of Atlantis, is, as in the case of "The Moon-Bog", the triumph of traditionalism and history over the mistakes of humanity.

Science and technology, with their differentiated roles associated to the imaginary Real and the real Real respectively, are represented by scientists and the artifacts they create. The figures of Tillinghast and, in a more evident way, Herbert West, are a source for the imaginary Real in "From Beyond" and "Herbert West – Reanimator". The two mad scientists are dealing with knowledge that menaces the symbolic Real, and the devices they create (Tillinghast's machine and West's serum) provoke the fracture of the symbolic level. The forbidden knowledge that they assimilate is able to explain the inconsistency of reality. Tillinghast portrays the existence of creatures dwelling in parallel dimensions, and West theorizes about the possibility of bringing back to life a dead person. Theoretically, they think resurrection is possible to achieve, and this

simple possibility reveals the fragility of the symbolic Real created by the narrators (and close friends) in both stories. It is with the use of their devices that the whole symbolic level is attacked, when the walking dead and the inhabitants of other dimensions are shown and symbolized. Science, once again, is a valuable tool that helps Lovecraft to unravel the mysteries of mankind. The problem, as usual, is that the consequences derived from the discoveries are sometimes too frightening to be symbolically assimilated.



## **CHAPTER 13: CONCLUSIONS**

1.- The present study has proved that the methodological use of triad of the Real is suitable for the analysis of Lovecraft's ideological background throughout his fictional narrative. The division that Žižek put forwards is suitable for the exploration of tales in which there is a clear component of supernatural entities that are discovered by mankind.

The assimilation of the imaginary Real as the moments in which the atmosphere of weirdness and threat appears has shown to be effective in the analysis of the most technically "Gothic" stories, such as "The Moon-Bog". It is also a suitable tool for analysis for those texts in which the genre is closer to science fiction, for instance "From Beyond". At the same time, it is also possible to find the traces of the imaginary Real in the purest Lovecraft tales, those that offer the most atavistic elements of his narrative, due to the important presence of the past. Works such as *At the Mountains of*

*Madness*, "The Dunwich Horror" or "The Shadow over Innsmouth" present the reader with an adept field for the analysis of the triad of the Real.

The proposal made by Graham Harman, with his concept of the linguistic gap in the representation of the object that he applied to Lovecraft, works softly and efficiently integrated in my theoretical framework. The distinction between the vertical gap and the horizontal or "cubist" gap is perfectly assimilated in the different moments in which the imaginary Real is analyzed throughout the various texts making up the corpus of this study. Harman does not explicitly mention Žižek's triad of the Real, but the Slovene philosopher is quoted and widely used in his theoretical explanation, especially for the development of the "Inherent stupidity of all content" (11-17). This leads me to consider Harman's proposal as a very useful and valid tool that should be considered whenever any text by Lovecraft is approached in order to explore its representation of reality.

"The Quest of Iranon", however, is a text much more resistant to my analysis proposal. The presence of the imaginary Real is very limited in the text, and it is difficult to grasp a clear division of the triad of the Real. The most remarkable difference between "The Quest of Iranon" and the other texts analyzed is that the former lacks a gothic or horror component which is present, in some way or another, in the rest of the stories. There are no threats in form of aliens, monsters or any other kind of creature, and this provokes that the whole narrative structure changes. Botting remarks the following as regarding the gothic genre:

In Gothic fiction certain stock features provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties. Tortuous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits predominate in the eighteenth century. Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines

## Chapter 13: Conclusions

and bandits populate Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats. This list grew, in the nineteenth century, with the addition of scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double signifying duplicity and evil nature. (2)

None of these features is present in “The Quest of Iranon”, in contrast with what can be found in the rest of tales in the present study. If there are no alien presences that menace the integrity of the symbolic Real, it is impossible to identify any kind of imaginary Real. The conclusions drawn from “The Quest of Iranon” are partial from the point of view of Žižek’s division of the Real. The real Real is identified, but just a very brief fragment can be identified with the imaginary Real (the description of the color of the domes in the city of Oonai). However the duality between reality and real Real is clear and allowed me to trace the ideological connotations underlying the tale.

The case of “The quest of Iranon” leads me to think that the theoretical framework I have proposed, based on Žižek’s concepts on the Real, is efficient just under some circumstances. The tales which have a component related to horror, weird, supernatural or uncanny events are structured in a way that allows the apparition of the imaginary Real. The fantastic, in its broadest sense, is required in order to produce a framework for the imaginary Real to be shown. This hypothesis opens the gate to a further line of research, in order to explore the validity of the triad of the Real in other literary genres distant from the supernatural/science fiction.

The distinction between imaginary, symbolic and real Real has revealed that Lovecraft’s narrative goes beyond the standard pulp fiction tale in that it offers a complex ideological valence behind the surface fabric of the tales. Lovecraft developed an interesting philosophical, metaphysical, cultural and ideological background that arises

when the literary fireworks are detached from the ideological connotations and the underlying proposal of each text arises.

2.- The category of *communal decay* is tied to the vast majority of the issues that worried the writer, and it is present in most of his tales in different forms. As has been proved, communal decay is associated by Lovecraft to degeneration of a particular race (generally the Teutons), as in the case of "The Shadow over Innsmouth". But it is also connected with the corruption of a social group, such as the aristocracy in "The Moon-Bog" or the lower classes that arrived to New England from London, as depicted in "The Dreams in the Witch House". This *communal decay* is also linked with the degeneration of society due to its lack of cultural interest, as has been proved in "The Quest of Iranon" and "The Moon-Bog", or even the social degradation brought by democracy (concept also explored in "The Quest of Iranon").

Lovecraft foresaw a decline of the Western values he loved, supporting the theories of Oswald Spengler in a 1930 letter:

The natural adjustment of man to the earth, to the landscape, to the conceptions of time and space and proportion, to the social group, to the struggle for existence, to his fellows, to himself and his own imaginative life—all this will inevitably be uprooted by the changes accruing from a mechanized regime which destroys familiar dependences and limitations and economic balances, and substitutes a new set unlinked with that age-long conditions have crystallized, and wholly dependent on a complex technological organization that ennui or revolt or conquest or natural convulsions will sooner or later destroy. From now until the next Spenglerian collapse of civilization we shall have an increasingly grotesque and unsatisfying type of life. (*SL III* 156-57)

The real Real that I have inferred from the Lovecraftian oeuvre is connected with the “mechanized regime”, and the “adjustmen of man” to the ongoing changes that the world was experiencing during Lovecraft’s life. The arrival of democracy to the United States, the immigration waves that reached New York or the scientific discoveries of Darwin, the eugenicists and Einstein, Heisenberg or Planck, destabilized Lovecraft’s own symbolic Real. The writer was unable to assimilate and understand the changing society and world he lived in, and he reflected his anxieties and worries through the workings of the underlying real Real in his texts.

The relevance that science and technology have in the Lovecraftian oeuvre has been proved throughout the present study. Science is closely tied to the idea of forbidden knowledge and to the discovery of a hidden truth that will condemn the protagonist of the story. The examples in which science acts as the trigger of the supernatural events are numerous: the expedition in *At the Mountains of Madness* has scientific purposes. Their initial aim is to “unearth a quite unprecedented amount of material” (247) to be used in later geological studies. The narrator’s particular task was “that of securing deep-level specimens of rock and soil from various parts of the Antarctic continent” (246). Walter Gilman, the protagonist of “The Dreams in the Witch House”, is a student of mathematics and folklore, and it is via the advanced formulas he studies that he is able to establish contact with Keziah, the witch, connecting different planes of existence thanks to “Non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics” (64). The creature hidden by the Whateleys in “The Dunwich Horror”, invisible and terrible, is defeated by the group of scholars, thanks to the research carried out by Henry Armitage at the Miskatonic University. Herbert West, the mad doctor from “Herbert West – Reanimator”, studies if it is possible to revive a corpse, using a special serum he creates.

Finally, Crawford Tillinghast is a scientist that creates an artifact which allows him to navigate through other dimensions in "From Beyond".

3.- I have proved that in Lovecraft's narrative fiction, science, considered as pure knowledge, acts as a constant menace to the symbolic level of reality. Knowledge incites and activates the imaginary Real, reaching its peak point in the figure of Herbert West, who is the embodiment of Lovecraft's repulsion of science. For the narrator, West is the spring of the uncanny and menace, due to his vast knowledge about forbidden issues. The final act of "The Dunwich Horror" takes place after Armitage "looked involuntarily over [Wilbur's] shoulder" the pages Wilbur Whateley is reading in the *Necronomicon*. The reading of the carvings of the city in *At the Mountains of Madness* reveals the history of the Elder Ones and the shoggoths, and also the origins of mankind, probably created by the former.

On the contrary, the applied sciences, in the form of technology, act in a different form to that of pure knowledge. Whereas science *per se* implies a threat to the symbolic Real, since it proves that reality is fragile and there are certain aspects of it that are suitable to be questioned, technology *actively* attacks these fissures, reorganizing the symbolic level by reshaping and reformulating its contents. The dust that the researchers of Miskatonic spread over the Dunwich creature immediately brings it to the symbolic Real, reformulating the laws of natural order since a new entity that should not exist is, in fact, alive. The same can be said about the parallel dimensions visited by the narrator of "From Beyond". The machine developed by Tillinghast is a powerful attack against the laws of the imaginary Real, since the narrator observes the alien entities dwelling among us: "It likewise seemed that all the known things entered into the composition of

other unknown things, and vice versa” (28). The serum synthesized by Herbert West breaks the final frontier between life and death, and the symbolic Real has to be restructured by the narrator and the mad doctor himself, since the possibility of creating walking dead is made real. At the same time, for Lovecraft, technology allows the excessive growing of urban areas and metropolises, sinking nature into oblivion, as discussed in the chapters devoted to “The Moon-Bog” and “The Quest of Iranon”.

The influence of scientists such as Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, Albert Einstein or Ernst Haeckel has been broadly exemplified in the analysis of the different texts. Lovecraft uses science as a way of underpinning his conscious ideological mindset. The fields of knowledge related to physics and astronomy helped Lovecraft to reinforce his cosmicism. The radicalism of Haeckel, who, according to Joshi “sees the principle of evolution as dominating the cosmos” (*Decline* 11), together with Elliot’s mechanistic principles formulated in *Modern Science and Materialism*, strongly influenced Lovecraft’s ideas. The writer’s fears of miscegenation, provoking the decay of the Teutons (perfectly described in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”), are supported by the eugenicist theories of survival of the fittest applied to society. The proposals of Thomas Malthus and Galton, which are the grounds of social engineering, are gathered by Lovecraft in his texts: the rejection against the lower classes and their supposedly active sexual condition is disguised as the witch Keziah in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, and the fear of the reproduction and advance of mixed blood or degenerated families permeates “The Dunwich Horror” and “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, among others.

4.- The categorization of the Lovecraftian tale that I have proposed in the fifth chapter, using a previous study of my own (Pérez de Luque 40-81), has proved to be a useful

and efficient tool in order to perform a post-structuralist analysis –both narratological and ideological– and classification of the corpus I have explored.

The problem of approaching a corpus constituted by 65 different stories raised the necessity of doing a reduced selection of tales. This selection had to be representative of the whole narrative work of Lovecraft, and the fact that the writer did not elaborate a massive amount of different plots, has been extremely useful for this particular proposal in my analysis. The limited number of situations, characters and stories has been critical for achieving a complete classification of the oeuvre. The reductionist list of 30 items that summarize the different Lovecraftian items allows an easy computation of the most common situations to be found in a typical piece of fiction by the author.

The resulting list of stories that were selected after the categorization (*At the Mountains of Madness*, “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, “The Dreams in the Witch House”, “The Dunwich Horror”, “The Quest of Iranon” and “The Moon-Bog”) includes some texts which have been classically regarded as landmarks in Lovecraft's narrative. However the two last choices are minor texts. This has been troublesome in terms of bibliographical support, since the two stories have been historically neglected by most of the critics when analyzing Lovecraft's literary heritage. Thus, the amount of literature about both texts is very limited. The chapters devoted to them prove that the two stories are interesting enough, and that they display a wide range of levels of analysis. This, hopefully, will help to raise awareness on the Lovecraft's texts regarded as minor works. The exploration of these texts has been proved to be fruitful and definitely worth the effort of having a reduced amount of texts supporting my survey.

There is a clear limitation in this classification: it is excessively restricted if applied to other corpora. It has been easy-to-handle for Lovecraft's oeuvre, but I do not think it

can be a source of inspiration for similar classifications devoted to other authors. As has been already mentioned, Lovecraft's reduced amount of situations was the key factor for me to put forward this categorization. But this formalist approach cannot be useful at all for authors whose work include a wider range of plots, characters and structures. Depending on the writer, the amount of variables varies and categories may multiply, obscuring the clarity of the analysis. A brief overview of the fictional work of one of Lovecraft's most remarkable literary influences, Edgar Allan Poe, soon dismantles the possibility of establishing a similar classification, since the amount of items increases enormously. In spite of the theory proposed by Booker, who considers that all fictional plots can be summarized in seven different general categories, I assume that in order to approach a particular author, a more detailed level of analysis in a classification of this kind is required.<sup>1</sup> So I consider my categorization of the Lovecraftian tale as a tool useful just for the analysis of this particular author, and that the chances of successfully performing a similar classification in a different writer, with a broader conception of the narrative structure, are low.

5.- As regarding further lines of research, the present study has put forward several issues that offer the possibility of expanding academic studies on Lovecraft.

First of all, as mentioned above, the triad of the Real has proved to be a powerful tool of analysis. In spite of my reservations towards its use in genres different from the supernatural or weird tale, I think the theoretical framework can be useful to explore the narrative of other authors working within the framework of these genres. The first

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<sup>1</sup> James Bowell, in his *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, stated that Dr. Johnson (1709-1784) already put forward the idea of limited plots: "He had likewise projected, but at what part of his life is not known, a work to show how small a quantity of real fiction there is in the world; and that the same images, with very little variation, have served all the authors who have ever written." (355)

obvious reference is Edgar Allan Poe, but there are three different groups that should be considered.

On the one hand, contemporary authors producing texts close to the gothic or supernatural tradition: Angela Carter, Richard Matheson, Stephen King, Chuck Palahniuk, Clive Barker or Ramsey Campbell. This list is, above all, tentative and non exclusive, since the list of writers and works suitable to be studied is vast and varied. I have not included classical gothic writers (Mary Shelley, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Charles Maturin, Bram Stoker, Sheridan Le Fanu, Guy de Maupassant, etc.) since I think the ideological background underlying these authors has been broadly studied by several scholars (see, for instance, Botting's *Gothic*, or Lovecraft's *Supernatural Horror in Literature*). However contemporary supernatural fiction still offers a broad field to explore, and in my opinion the Žižekian approach I have proposed can offer an interesting starting point for these authors.

The second group is constituted by the writers who are part of the Cthulhu Mythos circle. It would be interesting to explore if there are common ideological factors shared by some of them, and if these ideological backgrounds are to be found in their contributions to the expansion of the Lovecraftian universe. It has been demonstrated by other scholars that August Derleth's contribution was highly biased by his religious views, but other writers are still to be explored in detail.<sup>2</sup> Apart from Derleth, the list is composed by Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, Frank Belknap Long, Clark Ashton Smith and Donald Wandrei, among others. These names, once again, are not exclusive, since there are many authors that have contributed in a more or less active way to improve the Cthulhu Mythos to the present. The most famous contemporary writer is

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Derleth's misreading and distortion of the Cthulhu Mythos, see Schultz's "Who Needs the "Cthulhu Mythos"?", Mosig's "H.P. Lovecraft: Myth-Maker", and Price's "Lovecraft's 'Artificial Mythology'".

Stephen King, who has written several stories with discernible Lovecraftian background.<sup>3</sup> I would also consider including in that group all the collaborations that Lovecraft himself wrote with other authors, and the texts that he reviewed and corrected for friends and colleagues. Some of them are not part of the Cthulhu Mythos circle, but the influence Lovecraft might had on these texts is probably enough as to be a corpus worth exploring.

The third group is composed by science fiction writers. An important addition to this group is the possibility of exploring the effects of science and technology as depicted in their narrative. The science fiction genre has been traditionally associated with dystopian and utopian universes, and it is a fruitful field to analyze the political and ideological background that is portrayed in its texts. I have expounded how science as pure knowledge and its practical applications in form of technological devices play different roles in the narrative of H.P. Lovecraft, something that David A. Oakes partially studied in *Science and Destabilization in the Modern American Gothic*. Considering that Lovecraft has tales which can be regarded as science fiction, I think it is interesting to explore if the same happens with other authors. My first intuitive idea is that since in pure science fiction narratives technology is assimilated by universes in which a very advanced device does not cause commotion among mankind, its role has been probably neglected. So there might be some interesting ideological connotations associated to science and technology in science fiction that have been overlooked. Authors both classic and contemporary are susceptible of analysis: Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Frank Herbert, Philip K. Dick, Isaac Asimov or George R.R. Martin are, once again, some possible starting points for further research.

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<sup>3</sup> I already mentioned King's short story "Gramma" in chapter 6. *Pet Sematary* is based on the legend of the Wendigo, a creature taken from the native American mythology, that was added to the Cthulhu Mythos thanks to Algernon Blackwood's "The Wendigo".

A second line of further research has to do with Lovecraft's non-fictional texts. The relevance of his essays and especially his letters for this study has been outstanding. These texts portray the thoughts of the writer in many different topics: from literature to occultism, science, politics or philosophy. There have been few studies based on Lovecraft's non-fictional texts, and just S.T. Joshi has been deeply concerned with them. Most of the scholarly production on Lovecraft uses both letters and essays as supporting bibliography for analyzing his literary texts, but there is still room for studying the author as a thinker. Joshi's *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West* can be an appropriate starting point, and the ongoing editions he is publishing of Lovecraft's letters provide valuable material to explore the writer's philosophical thoughts throughout his letters. A study of the figure of Lovecraft as a thinker, leaving apart his status as a fictional writer, appears to me as an exciting and probably rewarding task to be done.

A third topic to be explored, strongly connected with the previous one, is the particular topic of Lovecraft and his relationship with witchcraft. From his letters I have concluded that he had a deep understanding of the issue, and that he read several books about witchcraft and its social, political and religious connotations. As I have analyzed in the chapter devoted to "The Dreams in the Witch House", the Salem Trials were of interest for the writer, and he considered covens as a source of communal decay provoked by the scum coming from London and an oppressive Puritan environment. The strongly sexual component of witchcraft, and Lovecraft's rejection to any kind of sexual content, provide another point of interest in this particular issue. Witchcraft is secondarily present in other tales from Lovecraft, such as "The Very Old Folk", "The Call of Cthulhu" or "The Dunwich Horror", but the main primary source is undoubtedly to be found in his letters and essays.

## Chapter 13: Conclusions

Finally, also relevant would be the in-depth study of other minor fictional works by Lovecraft. After providing an extensive analysis of “The Moon-Bog” and “The Quest of Iranon”, it has been proved that both texts have important levels of analysis that enrich Lovecraft’s global understanding. This lead me to think that a closer look to other pieces of fiction that have been neglected by academic critics might cast light on or reinforce other aspects of Lovecraft as a writer and as a thinker.



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