Mats Nyholm

Searchers After Horror

Understanding H. P. Lovecraft and His Fiction

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the life and work of H. P. Lovecraft in an attempt to understand his work by viewing it through the filter of his life. The approach is thus historical-biographical in nature, based in historical context and drawing on the entirety of Lovecraft's non-fiction production in addition to his weird fiction, with the aim being to suggest some correctives to certain prevailing critical views on Lovecraft. These views include the "cosmic school" led by Joshi, the "racist school" inaugurated by Houellebecq, and the "pulp school" that tends to be dismissive of Lovecraft's work on stylistic grounds, these being the most prevalent depictions of Lovecraft currently. Certain additional views of long standing are also addressed, such as Lévy's suggestion that Lovecraft was withdrawn from the world due to existential hopelessness and therefore created his art by escaping into dreams. The specific research question to be answered revolves mainly around matters of motivation and intention: What did Lovecraft wish to accomplish with his writing? Why did he write? Can answers be found through a study of his life and thinking based on all the relevant material that is available? This presupposes a view of literature as a communicative act between a writer and a reader, via a written text, which means that the research question can be tightened: What was Lovecraft trying to communicate with his writing, and did he succeed in communicating it? I suggest that an answer to this question is that Lovecraft was primarily concerned with creating mood and atmosphere through artistic self-expression, and that this was grounded in a strict adherence to the traditional past associated with his cultural heritage, further motivated by what I refer to as his gentlemanly pessimism in combination with a strong curiosity about the nature of reality. Lovecraft's identity was rooted partly in his view of himself as an English gentleman with values going back to the eighteenth century, and partly in his cultural pessimism that was an outgrowth of certain larger intellectual and cultural trends at the time in New England and in the Western world in general. Out of this, I believe, grew all the themes that are of central importance in Lovecraft's fiction.

Abstrakt

Avsikten med denna avhandling är att undersöka H. P. Lovecrafts liv och litterära verk i ett försök att uppnå en djupare insikt genom att sätta Lovecrafts litterära produktion i relation till hans liv. Tillvägagångssättet är därför historiskt-biografiskt, med basis i historisk kontext och baserat på Lovecrafts hela facklitterära arbete utöver hans skönlitteratur, med avsikt att föreslå vissa korrektiv till rådande kritiska åsikter om Lovecraft. Dessa åsikter inkluderar den "kosmiska skolan" under Joshis ledning, den "rasistiska skolan" som påbörjades av Houellebecq, och "pulpskolan" som tenderar att avfärda Lovecrafts arbete på stilistiska grunder. Dessa tre inriktningar är de för närvarande huvudsakliga kritiska framställningarna rörande Lovecraft. Några andra långvariga kritiska åsikter tas också upp till behandling, som till exempel Lévys antagande att Lovecraft drog sig tillbaka från världen på grund av en känsla av existentiell hopplöshet och av den orsaken skapade sin konst genom att fly in i sina drömmar. Den specifika forskningsfrågan som skall besvaras är främst fokuserad på avsikt och motivation: Vad önskade Lovecraft uppnå med sitt skrivande? Varför skrev han? Kan svar hittas genom en studie av hans liv och tanke baserad på allt relevant material som är tillgängligt? Det här förutsätter en syn på litteratur som en kommunikativ handling mellan en författare och en läsare, via en skriven text, vilket medför att forskningsfrågan kan göras mera exakt: Vad avsåg Lovecraft att kommunicera med sitt skrivande och var han framgångsrik i sin avsikt? Jag föreslår att ett svar på denna fråga är att Lovecraft huvudsakligen var intresserad av att skapa stämning och atmosfär genom artistiskt självuttryckande, och att detta var grundat i en djup sympati för ett traditionellt förflutet som var associerat med hans kulturella arv, ytterligare motiverat av vad jag kallar hans gentlemannamässiga pessimism i kombination med en stark nyfikenhet om verklighetens sanna natur. Lovecrafts identitet hade sitt ursprung dels i hans syn på sig själv som en engelsk gentleman med värderingar som gick tillbaka till sjuttonhundratalet, och dels i hans kulturella pessimism som var en följd av vissa intellektuella och kulturella trender i New England och västvärlden som helhet vid den här tiden. Min åsikt är att alla de litterära motiv som är av central betydelse i Lovecrafts skönlitteratur hade sitt ursprung i denna bakgrund.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the life and work of H. P. Lovecraft, in an attempt to understand his work by viewing it through the filter of his life. Largely unknown in his own time, Lovecraft is today regarded as an icon and a giant in the field of speculative fiction, and has for this reason attracted a significant amount of attention, both popular and critical. Thus, I suggest that there are three main reasons why an in-depth academic study into Lovecraft can and should be conducted: 1) his current popularity and consequent influence on popular culture, both from a Western and a non-Western perspective; 2) his standing as a founding figure in speculative fiction, in the context of the impact that speculative fiction has had on society; and 3) his fiction as literature in itself, particularly with respect to his own views on his writings.

The specific research question to be answered in this thesis revolves mainly around the matters of motivation and intention. What did Lovecraft wish to accomplish with his writing? Why did he write? Can answers be found through a study of his life and thinking based on all the relevant material that is available?[1] For more than half a century now, Lovecraft has tended to be viewed as one of either three things: a pulp writer producing trash for money,[2] a promoter of a new cosmic school of philosophical horror fiction,[3] or a racist neurotically driven by hate and

1 See the appendix for a complete list of source material.

2 "The only real horror in most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art," is how Wilson (1980: 47) dismissed Lovecraft's work in 1945. This view of Lovecraft is not as common nowadays, but still appears from time to time. See, for example, Le Guin (1976), Schwartz (2005), and Baxter (2014).

3 Among the first to express this view was Leiber (1998), as far back as 1949. The current leading voice in the cosmic school is Joshi (2013a, 2013b, 2014a), whose standpoint, as it emerges from his extensive critical writings, seems to be that all of Lovecraft's mature fiction is animated by a unifying and underlying cosmic philosophy, and that it is the consequence of a bad or failed story if the cosmic presence is not apparent in the actual text (see, for example, Joshi 2015b: 17). Schultz (2011: 208-209), similarly, argues that "only [Lovecraft's] late fiction contains the elements by which we characteristically refer to his work as *Lovecraftian*," which seems to suggest that these late stories are the only ones to have any real merit, and that this is because Lovecraft's "cosmic vision" (ibid: 209) is fully developed in them. See also Waugh (2006: 9): "Lovecraft's most basic theme [is] the place of humanity in an indifferent universe," Mariconda (2011: 196): "Lovecraft's weird tales are distinguished by their unique cosmic orientation," and Price (2018: 216): Lovecraft "was certainly the one to perfect the aesthetic" of cosmic horror.

fear.[4] It is difficult to see how such widely diverging depictions of Lovecraft as a person and writer could be reconciled in any meaningful way, and so I suggest that a better way to approach the complicated questions of intention and meaning in (and behind) Lovecraft's fiction is to go back to the original source. What, simply put, did Lovecraft himself have to say regarding his work, both directly *about* his work and indirectly *through* his work?

This suggests two additional questions: Why should one be concerned with Lovecraft's perspective on his work and writing, and why should he be trusted in this matter? I believe there is a two-fold answer to these considerations, having to do with respect and communication. To begin with, in the matter of respect, one can fruitfully make use of a distinction elucidated by Percival, who distinguishes between *deferential* and *appropriative* approaches in literary interpretation, the first aspiring "to attribute to an object a critical meaning that object already possesses," while the second means "to confer a critical meaning upon an art object."[5] Accordingly, I will in this thesis adopt a deferential approach when dealing with the entirety of the source material. From this follows the corresponding matter of communication, which Lovecraft himself indirectly touches on in the first of his "In Defence of Dagon" essays, written in January 1921, in response to some critical remarks, no longer extant, which he had received from a group of his amateur journalism colleagues at the time. In this essay, Lovecraft succinctly defines the first rule of criticism as follows: "As to criticism – I ask only that my reviewers observe the basic law of their craft; a comparison between design and achievement."[6] Here, one should immediately see that in order to determine if Lovecraft succeeded in achieving his intended design, one obviously first needs to know what that design was, and the only way to gain this knowledge is to examine what Lovecraft had to say about it.

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4 This line of criticism was originated in its present form by Houellebecq (2008) in the early 1990s, and has been continued primarily by Miéville (2009) and others. See, for example, Lovett-Graff (1997), Lord (2004), Miller (2005), Sante (2006), Baxter (2014), House (2017), and Smith (2019). Contrast with Waugh (2006: 90), who argues that Lovecraft exhibits "almost none of the hysterical traits that provide the shape of racism, as we might expect given the unimportance of racism to his daily life and his fiction." See also Joshi (2018b).

5 Additionally, an appropriative interpretation can be *cynical*, "in that the critic who pursues it does so caring not one jot whether the object he interprets possesses the meaning he attributes, or whether the artist's own interpretative intentions were to create a work that does not have that meaning" (Percival 2002: 199).

6 See Lovecraft (2006: 48).

From this follows a view of literature that is built on the conception of writing as a communicative act, more on which shortly.

To reiterate, this thesis aims to show that it is possible to gain a better understanding of an author's body of work by first gaining a better understanding of the author. This, of course, does not preclude a continued appropriative approach for those who are so inclined, but if the aim is increased understanding, then it seems to me that this is best achieved by respecting the author, the same way we would normally respect anyone with whom we are engaged in a communicative act of some kind.[7] And the main reason why Lovecraft is eminently suitable for an undertaking of this sort is the overwhelming amount of material that is available for study. There are biographical and autobiographical articles, essays, and memoirs (even a diary) by Lovecraft himself and many of his contemporaries and disciples; there are several full-length biographies by later scholars; there are volumes of non-fiction (mostly essays) and poetry; and, above all, there are the thousands and thousands of letters written by Lovecraft to the many members of the widespread network of correspondents that he maintained for most of his adult life.[8] This, quite simply, makes him one of the most thoroughly (self-)documented figures in literary history.

1.1. Definitions

Before proceeding with a more in-depth description of methodology, I will first present some basic definitions. Lovecraft was active within the field of literature that is sometimes popularly referred to as "speculative fiction," this being an umbrella term for three particular types of genre fiction that are frequently grouped together, namely fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Subgenres within horror include Gothic horror, supernatural fiction, cosmic horror, and weird fiction, among other things, the latter two being the most relevant in this context since both

7 See Sell (2000: 1, 255) for a pragmatic viewpoint on "literature as a genuine form of communication," according to which "a reader's self-projection into the communicative relationships proposed by a literary text involves the same mental effort as is required for any other kind of communication."

8 Estimates vary as to how many letters Lovecraft wrote during his life, one commonly cited number is 100,000. Of these, probably no more than 10,000 now survive (Joshi 1999: 236-237). Some of these letters were notoriously long, the most extreme example consisting of 70 handwritten pages.

can be said to have been co-created by Lovecraft to some degree.[9] I do not intend this terminology to be prescriptive, however, forcing Lovecraft's respective short stories to belong exclusively to one genre or another. In the case of Lovecraft, there is certainly much overlap within many of his stories, his early fiction being more Gothic and supernatural in nature, but then gradually, as his career progressed, moving increasingly in the direction of science fiction (via the occasional early detour into fantasy).

With respect to the view of writing as a form of communication, I will proceed from an assumption tangentially connected to speech act theory, with the focus accordingly on utterances made by a speaker and what the speaker means by them (the speaker in this case being the author, H. P. Lovecraft). Thus, my preferred definition of meaning concerns itself with the communicational content that is transmitted between an author and a reader, via a written text, as the end result of a successful communicative act of this particular kind. It is certainly possible to envision forms of writing that are not communicative in the sense suggested here, be they shopping lists or forms of so-called outsider art or something else, but, interesting though such exceptions may be, they do not invalidate the general rule that people express themselves with a communicative purpose that is normally directed towards other people, and that this underlying drive is still likely to be present even if it is overridden by other concerns or if there is no outlet for it due to adverse circumstances. In the end, an acceptance of the definition of meaning presented here will also lead to a tightening of the research question: What was Lovecraft trying to communicate with his writing, and did he succeed in communicating it?

1.2. Methodology

The methodological foundation underlying this thesis can be said to consist of three levels, each more narrowly defined and detailed than the

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9 Weird fiction, following Lovecraft's work, can also be considered as a genre in its own right, straddling the borders between horror, science fiction, and fantasy. See Lovecraft (2004b: 84) for his personal definition: "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 [n]ature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space."

previous: 1) literary Darwinism, 2) the utterance model and Noël Carroll's concept of reasoned evaluation, and 3) historical-biographical analysis and some specific ancillary concepts and subdisciplines that are relevant to my aims. In the following I will describe these levels in more detail, in order to clarify how the material they encompass is to be applied in my research. The discussion will thus move from a general background to the detailing of a more thorough analytical method.

1.2.1. Literary Darwinism

At its most basic and widely encompassing level, the view of literature advocated in this thesis is based on insights derived from Darwinian literary studies, which takes into account the evolutionary origins of humanity as a foundational starting point, with a particular focus on the human universal of storytelling. In this I follow Jonathan Gottschall in particular.[10] What is especially relevant in the context of the present discussion is the fact that the traditional concept of Western "high art," with its origins in the aesthetics of the eighteenth century, must, from an evolutionary perspective, be recognised as merely a recent cultural phenomenon that is essentially no different than any other cultural oddity (I use the term advisedly) in other parts of the world. It is very much a product of a certain time and a certain environment, and, in fact, most traditional societies do not have a concept or term that corresponds directly to the Western idea of art,[11] even though activities that are now recognised as artistic have always existed in all human cultures.

This suggests that artistic *behaviour* is a human universal, and that it is this behaviour, as a product of human evolution, that is then expressed differently in different human cultures. In other words, the human need to create art is biologically driven at its core, but is expressed culturally in a multitude of different forms. Two such forms, relevant to this thesis, are Western high art and popular culture. The split between these culturally determined opposing forces was one that affected Lovecraft in a peculiar way. Due to his background and personality, he aspired in an idiosyncratic manner to some specific aspects of Western high culture (of which he saw himself as a product), while at the same time working within, and reluctantly embracing some particulars of, the popular

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10 See Gottschall (2012). See also Boyd (2009), Dissanayake (1988, 1992, 2000), Dutton (2009), and Davies (2012) for theories concerning the origins of art and literature. For literary Darwinism, see Carroll et al. (2012, especially Chapter 3), as well as Carroll (2004, 2011), Gottschall (2008), and Swirski (2010).

11 See Dissanayake (1988: 35).

culture of his day. In this, as in some other things, Lovecraft was conflicted and divided against himself, which is a fact that needs to be taken into account if he is to be fully understood as a person. Furthermore, since his work has been wholeheartedly embraced by the popular culture of the present, this side of the equation must also enter into the picture to ensure a successful analysis and understanding of Lovecraft's work overall.

1.2.2. The Utterance Model and Reasoned Evaluation

The question of literary meaning is a complicated one, a full discussion of which falls outside the purview of this thesis. As far as my own thinking goes, I follow Noël Carroll and Robert Stecker, who are the leading figures behind what has recently been labelled the utterance model in literary interpretation.[12] According to this view, a work of literature is "a contextually situated utterance whose meaning must be connected to some definite speaker," which means that when "we read a literary text or contemplate a painting, we enter [into] a relationship with its creator that is roughly analogous to a conversation."[13] In addition:

> We would not think that we had had a genuine conversation with someone whom we were not satisfied we understood. Conversations, rewarding ones at least, involve a sense of community or communion that itself rests on communication. A fulfilling conversation requires that we have the conviction of having grasped what our interlocutor meant or intended to say. This is evinced by the extent to which we struggle to clarify their meanings. A conversation that left us with only our own clever construals or educated guesses, no matter how aesthetically rich, would leave us with the sense that something was missing. That we had neither communed nor communicated.
>
> […] We may read to be entertained, to learn, and to be moved, but we also seek out artworks in order to converse or commune with their makers. We want to understand the author, even if that will lead to rejecting his or her point of view. (Carroll 1992: 118)

Stecker provides a somewhat more technical definition, according to which "the meaning of an utterance is the meaning successfully intended by an utterer, or, if the utterer's intention is not successful, the meaning is determined by convention and context at the time of utterance […] In the

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12 See Carroll (2002) and Stecker (2006). See Mikkonen (2010: 68) and Puolakka (2011: 62-67) for discussions on the utterance model. See also Pratt (1977) for an earlier application of speech act theory to literary interpretation.

13 See Carroll (1992: 117; 2002: 327). See Jannotta (2014) for a discussion of the conversational approach of literary interpretation.

case of literary artworks, my claim is that they are utterances, and artwork meaning just is utterance meaning."[14]

The main part of this thesis will be devoted to an in-depth analysis of Lovecraft's life and work, and, as far as Lovecraft's work is concerned, I will make use of another concept derived from Carroll, which he labels "reasoned evaluation." Carroll presents a model that consists of a series of component operations: description, classification, contextualisation, elucidation, interpretation, analysis – the step-by-step implementation of which should generate a reliable and constructive end result that constitutes "evaluation grounded in reasons."[15] However, since my present concern is to evaluate Lovecraft's work in the light of a relevant contextual background, and since I am therefore as concerned with Lovecraft's life (which is the historical-biographical side of this endeavour) as I am with his work, I will in this thesis for the most part limit my use of Carroll's model to the component operations of contextualisation and analysis. The first of these is defined as "the circumstances – art historical, institutional, and/or more broadly socio-cultural – in which the artwork has been produced," and the second is concerned with explaining how an artwork "achieves its ends" in a larger sense than merely offering a standard critical interpretation of meaning.[16] This means that all interpretation is analysis, but all analysis is not interpretation, and therein lies the space within which I will attempt to operate. And since I believe (as stated) that some important aspects of this kind of wider examination must be rooted in a relevant contextual background, it will, in addition to the literary analysis of Lovecraft's work, be necessary to perform a corresponding and parallel historical analysis of Lovecraft's life.

1.2.3. Historical-Biographical Analysis

Given my personal background as a student of history, my research will accordingly rely on a methodology grounded in some basic concepts

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[14] See Stecker (2006: 429-430). See also Currie (2004: 132), cited by Stecker, who argues that "we must see text-based works for what they are: the intentional products of communicative action. We have every reason to think that it is by treating them as such products that we do interpret them, and no idea about how else we might do it." See also Gracyk (2007: 73), who, in a similar context, suggests that the "interpretive power" that an intention-ignoring critic is free to apply amounts to "nothing more than the freedom to misunderstand." In agreeing with these sentiments I recognise that I am in the minority, while expressing the hope that there will always be room for a diversity of approaches and viewpoints in these matters.

[15] See Carroll (2009: 7-8, 13-14).

[16] See Carroll (2009: 102, 111).

drawn from the fields of history and autobiography, with some additional input derived from the direction of psychology. The historical approach is necessary since Lovecraft lived in the past. To understand him and his work it is necessary to know something about the times (and places) in which he lived, especially in order to put his life experiences, large and small, into context to be able to view them against a larger picture. To know what these experiences were it is necessary to make use of the biographical and autobiographical approach, which in turn should make it possible to say something about how and to what extent Lovecraft's life as a whole shaped his work and his motivations for writing. From this proceeds the psychological approach, with a special (but not exclusive) focus on concepts such as trauma and nostalgia, for reasons that will become clear as Lovecraft's life is explored in more detail. And since writing is always an intellectual exercise to at least some degree, it follows that an improved understanding of Lovecraft's work (and of the motivations behind his work) necessitates a more extensive exploration of Lovecraft's overall intellectual development.

This approach, as briefly outlined above, is commonly referred to as the historical-biographical method, and it is important to recognise that this method, in its present-day form, has evolved significantly from its Victorian origins. It is a now a standard way of doing literary research informed by such tools and insights as can beneficially be derived from current mainstream historical and biographical scholarship.[17] I would also argue that the suitability of this method within the confines of literary research depends mainly on what the critic, or the scholar, intends to achieve.[18] In writing this thesis, as a work intended to fall within the field of literary history, I hope to follow some well-established principles of rigorous scholarship, which is a concern that I would ultimately regard as timeless.

1.2.3.1. Source Criticism and Textual Criticism

A historical approach to the study of literature can take many forms. Traditional concerns such as source criticism and textual criticism are highly relevant, but also outside my present purview since these undertakings have for the most part been completed by other scholars.

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17 See Klarer (2004: 85-86) and Chapter 3 in Guerin et al. (2005) for standard definitions of the historical-biographical method. See also, for example, Evans (2013). See also Stillinger (1991: 8-9) for a summary of the various elements that go into the analysis of an author's work.

18 "The ultimate aim of most literary research is to produce some critical, theoretical or historical writing" (Correa and Owens 2010: 3). Of the three options presented here, the focus in this thesis is on the third.

The majority of Lovecraft's manuscripts and letters are kept at the John Hay Library in Providence, and since I am relying on published volumes of these papers, I will accept the contents of those volumes as being verifiably authentic. Likewise, with respect to the thorny issue of textual accuracy (particularly since Lovecraft's manuscripts were initially subjected to harsh editorial treatment and shoddy publication in pulp magazines), the advent of the corrected texts under the editorship of S. T. Joshi since the 1980s has removed the need to be concerned about textual criticism when reading Lovecraft's texts.[19] This, of course, is not to suggest that the work undertaken by Joshi and others is to be regarded as infallible, but that it is not the purpose of this thesis to unearth and correct whatever errors still remain.

1.2.3.2. Context

More immediately pertinent to the aim of this thesis is the question of context, by which I mean the necessary awareness on the part of the scholar that a relevant background matters. When studying Lovecraft, one needs to keep in mind when and where he lived, with all the social and historical implications that this entails. Objectivity may remain theoretically unachievable, but it nevertheless serves as an ideal towards which it is always worth striving, which is why a focus on context is essential if one wishes to avoid misrepresentation and anachronistic interpretation. Simply put, it is not possible to fully understand Lovecraft and his fiction (other than on a superficial level), and why he said and did the things he did and said, if one persists in judging him by the shifting standards of later times, or if one entirely ignores the background against which he existed. Hence the importance of context.

Acknowledging that the past is different, by virtue of it being the past, does not mean that one cannot understand it, nor is it the case that every different period of the past is a monolithic and impenetrable unit that is inaccessible and incomprehensible to people from other times. If that were true, history would not be possible. Such a theoretical viewpoint also founders on another objection: Where are the boundaries drawn? When does "our" context become "their" context? While certain things were very different in Lovecraft's time compared to the present, other things were very similar, and, in any case, underlying all of this is the basic evolutionary insight that human nature rests on a large number of universal traits that define our common humanity. This is the reason why

[19] See Joshi (2001b) for a discussion on textual problems in Lovecraft.

we can understand each other now, and why we can also understand people from the past (if we are willing to make the effort).

More generally, when it comes to the element of historical research in itself, there is the simple question of determining what is relevant for the purpose of understanding Lovecraft in his time and place. What is to be considered important from a contextual point of view? A great many things happened in the world, in the United States, in New England, in Rhode Island, and in Providence during the years between 1890 and 1937, but obviously not all of these things can be taken into account. What is needed is a way to isolate certain contextual background details that are important to the understanding of Lovecraft's life, and the only reliable way to do this is to go by Lovecraft's own words. Clearly, then, a contextual detail is relevant to Lovecraft if it is mentioned by him, either directly or indirectly, in his letters and essays, or in his stories. Consequently, I will take particular note of such details if they are conspicuously referred to by Lovecraft in some manner in the material under review. This may seem like a circular approach, but it is necessary for a number of reasons. One is the self-evident fact that it is impossible for me to trawl through every last historical document in existence that might contain some incidentally illuminating information. Also, such an approach, were it somehow feasible, would result in nothing but speculation (a certain thing happened, Lovecraft never talks about it, but it could perhaps have influenced him anyway, etc.), and as such it would be an example similar in kind to the overzealous source hunting that is nowadays frowned upon for a reason. In short, the material must be limited, and this is the best way of limiting it.[20]

1.2.3.3. Biography

"Properly speaking, there is no such thing as history. There is only biography." This quote is attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson,[21] and it suggests something about the importance of biography in the study of literature – even if it is not strictly true that history, literary or otherwise, is shaped solely by the lives of people. When taking biographical facts into account, it is important to ensure that such facts are indeed facts and not merely speculation, particularly since speculation tends to confirm

[20] There is an important caveat to these considerations, concerning the possibility of relevant details that for whatever reason are not mentioned by Lovecraft. But as it is very likely that such details would be of a personal and private nature, they thus fall within the purview of biographical research (and, if reliably unearthed, such material can then be used by other scholars).

[21] See Shattuck (1999: 14).

the biases of the critic rather than the motivations of the author. Similarly, it is equally important not to sink too deep into whatever close study is being performed, which in the end is likely to result only in the critic seeing things that are not really there. As for actual published biographies about Lovecraft, the currently recognised standard work is that by Joshi (see the appendix), which I will rely on as a starting point for the next chapter.[22]

1.2.3.4. Autobiography

It is not that long ago that autobiography was regarded as an "ancillary matter" or "service literature," in the words of Olney, and "[p]rior to the mid-1950s autobiography was seen as little more than a special variety of biography and as a kind of stepchild of history and literature, with neither of those disciplines granting it full recognition as a respectable subject for study in itself."[23] But the situation rapidly changed and only two decades or so later, Olney could claim that "[a]utobiography's time has come."[24] Another twenty years on, and "we live in an age of memoir," for which "critics have coined an umbrella term, *life writing*, to cover the protean forms of contemporary personal narrative, including interviews, profiles, ethnographies, case studies, diaries, [w]eb pages, and so on."[25] The overwhelming amount of life writing about Lovecraft that exists makes autobiography one of the foundations on which this thesis stands, and although Lovecraft never wrote a memoir or an autobiography in the strict sense (aside from some brief fragments during his amateur journalism years), he might as well have, considering the amount of autobiographical material he produced in his letters.

Critical debates concerning the deeper nature of autobiographical writing have ranged from the impossibility of such writing to the claim that all writing is autobiography and that nothing else exists in literature.[26] However, if one takes a middle road and accepts that all

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22 Lovecraft occasionally commented on the subject of biography, as in a letter in 1931 in which he spoke of "that unconscious self-revelation common to all biographers of distinction" (Lovecraft 1971b: 312). Very late in his life, in December 1936, he wrote as follows: "My existence has been so prosaic & uneventful that a blank-book would make an excellent biography" (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 353). This, however, was more properly a comment on the uneventfulness of his life, as he saw it, than a direct argument against the usefulness of biography.

23 See Olney (1988: xiii-xiv).

24 See Olney (1988: xiv).

25 See Eakin (2004b: 1). Letters are obviously also included in this definition (see Kadar 1992: 5), supplanted though they may be in the present day by e-mail and social media.

26 See Sprinker (1980: 342) and Olney (1980b: 4).

autobiographical writing is to some degree fiction, does it then follow that all fiction is to some degree autobiography? According to biographer Jerome Hamilton Buckley, in the late nineteenth century it was becoming "increasingly difficult to distinguish between the autobiography invaded by fiction and the first-person fiction involving the autobiography of the author." Buckley goes on to claim that much fiction of that period and afterwards equated to a sort of autobiography: "avoiding broad generalizations about the novel and restricting our definition of autobiography to conscious self-revelation, we may still consider a large body of fiction designed, at least in part, to accomplish the central purposes of a 'true' personal narrative."[27] Is Lovecraft's short fiction, often written in the first person, similarly designed? Or was Lovecraft more interested in expressing his art rather than his self (or is that the same thing)? In any case, this is a tendency that Buckley attempts to explain by introducing the concept of "the subjective impulse," which he defines as "the writer's assumption that he or she may or even must confess, explain, divulge, or simply display an innermost self to a putative audience."[28] Buckley presents the late-Victorian novelist George Gissing and his *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* as a "striking example" of the subjective impulse in operation,[29] which is interesting since *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* is a novel that Lovecraft gave to his wife-to-be Sonia Haft Greene, early in their romance, in an apparent attempt to supply "some hints about his own character and temperament."[30] More importantly, the subjective impulse can be seen as an alternative expression of the kind of meaning-generating communicative act that I suggested earlier.

1.2.3.5. Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a concept that has many different meanings depending on which theoretical background is current.[31] For my own purpose, I will regard intertextuality as "a general term, working out from the broad definition of influence to encompass unconscious, socially prompted types of text formation (for example, by archetypes or popular culture); modes of conception (such as ideas 'in the air'); styles (such as genres);

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[27] See Buckley (1984: 115, 117).
[28] See Buckley (1984: vii).
[29] See Buckley (1984: 117-118).
[30] See Joshi (2013b: 627).
[31] See Allen (2006) for a discussion of different theoretical approaches concerning intertextuality. See also Genette (1997: 1-5) for a detailed discussion of his related concept of *transtextuality*, which he defines as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts."

and other prior constraints and opportunities for the writer."[32] In my analysis, I will also focus on connections within Lovecraft's oeuvre itself, that is to say, how Lovecraft in later stories built on material and concepts from his previous stories. In my opinion, some earlier criticism on Lovecraft has tended to focus overly much on perceived influences from works by other authors, based on little more than similarities in content and the assumption, occasionally perhaps unfounded, that Lovecraft had read the works in question.[33] But this is frequently a dubious endeavour that again comes too close to traditional source hunting. Thus, it is only if Lovecraft specifically elaborates (as he occasionally does) on a particular person or work as a source of influence that I will consider the role of that respective person or work in Lovecraft's fiction.

1.2.3.6. Ethics

The question of ethics is relevant in the case of scholars and critics who are overly sympathetic or hostile towards their subject, with consequent concerns about the reliability of their conclusions and verdicts, including the matter of "what rights […] the dead retain that the living are bound to respect?"[34] This latter question has no easy answer, and I can only suggest that the dead have the right to be understood. The larger question of truth is even more difficult: If Lovecraft says something about his life or his fiction, how can one be sure that he is telling the truth? If a friend or acquaintance says something about Lovecraft's life and/or fiction, how can one be sure that *they* are telling the truth? This becomes more complicated still when dealing with questions that cannot easily be answered objectively. Lovecraft may have had compelling reasons to hide certain aspects of himself,[35] or disregard them when analysing his own life and fiction. Or he may sincerely have believed something that in the end turns out not to have been true, it being all too easy to fool oneself on important or sensitive issues. This, however, can be compensated for by appealing to the sheer wealth of material available about Lovecraft, which is so extensive that the reliability of the conclusions drawn from it should rise in equal measure. Also, Lovecraft had little reason to think

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[32] See Clayton and Rothstein (1991b: 3).

[33] See, for example, Joshi (2013b: 898-899) concerning possible literary influences behind "The Shadow out of Time."

[34] See Eakin (2004b: 10).

[35] There are a few known instances in which Lovecraft lied (or was evasive) about himself in his letters, for example his occasional claim that he had graduated high school, when in fact he had dropped out (see Joshi 2013a: 126-128).

that he would ever become posthumously famous, or that his writings would be analysed in detail by future critics and scholars, which is why it is unlikely that he would have engaged in a wilful and systematic misrepresentation of himself, consistently repeated in his letters and essays over a period of decades (and this becomes more unlikely still if one takes into account his gentlemanly persona and his aesthetic views concerning self-expression).

In this context, something more needs to be said on the matter of Lovecraft's correspondence and my use of this correspondence in this thesis. Obviously it is not the case that a scholar should blindly accept anything and everything that Lovecraft says in his letters, but this is precisely why it is important to understand the nature of Lovecraft's letter-writing and why he engaged in it to the excessive degree that he did. His letters were written fast and without preplanning (making many of them almost stream-of-consciousness writing), often outside in beautiful park or nature landscapes if the weather permitted, and were thus characterised by immediate and spontaneously formulated responses to points raised by his correspondents. Lovecraft frequently emphasised the fact that his letter-writing served the purpose of replacing direct conversation in his life, thereby again underscoring the importance of writing as a form of communication. Certainly it is the case that a formal autobiography, carefully prepared and intended for posterity, must always be viewed as biased and somewhat suspect, but this is not what we find in Lovecraft. It is the very fact that his letters serve as an unfiltered form of direct and uncensored communication that makes them so valuable for this endeavour.

Certainly it is also the case that there is always an element of interpretation involved when reading Lovecraft's writings, just as there is in real life in every other form of communication. But this does not suggest that there are no limits to how Lovecraft's writings can be understood. If we can understand a person with whom we are engaged in a real-life conversation, then we can also understand Lovecraft in his correspondence, even if that correspondence is not directed at us. We do not normally have any difficulty interpreting and understanding communications that we ourselves receive (such as e-mail, in the present day), even though the person writing to us may be engaging in "performative" behaviour in the same way that is sometimes the case with Lovecraft in his letters. Sometimes Lovecraft exaggerates, sometimes he jokes (and sometimes the jokes are subtle and, indeed, easily missed or misunderstood), sometimes he rants, and so on. But if

we can understand instances of these behaviours in real life, then we can also understand them and know how to interpret them when they occur in Lovecraft's letters and essays. If, on the other hand, we deny that this is the case, then that leaves us with an unhappy choice – what is preferable: Lovecraft's supposedly unavoidable misrepresentation of himself, or an equally (or more) misleading critical misrepresentation? If these are the options, then it is difficult to find any worthwhile reason for these undertakings.

1.2.3.7. Memory

Closely related to concerns about reliability is the question of memory. This, needless to say, is a very complex subject, and I will make no effort to summarise what neuroscience has revealed about it – it is enough to say that memory is fallible, in fact more so than most of us ever suspected. For instance, the fact that a memory is slightly altered every time it is accessed, and that a lot of what we think we remember actually consists of false memories or even implanted ones, is disconcerting to say the least, and not only for scholars who rely on autobiographical sources for their research purposes.[36] Talking about implanted memories may sound sinister and even conspiratorial, but extensive research by Elizabeth Loftus and others has conclusively shown that memory is unreliable and can be manipulated simply by a person being exposed to misinformation or asked suggestive questions, and that eyewitness testimony should therefore under no circumstances be relied on exclusively as evidence.[37] What this means in the context of this study is that to the question, "can we trust Lovecraft not merely to tell the truth in his letters but to remember things correctly?" the answer is simply: "No, we cannot." We do, however, yet again have the benefit of Lovecraft's correspondence being so extensive, since the fact that he wrote multiple letters almost every single day of his adult life means that events were fresh in his mind when he wrote about them. Sometimes he also wrote about the same subjects to a number of different friends at different times,[38] which makes comparisons possible. Also, acknowledging the

[36] See Fernyhough (2013), Hayasaki (2013), and Lacy and Stark (2013).

[37] See Loftus (1998, 2016, 2018).

[38] As Shattuck (1999: 157) says, letters "provide a high-fidelity tap into the stream of history, particularly when we have both sides of the exchange." It is usually only Lovecraft's side of the correspondence that is preserved, with some exceptions, but that is a minor problem since, a "letter or an exchange of correspondence conveys information – not always the truth or the whole truth – but enough so that read in context it is evidence not only of its own contents but also of the writer and of the recipient and of the relationship between them" (Handlin 1979: 123).

likelihood that Lovecraft occasionally did get some details wrong in his recollections does not mean that everything he said should therefore be dismissed as unreliable and that the particulars about his life are irretrievable. It is simply a question of whether certain details are to be regarded as important or not in individual cases, with accompanying estimates of reliability.

1.2.3.8. Inspiration and Creativity

Lovecraft's literary work must self-evidently be seen as the product of a creative process, which brings into focus questions of inspiration and creativity. In some of his letters, Lovecraft gave detailed descriptions of where the initial inspiration for one or another of his stories came from, and from where he derived his ideas. Some examples include dreams (as was the case on several occasions), or reading, or the long walks and travels he undertook for the purpose of examining colonial antiquities and architecture. The key point in this context is that inspiration is something that happens to a person, and it cannot be willed into existence,[39] which is particularly relevant in the case of Lovecraft, who more often than not refused to simply sit down and start writing a story as a form of work. He also sometimes talked about how fast he wrote some of his (usually shorter) stories once he was seized by inspiration.[40]

Creativity "is the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are new, surprising, and valuable."[41] In this context, a short story can be an idea in itself, as can any of the concepts used in the construction of the story. Creativity, according to Boden, can happen in three ways, the first of which involves "making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas."[42] The other two ways are achieved through, first, the exploration and, second, the transformation of conceptual spaces in people's minds. Conceptual spaces are structured styles of thought, usually culture-specific, one example being the writing of short stories in the weird fiction genre in Western literature. Every new weird short story written is an example of this particular conceptual space being explored by the writers of those particular short stories. But sometimes, on

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[39] See Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004) and Oleynick et al. (2014) for discussions on the underlying psychological mechanisms relevant to this.

[40] "I work when the inspiration or mood takes me, & dash off whatever I have to write with great speed," Lovecraft 2005d: 122) said in a letter in 1917, in reference to his poetry and letter-writing.

[41] See Boden (2010: 29). Another, similar, definition of creativity is "the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints)" (Sternberg and Lubart 1999: 3).

[42] See Boden (2010: 31).

comparatively rare occasions, a writer comes up with something completely new that would previously have seemed impossible within the given limitations of the genre: "The deepest cases of creativity involve someone's thinking something which, with respect to the conceptual spaces in their minds, they couldn't have thought before."[43] And when this is accomplished, the conceptual space has been transformed. A further question, following on this, involves the particular circumstances that led to Lovecraft exploring and transforming the conceptual space of weird fiction in his mind in the particular way that he did. Lovecraft did not exist in a vacuum, and the ideas generated inside his head (be they new and original or not) likely had their ultimate source in something *outside* his head. Thus, when Lovecraft set the stage for the new genre of cosmic horror, the relevant ideas that made this process possible did not just pop into existence out of nothing.

1.2.3.9. Trauma

In the words of Collins and Amabile, "love for one's work is advantageous for creativity [but] when factors external to the task distract from or reduce a person's enjoyment, creativity will suffer."[44] In this thesis, the question of trauma as a possible motivating factor in fiction has its starting point in Shippey, who, writing about another giant in speculative fiction, argues that "it is possible to see Tolkien as one of a group of 'traumatized authors', all of them extremely influential [...], all of them tending to write fantasy or fable."[45] Most of these authors were traumatised after having endured "close or even direct first-hand experience of some of the worst horrors of the twentieth century, horrors which did not and could not exist before it: the Somme, Guernica, Belsen, Dresden, industrialized warfare, genocide."[46] It is my belief that Lovecraft – despite his, in some ways, sheltered life – can aspire to associate membership in this group, not because he was closer to the particular horrors of the early twentieth century than anyone else, but for other and more personal reasons that will become evident in later chapters. Lovecraft never had to participate in a war, nor did he ever directly experience anything that would necessitate taking PTSD into consideration, but questions concerning possible mental health issues still arise due to Lovecraft having suffered a number of nervous breakdowns in his youth. More relevant still are examples such as

43 See Boden (2010: 34).
44 See Collins and Amabile (1999: 308).
45 See Shippey (2001: xxix-xxx).
46 See Shippey (2001: xxx).

Lovecraft having contemplated suicide after the loss of his childhood home, or his claiming that he had attempted enlistment in the hope of being killed on the battlefield. Depression is thus likely, given the circumstances of his life and certain tell-tale symptoms from his letters.

All this evidence combined seems to indicate some sort of prolonged psychological damage, which suggests that Lovecraft's traumatic experiences lay on a deeply personal and intimate level, revolving around bereavement and repeated instances of personal loss (especially during his formative years) and personal failure (as an adult). I do wish to emphasise that I do not view Lovecraft's personal difficulties as in any sense comparable to experiences such as surviving the Battle of the Somme (Tolkien) or the bombing of Dresden (Kurt Vonnegut), or having been shot and nearly fatally wounded on the battlefield (George Orwell, C. S. Lewis, and others). But less dramatic experiences nevertheless take their toll on an emotional and over-sensitive personality, and many such experiences can have a cumulative effect.[47] This, in turn, is likely to have had a discernible impact on Lovecraft's fiction, either in the way his work was shaped or as a motivation for writing it in the first place. It is conceivable that Lovecraft's fiction may have been therapy more than autobiography – or it may have been neither. In this context it is also worth nothing that the feeling of nostalgia (which Lovecraft often elaborated on in his letters) is "a mixed emotion that is more likely to covary with negative states than positive ones," and that "[n]ostalgia-prone individuals tend to report lower well-being."[48]

The other side of the coin in this context is the concept of post-traumatic growth, which is a psychological term for the ultimately positive changes that people sometimes experience in their lives following a major life crisis:

> Posttraumatic growth is not uncommon. It has been reported by at least some persons experiencing a wide array of different life crises. The common elements of posttraumatic growth include a changed sense in one's relationships, a changed sense of self, and a changed

47 "From the clinician's perspective […] the criterion for significant trauma is the degree to which events have been seismic for the individual" (Calhoun and Tedeschi 1999: 2), and the focus "is not only on persons who have been held hostage, raped, or who have personally experienced violently destructive combat or other horrible events [but also on] the large number of persons who come to the clinician for help in coping with more common, but still emotionally overwhelming, events […] that represent a severe challenge to their past ways of understanding the world and their place in it, (in other words, events that have rocked and perhaps destroyed the foundations of their way of construing the world)" (ibid: 2-3).

48 See Newman et al. (2020: 343-344).

> philosophy of life. Posttraumatic growth can involve an experience of deepening of relationships, increased compassion and sympathy for others, and greater ease at expressing emotions. The change in self-perception may include an increased sense of vulnerability, but an increased experience of oneself as capable and self-reliant. Finally, some individuals report a greater appreciation for life, a changed set of life priorities, and positive changes in religious, spiritual, or existential matters. (Calhoun and Tedeschi 1999: 16)

In Lovecraft's case, such positive changes do indeed seem to manifest themselves, particularly in two notable episodes in his life: the years following the death of his mother, and the later years following his return home to Providence from New York.

1.2.3.10. Personality

Based on an extensive meta-analysis of previous historiometric research, Simonton has concluded that there is indeed "some grain of truth to the notion that you must be at least a little crazy to be a creative genius."[49] In fact, "a rough estimate is that creative geniuses are about twice as likely to experience some mental disorder relative to reasonable comparison groups,"[50] with depression, alcoholism, and suicide being the most frequent symptoms. Furthermore, "familial lineages that generate the creative geniuses also tend to manifest a higher rate and intensity of psychopathologic symptoms," that is, "the pedigrees of genius overlap the pedigrees of madness," which means that a "creative genius is not only born but also born mad."[51] Lastly, "eminently creative individuals are more likely to come from highly unstable homes in which they experienced any of a number of traumatic events […] Particularly conspicuous is the early loss of one or both parents," and "[e]ven if the future genius did not suffer partial or complete orphanhood, he or she might be exposed to economic ups and downs, cognitive or physical disabilities, and other early experiential uncertainties or obstacles."[52] This, it must be said, is a remarkably accurate description of Lovecraft's childhood and teenage years.

However, "whereas in the case of a psychotic person both parents are commonly disturbed, the creative person almost invariably has at least one parent who is rather healthy psychologically," and "there is almost always one parent who has in some way been interested, or has tried and

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[49] See Simonton (2010: 219).
[50] See Simonton (2010: 222).
[51] See Simonton (2010: 223).
[52] See Simonton (2010: 224).

not succeeded, in a particular creative field."[53] Since Lovecraft never really knew his father, and his relationship with his mother was troubled, the role of the healthy parent is likely to have been filled by Lovecraft's maternal grandfather. It is also significant that both Lovecraft's mother and elder aunt appear to have been gifted painters.[54] In any case, "creative geniuses are more eccentric than crazy," and "most creative geniuses most of the time will display an eccentricity that strays noticeably away from normalcy while stopping just short of the utterly crazy."[55] Lovecraft, of course, was hardly lacking in eccentricities and personal quirks and peculiarities. These were manifest in, for example, his idiosyncratic early literary style, his love of debate and argument (with a concomitant penchant for exaggerated ranting), his near-obsessive letter-writing, his presentation of himself as an elderly gentleman, and, particularly, his extreme attachment to his home town of Providence, and to Rhode Island and New England in general.[56] The latter suggests a case of what Yi-Fu Tuan has termed topophilia:

> The word "topophilia" is a neologism, useful in that it can be defined broadly to include all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment. These differ greatly in intensity, subtlety, and mode of expression. The response to environment may be primarily aesthetic; it may then vary from the fleeting pleasure one gets from a view to the equally fleeting but far more intense sense of beauty that is suddenly revealed. The response may be tactile, a delight in the feel of air, water, earth. More permanent and less easy to express are feelings that one has toward a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a livelihood. (Tuan 1974: 93)

Sampson has expanded on this concept to present the so-called topophilia hypothesis, according to which "humans possess an innate bias to bond with local place."[57] This suggests the possibility that Lovecraft may have been more right than he knew, in a sense, after his difficult two years in New York, when he insisted on a connection with his home and ancestral region so strong that it was even biologically determined.

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[53] See Rothenberg (1990: 12-13).
[54] As Lovecraft (2005d: 62) said in 1916: "On the maternal side I inherited a love of art."
[55] See Simonton (2010: 229).
[56] See Willard (2015) for a discussion of Lovecraft's fiction from an ecocritical perspective.
[57] See Sampson (2012: 25-26).

1.2.3.11. Dreaming

Lovecraft was one of the great dreamers, or "nightmarers," to quote Joshi,[58] of literary history. There is, of course, no shortage of theories about the meaning (or lack thereof) of dreams, or whether or not dreams are merely random by-products of the brain cleaning house every night, but as far as nightmares go, clinical observations confirm that horrible dreams are "closely associated with depressive symptoms."[59] There is something of an interesting contradiction here in that Lovecraft experienced his worst nightmares as a child, during a time that he otherwise described as idyllic and happy (despite occasional dark times), whereas he rarely suffered nightmares as an adult, when his life at times had become very difficult. Possibly this suggests increased maturity on some level – aside from the likelihood that he looked back on his childhood through rose-tinted glasses – with Lovecraft gradually learning to handle the obstacles that circumstances threw in his way, and he continued, at any rate, to experience extremely vivid dreams of a more positive nature throughout his life. It is, in the end, perhaps not so important to discern precisely why (on psychological or neurological grounds) Lovecraft experienced these dreams and why they were so vivid, but to instead focus on what he had to say about them when they occurred, particularly in connection with his writing.

1.3. Summary

To summarise, if writing is viewed as an act of communication between an author and a reader via the medium of a written text, what, then, was Lovecraft attempting to communicate with his fiction, and did he succeed in communicating it? I suggest that these questions can be answered through an in-depth study of Lovecraft's non-fiction (letters and essays) and fiction (short stories), and that such a study (both in how it is undertaken and with a view to its outcome) must be grounded in a genuine desire, or at least willingness, to connect with the author. To understand Lovecraft's work on a deeper level, it is necessary to first understand Lovecraft as an author and a person, to the extent that this is possible, and to know why he wrote and what he hoped to achieve (and to communicate) with his writing. This may then serve as a starting point

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[58] See Joshi (2013a: 34).

[59] See Nader (1996: 9).

for additional analysis or criticism, or it may be the end goal in itself, as is the case in the following chapters.[60]

In the remainder of this thesis, I will in Chapter 2 present a brief biographical sketch of Lovecraft, coupled with an equally brief overview of some relevant background developments in American history (mainly political and social) during Lovecraft's lifetime. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will describe Lovecraft's intellectual development in detail from his earliest childhood to the final years prior to his death, touching on such elements as his interest in science, his personal philosophy, and his political opinions and attitudes. In Chapters 5 and 6, I will present an overview of Lovecraft's short fiction oeuvre, from his earliest amateur efforts through all the developing stages leading up to the mature novelettes and short novels of his final decade, coupled with an analysis of his developing aesthetic views. In Chapters 7 and 8, I will draw on the preceding chapters in order to carry out a more comprehensive thematic analysis of Lovecraft's fiction in light of his life and intellectual development. In Chapter 9, I will build on this analysis, informed by Lovecraft's own aesthetic views, in order to undertake a close reading of three of Lovecraft's short stories. And in Chapter 10, finally, I will present a summary of my conclusions, which can also hopefully help point the way to future work within the field of Lovecraft scholarship. Additionally, the appendix contains an exhaustive list of source material.

60 "[T]he literary scholar and the critic are engaged in a common pursuit, so that the findings of one are indispensable to the work of the other" (Altick and Fenstermaker 1993: 1).

2. Background

The first part of this chapter consists of a biographical sketch of Lovecraft's life, followed by an overview of some important developments in American history during the relevant time period. I will elaborate slightly only on a couple of points in which I go against the conventional wisdom concerning Lovecraft's biography. The overview of American history, for its part, will be very brief and will not deviate in any significant way from currently accepted standard views.

2.1. Biographical Sketch

I will follow a chronological approach when describing Lovecraft's life, with the following outline suggesting the essential developments in Lovecraft's life from 1890 to 1937:

- happy childhood, 1890-1903
  - Massachusetts, 1890-1893
  - growing up in Providence, 1893-1900
  - financial decline, 1900-1903
- troubled teenage years, 1904-1908
- self-imposed isolation, 1908-1913
- amateur journalism, 1914-1923
  - reclusive invalid phase, 1914-1919
  - improved health, 1920-1923
- marriage and New York, 1924-1926
- final decade, 1926-1937

Standard biographical information has been taken from Joshi, unless otherwise indicated.

2.1.1. Childhood and Teenage Years

Lovecraft was born in 1890 in Providence, Rhode Island, but he spent the earliest years of his life in Massachusetts. His parents lived in Dorchester for a while, and later in Auburndale, where, in the winter of 1892-1893, they stayed at the house of the poet Louise Imogen Guiney. But in April 1893, Lovecraft's father Winfield fell ill and had to be confined to Butler Hospital, a private psychiatric hospital in Providence, where he remained until his death in 1898. The cause of death is likely to have been untreated syphilis,[61] which had also resulted in Winfield experiencing

[61] See de Camp (1996: 15-16), Derie (2014: 34-38), Faig (2011: 46-50), and Joshi (2013a: 22-24).

severe mental instability in the final years of his life. The extent to which the young Lovecraft, who now lived with his mother and grandparents in Providence, was aware of the graphic and unsavoury details concerning his father's condition is unclear.

Growing up in the prosperous College Hill neighbourhood, in the household of his maternal grandfather Whipple (at the time a well-to-do businessman), Lovecraft enjoyed all the comforts that came with a sheltered and, in fact, pampered upbringing. He was indulged in his many and varied intellectual interests by his overprotective mother and aunts; and, looking back on this happy period of his life, the adult Lovecraft later acknowledged that he had been spoiled as a child.[62] This idyllic time was marred only by two significant deaths in the family (that of his maternal grandmother in 1896 and his father in 1898), the first of which was the cause of Lovecraft's notorious nightmares. Then, around 1900, Lovecraft's grandfather suffered a financial setback,[63] which led to the selling off of property and steadily increasing financial worries for the family over the coming years. The sudden death of Whipple in 1904 marked the definitive end of Lovecraft's carefree childhood, primarily due to the loss of his father-figure, followed by the subsequent loss of his home as a consequence of financial mismanagement of the remaining family fortune.[64] What followed was one of the most difficult times in Lovecraft's life, and he may have contemplated suicide during the summer of 1904 (whether seriously or not is unclear).[65]

Given the dividing point that the events of 1904 represented, it is not surprising that an emphasis on the idyllic elements of his childhood became increasingly marked the more Lovecraft advanced in years (conversely, he may have focussed more on the negative facets when he was younger, during his reclusive invalid phase). But he did not go so far as to turn wilfully blind to some of the less positive aspects.[66] He sometimes referenced his lack of friends in early childhood,[67] a fact that is partially borne out by the testimony of some of his childhood

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62 "I was actually spoiled – having just about everything I wanted" (Lovecraft 2016b: 189).

63 See Faig (2009: 50-55).

64 See Lovecraft (2005d: 75-76; 2018: 300-301).

65 See Lovecraft (2016b: 221-223). In this letter from 1934, Lovecraft stated that he was saved from suicide by sheer scientific curiosity, which provided him with the will to continue living.

66 See Lovecraft (2005d: 54-55).

67 See Lovecraft (2005d: 68).

neighbours,[68] but there is no indication that he resented his outsider status during these years (on the contrary, he seems to have embraced it). Another way of looking at the existing accounts of Lovecraft's childhood strangeness and loneliness is that these are impressions to be expected from conventionally-minded people who were unlikely to understand the behaviour of an odd introvert who neither needed nor desired their company. This appears to have been the case in Lovecraft's early childhood, when he rarely attended school (and displayed disruptive behaviour when he did attend), but rather stayed at home in the company of his older relatives.[69] But at the same time, the teenage Lovecraft, once he began attending high school (to which he took an unexpected liking), did not have much difficulty in developing friendships, and in fact he soon became something of a leader in his local group of boyhood friends.[70]

It is not entirely clear if Lovecraft's conception of his happy and idyllic childhood referred to his early childhood, without friends of his own age but spent largely in a world of his own making, or to his teenage years, when his own world was lost for a while and partly replaced by more "normal" activities with the friends he had then gained, or to both, but this is mostly a trivial distinction. "I really had a damn good time in childhood" he said in 1933,[71] and the importance of those youthful days is well summarised in two statements from 1916 and 1920, respectively: "Childhood was to me the zenith of life," while "Adulthood is hell."[72] And, likewise, "The only true happiness lies in the partial ignorance of childhood" in a letter from 1916.[73] To be sure, these sentiments were also likely grounded in Lovecraft's later view of himself as a failure who had not lived up to the high expectations put on him by the fact that he had been a child prodigy.[74] In the end, even without the filter of nostalgia,

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68 Such as Clara L. Hess (Derleth 1998) and Harold W. Munro (1998). Munro is not to be confused with Harold Bateman Munroe, who was another of Lovecraft's childhood friends. See also Derleth (1998: 35) for an account by someone whose name is given only as Mrs. Carlos G. Wright.

69 See Lovecraft (2003b: 18; 2005d: 68; 2016b: 186-187) for some comments on his solitary childhood activities and how he claimed to have disliked games and playing with other children.

70 See Lovecraft (2003b: 96-98; 2016b: 188)

71 See Lovecraft (2016b: 190).

72 See Lovecraft (2003b: 95; 2005d: 78).

73 See Lovecraft (2005d: 56).

74 "When the high-flown imaginings of the child peter out in a manhood of mediocrity & non-achievement like mine, there is an ever-present sense of mocking anticlimax which makes formal exploitation subtly ridiculous & out of place," Lovecraft (2016b: 217) said in 1934, in response to an apparent suggestion that he publish a memoir.

there is little reason to doubt the sincerity in Lovecraft's conviction that his childhood had, on balance, been a happy time.

So Lovecraft's childhood was on the whole happy, despite the two "near-breakdowns" he experienced in 1898 and 1900 that presumably had something to do with the death of his father and the onset of the family's financial decline, respectively.[75] Indeed, it is curious that he did not also list 1904 among the years in which an episode of this type occurred. This makes it something of a mystery as to what these breakdowns really were, and how and why they manifested themselves (most likely they were episodes of depression). Perhaps the circumstances at this time, necessitated by the move to smaller and cheaper quarters down the street and having to try attending high school next autumn, meant that Lovecraft was forced to power through somehow, no longer having the luxury of going to pieces like he had in the past. And in fact he came to enjoy his high school experience,[76] for the most part, despite his attendance remaining intermittent (as in previous years) due to both health and temperament issues.

2.1.2. Health Issues

There has been much conjecture regarding Lovecraft's many and various health issues, with the consensus being that most of it was only in his head.[77] This, however, strikes me as an unjustified over-simplification, given not only the variety of symptoms listed by Lovecraft but also their apparent severity.[78] This should also be seen against the background of his failure to graduate high school in 1908, which caused him to more or less disappear from public view for more than half a decade, and which meant that his plans to study astronomy at Brown University were permanently dashed. It is possible that this development had its origin at least in part in his difficulty with mathematics,[79] whether or not this was the direct cause of his suddenly dropping out of high school prior to graduation, but his subsequent withdrawal from life is likely to have been

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[75] Lovecraft listed these breakdowns as having occurred in 1898, 1900, 1906, 1908, 1912, and 1919, but he never elaborated on their nature or what had caused them. See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 461).

[76] This can be viewed as another example of post-traumatic growth, as in the later cases involving the death of his mother and his years in New York.

[77] See, for example, Joshi (2013a: 303-304).

[78] This involved chronic fatigue, headaches, digestive trouble, dizziness, blurred vision, irregular heartbeat, etc. See Lovecraft (2003b: 14, 18; 2007b: 125). He also, by his own account, nearly died from the measles at age 19, see Lovecraft (2018: 55).

[79] See Lovecraft (2016a: 157) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011b: 583).

due to feelings of shame over his failure, further exacerbated by an apparent aimlessness as to what he was going to do with his life.

One can therefore conjecture that his health issues during these years were rooted in depression combined with an unhealthy lifestyle that revolved around overeating, lack of exercise, and sleeping during the day.[80] The overeating had been urged on him by his mother, "to counteract my lack of an active appetite,"[81] and it seems likely that this lack of appetite in turn had its origin in his depressive episodes. The main support for this hypothesis lies in the fact that Lovecraft's health suddenly improved dramatically during the years around 1920 when his mother was in hospital and he finally began to assert his own independence.[82] At this time he also began to be more physically active, travelling to gatherings of amateur writers and visiting amateur colleagues, and doing some walking and hiking.[83] The pattern repeated itself during his subsequent marriage and New York years, when his wife Sonia disliked his "gaunt" look and set about to change it,[84] but then Sonia had to move to Cincinnati to find work in 1925 and Lovecraft immediately seized the opportunity for a campaign of "reducing."[85] From now on, Lovecraft apparently ate only twice a day for the rest of his life, and this sparse diet combined with vigorous and extensive nature walks and travelling, which started up in earnest after his return to Providence from New York, suggests a strong likelihood that he went too far in the other direction and became malnourished towards the end of his life. As for Lovecraft's notorious sensitivity to cold,[86] a likely explanation would seem to involve poor blood circulation.

2.1.3. Self-Imposed Isolation

Not much is known about Lovecraft's activities during the years from 1908 to 1913. There were some apparent attempts at continuing his

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80 See Lovecraft (2007b: 67, 72, 106, 125; 2015e: 221) for statements that clearly suggest his having suffered from depressive symptoms, particularly in the early decades of his life.

81 See Lovecraft (2016b: 67). See also Lovecraft (2016a: 167-168).

82 See Lovecraft (2005d: 223; 2016a: 46; 2018: 303-304).

83 "I am sure that [my walking] does much to prevent me from lapsing into the semi-invalidism of my 1908-1920 period," Lovecraft (2016b: 51) said in 1931, adding that he had not been able to do much long-distance walking prior to 1924.

84 See Davis (1998: 258) and Joshi (2013a: 516).

85 See Lovecraft (2016a: 167-168). Lovecraft described himself as having been "uncomfortably fat" during this time, a statement that finds support in some surviving photographs from the 1920s.

86 See Lovecraft (2015e: 44). He was also hypersensitive to bad odours and loud noises, see Lovecraft (2016b: 190).

earlier interests, mainly chemistry: "Between 1909 & 1912 I tried to perfect myself as a chemist,"[87] but in the end he seems to have decided that he was going to be a poet. In later years he came to regard this as a mistake, lamenting his "changeable dilettantism" in a letter in 1927,[88] and in the same context mentioning how he at age eighteen had "turned to poetry & criticism" after previous periods devoted first to fantasy and then to science. He published poems in local newspapers on occasion, but in later years he came to view this early work as almost entirely without merit, as his opinions on poetry changed dramatically towards the end of the 1920s. During the years 1911 to 1914, he sometimes wrote letters to his favourite pulp magazines, most notably *The Argosy*, and in 1913 he became involved in a controversy over the romance pulp writer Fred Jackson (later a noted playwright and screenwriter), whom he had strongly criticised, which led to his being invited into the amateur journalism movement.[89]

2.1.4. Amateur Journalism

Lovecraft joined the United Amateur Press Association (UAPA) in April 1914, a few months prior to the outbreak of World War I. Several pieces of his early amateur writing are thus concerned with the war (mostly war poems and some essays), and in them he displayed a strongly militaristic and pro-British attitude. Lovecraft's immaturity and provincial outlook, a natural consequence of his sheltered upbringing and self-imposed withdrawal from the world, became potent ammunition for his adversaries, but he soon gathered a good deal more friends than enemies once his literary gifts were recognised within the small world of amateur journalism. He also had ambitious ideas on the purpose of amateur journalism, and within a short period of time he became the de facto leader of a "literary" faction of the UAPA. He served in several capacities – president, official editor, chairman of the public criticism department – and over the coming years the entire UAPA came to be known informally as the "Lovecraft United."[90]

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87 See Lovecraft (2005d: 63).
88 See Lovecraft (2015f: 81).
89 See Murray (2011) for details.
90 See Cook (1998: 142). The UAPA was formed in 1895 when it split from the National Amateur Press Association (NAPA), which was the first amateur press association in America, still in existence today. The UAPA then had a schism of its own in 1912, splitting into two groups referred to as the United Amateur Press Association and the United Amateur Press Association of America, respectively, the former being the Lovecraft United. See Joshi (2013a: 160-161) for additional details.

The United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, and Lovecraft's immediate reaction was to attempt enlistment in the Rhode Island National Guard without informing his mother. He passed his cursory physical examination, and if not for the subsequent intervention of his mother and the family doctor, which caused the enlistment to be annulled, he might have served out the war safely with the coast artillery in Boston. The Selective Service Act of 1917 went into effect in May, and Lovecraft registered for the draft on June 5, as he was legally obliged to do. His questionnaire arrived in December, and he had hoped to put himself in a class where he could at least do clerical work, but on the advice of the head physician of the local draft board (who was also a friend of the family) he placed himself in the lowest category instead, as "totally and permanently unfit."[91] As he noted at the time, "It is not flattering to be reminded of my utter uselessness twice within the space of six months, but the war is a great exposer of human failings & inefficiency."[92] But it was also at this time, in the summer of 1917, that he commenced his fiction writing career with "The Tomb" and "Dagon," the latter of which was set during the war.

What little income Lovecraft was earning in the final years prior to the 1920s came from revising work that he was offered through his growing network of amateur colleagues, but this, coupled with his dwindling inheritance, was not enough for him to support himself. His uncle, Edwin E. Phillips, died in November 1918, and not long after, in January the next year, Lovecraft wrote in a letter that his mother had gone to visit his aunt Lillian "for purposes of complete rest."[93] At this time Susie Lovecraft had already shown signs of mental deterioration for at least a decade (the extent to which there were underlying reasons other than the strain of financial worries is unclear),[94] and she was eventually admitted to Butler Hospital in March 1919. Lovecraft did not react well to this turn of events,[95] but in the end these difficult times became the necessary impetus for his first steps on the path to maturity and independence.

Lovecraft's mother died in Butler Hospital on May 24, 1921, of unexpected complications after a routine gall bladder operation, and the initial impact of this loss on Lovecraft was equalled only by the death of

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91 See Lovecraft (2005d: 108-109, 123). See also Joshi (2013a: 223-224, 277, 300-301) for additional details.

92 See Lovecraft (2005d: 123).

93 See Lovecraft (2005d: 154).

94 See Scott (1998: 15-16) and Joshi (2013a: 301-302).

95 "Melancholy at times seems oppressive" (Lovecraft 2005d: 155).

his grandfather in 1904.[96] But, although he remained in a state of grief and shock for a while, he soon recovered, adopting a calm and resigned attitude to the unavoidability of what had happened. He travelled a little, responding to an invitation to visit a female amateur colleague in New Hampshire on the insistence of his aunts, and in the end he pulled through remarkably quickly after Susie's death, being back to normal within a few weeks.[97] Less than two months later, at the NAPA convention in Boston, he met Sonia Haft Greene for the first time. Sonia was a Jewish immigrant divorcee of Ukrainian origin, seven years older than Lovecraft, and she appears to have been the driving force behind the romance that slowly developed over the coming years.[98] But it was not until March 1924 that marriage was eventually decided on, with the additional consequence of Lovecraft's move to New York. Prior to that he embarked on his career as a professional writer with the publication of "Herbert West – Reanimator" in a cheap, semi-professional magazine in 1922. He also made occasional longer trips out of Rhode Island, seeing New York for the first time and spending a month in Cleveland in the summer of 1922,[99] where he met the poet Hart Crane and began a life-long correspondence with fellow writer Clark Ashton Smith (who lived in California). In December came his discovery of Marblehead, Massachusetts, with its unspoiled colonial antiquities, the sight of which had a deeply transformative effect on him,[100] serving to inspire much of his subsequent antiquarian travelling in later years.

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[96] "Psychologically I am conscious of a vastly increased aimlessness & inability to be interested in events; a phenomenon due partly to the fact that much of my former interest in things lay in discussing them with my mother & securing her views & approval […] For some time I was unable to dress or be about – the shock affected my throat & motor nerves so that I could not eat much, or stand & walk with ease" (Lovecraft 2005d: 207). "For my part, I do not think I shall wait for a natural death; since there is no longer any particular reason why I should exist. During my mother's lifetime I was aware that voluntary euthanasia on my part would cause her distress, but it is now possible for me to regulate the term of my existence with the assurance that my end would cause no one more than a passing annoyance" (Lovecraft 2014a: 364).

[97] Years later, looking back on this time, Lovecraft (2016b: 39) suggested that the death of his mother had been a liberating experience for him in some strange way. He also made the same veiled suggestion in "The Thing on the Doorstep," see Lovecraft (2015c: 328).

[98] This is indirectly suggested in her own memoirs, see Davis (1985, 1998).

[99] See Lovecraft (2018: 84, 91-92) for a description of his positive first impressions of New York.

[100] See Lovecraft (2011b: 222). This was the "high tide of my life," as he put it.

2.1.5. Marriage and New York

Several suggestions have been offered with respect to Lovecraft's motivations for getting married and embarking on his New York adventure in 1924,[101] but it seems the most likely answer is one that is rarely entertained: namely, that Lovecraft moved to New York to start a new life by becoming a writer.[102] This was the Roaring Twenties, when several of the friends that Lovecraft made at this time also arrived in the city with similar goals in mind, and Lovecraft had recently experienced some notable success in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. And, it should be remembered, Sonia was at this time a well-to-do Manhattan executive in the garment industry, which meant that money was not an immediate concern. Also, since Lovecraft was at this point deeply immersed in his aesthetic decadent phase (more on which in Chapter 5), it meant that New York was the only place where he could realistically find an outlet for his artistic aspirations. Obviously he had no ambitions in the Greenwich Village direction, but he was rather hoping for literary work via connections,[103] with the prospect of a regular and salaried position a seemingly realistic possibility, and his letters at the time are tinged with obvious optimism.

But the situation changed drastically only a few months later. Sonia had lost (or given up) her well-paid job at a Manhattan clothing store, and she then unsuccessfully tried to start her own hat shop. Lovecraft's modest job prospects had also come to nothing, and he was now reduced to answering want ads and going around the city on a humiliating quest for work of any kind, but without success. Sonia then took ill and had to leave for a while to rest, but eventually she found work in Cincinnati (and later in Cleveland), meaning that she had to give up her large apartment in Brooklyn. On December 31, 1924, Lovecraft moved to a seedy one-room apartment on Clinton Street near Red Hook and began the next phase of his life as a bachelor in all but name. By now he had given up trying to find work, and was instead spending most of his time with friends (this was the heyday of

101 See Joshi (2013a: 496).

102 See Lovecraft (1965: 321-322), Eddy (1998: 56), and Davis (1998: 256-257). See also Orton (2010: 53): "Two years ago he tried to exist in New York for the sake of his literary labors, but gave it up as a bad job."

103 Lovecraft, with the help of Sonia and *Weird Tales* editor Edwin Baird, had been put in touch with an editor named Gertrude Tucker at a literary agency known as The Reading Lamp, see Lovecraft (1965: 303; 2005c: 53). He was apparently commissioned to write a non-fiction book, but nothing came of this project, see Joshi (2013a: 505-506).

the Kalem Club),[104] walking around New York late at night on a quest for antiquarian sights, and sometimes not arriving home until early in the morning. It was during this period that Lovecraft developed his hatred of the city and its people, and the despair frequently evinced in his letters at this time makes for sobering reading.[105]

2.1.6. Final Decade

Eventually, in April 1926, it was arranged for Lovecraft to return home to Providence.[106] His happiness at being home again cannot be overstated,[107] even if it meant that his marriage would have to be dissolved, despite his evident reluctance on gentlemanly grounds to agree to this.[108] Divorce proceedings were finally initiated in 1929, but were never finalised since Lovecraft did not sign the final decree. When Sonia later remarried, she unwittingly committed bigamy.

The final decade of Lovecraft's life was at first characterised by a deliberate return to his roots, but the Great Depression caused a decisive overturn of his opinions and attitudes in political and social matters within a few years. Other developments included his steadily increasing correspondence and consequent gaining of notable new friends and colleagues, beginning with August Derleth and Donald Wandrei in 1926; his embrace of a more contemporary style in writing and his abandoning of his old poetic principles in the late 1920s; his extensive travels up and down the Atlantic seaboard, ranging as far afield as Quebec in the north and the Florida Keys in the south; and his poverty necessitating a move to cheaper quarters in 1933, on 66 College Street next to the John Hay Library at Brown University, in a building almost dating back to colonial times that became his final home. He also continued his long antiquarian walks (which he had begun in New York) in and around Providence during the summers when the weather permitted, discovering new sights up until the last few months before his death.

On a less positive note was the passing of his elder aunt Lillian in 1932, and several deaths among his friends. The overall situation took a sharp turn for the worse in the early months of 1936, beginning with a

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[104] The Kalem Club consisted of Lovecraft and some of his closest friends, and was so named because the surnames of the initial members all started with the letters K, L, or M (see Kleiner 1998a: 190). The Kalems met weekly at each other's rooms or in cheap cafeterias, and spent the evenings and nights in lengthy discussions.

[105] See, for example, Lovecraft (2005c: 168).

[106] See Lovecraft (2005c: 283, 288, 290-291).

[107] See Lovecraft (1968: 45-49) and Cook (1998: 116-117).

[108] See Davis (1998: 261-262).

bout of the "grippe" (a term for the flu) that Lovecraft suffered from, although it is possible that this was instead a symptom of his cancer in its advancing stages, and if he had seen a doctor at this time maybe his life could have been saved, but his finances and aversion to hospitals ensured that his symptoms remained undiagnosed until it was too late. The botched publication of *At the Mountains of Madness* (following its unexpected acceptance, see Chapter 6) in the spring dampened his mood further, as he gradually discovered the extent of the editorial manhandling of the text while ineffectually trying to amend some corrected copies,[109] at the same time as his aunt Annie had to undergo surgery for breast cancer, on top of which came the news in June that his friend and colleague Robert E. Howard had committed suicide. The remainder of Lovecraft's life, now to be counted in months, was largely spent on ill-paid and futile revision work and on his correspondence. He entered Butler Hospital on 10 March, 1937, after having been informed of his terminal illness late in February. "Sometimes the pain is unbearable,"[110] he said to a visiting friend, in reference to his medical condition, two days before his death early in the morning on 15 March.

2.2. Historical Overview

This part of the chapter will consist of three sections. The first will present the actual historical overview, the second will say something about Lovecraft's attitude concerning social change, and the third will elaborate briefly on certain societal attitudes having to do with such matters as race, degeneration theory, immigration, eugenics, Anglo-Saxonism, and physical anthropology. A background discussion such as this is necessary, in my view, given Lovecraft's negative association with some of these subjects in recent years.

2.2.1. A Sense of the Past

A historical-biographical analysis requires the scholar to "cultivate a sense of the past,"[111] and the following brief overview is intended as a refresher in the furtherance of this aim. In very general terms, then, the transcontinental railroads in combination with various new technological developments (steel, electricity, oil) facilitated a long-lasting era of

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109 See, for example, Lovecraft (1992b: 81-82), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 384-385), and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 737).
110 Quoted in Joshi and Schultz (2001: 25).
111 See Altick and Fenstermaker (1993: 135-154).

economic development that transformed America from agrarianism to the urban industrialisation of the twentieth century.[112] The industrialisation boom was financed by new investment banks, and the new industries obviously required workers, which resulted in people migrating from the country to the city, while trans-Atlantic steamships (now replacing sail) made a great increase in immigration possible, with new immigrants consequently arriving in large numbers. At the same time, the aftermath of the civil war and the failure of Reconstruction resulted in a dysfunctional social environment characterised by deteriorating race relations between whites and blacks (following the idealistically hopeful attitudes in the early days of Reconstruction), the repercussions of which are still felt in American society today. The early decades of Lovecraft's life coincided with a period commonly known as the "nadir of American race relations,"[113] which lasted into the 1920s and which involved such nationwide elements as violent race riots and lynchings, racial segregation and Jim Crow laws, and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan.

With respect to immigration, there were enduring concerns over integration due to the newcomers being markedly distinct on ethnic, cultural, and linguistic grounds, with the further difficulty of the "melting pot" idea being opposed by those who favoured so-called racial purity. The two premier hotspots in this context were California (Asian immigrants) and New York (Jewish and Slavic immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia, and Latin immigrants from southern Europe), although there were large immigrant communities in most of the major cities. With millions of people arriving every year, it was inevitable that disease, crime, and poverty followed in their wake,[114] with the explosively growing cities

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[112] The romanticised view of America's agrarian past that was common around the turn of the 20th century, and that was also sometimes echoed by Lovecraft (although in reality he looked further back still, to an equally romanticised English country squire ideal), was famously labelled "the agrarian myth" by Hofstadter (1955a). It gave birth to a short-lived populist movement (centred on the People's Party and the Farmers' Alliance), which gained momentum after a brief economic depression in the mid-1890s, but it soon collapsed after the 1896 election.

[113] See, for example, Loewen (2005). The term was originally coined by Logan (1954). See also Southern (1968) and Katznelson (2013) for examinations of the negative racial attitudes that remained an integral part of the political and social reform movements in the early 1900s.

[114] "Tuberculosis, typhoid fever, and other diseases took a fearful toll in teeming, unsanitary immigrant slums" (Boyer 2012: 64). "Unskilled workers often lived in abject poverty. For many immigrant workers, American industry was better than the conditions they had left; for others it became a motive for returning home" (White 2017: 675). "As New York's Lexow investigation during the 1890s documented, bosses tolerated and even colluded in police graft and organized crime" (Cocks et al. 2009: 55).

unable to handle the influx at first. Demographic change in turn led to the rise of bosses and corrupt political machines (exposed by muckrakers), and labour unrest and anarchist agitation (strikers against strikebreakers, workers against the new immigrants: the unions and labour organisations tended to favour restricted immigration). The poor working conditions with consequent safety concerns for both workers and consumers (also exposed by muckrakers) sparked many of the calls for reform that characterised the Progressive Era, which culminated in a notable increase in government regulation in the form of anti-trust legislation and worker-protection laws, but also anti-immigration acts.

In the scientific world,[115] always of consuming interest to Lovecraft, important achievements in the early decades of the 1900s ranged across the spectrum from revolutionary advances in astronomy (Leavitt's discovery of Cepheid variables, Hubble's discovery of other galaxies, Lemaître's theory of the expansion of the universe) and theoretical physics (Planck's constant, Einstein's special and general theory of relativity, the Rutherford-Bohr model of the atom, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle) to such other developments as the first radiometric dating of the earth (still at this time off by more than two billion years), the Chamberlin-Moulton model describing the formation of the solar system (later discredited), Wegener's continental drift theory, Freud's psychoanalysis and Watson's school of behaviourism in psychology, and the archaeological excavations of such classic sites as the palace of Knossos on Crete and Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt. The upshot of all this activity, in combination with the new technological progress, was a general feeling of cultural and intellectual upheaval in the Western world, steadily rising since the introduction of Darwin's theory of evolution in the 1860s, which, as will be seen in the next chapter, had a notable influence on Lovecraft's intellectual development. As a consequence of this, widespread *fin de siècle* cultural pessimism coexisted with a deep belief in scientific and technological progress,[116]

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[115] Some useful overviews and reference works on the history of science include Geller (2005), Morus (2017), Pickover (2018), Winston (2013), and Bunch and Hellemans (2004).

[116] See Teich and Porter (1990), although the essays in this volume are mostly concerned with a European perspective. See also Hurley (1996) and Schaffer and Wolfson (2007) for some discussions of the *fin de siècle* in the context of literature and the Gothic from a mostly British perspective. A minor field of "*fin de siècle* studies" emerged in the 1990s, with some useful overviews including Marshall (2008) and Stokes (1992). The term *fin de siècle* is mostly associated with France and Britain, but also extends to the larger English-speaking world, particularly the United States, given the close links between America and England.

based in large part on an overoptimistic faith in scientific expertise. Lovecraft, who always looked to the past, embraced the pessimism but rejected the progressivism of the cultural milieu in which he grew up, and he did not change his mind on the latter aspect until the final years of his life in the 1930s.[117]

2.2.2. Change

The time period encompassed by Lovecraft's life was one that saw tremendous change on many fronts: political, social, economic, scientific, and technological. The 1890s was the final decade of the so-called Gilded Age of rapid economic growth, and it was also the beginning of the Progressive Era that lasted into the 1920s, with the Republicans in power under the so-called Fourth Party System until the 1932 election – except for the interval of the Wilson presidency (when Roosevelt split the Republican vote against Taft). The Progressive Era culminated in the Roaring Twenties (or the Jazz Age), which ended in the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the Great Depression in the 1930s, which brought FDR and the New Deal into power. As can be seen from most of these terms, this was a time of wide-reaching expansion and development, which was given a further boost by the jingoistic Spanish-American War in 1898, which set the United States on the imperialist path to becoming a political and military superpower in the twentieth century.[118]

The element of dramatic change is the key component in the developments in society outlined briefly in the following paragraphs (as a means of viewing a larger contextual background for Lovecraft's life). It is important to remember that, for Lovecraft, change was above all else

[117] Late in life, in connection with the 1936 presidential election in which Roosevelt was re-elected, Lovecraft (2007b: 369) commented on "the woebegone state of the staid reactionary reliques with whom I am surrounded," at a time when he had himself left reactionary politics behind in favour of becoming a Roosevelt supporter.

[118] Some useful general overviews of American history include Boyer (2012), Davidson (2015), Grant (2012), Lepore (2018), and Remini (2008), among others (the relevant time period is covered by Chapters 5-7 in Boyer, Chapters 29-32 in Davidson, Chapters 8-9 in Grant, the Chapters in part 3 in Lepore, and Chapters 7-8 in Remini). Overviews that focus specifically on the relevant time period include Piott (2011), Sklar (1992), Nichols and Unger (2017), Chapters 1-12 in Kennedy (1999), and Chapters 4-12 in Painter (2008). I have also made use of some relevant entries in volumes 6-8 in Nash (2010), the chronologies in Cocks et al. (2009) and Trager (2006), as well as various entries in Johnson (2017), Link and Link (2012), and Perry and Smith (2006). Other relevant works include Hofstadter (1955a) and McClymer (2009). For a history of the pulp magazines, see Agnew (2018).

the great enemy.[119] His negative reaction to societal and cultural changes was for this reason remarkably strong and frequently emphasised in his writings – the following illustrative example is from 1933 (emphasis in the original):

> Everything really satisfying in life is the result of *stability & continuity* – since, outside the narrow radius of crude sensation, virtually nothing has any interest or meaning apart from the associations twined around it through generations of racial experience. That is why the machine age tends so greatly to impoverish life – by removing us from our hereditary adjustment to the landscape, the seasons, the agricultural cycle, the acts of daily life & industry, & the familiar concepts of distance dependent upon transportational speed. Change sets us down in an alien world where experiences mean nothing to us because they form no part of any pattern we know. Thus change is, in the long run, intrinsically undesirable despite the transient thrills of pleasant novelty which certain minor manifestations of it bring. (Lovecraft 2019: 322)

To put this into perspective, consider the following contrast. When Lovecraft was born in 1890, the United States consisted of 42 states, and people travelled by horse-drawn carriage or steam train, with the Old West of the American frontier still lingering in the western territories. When Lovecraft died in 1937, the United States consisted of 48 states (Alaska and Hawaii did not become states until 1959) and the nation had been transformed by electricity and oil, with some of the changes occurring during the preceding decades being in some ways even more rapid and dramatic than the technological advances of the present.

Notable examples of technological innovation include the introduction of motion pictures, subway trains, snapshot cameras, heavier-than-air aircraft, radio transmissions, Ford's moving assembly line in automotive production, and the earliest experimental beginnings of television. Equally transformative developments occurred in society overall, with some illustrative examples – sometimes elaborated on by Lovecraft in his discussions with correspondents over the years – including pulp magazines and yellow journalism, comic strips and crossword puzzles, professional sports for both teams and individual athletes, ice-less soda fountains and cafeterias, new food items and brands, and much else

[119] See Evans (2005: 100), who suggests that "[m]uch horror literature is predicated upon feelings of insecurity brought about by cultural change." And in Lovecraft's case, it is certainly true that his ideas about personal self-expression rooted in the past (to be explored in the chapters that follow) constitute a rejection of modernity.

besides. This was the time of the robber barons or the captains of industry, with antitrust laws and muckraker exposés, but also philanthropy and charitable endowments. Other social issues concerned the rise of Christian fundamentalism (famously represented by the Scopes Monkey Trial) in opposition to theological and cultural modernism, and the rise of organised crime in the wake of mass immigration and ethnic segregation in the big cities, further aggravated by such notorious legal measures as Prohibition, with the 1930s in particular being the so-called public enemy era.

2.2.3. Social Environment

The long-established social environment of the educated upper middle class in America around the turn of the twentieth century was markedly different in some important aspects from the modern world that began to emerge after World War II. Racial hierarchies were taken for granted and accepted as natural and self-evident,[120] gender roles were traditional and women still did not have the right to vote,[121] genetics did not yet exist as a science nor was the role of DNA a clearly understood concept in

120 See, for example, Barkan (1992: 2-3). These attitudes extended far beyond the standard notion of white supremacy in the Western world, as can be seen in such concepts as the age-old sinocentrism of China, traditional xenophobia and isolationism in Japan, and the ideas advocated by various forerunners to black nationalism, most notably W. E. B. Du Bois (best known for his intra-racial "talented tenth" ideas, but see Chapter 6 in Herman 1997) and Marcus Garvey. Compare also with the ideas of pan-African thinkers such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, who argued that slavery had created a superior African people that could now create its own modern civilisation in Africa, separate from whites and other blacks: "The liberated slave was at an advantage over the indigenous African as long as he retained the 'purity' of his race without 'mixture of his blood'" (Kanneh 1998: 62). Nation of Islam founder Wallace Fard Muhammad's bizarre Afrocentrist belief (still current today), according to which the evil white race was created in a breeding experiment by a black scientist named Yakub thousands of years ago, was another product of this time, see Dorr and Logan (2011: 69).

121 The 19th amendment gave women the right to vote on August 26, 1920. Prior to that, first-wave feminism began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, followed by the New Woman movement in the late 19th century and the militant suffragettes in the early 20th century, among similar movements. But these developments had little impact on the socially conservative environment in which Lovecraft grew up, despite the high life of the wealthy social elite in the so-called "gay nineties" (prior to the later economic difficulties of the family). See, for example, Lovecraft (2005d: 67), in which he talks about his aunt Annie having at that time been "a favourite in the younger social set," who "brought the principal touch of gayety [sic] to a rather conservative household."

biology,[122] the theory of evolution was incomplete and there was a resulting ruthless moral misapplication of the idea of the "survival of the fittest" in the form of social Darwinism and eugenics,[123] and traditional isolationism in combination with rising nativism in response to mass immigration was leading to increasing xenophobia and heightened anti-immigration attitudes.[124] It is against this background that Lovecraft combined his cultural pessimism with some ideas derived from physical anthropology, which, in further combination with the strong social conservatism of his New England environment and heritage, contributed to shaping some of his reactionary views on race, class, and society.

2.2.3.1. Race

To elaborate briefly, race in the modern sense of the term did not exist as a concept in the English-speaking world prior to the nineteenth century. In early Victorian times a race was simply a group, it could be as small as a clan or a family and it did not have to have common descent. A race could thus be, and frequently was, based on class or even occupation.[125] In fact, the term "racist" in its present-day negative sense did not come about until well into the 1930s, in response to the Nazi racial ideology coming out of Germany.[126] The term "racialist," although now dated, was the one current in Lovecraft's time, and it served as a label for the belief that the human species is divided into a number of biologically separate races that are clearly distinct from each other not merely in appearance but also according to ability and inclination. This did not necessarily imply ranking, but it was probably inevitable that racial hierarchies would soon follow from the racial typologies that had first appeared in the anatomical works of Blumenbach and Cuvier.

Ultimately, the origin of discrimination based on skin colour (particularly in its anti-black variety) went back to such economic interests as the Arab and trans-Atlantic slave trades.[127] In France racist ideologies arose partly in response to the Haitian Revolution, and in America similar ideas were developed as a justification for continued

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[122] The modern era of genetics began in the first decade of the 1900s, see footnote 141. The new scientific insights that were gained eventually culminated in the modern synthesis in the theory of evolution in the 1930s and 1940s. The molecular structure of DNA was not determined until 1953.

[123] See, for example, Hofstadter (1955b), Bannister (1979), Kevles (1986), and Dowbiggin (2003).

[124] See, for example, Higham (1988).

[125] See Beasley (2010: 2).

[126] See Barkan (1992: 2-3).

[127] See Beasley (2010: 12), Lewis (1992: 22-26, 40-53), and Sweet (1997).

slavery in opposition to the abolitionist movement.[128] The motivation for this way of thinking increased further around the middle of the nineteenth century, as a counter-reaction to the revolutionary unrest at the time, which led to the publishing of a number of influential writings on race, particularly the notorious work by Gobineau. At the core of the hierarchical view lay the old idea that racial types were fixed and deterministic in how they shaped human culture, combined with a new idea that miscegenation had caused irreversible degeneration, which is why the end of civilisation was no longer avoidable.[129]

2.2.3.2. Degeneration Theory

The basic concept behind degeneration theory was formulated by the French psychiatrist Bénédict Morel in a treatise in 1857. Essentially, degeneration theory was the Lamarckian idea that negative characteristics acquired from the environment could be passed on and expressed as regularly worsening disorders in the next generation, which resulted in a steadily accumulating generational decline through tainted heredity.[130] Morel's work was built on ideas developed in the 1840s and 1850s in response to deteriorating societal conditions in France, ideas that had also informed the thinking of Gobineau, and that had some conceptual similarities to the philosophical pessimism of Schopenhauer and others at the time, and with the decadent art movements that followed later in the century. Notable proponents of similar ideas included the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who argued that some people were "born criminal," and that criminality was a biologically determined inherited trait that represented an atavistic regression to a more primitive type.[131]

In England, the zoologist Ray Lankester tried to combine degeneration theory with Darwinism, the worry about degeneration being a rising concern in the British Empire at the time, particularly after early defeats in the Boer War, which, in combination with eugenic thinking, led to talk about race suicide unless drastic measures were taken to reverse the decline.[132] The psychiatrist Henry Maudsley was another notable advocate of similar ideas, which he developed in his 1883 work *Body and Will*, in which he argued that degeneration was not

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[128] See Beasley (2010: 12-14).

[129] See Spiro (2009: 103-106) and the entry on Gobineau in Cashmore (1996) for more details.

[130] See Nye (1984: 121).

[131] See Nye (1984: 99-100).

[132] See Dowbiggin (2003: 72-73).

an ultimately self-annihilating force (as Morel had suggested), but a regressive process that counteracted evolution and thus led to so much accumulated bad heredity that civilisation itself was now threatened.[133] Degeneration theory was also the animating idea behind Max Nordau's very popular book *Entartung* in 1892 (translated into English as *Degeneration* in 1895), in which Nordau extended the concept of degeneration into cultural criticism, mainly in the form of attacks on *fin de siècle* art and spiritualism in France. At the same time, Freud was developing his psychoanalytical ideas as a direct response to degeneration theory, although psychoanalysis obviously had a significant range of problematic aspects of its own.

In the United States, the studies on the Jukes and Kallikak families (the names were pseudonyms) were another symptom of the preoccupation with degeneration at this time, with the psychologist Henry H. Goddard, who had introduced the Binet-Simon intelligence tests from France in 1908, being responsible for a newly-invented scale of "feeble-mindedness" (this being a catch-all term for mental deficiency). Its gradations ranged from idiot to imbecile to moron, the latter term having been coined by Goddard himself from a Greek word for stupid. Goddard was also involved in the World War I army intelligence tests in 1917, which were utilised to evaluate and sort the draftees according to ability. These tests had been designed by a team of psychologists under the leadership of Robert Yerkes, other members of the group included Lewis Terman and Carl Brigham (who later created the SAT).[134] Brigham published a book, *A Study of American Intelligence*, in 1923, in which he used the army intelligence tests to support the contention of the time that the average intelligence of immigrants was declining. He argued that the so-called Alpine and Mediterranean races were intellectually inferior to the Nordics,[135] and also that the average black person had the mental age of a ten-year-old.[136] In 1930, however, the field of intelligence studies had advanced enough for Brigham to be able to conclude that many earlier studies, including his own, were groundless. Goddard, similarly, had retracted most of his earlier theories by the 1920s, as new insights from genetics and the realisation that earlier methods had been deeply

133 See Dowbiggin (2003: 82).

134 Terman had created the Stanford-Binet IQ test the year before. He also introduced "IQ" into the English language, the concept having been invented by the German psychologist William Stern in 1912. See Kevles (1986: 79) and Chapter 10 in Chase (1977).

135 See the comments on William Z. Ripley and Madison Grant later in this chapter.

136 See Kevles (1986: 82-83) and Chapters 10 and 11 in Chase (1977).

flawed had made this development unavoidable.[137] But the damage had been done by that time, and the so-called "menace of the feeble-minded" had played its part both in contributing to the emergence of the eugenics movement and in fuelling the nativistic anti-immigration fervour that was then at its height.

2.2.3.3. Immigration

Prior to the 1880s, the United States had been mostly welcoming to immigrants, who were needed in the steady expansion of the western frontier, and who were readily assimilated since they were ethnically, culturally, and linguistically similar to the earlier settlers. But this attitude changed in the final two decades of the 1800s with the mass arrival of the new immigrants, for reasons that mainly involving the three elements of radicalism, race, and religion.[138] The Haymarket riot in Chicago in 1886, in the midst of an economic recession and in the wake of police brutality against striking workers, revealed the danger of European radicalism in a dramatic manner when an anarchist terrorist attack resulted in the deaths of at least ten people.[139] The anarchists convicted of the attack were mostly German-born immigrants, but the threat of anarchist terrorism was henceforth mostly associated with the new immigrants, such as the Italian anarchist Luigi Galleani and his followers. Other examples include Alexander Berkman (a Russian Jew who tried to assassinate the industrialist Henry Clay Frick in 1892) and Leon Czolgosz (an anarchist of Polish descent who assassinated president William McKinley in 1901). The third element, religion, centred on the new immigrants being mostly Catholic – as had been the case with the Irish some decades earlier – with popular conspiracy theories about popish plots to conquer America circulating for a while, although this soon subsided without major incident. This way of thinking was also linked to the rising American nationalism and jingoism of the 1890s, which culminated in the brief Spanish-American War in 1898.

Additionally, popular anti-immigration attitudes stemmed from the view that the United States had become a dumping ground for European defectives and undesirables. This was an idea tied to the eugenic misconception that a disproportionate amount of immigrants were insane or feeble-minded and thus more likely to become dependents and public wards who had to be housed in asylums, almshouses, and prisons, meaning they would become a drain on the public purse. The perceived

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137 See Kevles (1986: 78-79, 148) and Dowbiggin (2003: 74-75, 101).
138 See Chapters 3 and 4 in Higham (1988).
139 See Avrich (1984).

link between immigrants and mental illness, in the early decades of the 1900s (after which it was discredited), meant that it was not just nativists but also eugenicists and public health authorities who wanted limits on immigration and added resources for medical inspections before immigrants were allowed to enter the country. Working to oppose this were immigrant organisations engaged in a range of activities from lobbying to bribing corrupt politicians, steamship companies that ferried the immigrants across the Atlantic, and commercial interests that sought access to cheap labour.[140] A number of influential anti-immigration organisations came about during this time, such as the Immigration Restriction League in Boston in 1894, with the aim of limiting immigration through such popular measures as a literacy test, the end result of which was a number of legal measures that culminated in the Immigration Act of 1924. Immigration was at this point severely curtailed according to a quota system that favoured the so-called old immigrants from north-western Europe, while immigration from Asia was banned altogether.

2.2.3.4. Eugenics

The element of eugenic thinking underlying the anti-immigration acts was apparent particularly in the categories of so-called undesirables or defectives that were to be excluded, such as alcoholics, epileptics, criminals, paupers, prostitutes, radicals, anarchists, perverts, and those who were ill, insane, feeble-minded, etc. At its core, eugenic thinking was the consequence of a flawed understanding of how evolution worked. The eugenics movement was at the height of its popularity in the early decades of the twentieth century,[141] and had as its stated goal the advancement of public health through the improvement of racial

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140 See Chapter 4 in Dowbiggin (2003).

141 The eugenics movement was an important component in the wider progressive movement that also encompassed the temperance movement (culminating in Prohibition), the Social Gospel, and the social hygiene movement, all of which had their roots to some degree in Victorian ideas about social purity, but most of the underlying thinking was built on an inadequate understanding of the pertinent scientific issues. This is because a vital core component was missing – namely genetics. Gregor Mendel's path-breaking but forgotten work on heredity was rediscovered in 1900, and this was the starting point for the modern era of genetics (the term was coined in 1905). The important work that was done over the coming years led to a gradual change of scientific opinion in the 1920s, and the popularity of eugenics subsequently declined in the 1930s. At the same time, the turn against eugenics was also accelerated by the fact that eugenic thinking was becoming increasingly associated with Nazi race ideology. See Carlson (2004), Egan (2009), Evans (2017), Kevles (1986), Worth (2009), Chapters 3 and 4 in Hunt (1999), and the relevant entries in Engs (2003) for details on these various movements.

qualities, based on the limited understanding of heredity that was current at the time.

These ideas had their root in the German biologist August Weismann's pre-genetic germ plasm theory, presented in 1892, according to which the information of heredity was transmitted by human germ plasm, on which environmental influences had no impact.[142] This was an important step in the right direction, as it ruled out Lamarckian inheritance, but in a eugenic context it also led to the conviction that every (real or perceived) defect of body and mind, such as illness, deformity, mental deficiency, non-conformist behaviour, even poverty and criminality, was the unavoidable consequence of tainted heredity. This defective germ plasm would persist and accumulate from generation to generation, which necessitated the carriers of it having to be kept out of the country and prevented from procreating. This was combined with the social Darwinist idea that natural selection was being thwarted by charity and public health institutions. In consequence, this argument ran, the unfit and the defective were no longer weeded out to the extent they had been in the past. Furthermore, the proponents of such views held that the lower classes were not only reproducing faster than the so-called elite but also producing proportionally more of the unfit in every generation. Hardcore eugenicists "truly believed that the United States was at a biological crossroads" at this time,[143] and newspapers "frequently published articles on eugenics and a steadily increasing number of such articles appeared in popular magazines."[144]

The eugenics movement sought to achieve its aims in part through the encouragement of selective breeding, but more often through the legislative prevention of those labelled unfit from producing offspring (positive and negative eugenics, respectively). This was to be accomplished through such measures as forced sterilisation and segregation in wards of the disabled and the mentally handicapped, restrictive marriage laws and the maintenance of colour lines against miscegenation, anti-immigration laws and selective immigration, and so on. There was much concern over the problem of differential birth rates and accumulating dysgenic effects, particularly since the so-called higher classes had no financial incentive to produce offspring, with a resulting pessimistic fear that Western civilisation would eventually collapse after having been overrun by the spawn of assorted defectives that were

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142 See Dowbiggin (2003: 71).
143 See Dowbiggin (2003: 110).
144 See Kevles (1986: 58).

fatally polluting and degrading the race stock. These ideas had wide circulation in society and enjoyed significant popular and political support in the early decades of the 1900s.[145] Opposition also came from across the political spectrum, depending on what elements in the eugenics program were being opposed and under what circumstances.[146]

2.2.3.5. Anglo-Saxonism

Also relevant in this context is the nineteenth-century political and cultural ideology known as Anglo-Saxonism. This went back to Sharon Turner's *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, published in four volumes between 1799 and 1805, and was an intellectual outgrowth of the larger romantic nationalism of the time. It was thus somewhat analogous to the later *Völkisch* movement in Germany, and other similar populist reactions to modernism. The animating principle behind Anglo-Saxonism was the idea that the various English-speaking nations, America in particular, could trace the origins of their supposedly superior brand of democracy and liberty to the Germanic tribes in the forests of north-western Europe that had invaded Britain in the Dark Ages, and that this "gift for political freedom" was thus uniquely racial in origin.[147]

In the United States, this way of thinking was particularly associated with New England intellectuals, which resulted in various calls for Anglo-American alliances and English-speaking leagues and fraternities, while historians of the Anglo-Saxon school "wrote about the American Revolution as if it were a temporary misunderstanding."[148] Obviously, this view of the future of America as promoted by the Anglo-Saxonists

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[145] Eugenicists tended to be middle class, but politically they ranged across the board from establishment conservatives to firebrand radicals, see Kevles (1986: 63-64). The eugenics movement also enjoyed political backing on the very highest levels, with presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Woodrow Wilson, and Herbert Hoover all sympathetic to the cause, in addition to which there was widespread support among both suffragettes (such as Margaret Sanger and Charlotte Perkins Gilman) and black intellectuals (such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Thomas Wyatt Turner). See Kühl (2002: 16; 2013: 96), Ordover (2003: 52-53, 137-158), Dorr and Logan (2011), and Chapter 1 in Kline (2001).

[146] "The standard political interpretation that eugenics was a ruling-class, reactionary, or conservative phenomenon is no longer tenable" (Dowbiggin 2003: 237-238). Early enthusiasm for eugenics in fact tended to be highest among radicals, see Kevles (1986: 21, 85-86, 93-94). Opposition tended to come from moderates who were ideological egalitarians, and from some religious authorities, particularly Catholics. See, for example, Leon (2013). Then again, some religious leaders from different faiths embraced eugenic principles enthusiastically, see Rosen (2004). For the influence of Christianity on eugenics, see Baker (2014). See also Kevles (1986: 61).

[147] See Higham (1988: 10). This is also known as the "Teutonic germ theory." See, for example, Moreau (2003: 152).

[148] See Hofstadter (1955b: 181).

had little room for increased immigration from eastern and southern Europe, but there was nevertheless a peaceful aspect to the movement, as it advocated the further idea that a union between Britain and America would usher in a worldwide golden age of prosperity and freedom.[149] The movement soon faded away, however (although it was boosted at first by the jingoism of the Spanish-American War), particularly as a consequence of the growing isolationism that followed after World War I. The overall cultural pessimism of the time also worked against this American iteration of the white man's burden,[150] finding expression in such works as *National Life and Character* by Charles Henry Pearson in 1893 and *The Law of Civilization and Decay* by Brooks Adams in 1895.

2.2.3.6. Physical Anthropology

Anglo-Saxonism in combination with the increasing resistance against new immigration and the developing science of heredity in the 1890s led to renewed attempts to find a scientific foundation for race-based thinking, one notable example of which was the economist William Z. Ripley's *The Races of Europe* in 1899. In this work of physical anthropology, Ripley divided the people of Europe into three distinct races – Teutonic, Alpine, and Mediterranean – separate from each other on both physical and geographical grounds, based on skull measurements (long-headed and round-headed) and the so-called cephalic index.[151] Some years later, in 1908, Ripley went on to suggest that race mixing between so-called superior and inferior races led to degeneration in the superior race, this time basing his argument on early genetic experiments that had showed that hybridisation sometimes resulted in atavism, i.e., the recurrence of latent traits inherited from a remote ancestor. Thus, the ongoing race mixing in America "might produce a reversion to a primitive type,"[152] which was another reason, in addition to earlier talk of race suicide (having to do with declining birth rates, a favourite topic of Theodore Roosevelt's at this time),[153] why the new immigrants were a threat.

The culmination of this line of thinking came in the work of the lawyer and conservationist Madison Grant, who published *The Passing of the*

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[149] See Hofstadter (1955b: 181-183).
[150] See Hofstadter (1955b: 185-187).
[151] A dated concept in physical anthropology, having originated in the 1840s.
[152] See Higham (1988: 155).
[153] See Gerstle (2017: 25), Kline (2001: 11), Kühl (2002: 16), Ordover (2003: 34), and Stern (2016: 14, 145).

Great Race in 1916. Like Gobineau before him (and like Houston Stewart Chamberlain in Germany), Grant attributed the decline of the western world to unrestrained race-mixing and immigration. He subscribed to the same misapplication of heredity (or Mendelian inheritance) over environment as Ripley and others had done, according to which miscegenation always resulted in a reversion to a lower type, which was how the "great race" was now passing out of existence.[154] Grant had picked up Ripley's tripartite race division for the people of Europe, but he substituted "Nordic" for Teutonic, having adopted the new designation from the French anthropologist Joseph Deniker. Grant's work remained influential until the 1930s, by which time both eugenics and traditional physical anthropology were in steep decline.

In the 1920s there had been an ongoing heredity vs. environment battle between the anthropology departments at Harvard and Columbia – the latter led by Franz Boas, who was the founder of the new discipline of cultural anthropology. Harvard, meanwhile, represented the older physical anthropology with it roots in the theories and thinking of the previous century, centring on the classification of different human races according to typology.[155] Essentially, Boas argued that the concept of race should be scrapped due to its unscientific vagueness and the fact that it was politically dangerous, and that it should instead be replaced with a focus on culture.[156] However, Boas grounded his argument not so much in science as in an idealistic egalitarianism that had its origins in personal experience,[157] which underlined the fact that both biology and anthropology remained in a state of "methodological chaos" in the early decades of the 1900s.[158] The new geneticists had immediately come into conflict with the old biometricians in arguments over continuous vs. discontinuous variation (essentially Darwin vs. Mendel, or a continuum against discreet categories, the modern synthesis still being decades in the

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[154] See Higham (1988: 156).

[155] There was also opposition between the Columbia anthropology department under Boas and the American Eugenics Society in New York (more specifically, the exclusive Galton Society represented the strongest opposition to Boas and his students). These two centres and the American Museum of Natural History made New York the primary locus for anthropological institutions in America at this time, followed by Harvard and its affiliated Peabody Museum. A third centre (also, like Harvard, devoted to physical anthropology) existed in Washington, D.C., with the Smithsonian Institution and the Bureau of American Ethnology. See Barkan (1992: 67, 96-97).

[156] See Jackson (2001: 248).

[157] See Barkan (1992: 76-90).

[158] See Barkan (1992: 138).

future), while many scientists persisted in an orthogenetic view of evolution. This, in turn, was often allied with other popular misconceptions such as neo-Lamarckism, which counted Ernst Haeckel and the novelist Samuel Butler among its adherents, with anti-racists such as Boas also sometimes leaning in a Lamarckian direction.

Still another disagreement concerned the question of human origins. Opposed monogenetic (a single origin and common descent for all of humanity) and polygenetic (human races have evolved or been created separately) theories both had notable proponents. The "out of Africa" theory (suggested by Darwin and supported by Thomas Henry Huxley) contrasted with the "out of Asia" theory (with Haeckel and others as noteworthy advocates).[159] This state of affairs endured until the disruptions of World War II, and much of Lovecraft's life therefore coincided with a period that Julian Huxley aptly labelled "the eclipse of Darwinism,"[160] which only faded with the emergence of population genetics in the 1920s and the beginnings of the modern synthesis in the 1930s. In anthropology, at the same time, among the mainstream theories that are now discredited were such examples as hyperdiffusionism, the so-called Hamitic hypothesis, and Murray's witch-cult theory (more on which later).

The main proponent of hyperdiffusionism was the British anthropologist Grafton Elliot Smith, who argued that the cradle of humanity was Europe, and that an original Mediterranean race had occupied an area that stretched from the British Isles to Eastern Africa, in which it first rose to greatness in the civilisation of ancient Egypt.[161] From here, the diffusion of culture then occurred in gradual waves to the rest of the world. In a similar vein was the so-called Hamitic hypothesis, advocated by the British ethnologist C. G. Seligman and others,[162] according to which the earliest Egyptian civilisation had been created by

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159 It is important to note, in this context, that the "out of Africa" theory was not fully accepted by the scientific community until the middle of the century. The physical anthropologist Carleton S. Coon, for example, argued as late as 1962 for a multi-regional theory according to which there were five different human races that had evolved separately into the *Homo sapiens* stage at different times. See Jackson (2001: 247-248).

160 In his 1942 work Evolution: The Modern Synthesis.

161 See Gamble (1997: 41, 47).

162 Seligman was professor of ethnology at the London School of Economics until 1934. Bronislaw Malinowski, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, and Meyer Fortes were among his students. He attempted to apply Jungian psychoanalysis to anthropology, but was also notable for opposing Nazi racial ideology in the 1930s, when his own ideas had begun to change. See Barkan (1992: 30-34) for additional details.

white "Hamites" who had wandered down from Europe.[163] It should be noted that the men advocating these ideas were not cranks or bigots, but the respected authorities of their day (Smith was one of the "big three" in British palaeoanthropology in the early 1900s, the other two being Arthur Keith and Arthur Smith Woodward).[164] They built their theories on incomplete evidence, and were further hampered by the contradictory demands of ideology, ambition, and political bias.

2.2.4. Conclusion

This, then, is the complex background against which Lovecraft's intellectual development, to be explored in the next two chapters, took place, and his awareness of and engagement with these and other issues is clearly reflected in his letters and essays over the years.[165] He mentioned Anglo-Saxonism directly in a couple of early essays,[166] and he sometimes referred disapprovingly to the American Revolution while expressing the apparently sincere wish that the United States should be under British rule.[167] "London is the centre of our culture," he said in 1916,[168] and he did not abandon his strong Toryism, or his own idiosyncratic version of it, until the final years of his life.[169]

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[163] See Dubow (1995: 86-87), Law (2009: 293-294), and Sanders (1969). The Hamitic hypothesis was not referred to as such until the term was retroactively coined in the late 1950s.

[164] The expertise of Smith and Keith did not prevent them from accepting the validity of the Piltdown Man fossils, for example, but they used this now notorious hoax – which was not exposed until 1953 – for their own respective contradictory purposes. Over time, Smith became unyieldingly fixed on his hyperdiffusionist theory (which died with him in the late 1930s), but otherwise he emerged as something of an early egalitarian in racial matters in his opposition to Nazi race ideology. Keith, on the other hand, went in the opposite direction, basing his theory on the view that human evolution was driven by war rooted in innate tribalism. See Barkan (1992: 38-53) for a more detailed discussion of these two men and their theories.

[165] His main sources of information were newspapers, popular magazines, and books. He sometimes received articles and newspaper clippings from some of his correspondents, and his debates made him aware of subjects he needed to read up on, with consequent trips to libraries and bookshops.

[166] See Lovecraft (2006: 32-35). See also Lovecraft (ibid: 147; 2018: 49-51).

[167] Or that New England could join Canada, as he said in 1930, see Lovecraft (2011b: 255).

[168] See Lovecraft (2018: 60). And similarly in a letter in 1933: "I see no reason for departing from the usage customary at the centre of our civilisation – London" (Lovecraft 2019: 242).

[169] See footnote 322. At the same time, as American isolationism increased after World War I, so did Lovecraft's scorn for such initiatives as the League of Nations, see Lovecraft (2003b: 55-56; 2006: 35-36).

His knowledge of anthropological concepts is hinted at in a few stories (to be discussed later), and is also revealed in his usage of terms such as "Teuton" in early letters and essays, before he switched to "Nordic" in the 1920s and 1930s (scattered references to "Teutons" and "Teutonic" also continue to appear over the years). His reliance on certain anthropological authorities came more clearly to the surface in his citing of both Grafton Elliot Smith and Arthur Keith in his debates with James F. Morton in the early years of the 1930s.[170] He also made reference to authorities such as Robert Yerkes, and he explained the meaning of the newly minted term "moron" in a letter to his aunt during his years in New York.[171] Similarly, his labelling of black people as "childlike" in a letter in 1926,[172] after his return from New York, is a likely reference to the skewed results of Brigham's intelligence tests three years earlier, or it revealed his probable awareness of recapitulation theory.[173]

His stance on immigration mirrored mainstream opinion, in that he viewed the new immigrants as socially and biologically inferior, but at the same time he knew that immigration could not be stopped,[174] although he clearly supported the anti-immigration acts: "All these

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170 Lovecraft (2015b: 476) also mentioned Smith and Keith in "The Whisperer in Darkness," in a list of "standard authorities" that included Edward Burnett Tylor, John Lubbock, James George Frazer, Marcellin Boule, Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau, as well as Margaret Murray and the eugenicist Henry Fairfield Osborn. As for Morton, this was a fellow amateur journalist with whom Lovecraft had been engaged in a brief feud in 1915. A few years later the two became friends and correspondents, and Morton (as an original Kalem Club member) remained one of Lovecraft's closest associates, despite his also being a militant atheist and freethinker with consequent radical ideas about remaking society, including advocating for racial equality. Later in life, Morton, who had been notable enough in his day to be featured in *Who's Who*, converted to Bahaism and settled down to married life after securing a position as curator at the newly established Paterson Museum in New Jersey. For additional details, see the introduction by the editors in Lovecraft (2011b).

171 See Lovecraft (2005c: 267).

172 See Lovecraft (1968: 68).

173 "Common among men of learning was the conception, taken over from Haeckel's Biogenetic Law, that, since the development of the individual is a recapitulation of the development of the race, primitives must be considered as being in the arrested stages of childhood or adolescence" (Hofstadter 1955b: 193).

174 The following are some relevant statements: "In many cases, these immigrants have proved valuable accessions, and when accepting fully the ideals of the Anglo-American culture, those of them who are of North European blood have become completely amalgamated with the American people" (Lovecraft 2006: 21-22). "Immigration cannot, perhaps, be cut off altogether, but it should be understood that aliens who choose America as their residence must accept the prevailing language and culture as their own; and neither try to modify our institutions, nor to keep alive their own in our midst" (ibid: 34). "We welcome any biologically & culturally assimilable newcomers *who are willing to abide by our institutions*" (Lovecraft 2016b: 136, emphasis in the original).

restrictions are in the right direction."[175] He mentioned eugenics briefly in letters some years into the 1930s (also to be discussed later), and he occasionally made use of technical terms such as "germ-plasm," mostly in the context of his adherence to the traditional past.[176] As for degeneration theory, there is an explicit mention of "biological degeneration" in connection with the character of Joe Sargent in "The Shadow over Innsmouth."[177] In his letters and essays Lovecraft spoke of "national degeneracy" as early as 1915,[178] and this was followed by many similar comments over the years, culminating in an observation in 1934 on the "degenerate specimens" produced by old aristocratic families,[179] at a time when his political opinions had undergone some dramatic shifts.

His lifelong interest in science (to be detailed in the next chapter) also motivated his discussing, and eventually rejecting, Freud on a number of occasions, culminating in a tart dismissal in 1935 when he referred to "the eroto-monistic obsessions of the lately-popular Dr. Freud,"[180] whereas he regarded John B. Watson as "one of the soundest psychological thinkers in existence."[181] He supported the recently proposed continental drift theory: "apropos of my dragging in the Taylor-Wegener-Joly-theory of continental cleavage & drift – it gives me quite a definite pang to see by the papers that Wegener himself has virtually been pronounced lost on the Greenland ice-cap,"[182] he wrote in 1931. In "The Dreams in the Witch House" he made reference to the physicists Planck and Heisenberg (in the company of Einstein and Willem de Sitter).[183] The "recent progress of both science & archaeology is certainly staggering in the extreme,"[184] he said in 1925. In the context of archaeology, the Egyptian excavations in particular were reflected in his making a reference to "Egyptian tomb paintings" at the School of Design Museum in Providence in 1934,[185] prior to which he had seen "the actual

175 See Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 78).

176 "My instincts were formed by the functioning of a certain line of germ-plasm through a certain set of geographical and social environing conditions," he said in a letter in 1931 (Lovecraft 2010a: 149-150). By this he meant, not inaccurately, that his nature was shaped in part by his biological ancestry and in part by his cultural environment.

177 See Lovecraft (2015c: 170).

178 See Lovecraft (2006: 14; 2018: 50).

179 See Lovecraft (2019: 373).

180 See Lovecraft (2007b: 246).

181 See Lovecraft (2015f: 129).

182 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 337).

183 See Lovecraft (2015c: 234).

184 See Lovecraft (2005c: 256).

185 See Lovecraft (2019: 246).

mummy of a priest of 2700 B.C." at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1922.[186] These are but a few of the relevant examples that can be listed, and the question must now be to what extent this multifaceted social and intellectual background, as outlined above and in the next two chapters, may have influenced Lovecraft's writing.

186 See Lovecraft (2018: 86).

3. Lovecraft's Intellectual Development: Before New York

Lovecraft continued to develop his thinking throughout his life. In fact, some of the most dramatic changes in his philosophy occurred in the final years prior to his death. Another major watershed was his two years in New York, which brought major changes to some of his attitudes after his return home to Providence (to be explored in the next chapter). This chapter will begin with an overview of pre-existing scholarship, after which I will present a discussion of Lovecraft's thought and how it developed from the earliest years of his childhood until the mid-1920s. The discussion will then continue, and conclude, in the next chapter.

3.1. Overview of Earlier Scholarship

A systematic stand-alone study of Lovecraft's thinking and intellectual development as a whole has to my knowledge never been undertaken, although the outline or beginnings of such a study can be extracted from Joshi's extensive biographical work, which has partly served as the underlying framework for this chapter and the next. I disagree with several of Joshi's suggestions, however, such as his emphasis on Bertrand Russell as a significant influence on Lovecraft's thought, and it also appears that Joshi has not developed a clear concept of such details as the exact nature of the ideas that Lovecraft gained from George Santayana. Also, Joshi has seemingly made little or no attempt to contrast Lovecraft's thinking with the larger intellectual trends and movements of the time, such as degeneration theory or the cultural pessimism of the late nineteenth century.

In *H. P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West* (1990), Joshi does provide an overview of Lovecraft's philosophical developmental as applied to his fiction, but with the focus limited to certain specific elements that fall under the four subheadings of metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and politics.[187] In this study, Joshi elevates certain authorities such as Nietzsche, whose importance for Lovecraft was decisive, as will be seen in this chapter, but this is again done with little attention paid to the

[187] This book is obviously now quite dated, as it came out thirty years ago, and it is in some aspects superseded by Joshi's later biographical work. The same is true of another work of criticism by Joshi, *A Subtler Magick: The Writings and Philosophy of H. P. Lovecraft* (1996), which only gives a brief overview of Lovecraft's philosophical thinking in the first chapter before proceeding with discussions of Lovecraft's fiction.

larger intellectual trends of the time and how Lovecraft's thinking fit within those trends. The fact that Lovecraft turned to Nietzsche at the time he did so was not the result of some random impulse, but was rather a natural development given the Nietzsche vogue after the turn of the century and the fact that Lovecraft was becoming aware of contemporary developments due to his increasing contact with amateur colleagues (to be fair, this latter aspect is recognised by Joshi). And despite the subtitle of Joshi's study, there is not much in this work that is relevant to an understanding of Lovecraft's thought in connection with Western *fin de siècle* cultural pessimism, with Joshi instead overemphasising Lovecraft's cosmic perspective in a manner that has come to characterise the majority of Joshi's writings in later years.

Joshi's presence unavoidably looms large over these proceedings, given the vast amount of material he has produced over the preceding decades, although most of it has been published outside the academic press. It is a curious phenomenon that even academics (such as Robert H. Waugh, Robert M. Price, Dirk W. Mosig, Donald R. Burleson, and others) who are or have been engaged in Lovecraft scholarship have also published most of their work on Lovecraft outside of academia, in amateur journals or publications put out by small independent presses. But this was not always necessarily the case, and the first academic to recognise Lovecraft's importance was the Poe scholar Thomas Ollive Mabbott, who as far back as 1940 suggested that, "Time will tell if his place be very high in our literary history; that he has a place seems certain."[188] From the very start, however, certain misconceptions were an indelible part of the emerging image of Lovecraft, as when biographer and critic Robert Allerton Parker wrote in 1943 of the "primordial creatures of Manichean evil" in Lovecraft's fiction,[189] despite Lovecraft's philosophical emphasis on concepts such as good and evil being wholly subjective and relative.

Much of this way of thinking was fostered by August Derleth, who, in various writings and in his introductions to the posthumous Lovecraft collections he published through Arkham House, advocated his own misleading good vs. evil interpretation of Lovecraft's work, based on selected elements derived from a few of Lovecraft's more popular stories in *Weird Tales* (such as "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Dunwich Horror," and the ghostwritten "Out of the Aeons"). This image of Lovecraft the writer went hand-in-hand with an equally misleading depiction of Lovecraft the

[188] See Mabbott (2010: 183).
[189] See Parker (2010: 186).

man, shaped by such critics as the *Chicago Tribune* journalist Vincent Starrett, who had briefly corresponded with Lovecraft in the late 1920s: "he fancied himself as a cadaverous, mysterious figure of the night – a pallid, scholarly necrologist – and cultivated a natural resemblance until it was almost the real thing."[190] But this description from 1944 is entirely untrue, perhaps having its source in accounts by Lovecraft of his reclusive invalid stage in youth. In fact, Lovecraft in later years sometimes spoke with pride about the healthy tan he developed during his extensive nature walks and travels in the summers, but the popular image of Lovecraft as a ghoulish recluse who shunned daylight nevertheless persists in the present day.

Edmund Wilson's dismissal of Lovecraft in *The New Yorker* in 1945 did much to ensure that critical recognition of Lovecraft's work for the most part disappeared over the coming decades, and it was not until the 1970s (in the wake of the publication of the *Selected Letters*) that renewed scholarly attention began to correct some of the by now firmly entrenched misconceptions. The Derleth school was at this time dismantled through the important but at first little recognised work by writers such as Richard L. Tierney and academics such as Mosig. According to Tierney, "Lovecraft's picture of the universe and Derleth's are completely dissimilar,"[191] while Mosig argued that "Derleth succeeded in disseminating an extremely distorted interpretation of what he termed Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu Mythos'."[192] This shift, however, also contributed to what can only be labelled as an overreaction in the opposite direction, with a corresponding diminishing of elements other than the cosmic, without which a full understanding of Lovecraft must, in my opinion, remain incomplete. The key figure in this development has once again been Joshi.

At the same time, some academic work on Lovecraft was undertaken in the final decades of the twentieth century, as primarily exemplified in two books by French critics. The first is Maurice Lévy, who in 1985 published a revised version of his doctoral thesis from 1969, in which, among other things, he argued that Lovecraft's tales "bring to light the connection between the fantastic and the oneiric," and that Lovecraft "[w]ithout doubt [...] was – all his life, in the most total and dramatic

[190] See Starrett (2010: 197). See also Waugh (2011b: 112).
[191] See Tierney (2001: 52).
[192] See Mosig (1997: 21).

sense of the term – a *man without hope*."[193] This, to begin with, introduces another overemphasis, in this case on the importance of dreams and dreaming in Lovecraft's work and in his approach to his work (to be explored later), whereas to suggest that Lovecraft was a man without hope is to go much too far, or, alternatively, to fail to understand Lovecraft's attitude towards life and existence. Certainly it is the case that the insignificance of humanity in an endless and indifferent universe, and the corresponding lack of some sort of higher purpose, was one of the cornerstones of his thinking, but this did not lead to hopelessness. This is instead where his emphasis on the maintenance of illusions (also to be explored later) enters the picture, by which he meant that individuals must create their own meaning.

The other notable French commentator at this time was Michel Houellebecq, who produced an influential study on Lovecraft in 1991, prior to his becoming a controversial novelist some years later. As briefly indicated in Chapter 1, Houellebecq's main contribution to Lovecraft studies has been to suggest that Lovecraft's stay in New York transformed his views on race "into a full-fledged racist neurosis," due to which Lovecraft displayed not only "the brutal hatred of a trapped animal" with respect to other races, but also "[a]bsolute hatred of the world in general," and that "hatred of life" preceded his writing, which is why "the central passion animating his work is much more akin to masochism than to sadism."[194] In the process Houellebecq also produced some quotes that do not actually appear anywhere in Lovecraft's writings.[195] The main problem here, however, is that Houellebecq was focussing exclusively on early material, as he had apparently not read any of Lovecraft's non-fiction work or correspondence past the mid-1920s, and also that he discounted the factor of stylistic excess that was a habitual component in Lovecraft's rants, which were aimed at a wide variety of subjects. Nevertheless, Houellebecq's line of thinking has been taken up with alacrity in recent years, and the current literature on Lovecraft's racism is extensive, albeit often popular or journalistic in nature.

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[193] See Lévy (1988: 31, 118). Essentially, Lévy's argument was that Lovecraft was a person so damaged by adverse circumstances (leading to his particular view of the world) that his only recourse was to escape into dreams, which then fuelled his fiction-writing.

[194] See Houellebecq (2008: 57, 105-106, 109).

[195] For more on this, see Joshi (2018b: 43).

3.2. Lovecraft's Personal Philosophy, Part I

With the above overview of critical opinion on Lovecraft's thinking concluded, it is now possible to proceed with an in-depth look into what this thinking actually entailed. In order to get a full picture of Lovecraft's intellectual development, as it unfolded in his teenage and adult years, it has first been necessary to know something about the background against which this development occurred, as detailed in the previous chapter. In the following, I will describe some important formative experiences in Lovecraft's childhood, followed by a discussion of various interests of his that were shaped by these experiences.

3.2.1. Early Experiences

Lovecraft saw himself as a product of his environment to such an extent that he freely confessed his interests and his entire personality to have been the result of chance over which he had no control. These, he thought, had to do with his heredity, his having happened to be born in New England, and his having experienced the particular surroundings and incidents that shaped him as a person.[196] Seen this way, his intellectual development started in his early childhood, and was initially fostered mainly by his extensive reading and some important formative experiences, the earliest of which, as detailed by Lovecraft in 1929, occurred while he was still living with his parents in Auburndale, Massachusetts (emphasis in the original):

> What has haunted my dreams for nearly forty years is *a strange sense of adventurous expectancy connected with landscape & architecture & sky-effects*. I can see myself as a child of 2½ on the railway bridge at Auburndale, Mass., looking across & downward at the business part of the town, & feeling the imminence of some wonder which I could neither describe nor fully conceive – & there has never been a subsequent hour of my life when kindred sensations have been absent. (Lovecraft and Derleth 2013a: 237-238)

A two-fold consequence of Lovecraft's move to Providence was the preference he came to develop for the nearby rural countryside and the

[196] "Aside from the morphological characteristics and neural, glandular, and organic reflexes determined by aeons of physical evolution, all that we are – all that we feel, think, say, do, hope, and dream – is the sole product of our environmental heritage. [...] We have no ideas, standards, likes, dislikes, or interests except those which the accidents of personal and racial history have bequeathed to us" (Lovecraft 2006: 119). This attitude was in itself made possible by the fact that Lovecraft lived in a certain time and a certain place, in which new scientific insights allowed him to think this way.

colonial architecture he first encountered in the College Hill neighbourhood, as well as the view he came to hold of his home state of Rhode Island as a haven from the outside world. This, on a smaller scale, is also why he contrasted Rhode Island with the rest of New England, Massachusetts in particular, where the history of the earliest Puritans provided him with an inspiring sense of Gothic darkness that was lacking closer to home due to the religious freedom of Rhode Island in colonial times.[197]

In later years the landscape (both rural and urban) and the colonial past of New England in general came to serve as something of a bulwark against modernity,[198] and he occasionally went so far as to state that the outside world of the present did not feel real to him, or that only Providence (and by extension New England) was real for him in some sense that the outside world was not.[199] In these years he also developed an aesthetic preference for outspread city vistas, particularly when viewed against spectacular sunsets, as regularly detailed in his letters,[200] and it was a vague feeling of half-remembering something wondrous that he could never quite describe or capture, and that was always evoked by sunset panoramas of outspread cityscapes or rural landscapes of haunting beauty, that he kept returning to, his frequent term for this phenomenon being "adventurous expectancy."[201] In his final years, as he travelled more, he developed an additional preference for cities like Charleston and Quebec (the latter with its spectacular sky-effects),[202] but this was largely because these places preserved links to the colonial past, and because this past, especially in the case of Charleston, carried connections to New England.[203] On rare occasions, Lovecraft mentioned

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197 See Lovecraft (1992b: 49; 2003b: 142-143; 2016b: 190-191, 317) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 66-67). See also Joshi (2013a: 29-30) and Waugh (2006: 165-166). See Eckhardt (2011) for a further discussion of Lovecraft's love of New England.

198 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 214).

199 See Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 56).

200 "[O]ne of my first memories is of the great westward sea of hazy roofs & domes & steeples & far hills which I saw one winter afternoon from that great railed embankment, all violet & mystic against a fevered, apocalyptic sunset of reds & golds & purples & curious greens" (Lovecraft and Wandrei 2002: 64). See also Lovecraft (1971b: 316-317, 319-320; 2005c: 289; 2015f: 103) and Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 89-90).

201 See, for example, Lovecraft (1976a: 150-152), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 284, 372), and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 288).

202 See, for example Lovecraft (2019: 288, 296-297).

203 Charleston (as the main city and economic centre in the South, and in what eventually became the state of South Carolina) was obviously not part of New England, and thus had a separate history, but Lovecraft (2018: 262-264; 2019: 344-345) sometimes elaborated in detail on the cultural and economic links, connections, and similarities that existed between these two areas in colonial times.

the possibility of moving to Charleston (or to Florida, or even Bermuda or Jamaica), as a way of escaping the cold that made life difficult for him during the winters, but in the end he never did move: partly due to his lacking the necessary funds, but mainly due to his attachment to familiar scenes.[204]

3.2.2. Anglophilia

Lovecraft's strong Anglophilia was also developed in early childhood,[205] and for the most part it stemmed from the same root as his devotion to ancestral tradition. New England had originally been settled by the English, and Lovecraft's family (of old colonial stock on his mother's side and more immediately English on his father's side) could likewise be traced directly back to the motherland. Additionally, Lovecraft associated his "Britannic predilection" with his reading of the Augustan classics,[206] which he took up at some point after 1895, perhaps at the instigation of his elder aunt Lillian.[207] Added to this is a clear influence from nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism, a movement that had its origin in Romantic nationalism and a consequent newly awakened interest in the history of the English people, and which became particularly prevalent among New England intellectuals (see the previous chapter). These ideas were at their height in the years when Lovecraft grew up and presumably absorbed them through his reading,[208] and it thus seems clear that they provided significant intellectual support for his Anglophilia and his frequently expressed wish for some sort of reunification between Britain and America.

3.2.3. The Eighteenth Century

Lovecraft's attachment to childhood scenes is closely linked with another of his peculiarities, his strong identification with the eighteenth century. "I am certainly a relic of the 18th century both in prose & in verse," he said in 1915, and similarly two years later: "My whole interest seems

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[204] See Lovecraft (2016a: 120-121).

[205] "I cannot even now excuse the revolution of America from England, and through the influence of heredity am at heart an Englishman despite my American birth," Lovecraft (2018: 47) said in 1915. Also, "England and America are spiritually one" (Lovecraft 2006: 33). For detailed accounts, see Lovecraft (2005d: 67-68; 2018: 294-295).

[206] See Lovecraft (2005d: 67).

[207] "She was a potent influence, I think, in turning my fancy toward the classics" (Lovecraft 2005d: 66).

[208] See footnote 165.

wrapped up in the eighteenth century – I preserve as much of its spirit as possible in the furnishing of my room, & always think of myself in breeches & full-bottomed periwig."[209] This was also echoed in the vivid dreams he frequently experienced, in some of which he was an eighteenth-century English gentlemen and in others an ancient Roman.[210] The source of this interest again lies in his earliest experiences, as he explained in 1931: "What I look back upon nostalgically is a dream-world which I invented at the age of four from picture books & the Georgian hill streets of Old Providence [...] I have traced the cause of my Georgianism to childish picture books & old Providence hill streets."[211]

But there was also a more prosaic reason for his devotion to the eighteenth century, namely, his need to escape what he termed the ugliness, hypocrisy, affectation, and sentimentality of the Victorian age: "To me the ancient hill with its Georgian spires and doorways joined with the ancient long-ſ'd books in the family library to represent an ideal world of escape from the intolerable ugliness of the 1890's."[212] Another source lay in his early reading, already mentioned, when as a child he used to go up to a dark room in the attic with only a candle for illumination and spend hours poring over the prose classics of Augustan literature.[213] The fascination with the past as evoked by the old buildings in his immediate neighbourhood was also combined with a vague feeling of uneasiness and even fear,[214] which connected his interests in his surroundings and in the eighteenth century with his (at this point not yet fully discovered) preoccupation with the weird. And similarly to how Providence seemed more real to him than the outside world, so did the eighteenth century seem more real to him than the present, particularly during difficult times, when an identification with the past served as an

[209] See Lovecraft (2005d: 15, 122).

[210] See Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 143-144). This was also a conscious predilection: "Psychologically I am either a Roman or an Englishman, with no possibility of imaginative expansion" (Lovecraft and Wandrei 2002: 188), as he said in 1927.

[211] See Lovecraft (1971b: 308, 313).

[212] See Lovecraft (2016b: 45). See also Lovecraft (1992b: 59; 2019: 331-332).

[213] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 378-380). Lovecraft also mentioned his uncle by marriage, Dr. Franklin Chase Clark, as having been a great influence on him in this regard some years later, see Lovecraft (2005d: 74) and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 253). In the same context, he stated that he had been taught the Greek alphabet at the age of six by his other uncle by marriage, Edward Francis Gamwell.

[214] "When I was 3 years old I felt a strange magic & fascination (not unmixed with a vague unease & perhaps a touch of mild *fear*) in the ancient houses of Providence's venerable hill" (Lovecraft 2016b: 181). See also Lovecraft (1976a: 152; 2016b: 181-183, 224).

avenue of imaginative escape. Later in life, his devotion to the eighteenth century also became a contributing reason for his extensive antiquarian travels.[215]

3.2.4. Early Reading

Lovecraft listed Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, rather than the Augustan classics, as his earliest reading material when he learned to read at about the age of four. His preference for the Brothers Grimm may have had something to do with "the fairy tales hitherto related to me" prior to his starting reading on his own,[216] and another early formative influence was the weird stories told to him by his grandfather.[217] From this it can be seen that there were at least three sources for Lovecraft's interest in weird fiction, all of them developed in early childhood: 1) the College Hill neighbourhood of Providence and the emotions inspired in him by the colonial architecture and the spectral New England countryside, 2) a feeling of alienation from his own era and a concomitant desire to escape from it, and 3) his reading of Grimm's fairy tales and Germanic mythology, alongside the stories told to him by his grandfather.

The next step in this development came with Lovecraft discovering the art of Gustave Doré, when he happened on an illustrated edition of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which combined a style and a theme he had never seen before at that time.[218] Prior to this he had also read *Arabian Nights* (this sparked a short-lived "Arabian phase," which nevertheless had some significant consequences for his later career in fiction),[219] before being diverted into classicism with his discovery of Greek mythology.[220] All this early reading, and perhaps some residual influence from Louise Imogen Guiney, made Lovecraft decide to become a writer, his earliest efforts being restricted to poetry written at the age of six.[221] Lovecraft's interest in Graeco-Roman civilisation soon began to focus more on Rome than on ancient Greece, however, for reasons that were closely linked to his developing aesthetic sentiments and, as before,

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[215] "That sense of immediate personal kinship with the 18th century […] has never left me or even diminished. It's that which sends me rambling around the country" (Lovecraft 1976a: 152).

[216] See Lovecraft (2006: 143).

[217] See Lovecraft (2005d: 67; 2015f: 106-107; 2016b: 218-219) for details on his early reading.

[218] See Lovecraft (2016b: 199).

[219] See Lovecraft (1968: 165; 2015f: 106; 2018: 429) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 55-56, 265).

[220] See Lovecraft (2006: 145-146).

[221] See Lovecraft (2005d: 80; 2018: 429-430).

his interest in the past.[222] Roman Britain thus became the obvious link through which Lovecraft's devotion to classical Rome and his ancestral English past fused into a unified whole,[223] which makes it somewhat odd that this is very rarely reflected in his fiction (aside from the occasional detail, such as the hints of a Roman past in "The Rats in the Walls").

3.2.5. Poe and the "Night-Gaunts"

The death of his maternal grandmother Robie in 1896 came to have long-term consequences for Lovecraft, since it was at this time that he began to experience the extreme nightmares that he later referred to as "night-gaunts," in reference to the monsters that appeared nightly in his sleep. The exact cause of these night terrors is unclear, as Lovecraft does not appear to have been particularly close to his grandmother, but he mentioned the oppressiveness of the black funeral attire worn by his mother and aunts,[224] and it is also possible that his realisation of the permanence of death at this time brought on depressive symptoms, as is not uncommon for children at this age (when this realisation is first normally made). The death of Lovecraft's father two years later, in July 1898, may have triggered or at least contributed to the "near-breakdown" he suffered this year, the first of several to come, although the exact circumstances remain unclear. But it is perhaps telling that the next formative experience in his life also occurred at this time, his discovery of the fiction of Edgar Allan Poe. This likely occurred at some point during the summer: in some letters Lovecraft says it happened at the age of seven, in others at the age of eight.[225] "When I write stories, Edgar Allan Poe is my model,"[226] he said in a letter in 1916, a year and a half before he took up fiction writing again as an adult. Although Lovecraft soon left this early period behind, Poe still remained his model for a long time to come with respect to short story technique. "It was Poe who first discovered the great aesthetic truth that the sine qua non of a short story is *singleness of impression*,"[227] he said in 1927, in the midst of the most fertile creative period of his career. This became one of the

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[222] See Lovecraft (1992b: 44) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 234-235).
[223] See Lovecraft (2014a: 30-31).
[224] See Lovecraft (2005d: 68; 2015e: 317; 2015f: 128) and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 323-324).
[225] See Lovecraft (2014a: 128; 2015f: 81; 2018: 431).
[226] See Lovecraft (2005d: 29).
[227] See Lovecraft (2015f: 46). This is Poe's concept of "unity of effect," described in his 1846 essay "The Philosophy of Composition."

cornerstones underlying his later insistence that the prime purpose of a literary short story is to capture a certain kind of mood.

The influence of Poe (and also, after 1919, of Lord Dunsany) was strong in Lovecraft's earliest fictional output, especially in the development of his style, and he was well aware of this. "There are my 'Poe' pieces & my 'Dunsany' pieces – but alas – where are any Lovecraft pieces?" he said in 1929.[228] "We all copy unconsciously now & then," he said two years later, continuing: "I suppose my natural style is built up of memories of Poe & the 18th century essayists; while as you know, I have been through a period of rather pale Dunsanian imitation."[229] In 1933 he offered the following advice in a letter (emphasis in the original):

> The only way to *begin* to acquire a good style is to copy those who seem to be saying about what you want to say. That's the way I did myself – copied Poe & Dunsany until their styles fused into something at least outwardly original. (Lovecraft 2007b: 51)

But a few years later, in 1935, he reframed the issue somewhat in terms that coincided with his then developed ideas of literature and culture, to be explored later (emphasis in the original):

> Many think I have derived this style exclusively from Poe – which (despite the strong influence of Poe on me) is another typical mistake of uninformed modernism. This style is no especial attribute of Poe, but is simply *the major traditional way of handling English narrative prose*. If I picked it up through [any] especial influence, that influence is probably the practice of the 18th century rather than Poe; since I always doted on the earlier authors. Despite changes of fashion, I still think that this full style, whose system follows the classic universal rules prevailing in all Aryan languages ancient & modern, is more effective in conveying exact meanings & delicate shadings of mood, than are any of the choppy, half-baked types of prose now temporarily in fashion. (Lovecraft 1992b: 66)

Lovecraft here linked himself to what he viewed as the traditional mainstream of English literature, in opposition to the burgeoning modernism of the time.[230] Lovecraft's idiosyncratic early style (although

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[228] See Lovecraft (2014a: 38).

[229] See Lovecraft (2016b: 88).

[230] Lovecraft viewed modernism as another symptom of the cultural decadence of the Western world at the time (see, for example, Lovecraft 2006: 120). But repeated attempts have nevertheless been made to classify Lovecraft as a literary modernist, examples include Gayford (2011) and Mariconda (2013: 110-128). See Pedersen (2018) for a contrasting argument that Lovecraft was a Romantic, whereas Butts (2018: 3) suggests that Lovecraft's cosmic horror is an outgrowth of American naturalism. Lovecraft himself traced his literary origins to the Gothic tradition via Poe (this is now sometimes labelled as "dark romanticism"), see footnote 547.

Lovecraft himself viewed it as quintessentially English) thus had its origin in his omnivorous reading of the Augustan essayists. This influence was then supplemented, particularly in his early fiction writing, with that of Poe, with a later detour into the biblical fairytale flourishes of the early Dunsany,[231] before becoming more modern and contemporary with the beginning of his mature period in the late 1920s.

3.2.6. Science and Astronomy

The next formative step in Lovecraft's childhood intellectual development was his discovery of science, beginning with chemistry at about the age of nine and continuing with geography (and later astronomy) around the time when he turned twelve. He mentioned being a "Verne enthusiast" at this time, and he described how his initial interest had been awakened by scientific illustrations in the back of an unabridged edition of *Webster's Dictionary*.[232] It is possible that it was his aesthetic sense – his enjoyment of the illustrations of scientific instruments, which, moreover, belonged to the past, in this case the middle of the nineteenth century[233] – that initially turned him to chemistry in 1899. His later interests in geography and astronomy, meanwhile, seem to have come about as the result of a more genuine interest in science itself. But Lovecraft also cited his aunt Lillian as instrumental in his coming to develop an interest in science in the first place: "My predilection for natural science, fostered by my Aunt Lillian, took form in a love of chemistry" and "my old love of chemistry also arises from her remarks on that science."[234]

Lovecraft's interest in geography culminated in his lifelong fascination with Antarctica, as he often pointed out later in life: "Ever since I was 11 or 12 the mystery of the great white Antarctic has haunted me poignantly – almost disturbingly," he said in 1934. Two years later he claimed that "the mystery and fascination of the Antarctic have haunted me persistently ever since I was ten years old."[235] Whether his interest in geography, and the Antarctic in particular, dates to 1900 or 1902 is a

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231 See Mariconda (2013: 13-45) and Harman (2012: 53-229) for discussions on Lovecraft's style. See also Airaksinen (1999) and Campbell (2013) for discussions on style as an element of Lovecraft's creativity and his use of language to achieve the effects he sought in his work. A more specific example is Van Elferen (2016: 89), who speaks of "a literary style best described as an act of ontological veiling."

232 See Lovecraft (2005d: 29; 2018: 431-432).

233 Natural science and Wagner's music were among the very few things that Lovecraft liked from the Victorian era, as he mentioned in 1933 (see Lovecraft 2016b: 333).

234 See Lovecraft (2005d: 66, 71).

235 See Lovecraft (2016a: 92; 2015e: 325-326).

minor detail here; more interesting is the source of his interest, which he attributed to Antarctica's remoteness and the early exploratory expeditions now referred to as the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. This period of polar exploration, which lasted into the early 1920s, had just begun at this time with the Belgian Antarctic Expedition in 1897-1899 and, more importantly, the Southern Cross Expedition in 1898-1900, led by Carsten Borchgrevink under the British flag, and it generated much media interest.[236]

Lovecraft reached the culmination of his purely scientific interests with his discovery of astronomy in late 1902. This new fascination also contributed decisively to his developing cosmic views: "The most poignant sensations of my existence are those of 1896, when I discovered the Hellenic world, and of 1902, when I discovered the myriad suns and worlds of infinite space."[237] It was this latter discovery that first opened the way for him into his later cosmic speculations, as he said in a letter in 1918:

> My real philosophical interest began when I was just your age – 1906. I then set about writing a book – a complete treatise on astronomy – and in doing so I resolved to use all the best material at hand. I would not write till I had made myself absolute master of my subject. Wherefore I commenced a campaign of intensive reading, devouring everything I could find on astronomy. This perforce turned my attention to the structure of the universe, and to problems in cosmogony, and literally obtruded upon my attention the matters of infinity and eternity which have since interested me so keenly. Before 1907 I was deep in speculation, and have not been able to get out yet! When I look back, I can see that I always held the idea of the earth's insignificance – but it was in a passive way before 1906. I knew it, but it made no impression on my thought. (Lovecraft 2003b: 27-28)

These views were further strengthened by Lovecraft's belief that the universe was endless and eternal,[238] an idea he apparently had carried

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236 See Lovecraft (1992b: 47; 2005d: 71).

237 See Lovecraft (2006: 147). As he wrote in 1926 (see Lovecraft 1968: 39), he bought his first astronomy book on February 12, 1903, having previously had access only to an old book of his grandmother's: "As I returned in the evening darkness on the rear platform of an Elmgrove Ave. car [...] I looked over the pictures & chapter headings with perhaps the most delightful sense of breathless anticipation I have ever known. Most literally, a strange cosmos of new worlds lay before me."

238 See, for example, Lovecraft (2014a: 206), in a letter from 1932: "In the absence of any information beyond relatively narrow limits, the only reasonable adult assumption is that the space-time continuum represents a fixed & basic condition. It is all there is, has been, or will be anywhere. It is the primal essence of reality. It is fundamental entity, infinite & eternal; whose patterned rearrangements are an integral part of its properties, & of which the visible universe & human life are a negligible quasi-atom casually spawned for an instant & soon to be as though they had never been."

with him from the earliest days of his astronomical studies, when he read an old book in his grandmother's library. The belief that the universe was eternal was still commonly held in the early twentieth century,[239] the big bang theory not yet having been suggested in Lovecraft's day (the term would not be coined until 1949, although Lemaître's theory of the expansion of the universe was first introduced in 1927). The concept of the heat death of the universe, on the other hand, had been present since the days of Lord Kelvin in the middle of the nineteenth century, and traces of this idea appear in Lovecraft's apparently vacillating view on a cyclical universe vs. entropy.[240]

This was at a time when the debate over the size of the universe was still current – was the universe coterminous with the Milky Way, or were the so-called "spiral nebulae" in fact other galaxies? – although the debate was not definitively settled until Hubble's observations of classical Cepheid variable stars at the Mount Wilson Observatory in California in the early 1920s.[241] But these developments, although significant for Lovecraft's later cosmic fiction, came too late to be the source of his initial interest in the subject. In Lovecraft's earliest astronomical writings, collected in volume three of the *Collected Essays*, there is instead mention of such subjects as the possibility of vegetation on the Moon, a suggestion (in a published letter to *Scientific American* in 1906) that an effort should be made to discover potential trans-

[239] This belief was the reason behind Einstein's so-called "biggest blunder," the cosmological constant he added to his equations to force them to predict an eternal and unchanging universe.

[240] See Lovecraft (2005d: 131; 2006: 30). He kept returning to a certain poetical illustration of entropy in his writings, involving the image of dead black worlds rolling through space: see Lovecraft (2005a: 311; 2006: 44; 2013a: 46). However, it is possible that he did not actually intend to evoke that particular conception, see Lovecraft (2015e: 249). It is true that no physical matter would remain at the very end in a universe that has run down due to entropy, but Lovecraft's poetic conception is largely accurate for a period trillions of years into the future, when the universe slowly grows dark and cold before the ultimate end.

[241] The so-called Great Debate between astronomers Harlow Shapley and Heber Curtis on the size of the universe took place in Washington, D.C., on April 26, 1920. Years later, in 1931, Lovecraft (2011b: 237) made a reference to his interest in "what Harlow Shapley has to say about the size & structure of the universe," although Shapley had in fact been on the wrong side in the initial debate. In 1929, Lovecraft (2014a: 50) referred to Shapley as "probably the foremost living American astronomer," and mentioned having read Shapley's popular book *Starlight*, published in 1926, "with great interest." He recommended this book "enthusiastically" as a work "dealing with the nature & dimensions of the larger universe as a whole, as revealed by the discoveries of the last 20 years" (ibid: 111), having to do with "the nearly unthinkable chasms envisaged by modern astronomy" (ibid: 117).

Neptunian planets, and essays on the Martian canals[242] and possible life on Mars. In other words, Lovecraft's initial interest in astronomy appears to have been confined to the planets of the solar system.

Tellingly, Lovecraft's turn towards science fiction began in earnest only after the vast size of the universe became an accepted fact with the publication of Hubble's findings in 1924. This is also confirmed by Lovecraft himself in a letter in 1918:

> I began to study astronomy late in 1902 – age 12. My interest came through two sources – discovery of an old book of my grandmother's in the attic, and a previous interest in physical geography. Within a year I was thinking of virtually nothing but astronomy, yet my keenest interest did not lie outside the solar system. I think I really ignored the abysses of space in my interest in the habitability of the various planets of the solar system. (Lovecraft 2003b: 27)

However, Lovecraft sometimes viewed his early scientific interests as a distraction, without which his failed career as a fiction writer (as he came to see it) might have turned out differently. "I could have done far better myself if I had steadily stuck to the weird genre from boyhood, and not allowed myself to be sidetracked to science in my teens and to poetry in my twenties," he said in 1931.[243] Underlying these sentiments was his lack of confidence in his own abilities in his later years and his view of himself as a failure who had never lived up to the high expectations set for him after his precocious childhood. In the end, Lovecraft does not seem to have adopted any particular theory on the nature of the universe, instead letting its sheer vastness serve as the wellspring for his cosmic musings.[244] And, in any case, his astronomical studies soon led the way to his next intellectual interest, which was philosophy. Another consequence was his continued shift towards non-belief in his views on religion.

3.2.7. Atheism and Evolution

Lovecraft left Christianity behind at an early age, first through his exposure to Greek mythology and later through his interest in science,

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[242] As famously seen by Percival Lowell, after a mistranslation of the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli's observations of channels on the surface of Mars in the 1870s.

[243] See Lovecraft (2016b: 42). See also Lovecraft (2015f: 81).

[244] Today, the diameter of the observable universe is calculated to be around 92 billion light years, and this in itself is a distance of such magnitude that it cannot be visualised in any meaningful way. For Lovecraft, who believed the universe to be endless, the full impact of the insight into the disparity in scale must have been that much stronger when he first began to contemplate it.

which turned him into a sceptic.[245] Lovecraft's father had been a member of the Anglican Church,[246] but the maternal side of the family was Baptist, although at best lukewarm in their beliefs.[247] After his entry into amateur journalism, Lovecraft engaged in long-running debates on religion and other subjects with some of his friends and colleagues, such as the freethinker James F. Morton and the Christian evangelical Maurice W. Moe.[248] In these debates, as they developed over the years, the picture emerges of someone who had as little use for militant atheists as he had for crusading Christians, and in this context Lovecraft also referred to, for example, political radicals as believers in a religion. But he was certainly a non-believer himself, and although he did sometimes suggest that it was better to maintain Christianity as opposed to other superstitions, since Christianity was an important component of the traditional past and it was impossible to get rid of superstition altogether, he nevertheless continued to repudiate religion in ever stronger terms in later years.

Thus, over the course of his adult life, Lovecraft went from seeing religion as necessary for morality, to seeing religion as something worthy of preserving (at least superficially) for the sake of artistic beauty and tradition, to not seeing any benefit in religion at all. Instead, he began to regard religion as harmful because it was a false relic from a primitive past that was forced on children before they could learn to think for themselves, and because its ethical precepts were based on superstition rather than science. These shifts in his outlook corresponded with his gradual move across the political spectrum, and became especially noticeable some years into the 1930s, in the depths of the Great Depression.

In this context the question occurs as to how far the theory of evolution influenced Lovecraft's developing philosophical views. Lovecraft did not often mention Darwin directly, nor did he refer to

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245 See Lovecraft (2005d: 184; 2006: 145-146) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 378).

246 See Lovecraft (2018: 51). By this he presumably meant the Episcopalian Church.

247 "Like me, she was an agnostic with no belief in immortality," Lovecraft (2014a: 364) said about his mother after her death. As a child, Lovecraft had been placed in a Baptist Sunday school, see Lovecraft (2018: 51).

248 See Lovecraft (2011b: 75, 109, 229; 2018: 52, 69-75, 306-307). See also Lovecraft (1968: 269-270, 293, 310-312; 1971b: 231-232, 314-315, 338-342; 1992b: 30-31; 2005d: 25; 2015e: 98-99, 264-272, 304; 2015f: 100-101; 2016b: 92, 306; 2019: 307-310), Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 55, 485-486), and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 221-223).

evolution much in his writings,[249] and this seems to have been a consequence of his rather limited reading in the relevant field. "Realistic analysis, favoured by history and by diffusive scientific leanings which now embraced Darwin, Haeckel, Huxley, and various other pioneers, was checked by my aversion for realistic literature," he wrote in 1922,[250] in an autobiographical account of his teenage scientific reading. It is clear that he was influenced more by Ernst Haeckel and Thomas Henry Huxley than by any direct reading of Darwin. However, in his fiction Lovecraft did make use of such concepts as devolution (as in reverting to a more primitive form) and the misanthropic suggestion of a debased origin of the human race as occasionally recurring themes, both having to do with degeneration theory and the general cultural pessimism of the time, as detailed in the previous chapter.

But, more importantly, Lovecraft also stressed the idea that conditions in other parts of the universe might be dramatically different from what can be detected and experienced in humanity's own little corner of existence (emphasis in the original):

> The principle of *life* appears to be a very well-marked form of energy – as definite as heat or light – hence although we see it only on our globe, we may reasonably expect it to exist in such other places as possess somewhat similar conditions. But this applies only to the kind of space we know. Other parts may have other types of organisation, equally complex or perhaps more so, & differing widely from anything which we might recognize as life. I have often wished that I had the literary power to call up visions of some vast & remote realm of entity *beyond the universes of matter & energy*; where vivid interplays of unknown & inconceivable influences give vast & fabulous activity to dimensional areas that are not shapes, & to nuclei of complex rearrangement that are not minds. (Lovecraft and Wandrei 2002: 104)

Here is the origin of Lovecraft's indescribable monsters, especially in the later part of his career, and it seems clear that these ideas ultimately derived from his philosophical conception of the universe as endless and eternal, and therefore capable of containing almost anything the mind could conceive – or rather, in this case, not conceive.

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[249] See, for example, Lovecraft (2015e: 281; 2018: 308-309), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 103-104), and Lovecraft and Howard (2011b: 522, 732-733). Lovecraft owned a copy of an anthology titled *Evolution in Modern Thought*, published in 1917, and he also owned a book called *Human Life as the Biologist Sees It*, published in 1922 (listed in Joshi 2012b: 60, 88). This latter title was a printing of the Charles K. Colver Lectures in 1921 at Brown University, delivered by the entomologist Vernon Lyman Kellogg.

[250] See Lovecraft (2006: 147).

3.2.8. Philosophical Pessimism

Lovecraft's entry into amateur journalism in 1914, aside from ending his self-imposed seclusion, also caused a great widening of his philosophical horizons due to the new influences he gained through correspondence with amateur colleagues. Prior to that, he had likely already encountered Epicurus and Schopenhauer in his teenage years (he had certainly read Lucretius by that point, but presumably not out of any desire to make a specific study of philosophy). It is not surprising that he was drawn to such schools of philosophy as dealt with the question of how to derive happiness out of an existence that was beset with difficulty and pain. It is not entirely clear exactly when, after 1906, Lovecraft began to put more serious thought into Epicureanism and Schopenhauer's pessimism.[251] Presumably he had encountered Epicurus at some point in the course of his studies into ancient Greece and Rome, and, in any case, he could not have failed to be aware of Schopenhauer at this time, given how characteristic the German philosopher's thinking was of *fin de siècle* cultural pessimism.[252]

Epicureanism, as one of the main schools of Hellenistic philosophy, taught that happiness can be achieved by living a simple life in order to attain a state of tranquillity that consists of *ataraxia* (a state of calmness, freedom from negative emotions) and *aponia* (the absence of pain).[253] Epicureanism is sometimes misleadingly referred to as a variety of hedonism, in that it holds the pursuit of happiness as its highest goal, but its emphasis on a simple life makes it more often than not the opposite of hedonistic pleasure-seeking, and this is clearly how Lovecraft saw it.[254] An accompanying emphasis on science went back to the atomism and materialism of Democritus and Leucippus, and this was the earliest foundation for Lovecraft's later and oft-repeated description of himself as a "mechanistic materialist."[255] Lovecraft occasionally cited Epicurus and Democritus (more rarely Leucippus) in his letters.[256] The original source via which he first steeped himself in Epicurean philosophy, aside from whatever modern and popular material he may have had at hand, is

251 See Lovecraft (1965: 135; 2003b: 89-91; 2005d: 184-185). See also Joshi (1990: 4).

252 As noted in Chapter 2, the term *fin de siècle* is associated mostly with British culture, but some elements also extended to America, and Lovecraft was in any case likely to have been susceptible to this way of thinking due to his Anglophilia.

253 See Kenny (2012: 78).

254 See Lovecraft (2003b: 90).

255 See, for example, Lovecraft (2014a: 57; 2015f: 81; 2016a: 40)

256 See, for example, Lovecraft (1968: 270; 1971b: 300; 1992b: 30; 2005d: 166; 2014a: 146; 2015f: 81, 102).

likely to have been *De rerum natura* by Lucretius, a Latin hexameter poem written to explain and popularise Epicureanism for a Roman audience in the first century BCE.[257]

The occasional references that Lovecraft made to Schopenhauer over the years revealed that his insight into Schopenhauer's thinking was limited, as it was likely based mostly on a translated essay collection titled *Studies in Pessimism* (1890).[258] However, it is not difficult to see why such concepts as asceticism or the disinterested contemplation of beauty (the so-called aesthetic attitude) would appeal to Lovecraft, which is why Schopenhauer (as understood by Lovecraft) could easily be combined with Lovecraft's own aesthetic and proto-cosmic ideas. Nor is it difficult to see why someone who felt himself harshly treated by life would feel this way. "At the time, I thought myself a much wronged genius; but later years have enabled me to view my childhood with more sense & cynicism, & less sympathy & self-pity," he said in 1916,[259] in reference to his teenage years.

3.2.9. Cynicism

Prior to the 1930s, Lovecraft frequently conflated cynicism with his professed scepticism, pessimism, and materialism, and one must here keep in mind that he was not a trained philosopher and never claimed to be one, and that most of his philosophical statements were written on the spur of the moment in letters to friends. Inconsistency and errors in logic are therefore unavoidable, and further exacerbated by the fact that Lovecraft changed his mind on many things over the years. Eventually, his pessimism and cynicism, which at times crossed over into outspoken misanthropy (especially during his decadent phase), gave way to his personal concept of "indifferentism" in the 1930s, but until then he held on to the persona of the world-weary cynic,[260] even some years after he had begun to shake off his decadent pose. This was also exemplified, in a letter from 1923, by Lovecraft exaggeratedly claiming that he had no

[257] Lovecraft owned a copy of this text, printed in 1879, see Joshi (2012b: 96). For direct references to Lucretius and *De rerum natura*, see Lovecraft (2003b: 89; 2018: 161, 458, 460). See also Joshi (2013a: 61-62, 269, 317-318).

[258] See Lovecraft (2003b: 171; 2004b: 53; 2005d: 65; 2011b: 226). See Kenny (2012: 766-767) for a brief summary of Schopenhauer's pessimism. See also Joshi (1990: 30). In a letter in 1923, Lovecraft (1965: 250) mentioned having acquired Schopenhauer's essay "Art of Controversy" in the Little Blue Book series published by Haldeman-Julius.

[259] See Lovecraft (2005d: 62).

[260] See Lovecraft (2003b: 105-106; 2005d: 202, 204; 2011b: 27, 28-29, 45, 49; 2014a: 42) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 44, 132).

beliefs of his own but instead amused himself by assuming "whatever opinion […] is the opposite to that of the person or persons present."[261] This is something to bear in mind when confronted with some of his more excessive outbursts during these early years, especially when contrasted with what he said in an earlier letter in 1921: "To me, the element of *conflict* is essential – I must always have something to hate & fight, & will never quit the field of controversy & satire."[262] This was in the context of finding "the animating principle of my weary days," and is thus again an outgrowth of Lovecraft's decadent approach to life during the first half of the 1920s (as further detailed in Chapter 5). This also explains something he reportedly said once according to his wife Sonia, "It is more important to know what to hate than it is to know what to love."[263] In short, this only meant that Lovecraft needed the stimulation of spirited debate in order to find meaning in existence at this point in his life.

3.2.10. Nietzsche and Determinism

The years bracketing 1920, when his mother was in Butler Hospital, was also the period when Lovecraft began to leave his youthful classicism behind in favour of decadence and aestheticism. Such a shift was partly a response to literary modernism and partly resulted from the influences he received from amateur journalism colleagues (and, in the context of aesthetics, this was when he discovered and was most influenced by Dunsany). This period was also when he began to read Nietzsche, as a direct consequence of his correspondence with a young colleague named Alfred Galpin,[264] who was a college student at this time and presumably had studied Nietzsche in school. The Nietzsche vogue had spread to the English-speaking world in the early decades of the twentieth century, following the first English translations of Nietzsche's work, and there were a number of popular books available (including one by Mencken), some of which Lovecraft likely read at this time.

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261 See Lovecraft (2011b: 45).

262 See Lovecraft (2005d: 205). His temperament also likely played into this to some degree, see Lovecraft (2003b: 179; 2005d: 166-167; 2016b: 220-221; 2019: 360-361) for comments on how he struggled with temper issues in youth before learning self-control.

263 See Davis (1998: 260). Contrast this with another comment years later in 1934: "It is now much easier for me to *despise* or *laugh at* a person or thing than to *hate* him or it" (Lovecraft 2016b: 221).

264 See Lovecraft (2003b: 89-90; 2005d: 166, 202-203; 2006: 147-148; 2014a: 364-366).

The most immediate consequence of this reading, complemented by continued debating via correspondence, was Lovecraft's reluctant conversion from free will to determinism.[265] Causal determinism, simply put, is the philosophical position that everything that happens is the inescapable consequence of everything that has happened previously. Thus, when faced with a choice, the choice a person makes is the only choice that person could have made, as determined by everything that has gone before, both in terms of events and conditions, and in accordance with the laws of nature. For Lovecraft, the consoling attractiveness in this idea may have lain in the fact that it gave him another reason to accept his personal misfortunes with equanimity, and that it made it easier for him to maintain a detached – or cosmic, as it would become – point of view on existence (intellectually, if not always emotionally).

3.2.11. Haeckel and Elliot

Another important influence on Lovecraft at this time (or possibly some years earlier) was the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel,[266] now best known as an early populariser of Darwin who coined the terms "stem cell" and "ecology." His thinking was symptomatic of the early uncertainties in the biological science of the day, as he also advocated a form of Lamarckism (recapitulation theory), as well as a number of other unorthodox ideas such as his pantheistic philosophy of monism. Nowadays he is popularly depicted as an anti-Semitic leading figure in scientific racism and the eugenics movement in Germany, and as an advocate of euthanasia whose ideas would later be adopted by the Nazis,

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[265] See Lovecraft (2005d: 206; 2006: 148; 2015f: 74). Prior to this, Lovecraft may also have been confronted with determinism in Schopenhauer, but without yet being convinced of this philosophical position at the time. As for Nietzsche, it is also possible, although conclusive evidence for this is lacking, that Lovecraft found in Nietzsche some basis for his belief in the importance of maintaining illusions as a substitute for meaning (more on which later). As Saler (2012: 12-13) suggests in a discussion on "enchanting" illusions: "Nietzsche, for example, relentlessly punctured enchanting illusions – but he also recognized that such enchantments were necessary for human flourishing. [His] solution was to embrace illusions without relinquishing an awareness of their contingent status as human creations: to promote a disenchanted form of enchantment. Many of those who followed Nietzsche's trajectory advanced related ideas about the importance of provisional fictions for a pluralistic, nonessentialized world." Elsewhere, Lovecraft (2011b: 226), in a somewhat similar vein, spoke of the three refuges from reality, which he listed as alcohol, religion, and fiction.

[266] See Lovecraft (1968: 263; 2004a: 255; 2005d: 166-167; 2014a: 60; 2015e: 208; 2015f: 81), Lovecraft and Howard (2011b: 748), and Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 103).

although some of these claims have been disputed.[267] Additionally, Haeckel was a proponent of polygenesis and an “out of Asia” theory of human origin, both of which became discredited concepts some decades later. Lovecraft, however, was receptive to some of these ideas, and there are clear and persistent echoes of Haeckel’s thinking in Lovecraft’s non-fiction, with familiar concepts such as the denial of free will, the conception of the universe as eternal, and Haeckel’s views on evolution and religion all of significant relevance to Lovecraft’s developing materialist philosophy.[268]

In 1921, Lovecraft recommended a book called *Modern Science and Materialism* by the science writer Hugh Elliot to one of his correspondents.[269] This now-obscure work was a popular survey of science and philosophy from a strongly materialist standpoint, and it is otherwise hardly ever mentioned by Lovecraft, yet it is possible, following Joshi,[270] that it served as a contributing source for Lovecraft’s view of himself as as mechanistic materialist. In Chapter 5 of the book,[271] Elliot set down his three principles of materialism, namely: 1) the uniformity of law, 2) the denial of teleology, and 3) the denial of any form of existence other than those envisaged by physics and chemistry. These principles are also core concepts in Lovecraft’s own philosophy, corresponding, as will become clear, to 1) his desire to escape the limitations of time, space, and natural law, 2) his conviction that the universe has no purpose and that existence lacks inherent meaning, and 3) his refutation of supernaturalism, including the idea of a human soul. This, of course, is not to say that Lovecraft derived these ideas directly from Elliot, but rather that he found support in Elliot for convictions that he had already held, in one form or another, since his teenage years.

Over the following years, during which Lovecraft embraced his short-lived decadent phase, his thinking remained relatively unchanged. The period culminated in his two years in New York, after which he returned home to Providence. The dramatic philosophical developments that came to pass in the subsequent years will be the subject of the next chapter.

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[267] See Richards (2008: 269-276).

[268] Lovecraft particularly enjoyed Haeckel’s description of God as a “gaseous vertebrate,” see Lovecraft (2006: 42; 2016a: 164).

[269] See Lovecraft (2014a: 365).

[270] The influence of Elliot and Haeckel and their respective books on Lovecraft’s metaphysics has been extensively analysed by Joshi (1990: 7-20; 2013a: 316-322). However, it is possible that Joshi significantly overestimates the direct impact of Elliot’s work on Lovecraft’s thinking.

[271] See Elliot (1919: 138-142).

4. Lovecraft's Intellectual Development: After New York

In the previous chapter, the story of Lovecraft's intellectual development ended with the years in the early 1920s prior to his marriage and move to New York. In this chapter, the story will continue with his philosophical development immediately after his return from New York, which at first was characterised by an emphatic drive to return to his roots. Later changes were tied to his evolving political views, in the wake of the Great Depression.

4.1. Lovecraft's Personal Philosophy, Part II

Towards the end of his stay in New York, Lovecraft hoped only for a return to Providence, and he had come to view his intellectual interests as being at least partly responsible for the mistake of moving to the metropolis. The development of these interests had lain at the root of his decadent phase, which in turn had inspired him to pursue a literary career in New York. But that was a closed chapter now, as Lovecraft looked forward to returning to his home, and to his past. This was spelled out in the following letter, written shortly before he left the city:

> In my younger days I was fond of these philosophical speculations, but finally reached so complete a degree of scepticism that the very process of philosophising ceased to interest me. I am an absolute sceptic and materialist, and regard the universe as a wholly purposeless and essentially temporary incident in the ceaseless and boundless rearrangements of electrons, atoms, and molecules which constitute the blind but regular mechanical patterns of cosmic activity. Nothing really matters, and the only thing for a person to do is to take the artificial and traditional values he finds around him and pretend they are real; in order to retain that illusion of significance in life which gives to human events their apparent motivation and semblance of interest. I'm through with intellectualism now – my tastes are wholly those of an antiquarian, and of one who is amused by certain special trifles in literature and the arts. An epicurean and dilettante, in short. (Lovecraft 1968: 41)

However, as it soon turned out, Lovecraft was far from done with intellectualism. This chapter will outline his main intellectual interests during the remainder of his life after his return from New York.

4.1.1. Santayana

Lovecraft's two years in New York, following his marriage, gradually built up a deep-seated need in him for a return to his old life, which is why he went to great lengths to regain his roots once he returned to Providence. In fact, he embarked on a quest for a philosophical and aesthetic return to New England and its traditional past on every front. An important component in this endeavour was his reading of the Spanish-born philosopher George Santayana. Lovecraft had mentioned as early as 1921 that he had not yet read Santayana at that time – "till I have perused Santayana"[272] – and it is unclear exactly when this perusal eventually took place. What we do know is that in a 1928 letter he offered the following comment: "As a cynic, I don't consider truth of sufficient importance to warrant the shattering of a beautiful illusion for its sake – my general attitude being much like that of George Santayana in this respect."[273] Two years later, Lovecraft was now referring to Santayana as "the greatest living philosopher," and two years after that, Santayana was not only the greatest but also "the *only* living philosopher of the very first rank."[274]

What was it about Santayana's thinking that appealed so strongly to Lovecraft? Santayana's materialism was a part of it, but his anti-foundationalist ideas concerning knowledge and belief became particularly important to Lovecraft over the subsequent years. These related closely to Lovecraft's own ideas of how to maintain illusions in order to find meaning in existence, more on which later. This was spelled out in Santayana's *Scepticism and Animal Faith* in 1923, a work that served as an introduction to a new system of philosophy that was eventually developed in *Realms of Being* in 1942. This later work dealt with questions of ontology, whereas *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, as well as the earlier five-volume work *The Life of Reason* in 1905 and 1906, which Lovecraft may or may not have read, dealt with epistemology.

Since Lovecraft never specified in detail what it was that he derived from his reading of Santayana, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of the influence. But it seems that the concept of "animal faith," which can be briefly summarised as "the recommendation to develop our view of the world on the basis, not of some supposed elementary data of consciousness, but of everyday beliefs which it is dishonest to pretend

[272] See Lovecraft (2003b: 116).
[273] See Lovecraft (2015f: 101).
[274] See Lovecraft (2014a: 146; 2016b: 323).

we do not hold,"[275] supplied him with a needed philosophical permission to hold on to certain prejudices and biases while still claiming to be a detached and unemotional observer who was only interested in beauty and truth. This became particularly important to him at this time, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when he was consistently and vigorously arguing for the unique importance of cultural traditions as the only thing that could anchor the individual in an otherwise meaningless existence, through the associations that such traditions had for the individual to whom they were relevant.[276] It was also around 1930 that Lovecraft began making use of the term "adventurous expectancy" (mentioned in the previous chapter) to describe the motivation behind his lifelong quest for such antiquarian vistas as could provide him with the emotional jolt he sought through finding something that connected him with the traditional past.

4.1.2. Cosmic Outsideness

Another term that appeared late in the 1920s was "cosmic outsideness," as a henceforth frequently recurring descriptor for Lovecraft's cosmic views. One of the first times Lovecraft made use of this term was in the capsule biography he provided for *The Best Short Stories of 1928*, an anthology edited by Edward J. O'Brien, in which "The Colour out of Space" was listed on the "Roll of Honor."[277] Lovecraft provided an early definition in a letter the following year (emphasis in the original):

> I dislike mechanically clever tales because I feel an omnipresent atmosphere of spuriousness & insincerity about them. I choose those with an element of cosmic outsideness, because I believe that this element is really the only form of the supernatural which can be used without a suggestion of flatness, grotesqueness, & falsity. Only in the direction of the outside can our sense of *mystic spaciousness & expectant adventurousness* be titillated to the fullest extent. The field is far richer – though of course it is possible to do very poor work in it. (Lovecraft and Derleth 2013a: 225)

This was strongly associated with the ever-present attraction of the unknown for Lovecraft, and, particularly, the emphasis on artistic sincerity that became the hallmark of his aesthetics in the years following his return from New York (as will be seen in the next chapter).

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275 See Sprigge (1995: 63).

276 This is well exemplified in a debate that Lovecraft carried on with James F. Morton in 1930, see Lovecraft (2011b: 220-222, 226-227), which reveals the extent to which his views on truth and knowledge had changed at this time compared to earlier years.

277 See Lovecraft (2018: 195) and Joshi (2013b: 693).

4.1.3. Spengler and Krutch

Two other authorities of interest – although they were tied more to certain opinions that Lovecraft had held since his teenage years than to any change in these opinions – were Oswald Spengler and Joseph Wood Krutch, both of whom were frequently mentioned by Lovecraft in the final decade of his life. Both were also representative of a larger intellectual current that was concerned with "the decline of the West," and that found some of its philosophical underpinnings in the pessimism of Schopenhauer and, particularly, Jacob Burckhardt (whom Lovecraft apparently never read), as well as in some aspects of the thinking of Nietzsche. Other early foundations included degeneration theory and the writings of Henry Adams and Brooks Adams (the racial pessimism of Arthur de Gobineau was another early outgrowth of the same general idea).[278]

Lovecraft read the first volume of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* in 1926 (when the English translation was published) or early in 1927, and in it he found confirmation of some pre-existing pessimistic ideas he had held since childhood.[279] These ideas had their roots in Lovecraft's personal misfortunes as much as in larger historical developments such as the fall of Rome in ancient times and *fin de siècle* cultural pessimism and the Great War in the present. They centred on the coming collapse of Western civilisation, which Lovecraft saw as inevitable, with the twentieth century being an increasingly decadent twilight period before the ultimate end, which presumably was to come at the hands of some invading force from the east.

Lovecraft's reading of Krutch's *The Modern Temper*,[280] when this book was published in 1929, was closely tied to his opposition to the "machine culture" that he saw as deeply destructive to the traditional past that he desired to preserve,[281] particularly at this time in the years after his

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[278] See Herman (1997) for a detailed discussion of some of these thinkers.

[279] See Lovecraft (2003b: 166; 2011b: 190, 278; 2015e: 196; 2015f: 103; 2016b: 207-208, 300, 368), Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 246, 2011b: 519-520), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 78), Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 273-274), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 122).

[280] Lovecraft first read the book in serialised form in *The Atlantic Monthly*, see Lovecraft (2015f: 172). See also Lovecraft (1971b: 82-83; 2011b: 180, 197, 226, 273-274).

[281] "I find existence tolerable – because I keep aloof from the rising machine-culture and remain a part of the old New England civilisation which preceded it. But nothing good can be said of that cancerous machine-culture itself," and "We need an urbane and homogeneous upper class to maintain a real civilisation amidst the decay of the machine age" (Lovecraft 1968: 304; 2018: 202), as he said in 1929. See also, for example, Lovecraft (1971b: 63-65; 2016b: 137-138; 2019: 121).

return from New York. *The Modern Temper* concerned itself with a personal response to the impact of modernity on the Western world, in some aspects as a kind of early forerunner to Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, and in other aspects as a product of the cognitive dissonance that Krutch suffered from having to "undergo the painful process of reconsidering his belief in man's nobility and importance in the universe because it could not be reconciled with seemingly incontrovertible evidence to the contrary."[282] Such evidence had been produced by the scientific breakthroughs of the modern era. Although he was a secularist, Krutch was essentially saying that "men of the modern temper no longer believed in religion, yet had also lost faith in the secular systems which had taken its place."[283] And the consequence for Krutch was one that was equally descriptive of Lovecraft: "That Krutch accepted science as the final arbiter, while the anti-secularists rejected it, can be less obvious than what was shared: a pessimism about the present and the future, and a tendency to glorify the past."[284] Just as in the case of Spengler and *The Decline of the West*, then, Krutch and *The Modern Temper* was an example of a popular book that confirmed some of Lovecraft's long-standing preconceived notions. And the similarities were further extended by the fact that Krutch, again like Spengler, presented a cyclical theory of history that explained the rise and fall of civilisations.

4.1.4. Indifferentism

In March 1927, almost a year after his return from New York, Lovecraft wrote in a letter about being "absolutely indifferent instead of actively hostile toward mankind,"[285] for reasons that at that time seemed to revolve mostly around the fact that very few people, according to Lovecraft, liked his fiction. Around 1930, however, the cynical pessimist had transformed into the "indifferentist,"[286] at least on paper, as Lovecraft was sometimes anything but indifferent when he was passionate about something. This included tradition, as his favoured way of finding meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence, but otherwise he henceforth consistently claimed to be a rational indifferentist against a cosmic backdrop. At the same time, it seems a likely possibility that Lovecraft's indifferentism also reflected a desire to portray himself

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[282] See Slater (1981: 193).
[283] See Slater (1981: 189).
[284] See Slater (1981: 198).
[285] See Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 67).
[286] See Lovecraft (1971b: 186; 2011b: 186) and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 269).

(perhaps even to himself) as mostly detached from worldly worries, while hardship and difficulties continued to beset him. If so, this served as a way of shielding himself from the psychological consequences of future setbacks, which he may have come to see as inevitable, particularly since he developed these ideas in the early years of the Great Depression.

4.1.5. Relativity

Lovecraft's initial reaction to Einstein's theory of relativity had been decidedly negative,[287] but his understanding soon improved significantly. This was a likely result of his having read popular articles in magazines and newspapers at the time, since no other material would have been available to him. Another reason why Lovecraft so quickly developed a better understanding of Einstein's theories, and thus a more favourable view of them, may have been the fact that religious believers attempted to make use of relativity in order to support their embattled theistic beliefs, and this was a manoeuvre that Lovecraft the materialist could not easily tolerate.[288] At this time Lovecraft had also developed a more nuanced way of looking at the question of truth and how to determine whether a claim was true or not, "is or isn't," as he habitually referred to it. His former absolutist attitude thus increasingly gave way to an approach informed by probability:[289] "All I deal in is probabilities."[290] However, Lovecraft's portrayal of himself as a methodological sceptic with a mind kept free of irrational beliefs and other biasses often conflicted with his habitual and idiosyncratic appeal to tradition, which at such times left his scepticism and indifferentism as unachievable ideals.

4.1.6. Meaning and Illusions

Lovecraft's cosmic perspective had also led him to regard the concepts of value and meaning as wholly relative in a deterministic universe that was

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[287] See Lovecraft (2003b: 75-79).

[288] See Lovecraft (1968: 263-265; 2014a: 170, 180-181).

[289] See Lovecraft (1971b: 223) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 363-364). Compare, for example, with Lovecraft (1971b: 299; 2011b: 279).

[290] See Lovecraft (2011b: 186). This was not a new insight for Lovecraft, since as far back as 1917 he had spoken of how "[o]pen-mindedness becomes a fault when it fails to take into account the fundamental probabilities of things" (Lovecraft 2005d: 88). He also discussed probability in the first of his "In Defence of Dagon" essays in 1921 (see Lovecraft 2006: 51). But the concept did not seem to have become a fully developed and integrated part of his thinking until the late 1920s.

entirely indifferent to human concerns.[291] This was a viewpoint he had maintained, in one way or another, since the earliest days of his intellectual discoveries. His experiences in New York served as a pivot for many developments in his life, and, as stated earlier, there is a clear distinction between his thinking before New York and after New York, but there are nevertheless some elements, one in particular, that united Lovecraft's earlier and later life. Before going to New York, and during his decadent phase, Lovecraft naturally enough emphasised beauty, and he had also come to see the discoveries made by science (the truth, in other words) as a destroyer of the comforting illusions of the past. Hence the need for the individual to maintain his own illusions, as he later expressed it. But after his return from New York, he also sought a return to the past, and the only way to accomplish this was via the road of tradition. But the discoveries of science still remained. They revealed tradition to be empty and false as far as truth was concerned, and this could not be denied. Believers in religion and the supernatural believed what was manifestly false, and for them Lovecraft had nothing but scorn. Faced with this, his solution was to maintain a wilful illusion of the past in the present, all the while freely acknowledging that this was exactly what he was doing. Thus, the uniting element of Lovecraft's entire life was his reverence for what he viewed as the traditional past, which emerges as the intellectual backbone of his thinking, and as the chief source of meaning in his existence, since his earliest memories of childhood.

With this analysis in mind, it is possible to see that there were essentially three different ways in which Lovecraft found meaning in his life: meaning from beauty, meaning from truth, and meaning from tradition. There are, of course, no absolute boundaries between these groupings, and the ideas associated with them often overlapped during the various phases of Lovecraft's life, which led to unavoidable inconsistency and self-contradiction. It must again be remembered that none of this was intended by Lovecraft as a coherent and fully developed philosophy to be presented before the world, but was instead merely the result of decades of reading and stimulating argument (sometimes only for the sake of argument) with his friends. In the end, however, beauty and truth had to yield to tradition, and the only way to find meaning in tradition was to put it there through a continual process of personal association (emphasis in the original):

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291 See, for example, Lovecraft (1968: 234; 2005c: 214; 2005d: 185-186; 2006: 76).

> It is *because* the cosmos is meaningless that we must secure our individual illusions of values, direction, & interest by upholding the artificial streams which gave us such worlds of salutary illusion. That is – since nothing means anything in itself, we must preserve the proximate & arbitrary background which makes things around us seem as if they did mean something. (Lovecraft 2011b: 243)

Lovecraft sometimes referred to himself as an "inveterate associationist,"[292] although he always conceded that the (for him) deeply meaningful attachments he formed with various elements in his surroundings were, in the end, entirely the product of meaningless chance, which did not make them any less valuable for Lovecraft.

4.1.7. Time

It is tempting to see Lovecraft's peculiar attitude towards time as merely an example of some sort of Peter Pan syndrome:[293] Lovecraft's childhood was for the most part happy, whereas his adulthood was difficult, and so he yearned for an escape back to the carefree time of his youth before the intrusion of reality. This suggestion, although too superficial, has an element of truth to it, in that the passing of time was obviously associated with change for Lovecraft, and it was also the element that prevented him from reaching all of the past (not just his childhood). Hence his antagonism towards the "clawing monster Time,"[294] coupled with nostalgia, or escapism, or future shock, or a combination of these and perhaps still other things. Thus, an imaginative move backward through time was a frequently occurring component in Lovecraft's nostalgic accounts of various episodes from his life. Examples include his return with a childhood friend to their boyhood clubhouse in the woods, his discovery of Marblehead, the fact that he was writing on old stationary purchased in 1910 that he happened to find 25 years later, his first visit to the rural countryside in Vermont, his trip to the island of Nantucket off Cape Cod, a day's visit with his aunt to an ancestral area in western Rhode Island,[295] and so on. Being able to (re-)experience the

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292 See Lovecraft (1976a: 150-151). See also Lovecraft (1992b: 44; 2003b: 122-123; 2004b: 62; 2011b: 123). See also Lovecraft (2011b: 248-251; 2018: 152-153) for examples of the long lists of associations that were sometimes sparked for Lovecraft by, in these particular cases, a spoon and the early 1900s.

293 See Lovecraft (1976a: 261; 2005d: 164; 2007b: 69, 73; 2016b: 183-184, 192-194, 221) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 198). See Murray (2009) for a discussion on Lovecraft's "time-defiance."

294 See Lovecraft (2005d: 212).

295 See Lovecraft (1968: 158-159; 2005d: 211-212, 227; 2011b: 360-361; 2016b: 249-250) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 380-381).

past in this manner meant that time's inexorable march was defeated, if only for a moment, and this was an idea that Lovecraft emphasised repeatedly in the 1930s.

4.2. Social Attitudes

At this point, following the discussion on Lovecraft's scientific and philosophical thinking as it has been presented so far, it only remains to say something on certain underlying social attitudes that Lovecraft maintained and in some cases slowly modified over the course of his life. In the main, this concerns such important elements as his views on race and class, his political opinions, and his portrayal of himself as a traditional English gentleman. These elements are interconnected to some degree, as they all share a common source in Lovecraft's cultural and social background, but, on the other hand, they diverge to a significant extent with respect to how much Lovecraft developed and integrated them into his mature thinking.

4.2.1. Racial Views

Lovecraft's racial views constituted an unexamined reflection of the prejudices of the day that were current in the social and political climate in New England, entailing such main components as anti-Semitism and antipathy towards the new immigration,[296] a strongly racialist viewpoint according to which different "race stocks" were clearly separable from each other according to their respective defining characteristics,[297] and an enduring belief in the biological inferiority of blacks and aboriginal

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[296] In this context he frequently emphasised what he saw as the cultural incompatibility between Anglo-Saxon and Jewish people, as in the following late example from 1934, when he was arguing against Alfred Galpin, who was clearly displaying fascist sympathies at the time: "Jewish culture is basically antipathetic to ours – permanently hostile, & incapable of admixture or compromise" (Lovecraft 2003b: 209). However, "since the major differences between the Aryan & Semite groups, so-called (actually, each is infinitely varied & lacking in biological homogeneity), is *cultural* rather than *biological*, it is absurd & unwise to carry discrimination to the point of disqualifying thousands of cultural Aryans who may happen to possess a stray drop of Semitic blood" (ibid).

[297] Lovecraft was unsympathetic to the cultural anthropology of Franz Boas, see Lovecraft (2011b: 252). He also clearly subscribed to a polygenetic theory of the origin of human races (as, for example, suggested by the racial distinctions in "Polaris"), and he was a proponent of an "out of Asia" theory of human origins (referenced in the ghostwritten "The Last Test," in addition to which he alluded to the cephalic index in "The Mound," see Lovecraft 2017a: 91, 172). These ideas likely derived from his reading of Haeckel.

Australians.[298] These opinions, combined with a concomitant belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy, were forcefully expressed by Lovecraft until the early 1920s, at which point his exposure to different viewpoints from some of his friends and amateur journalism colleagues, as well as various scientific developments (as detailed earlier), caused him to begin re-evaluating some aspects of his earlier dogmatic attitudes.

Lovecraft's limited writings on race are mostly restricted[299] to his early correspondence with Rheinhart Kleiner (prior to 1920),[300] his reaction in 1922 to seeing the slums of New York for the first time,[301] and some long-standing debates with James F. Morton and J. Vernon Shea in the early 1930s.[302] A more detailed analysis of this material reveals the fact that Lovecraft's early hostility against Jews was directed at the new immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia, due to both cultural and racial differences.[303] This position was later coupled with a further resentment against assimilated Jews for having too much influence, as Lovecraft saw it, over the artistic and literary scene in America due to their economic control over newspapers and publishers.[304] However, both of these strands of anti-Semitism had for the most part disappeared in the final years of Lovecraft's life, partly due to his increased and

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[298] See, for example, Lovecraft (2011b: 283-284; 2015e: 83-84). What signs of ancient civilisation there were in Africa he attributed to influences from the north, see Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 140-141), which suggests familiarity with ideas such as hyperdiffusionism and the Hamitic hypothesis, as previously discussed.

[299] He also produced two notorious racist poems (Lovecraft 2013a: 33-34, 389), the first in 1905, when he was a teenager, and the second in 1912, during the blank years after his failure to graduate high school. Among the few things that are known about Lovecraft's life at that time is that he suffered one of his "near-breakdowns" in 1912, and that he also made his will the same year, see Joshi (2013a: 134).

[300] See Lovecraft (2005d: 19, 25-27, 35-36, 74-75, 111, 124, 154-155).

[301] See Lovecraft (2005c: 28-30; 2018: 97-98). Some additional comments followed during his two years in New York, see Lovecraft (2005c: 115, 234, 268-271).

[302] See Lovecraft (2011b: 251-261, 281-284, 306; 2016b: 97, 136-137, 142-143, 154-160, 176-177). Lovecraft also occasionally discussed racial matters with Robert E. Howard, who was of a similar mind on this matter, see, for example, Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 78, 133-135, 212, 466-467, 480-482).

[303] Contrast with Lovecraft (2005c: 269), in which he speaks approvingly of "superior Semites," meaning Sephardi Jews who originally hailed from the Iberian peninsula. Some of them had settled in America in early colonial times, which is why Lovecraft accepted them as assimilated members of the New England elite. Also, his denigrating views on the newly arrived Ashkenazi Jews from the east were shared by many Sephardi Jews, who at this time also regarded the Ashkenazi as inferiors, see Chapter 2 in Efron (2016). And there was a further division within the Ashkenazi culture itself, between earlier Jewish immigrants from Germany and the new arrivals with their separate culture and language from farther east, see Higham (1988: 66-67).

[304] See, for example, Lovecraft (2016b: 170-171) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 134).

mutually beneficial contact with Jewish writers and fans (such as Robert Bloch, Donald A. Wollheim, Julius Schwartz, Kenneth Sterling, and others),[305] and partly due to his changing political beliefs overall (which moved him in an increasingly egalitarian direction at the very end of his life). He also abandoned his belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority after his years in New York, as stated explicitly in some of his letters in the late 1920s.[306] However, he still maintained his anthropologically motivated conviction that blacks and aboriginal Australians were biologically inferior,[307] until his premature death in 1937 put an end to any potential further evolution of his views.

4.2.2. Political Opinions

Lovecraft's youthful political opinions are well summed up in the fact that he named his amateur journal *The Conservative*, and it was in the essays he printed in its pages that he first laid out his dogmatic views in

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305 For example, Lovecraft defended Jewish art against Nazism in a letter in October 1936 (see Lovecraft and Derleth 2013b: 753). Another example of this tendency was his support and defence of his amateur journalism colleague Hyman Bradofsky, who, as president of NAPA for the 1935-1936 term, had been the target of excessive hostility from other NAPA members, see Lovecraft (2004a: 401-402). See Joshi (2013b: 975-976) for additional details. See Waugh (2006: 177-178) for a comparison between Lovecraft and Ezra Pound with respect to anti-Semitism.

306 See, for example, Lovecraft (2011b: 114, 281). Compare also with what Lovecraft said in 1933: "I am at one with those who lament the imposition of Aryan civilisation upon alien races who – like the Polynesians and the more advanced American Indians – were gradually working out ways of life of their own, fitted to their especial needs," and "there is no reason to consider western civilisation superior to the culture of China or ancient Egypt or perhaps other groups" (Lovecraft and Howard 2011b: 574, 675). Likewise, in 1934 (Lovecraft 2015e: 200): "Only an ignorant dolt would attempt to call a Chinese gentleman – heir to one of the greatest artistic & philosophic traditions in the world – an 'inferior' of any sort […] most of the psychological race-differences which strike us so prominently are *cultural* rather than *biological*. If one could take a Japanese infant, alter his features to the Anglo-Saxon type through plastic surgery, & place him with an American family in Boston for rearing – without telling him that he is not an American – the chances are that in 20 years the result would be a typical American youth with very few instincts to distinguish him from his pure Nordic college-mates. The same is true of other superior alien races including the Jew – although the Nazis persist in acting on a false biological conception." In this context it merits noting that Lovecraft's occasional derogatory comments about "Asiatics" and "Mongoloids" in connection with his years in New York did not refer to actual Asians, particularly since East Asian immigration was mostly concentrated to the West Coast. It seems clear that these comments instead referred to Jewish immigrants from the east that Lovecraft believed to be of mixed origin (see Lovecraft 1968: 68-69; 2005c: 72, 268). This reveals his awareness of a now discredited anthropological theory that linked the Ashkenazi Jews to the Khazars.

307 See, for example, Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 177).

favour of American entry into World War I,[308] against pacifism and the League of Nations,[309] in favour of prohibition and temperance,[310] against immigration and the melting pot,[311] and so on. These ideas, at this time, were mainly a consequence of his cloistered immaturity and the fact that he was still some years away from breaking out of his reclusive invalid stage, and must also be seen in the context of some relevant developments leading up to the entry of the United States into the war. This was a time of rapidly rising nationalism, with a resulting Americanisation drive that insisted on the complete cultural assimilation of all immigrants in the wake of mass immigration. The actual outbreak of war resulted in a strong anti-German reaction for a while, although other nationalities fared better during the war years, when the entire nation came together to support the war effort.

After the war, the Americanisation efforts largely collapsed in the early 1920s after the violence and unrest of the Red Scare, to instead be replaced by increasing isolationism and strengthened anti-immigration sentiments, anti-Semitism in particular.[312] Lovecraft's political opinions followed suit in the early 1920s, and his subsequent attempts to return to his roots after his years in New York only deepened his reactionary aristocratic attitudes in the late 1920s, until the outbreak of the Great Depression.[313] But the nationwide poverty and unemployment that followed in the 1930s, coupled with the increasing amount of debating via correspondence that he undertook at this time, caused his political thinking to change dramatically in a process that became particularly

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308 See, for example, Lovecraft (2006: 15-16).

309 See, for example, Lovecraft (2003b: 55-56; 2006: 35-36).

310 See, for example, Lovecraft (2003b: 85; 2005d: 39, 48-49; 2006: 16-19, 27-28). For a later perspective, when Lovecraft had come to see Prohibition as unworkable, see Lovecraft (2007b: 92).

311 See Lovecraft (2006: 21-22, 33-35).

312 See Chapters 8-10 in Higham (1988) for a detailed account of these developments. This was the time of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and Henry Ford's campaign against the "international Jew," with the Jewish population in America being the target of both anti-German and anti-radical antipathy, since the Bolshevik revolution in Russia was seen by some as a plot by Russian Jews, supported and funded by wealthy German Jews.

313 Lovecraft expressed some measure of support for fascism at least as early as 1923, following the rise of Mussolini's regime in Italy the year before, see Lovecraft (2011b: 22-23). He also continued to emphasise his desire for the maintenance of a high cultural standard based on the traditional past, and the consequent need to protect civilisation from communist revolution, see, for example, Lovecraft (1968: 307-308; 1971b: 79-80; 2014a: 162). His continued support for fascism and Mussolini in the late 1920s are to be seen in the same context – see, for example, Lovecraft (2015f: 101; 2018: 200-201; 2019: 67-68) – prior to these views being modified by his taking an interest in the technocracy movement, as detailed below.

noticeable around 1931. Significantly, this was also the year when his writing career went to pieces with the rejection of *At the Mountains of Madness*.[314] He became increasingly convinced of the unworkability of Western democracy (largely because he viewed the government as being entirely under the control of capitalistic plutocrats),[315] and, wanting to avoid a communist revolution, he instead began developing his thoughts on a Mussolini-style brand of fascism.[316]

However, a closer examination of Lovecraft's writings on the matter will reveal that what he was advocating was more properly understood as a form of technocracy,[317] consisting of highly trained specialists that constituted an aristocracy of merit (or meritocracy) rather than an aristocracy of birth.[318] The political program he now promoted in fact

[314] In a letter written in June 1931, Lovecraft (1971b: 377) described himself as "arguing with the blind upholders of an aristocratic tradition for its own sake." Two and a half years later, he was engaged in a "half-dozen or so other controversies with reactionaries" (Lovecraft 2019: 323), as a result of which he wrote an essay on his political and economic views (see Lovecraft 2006: 96-110). In this context he also made the following observation, which is as pertinent now as it was 90 years ago: "The one amusing & edifying thing about occupying a middle ground like mine is that one can experience simultaneously the abuse of both reactionaries & radicals – thus being able to compare the two psychologies impartially (Lovecraft 2019: 323). And similarly: "If the extremists on both sides can only be kept in check, the middle-grounders will probably be able to devise a safe course through the one method – trial & error – applicable to so unprecedented a muddle" (ibid: 388).

[315] See, for example, Lovecraft (2014a: 166, 179-180).

[316] See Lovecraft (2003b: 166-167; 2006: 93-94) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 365-366, 469-472; 2011b: 562).

[317] The technocracy movement in North America enjoyed a brief vogue in the early 1930s as a direct consequence of the Great Depression, the Committee on Technocracy having been founded at Columbia University in 1932 under the leadership of Howard Scott (with the sociologist Thorstein Veblen as an important forerunner in the previous decades). See Kuznick (1987: 47-51) for additional details. See also Joshi (2013b: 907-908).

[318] Lovecraft had in fact never really supported the idea of an aristocracy of birth. "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 organisation" (Lovecraft 2006: 70), he had said in 1921, but he had also argued that the "healthiest aristocracy is the most elastic – willing to beckon and receive as accessions all men of whatever antecedents who prove themselves aesthetically and intellectually fitted for membership" (ibid: 71). Similarly in 1919: "In the abolition of fixed and rigid class lines a distinct sociological advance is made, permitting a steady and progressive recruiting of the upper levels from the fresh and vigorous body of the people beneath" (ibid: 34). Later in life he wished to do away with class distinctions altogether, see footnote 322. But he consistently maintained his meritocratic views to the end of his life, the following example is from 1933: "the easy accessibility of avenues of development seems to me an unqualified advantage; insomuch as it opens the way for persons to find their own proper level according to natural capacity" (Lovecraft 2019: 321).

turned out to resemble European-style social democracy – except that it was non-democratic since Lovecraft believed that only an authoritarian government could implement the reforms that were needed, precisely because such a government did not have to concern itself with party politics or popular support.[319] He summarised this view in a letter in 1932 (emphasis in the original):

> What I'd like to see is a kind of modified fascism, conducted by a group whose dominant purpose is genuine equilibrium rather than excessive profit. Artificially spread-out unemployment, unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, government by commissions of experts, restriction of the franchise through very severe educational tests, (tests that would bar *me* out) replacement of the profit motive by the demand-supplying motive, education for both intelligent industry & cultivated leisure – utopian stuff, which only gawd knows how could ever be secured. […] I'm coming to think that the Republican party represents about the most hopelessly obsolescent & least promisingly flexible organisation in the field. […] I fancy the Democratic ticket is the best bet this year. (Lovecraft and Derleth 2013b: 513)

The reforms that Lovecraft supported thus in some instances surpassed the ones that had brought the beginnings of the British welfare state into being in the years leading up to World War. In fact, Lovecraft looked more to the Scandinavian countries for inspiration in this regard. But, in any case, this phase lasted only a few years, as Lovecraft well knew the impossibility of seeing these plans realised, and as the harsh realities of fascism in practice gradually became apparent to him,[320] which is why he turned to the only realistic alternative: Roosevelt's New Deal.[321] Lovecraft had thus gone from being a reactionary pretend-aristocrat in his youth,

[319] Lovecraft was not the only one to conflate fascism and social democracy at this time, since one of the official party lines supported by Comintern in the 1930s (and originally coming out of the German Communist Party in the 1920s) was that social democracy was indeed a variety of fascism. See Winner (2018) for a detailed discussion.

[320] As to the question of Lovecraft's qualified support for Hitler and the Nazis (see Lovecraft 2011b: 322-323; 2015e: 81-83; 2016b: 132-134, 143, 149, 160-163, 202-203; 2019: 327-328), this was in the context of Hitler's attempts (as Lovecraft saw it, as a way to resist decadence) to maintain a traditional German culture combined with a strong opposition to communism. Thus, Lovecraft's supportive statements occurred prior to the major Nazi atrocities, beginning with the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, and his subsequent letters contain occasional condemnations of Nazi policies. See, for example, Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 754): "But whatever permanent difficulties there are, almost any line of solution is better than the arbitrary & unscientific one which the Nazis have chosen […] One would prefer a gradual evolution like that going on in the Scandinavian countries."

[321] See Wolanin (2013) for a discussion on politics in Lovecraft's correspondence during the time of the New Deal.

who scorned "the rabble" and whose only concern was the maintenance of a romanticised English civilisation of the past, to being (on paper) a technocratic fascist in the early 1930s, to being a contemporary Fabian socialist who had finally accepted all the realities of the modern world.[322]

4.2.3. The Old Gentleman

The young Lovecraft liked to present himself not merely as a reclusive invalid, but also as an elderly gentleman, clearly patterning himself on his grandfather Whipple and on Dr. Clark (his aunt Lillian's husband), since these two important figures in his life had served as his male role models during his childhood. There is nothing particularly strange about this, although it is perhaps notable that the pose stayed with him into his adult years and remained one of his eccentricities for the rest of his life (whereas the reclusive invalid soon disappeared in the early 1920s). "I was never really young, & always strove for elderly, sedate effects in attire," and the "way to lead a contented life […] is to put away childish things at the start and be an old fellow early and long," he said in letters in 1919 and 1926.[323] A few years later he described in another letter how, "in adolescence […] I acquired the dignified old man complex and did my best to emulate my revered grandfather's sartorial scheme."[324] As an adult he was always conservative in his attire, so as not to attract undue attention, and he never grew facial hair, always insisting on a clean shave due to his concern for what was fitting in the context of the eighteenth century. In later years he relished playing the role of "Grandpa" to many of his correspondents, some of whom were only a little younger than him, and in the 1930s he became increasingly

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322 "I stand today somewhere among the Fabian socialists – having ideas in common with Wells, Shaw, Norman Thomas, Bertrand Russell, &c., but still believing that the only way to put rational ideas in force is to hammer them little by little into the programmes of the existing major parties & bring about their adoption through traditional avenues of legislation" (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 127), he said in 1936. In other letters the same year he also talked about "having become democratic in my old age," and how Marxist class consciousness was a "vicious principle," with social classes consequently something "to be got rid of or minimised" (Lovecraft 2007b: 368; 2015e: 284). See also Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 151, 213, 217) for Lovecraft's oft-quoted indictment of the Republicans, his dismissal of various white supremacist and fascist movements (including the Ku Klux Klan), and for comments about how he had been "on the other side until 1931." Also, in a letter to another correspondent, "I used to be a hide-bound Tory simply for traditional and antiquarian reasons – and because I had never done any real *thinking* on civics and industry and the future" (Lovecraft 1976b: 279).

323 See Lovecraft (2005d: 163; 1968: 56).

324 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 294). See also Lovecraft and Derleth (ibid: 115).

involved in acting as a mentor to aspiring writers, donating much time and assistance against no compensation despite his own difficult situation.

The "old gentleman" persona, then, was integral to Lovecraft's personality, and to his whole approach to life, or, more specifically, to living his life. Another foundation for Lovecraft's view of himself as a gentleman lay (once again) in his devotion to the traditional past, specifically the Georgian era and the birth of English high culture in the eighteenth century, with which he identified (as detailed earlier).[325] This peculiarity had its roots in his childhood reading of the Augustan classics, and it is not an exaggeration to say that it turned into almost an obsession with him, as the deepest bedrock on which he constructed his whole personal identity. It explains many of his eccentricities and odd behaviour patterns, including the persistent and ever-present self-sabotage that dogged his literary career and ultimately ended up killing him at the age of 46.[326] He did not often elaborate on his gentlemanly ideals in detail, however, with some rare exceptions occurring in two letters from 1929 and 1933:

> 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. […] 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. (Lovecraft 1968: 288-289)

> Of course, one is at liberty to have his own preferences in comparing the gentleman – who regards the process of living as an art – with those specific practitioners of various creative arts who are callous to the art-element in life. As I have said, my vote goes to the gentleman; because I believe that a well-rounded civilisation demands first of all a sound groundwork which can infuse the element of beauty (i.e., rhythm, harmony with a given pattern, consistency with major motivations, absence of excrescences, favouring of the evolved & richly rewarding sensitivenesses over the cruder instincts) into the

[325] See Brewer (2013) for a detailed account of this period in English history.

[326] This is an example of Max Weber's concept of pure value-related conduct, defined as "the behavior of persons who, regardless of the consequences, conduct themselves in such a way as to put into practice their conviction of what appears to them to be required by duty, honor, beauty, religiosity, piety, or the importance of a 'cause,' no matter what its goal," quoted in Castronovo (1987: 12).

> constantly-encountered fabric of daily living as well as into the merely occasionally-encountered objects of conscious & specifically aesthetic craftsmanship. (Lovecraft 2016b: 205)

There are also some examples of Lovecraft claiming to hardly ever have laughed out loud in public, since a gentleman is reserved and does not show emotion.[327] His oft-recurring raging against commercialism (not just in the context of pulp fiction) was another symptom of his gentlemanly attitude, as was his categorical refusal, despite looming poverty and starvation, to adjust to a career as a professional writer.[328] A gentleman simply did not write for money,[329] and for Lovecraft to be forced to do so was to once again have to acknowledge his failure in life. His frequently expressed need for leisure in which to produce his personal art that needed only to be beautiful and not socially relevant is another attitude he saw himself having inherited from the past. This meant that, when the 1920s and the 1930s rolled around, Lovecraft had put himself in the frankly absurd and impossible situation of trying to combine the writing of weird fiction for a modern pulp audience with centuries old high culture ideals about writing as an elegant amusement to be pursued only for its own sake. The consequence of this was a constant struggle between his personal desire for pure self-expression against the demands of a commercial market, which left Lovecraft deeply unsatisfied with most of his work, as will be detailed in the coming chapters.

The fact that Lovecraft located his ideals so far in the past carries the additional implication that he should not be seen as a product of the so-called "genteel tradition" that permeated the New England culture in

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327 See, for example, Lovecraft (2007b: 126, 370) and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 286).

328 His moving to New York did not fit very well with this attitude, which is why Lovecraft later referred to the move as the biggest mistake of his life. However, it seems clear that he would have happily continued with professional writing if he had managed to achieve a secure position in which publishing was more or less automatically ensured (he never censured Lord Dunsany, for example, for being both a gentleman and a professional writer – Dunsany having self-published his first book, which then became a huge success). It seems that Lovecraft's difficulties in this regard stemmed mainly from his having to struggle with commercial-minded editors and publishers, as well as with hostile and unsympathetic critics and readers, which is why his gentlemanly persona increasingly came to serve both as a shield and as an excuse for his failed career.

329 See, for example, Postman (2000: 65), Barzun (2000: 142), and Altick and Fenstermaker (1993: 89).

which he grew up.[330] Lovecraft in fact spoke with approval about how this tradition, particularly since it had its roots in Victorian times, had been punctured by Mencken and consigned to the grave by Santayana.[331] The term had been coined by Santayana, and it referred to a rigid old-school high culture ideal (prior to modernism but largely contemporary with literary realism), according to which good literature was concerned only with the maintenance of certain Victorian high standards of taste.[332] Lovecraft presented a minor diatribe against this tradition as early as 1921, in the second part of "Herbert West – Reanimator":

> Only greater maturity could help him understand the chronic mental limitations of the "professor-doctor" type – the product of generations of pathetic Puritanism; kindly, conscientious, and sometimes gentle and amiable, yet always narrow, intolerant, custom-ridden, and lacking in perspective. Age has more charity for these incomplete yet high-souled characters, whose worst real vice is timidity, and who are ultimately punished by general ridicule for their intellectual sins – sins like Ptolemaism, Calvinism, anti-Darwinism, anti-Nietzscheism, and every sort of Sabbatarianism and sumptuary legislation. (Lovecraft 2015a: 298-299)

The young Lovecraft had found his artistic and gentlemanly ideals in times that long preceded the later Victorian and Edwardian eras, and the older Lovecraft turned almost contemporary in the final years of his life. Culturally, if not always intellectually (when it came to such New England political components as racial attitudes, anti-immigration, and Prohibition), he thus bypassed the genteel tradition entirely in the course of his intellectual and aesthetic evolution. To briefly summarise Lovecraft's gentlemanly ideals, then, he went from a youthful and immature aristocratic notion of being a gentleman of blood (whose status derived from his ancestors), as opposed to a gentlemen of rank (whose status was bought or granted), to gradually becoming a more contemporary gentleman of integrity in matters of personal conduct (concerned with such things as manners, decorum, good taste, and harmonious living, but no longer dependent on

[330] For this reason, St. Armand's (1979: 21) suggestion that "Lovecraft confined his Aestheticism within the narrow limits of the American Genteel Tradition, which itself was only the newest form of the old Puritan orthodoxy," must, in my opinion, be viewed as entirely incorrect.

[331] See Lovecraft (1992b: 84; 2016b: 27).

[332] See Teorey (2006: 413).

class).[333] These ideas, first developed at some point in his early youth, stayed with him in one form or another for the remainder of his life, including his final years.

4.3. Conclusion

To conclude the discussion that began in the previous chapter, it is possible to use a number of sometimes idiosyncratic terms for an emblematic summary of Lovecraft's formative experiences (in youth and as an adult) and how his personality and thinking was shaped as a result of these experiences, as follows: adventurous expectancy, Britannic predilection, mechanistic materialist, rational indifferentist, inveterate associationist, cosmic outsideness, and the old gentleman. These are not the only terms that are relevant but they are among the most important, and all of them can be drawn together into what Lovecraft himself described as his tripartite nature:

> 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. (Lovecraft 2005d: 184)

It is no accident that Lovecraft offered this insight into his own nature at the particular time when he did so, in March 1920, a few months before he turned thirty, since this was in the middle of his transitional period into belated adulthood. Many years later, in a letter in January 1936, he said much the same thing:

> It is also to be noted that certain specific details o[f] my interests – love of ancient things, sensitiveness to architecture & scenery, fascination by the strange & weird, addiction to scribbling, respect for the sciences, &c. &c., have remained unaltered since my earliest recollections. I am more like my 1896 self than most persons are like their six-year-old selves. (Lovecraft 2015e: 276-277)

[333] See Castronovo (1987: 7, 26-30) for these distinctions. A typical example in fiction of the gentleman of integrity is found in *John Halifax, Gentleman* by Dinah Craik, first published in 1856. Lovecraft owned a copy of this book, in addition to several other titles by Craik. He also owned a copy of the third edition of George H. Calvert's *The Gentleman*, first published in 1863. This was a brief historical treatise on the gentleman, with biographical examples going back to ancient times. Also relevant is the fact that Lovecraft owned three volumes of the fifth edition of *The Peerage of England*. See Joshi (2012b: 41, 45-46, 47).

For all the contrasts and contradictions that sometimes appeared in Lovecraft's thinking and in his presentation of himself, certain core elements nevertheless remained the same and unchanged throughout his life, and they can all be traced in their earliest beginnings to his childhood. Later developments and events added their own layers, and it is against this multifaceted background that any successful understanding of Lovecraft's fiction must now be presented.

5. Fiction and Aesthetics: 1897-1927

For the purposes of an overview, Lovecraft's fiction can be grouped into certain chronological categories that correspond to his changing views on aesthetics. Accordingly, there are roughly three major periods in Lovecraft's literary life: the classicist period (before 1919), the decadent period (1919-1925), and the realist period (after 1925).[334] Furthermore, these three periods can be separated by two transitional periods, meaning there are five periods in total. They can be listed as follows, according to an alternative naming scheme that takes into account Lovecraft's life as a whole:

- the early period (1917-1919)
- the Dunsany period, or the first transitional period (1919-1921)
- the early professional period (1921-1924)
- the New York period, or the second transitional period (1924-1926)
- the mature professional period, or the great stories period (1926-1937)

It does not matter much, obviously, how these periods are named, and mostly these groupings are for convenience, to make it easier to trace Lovecraft's development as an author of fiction. But, as will become apparent, there is good reason to maintain a categorisation such as this,

[334] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 234) in 1929: "I can look back, indeed, at two distinct periods of opinion whose foundations I have successively come to distrust – a period before 1919 or so, when the weight of classic authority unduly influenced me, & another period before 1919 to about 1925, when I placed too high a value on the elements of revolt, florid colour, & emotional extravagance or intensity. My present position is as unlike either my first or my second, as the second was unlike the first[.]" In June 1927, Lovecraft (2018: 454) elaborated on how "in youth [...] I cultivated an universal outlook, and sought the general, the metropolitan, the cosmic in manner and theme; delighting to echo Continental iconoclasm and to experiment in the literary sophistication, ennui, and decadent symbolism which those around me exalted and practiced. This phase, though, was exceedingly brief with me; for the old urge toward antiquarianism was a natural thing which no artificial veneer could long obliterate. And even in its midst my writings constantly betrayed the old New Englandism which I sought to expand into a Baudelairian Continentalism. Then at last the inevitable full reaction came, and I snapped back into my complete and complacent Yankee provincialism with a loud report whose echoes are yet resounding." This described his approach to life in general, before and after New York, and not merely his writing. In 1933, Lovecraft stated that his "first fictional period – that of florid, rhetorical stuff – ended about 1927" (Lovecraft and Howard 2011b: 582). This was followed by his "quasi-realistic period" which began with the writing of "The Colour out of Space." These latter comments represent his personal views on stylistic changes in his writing. See Burleson (1983) and Joshi (1999) for alternative systems.

as the periods should correspond well to certain major developments in Lovecraft's life and writing, and how he himself thought about his life and writing.

5.1. Juvenilia and the Early Period

Lovecraft began writing early in life, composing poetry inspired by the Greek myths at the age of six, while his earliest prose stories date from 1897, being at first influenced by the dime novels of the era, followed by some early efforts inspired by Poe. His scientific interests then diverted him away from fiction for a while, until his entering high school motivated him to begin writing stories again, but in 1908, after he had dropped out of high school, he decided to destroy all these later efforts except for two ("The Beast in the Cave" and "The Alchemist").[335] Over the coming years he only wrote Georgian-inspired poetry and, after his entry into amateur journalism, non-fiction essays, articles, criticism, and other editorial content.

Having published in amateur journals the two stories he had saved from his teenage years, Lovecraft was soon asked by colleagues to produce more and accordingly commenced his adult fiction writing career in the summer of 1917 – after his failed enlistment attempt – with "The Tomb" and "Dagon."[336] These tales, the first he had written in nine years, were well received (his friend W. Paul Cook was particularly instrumental in this regard), spurring him to continue with "Polaris" in 1918[337] – this story, similarly to "Dagon," was directly inspired by a dream[338] – and "The Green Meadow" in the first half of 1919, this latter effort a collaboration with fellow poet and amateur journalist Winifred Virginia Jackson.[339] The hospitalisation of Lovecraft's mother and the sixth and final of his "near-breakdowns" in youth also occurred at this time, after which he wrote "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," set in a psychiatric hospital, at some point in the summer.[340] The final story in this early period of Lovecraft's fiction writing was "The Transition of Juan Romero," written in September in reaction to another story by an amateur

[335] See Lovecraft (2003b: 81; 2005d: 114; 2011b: 363; 2015e: 20, 28, 34, 413; 2016b: 17; 2018: 431-432) and Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 16-17).

[336] See Lovecraft (2003b: 81-82; 2015e: 34; 2016a: 85) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 44).

[337] See Lovecraft (2003b: 82) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 62).

[338] See Lovecraft (2006: 49; 2018: 70).

[339] See Lovecraft (1965: 136; 2003b: 82-83) and Cook (1998: 150).

[340] See Lovecraft (2003b: 83; 2005c: 243).

colleague.[341] As a whole, these early stories were unified by the fact that they were stylistically influenced by Poe, "The Tomb" in particular, and that they largely came about as a result of influence of some sort from amateur colleagues. The one exception to this, "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" (inspired by a newspaper article), is also the most original, in its early prefiguring of Lovecraft's later cosmic conceptions.

5.2. The Dunsany Period

Lovecraft read Dunsany for the first time in the fall of 1919.[342] The fairy-tale-like fantasy short stories of Dunsany had an immediate and dramatic effect on him, and for the next two years Lovecraft produced a series of tales that for the most part were straight imitations of Dunsany's early work, although he still continued to rank Poe at the top of the weird fiction pantheon. It was around this time that Lovecraft began writing down ideas and impressions in his commonplace book that he continued to maintain for the rest of his life, and he also for the first time undertook a self-prescribed reading program for the sake of inspiration[343] – he would do so again on at least two other occasions later in life.

In an essay on literary composition, printed in January 1920, Lovecraft offered the following advice to aspiring fiction writers:

> Every incident in a fictional work should have some bearing on the climax or denouement, and any denouement which is not the inevitable result of the preceding incidents is awkward and unliterary. No formal course in fiction-writing can equal a close and observant perusal of the stories of Edgar Allan Poe or Ambrose Bierce. In these masterpieces one may find that unbroken sequence and linkage of incident and result which mark the ideal tale. […]
>
> In fictional narration, verisimilitude is absolutely essential. A story must be consistent and must contain no event glaringly removed from the usual order of things, unless that event is the main incident, and is approached with the most careful preparation. In real life, odd and erratic things do occasionally happen; but they are out of place in an ordinary story, since fiction is a sort of idealisation of the average. (Lovecraft 2004b: 44)

341 See Lovecraft (2003b: 83). Lovecraft also wrote the minor prose poem "Memory" around this time.

342 See Lovecraft (2003b: 83; 2005d: 169, 171-174) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 172).

343 See Lovecraft (2005d: 183).

This is Poe's unity of effect in short story composition.[344] In this same essay Lovecraft referred to Dunsany as "perhaps the greatest living prose artist,"[345] and the reference to Bierce is also worth noting. The demand for realism except in the one jarring and (at this time) often supernatural detail that is the focus of the story was to remain one of the cornerstones in Lovecraft's approach to fiction writing over the coming decades.

In his three seminal "In Defence of Dagon" essays, written in January, April, and September 1921, Lovecraft summarised his then current aesthetic views, providing some foundational statements for his literary career in the process. These essays were written in response to some adverse criticism he had received for his short story "Dagon" from fellow amateurs in the Transatlantic Circulator. This was a group of amateur journalists in North America and England, members of which commented on each other's work in manuscript. In the essays he outlined a general theory according to which fiction falls into "three major divisions; romantic, realistic, and imaginative."[346] These divisions referred not so much to genres as to literary movements, with the romantic category encompassing romanticism and Victorian sentimentality, while the realistic category was restricted to realism, naturalism, and the general idea that literary works had to be socially relevant. Both of these categories often also included a didactic element in Victorian times. The third category was Lovecraft's own, into which he sorted his favourite thematic forerunners, Gothic and otherwise, such as Poe, Dunsany, and Bierce, but also such earlier writers as William Blake. It is significant that he linked this group to poetry, given his view of himself as a poet and his repeated insistence over the years that weird fiction was a form of poetic self-expression concerned only with capturing personally experienced moods and images into words.

Then, in the second essay, Lovecraft made a statement of principles that would continue to be his primary defence in the face of adversity and criticism for the remainder of his life, and that also served as an early foundation for the works of cosmic outsideness that were still to come:

> The opinions of the masses are of no interest to me, for praise can truly gratify only when it comes from a mind sharing the author's perspective. There are probably seven persons, in all, who really like my work; and they are enough. I should write even if I were the only patient reader, for my aim is merely self-expression. I could not write about "ordinary people" because I am not in the least interested in

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344 See footnote 227.
345 See Lovecraft (2004b: 41).
346 See Lovecraft (2006: 47).

> them. Without interest there can be no art. Man's relations to man do not captivate my fancy. It is man's relation to the cosmos – to the unknown – which alone arouses in me the spark of creative imagination. The humanocentric pose is impossible to me, for I cannot acquire the primitive myopia which magnifies the earth and ignores the background. Pleasure to me is wonder – the unexplored, the unexpected, the thing that is hidden and the changeless thing that lurks behind superficial mutability. To trace the remote in the immediate; the eternal in the ephemeral; the past in the present; the infinite in the finite; these are to me the springs of delight and beauty. Like the late Mr. Wilde, "I live in terror of not being misunderstood." (Lovecraft 2006: 53)

There was a clear repudiation of both didacticism and commercialism in these essays,[347] with Lovecraft presenting some personal principles that he later returned to and embraced with renewed vigour after his difficult years in New York.

It is probably not a coincidence that this period, during which Lovecraft broke out of his previously sheltered existence and began to test his wings for the first time, coincided almost exactly with his mother's hospitalisation. Once he had recovered from his "near-breakdown," he resumed his life of reading and writing, combined with amateur activities, and the transformation began in earnest after his reading of Dunsany in the fall. At this time, as mentioned previously, Lovecraft was also heavily involved in debating with amateur colleagues, both individually and in correspondence cycles, which led to his renewed reading of philosophy, particularly Nietzsche. It was this stimulating contact with other amateurs that facilitated Lovecraft's transition from classicism to decadence in his views on art and literature (signalled by his quoting Oscar Wilde), added to which were some literary influences other than Dunsany, primarily Bierce and Algernon Blackwood.[348]

Lovecraft wrote "The White Ship," "The Street," "The Doom That Came to Sarnath," and "The Statement of Randolph Carter" in November and December of 1919, and then composed no less than nine stories during 1920: "The Terrible Old Man," "The Tree," "The Cats of Ulthar," "The Temple," "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family," "Celephaïs," "From Beyond," "Nyarlathotep" and "The Picture in the

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347 However, Lovecraft had in fact sent "The Tomb" to the pulp magazine *The Black Cat* at some point prior to April 1920 ("at the repeated nagging of my aunt"), and he also appears to have sent "Dagon" to *Black Mask* (Lovecraft 2003b: 84, 2011b: 40). Both stories were rejected.

348 See Lovecraft (2003b: 73; 2018: 529-530).

House."[349] Next he wrote "The Nameless City," "The Quest of Iranon," and "The Moon-Bog" in the early months of 1921, until this period of intense literary activity came to a sudden end with the death of his mother in May. All of these stories show Dunsanian influences to some degree, with the most notable examples having a setting that turns out to be the distant prehistory of the earth rather than a fantasy dream-world, as is more commonly assumed ("The White Ship" and "Celephaïs" being the only exceptions in this regard, in addition to "The Tree" which is set in ancient Greece).

The stories that are not set in the past are instead frequently inspired by specific incidents: "The Street" as a response to the Boston police strike in September 1919,[350] "The Statement of Randolph Carter" and "Nyarlathotep" being literal transcriptions of dreams,[351] "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" as a reaction to the modernist fiction of Sherwood Anderson,[352] "The Nameless City" being inspired in part by a dream, in part by an article in *National Geographic*, and in part by Thomas Moore's epic poem "Alciphron,"[353] and "The Moon-Bog" being written to order for a presentation at an amateur gathering in Boston.[354] The origins of "The Temple" (set during World War I) and "From Beyond" are unclear, whereas "The Terrible Old Man," although Dunsanian in tone, is another contemporary tale that also introduced Lovecraft's fictional location of Kingsport, at this point not yet identified with Marblehead. Of all these stories, "The Picture in the House" stands out for being "of the realistically gruesome type" and "rather unique,"[355] and as such it is an important forerunner to Lovecraft's later work. It introduced the town of Arkham, and the Miskatonic Valley in which Arkham is located, but, as in the case of Kingsport, these were as yet only names with no developed background and no established basis in Essex County (or elsewhere) in Massachusetts.

The main new element, however, was the identification of backwoods New England with Gothic horror, which was not an original idea in itself, but something that Lovecraft had not explicitly done to this extent before.

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349 There were also two collaborations with amateur colleagues: "Poetry and the Gods" with Anna Helen Crofts and "The Crawling Chaos" with Winifred Virginia Jackson, and a minor prose poem titled "Ex Oblivione."

350 See Joshi and Schultz (2001: 254).

351 See Lovecraft (2003b: 63-66; 2005d: 176-177, 200-201).

352 See Joshi (2013a: 364).

353 See Lovecraft (1965: 122), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 73), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 612).

354 See Lovecraft (2005d: 202).

355 See Lovecraft (2005d: 201).

And since an established tradition of a purely American brand of Gothic horror was largely absent,[356] the most effective way to achieve the desired Gothic atmosphere was to emphasize the Puritan past, and thus make use of an established tradition that did exist. Lovecraft's next story, "The Nameless City," introduced some new concepts that pointed the way to cosmic horror as the other main pillar of his fiction. This story, following "Dagon," was an important precursor to some later works, especially as a thematic forerunner to *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Mound," which makes it unfortunate that Lovecraft found it so difficult to get it published. Nevertheless, he referred back to it in later tales as part of the background mythology he was slowly building up over the coming years. "The Nameless City" is also noteworthy for containing the first references to the mad poet Abdul Alhazred (at this stage not yet the author of the *Necronomicon*) and his famous couplet:

> "That is not dead which can eternal lie,
> And with strange aeons even death may die."
> (Lovecraft 2015a: 232)

The character of Abdul Alhazred, with his grammatically incorrect and Arabic-sounding but actually non-Arabic name, had originated in Lovecraft's childhood and early fascination with the *Arabian Nights*.[357] "The Nameless City" also introduced the idea (later to recur frequently, with particular emphasis in "The Call of Cthulhu") of strange architecture and geometry – so strange, in fact, that it seems wrong – being suggestive of a non-human origin.

5.3. The Early Professional Period

The year 1921 was a watershed in Lovecraft's life. The death of his mother on May 24 was the turning point after which many things changed, with Lovecraft (once he had recovered from the loss) becoming increasingly more active both socially and physically. He began to visit Boston more frequently, and he travelled to see amateur friends and colleagues, on top of which came his official amateur journalism activities and his slowly developing romance with Sonia. His correspondence and personal contact with other amateurs widened his horizons, and led to his gradual transition into a period of "revolt, florid

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[356] See, for example, Lévy (1988: 15-16) and Joshi (2013a: 374-375). See also Lovecraft (2015a: 207), Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 66-67) and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 47).

[357] See Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 265) and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 324-325).

colour, & emotional extravagance" as he later put it.[358] He was now beginning to express and defend his art for art's sake views by citing the leading figures in the aesthetic and decadent movements, Oscar Wilde in particular, while continuing to distance himself from modernist literature, as well as from the popular magazine fiction that he had begun to see as harmful to genuine self-expression.[359] He also repudiated romanticism (despite his own explorations into the emotions of fear and awe),[360] apparently on the basis of his conviction that the passions were base and animalistic since they were the product of physiological processes in the animal body that were now thoroughly explained and understood.

At the same time, Lovecraft was slowly beginning to part ways with amateur journalism,[361] in part because the hobby had not lived up to his personal ideals and in part because he was himself moving in the direction of professional writing over the coming years. Ever since he had entered the ranks of the amateur journalists, he had fought a futile battle against much opposition and hostility to raise the literary standards of amateur writing. It is not surprising that this was met with little understanding, since the one-sided view of writing he presented was one that only someone of his sheltered upbringing could have advocated. Lovecraft's frequently expressed idea of writing as a gentlemanly pursuit to be undertaken only for one's own amusement and only when struck by a certain kind of artistic inspiration, for the sole purpose of expressing a specific mood or image, was linked to his class-based conception of himself as a gentleman poet. For the rest of his life it remained one of the core tenets that he would adhere to. Ultimately he became disillusioned with amateur journalism when he had to realise that he could not impose this idea on other amateurs, and for several years he drifted out of the movement entirely.

The seemingly wilful and persistent acts of literary self-sabotage that resulted from Lovecraft's refusal to compromise his gentlemanly ideals undeniably appear odd to present-day eyes, but these ideals constituted a key component of his personal identity, and without them he would not have been the person he was. He may have been naive and unrealistic in

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358 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 234). The conception of Lovecraft as a "New England decadent" was first explored in St. Armand (1979). See also footnote 334.

359 See, for example, Lovecraft (2003b: 113-114; 2004b: 75-76; 2006: 62-63).

360 See, for example, Lovecraft (1992b: 51; 2005d: 15; 2018: 286, 434) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 183).

361 See, for example, Lovecraft (2005c: 32; 2011b: 37-38, 40) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 52-53).

trying to impose an imagined high culture attitude from two centuries ago on the literary present of his own time. But it would be equally inappropriate to censure him today for not subscribing to an attitude of literature (advocated in this thesis) as a form of storytelling with its roots in biological drives shaped by evolution, or to criticise him for refusing to view writing as a way to make a living. Lovecraft's ideals were his own, and they shaped and supported his fiction writing, and without them his stories would likely have lost much of the power that now animates them.

Lovecraft wrote "The Outsider" at some point in the first half of 1921 (the exact date is unclear), and he may in fact have worked on this Gothic tale prior to his mother's death. It was followed by his final Dunsanian tale (until his return from New York), "The Other Gods," in August, after which he worked on his first professionally published story, "Herbert West – Reanimator," written in six instalments from October 1921 to June 1922. The final story for 1921 was "The Music of Erich Zann," followed by "Hypnos" early in 1922.[362] Late in 1922 came "The Hound" and "The Lurking Fear," the latter in four instalments, after which followed "The Rats in the Walls," "The Unnamable," and "The Festival" in 1923. The period came to an end with "Under the Pyramids," ghostwritten for Harry Houdini and completed late in the night early in March, prior to Lovecraft boarding the train to New York the following day to marry Sonia.

5.3.1. "The Outsider" to "Herbert West – Reanimator"

"The Outsider," now often seen as one of Lovecraft's signature works, was not highly regarded by Lovecraft himself (but then he customarily disparaged all his early fiction),[363] and the tale is difficult to analyse due to the uncertainty as to whether it was written prior to or after the death of Susie Lovecraft. Asked specifically about his motivations, Lovecraft confessed to an at that time still undiminished influence from Poe, and a wish to experiment "in my special hobby of the *unconventional angle*,"[364] by which he meant his occasionally expressed desire to write a story

[362] There was also the brief prose poem "What the Moon Brings," and a collaboration with Sonia titled "The Horror at Martin's Beach" (later published in *Weird Tales*), both written in 1922.

[363] See Lovecraft (2016b: 16) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 67).

[364] See Lovecraft (2016b: 22).

from the viewpoint of the monster,[365] so to speak, rather than an ordinary and conventional human protagonist.[366]

Even less is known about the origins of "The Other Gods," but the fact that it was the last of his early Dunsanian tales suggests Lovecraft's increasing realisation that Dunsany's style had become unsuitable to his own work.[367] "The Music of Erich Zann" is likewise rarely mentioned by Lovecraft, which is curious since it always remained one of his two favourite stories, the other being "The Colour out of Space," and it was also one of the most successful efforts of his career (it was anthologised twice in his lifetime). As for "Herbert West – Reanimator," this classic pulp tale came about as a consequence of Lovecraft having been asked by one of his amateur colleagues to provide an over-the-top Gothic horror story for a newly founded semi-professional humour magazine called *Home Brew*. Lovecraft, secretly pleased at the prospect of achieving professional publication,[368] agreed to undertake the project, although he was careful to emphasise his gentlemanly reluctance to be reduced to the level of a "hack."[369] In later years he was savage in his dismissal of the story, blaming its faults on the restrictions that had been imposed on him due to his having had to write to order.[370]

5.3.2. "Hypnos" and "The Hound"

"Hypnos" was likely written in anticipation of Lovecraft's first visit to New York in April 1922, where he read the completed story to some of his friends that he now met in person for the first time.[371] The story itself seems to have had its origin in Lovecraft's reading of Baudelaire,[372] and it also incorporated some concepts connected with Einstein's general

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365 See, for example, Lovecraft (2016b: 16) and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 241).

366 See also Barlow (1934: 353) for some comments on the ending of the tale. See Burleson (2015: 141-144) for the suggestion that the protagonist in "The Outsider" is female, which seems to entirely miss the point of the narrative. Surely gender is irrelevant if the point of the story is that the eponymous outsider, presumably a ghoul, is no longer human? The concept of gender may not even be applicable at that point, albeit that the word "he" (Lovecraft 2015a: 265) in the very first sentence should remove all uncertainty regarding the matter.

367 But it would be years before he was ready to admit this realisation. See, for example, Lovecraft (2015e: 27, 34).

368 See Lovecraft (2018: 91), in which this is clearly revealed. See also Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 39).

369 See Lovecraft (1965: 158; 2005d: 219-221, 224; 2014a: 367).

370 See Lovecraft (2005d: 219; 2007b: 52; 2016a: 85-86, 126, 129) and Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 1).

371 See Lovecraft (2018: 85).

372 See Lovecraft (2006: 220).

theory of relativity, which had been much discussed since Eddington's experimental testing during the total solar eclipse in 1919.[373] Lovecraft soon visited New York again, on his way back from his trip to Cleveland in the summer, this time staying two months with Sonia in her apartment. Two visits with a friend to an old Dutch colonial cemetery during this time provided the inspiration for "The Hound,"[374] a story that represented Lovecraft at the height of his "florid" style, while also constituting the culmination of his Poe-influenced fiction.[375]

What makes "The Hound" most noteworthy, however, is the introduction in it of Lovecraft's most famous forbidden book, the *Necronomicon*, which, furthermore, now came to be explicitly connected with Abdul Alhazred as its author. As the mythology surrounding the *Necronomicon* began to grow over the coming years, with the book mentioned recurrently in later stories both by Lovecraft himself and several of his colleagues, Lovecraft wrote a "History of the Necronomicon" in 1927 in order to keep references straight for future use, and he also circulated this document to some of his correspondents.[376] This was never a very serious endeavour, however, and Lovecraft seems to have enjoyed incorporating the various additions made by his colleagues into the growing mythology, sometimes mock-complaining as when, for example, Clark Ashton Smith "balled up the works" by referring to a surviving edition in the original Arabic in one of his stories.[377]

5.3.3. "The Lurking Fear" and "The Rats in the Walls"

"The Lurking Fear" was another pulp story written to order for *Home Brew*, following "Herbert West," with similar complaints from Lovecraft about his creativity being restricted.[378] In 1923, however, several developments occurred that had a significant impact on his subsequent

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[373] See Chapter 6 in Crelinsten (2006). See also Lovecraft (2014a: 116), in which he recommended Eddington's later book *The Nature of the Physical World*, published in 1928.

[374] See Lovecraft (2005c: 28) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 37, 41-42).

[375] In this context it is worth pointing out that Lovecraft always regarded this tale as a serious, albeit failed, attempt at self-expression (see, for example, Lovecraft and Smith 2017: 244), which refutes Joshi's claim that the story is a self-parody of some sort (see Joshi 2013a: 432). See Goho (2008) for a defence of the tale on stylistic grounds.

[376] See, for example, Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 40), and Lovecraft (2015e: 223, 369).

[377] See Lovecraft (2015e: 54).

[378] See Lovecraft (2016b: 34), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 47-48), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 40-41).

career. First and foremost was the founding of *Weird Tales* in March 1923, as the first pulp magazine to be devoted exclusively to weird fiction. Several of Lovecraft's friends urged him to submit his stories for publication, and at some point prior to the middle of May he sent five single-spaced typed manuscripts to the editor, Edwin Baird (these were "Dagon," "The Statement of Randolph Carter," "The Cats of Ulthar," "Arthur Jermyn," and "The Hound" – the manuscripts all still survive).[379] As before, Lovecraft affected great reluctance on gentlemanly grounds to do this, and the cover letter to Baird that he included with the manuscripts speaks for itself:

> My Dear Sir: Having a habit of writing weird, macabre, and fantastic stories for my own amusement, I have lately been simultaneously hounded by nearly a dozen well-meaning friends into deciding to submit a few of these Gothic horrors to your newly-founded periodical. [...]
>
> I have no idea that these writings will be found suitable, for I pay no attention to the demands of commercial writing. My object is such pleasure as I can obtain from the creation of certain bizarre pictures, situations, or atmospheric effects; and the only reader I hold in mind is myself. (Joshi 2013a: 453)

But the stories were accepted, and Lovecraft's exuberance as revealed in some of his letters at this time is telling, as it seems clear that he was now fired up and motivated to continue writing over this unexpected success, especially since it may have offered the tantalising hope of an eventual escape from his financial difficulties.[380]

The next significant development, after *Weird Tales*, was Lovecraft's discovery of Arthur Machen, who had been recommended to him by two of his friends.[381] Lovecraft proceeded to read everything by Machen he could find, which had some long-term consequences with respect to his style and some of his fictional conceptions, in addition to which he was also reading the Gothic classics at this time, during spring and early summer.[382] These three elements, then – *Weird Tales*, Machen, and the classic Gothic novels – are the necessary preliminaries during the first half of 1923 without which a full understanding of "The Rats in the Walls" is not easy to achieve. There may not be that much of Machen in the story (these influences would reveal themselves more clearly later), but the tale is surely one of Lovecraft's most Gothic creations, and it also

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379 See Lovecraft (2011b: 40).
380 See Lovecraft (1965: 233; 2011b: 43, 46-47; 2018: 139).
381 See Lovecraft (1965: 233-234; 2005d: 229; 2011b: 33).
382 See Lovecraft (2011b: 35).

shows him having begun the transition into a full storyteller rather than simply a poetic recorder of moods and images. "The Rats in the Walls" stood right on the threshold that separated Lovecraft the future professional from Lovecraft the amateur poet of the past, and it is also at this time that he began seriously contemplating a career as a writer,[383] culminating in his move to New York the following year.

5.3.4. "The Unnamable"

"The Unnamable" is a comparatively slighter effort, which seems to have had its origin in a visit from Lovecraft's amateur colleague (and debating opponent) Maurice W. Moe in August 1923, since the story contains a character that is likely based on Moe.[384] The story also contains "some hits at the philistines,"[385] but these "hits," which turn the tale into more of a manifesto than a short story, were directed not so much at Moe as at the conventional readers who had criticised Lovecraft's vagueness in earlier stories, and who had no patience with anything that was out of the ordinary. There are some echoes here of the early criticism that Lovecraft had attempted to counter in his "In Defence of Dagon" essays.

Another main source of inspiration was an anecdote in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (an ancestral copy of which Lovecraft owned), combined with some local folklore sourced from an amateur journalism colleague.[386] Otherwise the tale again underscored Lovecraft's conviction that backwoods Puritanism was primarily a source of horror. In a letter some years later he cited the critic Paul Elmer More, whom he also cited in Chapter 8 of "Supernatural Horror in Literature,"[387] as having traced "the horror-element in American literature to the remote New England countryside with its solitude-warped religious fanaticism."[388] If anything was unnamable, it was the madness that brewed in minds that were warped by isolation and

383 See, for example, Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 59): "I shall probably try it professionally somewhere, now that I'm aroused to that sort of thing."
384 See Joshi (2013a: 461).
385 See Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 63).
386 See Lovecraft (2018: 455-456). The anecdote concerned some sort of abnormal character who had been kept locked up in colonial times. The amateur journalism colleague was Edith Miniter, a published novelist described by Lovecraft as "a highly intelligent old lady," who nevertheless regarded as true an item of folklore about faces of past generations becoming fixed on windows. Lovecraft visited Miniter in North Wilbraham some years later and learned additional examples of local folklore from her that he incorporated in some of his stories.
387 See Lovecraft (2012a: 60-61).
388 See Lovecraft (2018: 456).

religious extremism, and which would cause an unfortunate freak of nature to be regarded as a spawn of the devil. This was the basic concept that Lovecraft then took in his own direction in his extravagant concluding depiction of the unnamable entity in the story. Also worth noting is the fact that this story began the process whereby Lovecraft explicitly identified Arkham with Salem, in that the cemetery that is at the centre of the narrative was based on a real-world counterpart, namely the Charter Street Burying Ground in Salem.[389] Lovecraft had visited Salem for the first time in December 1922 (the same occasion on which he discovered Marblehead), and he returned again in February and April 1923, visiting the Rebecca Nurse Homestead in Danvers on the latter occasion, with additional visits to Marblehead in the summer.

5.3.5. "The Festival"

Lovecraft's visit to Marblehead found its literary expression in "The Festival," which constituted "a sincere attempt to capture the feeling that Marblehead gave me when I saw it for the first time."[390] Here, over the coming years, was the model for Kingsport, which had been introduced in "The Terrible Old Man," but it was only in "The Festival" that the imaginary fishing town came to be fully identified with Marblehead. Another detail of interest (never explained in the narrative) is the fact that the strange people encountered by the narrator are in fact "grave-worms which had fed monstrously upon the accursed corpses of long generations of blasphemous necromancers,"[391] in this way having achieved sentience and an upright human-like appearance. More importantly, the dead necromancers (the presumable ancestors of the narrator) may have had their origin in Lovecraft having come across Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* around this time.[392] This was written as a serious work of anthropology by Murray, who for decades afterwards was a recognised authority on witchcraft on the strength of this book and its sequel, *The God of the Witches*. Murray's work served to popularise the so-called

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389 See Lovecraft (2016a: 140).

390 See Lovecraft (1976a: 275). See also Lovecraft (2005d: 226-227) for a lengthy description of this feeling.

391 See Lovecraft (2015e: 47).

392 The chronology is slightly unclear with respect to the exact date when Lovecraft first read Murray, see Lovecraft (2005c: 53) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011b: 655).

witch-cult hypothesis,[393] which remained influential for decades, although it is now entirely discredited. This, together with the "little people" concept he derived from Machen,[394] was the theoretical foundation underlying Lovecraft's developing literary ideas about secret cults that had survived down the ages from the prehistoric past,[395] which was soon to become a key component in some of his mature stories.

5.3.6. "Under the Pyramids"

"Under the Pyramids" was based on an anecdote told by Harry Houdini that Lovecraft had been commissioned to write up as a story for *Weird Tales*.[396] Lovecraft then lost the typed manuscript on the way to New York, and had to retype it with the help of Sonia during their brief honeymoon in Philadelphia.[397] In less than a year, Lovecraft had become a top-tier writer for *Weird Tales*,[398] and now he was also unexpectedly offered the editorship of the magazine. Sonia urged him to accept, but in the end he decided to decline, partly because he did not wish to move to Chicago and partly because of the uncertainty of the venture. The new editorship went to Farnsworth Wright instead, an unexpected consequence of which was that Lovecraft's days as a feted star of *Weird Tales* now came to an abrupt end. The previous editor, Edwin Baird, had accepted everything that Lovecraft had sent him, whereas Wright almost routinely rejected all of Lovecraft's manuscripts on first submission, and since Lovecraft was very reluctant to resubmit a manuscript after an initial rejection (although Wright often accepted unchanged resubmissions), the result was that a majority of Lovecraft's stories remained unpublished for years. As for "Under the Pyramids," the setting of the tale may have had something to do with the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in November 1922 (reported in *The New York Times* the following month), and with the subsequent media interest

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393 Briefly, the hypothesis argued that an ancient pagan fertility religion – predating Christianity and originating among an earlier and physically undersized race that had been driven out by invading Indo-European tribes – still survived underground in western Europe in the form of witchcraft. See Murray (1921) and Simpson (1994).

394 As Lovecraft (2014a: 40) wrote in a letter in 1929: "There is no archaeological evidence to prove that this stock ever crossed into the British Isles, but writers like Arthur Machen love to imagine that they did, & to base fantastic & horrible tales upon certain influences emanating from them."

395 See Lovecraft (2005c: 53-54; 2018: 427-429) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 26-27, 69-74), in which Lovecraft elaborates in detail on Murray's ideas.

396 See Lovecraft (1965: 311-312, 317; 2011b: 67) and Joshi (2013a: 498).

397 See Lovecraft (1965: 330, 332; 2011b: 70-71).

398 See Lovecraft (1965: 292-293), in which he mentions how "solidly I stand" with the magazine.

surrounding the so-called curse of the pharaohs. The discovery had led to a craze for all things Egyptian, ranging from cinema to fashion to literature.[399]

5.4. The New York Period

Lovecraft's initial experiences in New York did not leave him any time for story-writing, and it was not until October 1924 that he composed "The Shunned House." This was followed by another fallow period, after which he wrote "The Horror at Red Hook" and "He" in August 1925, and "In the Vault" the following month. His final New York tale was "Cool Air," written in March 1926.

5.4.1. "The Shunned House"

"The Shunned House," the inspiration for which was an old house Lovecraft had witnessed on a sightseeing trip to Elizabeth, New Jersey,[400] represented a new development in Lovecraft's career as a writer – and it was also the first story of his that was rejected by Farnsworth Wright,[401] at a time when his economic difficulties had already become acute. This followed a pattern that was to repeat itself distressingly often, in that whenever Lovecraft tried something new and different that showed a marked improvement on his earlier work, his efforts were only met by failure and rejection. The reason for the rejection is not difficult to see, since this long, slow-building, atmospheric tale was the opposite of the formulaic action stories that made up the bulk of the material in the pulp magazines of the day (and that Lovecraft raged against with increasing hostility and bitterness in the 1930s). The quality of the story was immediately recognised by Lovecraft's colleagues (and privately by Wright),[402] and it seems clear that the best thing for Lovecraft, had it been possible, would have been to part ways with the pulp magazines at this point. If a book deal could have been secured while he lived in New

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[399] See, for example, Chapters 2 and 3 in Day (2006).

[400] See Lovecraft (2005c: 82). However, the house as it is described in the story is based on a real house in Providence, see entry #95 in Lovecraft's commonplace book (Lovecraft 2006: 225).

[401] See Lovecraft (2005c: 197; 2016a: 27). The story had also been rejected by Edwin Baird, who was now the editor of *Detective Tales*, see Lovecraft (2005c: 155). Lovecraft's next story, "The Horror at Red Hook," may have been written specifically with this magazine in mind, given that the protagonist is a police detective and that Lovecraft had been planning a possible novel or novelette that he had hoped to "be able to cast in a sufficiently 'detectivish' mould" (ibid) to sell to Baird.

[402] See Lovecraft (2005c: 93, 197).

York, his subsequent life and career might have turned out very differently.

This is not to say that pulp fiction is "bad," as is often popularly assumed, but simply that pulp fiction is not what Lovecraft was writing. A good pulp story is one that fulfils its purpose as a pulp story, and as such it is an example of good literature of that particular kind, but Lovecraft had always written something that was almost uniquely his own, first as a poet and now as a storyteller who was growing increasingly sure of his craft. "The Rats in the Walls" had been a first step, but "The Shunned House" was a leap, and as such it was the first story that set him on the path to literary maturity. In addition, the tale is notable for revealing Lovecraft in the early stages of a process in which he turned classic Gothic tropes (in this case some sort of vampire-like creature) into science fiction:

> We were not, as I have said, in any sense childishly superstitious, but scientific study and reflection had taught us that the known universe of three dimensions embraces the merest fraction of the whole cosmos of substance and energy. In this case an overwhelming preponderance of evidence from numerous authentic sources pointed to the tenacious existence of certain forces of great power and, so far as the human point of view is concerned, exceptional malignancy. To say that we actually believed in vampires or werewolves would be a carelessly inclusive statement. Rather must it be said that we were not prepared to deny the possibility of certain unfamiliar and unclassified modifications of vital force and attenuated matter; existing very infrequently in three-dimensional space because of its more intimate connexion with other spatial units, yet close enough to the boundary of our own to furnish us occasional manifestations which we, for lack of a proper vantage-point, may never hope to understand. (Lovecraft 2015a: 468-469)

This is the closest to an explicit formulation of Lovecraft's cosmic outsideness in any of his fiction up until this point, especially in the emphasis on "the human point of view" and, as Lovecraft saw it, how little of ultimate reality is really contained within the known universe. If it is possible to imagine other dimensions of existence that are vastly different from anything we are familiar with, then it is not difficult to come up with an "occasional manifestation," the nature of which would cause it to mimic the behaviour (and the effects of such behaviour) of a traditional vampire. And in the end, even though this incomprehensible thing may not even be hostile, its influence on its surroundings is such that it must be treated as an enemy.

5.4.2. "The Horror at Red Hook"

The positive development in "The Shunned House" was unfortunately not continued in Lovecraft's next story, which was instead an example of backsliding and regression. This was "The Horror at Red Hook," which Lovecraft did not write until almost a year later, over a single weekend in August 1925.[403] He had at this point lived in a slum for half a year, unemployed and increasingly impoverished, and his negative views on the city of New York and its inhabitants are clearly echoed in the prose of the narrative. It seems, however, that the tale was mostly an attempt by the desperate Lovecraft to cater to the pulp market (Wright had at this point rejected several old amateur efforts that Lovecraft had been typing up), which is why he was deeply dissatisfied with the result.[404] It also, on the other hand, represented his first serious attempt to develop his fictional cult ideas (based on Murray and Machen),[405] the outcome of which was little more than a stereotypical depiction of Gothic-inspired Satanism at this stage, but it was nevertheless an important starting point for certain conceptions that would be put to better use in "The Call of Cthulhu." The story, in any case, was immediately accepted by Wright for publication in *Weird Tales*, where it proved to be very popular with readers, and it was anthologised twice in Lovecraft's lifetime.

5.4.3. "He," "In the Vault," and "Cool Air"

Lovecraft's remaining fictional output in New York consisted of three brief efforts: "He," "In the Vault," and "Cool Air." "He," written on a park bench in Elizabeth, New Jersey, after an all-night antiquarian excursion through New York and a subsequent ferry ride from Staten Island,[406]

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[403] See Lovecraft (2005c: 160-161).

[404] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 30, 52, 102) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 225), in which Lovecraft declares unequivocally that the story was written with the pulp magazines and their clientele in mind. See also Lovecraft (2019: 185): "One can't succeed in a field for which one has only contempt & loathing, so beginning about five years ago I stopped trying to suit shoddy markets & decided to work sincerely." This was from a letter in October 1931, suggesting that Lovecraft had indeed been trying to write for the pulp market while living in New York, and that he had decided to leave these attempts behind and re-embrace his aesthetic notions about artistic self-expression after his return to Providence. This also meant having to accept the fact that most of his fiction would henceforth be unsuitable for the pulps, with inevitable rejections as a result: "That is why popular fiction is almost totally devoid of art, & why, conversely, only a small part of the material produced artistically happens to fall within the circle of commercial acceptability" (ibid).

[405] See Lovecraft (1968: 19-20) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 83-84).

[406] See Lovecraft (2005c: 169-172).

repeats the laments about the city from "The Horror at Red Hook,"[407] but in less strident tones. "In the Vault," written in September at the behest of an old amateur colleague,[408] is notable mostly for the hints it provides of an incipient stylistic change in Lovecraft's fiction, and "Cool Air," written early in 1926, was an attempt to "conjure up an air of horror in a sunlit room with street cars clanging outside."[409] These latter two stories feel unconnected to Lovecraft's earlier work, suggesting an imminent departure and new direction that was likely also aided in no small amount by the extensive reading that Lovecraft was now doing in preparation for "Supernatural Horror in Literature,"[410] an essay that had been commissioned by his amateur colleague W. Paul Cook in November 1925.[411] One consequence of all this reading was Lovecraft's discovery of his "new idol of idols,"[412] M. R. James. The ghost stories written by James redefined the genre, and are likely to have played a significant part in influencing Lovecraft's shift towards contemporary realism over the coming years. James, a noted scholar and antiquarian at King's College, Cambridge, who wrote stories in his spare time, embodied an ideal that Lovecraft had always strived to emulate, which also perhaps suggests a reason why so many of Lovecraft's protagonists would henceforth be learned scholars or academics of some sort.

5.5. The Great Stories Period: Return

Lovecraft's happiness at being home again, following his return from New York, expressed itself in a remarkable period of literary activity,[413] which lasted into the early months of 1927. During this time he wrote "The Call of Cthulhu" (his seminal signature story), followed by "Pickman's Model" (essentially an artistic manifesto), "The Silver Key" (a philosophical essay masquerading as a short story), "The Strange High House in the Midst" (a

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407 See Lovecraft (2016a: 29) and Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 33).

408 See Van Hise (1999: 37).

409 See Lovecraft (2016a: 165). See also Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 247-248).

410 See Lovecraft (2005c: 266, 272), in which Lovecraft anticipated his creativity benefiting from the reading.

411 Lovecraft began the actual writing of this essay very late in December, according to a diary he maintained in 1925 (Lovecraft 2006: 175); "it goes on very slowly because of the reading & re-reading necessary for its intelligent preparation" (Lovecraft 2005c: 274).

412 See Lovecraft (2005c: 275).

413 "It is astonishing how much better the old head works since its restoration to those native scenes amidst which it belongs," Lovecraft (2011b: 93) said in a letter a month after his return. This was the same letter in which he also said, "I am Providence, & Providence is myself." See also Lovecraft (2005c: 289) and Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 32-37).

Dunsanian mood piece), and the two short novels *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (his farewell to Dunsany) and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (mostly a love letter to Providence), before finishing the period with "The Colour out of Space," which he henceforth always regarded as the best story he had ever written. He also began the process of immersing himself in his traditional and ancestral background by taking a trip with his aunt to western Rhode Island (from which his mother's side of the family originated) in the fall of 1926,[414] the impressions he gained there ameliorating the predictable rejection by Wright of "The Call of Cthulhu,"[415] and also likely providing some inspiration for "The Silver Key" (which was rejected by Wright the following summer).[416]

These activities, for Lovecraft, were all about coming home. His highly developed sense of place had always been wedded to his love of the past, and this was now combined with his need, built up over two years in New York, to return to his roots. As such it was a clear exercise in topophilia, although he would return only once more to western Rhode Island in later years. But this trip was only the first of many over the coming years, at first to other locations in New England, and then gradually farther afield along the entire Atlantic seaboard from Quebec in the north to Florida in the south. This was a development he had planned from the very beginning after his return from New York, as indicated by a letter in June, in which he stated that he was "saving cash desperately for a series of New England tours in the summer."[417]

5.5.1. "The Call of Cthulhu"

The idea for "The Call of Cthulhu" came to Lovecraft in the middle of August 1925 during one of his evening rambles around New York in search of inspiration from antiquarian oases,[418] but it was not until a year later that he began the actual writing of the story. The result, as it turned out, was a revolutionary step forward on almost every front in his fictional

[414] See Lovecraft (1968: 81-89).

[415] The story was accepted the next year, in July 1927, see Lovecraft (1968: 154). Prior to that it had also been rejected by *Mystery Magazine* (a pulp magazine devoted mostly to detective stories), see Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 106). See Wandrei (1998: 314-315) for an account of how he had tricked Wright to accept the story by claiming that Lovecraft was planning to bypass *Weird Tales* and broaden his market by approaching other magazines (which, in fact, was likely to have been true at least in part).

[416] See Faig (2009: 148-182).

[417] See Lovecraft (1968: 56).

[418] See Lovecraft (2005c: 172). Lovecraft mentioned the idea for this story on several occasions in the subsequent weeks and months (ibid: 188, 214, 245), see also Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 85).

development, a consequence not only of the story's long gestation period, but also the fact that Lovecraft was home again and permanently installed in Providence when he wrote it. With, it may be assumed, his creativity overflowing and his happiness at being home matched only be his desire to put pen to paper, he could now integrate many of the ideas and concepts that had been percolating in his mind for years, and the result was a literary creation that was almost entirely new. "The Call of Cthulhu" thus stands as a definitive milestone in Lovecraft's career, and it also became the central core around which the entire Cthulhu Mythos came to be built – for good or ill – over the coming years and decades. The main reason for this was the strengthening of the previously only hinted at element of pure cosmic horror. Lovecraft accomplished this by developing his idea of supernatural "gods" (referred to only very infrequently until this point) into god-like extraterrestrials. The very presence of these beings in the world was a violation of the established view of reality and humanity's place in it to such a degree that the revelation of this fact would drive mad those unfortunate enough to learn the truth.

To accomplish this effect, Lovecraft adhered to a strict and detailed realism in every part of the story except for the one element that constituted the violation of reality,[419] an old idea that he began to state more explicitly in the coming years, as in this example from October 1930 (emphasis in the original):

> The more I consider weird fiction, the more I am convinced that a solidly realistic framework is needed in order to build up a preparation for the unreal element. […] My own rule is that no weird story can truly produce terror unless it is devised with all the care & verisimilitude of an actual *hoax*. The author must forget all about "short story technique", & build up a stark, simple account, full of homely corroborative details, just as if he were actually trying to "put across" a deception in real life – a deception clever enough to make adults believe it. My own attitude in writing is always that of the hoax-weaver. […] This ideal became a conscious one with me about the "Cthulhu" period, & is perhaps best exemplified in "The Colour Out of Space". (Lovecraft and Smith 2017: 244)

The two main reasons, then, for the importance of "The Call of Cthulhu" are, one, that this was the first story in which Lovecraft decisively (albeit only temporarily) turned from Gothic horror in the direction of the new

[419] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 180): "I always try to achieve a realism of atmosphere by adhering to absolutely commonplace nature *except* where my one thread of supernaturalism is concerned."

field of science fiction, and, two, that this was the first major story in which he deliberately worked as a "hoax-weaver" for aesthetic reasons.

The cult concept had now been greatly expanded from its origins in "The Horror at Red Hook." However, the basic idea of an investigator who is gradually putting the pieces together to learn the truth about a worldwide dark cult devoted to the worship of unknown alien beings since prehistoric times perhaps originated in Lovecraft's recent attempts to expand his market by writing pulp mystery fiction as much as in his reading of Murray and Machen. In this context it has sometimes been argued that the cult should be regarded as irrelevant and misguided, and that its beliefs and activities have no bearing on the ultimate plans of the Great Old Ones, whatever those plans may be.[420] However, if "The Call of Cthulhu," coming as it does at the very beginning of Lovecraft's mature period, is read without preconceived notions that are grounded in present-day conceptions of cosmic horror (with the focus on the incomprehensibility of god-like aliens who are utterly indifferent to human concerns), then it will be seen that the cult does in fact have a role to play, even if that role is not necessarily what the cult members think. In fact, the narrative makes it clear that the sailors had done by accident what the cult had failed to do by design, which suggests that some sort of outside assistance for Cthulhu's emergence is indeed needed. In the end, humanity as a whole is not important on the cosmic scale, but that does not mean that Lovecraft's aliens are averse to using individual humans to achieve their purposes (as clearly happens in other stories).[421] Why else, after all, would "sensitive" people all over the world react the way they do to Cthulhu's telepathic communications,[422] unless these communications have a purpose and are intended for specific receivers? Many of the receivers may certainly be unwilling and unintended targets, but the point is that there is a message for them to pick up. And one should also keep in mind the "shapes [that] came out of the dark to visit

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[420] See, for example, Joshi (2013b: 645), in which this cosmic viewpoint is strongly suggested.

[421] In "The Dunwich Horror," for example, beings from outside cannot "take body without human blood" (Lovecraft 2015b: 450).

[422] "Telepathy […] may some time furnish me with a plot," Lovecraft (2006: 53) had said as far back as 1921, and throughout his life he remained open to the idea that telepathy could not entirely be ruled out of the realm of the possible, largely due to the fact that he also accepted the existence of the ether (the mythical substance once thought to permeate empty space). But although Lovecraft accepted the theoretical possibility of "thought-waves in the ether" (Lovecraft and Derleth 2013a: 43), he was still mostly sceptical about the actual reality of telepathy. See, for example, Lovecraft (2016a: 352) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 431).

the faithful few,"[423] which appear to be some sort of non-human intermediaries between the cultists and the Great Old Ones after the sinking of R'lyeh severed the original telepathic link.

As to whether the true purposes of the Great Old Ones really are unknown and unknowable, or whether these beings merely mean to do something so banal as to conquer and rule the earth,[424] it may in the end amount to the same thing. Whatever their plans are, it is clear that nothing good will come of it for humanity. As seen in "The Shunned House," where this idea first began to emerge, the "monsters" in Lovecraft's stories are not evil as subjectively understood by humans. Instead, their presence constitutes a threat of such overwhelming proportions that the distinction between good and evil becomes meaningless, and this remains the case in subsequent stories even if, as Lovecraft also made it clear, one should never ascribe human motivations and aspirations to beings that are utterly alien and therefore non-human. In the end, Lovecraft set speculative fiction on the path to cosmic horror, even if the core concepts as they are now understood sometimes were imperfectly realised in his own stories (according to present-day standards). This should not be seen as diminishing the value of these stories, or the enjoyment to be derived from them, but it is a fact that needs to be acknowledged.

5.5.2. "Pickman's Model"

In "Pickman's Model," the setting of which was a real location in Boston,[425] Lovecraft effectively spelled out his aesthetic turn towards increased realism at this time. This did not imply a rejection of his art for art's sake principles, which he would continue to espouse for years to

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[423] See Lovecraft (2015b: 38).

[424] As in fact is possible, given the waves of wars and conquests by alien races in earth's prehistory that Lovecraft described in some of his later stories. In this context it should be remembered that Lovecraft wrote all his fiction in the years between World War I and World War II. But see also Lovecraft (1992b: 11), in which he speaks of the "triteness" of the alien invasion scenario. By setting such invasions in the impossibly distant past, Lovecraft avoided or subverted the scenario entirely. Another possibility, suggested by Livesey (2008: 57-58), is that these conquests take place because the earth is a rare and special place (whereas its human inhabitants are, as always, unimportant), and that this idea was a consequence of Lovecraft having adopted, at some point prior to 1929, the recently proposed Chamberlin-Moulton tidal model to describe the formation of the solar system. This model, which involved the mechanism of near-collisions between stars, suggested that planetary systems were very rare, whereas the earlier Laplacian theory had suggested the opposite. This also had some possible further consequences for Lovecraft's long-held view of the universe as eternal, although his comments on the matter date from 1935 (see Lovecraft 1976b: 154), when most of his fiction-writing was already behind him.

[425] See Lovecraft (2015e: 26-27; 2015f: 87).

come (and which, in any case, were more concerned with the reasons for art rather than the forms of art). Instead, as Joshi puts it, it suggests "the need for artistic *sincerity* and a knowledge of the true foundations of fear in the production of weird art."[426] Those few who were in possession of such knowledge could produce "art that convinced" and that "was not any mere artist's interpretation,"[427] but instead the real thing.

There is always a risk in ascribing the opinions of a fictional character in a story to the author of the story. Still, in this case, as in "The Silver Key," which followed shortly afterwards, it is clear that Lovecraft was expressing his developing views (shaped during his years in New York, through his reading for "Supernatural Horror in Literature," and as a result of his move back to Providence) on aesthetics in art and literature through a discourse in fictional form. This becomes obvious when Lovecraft has the main character of Pickman express the desire – especially strong for Lovecraft at this time – for an almost organic connection to the past as a foundation for the sincere art he was striving for, combined with the ever-present yearning for "wonder and terror and escape from the commonplace" (emphasis in the original):[428]

> The place for an artist to live is the North End. If any aesthete were sincere, he'd put up with the slums for the sake of the massed traditions. God, man! Don't you realise that places like that weren't merely *made*, but actually *grew*? Generation after generation lived and felt and died there, and in days when people weren't afraid to live and feel and die. [...] What do moderns know of life and the forces behind it? You call the Salem witchcraft a delusion, but I'll wage my four-times-great-grandmother could have told you things. They hanged her on Gallows Hill, with Cotton Mather looking sanctimoniously on. Mather, damn him, was afraid somebody might succeed in kicking free of this accursed cage of monotony – I wish someone had laid a spell on him or sucked his blood in the night! (Lovecraft 2015b: 60)

There is also an echo here, as before, of Puritanism as a source of horror.

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426 See Joshi (2013b: 648). In 1933, Lovecraft (2006: 210) made the following comment in an autobiographical essay: "The only thing I can say in favour of my work is its sincerity." See also Lovecraft (1971b: 205) for some comments in a letter from 1930 on the need for seriousness in motivation, or "fumbling sincerity and crude truthfulness," as Lovecraft put it. And in another letter from 1930: "My valuation of the element of *sincerity* in works of art and literature has increas'd to such an extent that I now esteem it a necessity to perfect expression" (Lovecraft 2018: 272). With respect to the view of a story as a communicative act between a writer and a reader, it seems clear that an insincere writer will have little or nothing to communicate, with the obvious further consequence that the one-sided communication will fail, and the result is a bad story.

427 See Lovecraft (2015b: 67).

428 See Lovecraft (2015b: 61).

5.5.3. "The Silver Key" and "The Strange High House in the Mist"

"The Silver Key," on the other hand, is the first in a series of three stories that marked the definitive end of Lovecraft's Dunsany-inspired fiction. It is also one of Lovecraft's most autobiographical tales, retelling his own philosophical development (the inveterate associationist driven by a sense of adventurous expectancy who now, in seeking his roots, rejected the urban sophistication and cosmopolitanism that had led him astray in New York) through the fictional character of Randolph Carter (who goes through similar stages of experimentation and disillusionment before finding a way to escape back to his childhood). Additionally, "The Silver Key" is the first story by Lovecraft to be truly interconnected with his earlier work, and also the first story in which the so-called Lovecraft country is more fully developed geographically (in both cases through references to elements and locations from previous stories).[429] "The Strange High House in the Mist," in contrast, seems to be a mere record of an "especially powerful or suggestive mood or picture."[430] There is a real-world geographical feature that corresponds to the cliffs on which the fictional house is located, and this is the "the titan cliffs of Magnolia – memories of which prompted" the story.[431] Magnolia is the resort village in Massachusetts in which Lovecraft had stayed with Sonia at the beginning of their romance.

5.5.4. *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*

Lovecraft began writing his final Dunsanian effort, the short novel *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, in November 1926, finishing the work in January the next year.[432] But he was unhappy with the result and never typed the manuscript, stating in a letter that "the massed effect of it so bored & disgusted me that I changed my attitude & methods altogether."[433] He also referred to the writing of this novel (and the next one, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*) as practice work, which paved the way for "The Colour out of Space," which he henceforth regarded as the starting point for his mature period of fiction-writing both stylistically and thematically. As for *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, this was

[429] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 405) for some comments on the steadily growing Lovecraft country, a popular term for the area containing Lovecraft's fictional locations in Essex County, Massachusetts.

[430] See Van Hise (1999: 34).

[431] See Lovecraft (1968: 164).

[432] See Lovecraft (2019: 63), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 2, 21), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 53, 58), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 114, 120-121).

[433] See Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 236).

the tale in which the fully developed concept of the "dreamlands" was introduced, and also abandoned, which means that there are only really three stories in total, including "Celephaïs" and "The White Ship" (with some possible hints in "The Silver Key"), that are actually set in the dreamlands. Otherwise the basic theme of *The Dream-Quest* is the same as in "Celephaïs," except reversed, in that Carter,[434] unlike Kuranes, does not find his escape in a fantasy dream-world of his own making, but in a return to his home in the real world. Lovecraft had thus replaced his old yearning for the dreams of his childhood with a real-world attachment to his ancestral roots and traditions after his return from New York.[435] In this specific sense, fantasy had now been replaced by realism, as would become increasingly apparent in his subsequent fiction.

Another thing to note is the mass of references to earlier stories that Lovecraft included in *The Dream-Quest*, with some unavoidable inconsistency as a result. In this context it is important to note that there was never any overarching master plan with respect to plot behind Lovecraft's fiction, which is why the cross-references that become ever more frequent in future tales were only intended to serve as atmospheric background matter to enhance the hoax-like effect that Lovecraft sought.[436] Thus, it is futile to try to impose consistency on this material after the fact, and any attempt to do so must be seen as a failure in understanding what Lovecraft was trying to achieve. Certainly, Lovecraft may have transitioned entirely from poetic mood-weaver to storytelling hoax-weaver at this time, but world-building in a present-day speculative fiction sense (pioneered to a significant extent by George MacDonald, and soon to be further developed by Tolkien and C. S. Lewis) always remained outside of his toolkit.[437]

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434 Late in life, in 1936, Lovecraft referred to the recurring autobiographical character of Randolph Carter as a "flexible dummy" (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 298), due to the differing depictions of Carter in different stories.

435 Joshi (2013b: 659) goes so far as to refer to *The Dream-Quest* as Lovecraft's "spiritual autobiography for this precise moment in his life." To this I would add that the story sets the tone, in this respect, not just for this precise moment but for most of the remainder of Lovecraft's life.

436 "I have been very elastic in throwing out some of those mythological hints, and may have contradicted myself in different stories," Lovecraft (2015e: 325) said in 1936.

437 See Wolf (2012) for a detailed overview of this concept.

5.5.5. *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and "The Colour out of Space"

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward, completed early in March 1927,[438] had its likely origin in all the historical and antiquarian information about Providence that Lovecraft had absorbed in the summer of 1925, mostly by reading *Providence in Colonial Times* by Gertrude Selwyn Kimball at the New York Public Library.[439] Whether this reading had been in preparation for a planned novel or if it was an effort by Lovecraft to achieve a mental escape from New York is unclear, but the eventual result was the longest work of fiction he ever wrote, a Gothic tale that also embodied his devotion to the city of his birth. And yet, he was once again deeply unhappy with the finished manuscript, and never typed it.[440] But the stage was now set for "The Colour out of Space," written prior to the end of March.[441] This "atmospheric study"[442] was an attempt "to present flashes of an *outer* or *deeper* cosmos in which all natural laws, standards, feelings, & purposes are entirely without relation to those of the familiar universe,"[443] and as such it was the culmination of Lovecraft's practice work during the winter, starting him on the next phase of his career, not just stylistically but also in his whole approach to fiction writing. It was published in the newly founded *Amazing Stories*, the first pulp magazine

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438 See Lovecraft (2018: 426, 433), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 21, 31-32), and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 68, 71, 72).

439 See Lovecraft (2005c: 155, 160-161, 192-194). He read several other works on Providence history as well at this time, see Joshi (2013b: 619-620). He also continued this research after his return home, see Lovecraft (1968: 55).

440 See Lovecraft (1976a: 152-153; 2007b: 119-120).

441 See Lovecraft (2018: 445), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 62), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 127).

442 See Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 76) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 130). See also Lovecraft (2011b: 133).

443 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 82-83). It is in this context that Lovecraft's (2014b: 7) classic quote a few months later, in a letter to Farnsworth Wright, must be seen: "Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large." Lovecraft was here announcing a new direction for his fiction – a direction that he subsequently did not maintain consistently, since the Gothic horror of old continued to loom as large in his production over the coming years as the new cosmic horror. His next story, in fact, written almost a year and a half later, was "The Dunwich Horror," which was Gothic to the core. It is my belief that Joshi and his followers have greatly overemphasised the importance of the "all my tales" quote, in an effort to make Lovecraft's literary production conform to a consistent pattern of cosmic horror that is simply not there in most of his tales, including some of the greater ones. Among the comparatively few scholars who have recognised this is Reyes (2018), who argues that "Lovecraft's fascination with the Gothic was a sustained one [and] he returned to tales with a strongly Gothic flavour throughout his career."

to be devoted exclusively to science fiction, since Lovecraft had evidently again decided to try to broaden his market.[444]

Lovecraft's evocation of cosmic outsideness was rarely as successful as it was in "The Colour out of Space." In a discussion of the story some years later, in 1932, he also referenced "the very obvious fact that anything not designed for the earth would be overwhelmingly likely to prove more or less deleterious when brought into contact with terrestrial life."[445] This illustrates Lovecraft's oft-repeated conviction that in an infinite universe there must be distant places, "regions unnamed and unnamable,"[446] where the laws of nature and reality work very differently compared to our own local surroundings. Things emanating from such places are not evil (since this is an anthropocentric term that makes sense only from a subjective human perspective), but simply so alien that the consequences of an encounter are indeed likely to be "deleterious." One may ask, of course, why the consequences of such encounters must always be harmful to humans, and this is a question perhaps best answered by use of a simple analogy. The mysterious colour, arriving from outer space, is similar in kind to an invasive species that by its very nature must upset the natural ecosystem precisely because it is too alien to harmonise well, or at all, with its new environment. And the more alien it is (depending on how far away it originates), the more upsetting its presence will be to the natural order of things. Thus, Lovecraft is not saying that things that are different are bad because they are different, but that they *appear* to be bad precisely because they are so different.

With all the continuous work – which he later referred to as "valuable practice"[447] – Lovecraft had done since his return from New York at this point completed, his final decade of literary production now lay before him. Some notable developments were still to occur in the final years of the 1920s, having mainly to do with his rather dramatically changed attitudes towards poetry, but his aesthetic philosophy and his mature literary style were now for the most part fully developed. However, the coming years would also prove to be a period beset with many difficulties and setbacks, as will be seen in the next chapter.

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[444] There has been some confusion about this, see Joshi (2013b: 674-675), but the matter is conclusively cleared up in a letter from July 1927: "Wandrei tells me that *Amazing Stories* doesn't pay well, so that I'm sorry I didn't try *Weird Tales* first" (Lovecraft and Smith 2017: 136). Lovecraft was paid almost nothing for the story (Lovecraft and Smith 2017: 210), and as a result he never submitted another manuscript to *Amazing Stories*.

[445] See Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 394).

[446] See Lovecraft (2015b: 383).

[447] See Lovecraft (2011b: 130).

6. Fiction and Aesthetics: 1927-1937

Having completed his work on "The Colour out of Space" in March 1927, Lovecraft's creative energy was temporarily spent, and his period of continuous literary production since his return from New York came to an end. This was also due to the intrusion of the real world, in that he had to earn a living in some manner, especially since he only had the occasional sale of a story on which to support himself. As a result, he became engulfed in revision work at this time, and in fact he was to produce only two original stories of his own over the next four years.

6.1. The Great Stories Period: Revision

This was the time of the Great Depression, making Lovecraft's increasing poverty an ever more serious concern (aside from the income brought by his revision work, he only had a small mortgage from a failing quarry and what little remained of a lump-sum inheritance from his grandfather on which to support himself).[448] Additionally, much labour was spent on his correspondence, as well as on the time-consuming activities of amateur journalism, into which he had allowed himself to be lured back.[449] And these were the years when his wide-ranging travels began in earnest, with Lovecraft spending the winter half of every year saving as much money as he could in order to barely be able to afford bus tickets and food during the summer months. One result of his travels was a series of very lengthy travelogues, which no one read other than himself and a few close friends. As a consequence of all these activities, he often

[448] See, for example, Lovecraft (2011b: 137; 2018: 155) for comments regarding the quarry.

[449] A counterpoint might be raised here that Lovecraft should not be criticised for "wasting time" on activities that he enjoyed pursuing, even if they had a deleterious effect on his fiction writing. This is true enough – except for the fact that Lovecraft himself kept complaining about how much time he lost on "wrestling" with his endless correspondence, and how frustrating it was to deal with the petty political infighting that was part and parcel of amateur journalism. He may have enjoyed these activities up to a point. His correspondence, in particular, helped him in that it served as a replacement for normal conversation. But there is an important distinction to be drawn between letter-writing with congenial friends and colleagues and official amateur business and pestering fans who wrote to him in steadily increasing numbers in the 1930s. It was when Lovecraft allowed the latter sort of correspondence to take over his life that it became a negative rather than a positive for him.

complained about never having the undisturbed leisure to write any stories of his own.[450]

One of the revisions Lovecraft undertook at this time was a textbook on poetry by his amateur colleague Maurice W. Moe, which was never published. But an important consequence of all the work he did on this project was his final abandonment of the principles of eighteenth-century poetry. It is also likely that this was one of the main reasons why he briefly took up writing verse of his own again, when he composed the *Fungi from Yuggoth* sonnet cycle in late December 1929 and early January 1930.[451] His most important revision client during this time, however, was a woman named Zealia Brown Reed Bishop,[452] for whom he ghostwrote a number of stories and with whom he also engaged in a lengthy correspondence. Lovecraft essentially acted as a writing coach for Bishop, and in August 1929 he offered the following summation of his teachings over the previous years:

> This, then, is the writer's fivefold problem:
> 1. To get the facts of life.
> 2. To think straight & tell the truth.
> 3. To cut out maudlin & extravagant emotion.
> 4. To cultivate an ear for strong, direct, harmonious, simple, & graphic language.
> 5. To write what one really sees & feels.
> (Lovecraft 2015f: 157)

These years also saw the beginnings of the so-called "Lovecraft circle," which continued to grow in the 1930s with the addition of several notable young pulp writers (Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, C. L. Moore, Henry Kuttner, and others).

Among other new correspondents at this time was a man named Woodburn Harris, with whom Lovecraft discussed a wide variety of

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[450] See Lovecraft (2011b: 178; 2014a: 135, 157; 2014b: 9; 2015f: 110, 112, 124, 159), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 76, 201, 243), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 106, 181, 199, 231, 235, 243), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 132, 145). All the revising work Lovecraft did at this time had the additional consequence of contributing to his dissatisfaction with his earlier work, as well as increasing his desire for realism (as previously discussed) and a more contemporary style, see Lovecraft (2018: 234) and Van Hise (1999: 37).

[451] See Lovecraft (2017d). See also the introduction by the editors in Lovecraft (2018: 16-21).

[452] She is referred to by Lovecraft in earlier letters as Mrs. Reed, as she did not become Mrs. Bishop until July 1930 (see Lovecraft 2015f: 20). The amalgamation of different surnames under which she is known to posterity is a consequence of marriage and remarriage.

different matters, including aesthetics, early in 1929.[453] Lovecraft's theory of aesthetics, as it emerges in the extant letters, tied into several of the concepts he had been thinking about for years at this point. It was, of course, primarily concerned with beauty, but it was also connected with his idea of things being important through their associational value, which in Lovecraft's case meant connections with his immediate surroundings and the past.[454] An emphasis on symmetry meant that things were beautiful by virtue of being harmonious in themselves and also in how well they harmonised with their surroundings.[455] But because the ability to see and experience this effect was necessarily individual for every person, good art for Lovecraft meant such works as succeeded in making others see what the artist (or the writer) saw in the scene that was being depicted.

In other words, although Lovecraft's main focus may not have been on this particular implication, he was here advocating for art as a communicative act between the artist and an audience. Self-expression from an artistic point of view meant nothing without an audience for artists to express themselves to. Although Lovecraft elsewhere repeatedly stated that he did not care about the opinions of others, such statements must for the most part be sorted under the category of defensive posturing (Lovecraft clearly did care about the opinions of his colleagues, for example, and he remained as hypersensitive to rejection as he had always been).[456] He then went on to argue that this kind of exposure to the artistic visions of others meant that the individual vision was enlarged by having seen something new and, through that, having gained a bit more of the totality of all that was there to see. And, as a further consequence, it was now possible to do one's own work, if one

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[453] See Lovecraft (1968: 288-312).

[454] "I find by experience that my chief pleasure is in symbolic identification with the landscape and tradition-stream to which I belong" (Lovecraft 1968: 288).

[455] "At least three separate factors seem to be involved – physical-sensory pleasure, mental-emotional association, and mathematical symmetry or rhythm; the last-named of these being most purely and characteristically aesthetic and differentiated from general sensations and emotions" Lovecraft (1968: 297).

[456] Also, there is an important distinction here between, on the one hand, writing *for* a particular audience, and, on the other hand, expressing oneself *to* an audience. Compare with what Lovecraft (2019: 381) said in 1934, in a discussion on friendship and its different causes, one of which is: "the intrinsic pleasure of exchanging ideas & impressions with others capable of understanding & parallelling [sic] them[, which is] closely connected with the general creative impulse behind art & scholarship, whereby the individual feels a wish to formulate & transmit the impressions & experiences he receives." This is essentially an alternative phrasing of the subjective impulse as this concept was defined in Chapter 1.

was so inclined, from a starting point of greater clarity. Ultimately, then, art is a process of inching ever so slowly closer to an image of ultimate reality,[457] an image the complete grasp of which will forever remain out of our reach, which is why art in the end is only an illusion – but it is the most important illusion we have.

6.1.1. "The Dunwich Horror"

Following "The Last Test" (a rewrite, late in 1927, of a previously published story by Lovecraft's revision client Adolphe de Castro)[458] and "The Curse of Yig" (a story ghostwritten for Zealia Brown Reed Bishop early in 1928),[459] Lovecraft wrote "The Dunwich Horror" in the summer of 1928.[460] The impetus for this Gothic tale came from the extensive travelling that Lovecraft undertook in the summer of 1928, beginning with a six-week stay with Sonia in Brooklyn from late April to early June, during which time he also visited Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow. From New York he went to Vermont where he stayed two weeks on a farm owned by his friend Vrest Orton, after which he spent a week in Athol, Massachusetts, in the company of W. Paul Cook and fellow pulp writer H. Warner Munn. This was followed by an eight-day stay with his amateur colleague Edith Miniter and her cousin in North Wilbraham in July. He then returned to New York and continued on to Philadelphia, Baltimore, Annapolis, Washington, and the Endless Caverns in Virginia, before finally coming back to Providence.

It appears that Lovecraft had begun preliminary work on the tale while still in New York, before doing the bulk of the writing in early August after his return home – his weeks in Vermont and (especially) North Wilbraham in rural Massachusetts having provided the necessary inspiration.[461] As Lovecraft said in 1936:

> "The Dunwich Horror" attempts a certain composite realism in setting – engrafting certain characteristics of Southern Vermont upon the retrogressive countryside of the region near Springfield, Mass. It is, in

[457] Later in the letter, Lovecraft (1968: 311) referred to this process as "the reality-seeking impulse," and it can perhaps best be illustrated by comparison with the old parable of the blind men and the elephant. From this it can also be seen that Lovecraft's theory of aesthetics is one that ascribes cognitive functions to the pursuit of art.

[458] See Joshi and Schultz (2001: 62).

[459] See Lovecraft (2015f: 107-108, 112), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 213-214), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 137, 222), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 181).

[460] See Lovecraft (2011b: 163, 165) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 151-152).

[461] See Lovecraft (1992b: 82; 2014a: 35; 2016a: 61-62; 2016b: 16), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 151), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 163).

> a way, an echo of a visit to Wilbraham, Mass. in 1928, during which my hosts related much of the local traditions, & had much to say of the state of the contemporary peasantry. (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 300)

In other words, the town of Dunwich and its surrounding geography is an intentional mishmash of impressions – or "composite realism" – gathered by Lovecraft from his travels in Massachusetts and Vermont during the late 1920s.

As far as underlying plot concepts are concerned, "The Dunwich Horror" can be seen as belonging to a very small subgroup within Lovecraft's oeuvre that is unified by a central idea concerning cultists trying to prepare the way for the return of the Old Ones – made explicit in "The Dunwich Horror" – that then came to constitute the ultimate origin of the later Cthulhu Mythos as developed by August Derleth and others.[462] It is also interesting to note how Lovecraft handled the descriptions of Wilbur Whateley and Whateley's monstrous twin at this time,[463] given what he said in a letter a few years later (emphasis in the original):

> I agree with what you say about *suggestion* as the highest form of horror-presentation. The basis of all true cosmic horror is *violation of the order of nature*, and the profoundest violations are always the least concrete and describable. […] But the mob – including Farnsworth Wright – can never be made to see this; hence W.T. will always reject work of the finest and most delicate sort. Of course, there is such a thing as *excessive* indefiniteness, especially among novices who do not really understand how to handle cosmic suggestion. Crude writers use the old trick of calling a hidden horror "too monstrous to describe", merely as an excuse for not forming any clear picture of the alleged horror themselves. But the skilled author who knows what he is doing can often hint a thing much better than it can be told. Drawing the line between concrete description and trans-dimensional suggestion is a very ticklish job. […] The keynote of such suggestion is the *implication* of fundamental disarrangements of natural law, especially as relates to space and time. Unholy *survivals*, intrusions from other worlds and other dimensions, etc., are the kind of thing having the richest possibilities. (Lovecraft and Howard 2011a: 52-53)

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[462] Other stories in this category include *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and the revision of Adolphe de Castro's "The Electric Executioner," which was the next story that Lovecraft worked on after "The Dunwich Horror."

[463] The description of the twin appears to have been inspired by Clark Ashton Smith's artwork, see Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 164), which underlines the importance of the creative inter-pollination that occurred between Lovecraft and his colleagues at this time, as it contributed to the creation of some of the most important stories by Lovecraft and Smith and also (later) by Robert E. Howard and others.

It is here worth noting how Lovecraft's comments go against the popular stereotype of his fiction as being specifically of the "too monstrous to describe" variety. In fact, Lovecraft would soon begin to complain that the mature stories he wrote in the 1930s were, if anything, too explicit (as a consequence of his having to write for the pulp market),[464] and it is indeed true that many of the alien races and extraterrestrial monsters he depicted in later stories were described in minute detail to an almost excessive degree (the Great Race in "The Shadow out of Time" is a typical example).

Critical reception of "The Dunwich Horror" has long been influenced by Joshi's strong dislike of the story, which stems from its simple good vs. evil nature and the fact that it is therefore not a pure cosmic horror tale.[465] It is in this context interesting to note that Lovecraft in a letter in 1935 mentioned "The Dunwich Horror" among such of his stories as had ended "in a manner totally unforeseen when I began."[466] It is therefore possible that he may have set out to write a cosmic horror story inspired by the New England landscape from his travels, but that his conception changed during the composition of the tale. A comment he made about psychologically identifying with Dr. Armitage is significant in this context,[467] especially since Armitage as a character is quite similar to Dr. Elihu Whipple from "The Shunned House," and to other aged scholars who had appeared in his fiction (patterned on his grandfather and Dr. Clark). These learned and elderly gentlemen, fighting their battles on hallowed New England soil, had to be given an apparent victory at least occasionally (see also the close reading of this story in Chapter 9), and so it can be seen that "The Dunwich Horror," aside from being a masterpiece of Gothic fiction, also illustrates Lovecraft's parallel conception of how, even though life is ultimately meaningless and without purpose, one should nevertheless live *as if* there was meaning and purpose of one's own making.

6.1.2. "The Mound"

Lovecraft's next revision job was "The Electric Executioner" (another rewritten story for Adolphe de Castro),[468] followed by the "The Mound" (ghostwritten for Zealia Brown Reed Bishop late in 1929). "The Mound,"

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464 See, for example, Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 289) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 362-363).
465 See Joshi (2013b: 716-721).
466 See Van Hise (1999: 34).
467 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 158).
468 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 200, 249).

the seed of which was a very brief story suggestion by Bishop,[469] turned out to be the longest ghostwriting project that Lovecraft ever undertook, and as such it was an almost entirely original creation.[470] It also involved an early example of Lovecraft adopting various elements from the works of his colleagues for hoax-weaving purposes, in this case Clark Ashton Smith's monstrous toad god Tsathoggua.[471] The idea, as it gradually emerged, was to create an illusion of increased verisimilitude by having various alien gods, monsters, forbidden books, etc., appear in different stories by different authors (as Lovecraft's colleagues also began to use his material in their own tales). The result was undeniably successful, given how many times Lovecraft was asked by fans for more information about his "synthetic myth-cycle" or "artificial mythology," as he began to call it.[472]

A central theme in "The Mound" is the idea of an unknown prehistory of the world that reaches far back in time and that, as in "The Call of Cthulhu," suggests not only that humanity has been preceded in this world by immensely older and more powerful beings, but also, as in "The Nameless City," that these precursors are still here. What makes "The Mound" notably different from Lovecraft's other variations on this theme is the fact that the extraterrestrial race in question is also the ancestral race of all humans (a necessity perhaps imposed by Bishop's original story idea). This is the first fictional exploration by Lovecraft into the origins of humanity, and he presented a very different version some years later in *At the Mountains of Madness*.

This is also the first time that Lovecraft created a detailed alien civilisation (he would do so again in *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Shadow out of Time"), albeit one that was human-like, and it is interesting in this context to note that the ancestors of all humanity are depicted as looking mostly like American Indians. The origin of this idea lay in the Oklahoma setting of the story, provided by Bishop, and in the fact that Lovecraft combined the real-world Mound Builders in North America with the various legends, specifically the Seven Cities of Gold, similar to El Dorado further south, that had set the Spanish conquistadors on their quests for legendary cities filled with treasure,

[469] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 225) and Joshi (2013b: 745).

[470] See Lovecraft (2014a: 114, 118), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 231), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 187-188).

[471] See Lovecraft (2007b: 142; 2016a: 142) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 192)

[472] See, for example, Lovecraft (2015e: 32) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 40) for instances of this terminology.

but it also revealed something about Lovecraft's enduring respect for Native Americans (in contrast to some of his other racial attitudes).[473]

Another main theme in the story, however, is that of decadence and the unavoidable fall of civilisation. The underground K'n-yan civilisation, although once great, is now described as having fallen into such an exaggerated state of decay that there is even an explicit mention of the possibility of "social satire" in the account.[474] The culmination of this process is the fact that the remaining capital city of Tsath is described as "a kind of communistic or semi-anarchical state,"[475] which suggests that a regime of this kind is the unavoidable consequence of a civilisation having fallen into complete decadence, which is what Lovecraft also saw happening in the Western world. A once great civilisation could sink no lower, the way Lovecraft saw it, against a contemporary real-world background shaped by anarchist agitation in America and the communist revolution in Russia in 1917.

6.1.3. "The Whisperer in Darkness"

Lovecraft's final ghostwriting project for Bishop was "Medusa's Coil," written on a park bench in Richmond, Virginia, over a few afternoons in May 1930.[476] His next original story under his own name (his first in two years) was "The Whisperer in Darkness," on which he worked over an unusually long period extending from February to September 1930, due to continuously being interrupted by other matters.[477] Lovecraft had visited Charleston for the first time in spring, and he had finished the first draft of the story just before starting on the return trip via Richmond to New York,[478] where he stayed two weeks. He then visited friends in Kingston and Athol before returning home in the middle of June, at which point some adverse criticism he had received along the

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473 See, for example, Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 481-482). Lovecraft here refers to Native Americans as "certainly not inferior," and suggests that if "Europeans had delayed their discovery of the New World for another thousand years, they would have found another great civilisation – a civilisation utterly unlike any other in existence."

474 See Lovecraft (2017a: 234).

475 See Lovecraft (2017a: 208).

476 See Lovecraft (2007b: 276). It is likely that this story, to which I will return in Chapter 8, was written in haste and with little care, since Lovecraft was on one of his customary sightseeing trips at this time, and was therefore presumably more interested in exploring Richmond than in writing out a story for a ghostwriting client.

477 See Lovecraft (1971b: 130; 2014a: 137, 139, 146), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 249-251, 254, 258), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 210, 215).

478 See Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 249), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 262-263), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 217).

way caused him to do some revisions.[479] Late in August he went on a brief visit to Quebec City, also for the first time, and the revision was not finally complete until the following month.[480]

The major impetus for the story was once again (as in the case of "The Dunwich Horror") the impressions that Lovecraft had gathered from the Vermont landscape during his visits there in 1927 and 1928.[481] However, in this case the focus was more on the cosmic side than the Gothic, as Lovecraft continued the process, which he had begun in "The Shunned House," of re-imagining some of his earlier fiction by turning the old Gothic horrors of the past into entirely new cosmic horrors that were grounded mostly in science fiction rather than supernaturalism. The story also confirmed the idea that some humans have been in contact with alien beings since the very dawn of humanity, but that the inability of these humans to fully understand what they were dealing with led them to conjecture a supernatural explanation for what was in reality only the actions of supremely advanced extraterrestrials.[482] In the end, though, the hapless character of Wilmarth reacts to what he learns in a very human way, and it is clear that cosmic awe will for him always be outweighed by cosmic horror:

> My scientific zeal had vanished amidst fear and loathing, and I felt nothing now but a wish to escape from this net of morbidity and unnatural revelation. I knew enough now. It must indeed be true that cosmic linkages do exist – but such things are surely not meant for normal human beings to meddle with. (Lovecraft 2015b: 527-528)

This is a very clear expression of the "things man was not meant to meddle with" trope that is now so closely, perhaps too closely, associated with Lovecraft.

Another important component of Lovecraft's aesthetic thinking that emerged around this time was the concept of an imaginative escape effected through the breaking of the limits imposed by "time, space, and natural law." One of the first occasions on which Lovecraft began to elucidate this idea in this way was after his boat trip to Provincetown on the tip of Cape Cod in 1930, when he experienced the open sea for the

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479 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 265) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 220).

480 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 279-280) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 236, 242).

481 See Lovecraft (1992b: 34, 41), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 409), Van Hise (1999: 33), Mariconda (2013: 190-200), and Joshi (2013b: 760-761).

482 This is essentially the same basic concept that was later formulated as Arthur C. Clarke's famous third law, which states that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

first time, immediately after his first visit to Quebec City for three days (with its traditional architecture and strange sky effects, which had also made a deep and long-lasting impression on him).[483] It was not long before Lovecraft began to link this newly articulated concept of escape to his cosmic views, which he was now explicitly labelling as "cosmic outsideness."[484] More important still, in fact profoundly so, was the new aesthetic idea of supplementing rather than contradicting reality in his fiction (emphasis in the original):[485]

> The time has come when the normal revolt against time, space, & matter must assume a form not overtly incompatible with what is known of reality – when it must be gratified by images forming *supplements* rather than *contradictions* of the visible & mensurable universe. And what, if not a form of *non-supernatural cosmic art*, is to pacify this sense of revolt – as well as gratify the cognate sense of curiosity? (Lovecraft 1971b: 295-296)

Lovecraft's concept of a non-supernatural cosmic art functioning as a supplement to reality in order to gratify a sense of curiosity about existence that cannot be gratified in any other way stands as one of the main foundations underlying his mature cosmic horror fiction, expressed primarily in such efforts as *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Shadow out of Time."

6.2. The Great Stories Period: Rejection

The first months of 1931 saw Lovecraft at work on the most ambitious of his literary projects thus far, the short novel *At the Mountains of Madness*. The writing was complete late in March, and Lovecraft sent the typed manuscript to Farnsworth Wright, who rejected it in June, and the tale also received a good deal of negative criticism from some of Lovecraft's friends and colleagues,[486] who neither understood nor appreciated the new directions that Lovecraft was again taking in his fiction writing. Added to this was the further setback of having some of his old stories rejected by Harry Bates,[487] who was the editor of the newly launched *Strange Tales* – although this outcome was expected when it occurred in

483 See, for example, Lovecraft (2003b: 156-158).
484 See Lovecraft (1971b: 294-295) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 225). See also the earlier discussion of this term in Chapter 4.
485 See also Lovecraft (2011b: 226-227; 2014a: 147).
486 See, for example, Lovecraft (1976a: 401-402; 2015e: 325-326; 2016a: 92).
487 See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 329-330, 334).

April and May – followed by the stinging rejection of a possible book collection by Putnam in July.

At this point, the combined effect of having both *At the Mountains of Madness* and the Putnam collection rejected proved too much for Lovecraft's fragile self-esteem, with the predictable consequence (not for the first time) that he began talking about withdrawing entirely from fiction writing.[488] The coming years would bring new rejections from book publishers, first Vanguard Press in March 1932, then Knopf in August 1933, and finally Loring & Mussey in February 1935.[489] Lovecraft also encountered continued adverse criticism from colleagues, which sent him deeper into self-doubt and insecurity. He had at this point entirely stopped submitting stories to *Weird Tales*,[490] and for years nothing under his name other than reprints appeared in the magazine (until August Derleth submitted "The Dreams in the Witch House" behind Lovecraft's back). A wounded Lovecraft had retreated deep into his shell during this time, once again fully embracing the persona of the aristocratic gentleman who would no longer subject himself to the indignity of trying to write for the common market. But underlying the posturing (which flared up more strongly as the years went by) was the real pain Lovecraft experienced at finding himself in an impossible situation, with the wish – and sometimes the actual need – to write what he regarded as real literature, but with no outlet available and consequently no way to express (or support) himself.[491]

In the meantime his correspondence kept increasing, with Lovecraft adopting the role of elderly mentor to young aspiring writers, and his letters in the early 1930s frequently reiterate the points he habitually brought up during these years, including an emphasis on a simple style (without too many adjectives), escape from the ordinary, violation of the laws of nature, subtlety and gradual development in story structure, realism in depiction except for the one "chosen marvel" at the centre of

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[488] See Lovecraft (2007b: 4; 2016b: 23-24, 29-30), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 289), and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 351, 362-363). Lovecraft kept declaring the end of his writing career over the coming years, usually in the wake of the latest round of rejections. See, for example, Lovecraft (2016b: 105).

[489] See, for example, Lovecraft (2007b: 26-28, 35, 273-274; 2015e: 68, 72-74, 191-192; 2016b: 93, 96), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 304, 330), and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 464, 466-467, 469, 697, 703).

[490] See, for example, Lovecraft (1976a: 17).

[491] See, for example, Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 397): "I have to write what's in me at the time, or not at all. Every time I've written even slightly to order, the result has been a lamentable mess." See also Lovecraft (1976a: 264), as an illustrative example from a long-standing debate with fellow writer E. Hoffmann Price on commercialism vs. art.

the tale, art against commercialism, weird fiction as an expression of a mood, and laments over his own inability to write what he wanted to write.[492] He also emphasised mood and atmosphere over plot, while customarily dismissing as mechanical and artificial any story structure that contained elements outside the framework imposed by everyday realism (except, of course, for the one reality-breaching marvel from outside). This was also why he was equally critical of the use of coincidence in stories, which for him was absolutely impermissible, no matter that coincidences did happen in real life.[493] But what he constantly attacked, over and over again, were the formulaic pulp action stories that lacked not only realism but also the specific emphasis on atmosphere that he always sought.[494] Late in life, in 1935, he produced what is probably his most definitive statement on aesthetics with respect to weird fiction, as follows (emphasis in the original):

> In the weird field, a *genuine* story is more likely than not to consist simply of a pageant of baffling shadows seen – without conflict – by some kind, obscure, middle-aged house-holder. The "hero" of such a story is never a person but always a *phenomenon* or *condition* – the "punch" or climax is not what *happens to anybody*, but *the realisation that some condition contrary to actual law as we understand it has (fictionally) had a brief moment of existence*. For the object of weird fiction is purely & simply emotional release – a highly specialised form of emotional release for the very small group of people whose active & restless imaginations revolt against the relentless tyranny of time, space, & natural law. It must, if it is to be authentic art, form primarily *the crystallisation or symbolisation of a definite human mood* – *not* the attempted delineation of *events*, since the "events" involved are of course largely fictitious & impossible. These events should figure *secondarily* – *atmosphere* being first. All real art must somehow be connected with *truth*, & in the case of weird art the emphasis must fall upon the one factor representing truth – certainly not the events (!!!) but *the mood of intense & fruitless human aspiration typified by the pretended overturning of cosmic laws & the pretended transcending of possible human experience*. (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 27)

And similarly in the essay "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," probably written in 1933:

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[492] See, for example, Lovecraft (2016b: 38, 41, 55-58, 65-66, 75), in which these points show up in letters to J. Vernon Shea, who was one of Lovecraft's many correspondents on these matters at this time.

[493] See, for example, Lovecraft (2004b: 140-141; 2015f: 57; 2016b: 246, 343) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 399; 2013b: 508, 516-517, 525, 576-577, 581-582).

[494] See, for example, Lovecraft (1992b: 19), among numerous examples.

> My reason for writing stories is to give myself the satisfaction of visualising more clearly and detailedly and stably the vague, elusive, fragmentary impressions of wonder, beauty, and adventurous expectancy which are conveyed to me by certain sights (scenic, architectural, atmospheric, etc.), ideas, occurrences, and images encountered in art and literature. I choose weird stories because they suit my inclination best – one of my strongest and most persistent wishes being to achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which for ever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis. These stories frequently emphasise the element of horror because fear is our deepest and strongest emotion, and the one which best lends itself to the creation of nature-defying illusions. (Lovecraft 2004b: 175-176)

Lovecraft had always tried to write fiction as a uniquely personal form of art, and it is thus not surprising that this was met with resistance and lack of understanding from both the general pulp audience and also the modernist literary audience. A small but more appreciative target audience still existed, of course, but Lovecraft had no effective way of reaching it at this time (except through the limited way of circulating his unpublished manuscripts among his friends).

6.2.1. *At the Mountains of Madness*

At the Mountains of Madness clearly represented the culmination of Lovecraft's lifelong fascination with Antarctica,[495] and added to this long-standing motivation was the fact that the previous year had been full of imaginative stimulation, with visits by Lovecraft to Charleston and Quebec, and his first boat trip on the open sea.[496] It is probably not a coincidence that these experiences occurred at the same time as the developments in his aesthetic philosophy that he frequently described during these years as a sense of adventurous expectancy centring on the concept of escape from the confines of time, space, and natural law, as outlined earlier – not in itself so much a new idea as a new way of articulating it. In addition to this, there were more specific sources of influence, such as the paintings by the Russian mystic Nicholas Roerich

[495] See Lovecraft (1976a: 401-402; 1992b: 57; 2015e: 27, 325-326, 332; 2016a: 77, 92).

[496] It is perhaps notable that Lovecraft mentioned Arthur Gordon Pym in his description of that boat trip, see Lovecraft (2003b: 157-158). Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is prominently mentioned in *At the Mountains of Madness* (see Lovecraft 2015c: 18-19, 145). See also Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 336).

that Lovecraft had admired in a museum in New York.[497] A major background theme that runs through the story, as in the case of "The Mound," is once again cultural decadence, in that the fate of the alien civilisation that is introduced in the narrative is also indicative of the coming collapse of Western civilisation, due to the societal decay that Lovecraft viewed as irreversible. Otherwise *At the Mountains of Madness* is characterised by meticulous scientific verisimilitude and attention to detail, and an evocation of atmosphere that reaches a higher level compared to most of Lovecraft's earlier work.

6.2.2. "The Shadow over Innsmouth"

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" was the first story that Lovecraft attempted to write after he had spiralled into his long period of insecurity and self-doubt following the twin rejections of *At the Mountains of Madness* and the Putnam collection. The criticism from Putnam had hit a particularly sore spot at this time,[498] and Lovecraft kept repeating to his correspondents how his stories were not bad enough for the pulps but also not good enough to be published as literature, and how he needed to shake free from the pulp influence and henceforth write freely without restrictions, or else not write at all. Accordingly, he described his work on this new effort as the product of a series of experiments in different styles,[499] that, after a number of failed attempts, culminated in his writing out the story in his customary manner, which in turn led to his increased dissatisfaction with both the tale itself and his (as he saw it) continued inability to write what he wanted to write. He refused to submit the manuscript for publication,[500] and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" remained unpublished until 1935, when it appeared in a shoddily produced amateur printing filled with errors.[501] As for the decaying coastal town that lies at the centre of the narrative, this deeply

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[497] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 263, 265-266), Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 213), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 539). Roerich is frequently mentioned in the narrative (see Lovecraft 2015c: 18, 28, 51, 65, 67, 154).

[498] See Lovecraft (2016b: 30), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 289), and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 362-363, 417).

[499] See Lovecraft (2016b: 85), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 291), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 410, 417-420), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 336).

[500] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 462).

[501] For comments over the years on this project and its eventual completion, see Lovecraft (2005d: 237; 2007b: 318-319, 323, 373; 2014a: 345, 348-349, 350-351; 2015e: 180-181, 366-367; 2016b: 378; 2018: 517), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 384), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 693, 725-726, 728, 732, 742, 759, 763), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 630, 635, 639, 661).

atmospheric location had its inspirational origins in a visit that Lovecraft undertook in early October 1931 to Newburyport, a once prosperous seaport in Essex County that had fallen into decay (its historic downtown section has since been restored).[502] The story was thus an exercise in "regional horror," as Lovecraft emphasised on several occasions,[503] although the central theme is more properly biological devolution rather than cultural decadence.

6.2.3. "The Dreams in the Witch House"

After the difficulties Lovecraft had experienced with "The Shadow over Innsmouth," the writing of "The Dreams in the Witch House," early in 1932,[504] seems to have proceeded smoothly.[505] He put the manuscript into circulation among his friends before embarking on his travels for the summer, going first to New York for a week before continuing on to New Orleans. As comments and verdicts began to trickle in, Lovecraft reacted the way he normally did at this time, immediately attempting to withdraw the manuscript on receiving the first negative criticism, which came from August Derleth.[506] Derleth, however, later sent the manuscript to Farnsworth Wright, without Lovecraft's knowledge, and Wright immediately accepted it for publication.[507] "The Dreams in the Witch House," similarly to several of Lovecraft's previous tales, again combined classic Gothic tropes with science fiction elements inspired by the (at the time) latest advances in scientific theorising in the fields of quantum mechanics and general relativity, including the now classic tropes of hyperspace travel and the use of wormholes that connect two widely separated points in space or even time.[508] Lovecraft also again suggested

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[502] See Lovecraft (2015e: 27; 2016a: 77, 93) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 332-333).

[503] See Lovecraft (1992b: 55; 2011b: 362; 2016a: 267) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 603), in which he repeats the same phrasing to several different correspondents.

[504] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 458) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 348).

[505] Some years later, in 1935, Lovecraft (2015e: 130) described the writing of the story as "a pleasure, which didn't exhaust me at all," since, "I knew what I wanted to do, & didn't have to heed what anybody else wanted." He did rewrite the ending, however, see Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 460) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 353).

[506] See Lovecraft (1976a: 91), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 482-483), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 372).

[507] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 538, 540, 544-545).

[508] See Leiber (2003) for an early and insightful discussion of Lovecraft's use of hyperspace travel in his fiction. The term "wormhole" was not coined until 1957 by John Archibald Wheeler, but the idea had been around since at least the late 1920s. An early example in science fiction occurred in Jack Williamson's classic short story "The Meteor Girl," published in the March 1931 issue of *Astounding*, which Lovecraft may have read, since he later referred approvingly to Williamson's work, see Lovecraft and Howard (2011b: 727).

the idea of a higher and vastly more complex super-reality enveloping our own, which sometimes either breaks through or can be accessed via means that in the past would have been considered supernatural but are now merely a form of highly advanced mathematics. A possible contributing source of inspiration for these ideas was the lecture on the size of the universe by the Dutch mathematician and astronomer Willem de Sitter that Lovecraft attended early in November 1931,[509] a few months before he began work on "The Dreams in the Witch House." The lecture concerned the expanding universe, but it may have set Lovecraft's imagination moving in the right direction.

During this time (1932 and early 1933) Lovecraft also ghostwrote five stories for a client named Hazel Heald: "The Man of Stone," "Winged Death," "The Horror in the Museum," "Out of the Aeons," and "The Horror in the Burying-Ground." These stories were for the most part original compositions by Lovecraft: "Mrs. Heald is a revision client of mine, & all her W.T. material is virtually written by me,"[510] as he stated in 1935.[511] This meant that Lovecraft did not take much care in writing them,[512] being content to recycle ideas and conceptions from earlier work to some degree, although "The Horror in the Museum" and "Out of the Aeons" were somewhat more substantial, the latter in particular since it presented a new variation by Lovecraft on the fictional prehistory of the earth (which, in this case, was also a variation on the Atlantis myth).[513]

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509 See, for example, Lovecraft (2016b: 80). Willem de Sitter – along with Max Planck, Werner Heisenberg, and Albert Einstein – is mentioned by name in the story (see Lovecraft 2015c: 234).

510 See Lovecraft (2015e: 205).

511 See also Lovecraft (1976a: 229; 2007b: 120, 129, 255; 2011b: 350; 2015e: 59, 138; 2016a: 271), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 314), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 698), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 394, 420, 544, 594, 603) for comments on Lovecraft's weird fiction revision work.

512 "It is not, I fear, as carefully written as a signed story of mine would have been" (Lovecraft 1992b: 58).

513 "Out of the Aeons" proved very popular with readers, and the story is also noteworthy for the fact that Lovecraft in it, on this one occasion only, actually did set different groups of "gods" against each other based on whether they were hostile or not towards humanity. Here, then, more than anywhere else in Lovecraft's writings, is the template for this particular aspect of the Cthulhu Mythos as it was later devised by August Derleth and his followers, and this development was likely given further impetus by the popularity of the story in *Weird Tales*. The misrepresentation of Lovecraft's ideas that resulted from this is thus partly attributable to the fact that some of his work under his own name was not published until later or not at all, or in magazines other than *Weird Tales*.

6.2.4. "Through the Gates of the Silver Key"

Another project that Lovecraft worked on in the early months of 1933 was a collaboration he had reluctantly undertaken at the behest of a colleague, E. Hoffmann Price (whom he had met in New Orleans). This collaboration was "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," and the details of how it came about are as follows: Price had liked the original "The Silver Key" so much that he had urged Lovecraft to write a sequel, which Lovecraft had no interest in doing; Price then wrote his own sequel and sent it to Lovecraft, whereupon Lovecraft rewrote Price's version entirely in order to reconcile it with the original story.[514] Predictably, Lovecraft was unhappy with the result (the story was published in *Weird Tales* after an initial rejection),[515] for all that the cosmic vision he put across in the narrative was unlike anything he had attempted in previous work, in the process also providing a very clear elucidation of what a cosmic viewpoint truly entails (emphasis in the original):

> Damnation, he reflected, is but a word bandied about by those whose blindness leads them to condemn all who can see, even with a single eye. He wondered at the vast conceit of those who had babbled of the *malignant* Ancient Ones, as if They could pause from their everlasting dreams to wreak a wrath upon mankind. As well, he thought, might a mammoth pause to visit frantic vengeance on an angleworm. (Lovecraft 2015c: 293)

This is one of the few passages that Lovecraft, for understandable reasons, preserved almost intact from Price's original,[516] which also reveals that Price, unlike Derleth and many others, had clearly understood what Lovecraft was trying to say.

6.2.5. "The Thing on the Doorstep"

At some point during the summer of 1933, Lovecraft decided to embark on a course of re-reading the classics in weird fiction with the aim of getting his own writing back on track. This was likely a consequence of the first weird fiction fanzine, *The Fantasy Fan*, having been founded by Charles D. Hornig at this time (the first issue appeared in September), since Lovecraft, always willing to support the cause, had begun placing his old rejected stories in the magazine, and had also offered to let

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[514] See Lovecraft (1976a: 160, 175-178; 1992b: 27; 2007b: 60-61; 2014a: 274; 2015e: 379; 2016a: 29; 2016b: 135), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 557, 560, 567), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 390-391, 403, 410, 413-414).

[515] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 614, 650) and Joshi (2013b: 842).

[516] See Joshi (2013b: 841).

Hornig publish a revised edition of "Supernatural Horror in Literature."[517] This preparatory reading, in turn, and in addition to the relaunching of *Astounding* at this time (which opened up a possible new market),[518] resulted in Lovecraft writing "The Thing on the Doorstep" over a few days in August 1933.[519] As before, he was uncertain and unhappy with the result, and he experienced his usual ups and downs on whether to repudiate the story or not depending on the comments and verdicts from his colleagues.[520] As for specific inspirations, Lovecraft merely stated that this Gothic tale was, unusually for him, "more of a character study than a geographical study" and that most of it "had taken form" in his head before he began writing.[521] Thus, it is possible that the story was written quickly, based on a preconceived idea calculated to make it easy to sell, with the intent to submit it to some other magazine than *Weird Tales*, but that Lovecraft's dissatisfaction with the finished result (and his reluctance to face another rejection) prevented him from making any actual effort at having it published. Instead, he continued to get by as best he could on revision work, although impending bankruptcy and starvation were now looming on the horizon.

6.2.6. "The Shadow out of Time" and "The Haunter of the Dark"

It was almost a year and a half before Lovecraft began working on his next-to-final story, "The Shadow out of Time," written over a period from November 1934 to February 1935.[522] He described this effort as another experiment,[523] in the wake of his re-reading program, but the work proceeded slowly, partly due to his having to start over after he discarded an initial version, and partly due to other time-consuming matters, and in

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517 Hornig accepted the offer, but the serialised publication of the revised version of the essay remained incomplete when the struggling magazine folded with its final issue in February 1935. See Joshi (2013b: 858-859).

518 See Lovecraft (2011b: 334) and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 600). This classic pulp science fiction magazine was revived under the editorship of F. Orlin Tremaine in the summer, the first issue was dated October 1933. See Tymn and Ashley (1985: 62).

519 See Lovecraft (2007b: 77; 2015e: 70), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 603), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 433).

520 See Lovecraft (2015e: 103; 2016b: 175), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 604, 626), and Lovecraft and Smith 2017: 473, 494, 513-514). He did not submit the story for publication until two years later, when it was accepted by *Weird Tales* together with "The Haunter of the Dark," see Lovecraft (1976b: 274-275; 2015e: 174).

521 See Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 300) and Lovecraft (2016a: 338).

522 As noted on the autograph manuscript, see Joshi (2013b: 895).

523 See Lovecraft (2016a: 240). He had also drawn up various documents on how to write weird fiction during this time, see Lovecraft (2004b: 169-178).

the end he was as displeased and uncertain about the result as he had been with almost all his previous stories since 1931.[524] Having sent the manuscript to Derleth,[525] Lovecraft then started on his travels for the summer, going south via New York and Charleston to Florida in June, where he stayed with the Barlow family until the middle of August. It was during this time that R. H. Barlow, to whom Lovecraft had given the manuscript to read after recalling it from Derleth,[526] prepared a typed copy in secret, presenting it as a surprise gift when Lovecraft left for St. Augustine in August.[527] Lovecraft sent this typed manuscript on the customary round among his colleagues, which gave Donald Wandrei the opportunity to submit it behind Lovecraft's back to F. Orlin Tremaine at *Astounding*. Tremaine accepted both this story and also *At the Mountains of Madness*, the latter having been submitted by Julius Schwartz – Schwartz having offered to act as Lovecraft's agent at some point when Lovecraft passed through New York in early September.[528] This sudden change in Lovecraft's fortunes occurred in late October and early November, prior to which he had been entirely unaware of all this secret activity on his behalf, and it would likely have set him on the path to renewed creativity if not for another series of misfortunes, for the most part health-related (including the cancer that eventually killed him), that was still to come in 1936.

As for "The Shadow out of Time," it brings to the forefront Lovecraft's perpetual fascination with time more strongly than in any of his earlier work. The greatness of the Great Race stems precisely from the ability of these extraterrestrials to project their minds into any time period in

[524] See Lovecraft (2007b: 230; 2015e: 127-128, 133; 2016a: 113, 115, 125, 247, 255, 257; 2016b: 256), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 678-680), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 592, 594).

[525] See Lovecraft (1992b: 59).

[526] See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 697). Barlow was a teenage fan and correspondent who later became Lovecraft's literary executor, as well as a noted anthropologist in Mexico.

[527] See Lovecraft (2016a: 290-291).

[528] The exact details are slightly unclear at this point, and Wandrei's personal recollections in his Lovecraft memoir, written in 1959 (see Wandrei 1998: 315-316), are somewhat faulty. Among other things, he claims to have submitted both *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Shadow out of Time" to *Astounding*, which cannot be the case. As detailed by Lovecraft in a letter to Wandrei himself, *At the Mountains of Madness* was submitted by Julius Schwartz, acting as Lovecraft's agent (see Lovecraft and Wandrei 2002: 367-368).

history,[529] which allows them to acquire complete knowledge of everything, and the extolling of their concomitant superiority is contrasted with a denigration of humanity, with humans presented as the least impressive of all the species that have been in control of the planet. The intricacies of the culture and the civilisation of the Great Race are accordingly described in great detail, following similar descriptions of the Old Ones in “The Mound” and the different Old Ones (or the Elder Things) in *At the Mountains of Madness*, which also allowed Lovecraft to express in fictional form some points of interest with respect to his changing political views in the final years of his life.

Lovecraft’s final ghostwriting project, in October 1935, was “The Diary of Alonzo Typer” for a correspondent named William Lumley.[530] At this point, following the unexpected acceptances of two of his lengthier stories, Lovecraft’s spirits were much lifted,[531] and the immediate result of this renewed creativity was “The Haunter of the Dark,” written over the span of a few days early in November.[532] This Gothic tale was his final signed original work,[533] and despite his newfound encouragement and inspiration, he nevertheless sat on the story without submitting it anywhere until the summer of 1936,[534] mainly due to his steadfast determination not to submit anything to editors until he had

529 This idea also served as the basis for Lovecraft’s segment of the round-robin story “The Challenge from Beyond,” which had been commissioned by Julius Schwartz for an anniversary issue of his *Fantasy Magazine* fanzine in 1935, see Lovecraft (2007b: 288, 291, 298-299; 2016a: 284, 287-288, 294-295).

530 See Lovecraft (2007b: 299), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 711-712), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 619).

531 See Lovecraft (1992b: 67; 2007b: 303), Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 365-366), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 620-622).

532 See Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 368), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013b: 718), and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 622). The story was written in response to Robert Bloch’s “The Shambler from the Stars,” which had been published in the September 1935 issue of *Weird Tales*, and in which an unnamed character who was clearly based on Lovecraft had come to a particularly gruesome end (this, of course, was meant as a friendly homage). See Lovecraft (2015e: 159-160; 2016a: 299).

533 The very last story that Lovecraft worked on was “In the Walls of Eryx,” a collaboration with Kenneth Sterling, a teenage fan and later medical doctor who had become a close friend during Lovecraft’s final years. Sterling lived in Providence after his family had moved there from New York, and, being a fan of Lovecraft’s work, he showed up unannounced one day at Lovecraft’s house in 1935. Lovecraft, who was impressed by Sterling’s precociousness, told this anecdote in several letters, see, for example, Lovecraft (2016b: 263).

534 He continued to suggest his rediscovered willingness to continue writing, in the final months of 1935, while at the same time emphasising that he expected nothing to come of it, see, for example, Lovecraft (2015e: 322; 2016a: 299; 2016b: 276-277) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 625).

accumulated a pile of manuscripts to send all at once,[535] as had been the case in the more carefree early years of his career. At the same time, there clearly was a demand, and thus an audience, for his fiction: "Requests for loans continue to accumulate – from persons getting in touch with me through W T – & I find it increasingly difficult to meet them as my various available MSS. wear out, get lost, or become tied up."[536] And there was again much activity undertaken among his friends on his behalf (in the summer and fall of 1936), with examples including Wilfred B. Talman approaching the publisher William Morrow, Virgil Finlay offering to provide illustrations to further the marketability of a possible collection, and Julius Schwartz attempting to place Lovecraft's work with a British publisher.[537] But it all became a moot point with Lovecraft's death in March the following year.[538]

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535 See Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 242). He also remained determined to make no further attempts at book publishing, see Lovecraft (2007b: 361, 364).

536 See Lovecraft (2019: 271).

537 See, for example, Lovecraft (2019: 268-270). Talman was an editor and aspiring agent at the time, Finlay was an artist and pulp illustrator, and Schwartz (a future comic book editor) was still acting as Lovecraft's agent.

538 Talman had essentially committed Lovecraft to writing a novel for William Morrow, with Lovecraft tentatively agreeing (see Lovecraft 2019: 271-277), but Lovecraft's final letter to Talman tells a very dark story: "I've no idea what lies ahead of me" (he had in fact been informed of his terminal illness the day before), and "All my correspondence & affairs are going to hell" (ibid: 282). He died two weeks later.

7. Analysis: Thematic and Philosophical Foundations, Part I

Following the preliminary analysis of Lovecraft's life and fiction in the previous chapters, it is now possible to attempt a further analysis in more detail, which will hopefully reveal certain patterns that are likely to have emerged. In this chapter, then, I will suggest that the intellectual and aesthetic content of Lovecraft's fiction centres on a small number of consistent aims, purposes, and subjects that can be categorised into three distinct groupings as follows: 1) expressing Lovecraft's personal thinking, as it evolved and developed, 2) recreating moods and images, as Lovecraft experienced and perceived them, and 3) maintaining illusions, as a form of storytelling and even as a substitute for meaning in real life, including dealing with change and loss. The first of these groupings has been strongly advocated by Joshi in his writings on Lovecraft, the second was always emphasised by Lovecraft himself, and the third is a comparatively new one that I would like to elevate and put the spotlight on in this thesis.

More specifically, these aims, as outlined above, were expressed through certain recurring themes or thematic clusters and linked subject matters, some of which are now popularly associated with Lovecraft to a greater extent than others.[539] In this context, the three conceptual groupings above correspond to overarching thematic groupings that revolve around: 1) cosmic outsideness (Lovecraft's personal term) and the idea of human insignificance, 2) artistic self-expression and assorted autobiographical material, and 3) imaginative escape through dreaming or through the illusory transcending of the limits imposed by time, space, and natural law. Furthermore, this theoretical structure is supported by certain general attitudes of lifelong standing – such as Lovecraft's cultural pessimism and view of himself as a gentleman – while standing on the two foundational pillars of his fiction: the Gothic and the cosmic,

[539] With respect to thematic studies, Joshi (2015b: 17-19) suggests that Lovecraft's mature fiction (what Joshi terms the "Lovecraft mythos") is characterised by four thematic groupings: A fictional New England topography, a growing library of invented "forbidden" books, a diverse array of extraterrestrial "gods" or entities, and a sense of cosmicism. Burleson (2011: 140), on the other hand, suggests five major themes in Lovecraft's fiction: denied primacy (i.e., the insignificance of humanity), forbidden knowledge (or merciful ignorance), illusory surface appearances (things are not what they seem), unwholesome survival (things have been here prior to humanity, and are still here although they should not be), and oneiric objectivism (what Burleson calls "an ambigious distinction between dreaming and reality"). I believe these overviews, although not incorrect, to be too limited in scope.

the first of which persists as a backbone throughout his literary work, while the other grows in strength from some early hints at the start of his career to become a fully developed new way of looking at the world in his mature work in the late 1920s and the 1930s.

The two stories that Lovecraft wrote as an adult in the summer of 1917, "The Tomb" and "Dagon," set him on the twin paths of the Gothic and the cosmic, respectively. The Gothic is where Lovecraft started out with his early Poe-inspired work that culminated in "The Outsider" and "The Hound," with colonial Puritanism ("The Picture in the House," "The Unnamable") serving as the model for a uniquely American brand of Gothic horror that was also Lovecraft's own, in which he continued on a path originally set by Charles Brockden Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne. "The Rats in the Walls" paved the way for later Gothic-infused work such as *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, "The Dunwich Horror," "The Shadow over Innsmouth," and "The Haunter of the Dark," which was also intertwined with the cosmic. Puritanism gradually gave way to science fiction, however, in an ongoing process that started around the time of Lovecraft's years in New York, when he began to re-imagine old Gothic tropes into something new that was imaginatively informed by cosmic horror, as seen particularly in "The Shunned House" (vampires, werewolves) and "The Dreams in the Witch House" (witches, magic).

But despite Gothic influences remaining strong in Lovecraft's work throughout his career, the cosmic was also present from the start with its roots in his early interest in astronomy. Lovecraft lived at a time when the understanding of the universe was expanded to a degree not experienced since the Copernican revolution, when, during the course of the 1920s, it became clear that the universe was vast to a degree that was literally impossible to understand or even visualise, and that outer space therefore encompassed so much more than merely the Milky Way galaxy. Added to this was Lovecraft's view of existence as eternal and endless in both space and time, coupled with the turn-of-the-century scientific insights about humanity that had clearly revealed the human animal to be just that, a product of blind evolution leading a deterministically guided existence without goal or purpose on an insignificant planet that, against the cosmic background, was lesser than the smallest mote of dust suspended in an infinite beam of sunlight. For Lovecraft, with his peculiar temperament, and coming out of a social environment with its roots in Victorian ideals about nobility and progress (ideals that he rejected in favour of a more directly derived Enlightenment rationalism),

these insights proved particularly shattering, and the result was his long-standing struggle to express his emotional reactions in poetic fiction.

7.1. Cosmic Themes

It is important to recognise that Lovecraft's "cosmicism," as it is now popularly known,[540] was never formulated as a philosophy under that name by Lovecraft himself. It was only later named as such, as a descriptive term for a number of philosophical notions and principles that had been loosely expressed by Lovecraft in letters, essays, and some of his fiction over the course of his life. One of the first to suggest this was Fritz Leiber in 1949:[541]

> Lovecraft was the Copernicus of the horror story. He shifted the focus of supernatural dread from man and his little world and his gods, to the stars and the black and unplumbed gulfs of intergalactic space. To do this effectively, he created a new kind of horror story and new methods for telling it. (Leiber 1998: 455)

Statements by Lovecraft on his developing cosmic views are found in letters as early as 1916, and continue to appear sporadically to the end of his life.[542] A typical example is the following verdict on Joseph Conrad, penned by Lovecraft during his New York years: "He feels and expresses as few authors can, the prodigious and inhuman tides of a blind, bland universe; at heart indifferent to mankind, but purposefully malignant if measured by the narrow and empirical standard of human teleology."[543]

Lovecraft's cosmic views constitute one of his most important contributions to literature, and for that reason it is important to understand what those views actually entailed, particularly since the current popularity of not just Lovecraft but also the problematic Cthulhu Mythos makes is easy to fall prey to popular misconceptions.[544] Conversely, there is also the fact that some disciples and interpreters of

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540 See Joshi (2013a: 484) for a standard definition.

541 Leiber maintained a close correspondence with Lovecraft in the final year of Lovecraft's life.

542 See, for example, Lovecraft (2005d: 37-38, 131, 191-192, 194; 2006: 30-31, 46; 2011b: 215, 229; 2015e: 218-219; 2018: 492), Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 311, 410-411; 2011b: 731-733), and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 266).

543 See Lovecraft (2005c: 126). Contrast with Lovecraft's (2019: 435) verdict on Thomas Hardy in 1935: "I am not a *pessimist*, but merely a realistic *indifferentist*. It is just as childishly romantic to postulate an actively hostile & malignant cosmos, as Thomas Hardy did, as to postulate a friendly, 'just', & beneficent one. The truth is that the cosmos is blind & unconscious."

544 See Joshi (2011) and Price (2011) for discussions on the Cthulhu Mythos and its origins.

Lovecraft have developed his ideas further, and have in a sense clarified the implications of Lovecraft's cosmic outsideness by taking these concepts to their logical conclusion.[545] But one must realise, in this context, that it is inappropriate to apply present-day definitions retroactively to Lovecraft's fiction, or to project present-day understandings of his thinking onto his stories as he wrote them in the 1920s and 1930s in accordance with his then developing ideas. One must, in the end, look to what Lovecraft himself said about his cosmic views, at the time he said it, and not to what his latter-day interpreters think he said (or, worse, what they think he should have said). The main point is that Lovecraft himself never presented a developed philosophy of cosmicism as a school of thought for others to follow, never mind that such a school now exists through the efforts of others (represented chiefly by the work of Joshi and his followers). To be blunt, cosmicism as it is now understood, just like the Cthulhu Mythos, was never fully developed as such by Lovecraft, and this must be recognised when trying to understand his work. With this in mind, the following section will take a closer look at how Lovecraft's cosmic outsideness was originally developed and expressed within the confines of his fiction.

7.1.1. Cosmic Outsideness

The first hints of Lovecraft starting on the cosmic path occurred in "Dagon," albeit that the vastness of the universe was not yet at this stage a component in his attempts at poking holes in human self-importance, but the vastness of the ocean served equally well for the purpose. Other early stepping stones include "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" (which evokes cosmic awe rather than cosmic horror) and, particularly, "The Nameless City," the latter of which hinted at a new direction that began in earnest with "The Call of Cthulhu." However, the foundational principles underlying Lovecraft's true cosmic outsideness first achieved clear articulation and explicit formulation in "The Shunned House," in which Lovecraft wrote of the known universe embracing the merest fraction of the whole cosmos, and how certain outside forces of great power will likely come across as malignant from a limited human point of view.

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[545] Examples of this are found in the work of writers such as Thomas Ligotti and others. Lovecraft's ideas have also been influential in a contemporary school of philosophy known as speculative realism: see, for example, Harman (2012) and the first five essays in Sederholm and Weinstock (2016).

This is one of the main animating concepts underlying Lovecraft's cosmic outsideness, the idea that terms such as good and evil are wholly relative,[546] and that the terrible entities that intrude from outside are motivated by concerns that are beyond the ability of humans to understand them, which is why humans will label these things as "evil" when their presence causes collateral or accidental harm, a primary example being the mysterious visitor in "The Colour out of Space." However, it must also be recognised that this idea is not always consistently executed (and, in fact, occurs in its "pure" form only in a small number of stories), which is why some tales, particularly ones that are also more Gothic in nature, feature alien beings that do in fact seem to be motivated by fairly easily understandable concerns. In such cases Lovecraft may indeed have failed to evoke a cosmic viewpoint, as he sometimes complained in his letters, or he may have intended to achieve another kind of effect all along, since he did also have other aims with his fiction.

In "The Call of Cthulhu," as the next step after "The Shunned House," Lovecraft introduced the fully developed concept of an alien intrusion from outside that shattered the accepted view of the world simply through the fact of its existence. The majestic grandeur of the universe and all the incredible things it may contain is awe-inspiring, but this is followed by the horror that comes from the realisation of the true nature of reality and humanity's situation in it, and the resulting precariousness of mankind's existence. And the most effective way to bring home this insight is through the revelation, against an otherwise entirely realistic background, of an incomprehensible phenomenon that should not exist (as far as humans know and can understand) and that as such serves as the de facto "main character" of the narrative. This, as Lovecraft came to refer to it, was an example of the supplementing rather than the contradiction of reality, signalling his desire to leave the purely supernatural aspect of the Gothic behind – but not the Gothic

[546] Some critics still do not seem to understand this point, a prominent example being Punter (2016: 189), who claims that Lovecraft's texts "appear to suggest unknown powers at work and, although it might appear bizarre, it would not in fact be too far from the point to think of Lovecraft's ongoing battle between the (evil) 'Great Old Ones' and the (good, or at least fair) 'Elder Gods' as an internal battle within the adolescent[.]" But this confused suggestion hearkens back directly to Derleth's misleading concepts that have now been discredited for half a century.

itself[547] – in favour of realism informed by elements of philosophical science fiction.

7.1.2. Alien Gods and Beings Older than Man

Lovecraft's cosmic outsideness is often evoked through a combination with two other notable themes in his fiction: the idea of an alien species that is older and more advanced than humanity, and the idea of strange beings so incomprehensible and powerful that they are seen as gods by the humans who worship them.[548] Underlying both these themes, accordingly, is the philosophical idea of the unimportance of humans, with the alien gods emphasising the insignificance of humanity on a cosmic scale, whereas the non-human species that are found on earth reveal that humans are not even masters of their own world, or at least not to the extent they think. There have been other beings here before us, and soon we will be superseded again, either by something old that returns or by something new that replaces us. This repudiates the age-old traditional idea that all of creation revolves around humanity and that humans are made in the image of the creator of the universe, but, more importantly, it also reflects the insights into the true nature and extent of reality that came with the string of scientific breakthroughs and revolutions in modern times (specifically in the fields of biology, psychology, and astronomy).

Notable representations of non-human species on the planet, usually extraterrestrial in origin, occur in "Dagon," "The Doom That Came to Sarnath," "The Nameless City," "Under the Pyramids," "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Mound," "The Whisperer in Darkness," *At the Mountains of Madness*, "The Shadow over Innsmouth," and "The Shadow out of Time." A closer look at this material will reveal that Lovecraft started out with fairly conventional monsters in the form of aquatic fish- or toad-like beings, followed by some sort of reptilians in "The Nameless City," after which he began to move more and more in the direction of the truly

[547] Gothic elements remained in Lovecraft's fiction over the coming years, as evidenced by several of the stories he wrote and by comments from as late as 1936, in which he speaks of how, in weird fiction, his "type of vision is preëminently Gothic & Teutonic" (Lovecraft 2007b: 346), and how a story he had read had "the Gothic atmosphere touch that I supremely relish – the one intangible element which makes a weird story really potent & fascinating in my eyes" (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 253). See also Lovecraft (2005d: 174), in which he rejects modernism in favour of a literary lineage leading back to the Gothic novelists.

[548] See Colavito (2005) for the suggestion that the co-called "ancient astronaut" theory, advanced as a popular form of pseudoscience or pseudo-archaeology since the 1960s, had its ultimate roots in Lovecraft's fiction.

alien. The ancestors of humanity in "The Mound" are an anomaly in this context, having to do with limits introduced by the story being based on concepts from a ghostwriting client, but from "The Call of Cthulhu" onwards the narratives are usually concerned with beings and creatures that have little or nothing in common with anything normally found on earth. The fish-frogs in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" constitute another exception in this regard, due to the fact that they appear to be indigenous to the planet (with humanity as a possibly degenerate offshoot from this mother species),[549] unlike other alien species who have been here in the past and who always arrived as invaders or colonisers.

This development also emphasises Lovecraft's gradually evolved concept of alien beings having to be truly alien and not merely recycled Gothic stock monsters, and his attempts to achieve this effect was part of the reason why he sometimes engaged in the process of re-imagining Gothic tropes within prototypical science fiction. Another idea, which he sometimes struggled with and rarely achieved successfully, was to tell a story from the point of view of the monster, but not in a stereotypically antagonistic way that still had its basis in human feelings and assumptions.[550] On such occasions Lovecraft instead wished to achieve the effect of the truly alien and non-human, a primary example being the alien visitor in "The Colour out of Space." It is clear, then, taking these various points into account, that there is something more to Lovecraft's monsters than just "talking squids in outer space," as Margaret Atwood (Langford 2003) once put it.

The Pegāna stories by Dunsany constitute the original source for Lovecraft's interest in the fictional element that eventually became his alien gods,[551] but at the same time he did not begin to really develop his artificial mythology until after "The Call of Cthulhu," when his Dunsany phase was coming to an end. It is, however, inaccurate to suggest that Lovecraft first created a group of supernatural gods similar to what he had found in Dunsany, and then later turned them into extraterrestrials when his interests turned in the direction of space and science fiction.[552] To put it simply, some of Lovecraft's "gods" were aliens from the start,

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549 See the discussion on miscegenation in the next chapter.

550 See footnote 365.

551 See, for example, Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 40): "this is all a synthetic concoction of my own, like the populous and varied pantheon of Lord Dunsany's Pegāna," and Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 336): "it was really from Machen & Dunsany & others, rather than through the Bierce-Chambers line, that I picked up my gradually developing hash of theogony – or daimonogony."

552 See, for example, Joshi (2015b: 18): "it would appear that these 'gods' (who, in later tales, cease to be gods at all but become simply extraterrestrial aliens)[...]."

others never became aliens, and very few of them, at any rate, were developed to any significant degree. The earliest fictional deity in Lovecraft's artificial pantheon appeared (in name only) in "The Doom That Came to Sarnath," and some other early developments in Lovecraft's mythology followed in "Nyarlathotep," "The Other Gods," and "Under the Pyramids." At this stage there was very little detail in the depictions, and no connections between the relevant elements introduced in these tales.

A dividing point occurred in "The Call of Cthulhu" with the introduction of Great Cthulhu, a colossal entity of explicitly extraterrestrial origin that, as such, was worshipped as a deity by the members of a worldwide cult with its roots in immemorial times. Then, in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, despite this tale being a Dunsanian fantasy, the very cosmic imagery of Nyarlathotep as the messenger of Azathoth and the Other Gods and their nameless larvae was introduced (following an introductory iteration of this idea in "The Rats in the Walls," in which Nyarlathotep occupied the position now filled by Azathoth).[553] In subsequent stories, Lovecraft moved back and forth between the ideas of powerful extraterrestrial entities and more traditionally supernatural deities, depending on whether the stories in which these things appeared leaned more on the cosmic or the Gothic side of his storytelling. Thus, there is Yog-Sothoth, who, in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and "The Dunwich Horror," is an immensely powerful entity of some sort that can be conjured up from another dimension, but who later, in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," is depicted in a truly cosmic manifestation as the embodiment of existence itself (in this context, the point is also explicitly made that other aspects of Yog-Sothoth have been worshipped as deities in various parts of the universe).

A more nebulous being is Shub-Niggurath, first introduced in the ghostwritten "The Last Test," of whom nothing is known with certainty other than that the name was likely derived from Dunsany,[554] and that Lovecraft sometimes referred to this entity as a fertility or mother goddess (for example, in the ghostwritten "Out of the Aeons"). Likewise, the snake deity in the ghostwritten "The Curse of Yig" appears to be

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[553] Azathoth was originally the name of an abandoned story fragment that Lovecraft presumably now recycled for a new purpose, see Lovecraft (2015a: 337-338). Nyarlathotep, for his part, is only briefly mentioned in "The Rats in the Walls," whereas he is the major antagonist in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*.

[554] Lovecraft never provided any details on where or how he came up with the name, but a seemingly obvious source of inspiration is the god Sheol Nugganoth in the short story "Idle Days on the Yann" (Dunsany 2004: 148).

supernatural rather than extraterrestrial in origin. A return to the cosmic side occurred in the ghostwritten "The Mound," in which Lovecraft made use of a creation by Clark Ashton Smith in a context that clearly suggested extraterrestrial origins. The alien beings in the ghostwritten "The Horror in the Museum" and "Out of the Aeons," finally, originally hailed from another planet, which obviously implies an extraterrestrial origin.

All in all, this summary clearly demonstrates how both the Gothic and the cosmic strands in Lovecraft's fiction continued uninterruptedly side by side during his mature period, with some of his deities as extraterrestrials, some as supernatural beings, and some standing on both sides of the fuzzy border line. When the focus is on the cosmic perspective (and only then), Lovecraft's gods are not gods at all, but rather the products of unknown evolutionary processes in unknown parts of the universe, the result of which is something so alien – and the farther away it originates, the more alien it is – as to cause overwhelming terror in the hapless protagonist who is faced with one of these entities. Hence, also, the additional coupling of cosmic outsideness with the Gothic themes of fear and madness, to be explored later in this chapter.

7.2. Autobiographical Themes

The question of autobiographical elements in Lovecraft's fiction is a complex one. It is useful to make a distinction between immediate autobiographical details and implied autobiographical material, the former drawing on Lovecraft's life in a more direct manner and the latter dealing with Lovecraft's approach to such matters as loss, melancholy, nostalgia, wish-fulfilment, etc. Examples of direct correspondences include such details as Delapore's father dying in 1904 in "The Rats in the Walls" (the same year that Lovecraft's grandfather died), Peaslee's amnesia occurring during the years 1908-1913 in "The Shadow out of Time" (these are the years when Lovecraft withdrew from the world after his failure to complete high school), Lovecraft describing the view from his study window in Providence in "The Haunter of the Dark," Lovecraft inserting himself as the unflatteringly described character Ward Phillips in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," and various particulars in the descriptions of Charles Dexter Ward in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, Edward Derby in "The Thing on the Doorstep," and Robert Olmstead in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (the latter two characters also incorporating elements from friends and colleagues such as Alfred Galpin, Frank Belknap Long, Clark Ashton Smith, and Donald

Wandrei).[555] Details of this sort tend to show up more frequently in later stories, whereas earlier stories are more autobiographical overall, expressing as they do various moods and conceptions that were characteristic of Lovecraft at the time. This is also a contributing reason why early protagonists in Lovecraft's fiction tend to be sensitive dreamers and artists, whereas later ones are more often learned scholars and scientists (revealing a realist shift in Lovecraft's outlook, in addition to likely influences from M. R. James and Arthur Machen).

7.2.1. Loss

On one level all of Lovecraft's fiction is autobiographical, for the self-evident reason that the things Lovecraft wrote about came out of himself. But autobiographical elements as an actual theme are better thought of as something more than that, as aspects of his writing that tie into Lovecraft's life outside of his writing, his attempts to capture momentary moods and images, and his larger aesthetic and emotional conceptions. Such elements do occur in several of his stories, first and foremost such early Gothic ones as deal with a sense of melancholy loss and bereavement. Thus, some of Lovecraft's early stories feature protagonists similar to "Poe's gloomy heroes with their broken fortunes,"[556] as Lovecraft himself later put it, such as Antoine in "The Alchemist," Jervas Dudley in "The Tomb," and Arthur Jermyn in "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family." Antoine is alone and an orphan, he is poor and unable to maintain his home, he is an only child and had no companions growing up, and he spends all his time reading old books and feeling melancholy. Jervas Dudley, likewise, is sensitive and bookish, spending much of his time in a book-filled attic when he is not visiting the "singular wooded hollow" that is very similar to Lovecraft's favourite wooded areas near Providence, Quinsnicket Park and Lincoln Woods.[557] Arthur Jermyn was raised as a gentleman under poor circumstances, he loves his old home, he is a poet and a dreamer with a great sensitivity to beauty, and he is of "uncouth" appearance.

These depictions were a product of Lovecraft's mindset during his reclusive invalid phase, when he looked back on the comparatively recent times during his childhood and, especially, teenage years when

[555] Olmstead is not named in the actual narrative, the name instead derives from Lovecraft's notes for the story. See Joshi (2013b: 791).

[556] See Lovecraft (2018: 301).

[557] Compare, for example, Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 162-163) with Lovecraft (2015a: 39).

misfortune had first begun to strike, and they culminated in "The Outsider," in which the monstrous narrator is a stranger in this century whose memories of the past now only bring fear and sadness. It was when Lovecraft began to leave this period behind that he instead came to view his childhood as a lost and innocent paradise to which he yearned to return, to escape the difficulties of adulthood. This idea first showed up in "Celephaïs," in which Kuranes, a dreamer whose money and lands are gone, is a misunderstood writer who has withdrawn from the world, seeking beauty alone and finding it in the dreams of his childhood. The idea is brought to its logical conclusion with the experiences of Randolph Carter in "The Silver Key," and it is reversed in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, in which Carter replaces his childhood dreams of fantasy with an adherence to the real world instead, that goes beyond his childhood into the ancestral past.

Other stories involve the idea of regaining a lost home, either an ancestral one, such as in "The Moon-Bog" and "The Rats in the Walls," or an illusory one (meaning that it cannot be regained), such as the city the protagonist of "The Quest of Iranon" has wasted his life trying to find. In a similar vein is Henry Akeley's stubborn reluctance to leave his home in "The Whisperer in Darkness," since he is unable to force himself to let it go. The wish-fulfilling ending of "He," on the other hand, has the narrator returning to his ancestral environment in New England, and Lovecraft's actual return to Providence is echoed vividly in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, when Ward returns home after his years in Europe. Lovecraft's realisation that his move to New York had been the worst mistake of his life is clearly spelled out in "The Horror at Red Hook" (in which Thomas Malone had been a poet in youth, who was driven into unhappy circumstances by poverty and sorrow and exile), and, especially, in "He," in which the narrator states explicitly that his coming to New York had been a mistake.

As for Lovecraft's loss of family – his grandfather and mother in particular – this finds an echo in the fact that several of the protagonists in his tales are orphans or the last of their line (although this is also a Gothic stock trope), and when additional family details are provided they frequently mirror Lovecraft's own family situation. Thus, in "The Rats in the Walls," the deaths of Delapore's grandfather and father are mentioned during the course of the narrative, as well as the fact that his son (who also dies) is "motherless," and it is obviously significant that two of these deaths occur in the years 1904 and 1921 (the years when Lovecraft's grandfather and mother had died). In "The Silver Key,"

Randolph Carter "would often awake calling for his mother and grandfather, both in their graves a quarter of a century,"[558] and even the monstrous Wilbur Whateley in "The Dunwich Horror" loses first his grandfather and then his mother (albeit in the latter case because he may have killed her himself). Also worth noting in this context is the narrator's loss of his uncle in "The Shunned House" (the character having been based on Dr. Clark, and named after Lovecraft's grandfather), and the death of the narrator's grand-uncle in "The Call of Cthulhu," which is the incident that sets the events of that story into motion.

Another and minor throwback to Lovecraft's personal history occurs in stories that reference his lost military opportunities. There are hints of this in "Polaris," in which the narrator is described as "feeble and given to strange faintings";[559] "The Statement of Randolph Carter," in which Carter is a "bundle of nerves" and thus not strong enough to accompany Harley Warren underground;[560] "The Shunned House," in which the character of William Harris is successful in his attempt to enlist, which leads to "a steady rise in health and prestige";[561] *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, in which Ward undergoes some form of limited military training as a part of his schooling; and "The Thing on the Doorstep," in which Edward Derby is kept from participating in the war due to "health and ingrained timidity."[562] One final autobiographical characteristic shared by many of Lovecraft's protagonists does not involve a sense of loss and yearning for the past, but is instead centred on a love of the strange and the weird. The narrator in "The Lurking Fear," for instance, is "a connoisseur in horrors,"[563] and Thomas Olney in "The Strange High House in the Mist" is a conservative antiquarian who nevertheless longs for the unknown. The opinions expressed by Randolph Carter in his discussion with Joel Manton in "The Unnamable" also fall into this category, as does the repeated emphasis on Albert Wilmarth's zeal for the unknown in "The Whisperer in Darkness."

7.2.2. Ancestry

Lovecraft's interest in his ancestry, which expressed itself on several levels, is another element that is relevant to an autobiographical

[558] See Lovecraft (2015b: 79).
[559] See Lovecraft (2015a: 68).
[560] See Lovecraft (2015a: 135-136).
[561] See Lovecraft (2015a: 459).
[562] See Lovecraft (2015c: 328).
[563] See Lovecraft (2015a: 352).

understanding of his fiction. On the most intimate level was his immediate family and the status that the Phillips name carried in Providence and in certain local parts of rural Rhode Island.[564] The stereotypical old New England social elite (most famously exemplified by the so-called "Boston Brahmins") traced its ancestry to the earliest colonists from England in the 1600s, and Lovecraft's early interest in genealogy (sparked by his friend Wilfred B. Talman) centred on his confirming links to this ancestry, and, more importantly, finding connections to the colonial past in his immediate surroundings.[565] His conclusions were unreliable, however, as established through later research by Faig and others, and Lovecraft's ancestry was in fact for the most part undistinguished prior to his grandfather, Whipple Van Buren Phillips, whose business ventures provided the material foundation for Lovecraft's genteel upbringing.[566] After the collapse of these ventures and the subsequent squandering of what remained of the family fortune, Lovecraft and his aunts descended into what is sometimes called shabby gentility, trying to adhere to upper middle class social norms while living in conditions that increasingly approached abject poverty. This was a fate shared by many at this time, particularly during the Great Depression, and Lovecraft sometimes commented on examples of the phenomenon that he encountered on his travels.[567]

The next level was the "unmixed English ancestry" that Lovecraft often emphasised,[568] mainly on the basis of his Anglo-Saxonism and Anglophilia. He derived this ancestry both from the Yankee side of his mother, and, more directly, from the immediately English side of his father, whose grandfather had emigrated from England first to Canada and then to New York around 1830. Lovecraft believed he could trace this line back to late medieval times in Devon, with collateral lines extending to and even past the Norman conquest,[569] but once again he was mistaken, and conclusive evidence for any of this is simply lacking.

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[564] This also tied into Lovecraft's admiration for the country squire ideal: "By birth urban, I am by every hereditary instinct the complete rural squire" (Lovecraft 2018: 241), he said in 1929.

[565] See, for example, Lovecraft (1968: 81-89, 178-185, 203-204; 2019: 87-88, 98-99, 108-110, 260-267). Lovecraft's ideas of time also played into this, as he said in 1935, "Genealogy gives one a feeling of vital connexion with enormous reaches of time & space & history" (Lovecraft 1992b: 43). In this context it is worth noting that the protagonists of "The Picture in the House" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" are both engaged in amateur genealogical research.

[566] See Faig (2009).

[567] "Such is the end of too many great New-England lines" (Lovecraft 2018: 499).

[568] See Lovecraft (2006: 143).

[569] See Joshi (2013a: 3-5).

The New England variety of Anglo-Saxonism that he adopted in youth was also the basis for a more broadly historical view of his ancestry, in that the young Lovecraft saw himself as a scion of the Anglo-Saxon "race" that had ruled the British Empire.[570] Further back in time lay the glory of the Roman Empire, as the cradle of western civilisation, to which the adult Lovecraft discovered firmer links than he had suspected via Britain in the Dark Ages.[571] The different levels of Lovecraft's ancestry are thus: 1) his family and the upper middle class New England heritage to which he aspired, 2) the roots of this heritage in the English landed gentry (to which his paternal line in fact did not belong), 3) the "Aryan race" by which he meant the descendants of the Anglo-Saxon tribes in northern Europe that had invaded Britain during the Dark Ages, and, 4) ancient Rome via the tenuous link provided by Roman Britain.

As a counterpoint to Lovecraft's pride in his ancestry, however, lay the shame that came with his family haven fallen from grace, with, on the maternal side, the collapse of his grandfather's business and the subsequent loss of the family home and fortune, and, on the paternal side, the shameful secret that had necessitated his father being confined to an insane asylum. To this was added Lovecraft's own failures in life, and his repeated inability to achieve the success that would have allowed him to restore the family honour and fortune. These attitudes were further strengthened by Lovecraft's insistence on adhering to the traditional views not merely of the past but of the distant past. These two warring conceptions, then, pride and shame in his ancestry are both echoed in Lovecraft's work, particularly in the earlier periods. Both aspects come strongly to the fore in his Gothic juvenile effort "The Alchemist," in which the broken protagonist is the last of his noble line, living in a ruined castle and suffering under the burden of an ancestral curse. Jervas Dudley in "The Tomb" is similarly the last of his line, albeit with still living parents, as the member of a wealthy family of high social status in New England, and it is his obsession with his ancestry that leads to his doom and subsequent confinement in an asylum. The ancestral curse shows up again in "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and

570 As detailed in Chapters 2 and 3.

571 Lovecraft read a popular book called *Wanderings in Roman Britain* by Arthur Weigall late in 1933 or early in 1934, referring to it as an "eye-opener," and uncritically accepting Weigall's conclusions: "In other words, there is no question but that something like a third of my own personal blood ancestors bore Roman names, wore togas, spoke Latin […] the plain fact remains, that the forgotten blood link is there […] amidst the legionary mixture there must have been at least a *thin* strain of the *real* old Roman blood" (Lovecraft 2018: 477, 478).

His Family," in which the origins of Arthur Jermyn's aristocratic family turn out to be decidedly less than noble, with Jermyn himself once again the last of his line. One final case of the ancestral curse occurs in "The Rats in the Walls," in which a forefather of Delapore rids the family of its hereditary stain before emigrating to America, but then Delapore himself reverts to ancestral form when he discovers the truth about his origins, which suggests that one can never truly escape one's tainted heritage.

In "The Festival," the idea of ancestry is linked with Lovecraft's then recently developed cult ideas, in that the presumably non-Anglo-Saxon protagonist is called back to Kingsport to partake in an ancestral ritual that is performed by something quite other than his sorcerer ancestors (a similar development occurs in the ghostwritten "The Diary of Alonzo Typer"). The Gothic-inspired focus on ancestry and broken fortunes begins to fade closer to Lovecraft's mature period, with "The Shunned House" containing merely a historical account of the previous inhabitants of the house in question, which serves as a background for the culminating events. In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, similarly, the connection between Ward and Joseph Curwen (paralleling the prior use of the double as a theme in "The Tomb"), although based on familial bonds, is little more than an initial detail that sets the story in motion, followed by a focus on the city of Providence and its colonial history in the build-up to the culmination of the tale. The final significant use of the ancestry theme occurs in "The Shadow over Innsmouth," in which Robert Olmstead, similarly to Arthur Jermyn, discovers a disturbing truth about his ancestry. Quite unlike Jermyn, however, Olmstead chooses to embrace this truth and join his true ancestors rather than to end his own life. This reveals a clear development in which the importance of personal ancestry (either as a blessing or a curse) gradually decreased the closer Lovecraft came to his mature period of fiction-writing, to be replaced by a focus on ancestral tradition and ancestral regionalism instead.

7.2.3. New England Regionalism

A final autobiographical theme of notable interest is the New England regionalism that came to characterise much of Lovecraft's writing after his New York period.[572] The New England setting in some of his later tales was a direct consequence of Lovecraft attempting to return to his

[572] Schweitzer (2013: 64) refers to this as "regional realism" in Lovecraft's mature fiction during the final decade of his life. Meyer (2019: 175) suggests the term "Puritan regionalism." In a similar context, Lai (2015: 109) argues that Lovecraft acted "as a curator for New England" in the integration of his travels with his fiction.

roots after his years in New York, and as such it was also an outgrowth of a wider focus on geography (regional horror) and striking scenery in general that increasingly came to characterise his fiction in later years[573] – ultimately rooted in his fascination with the rural countryside, colonial architecture, outspread city vistas, and glorious sunsets of his Providence childhood. This involved conceptions of a varied nature, ranging from a Gothic-flavoured interest in underground caves, caverns, and tombs (sometimes involving entire underground realms)[574] to a more cosmic view of the untouched New England wilderness that also provided a connection to the past. Similarly, it was the dark backwoods region of Massachusetts and its whispered folklore and Puritan creeds that served as the main inspiration underlying Lovecraft's earliest invented locations, beginning with Kingsport and Arkham (later identified with Marblehead and Salem in Essex County, after Lovecraft's first visits there),[575] and continuing with Dunwich (a combination of impressions from Lovecraft's travels to Brattleboro in Vermont and the North Wilbraham area in Massachusetts) and Innsmouth (the decaying coastal town of Newburyport).

In the case of direct sources of inspiration deriving from geographical and architectural scenery, notable examples include "The Tomb" (inspired by Lovecraft musing on a tombstone in Swan Point Cemetery in Providence),[576] "The Hound" (written after a visit to a cemetery in the Flatbush neighbourhood in Brooklyn), "The Festival" (written in response to Lovecraft's ecstatic first visit to Marblehead), "The Shunned House" (based on two actual houses seen by Lovecraft in Providence and New York), "He" (written after Lovecraft visited the secluded Milligan

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573 "More & more my tales tend to become efforts to express *geographical* implications – the Antarctic, 'Innsmouth', & so on" (Lovecraft and Smith 2017: 392). Just prior to leaving New York, Lovecraft stated that his life "lies not among *people* but among *scenes*" (Lovecraft 2005c: 289). These scenes, furthermore, were frequently architectural as well as geographical: "Scenery & architecture & general types affect me more than individual people & detailed conditions" (Lovecraft and Wandrei 2002: 63). See Waugh (2011a: 230-236) for a discussion of Lovecraft's use of landscape in his fiction, and see Butler (2014) for a discussion of "part-fictional geographies" in Lovecraft.

574 "I am exceedingly fond of all things dark and subterranean," Lovecraft (2003b: 153) once said in reference to a Boston subway ride he had enjoyed in 1923, and this personal quirk had its origin in his phobia (the only one he confessed to having, see Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 324) of large enclosed spaces, which linked his interest in underground caves with his interest in exploring the emotion of fear.

575 However, Lovecraft's first fictional location is actually the fishing village of Potowonket on the coast of Maine, in the early collaboration "The Green Meadow."

576 See Lovecraft (2003b: 81).

Place courtyard in Greenwich Village),[577] "Pickman's Model" (based on a particular neighbourhood, later torn down, explored by Lovecraft in Boston), "The Silver Key" (likely originating in a visit to an ancestral region in western Rhode Island), "The Strange High House in the Mist" (inspired by a scenic cliff landscape near Gloucester and the resort village of Magnolia in Massachusetts), and, as stated, "The Dunwich Horror," "The Whisperer in Darkness," and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" all having their inspirational sources in Lovecraft's later travels around New England. All of this was a general expression of Lovecraft's highly developed sense of place and as such it was also an embodiment of his attempts to create the illusion of meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence that could not be endured without the fixed anchor point of the traditional past with its continuous roots in the regions of his ancestors.

7.2.4. Reading Lovecraft Autobiographically

All in all, Lovecraft's various autobiographical themes together underscore the close connection that endured between his fiction and his life. With very few exceptions, almost all of Lovecraft's tales came about as the consequence of some sort of direct outside influence, sometimes because he had intentionally gone in search of inspiration, and sometimes because his fiction grew out of impressions or scenes unexpectedly discovered among a wide variety of sources. He never wavered in his conviction that his writing was a form of art, intended to give expression to the impressions he had gathered, and it is my belief that this latter emphasis is one that is frequently unrecognised in critical writings about Lovecraft and his work.

At the same time, another main point with respect to Lovecraft's autobiographical material is that this material was (again) always intended to serve the larger aim of self-expression, and was thus never in itself the primary theme.[578] Lovecraft wished to express what he saw and

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[577] See Lovecraft (2005c: 59-62).

[578] For a discussion on autobiographical protagonists, see Lévy (1988: 118), who states that "in most of Lovecraft's tales, the main character […] *is* the author." But this seems to miss the point that the protagonist is for the most part merely a passive vehicle through which the reader experiences the weird phenomenon, and that the point of the tale is to paint an atmospheric depiction of what such an encounter would feel like. See Joshi (2014a: 219-231) for a further discussion of autobiography in Lovecraft, in which Joshi states that Lovecraft regarded characterisation as unimportant because his goal was to depict a cosmic philosophy. But I suggest that this was only an occasional part of Lovecraft's wider goal, which was instead to evoke a specific mood or atmosphere depending on a particular inspirational background, and which therefore sometimes did not involve a cosmic aspect at all.

felt, and an awareness of this fact, coupled with an insight into what it actually was that Lovecraft saw and felt, will, I believe, facilitate a deeper understanding and appreciation of his fiction.[579] For this reason, it must also be recognised that it is usually the weird phenomenon at the centre of the tale and the effect this phenomenon has on the human protagonists, rather than the human protagonists themselves, that constitute the main focus of Lovecraft's narratives ("The Thing on the Doorstep" being a notable exception in this regard). The weird phenomenon, however it ended up expressing itself, was intended to create an effect that was ultimately, again, rooted in what Lovecraft saw and felt in his surroundings (both intimate and cosmic), and in the way those surroundings had an effect on him. Obviously this is not to suggest that Lovecraft felt himself going mad contemplating the size of the universe, or that he imagined actual monstrous survivals from the past impinging on the present all around him. Instead, such elements served as tools in a toolkit that he employed in his attempts to express imaginatively the core or essence of his aesthetic impressions. In the end, Lovecraft could not have written the stories he wrote without the particular surroundings and experiences that shaped him as a person and writer, and it is this fact, I think, that more than anything contributed to the uniqueness of his work.

7.3. Gothic Themes

The two classic Gothic themes that are most prevalent in Lovecraft's fiction throughout his career are those of fear and madness. In addition to this there are also two other classic themes that serve mainly to enhance the dark background atmosphere that was one of the hallmarks of Lovecraft's work: forbidden books and hidden cults. Of these, the theme of forbidden books has received notably more attention, both critical and popular (to the point of these books becoming an overused trope), whereas the cult theme seems to have been largely ignored in criticism, despite it being one of the more original contributions by Lovecraft to weird fiction.

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[579] "Actually the only business of an artist is to express what he sees & feels, without any attempt at intellectual correlation. Usually the artist has a sort of perspective which may or may not crop out here & there – but the more he forgets about it, the better. Let the author present life itself – it is for each reader to draw philosophic conclusions, as he would from first-hand experience. Proust is right in saying that theories in a book are like a price-tag left on a pair of pants!" Lovecraft (2016b: 232-233) said in 1934.

7.3.1. Forbidden Books

As a theme, the idea of an ever-expanding index of books containing forbidden knowledge was originally carried over from Gothic fiction,[580] in which old tomes and manuscripts of this sort had been a staple since the beginning. For Lovecraft it began in "Polaris," with the introduction of the prehistoric Pnakotic manuscripts, followed by additional titles of various kinds in "The Doom That Came to Sarnath," "The Statement of Randolph Carter," "The Picture in the House," and "The Other Gods." At this stage, Lovecraft also made recurrent use of real volumes and grimoires from the past (in the service of realism), until the seminal introduction of the *Necronomicon* in "The Hound." The mythology surrounding this grimoire was gradually developed in more detail over subsequent stories, including "The Festival," "The Call of Cthulhu," *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, "The Dunwich Horror," and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," with frequent additional mentions in later stories.

The listing of forbidden books began in earnest in "The Festival" and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, but most of the titles mentioned at this stage continued to be those of actual grimoires. New fictional titles appeared in "The Dreams in the Witch House," in which Lovecraft for the first time made use of books that had been invented by his colleagues (Clark Ashton Smith and Robert E. Howard), with further mentions of these fictional works in the ghostwritten "The Man of Stone," as well as in "The Horror in the Museum" and "Out of the Aeons." The now classic catalogues of these titles continued through "The Thing on the Doorstep" and "The Shadow out of Time," the latter of which also introduced two new volumes by Robert Bloch, while making continued use of another text invented by Richard F. Searight (first adopted by Lovecraft in his segment of "The Challenge from Beyond"). There were some additional minor titles in "The Diary of Alonzo Typer," and a final concluding list of forbidden volumes in "The Haunter of the Dark."

What this brief summary suggests is that Lovecraft gradually moved from real books to fictional ones, invented both by himself and his colleagues, and that the forbidden books trope had almost descended to cliché status already in Lovecraft's time (as certainly happened with later Cthulhu Mythos fiction). However, as previously stated, his initial aim

[580] See, for example, Lovecraft (2015e: 187, 221; 2016a: 347), in which are listed various forerunners, beginning with Poe, who had invented volumes of this sort. See also the reference to "mouldy hidden manuscripts" (Lovecraft 2012a: 35) in a list of classic Gothic tropes detailed in "Supernatural Horror in Literature."

with the introduction of these books was merely to create a suitable background atmosphere of Gothic mystery. But as time went by, and as the connections to the works of other authors increased in the 1930s, the lists of forbidden books also came to play an integral part in Lovecraft's hoax-weaving activities, with the aim to create a sense of authenticity and verisimilitude for his growing artificial mythology. As a result, he received many letters over the years asking him for more information about the *Necronomicon* and where to find it, and he always replied with the same explanation that the book was wholly made up and did not exist.[581]

As for the contents of these books, the idea that they were depositories of forbidden knowledge was present from the start, even if they also (the *Necronomicon* in particular) often served as standard magic tomes filled with spells and rituals. There is a suggestion in *At the Mountains of Madness* that books such as the *Necronomicon* contain distorted and fragmented information about the (fictional) prehistoric history of the world, and that the accounts of gods and demons and magical spells presumably to be found within their covers really refer to the activities of advanced extraterrestrials and their magic-like technology,[582] collected by the authors of these books to the best of their limited ability. Thus, the *Necronomicon* goes from being a spell book (in some stories), to containing hints of forbidden cosmic truths (in other stories), to being mostly wrong about these truths as far as a deeper understanding of them is concerned. But at the same time, the parallel depiction of the *Necronomicon* as merely a black magic grimoire also persists throughout some of Lovecraft's more Gothic stories in the 1930s.

7.3.2. Ancient Cults

The idea of ancient cults surviving in hiding since time immemorial down to the present was a deeply fascinating one for Lovecraft,[583] and the application of this idea to literature (at least in the way Lovecraft

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581 See, for example, Lovecraft (1976a: 346; 2015e: 29, 59, 187, 221, 223, 377, 382, 395, 399; 2016a: 347), Lovecraft and Derleth (2013d: 610, 752), and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 257-258). To one correspondent who worked at a university library he jokingly pretended that the *Necronomicon* was real (see Lovecraft 2016b: 342).

582 "They were […] the originals of the fiendish elder myths which things like the Pnakotic Manuscripts and the 'Necronomicon' affrightedly hint about" (Lovecraft 2015c: 91-92). See also Joshi (2013b: 787), where this suggestion is highlighted, but I believe that Joshi is here again trying to overemphasise the cosmic by ignoring the aspect of black magic that also continued to be prevalent in Lovecraft's use of the forbidden books theme.

583 See Lovecraft (2016a: 134, 137) for some brief statements to this effect.

made use of it) was in fact a mostly original creation on his part. An early prefiguring hint occurs in "The Hound," and not long afterwards Lovecraft read Murray for the first time, as previously discussed, finding in her work the idea of a "witch-cult" that had survived into modern times, with its roots in a "pre-Aryan" race from the east that had been driven underground and to the edges of civilisation by the coming of the Indo-European conquerors into western Europe. This fit well with the fictional concept of the "little people" that Lovecraft found in Machen at around the same time, and out of these building blocks he gradually evolved his own fictional concept of hidden cults in possession of forbidden knowledge that had been transmitted down the ages since primordial times.[584]

Murray's witch-cult appeared explicitly for the first time in "The Horror at Red Hook", whereas the idea that the witch-cult was something other than mere Satanism was fully developed in "The Call of Cthulhu," in which the narrator discovers evidence of a worldwide cult devoted to the worship of the enigmatic Great Old Ones. From now on most of Lovecraft's tales (both cosmic and Gothic) included at least a hint of forbidden cult activities, which was used mostly as a device to evoke the theme of cosmic outsideness and the danger inherent in seeking forbidden knowledge, and which also strengthened the atmospheric background that Lovecraft wished to evoke.

In "The Whisperer in Darkness", however, human agents are now employed in the service of the extraterrestrial Outer Ones from Yuggoth, and Lovecraft here also incorporated some material from other writers, in the form of references to a possible rival cult linked to the enigmatic Hastur and the Yellow Sign.[585] In "The Shadow over Innsmouth," similarly, the Esoteric Order of Dagon has taken over the local churches on behalf of the fish-frogs who are really in control of the decaying town. In "The Dreams in the Witch House," on the other hand, the witch-cult in its old Satanic guise from "The Horror at Red Hook" returned briefly, and

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[584] Notable cult elements appear in "The Rats in the Walls," "The Festival," "The Horror at Red Hook," "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Dunwich Horror," "The Whisperer in Darkness," "The Shadow over Innsmouth," "The Dreams in the Witch House," "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," "The Thing on the Doorstep," "The Shadow out of Time," and "The Haunter of the Dark," as well as in the ghostwritten "The Last Test," "The Electric Executioner," "The Curse of Yig," "The Mound," "Medusa's Coil," "The Man of Stone," "The Horror in the Museum," "Out of the Aeons," and "The Diary of Alonzo Typer."

[585] Lovecraft derived these names from Ambrose Bierce and Robert W. Chambers, and he referenced the "accursed cult of Hastur" in a discussion on Chambers in "Supernatural Horror in Literature," see Lovecraft (2012a: 69).

there is even an appearance from "the Black Man" as the head of the coven.[586]

Lovecraft again expanded the cult concept in the ghostwritten "Out of the Aeons," in which any number of unnamed cults and occult organisations are active, and in which some of these cults are descended from rival priesthoods on a sunken continent 200,000 years in the past. Here also occurs the first glimmers of a somewhat more sophisticated view of these cults and their members, in that the cultists are no longer degenerates and madmen on the outskirts of society, but are instead the descendants of the survivors from a sunken land in the Pacific (albeit engaged in criminal activities that include theft and murder). In "The Thing on the Doorstep," the stereotypically Gothic witch-cult is back again, with the wizard Ephraim Waite as a member of the coven, but in "The Shadow out of Time," the cult concept is developed to a new level one final time, in that the secret cults are now devoted to aiding the members of the Great Race in their knowledge-seeking endeavours, and are thus mostly presented as caretakers of secret learning in this context, rather than attempting to destroy all life on earth in preparation for the return of the Old Ones.

As the above overview makes clear, the cult theme centres on two foundational conceptions. The first of these is concerned with the continued transmission of secret and forbidden knowledge from the primordial past (which is linked to Lovecraft's cosmic fiction), while the second concerns the activities on the part of certain degenerate cult members and outcasts to prepare for the return of the Old Ones (which is linked to Lovecraft's Gothic fiction).[587] As a whole, the theme thus stands in service of Lovecraft's larger fictional concerns, as is also the case with

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[586] The references to "the Black Man" (Lovecraft 2015c: 233, 244, 260) do not carry any racial connotations, since the designation was simply an epithet for the Devil, and as such the term (along with numerous similar ones) had been in common use since medieval times. In Lovecraft's story it was the Salem witch trials that constituted the main background from which this particular subset of folklore was gathered, and in this context Lovecraft again specifically referenced Murray's witch-cult theory (according to which the Rev. George Burroughs, who was hanged during the Salem trials, had been the Black Man of the only witch-cult coven in North America), in a detailed discussion in a letter in 1930 (see Lovecraft and Howard 2011a: 69-74). The figure of the Black Man also appeared in such works as "The Devil and Tom Walker" by Washington Irving, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and "The White People" by Arthur Machen, all of which were thoroughly familiar to Lovecraft. As a final point, the narrative explicitly makes it clear that the Black Man is a tall man "of dead black colouration but without the slightest sign of negroid features" (Lovecraft 2015c: 254).

[587] There is at times some overlap between these conceptions, most prominently in "The Call of Cthulhu."

the forbidden books, although it is the Gothic variety that has come to be embraced by the popular culture of the present, which perhaps is a contributing reason for the lack of critical interest in it.

7.3.3. Curiosity

The most important psychological drive that motivates the majority of Lovecraft's protagonists is not fear but curiosity (however, fear is frequently a consequence of too much curiosity). On one level this is simply a storytelling device, but it is telling that out of all the ways Lovecraft could have chosen to move the narrative forward, he almost always picked this one. Why curiosity? The piecing together of disconnected fragments of information to learn a shocking truth was partly a Gothic stock device, but curiosity was also a strong motivating force in much of Lovecraft's own life, fuelled by his desire to understand the nature of reality. But, at the same time, curiosity comes at a price. Lovecraft's desire to understand the nature of reality (combined with the unavoidable necessity of having to grow up) resulted in the shattering of his childhood illusions. For his protagonists the price was higher still: the loss of sanity and tranquillity that often came with having learnt the truth about reality and humanity's place in it, and from having seen what is really hidden behind the veils of the mundane and the conventional. For Lovecraft, the wilful maintaining of illusions was a way of coping with this bleak view of the world, but this option was not available to his protagonists, who sometimes ended up in asylums or lonely garret rooms where they penned their final accounts or suicide notes.

Classic examples include the unnamed protagonist of "Dagon" writing his final words after he has witnessed first-hand what may be lurking in the oceans, and Arthur Jermyn setting himself on fire in "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" after he has learnt the truth about the origins of his family. In "The Rats in the Walls," the wealthy Delapore reverts to ancestral type and ends up in an asylum after he has discovered the secrets of his family's past, whereas in "The Horror at Red Hook," police detective Thomas Malone needs to go on an extended leave of absence after he has developed a debilitating phobia as a result of his investigations into criminal cult activities in New York. Sometimes death comes unsought to those who delve too far, as in the example of the megalomaniacal Crawford Tillinghast who dies from apoplexy in "From Beyond," having gone insane in his quest for knowledge about other dimensions, whereas the narrator's (presumably imaginary) friend in "Hypnos" meets a tragic end due to hubris in

another mad quest for knowledge and power. In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, Charles Dexter Ward is murdered by his double from the past as a result of his obsessive delving into the past, and in "The Dreams in the Witch House," Walter Gilman is gruesomely killed by Brown Jenkin after his studies into non-Euclidean mathematics attracts the attention of the local witch-cult.

At other times the narrator survives after experiencing a close call. A primary example being Albert N. Wilmarth who narrowly avoids the fate of Henry Wentworth Akeley in "The Whisperer in Darkness," Akeley having ended up as a disembodied brain in a jar after having delved too deeply into the secrets hidden in the forested hills of Vermont. Expedition members Dyer and Danforth barely escape with their lives (if not, in Danforth's case, their sanity entirely intact) in *At the Mountains of Madness* after they have discovered what is hidden under the ice in Antarctica. Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee in "The Shadow out of Time" loses all hope after learning the truth about his dreams and in the process also discovered what is still in store for humanity in the future. The archetype and prime example of the theme of curiosity and its consequences in Lovecraft's fiction is Francis Wayland Thurston and his piecing together the fragments of truth in "The Call of Cthulhu," which leads to his death at the hands of the ancient cult he has discovered (which is also largely what happens to Dr. Richard H. Johnson in the ghostwritten "Out of the Aeons"). In the end, the theme of curiosity is now embodied in the classic trope or popular cliché, so strongly associated with Lovecraft, that certain things are best left alone and not meddled with, and that ignorance really is bliss if the alternative is madness and death.

7.3.4. Fear

The price of too much curiosity is fear, as previously stated, and the emotion of fear is consequently of no less importance in Lovecraft's fiction: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown,"[588] as the now celebrated opening of "Supernatural Horror in Literature" goes. And for Lovecraft, the origin of his interest in the subject lay in his early childhood experiences (emphasis in the original):

> My infant nightmares were classics, & in them there is not an abyss of agonising cosmic horror that I have not explored. I don't have such dreams now – but the memory of them will never leave me. It is

[588] See Lovecraft (2012a: 25).

> undoubtedly from them that the darkest & most gruesome side of my fictional imagination is derived. (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 323)

> I have nightmares only 2 or 3 times a year, & of these none ever approaches those of my youth in soul-shattering, phobic monstrousness. It is fully a decade & more since I have known *fear* in its most stupefying & hideous form. And yet, so strong is the impress of the past, I shall never cease to be fascinated by *fear* as a subject for aesthetic treatment. Along with the element of cosmic mystery & outsideness, it will always interest me more than anything else. It is, in a way, amusing that one of my chief interests should be an emotion whose poignant extremes I have never known in waking life! (Ibid: 324)

This is from one of Lovecraft's final letters, in February 1937, and it is one of the very few non-fictional comments he made on the subject of fear. Lovecraft's terrifying childhood nightmares, so intense that he had tried to stay awake to avoid experiencing them,[589] left their permanent mark on his psyche and resulted in his continued exploration of this phenomenon in his fiction, in combination with his other main fictional interest (emphasis in the original):

> I think I agree with you regarding the depth & sensitiveness of *fear as occasioned by strangeness*. Fear seems always able to gain an ascendancy over any other emotion, & a vast number of our most vital institutions are directly rooted in it. It has always interested & fascinated me more than anything else – except perhaps the essential element of *strangeness itself*, which most forms of it embody. (Lovecraft 2015e: 60)

The fact that Lovecraft's interest in fear had its roots in his nightmares did not, however, create any particularly significant link between the themes of fear and dreaming (the latter of which will be explored in the next chapter).

Lovecraft's emphasis on fear in how the protagonists in his stories react to the horrors they uncover has led to one of the most widespread and persistent misconceptions about Lovecraft himself as a person.[590]

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589 See Lovecraft (2016b: 224).

590 See, for example, Sante (2006), who, having flippantly produced a paragraph-length list of things that Lovecraft supposedly was afraid of, concludes by stating that "the things that did not frighten him would probably make a shorter list." See also Reinert (2015: 256): "fear was an emotion he would nurture throughout his secluded life, channelling it into his […] stories," and Conliffe (2016): Lovecraft "was a full-blown xenophobe, terrified of anyone or anything he perceived as different from himself," the latter a typical example of current popular attitudes. The same attitude is echoed in an interview with author Cherie Priest in Butts (2018: 262-263), in which Priest says that Lovecraft "was afraid of everything" and that he was even "afraid to open his front door."

But the popular image of Lovecraft as a frightened shut-in person who feared and hated everything and everyone that was different from himself and that he did not understand turns out to have little basis in reality, as becomes clear when Lovecraft's life as a whole is examined. The idea probably had its roots in Lovecraft's "reclusive invalid" phase, but this was a short-lived period that ended around 1920, and for the rest of his life Lovecraft is in fact better described as something of a thrill-seeker, albeit in modest and selective ways. He did, after all, travel alone every summer along the Atlantic seaboard on a quest – fuelled by the sense of "adventurous expectancy" that motivated his aesthetic outlook in connection with his antiquarian explorations – for the emotional jolt he derived from making unexpected scenic and architectural discoveries,[591] and these are activities that do not fit very well with someone whose life is supposedly motivated by fear.

Mostly, the over-emotional response displayed by a typical Lovecraft protagonist to the horrors he encounters is a consequence of Lovecraft's desire to emphasise the impact of the experience itself on an ordinary human mind. Lovecraft's heroes are not heroes at all, they are ordinary people who serve only as conduits for the readers to experience the weird and reality-shattering phenomenon that is the actual centrepiece of the story, and Lovecraft's aim is to depict the realistic reaction of an ordinary person, including its traumatic aftermath, to something like the emergence of Cthulhu in the real world. Certainly he sometimes overshot the target, which contributed to his increasing frustration with his, as he saw it, inability to say what he wanted to say, and which is the likely reason why the emphasis on exaggerated fear faded in his later work. At the same time, the element of exaggerated fear had its roots in Gothic fiction, as is clearly evidenced in Lovecraft's juvenile tales, "The Beast in the Cave" and "The Alchemist."

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[591] The following anecdote told by Rheinhart Kleiner (1998b: 200) illustrates the lengths to which Lovecraft was willing to go in order to find his architectural sights: "I recall that at least once, while stumbling around among old barrels and crates in some dark corner of this area, Lovecraft found a doorway suddenly illuminated and an excited foreigner, wearing the apron that was an almost infallible sign of a speakeasy bartender, enquiring hotly what he wanted. Loveman and Kirk went in after Lovecraft and got him safely out. None of us, surely, was under any illusion as to what might very well happen in such an obscure corner of the city." Lovecraft's letters during his years in New York contain many descriptions of night-time walks such as this, sometimes undertaken alone, and sometimes in the company of other Kalem Club members, George Kirk in particular. See also Hart (1998).

7.3.5. Madness

Madness is closely linked with fear in Lovecraft's fiction, and one is rarely present without the other to some degree. The theme of madness is also connected with the further question of how the traumatised narrator or protagonist of a story can be sure that what he has experienced really did happen. In some tales the narrator experiences something so terrible that his mind briefly snaps as he flees the scene in terror, leaving him to later record what has transpired as best he can. Examples of this include "Dagon" and "The Hound," in both of which the narrator is about to commit suicide, "The Nameless City," in which the narrator is left yearning for oblivion, and "The Shadow out of Time," in which Nathaniel Peaslee realises the utter hopelessness of human existence after his experiences in the underground ruins. In a similar vein is "The Festival," in which the narrator is left "delirious" by his experiences (this being attributed by doctors to some form of psychosis), and *At the Mountains of Madness*, in which Danforth is never quite the same after his escape from the shoggoth (and his subsequent witnessing of something even worse in the distance).

In other stories the mental state of a main character is dubious from the start, as in "The Tomb," in which Jervas Dudley writes his account from a madhouse, "Polaris," in which there is a veiled suggestion that the narrator may be mentally ill, "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," which is set in an institution to which the mentally subnormal Joe Slater has been committed, "Hypnos," which suggests the possibility that the narrator has imagined the events of the tale as the result of some unspecified mental condition, and "The Horror in the Museum," in which the mental state of George Rogers is precarious all through the narrative. Then there are the stories in which some characters go permanently insane, such as "The Temple," in which this happens to crew members aboard the submarine (eventually the commander of the submarine also begins to doubt his sanity), "The Rats in the Walls," in which Delapore writes his account from an asylum, "The Horror at Red Hook," in which a sailor goes mad at the sight of the mutilated bodies in the stateroom aboard the ocean liner, and "The Colour out of Space," in which the more sensitive members of the Gardner family loose their minds due to the vitality-draining effects of the intruding entity. A character failing to impersonate another character and instead ending up in an asylum is a main plot element in both *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and "The Thing on the

Doorstep" (echoing the twin motif from "The Tomb).[592] In "The Shadow over Innsmouth," on the other hand, the narrator plans to free his cousin from a local asylum as a result of the transformation he is undergoing. In "The Call of Cthulhu," finally, extensive and widespread mental illness spreads among sensitive people due to the telepathic interference that results from Cthulhu having emerged from the Pacific.

To fully grasp the theme of madness in Lovecraft's fiction, it is necessary to take into account certain relevant background attitudes that were grounded in social Darwinism, eugenics, and the physical anthropology of the day. As noted in Chapter 2, certain popular mainstream ideas such as restricted immigration, forced sterilisation, stricter marriage laws, the maintenance of colour lines, and so forth, supported a stated aim of preventing undesirable "inferiors" and "defectives" from overrunning society.[593] In this context, the stereotypical Gothic asylum of horror fiction had its basis in the real horrors of what went on at some psychiatric hospitals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the earlier concept of moral treatment was replaced by what essentially amounted to the warehousing of the mentally ill, as a result of which "[o]vercrowding, rough treatments, bizarre therapies, and an overall lack of standardization" constituted the norm rather than the exception in many cases.[594]

This, however, was not the case with Butler Hospital in Providence, which was a well-staffed and well-equipped private hospital that catered mostly (but not exclusively) to such members of the wealthy social elite as had curable conditions. This makes it somewhat odd that Lovecraft apparently never set foot inside this hospital during the two years his mother stayed there: he only ever walked with her in the park-like grounds when he went to visit.[595] Butler was in fact the opposite of the notorious state asylum outside Providence, which was part of an

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[592] This idea had its ultimate origin in a destroyed juvenile story (Lovecraft 2005d: 30): "One long-destroyed tale was of twin brothers – one murders the other, but conceals the body, & tries to *live the life of both* – appearing in one place as himself, & elsewhere as his victim. (Resemblance had been remarkable.) He meets sudden death (lightning) when posing as the dead man – is identified by a scar, & the secret finally revealed by his diary. This, I think, antedates my 11th year."

[593] See Rondinone (2017) for a discussion of the use of asylums in Lovecraft's fiction, and see Dowbiggin (2003) for a detailed discussion of contemporary attitudes towards the mentally ill in North America in the early 20th century.

[594] See Rondinone (2017: 93). Examples of treatments included "lobotomies, electrotherapy, focal infection therapy, malarial shock, and insulin coma treatments" (Dowbiggin 2003: 22).

[595] See Scott (1998: 16) and Joshi (2013a: 306).

institutional complex known as the State Farm,[596] and which by all accounts was a dismal place that mostly served as a storage facility for the poor and the incurably insane. To end up in an asylum of this variety was something to be feared, since it was akin more to confinement or imprisonment than a form of treatment, and it was also deeply stigmatising due to the class-based attitudes towards the poor. With this in mind, the theme of madness is also seen to be linked with degeneracy and even devolution in some of Lovecraft's stories (such as "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth").

However, these are mostly tangential concerns, as the madness theme in Lovecraft had its origin entirely in Poe and the Gothic classics, these being Lovecraft's original sources of literary influence. Thus, the fact that his mother's stay at Butler Hospital was of no consequence as far as the theme of madness is concerned is made clear once all the relevant facts are considered.[597] The British-born G. Alder Blumer was the superintendent of Butler from 1899 until his retirement in 1921 (the same year that Lovecraft's mother died), and he was precisely the kind of learned elderly gentleman that Lovecraft is likely to have respected and admired. Blumer's approach involved occupational therapy and "genteel amusements and distractions as therapeutic techniques,"[598] meaning it was essentially a continuation of the earlier moral treatment of the mid-nineteenth century. Also, although Blumer initially was an advocate of eugenic ideas, he quickly had to change course due to the reaction these concepts were met with from his clientele:

> [I]t would not do for Blumer to be constantly invoking the need for eugenic interference to erase the hereditary taint in the families of Butler's patients. Naturally the families of his patients would resent hearing that their maladies were due to the vices, delusions, and congenital inferiorities of their ancestors. At a time when some New England patricians were campaigning for immigration restriction on the basis of their hereditary superiority over southern and eastern Europeans, they did not want to hear their own physicians casting aspersions on their breeding and lineage. (Dowbiggin 2003: 86-87)

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[596] See Dowbiggin (2003: 59).

[597] The popular conception that the madness theme in Lovecraft derives from his fear of mental illness, due to both his parents having died in Butler Hospital, goes back to David H. Keller (1948), a psychiatrist and pulp writer who suggested that Lovecraft may have suffered from congenital syphilis inherited from his mother who in turn had been infected by his father. But there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case, and in fact there is conclusive evidence to suggest the opposite, see footnote 61.

[598] See Dowbiggin (2003: 66).

Consequently, Blumer soon began to argue that the emotional disorders of his patients were not to be seen as a stigma but were in fact "a mark of distinction," due to the brains of the social elite in New England being so "highly organized":[599]

> If intermarriage among the prosperous families of the Northeast had produced sensitive nervous systems [...] it was less a cause for alarm than for congratulations. He implied that nervous illness was the price the social elite paid for being so civilized. Blumer was not alone among New England physicians in recognizing that the inhabitants of that region viewed their mental infirmities as a badge of honor, a symbol of their social and cultural success. [...] A neuropathic streak in a genteel family, then, was nothing to be embarrassed about. Quite the contrary, it was a sign of distinction. (Ibid: 87)

The illness of Lovecraft's father had certainly been a source of shame for the family (and as such, it may occasionally have been hinted at as an ancestral curse in Lovecraft's earliest fiction), but his mother's stay at Butler Hospital and his own case of "nerves," which he frequently emphasised during his early amateur journalism years, was mostly a way for the young Lovecraft to highlight what he regarded as his own class superiority (however, Lovecraft did not much pursue this way of thinking after the end of his reclusive invalid phase). With all this in mind, then, it is clear that the theme of madness, despite its prominence, was simply a classic Gothic trope that Lovecraft frequently used for effect, to underscore the reality-shattering implications of an intruding horror from outside, and to create a sense of uncertainty in the reader as to whether the narrative was true or not (within the context of the story).

At this point, as the present discussion is now in danger of becoming overly long, it is time to bring this chapter to a close. There still remains to say something on the thematic grouping that I will describe under the label of imaginative escape, as well as on some of Lovecraft's political views in connection with his fiction, after which will follow a concluding discussion on what I will call Lovecraft's gentlemanly pessimism. These will be the subjects of the next chapter.

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[599] See Dowbiggin (2003: 87).

8. Analysis: Thematic and Philosophical Foundations, Part II

This chapter will concern itself with the remaining major thematic group out of the three that were listed at the beginning of the previous chapter, as well as with some aspects of Lovecraft's political and philosophical thinking in connection with his view of himself as a gentleman. Lovecraft's thinking on the importance of illusions in the context of imaginative escape is, I believe, a subject that has received limited attention among critics, and the same is true for the foundational importance of his gentlemanly attitudes to his fiction-writing in general. With this chapter I hope to be able to begin correcting some of these lacunae in the scholarly literature.

8.1. Imaginative Escape

The concept of imaginative escape as an important component in Lovecraft's fiction has tended to be undervalued in Lovecraft criticism (or, alternatively, it has been used as a reason for dismissing his work),[600] perhaps because of the common association between "mere" escapism and popular literature.[601] The term, and its negative associations, go back at least as far as the literary criticism of the 1930s, in the wake of which the consumer of escapist literature has often been seen as "a person who indulges in a mental process of emotional diversion by means of entertainment or other kinds of leisure activities to avoid or retreat from what is considered an unpleasant or unacceptable reality."[602] What is often left unanswered in these discussions is the question of why escapism is unavoidably seen as a bad thing that must lead to bad literature, but that is a debate for another time. What matters here is what Lovecraft had to say about the "literature of escape,"[603] and what he meant when he employed this terminology.

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[600] As when Wilson (1980: 48) dismissed Lovecraft's work as "a sort of grownup boyhood game in which he diverted his solitary life by playing with other horror-story fanciers."

[601] As evidenced in, for example, Goho (2014: 57), who states that "Gothic literature is not mere escapism," and that horror literature at its best "is not mere fantasy or gross-out movies," but this latter comment reveals the exact same attitude against which he claims to be arguing. Even Joshi has suggested that Lovecraft's "fiction, if read carefully, can be seen to be more than the escapist dreams of a doting antiquarian" (Schultz and Joshi 2011: 18-19).

[602] See Konzack (2018: 246).

[603] See, for example, Lovecraft (2004b: 57).

In youth, Lovecraft sometimes spoke of escaping reality as a necessity even outside of literature,[604] and such sentiments (following the attitudes suggested above) can indeed be seen as a natural consequence of his delayed transition into adulthood. These ideas had their ultimate source in his philosophical study of Epicureanism and Schopenhauer, having to do with his desire to minimise the pain and suffering inherent in an existence he regarded as difficult and pointless. Thus, in a review in 1922 of the amateur poetry of a colleague, he stated that "she glimpses the world's absence of substance – the need to retreat into the more tenuous upper regions of fancy to escape pain and sordidness [...] as a mark of aesthetic soundness in conformity with the truth emphasised by Schopenhauer, that the world is *beautiful as an object but ugly as a source of experience*."[605] Soon after, he wrote about Dunsany's work as follows:

> His main work belongs to what modern critics have called the "literature of escape"; the literature of conscious unreality created out of an intelligent and sophisticated conviction that analysed reality has no heritage save of chaos, pain, and disappointment. He is in this way both a conservative and a modern; a conservative because he still believes that beauty is a thing of golden rememberings and simple patterns, and a modern because he perceives that only in arbitrarily selected fancy can we find fixed any of the patterns which fit our golden rememberings. He is the supreme poet of wonder, but of the intelligently assumed wonder to which one turns after experiencing the fullest disillusion of realism. (Lovecraft 2004b: 57)

This position was one that Lovecraft maintained throughout his decadent period.

Following his years in New York, however, Lovecraft soon began to connect his ideas on imaginative escape to his now increasingly emphasised adherence to traditionalism and the past. In 1927, for example, he wrote pessimistically about art being unable to survive in modern times, which left only the possibility of "a *reminiscent* individual art for those who voluntarily remain outside the theatre of change and decay and cling tenaciously to the land and ways of their ancestors." Such art could only reflect the past and not its own age, or it could become purely decadent (subdivided into melancholy and malevolent varieties), and he also listed a third branch, "the fantastic art and literature of escape." This art in all its branches depended "upon the past; and will

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[604] See, for example, Lovecraft (2005d: 39): "the solution of the temperance question really lies in providing the race with a substitute means of escaping the realities of existence."

[605] See Lovecraft (2004b: 52-53).

grow weaker and weaker as the past and its conditions receded into the background."[606] Two years later, however, came the first signs of a significant change in his thinking, when Lovecraft advised a correspondent to start a library since, "You can't imagine how much it will enrich your life – give you a sense of command over gates & doorways of escape from stifling physical limitations into infinite avenues of imaginative freedom & magnificence."[607] At this time he began to repeatedly stress the need for an "imaginative escape from the limitations of time, space, and natural law"[608] (as previously described in Chapter 6), a concept that had also gradually emerged as a theme in its own right in his literary production, although it had not otherwise been articulated in this manner previously. Allied to it was the much earlier emphasis on dreams, the extent and importance of which will now be analysed in the following.[609]

8.1.1. Dreams

As in the case of several of the other main themes in Lovecraft's fiction, dreams and the centrality of dreaming originated as a Gothic stock trope. However, there was also a very personal dimension to the importance of nightmares and dreaming for Lovecraft (particularly in his early period), and in this context a distinction can to be made between stories that were *inspired* by dreams and stories that *feature* dreams and the activity of dreaming (the former presumably also giving rise to the latter, as Lovecraft's fictional concepts continued to develop). Tales inspired directly by dreams include such classic examples as "Dagon," "Polaris," "The Statement of Randolph Carter," and "Nyarlathotep," and Lovecraft also mentioned including elements from his dreams in several other stories, such as "The Doom That Came to Sarnath" and "Celephaïs."[610] In fact, so much of Lovecraft's early fictional production involved his having received inspiration from dreams that the almost romantic process of writing out dream images appears to have left its mark permanently on his aesthetic philosophy. This always centred on his high culture art for art's sake ideas, and was thus likely another reason why he was strongly

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606 See Lovecraft (2018: 449) for this and the preceding quotes.

607 See Lovecraft (1971b: 78).

608 See Lovecraft (1971b: 206).

609 As previously mentioned, my analysis will stand in contrast to a point of view advocated by Lévy, that Lovecraft's inability to deal with the real world led him to escape into dreams as a source for his fiction.

610 See Lovecraft (2003b: 63-66; 2005d: 200-201; 2014a: 269; 2018: 70).

opposed to the view of writing as a form of work to be done deliberately with the aim of producing a story.

It is not difficult to find psychological reasons behind Lovecraft's dreams and to see his early nightmares, which were terrifying in their vividness and intensity, as direct responses to upsetting events and incidents that occurred in his life at a time when he was not mature or experienced enough to handle them – the childhood "night-gaunts" (see Chapter 3) are a classic instance in this regard. In this context it is telling that Lovecraft's vivid nightmares more or less disappeared after the early 1920s,[611] when he had left his sheltered early life behind and begun to experience the outside world. His personal difficulties continued, but his return from New York back to the familiar surroundings of Providence gave him some needed calm and security, and he was rarely troubled by nightmares in later years. He did, however, continue to experience vivid dreams of a more positive kind to the end of his life, as sometimes recounted in his letters.[612]

The role of dreams and dreaming in Lovecraft's fiction thus varies widely, from the early cosmic imagery seen by the sleeping narrator in "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," to the first glimmers of a dream-world of some sort in "The White Ship" and "Celephaïs." Sometimes the protagonist in a story is merely disturbed by bad dreams, as in "The Nameless City" or "The Rats in the Walls," and at other times the dreams of the protagonist provide important hints about what is going on behind the narrative, as in "The Moon-Bog," "The Shadow over Innsmouth," and "The Shadow out of Time." This can also happen in the dreams of other characters, as in "The Shunned House" and "The Call of Cthulhu." Some stories centre entirely on dreaming without directly involving the fledgling concept of the dream-world, such as "Polaris," "Hypnos," and the prose poem "Ex Oblivione" (as well as the collaboration "Poetry and the Gods" and the brief fragment titled "Azathoth"),[613] with dreaming providing access to other places that have no connection with the

[611] "The night-gaunts do not harass me nowadays," as Lovecraft (2015f: 128) said in 1928.

[612] See Lovecraft (2015e: 67, 399, 413; 2016a: 185), Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 143), and Lovecraft and Moore (2017: 238). Many of these dreams involved his childhood and childhood home, others centred on the 18th century.

[613] There is also a single reference to "lands both of waking and of dream" (Lovecraft 2015a: 123) in "The Doom That Came to Sarnath," and a possible suggestion that the experiences of the protagonist in "The Strange High House in the Mist" may not have been real: "He could not recall what he had dreamed in the sky-perched hut of that still nameless hermit" (Lovecraft 2015b: 95).

dreamlands, this being particularly the case in "The Dreams in the Witch House."

At the other end of the spectrum is "Under the Pyramids," in which Lovecraft made use of the "it was all a dream" trope as a means of explaining away the events of the story. The culmination and ultimately repudiation of Lovecraft's dream-world tales occurs in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, in which Randolph Carter visits the dreamlands one final time, having lost access at some point before regaining it in "The Silver Key," with "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" revealing what subsequently happened. What this primarily suggests is that there is no "dream cycle" in any meaningful sense in Lovecraft's fiction,[614] and that the stories that are specifically set in the dreamlands are restricted to "The White Ship" (by later implication), "Celephaïs." and *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, with "The Silver Key" and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" tangentially connected to the concept. Most of the stories traditionally regarded as belonging to this subset are instead concerned with a Dunsany-inspired fictional prehistory of the world, later to be superseded by more cosmic aspects. It is thus a fact that needs to be recognised that Lovecraft left the entire dreamlands concept behind prior to embarking on the final phase of his fiction-writing career.

Nevertheless, there persists an overemphasis among some commentators on the dream cycle in Lovecraft's work,[615] and a corresponding reluctance to recognise that the few tales that do revolve around vaguely defined dream dimensions were mainly a consequence of Lovecraft's early and brief Dunsanian phase of fiction-writing, as stated above. Later tales such as "The Dreams in the Witch House" do not, in fact, involve any kind of alternate dream dimension at all, since the protagonist of that story is merely sleepwalking while accessing hyperspace in order to actually travel *physically* to other worlds, as is made clear in the narrative. Thus, the main elements involving the importance of dreaming in Lovecraft's writings are restricted to the following: his interest in exploring the emotion of fear (within the context of weird fiction) as a consequence of his childhood nightmares, and some of his earliest amateur fiction having its direct inspirational source in vividly experienced dreams. But in his mature period, this initial reliance on dreams and dream imagery disappeared almost

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[614] The "dream cycle," much like the Cthulhu Mythos, is a modern-day popular concept that, as such, does not appear anywhere in Lovecraft's own writings about his work. See Lovecraft (1995a) for a typical example.

[615] See footnote 193. See also Joshi (2014a: 275-288) for a discussion concerning the dream world vs. the real world in Lovecraft's fiction.

entirely, to instead be replaced with alternating cosmic and Gothic themes grounded mostly in New England tradition and geography.

8.1.2. Escape the Limitations of Space, Time, and Natural Law

The final theme of notable importance in Lovecraft's fiction was his lifelong desire to escape the limitations of space, time, and natural law, as stated at the beginning of this chapter. And due to the centrality of this idea, in its different manifestations over the years, Lovecraft consequently had to explain and defend it on more than one occasion. The following example is from 1936 (emphasis in the original):

> I have again & again driven home this point in repelling the charge of inconsistency levelled at me for being a complete agnostic & materialist on the intellectual side, & a confirmed fantaisiste & myth-weaver on the aesthetic side. I have told my critics that in all probability the reason I *want* to write about circumventions of time, space, & natural law is that I *don't* believe in such! If I *believed* in the supernatural, I would not need to create the aesthetic illusion of belief. Indeed, the supernatural would not seem strange & fascinating to me. I am preoccupied with the invention of a desired thing which I can get *only* through invention. (Lovecraft and Moore 2017: 275)

Lovecraft needed to create the "aesthetic illusion of belief" precisely because he did not believe in the supernatural, or, more relevantly, in the specific elements underlying his synthetic myth-cycle with all its implications about the cosmic scope of the universe.

This idea first began to emerge in "Polaris," in which the narrator is transported first in his dreams and then bodily into a (possibly ancestral) city 26,000 years in the past, although the overall point of that story is more concerned with how to determine truth and what is real. In the very next story, the co-written "The Green Meadow," a Greek philosopher has somehow escaped from the earth to another world, but how this was accomplished is left unclear in the brief narrative. It is instead in "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," in which the narrator is told that his cosmic soul is eternal and that his "real" self is able to roam freely through time and space, that the first true depiction of Lovecraft's desire to escape earthly limitations is found, and this is repeated in his earliest dream-world narratives, "The White Ship" and "Celephaïs." In these two stories the protagonists escape their sordid reality into a magical world of dream, albeit less successfully so in the case of Basil Elton in "The White Ship." The protagonist of "Hypnos" is also attempting to access new realities through dreams, attracting the attention of something terrible in the process, whereas the protagonist of "The Festival" appears to have

stumbled into his ancestral past in Kingsport in some undisclosed manner. In "The Shunned House," the character of Dr. Whipple seems to have briefly accessed earlier times while asleep, before he meets his gruesome end in the cellar of the old house, and in "He," the narrator can see both the distant past and the distant future through a strange window in an ancient house in New York.

In "The Silver Key," Lovecraft's desire for escape reaches something of a climax, in that the autobiographical character of Randolph Carter somehow finds a way to return to the happy and carefree times of his childhood. In the co-written sequel, "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," Carter achieves a complete understanding of reality that allows him to travel through time and space to such an extent that he can even inhabit an alien body on another world, where, however, he finds himself trapped for a long time. Lovecraft's desire to escape into a world of dreams then found its culmination in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, in which Carter comes to realise that the real world is preferable, after all, to childhood dreams and fantasies.

From now on, Lovecraft's yearning to escape played out on a more intellectual rather than emotional level, and in "The Whisperer in Darkness," Albert Wilmarth is accordingly tempted by the promise of unlimited knowledge and understanding if he is willing to pay the price of travelling the universe as a disembodied brain in a jar. In "The Dreams in the Witch House," Walter Gilman finds that he can reach other worlds by travelling through hyperspace through the use of advanced mathematics, and in "The Shadow out of Time," Nathaniel Peaslee involuntarily exchanges minds with an alien being and is transported 150 million years into the past, where he learns the true history of the planet, including the terrible future fate that is yet in store for humanity. From this cursory overview, then, it can be seen that the concept of imaginative escape for Lovecraft moves on two different levels: an earlier level when he was mostly concerned with escaping into dreams and back to his childhood, and a later level when his lifelong frustrated desire to see and experience other times on earth and other places in the universe came more strongly to the forefront. And it is this latter aspect that should be seen as the animating principle behind Lovecraft's "literature of escape," having to do with his intellectual curiosity (as in the case of so many of his protagonists) rather than with his emotional dissatisfaction with reality.[616]

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[616] I am not aware of any significant critical writings addressing this specific point. Such writings may certainly exist, but if they do, they have not contributed to the current commonly accepted understanding of Lovecraft as a writer.

8.2. Gentlemanly Pessimism

Turning now to the remaining matter of certain previously mentioned long-standing attitudes that lie at the foundation of Lovecraft's life and thinking, the main concern must be to what extent his cultural pessimism, his changing political opinions, his views on race, and his perception of himself as a gentleman also shaped and revealed itself in his fiction. The discussion will range across a spectrum of relevant issues, beginning with the philosophical concept of the decline of the west, and continuing with such ancillary matters as decadence, devolution, fascism, eugenics, and racism, before concluding with an overview of Lovecraft's identification with a certain gentlemanly ideal as applied to his fiction. As this will become a rather lengthy discussion, some subjects will be treated in more detail than others, depending on their relative importance.

8.2.1. The Fall of the West

The idea of the fall of the West and, ultimately, the end of the world is not often touched on directly in Lovecraft's fiction, although some examples do occur. The culmination of "Dagon" has the narrator muse about a possible threat coming from the ocean, "when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind – of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium."[617] The Temple," similarly, suggests that the Atlantis-like ruined civilisation on the ocean floor is the "remotest rather than the immediate" ancestor of ancient Greek culture,[618] through a possible succession of increasingly decadent lost civilisations.

"Nyarlathotep" and "The Crawling Chaos" are both essentially dream-visions of the end of all human civilisation and the destruction of the planet. "He" presents a future vision of a "corpse-city,"[619] clearly New York, that has fallen in some manner to what is presumably Asiatic invaders. "The Shadow out of Time," on the other hand, makes the larger point that a terrible fate of some kind is still in store for humanity as a whole, and that this fate cannot be avoided. In the end, not even Lovecraft's superior aliens are safe from the inexorable march of

617 See Lovecraft (2015a: 58).
618 See Lovecraft (2015a: 165).
619 See Lovecraft (2015a: 515).

decadence and decay, as is made clear in "The Mound" and *At the Mountains of Madness*.

8.2.2. Decadence and Devolution

Connected to these ideas are the twin themes of decadence and devolution, although the latter has its roots in Lovecraft's understanding of evolution more than in cultural pessimism. With respect to decadence, there is a small subset of Lovecraft's fiction that deals with "hillbillies" and "white trash" in a pointedly derogatory manner that had its intellectual source in the widespread concern over perceived degeneration and defectiveness in the lower classes at this time, the so-called menace of the feeble-minded (as detailed in Chapter 2). In America, this expressed itself most notoriously in the studies on the so-called Jukes and Kallikak families, the conclusions of which are clearly echoed in such stories by Lovecraft as "Beyond the Wall of Sleep,"[620] "The Lurking Fear," and "The Dunwich Horror."[621] Decadence is also an important part of the narrative in "The Shadow over Innsmouth," although here it shades over into biological devolution.

The concept of devolution implied an atavistic descent on the evolutionary ladder – which in turn implied the popular albeit incorrect view of evolution as an upward teleological and orthogenetic process (goal-oriented, leading in the direction of more complexity) – despite the fact that such a direct reversal from a current evolutionary stage to a previous one had been ruled out by Dollo's law of irreversibility as far back as 1893.[622] But Lovecraft's adherence to degeneration theory (at least some aspects of which he cannot have avoided picking up from his reading of newspapers and popular magazines), meant that he did not merely adopt devolution as a useful device for fiction writing, but that he also regarded this concept as an integral part of evolutionary thinking overall, as when in 1927 he criticised some idealists for including only "the evolutionary trend (ignoring the devolutionary) of our particular part of space" in their doctrines.[623] He made the same mistake in 1934 when he spoke of how "every stream of increasingly complex

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[620] In a letter in which Lovecraft (2003b: 83) briefly described the inspirational origins behind this tale, he specifically stated that he had written it "after reading an account of some Catskill Mountain degenerates" in a newspaper. See also Lovecraft (2005c: 243).

[621] The very brief depiction of the helpless Cajuns in "The Call of Cthulhu" also falls into this category.

[622] See, for example, Gould (1970).

[623] See Lovecraft and Wandrei (2002: 103).

organisation (what we call evolution or upward development, and of which the growth of animal life on this infinitesimal planet is a single negligible example) will eventually reverse itself and become a stream of decreasingly complex organisation (i.e., devolution, decay, disintegration), extending even to the dispersal of solid matter into separate electrons and protons."[624] The key point that eluded Lovecraft here is that evolution is concerned with adaptation rather than complexity.

Lovecraft's use of devolution as a theme began in the earliest of his preserved juvenile stories, "The Beast in the Cave," in which devolution is in fact the central idea underlying the plot. It occurred again in "The Lurking Fear," in the form of the devolved ape-like Martense clan that preyed on a community of backwoods squatters in the Catskills, and it is also suggested in "The Rats in the Walls," in which an ancestral line with its roots in prehistoric times is involved in degenerative and cannibalistic cult activities as evidenced by skeletal remains including skulls ranging from "supremely and sensitively developed types" to specimens denoting "nothing short of utter idiocy, cretinism, or primitive semi-apedom."[625] Other evidence indicated humans having been kept as livestock, "some of the skeleton things must have descended as quadrupeds through the last twenty or more generations."[626] In "Pickman's Model," the character of Pickman is the very embodiment of devolution: at one point he is even described as being "bound down the toboggan of reverse evolution,"[627] this process later culminating in his having become a ghoul in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, although the exact kinship between humans and ghouls remains unclear – as is also the case in the matter of the kinship between humans and fish-frogs in "The Shadow over Innsmouth."

Ultimately, the themes of decadence and devolution had their roots as much in Lovecraft's class attitudes and cultural pessimism as in his incomplete understanding of evolution and his adoption of various theories (some already outdated) from physical anthropology. These themes are undeniably important in Lovecraft's work, as in combination they serve as the animating core idea behind some of his tales, as seen in the examples above. But at the same time, this aspect of Lovecraft's thinking is only present in a limited subsection of his work.

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624 See Lovecraft and Howard (2011b: 732).
625 See Lovecraft (2015a: 391-393).
626 See Lovecraft (2015a: 393).
627 See Lovecraft (2015b: 62).

8.2.3. Fascism and Eugenics

With respect to the question of Lovecraft's developing political views as reflected in his fiction, there is a single reference to fascism in "The Shadow out of Time," which occurs in the detailed description of the civilisation of the Great Race: "The political and economic system of each unit was a sort of fascistic socialism, with major resources rationally distributed, and power delegated to a small governing board elected by the votes of all able to pass certain educational and psychological tests."[628] Clearly, this is a reference to Lovecraft's ideal technocratic state, still on his mind (the tale was written in the months between November 1934 and February 1935) at a time when he was in the midst of his final transition into Fabian socialism.[629] Prior to this, Lovecraft had described the deeply decadent precursor civilisation in "The Mound" as a communist state, as detailed earlier, and this possible exercise in social satire was followed by the more seriously intended depiction of the Old Ones in *At the Mountains of Madness* as having had a government that was "probably socialistic,"[630] this detail once again evoking Lovecraft's technocracy, now at the beginning of the phase. These three stories, at any rate, are the primary examples of Lovecraft revealing his developing political views through his fiction (his youthful aristocratic ideals are perhaps reflected in some of his early efforts, but always indirectly), and as such they can mostly be classified as tangential examples of utopian (or dystopian, in the case of "The Mound") science fiction.

Eugenic concepts are likewise mostly absent from Lovecraft's work, with the exception of a single reference in "The Mound" to the decadent ruling class having "become highly superior through selective breeding and social evolution,"[631] and a brief note concerning the reproductive habits of the Great Race in "The Shadow out of Time," according to which "[m]arkedly defective individuals were quietly disposed of as soon as

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[628] See Lovecraft (2015c: 404).

[629] It is thus to vastly overstate the case to suggest that Lovecraft "was quite clear about laying down the basic tenets of fascism as the best way of dealing with immigration and economic crisis" and that he "praised fascist politics and exterminationist eugenics" (Reinert 2015: 272-273), or that his "letters overflow with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories" and that his "sympathies with rising fascism were equally transparent" (House 2017). Huling (2019: 71), similarly, writes of Lovecraft's "encomia to fascism" and how he "looked on the rituals and myths of the Nazis with an only slightly qualified admiration."

[630] See Lovecraft (2015c: 99).

[631] See Lovecraft (2017a: 207).

their defects were noticed."[632] But neither of these comments are particularly important to their respective narratives as a whole (and it should again be remembered that "The Mound" may be intended as a satirical account). Both are buried in the midst of other descriptions, and there does not really seem to be any clear connection between Lovecraft's tales and his occasionally expressed private views on eugenic matters.[633] Certainly, Lovecraft declared a seemingly harsh social Darwinist and eugenicist standpoint at times, as in the following example from a letter in 1927 (emphasis in the original):

> The normal evolution of a human stock presupposes a certain amount of struggle with nature & with enemies in which the weak & inferior will be unable to survive, & will disappear in sufficient quantities to prevent exhaustion of food supplies & to ensure the perpetuation of the species through its able & more vigorous specimens. Modern civilisation, however, has developed a sentimental protection of the weak which ensures the survival of the inferior as well as the superior; so that unless something equally artificial is done to counteract the tendency, we shall be overrun with the unlimited spawn of the biologically defective & incompetent. […] Meanwhile, since the reproduction of good blood is so artificially cut off, shall we allow bad blood to multiply unchecked through ignorance, till the spawn of weak & unfit stock forms the bulk of our population? My answer is emphatically *no*! To hell with principle – our first duty is to save the fundamental biological quality of the race! (Lovecraft and Derleth 2013a: 78-79)

Significant statements by Lovecraft on eugenics are rare in subsequent years, however, and when they occur they clearly reflect his awareness of the growing resistance to eugenic principles, and the consequent unworkability of those principles, although he still advocated certain utopian ideals that went back to his technocratic phase. His advocacy of such measures as sterilisation,[634] following the notorious Buck v. Bell decision of the Supreme

632 See Lovecraft (2015c: 403).

633 Thus, critical confusion on these matters is revealed in statements such as the following: Lovecraft's "personal anxieties about sexuality found their material symbolization in eugenicist myths of unrestrained immigrant sexuality and reproductiveness" (Lovett-Graff 1997: 184), and "Lovecraft was a eugenicist – a self-professed proponent of 'eugenic control' [and many of his stories espouse] eugenic and racist opinions" (Frye 2006: 238).

634 Sterilisation of selected individuals for the purpose of improving the race was a popular eugenic initiative in the early decades of the 1900s, and it was the forced sterilisation laws in California, enacted in 1909, that later inspired the Nazi eugenics program. See Kühl (2002).

Court in 1927,[635] must be seen in this context, although sterilisation did remain a popular topic for years despite the increasing certainty in scientific circles that the procedure brought no benefits for either the race or the individual. In any case, Lovecraft's comments on sterilisation and what he termed "rational eugenics" occurred in 1934 and 1935,[636] at a time when he was transitioning into Fabian socialism, which is unsurprising given the fact that the Fabian socialists were also advocates of eugenics.[637]

8.2.4. Racism and Immigration

A close analysis of Lovecraft's fiction will reveal limited racist content and, for the most part, no underlying racist motivation. The exceptions, when they occur, are of three kinds: stories with a minor and incidental racist detail, stories with a negative background attitude towards immigrants, and stories concerned with miscegenation. The earliest example of a racist detail in Lovecraft's fiction is the prehistoric "squat, hellish, yellow fiends" called Inutos who are explicitly identified with present-day Esquimaux (an archaic spelling of Eskimo) in "Polaris."[638] Next there is a one-off mention of a "loathsome black woman from Guinea" in "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family,"[639]

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635 The decision was written by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., who infamously stated that, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough" (Kevles 1986: 111). There was widespread popular and intellectual support overall for forced sterilisation measures at this time, see, for example, Kevles (ibid: 115).

636 See Lovecraft (2015e: 197-198, 259, 261-262). In this context he also supported the maintenance of a colour line against mixing between whites and blacks, see Lovecraft (2005d: 155; 2015e: 83-84; 2016b: 142-143). Otherwise, by this time, he had come to view limited amounts of race-mixing between other races as acceptable: "Of course this does not mean that the crudities of Hitlerism are to be copied. It is absurd to think that a man of complete Aryan culture ought to be squelched because he has a quarter-share of Semitic blood" (Lovecraft 2016b: 133). In this context it is interesting to note that the main character Audrey Davis in "The Curse of Yig" is of mixed white and Native American ancestry, and that this has evidently equipped her with a "toughness of fibre" (Lovecraft 2017a: 129) that prevents her from fainting, quite unlike some of her male counterparts.

637 See, for example, Paul (1984) and Lucassen (2010).

638 See Lovecraft (2015a: 67). The name Inutos obviously brings to mind the Inuit, which is a term that correctly refers only to certain indigenous groups in Canada and on Greenland. The term Eskimo, on the other hand, applies to indigenous people in Alaska and is not derogatory. In "The Call of Cthulhu," Lovecraft (2015b: 32) did mix up his terminology when he spoke of a "cult of degenerate Esquimaux" on Greenland, since the indigenous population on Greenland is of Inuit origin. However, within the narrative, the point is made that the cult of the "degenerate" tribe in the north is not part of any ordinary Inuit religion. There is a similar reference to a "supposed" (ibid: 31) voodoo meeting in the Louisiana swamps, meaning that this is not voodoo (a popular umbrella term for various Afro-American religions) at all, but rather the activities of the Cthulhu cult.

639 See Lovecraft (2015a: 173).

followed by the "yellow evil faces"[640] in the repudiated "Nyarlathotep"[641] in connection with the fall of Western civilisation before the ultimate end of the world (likely hinting at the "yellow peril" ideas that were current at the time).[642] The worst example occurs in "Herbert West – Reanimator," in which a physically large black man is referred to as a "loathsome, gorilla-like thing" and "African monstrosity."[643] In "The Rats in the Walls," there is a reference to "the negroes howling and praying" when the Carfax estate burned down during the Civil War, and also a mention of the narrator's cousin "who went among the negroes and became a voodoo priest," in addition to an old cat named Nigger-Man.[644] The "malignant Arabs" that appear in the ghostwritten "Under the Pyramids" are probably best seen in light of what happens to the protagonist, Harry Houdini, who is captured by them and thrown into a tomb.[645] As for the euphemistically labelled "n-word," it occurs once in a piece of dialogue spoken by the old cannibal in "The Picture in the

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640 See Lovecraft (2015a: 204).

641 In 1931, Lovecraft (2007b: 17) was referring to "Nyarlathotep" as "definitely repudiated as below standard," adding that he was on the verge of also putting "The Tree," and "From Beyond" on the list of repudiated stories. In a 1932 letter, "The Tree" was listed as "now repudiated," see Lovecraft (2019: 204). In another letter from 1932, Lovecraft (2007b: 25) referred to "The Transition of Juan Romero" as "so far below my standard that I wouldn't have it in print under any circumstances." In 1934, the list of "absurd crap" expunged from Lovecraft's catalogue of acknowledged writings had grown to include "The Street," as well as the two short novels *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, soon to be joined by "Polaris," "The Hound," "The White Ship," "He," and "perhaps a few more" (ibid: 120).

642 The Chinese "will probably be the exterminators of Caucasian civilisation," Lovecraft (2003b: 57) had said in 1919. In the early 1930s he spoke of war with Japan as probably unavoidable, see, for example, Lovecraft (2014a: 200-201; 2016b: 90-91, 231) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 411). The term "yellow peril" had its origin in the 1890s, with the emergence of China and Japan as major powers on the world scene, and with the increased immigration from East Asia into the United States. The term is often traced back to Kaiser Wilhelm II, who for various political reasons began to agitate against Japan after the crushing Japanese victory in the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895. The perceived danger to Western civilisation was further heightened after the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1899-1901 and the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905. In this context it is interesting to note that Lovecraft came to develop an admiring attitude towards the traditional cultures of China and Japan. He also praised Chinese and Japanese art, and he named Hollywood silent film star Sessue Hayakawa as his favourite actor (see, for example, Lovecraft 2003b: 53, 132; 2014a: 121, 205-206, 232-233, 263; 2019: 404).

643 See Lovecraft (2015a: 306, 310).

644 See Lovecraft (2015a: 376, 379, 381). A black cat in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is named Nig, which is not much of an improvement (Lovecraft 2015b: 287). This animal and its counterpart in "The Rats in the Walls" both owed their names to the lost pet Lovecraft had owned as a teenager. As for the term "negro," this was a neutral descriptor in Lovecraft's time and did not denote racist intent.

645 See Lovecraft (2015a: 443).

House" and twice in outbursts from the antagonistic character Ernest B. Aspinwall in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key."[646] It is also used a few times by the villainous narrator of the ghostwritten "Winged Death."[647]

With respect to immigration, there is a mention of "a large herd of unkempt Mexicans" in the repudiated "The Transition of Juan Romero," but also, significantly, a description of Juan Romero himself as resembling "the ancient and noble Aztec."[648] "The Terrible Old Man" contains an unsubtle reference to immigration in the fact that the three thieves who are attempting to rob the old man are of Italian, Polish, and Portuguese origin, respectively, which meant that they "were not of Kingsport blood; they were of that new and heterogeneous alien stock which lies outside the charmed circle of New-England life and traditions."[649] "Herbert West – Reanimator," similarly, contains an incident involving a stereotypically violent and superstitious Italian immigrant.[650]

The opening paragraphs of "He" suggest that New York is now "quite dead" because of immigration.[651] "Cool Air" contains a comment about some "Spaniards a little above the coarsest and crudest grade,"[652] and the landlady is depicted as speaking with a heavy accent, but this latter detail is in the same category as Lovecraft's extensive use of a backwoods Yankee dialect in other stories (also contrast with the urbane Dr. Muñoz). In "Pickman's Model," the sinister character of Pickman rants about the network of old alleys that existed in the North End neighbourhood in Boston, unknown to most people except "the foreigners that swarm them" and how "those Dagoes,"[653] meaning Italian immigrants, know

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646 See Lovecraft (2015a: 214; 2015c: 319).

647 See Lovecraft 2017a: (345-346, 355). In addition to this, the word occurs a number of times in "Medusa's Coil" (Lovecraft 2017a: 253, 277, 284, 288, 296), discussed separately in this chapter.

648 See Lovecraft (2015a: 97). Compare with what Lovecraft (2019: 437) said in a letter many years later, in 1935: "I would like to see Mexico – though I would prefer regions far from the U.S. border, where the native life & architecture might be studied in their least mongrelised form."

649 See Lovecraft (2015a: 141).

650 See Lovecraft (2015a: 307). The hostility against the new immigrants had found a notable expression in a notorious incident in New Orleans in 1891, when eleven Italian immigrants (one was American-born, but of Italian descent) were lynched by a mob following the assassination of the New Orleans chief of police the year before. The killing of the police chief was widely believed to have been a Mafia hit, and the stereotype of the stiletto-wielding Italian immigrant was subsequently cemented in the public consciousness (and was briefly mirrored in "Herbert West"), albeit that the police chief had been shot by unknown assailants. See Gauthreaux (2007) for additional details.

651 See Lovecraft (2015a: 507).

652 See Lovecraft (2015b: 12).

653 See Lovecraft (2015b: 61).

nothing about the deeper history of the area. *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* has a single reference to a landlord who is described as "a small rodent-featured person with a guttural accent."[654] "The Dreams in the Witch House" contains a number of references to Polish immigrants, some sympathetic, others less so.[655] Later references to immigrants are largely neutral, as in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," in which there is a brief hint of superstition among "the Poles and Lithuanians of Boston's West End" and the "local Slavs."[656] Similarly, "The Haunter of the Dark" only mentions "the strange, dark faces of the drifting crowds, and the foreign signs over curious shops" when Robert Blake approaches the Italian quarter in Providence,[657] with the Italian community and its individual members otherwise depicted in a sympathetic light.

In the end, there are only three stories in Lovecraft's oeuvre that can be labelled as problematic with respect to racial and immigrant-related attitudes, and they are "The Street," "The Horror at Red Hook," and the ghostwritten "Medusa's Coil." The first of these, later repudiated by Lovecraft,[658] briefly describes the history of immigration into Boston, from colonial times to the present, with the focus on contemporary immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe who were associated with anarchism and political radicalism and the threat of communist revolution. This was a current topic at the time Lovecraft wrote "The Street" (he was directly inspired by the Boston police strike in 1919),[659]

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[654] See Lovecraft (2015b: 274).

[655] See, for example, Lovecraft (2015c: 263).

[656] See Lovecraft (2015c: 317, 323).

[657] See Lovecraft (2015c: 455).

[658] See Lovecraft (2007b: 119-120), in which he referred to the story as a failure, in the company of several other tales he labelled as "worthless junk." See also footnote 641.

[659] The Boston police strike on September 9, 1919, was a significant event with serious and long-term consequences, since parts of the city of Boston descended into lawlessness and rioting that lasted for days and that necessitated sending in the State Guard to restore order. This event was one in a chain of incidents known as the first Red Scare in the United States, in which radicals (both home-grown and immigrant) were involved in a string of labour strikes, bombings, and riots. Not every strike had direct radical underpinnings, a case in point being the Boston police strike itself, which was branded as an example of Bolshevistic insurgency despite there being little evidence to support this (see Murray 1964: 122-134), but finer distinctions were soon lost in a widespread climate of hysteria. Earlier in the year, a general strike had brought the city of Seattle to a standstill for five days in February, and this had been followed by a wave of anarchist bombings and assassination attempts in April and June (during the so-called Red Summer, now mostly remembered for its race riots). There was a real fear that a Russian-style violent revolution was on the way, and the fact that many workers did have genuine concerns about low pay and poor working conditions was quickly lost sight of and ignored (on all sides of the conflict) in the impenetrable fog of political extremism.

and the story must therefore stand as his strongest anti-immigrant and anti-radical statement in fiction. Lovecraft is certainly entitled to view anarchism and political radicalism as a threat to be opposed, but the conclusion of the story, in which the street itself rises up against its immigrant inhabitants (killing everyone by collapsing all the buildings, thus pre-empting a planned revolution), is as extreme as the methods of the radicals he despised. However, this tale was a product of Lovecraft's infancy as a writer, and it cannot be labelled as significant with respect to his mature production in the late 1920s and the 1930s.

"The Horror at Red Hook" concerns itself with underground cult activities that are the work of illegal immigrants smuggled ashore by organised crime, but the tale is marred by an excessive amount of derogatory descriptions that have their source in Lovecraft's personal experiences in New York and his consequent loathing of the city and its people.[660] At the same time, it was the lawless conditions of the Red Hook slum in particular, and the effect these conditions have on the people who have to endure them, that underlay Lovecraft's attempts to extract a supernatural horror story from the surroundings in which he found himself (his apartment in Brooklyn was within walking distance of Red Hook).[661] A second notable element, aside from illegal immigration, is the depiction of the cultists as being the product of degeneration and miscegenation – a group of them is at one point led by "an Arab with a hatefully negroid mouth"[662] – with the cult idea otherwise having its origin in Murray's witch-cult and Machen's little people from the east, as

660 See Lovecraft (2015a: 482-488).

661 This suggestion is made explicit in the following: "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; and he had often viewed with an anthropologist's shudder the chanting, cursing processions of blear-eyed and pockmarked young men which wound their way along in the dark small hours of morning" (Lovecraft 2015a: 485).

662 See Lovecraft (2015a: 496). However, the actual cult leader is a man named Robert Suydam, who, as a member of an old and settled New York family, is the opposite of a mixed-blood immigrant.

previously discussed.[663] However, there is also a secondary focus on miscegenation in "The Horror at Red Hook," in that the cult has attempted a forcible mixing between human victims and some sort of supernatural demons.[664] This has been temporarily thwarted at the conclusion of the tale, but soon the cult creeps back, which is why the narrative ends with "a swarthy squinting hag teaching a small child some whispered patois in the shadow of an areaway."[665]

The ghostwritten "Medusa's Coil" is the only story in Lovecraft's production that can be said to contain an explicit racist motif. The twist ending of the story, in which Marceline Bedard is revealed as having been "in deceitfully slight proportion […] a negress,"[666] appears to have originated with Lovecraft's ghostwriting client,[667] but Lovecraft clearly had no compunctions about making use of this idea. He also had the narrator express nostalgic pro-slavery sentiments over "a civilisation and social order now sadly extinct,"[668] which was not uncommon at the time, as evidenced by the success enjoyed by *Gone with the Wind* some years later, and which could thus be seen as a characteristic element of the

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[663] The concept was soon to be developed much further in "The Call of Cthulhu, in which the cult is depicted as being particularly widespread among sailors, which is reasonable given its origins in the Pacific. Thus, the narrator's grand-uncle is apparently poisoned by "a nautical-looking negro" (Lovecraft 2015b: 22), and Gustaf Johansen is similarly killed in some manner by two "Lascar sailors" (ibid: 49), meaning that the sailors were from India or south-east Asia. More importantly, the cultists are consistently referred to as being outcasts of mixed origin, with "mongrel" being a recurring term (ibid: 33, 36-37, 41, 43-44, 48). Later, there is "a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes" (ibid: 46) onboard a steam yacht, this being a reference to South Pacific islanders who were employed as workers, under difficult conditions often involving abuse, in Australian towns in the decades around the turn of the century. The hybrid cultists, moreover, are contrasted against the unmixed representatives of different ethnicities that Lovecraft included among the nominal heroes of the tale, such as a Spaniard named Joseph D. Galvez (who participated in the police raid in Louisiana) and a Portuguese sailor named Rodriguez (who finds the door through which Cthulhu emerges).

[664] See Lovecraft (2015a: 503).

[665] See Lovecraft (2015a: 505). It is worth noting that the problematic elements in "The Horror at Red Hook" did not attract any attention when the tale was first published. On the contrary, it is a telling commentary on the times that the story, which Lovecraft himself regarded as so bad (since it was written with the pulp market in mind) that he had hesitated to send it to *Weird Tales*, was accepted with enthusiasm and quickly became one of his most popular works. See Lovecraft and Derleth (2013a: 30, 52, 102) and Lovecraft and Smith (2017: 85).

[666] See Lovecraft (2017a: 298).

[667] See Lovecraft (2006: 244) for his notes on the tale: "unmistakably (surprise to reader as in original text) a negress."

[668] See Lovecraft (2017a: 251).

Missouri setting, but it is clear that Lovecraft still shared this outlook to at least some degree in the early 1930s.[669]

As for the main antagonist of the tale, Marceline is a one-dimensional cliché, and as such she is a cautionary tale illustrating the fact that Lovecraft's disinterest in creating fully fleshed-out characters[670] could on occasion result in poor writing when combined with an ideological standpoint that otherwise had no place in his fiction. At the same time, Lovecraft had shown himself capable of depicting black people in a sympathetic light in other tales, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* in particular, for all that the character of Hannah comes across as a typical "mammy" in that story,[671] but there is no sign of this in "Medusa's Coil." The tale, in short, has no redeeming qualities, and must stand as a blot on Lovecraft's record.

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[669] See, for example, Lovecraft (2019: 205-206) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 466-467; 2011b: 562). Lovecraft's brief comments on the matter seem to suggest his agreeing with the notion that "inferior" people would do better under slavery, since they were deemed as incapable of handling their own affairs efficiently, but that the conditions of slavery would in such cases need to be strictly regulated and monitored. But he also made it clear that he saw slavery as impractical in modern times. Another contributing detail in this context is the colonial history of Rhode Island in which slavery was a notable component, and Lovecraft sometimes commented approvingly on the plantation culture of those long-gone days, particularly in the parts of Rhode Island from which he derived his maternal ancestry, see, for example, Lovecraft (2018: 345-346). The extent to which such sentiments faded in step with his changing political views in his final years is unclear, since definitive statements are lacking. See also the section on Rhode Island in Reid-Merritt (2019).

[670] See, for example, Anderson (2011: 128-129), who observes that "Lovecraft did not consider character development an important part of his fiction, and this lack of character development effectively reinforces his theme of human insignificance."

[671] See Lovecraft (2015b: 271, 273, 297). Examples of this sometimes occurred in real life as well, as when Lovecraft spoke with affection of a "faithful" elderly black woman who was occasionally employed by his aunt to help out with chores, see Lovecraft (1968: 47, 51) and Lovecraft and Howard (2011a: 140-141). In 1934, in the midst of a lyrical description of the "earthly paradise" of Charleston, he mentioned the "*street-cries* of Charleston – uttered by negro hucksters" as forming "an element of tremendous charm" (Lovecraft 2019: 348).

8.2.5. Miscegenation

Aside from "Medusa's Coil," the attempted mixing with demons in "The Horror at Red Hook," and some scattered references in other stories,[672] there are only two other tales by Lovecraft that are concerned with miscegenation as a major theme: "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth."[673] In the first of these tales, the narrative revolves around hybrids that has resulted from the mixing of white people with apes. This, of course, is a case of species-mixing rather than race-mixing, and the point is also made that the black tribes in the surrounding area strongly disapprove of such mixing and the resulting hybrid offspring.[674] Given Lovecraft's racialist and polygenetic ideas, there may seem to be some cause for the suggestion that Lovecraft intended the apes that had overrun the white jungle city to represent a biologically distinct black tribe of some sort,[675] but this interpretation does not hold up on closer scrutiny. This is made clear by the fact that Lovecraft makes an explicit distinction between great apes, white people, and black people as separate groups in the

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[672] There is, for example, a comment in "Herbert West – Reanimator" about Kid O'Brien's "most un-Hibernian hooked nose" (Lovecraft 2015a: 306), which suggests that O'Brien is of mixed Irish and Jewish ancestry. In "He," the villainous (and undead) old man speaks of "mongrel salvages" [sic] (ibid: 513) in reference to some Native Americans from whom he learned forbidden arts in the distant past. In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, the cultist servants of the evil Joseph Curwen are described as "a sullen pair of aged Narragansett Indians; the husband dumb and curiously scared, and the wife of a very repulsive cast of countenance, probably due to a mixture of negro blood" (Lovecraft 2015b: 228). Curwen's sailors are "mongrel riff-raff" and "mongrel seamen" (ibid: 233, 245), and his henchman, a man named Gomes, is alternately described as "a villainous-looking Portuguese half-caste" from the waterfront and an "evil-looking mulatto" (ibid: 302, 315). See also footnote 663.

[673] The ghostwritten "The Diary of Alonzo Typer" is also tangentially connected to this category, with its references to the "mixed Chorazin villagers" (Lovecraft 2017a: 523), one of whom is a "swarthy, simian-faced, Indian-like" (ibid: 524) man. Similarly, the van der Heyl family has mixed its blood with something that is clearly non-human, which is hinted at in some paintings studied by the narrator (ibid: 528-529, 534).

[674] The same point against miscegenation is also made in "The Shadow over Innsmouth," in which neighbouring Pacific islanders wipe out a tribe that has been mixing with the fish-frogs, and in "Medusa's Coil," in which the black servants disapprove of Marceline's mixed origins, see Lovecraft (2015c: 191-192; 2017a: 259). Only in the latter case is this an example of actual race-mixing.

[675] As to the question of why there is a white city in the jungle to begin with, an answer is suggested by the following comment in a letter in 1931: "I feel sure, as you do, that Africa has swallowed many a white tribe both Aryan and Semitic" (Lovecraft and Howard 2011a: 140). See also footnote 298.

course of the narrative. In this context, the following comments by Lovecraft in a letter in 1934 are also of interest:[676]

> Your new friend certainly has covered the globe a bit – although I think his tale of negroes crossing with gorillas is a bit exaggerated. Legends of this sort are common in Africa, but are undoubtedly without foundation. Experiments conducted by the Dutch years ago, & more lately the Yerkes foundation in America, prove that gorillas are really very distant from all existing human species – our own simian ancestors having been apes of a wholly different sort. No fertile crossing between gorillas & negroes is possible, & gorillas are not attracted in any way by human beings. (Lovecraft 2016a: 93)

This letter was composed almost fifteen years after the writing of "Arthur Jermyn," at a time when Lovecraft had changed his mind on many things during the intervening years, but it also reflects his life-long scepticism – a scepticism that would have made him doubt this kind of story just as much in 1920, if he had come across it then, as in 1934.

As for "The Shadow over Innsmouth," this is another tale concerned with species-mixing rather than race-mixing, which is spelled out in the conversation between Olmstead and Zadok Allen.[677] The point is also emphasised, earlier in the narrative, that immigrants are as unwelcome in Innsmouth as everyone else,[678] which makes it clear that the fish-frogs from the ocean constitute an entirely different non-human civilisation – one that, moreover, is far older and far more powerful than humanity, and capable of creating artworks of unearthly beauty. Exactly why these fish-frogs desire to mate with humans, or "hankered arter mixin' with the folks," as Zadok Allen puts it, remains unclear, but it may have something

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[676] The letter makes a reference to the noted psychologist Robert Yerkes, whose work was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. See Spiro (2009) for detailed discussions on Yerkes's work in the context of his views on eugenics and immigration.

[677] See Lovecraft (2015c: 189-190).

[678] "Foreigners seldom settled there, and [...] a number of Poles and Portuguese who had tried it had been scattered in a peculiarly drastic fashion" (Lovecraft 2015c: 166). It is thus simply not the case, as suggested by Bealer (2018: 234), that Lovecraft's story "literalizes the racial anxieties activated by modernist social change into a horror plot," and that the fish-frogs are "for all intents and purposes, racially marked immigrants." This misinterpretation is grounded in Bealer's apparent failure to realise that the fish-frogs are not extraterrestrials (there is nothing in the tale to suggest an alien origin for these beings, nor would interbreeding with humans have been possible in such a case). For similar reasons, Newitz (2006: 91) refers to the "colonial allegories" in Lovecraft's fiction, by which she implies that Lovecraft's alien races are representations of racial minorities and immigrant communities. But the clichéd idea of aliens invading the planet in order to breed with earth women is the kind of pure pulp for which Lovecraft (who was always careful to get the science right) had nothing but contempt, and, in fact, the opposite occurs in the case of the fish-frogs: it is human males who have fish-frog wives.

to do with an ultimately shared evolutionary origin: "human folks has got a kind o' relation to sech water-beasts – that everything alive come aout o' the water onct, an' only needs a little change to go back agin."[679] This suggests the possibility that present-day humanity is merely a degenerate offshoot from an original superior race (as in "The Mound"), and that a union with the immortal fish-frogs is a way for the resulting offspring to return to its true origins. From the human point of view, the town of Innsmouth is indeed "an exaggerated case of civic degeneration," "a community slipping far down the cultural scale," and "a significant and exaggerated example of communal decay," but from the hybrid point of view this is merely the first step on a return journey leading to the ocean,[680] "and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory for ever."[681] Given that humanity is eventually doomed either way, this presents the only available escape for those chosen few who decide not to kill themselves.

Lovecraft's views on miscegenation were rooted in his adherence to some elements of degeneration theory and his pessimistic belief in the coming collapse of civilisation. Another intellectual underpinning was his racialism, based in physical anthropology, according to which the different racial groups of humanity (down to the smallest divisions according to ethnicity and nationality) were clearly separable and distinct from each other.[682] Race-mixing was therefore to be avoided, since miscegenation resulted in the weakening of both the contributing race stocks, which in turn led to decadence and degeneration. The ultimate end of civilisation was unavoidable, but an adherence to ancestral ways could at least delay the inevitable for a while and make existence endurable. Thus, race-mixing (in "Medusa's Coil"), species-mixing (in the stories analysed above), and the unspecified biological

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679 See Lovecraft (2015c: 189). See Shubin (2008) for an example of how a palaeontological study of ancient fish can tell us something about who we are. In fact, humans are "modified fish," as Stewart-Williams (2020: 4) put it.

680 Recall in this context Lovecraft's expressed desire to write a story from the point of view of the monster.

681 See Lovecraft (2015c: 166, 168, 180-181, 230).

682 It is worth noting in this context that Lovecraft's earlier emphasis on superior and inferior groups was gradually replaced by a more egalitarian belief in differences in kind rather than in rank, and he also came to see these differences as cultural rather than biological in origin (see footnote 306). See, for example, Lovecraft (2003b: 210), in which he argued against Alfred Galpin, who was apparently sympathetic to Nazism at this time (the summer of 1934): "The culture a man has is not what [h]is blood has determined, but what the massed impressions & traditions he has received have given him. Jewish culture is not a product of blood, but of historic accident. So is ours."

mixing that produced fictional chimaera-like monsters (in a handful of other tales)[683] all constitute parallel treatments of the same basic idea involving the problematic nature of hybrids. However, this is not to suggest that Lovecraft was attempting some form of political advocacy or allegory against race-mixing – which is especially the case since the monstrous hybrid is also a Gothic staple of long standing.[684] Lovecraft did not write in allegories,[685] and the negative consequences of miscegenation were thus merely an unquestioned assumption (now obviously known to be false on genetic grounds) among many others on the basis of which he proceeded with his storytelling, the thematic concerns of which revolved mainly around the Gothic and the cosmic.

8.3. Concluding Argument

Attempting to examine the difficult issue of Lovecraft's racial views is not to take a political or moral stand on the content of those views, but merely to hopefully discern whether and, if so, to what extent they had on impact on Lovecraft's fiction. It is obviously not pleasant to be confronted with the blunt and ugly language that Lovecraft sometimes used in his debates on these matters, especially from the perspective of

683 Notable examples include "the hybrid winged things that no sound eye could ever wholly grasp" (Lovecraft 2015a: 414) in "The Festival," "the mummies that are neither of man nor of beast" (ibid: 440) in "Under the Pyramids," and the "lumpish hybrid things" (Lovecraft 2017a: 370) in "The Horror in the Museum" – and then there is of course Great Cthulhu himself, who is described as a blend of "an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature" (Lovecraft 2015b: 23) in "The Call of Cthulhu."

684 Frankenstein's monster being a primary example in that regard, perhaps comparable to the scientifically reanimated corpses that the decadent civilisation in "The Mound" made use of for various purposes.

685 "Metaphor and allegory are the smoke screen wherewith all mystics, theists, and obscurantists have shielded themselves from truth since the dawn of speculative thought" (Lovecraft 2006: 63). One might thus wonder, in this context, why Lovecraft insisted on his aesthetic theory of strict realism except for the one "chosen marvel" from outside, if, in fact, the chosen marvel was merely a symbol for non-white people or immigrants. Surely he would not have phrased it like that if racism was his actual intent. Also, he never referred to this hypothetical intent, nor spelled it out, even though he otherwise always answered questions and discussed his thinking in a straightforward manner. It seems unlikely that he would have kept his real intent secret on this one subject matter, particularly since he did not otherwise shy away from stating his opinions on race if the subject came up. And critical interpretations concerned with reading into Lovecraft's texts meanings he supposedly was "unaware" of are of no help in this situation, since they are not the purpose of this thesis and, particularly, since the same kind of reinterpretation can also be performed on these critical interpretations themselves: Maybe the critics presenting them are unaware of the extent of their personal hostility in this matter, which therefore colours their criticism. In short, all these suggestions become exceedingly unlikely once we know something about the relevant background.

the present, but it is still the case that such emotional responses are irrelevant (and, in fact, counterproductive) if the goal is a fact-based examination. For this reason, it is my considered position that Lovecraft's racial opinions were not important to his fiction-writing, and I base this viewpoint on the following items of supporting evidence: 1) the majority of his fiction contains no discernable elements relevant to a discussion on racism, as evidenced by the fact that the exhaustive list of examples given earlier derive from a limited subset of stories; 2) many of his tales involve a lone protagonist facing a weird phenomenon of some kind that is clearly non-human in origin (this being an integral part of the animating idea behind the narrative), and it is thus difficult to see how race-based objections could apply to a story in which there are hardly any humans; 3) such tales are clearly not allegorical in nature, but are instead concerned with mood and atmosphere; 4) none of Lovecraft's essays, which fill five volumes, deals with race or immigration as the main subject, and Lovecraft never joined an anti-immigration organisation nor served as a political activist for a race-related ideology (compared, for example, to the immense amount of work he undertook voluntarily and without compensation for the benefit of amateur journalism and weird fiction writing); 5) Lovecraft's negative attitude towards race-mixing was grounded in his preoccupation with larger concerns having to do with decadence, degeneration, and cultural pessimism, similarly to how his negative attitude towards immigration was merely one component among many in his larger resistance to modernity; and 6) Lovecraft's views on race can in the context of this discussion be contrasted with, for example, his views on religion, which is another subject that almost never finds expression in his fiction,[686] despite the fact that he was just as vocal on the ills of religion as he was on the ills of race-mixing. But, significantly, he is not censured for this, nor has anyone to my knowledge ever suggested that his fiction is a vehicle for his anti-religious atheism, other than in the trivial sense that cosmic horror obviously implies the absence of a benevolent monotheistic god. This final point is intended to illustrate the fact that there was much that Lovecraft was passionate about in his life (to a greater degree than his comparatively limited writings on race) that never found fictional expression – such as his endlessly reiterated and

686 Aside from the obvious aspect of the secret cults, but this theme is not pertinent to the discussion, since Lovecraft's fictional cults served an atmospheric purpose and were not intended as a commentary on religion.

virulently expressed hatred of pulp writing, or the lyrical panegyrics to colonial architecture that filled hundreds of pages in his letters.

It needs to be emphasised that the goal of increased understanding does not imply that a "defence" of Lovecraft is therefore being constructed. It should be possible to conduct a discussion on difficult matters without repeatedly having to signal that we do not today agree with or accept the racial opinions of a man who lived prior to the great societal changes in the Western world in the second half of the 20th century. What matters is the scholarly conclusion to which the evidence points, and our willingness to accept this conclusion (as well as the evidence) if the argument is sound. And my conclusion is that Lovecraft's racial views obviously constituted an integrated part of the cultural and intellectual New England background that he took for granted, but that this is also the reason why those views in themselves were not very important. Lovecraft was not an advocate of politically motivated racial ideologies (the closest he came to that was his opposition to race-mixing because he believed it contributed to Western decadence). Instead, he was opposed to immigration and the presence of people not of Anglo-Saxon origin because he wished to preserve an unchanged traditional environment (this is the same reason why he also always reacted with great hostility to development projects that necessitated the razing of colonial buildings).

If, on the other hand, we do not regard Lovecraft's racial views as a small part of a larger package, but instead extract those views and make them stand in isolation as the proposed main motivating force behind the majority of his life and work, then it seems to me that the resulting conclusions must be rather one-sided. Compartmentalising his thinking in this exclusive manner is counter-productive because it ignores context and elevates what amounts to little more than some unquestioned assumptions to the position of philosophical foundation stones, and this is what I mean when I say that Lovecraft's racial opinions remained unexamined and, for the most part, unimportant to his fiction as far as motivational or inspirational sources are concerned. To reiterate, Lovecraft took certain social attitudes for granted, which is why traces of them occasionally appear in some of his tales, but it is precisely because he took these attitudes for granted that we can assume that he did not think about them much. Except for some components in his political sea change late in life, Lovecraft never freed himself from the racial ideas of his cultural background for the very reason that these ideas were not important to him, either in his everyday life or in his creative life. Instead,

it was only in the things that mattered to him that Lovecraft differed from his surroundings, most notably in his gentlemanly notions and in his adherence to the traditional past.

As a final point, a cynical critic can obviously read any desired interpretation into Lovecraft's texts,[687] including one that is preoccupied with race, but that is not the purpose of this thesis. The issue is not what critics can read into a text, or how readers (particularly if they are non-white) react to some of Lovecraft's personal attitudes that may sometimes be revealed – the issue, as stated in Chapter 1, is Lovecraft's *communicative intent* with his work. In the end, readers of Lovecraft are obviously free to continue reading him however they wish,[688] but if Lovecraft is read with a communicative purpose in mind, then the above points are worth keeping in mind.

Ultimately, what does emerge as the foundational bedrock on which not just Lovecraft's life and thought was built, but also the larger part of his fiction, is his view of himself as a gentleman author engaged in the delicate process of self-expression via the medium of his personal art, against the melancholic and pessimistically coloured (and romanticised) background of a once great but now fading aristocratic civilisation that had been replaced by commercialism and modernity. This particular positioning of himself also fuelled a deep-seated need for an imaginative escape from the oppressive ordinariness of the present, and also from the elements of chaotic change simultaneously brought about by time and cultural decadence, in which the sole avenue of escape was the imagination, coupled with an adherence to the traditional past as the only available anchoring point in an otherwise meaningless existence.

Lovecraft's very first story written as an adult, "The Tomb," looked back to previous centuries with its setting involving such details as a burned-down mansion, the Boston gentry (to which the narrator's family belongs), and a mention of "the Augustan wits and rimesters,"[689] while the narrator himself is not only "a dreamer and a visionary" but also "[w]ealthy beyond the necessity of a commercial life."[690] Almost all of Lovecraft's subsequent protagonists and narrators are also gentlemen,

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687 See footnote 5.

688 "[T]he author is content to let his images speak for themselves in beauty – the reader to draw whatever lesson – if any – he feels prompted to draw," Lovecraft (2004b: 219) wrote in 1925. This was in an essay on the poetry written by an amateur journalism colleague, but, as I have argued elsewhere, the links between Lovecraft's views on poetry and fiction-writing were strong.

689 See Lovecraft (2015a: 45).

690 See Lovecraft (2015a: 39).

either explicitly so, or implicitly through their manner and behaviour, and even if they are only rarely members of the landed gentry, they still tend to belong to the upper middle class by virtue of being trained and educated professionals. Thus, the narrator in "Dagon" is a supercargo (ranking only below the captain of the ship) who, after his vessel has been captured by a German sea-raider during the war, notes that "we of her crew were treated with all the fairness and consideration due us as naval prisoners."[691] In "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," the narrator works as a medical intern at the "state psychopathic institution,"[692] presumably as the final step on his way to becoming a full psychiatrist. In "The Transition of Juan Romero," the narrator has fallen from grace in some manner which is why he has left Britain, but prior to that he had served in India, perhaps as a member of the elite Indian Civil Service. The autobiographical character of Randolph Carter, in his first appearance in "The Statement of Randolph Carter," is a gentleman scholar of the occult and the forbidden who is addressing his statement to his fellow gentlemen. The narrator in "Celephaïs" is the last of his family, his money and lands gone, and at the conclusion of the tale there is an additional detail concerning the nearby Trevor Towers manor house, in which "a notably fat and especially offensive millionaire brewer enjoys the purchased atmosphere of extinct nobility."[693]

The commander of the German submarine in "The Temple" is a crude caricature of a Prussian aristocrat, and thus falls somewhat outside of the present discussion, but is nevertheless in the same general category. The title character in "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" is the scion of an old and noble family that has fallen on hard times, and he is also a poet and a dreamer, but his mother (who is a music-hall singer, her common origins signifying the decline of the noble line) "was not without notions of what a nobleman's dignity should be, and saw to it that her son received the best education which limited money could provide."[694] In "The Quest of Iranon," the narrator believes himself to have once been a prince whose "wealth is in little memories and dreams," until he learns that he was merely a beggar's boy, whose lifelong quest for "a fair city where dreams are understood" has been futile.[695] In "The Moon-Bog," the character of Denys Barry has made his fortune in America, which has allowed him to buy back "the old castle" in

[691] See Lovecraft (2015a: 52).
[692] See Lovecraft (2015a: 72).
[693] See Lovecraft (2015a: 191).
[694] See Lovecraft (2015a: 177).
[695] See Lovecraft (2015a: 248, 255).

Ireland, where "he wished to enjoy his wealth among ancestral scenes,"[696] until his misguided notions about progress lead to his undoing.

The noble origins of the hubristic protagonist of "The Other Gods" is made clear in the following observation on class differences: "Atal was only the son of an innkeeper, and was sometimes afraid; but Barzai's father had been a landgrave who dwelt in an ancient castle, so he had no common superstition in his blood, and only laughed at the fearful cotters,"[697] but his arrogance does not shield him from his fate. The undead protagonist of "The Outsider" dwells in an underground setting of some sort, reminiscent of a classic Gothic mansion or castle, and then, when he emerges above ground, goes to "a venerable ivied castle in a thickly wooded park" in which a ball is in progress, where he learns that he is always "an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men."[698]

The sculptor at the centre of the narrative in "Hypnos" lives and works in "the tower studio chamber of the old manor-house in hoary Kent," and he describes the friend (or double) he thinks he has found as "a faun's statue out of antique Hellas, dug from a temple's ruins and brought somehow to life in our stifling age only to feel the chill and pressure of devastating years."[699] In "The Hound," the narrator and his friend St. John similarly have a "great stone house where we jointly dwelt, alone and servantless," in which they "had followed enthusiastically every aesthetic and intellectual movement which promised respite from our devastating ennui."[700]

The Gothic narrative in "The Lurking Fear" centres on the isolated Martense mansion in the Catskills, in which a once noble Dutch family has mixed its blood with local commoners and then committed inbreeding to such an extent that the result is a clan of degenerate half-apes. There is also a marked contrast between the cultured capabilities of the narrator and the helpless and ignorant squatters (later repeated in the case of the Cajuns in "The Call of Cthulhu"). In "The Rats in the Walls," similarly to "The Moon-Bog," the narrator buys back and restores his ancestral seat of Exham Priory in England, but is unable to avoid reverting to type. This occurs in the presence of "five eminent authorities, all men who could be trusted to respect any family

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[696] See Lovecraft (2015a: 256).
[697] See Lovecraft (2015a: 275).
[698] See Lovecraft (2015a: 269, 272).
[699] See Lovecraft (2015a: 326-327).
[700] See Lovecraft (2015a: 339-340).

disclosures"[701] – due to the family's tainted heredity that has accumulated since prehistoric times. In "The Shunned House," the character of Dr. Whipple is an "old-fashioned gentleman, and a local historian of note," and when the house at the centre of the narrative has been cleansed of its unnatural presence at the end of the tale, the narrator feels "a queer regret when it is torn down to make way for a tawdry shop or vulgar apartment building."[702]

In "The Horror at Red Hook," the antagonist Robert Suydam is "a lettered recluse of ancient Dutch family, possessed originally of barely independent means, and inhabiting the spacious but ill-preserved mansion which his grandfather had built."[703] This suggests that Suydam is essentially a Dutch version of Lovecraft himself who never lost his childhood home, and even though he is eventually defeated, the cult he represented soon returns and the decay cannot be stopped: "Apes danced in Asia to those horrors, and the cancer lurks secure and spreading where furtiveness hides in rows of decaying brick."[704] The antagonist in "He," an undead old man born in colonial times, is described as having "a noble, even a handsome, elderly countenance," bearing "the marks of a lineage and refinement unusual for the age and place." This means that the present age is one of decadence and degeneration compared to the past, and the vision of the future he reveals is a culminating one in which New York has become a fallen "corpse-city" swarming with invaders.[705] In "Cool Air," the sympathetic (albeit technically undead) Dr. Muñoz is "a man of birth, cultivation, and discrimination,"[706] described in the following terms:

> A high-bred face of masterful though not arrogant expression was adorned by a short iron-grey full beard, and an old-fashioned pince-nez shielded the full, dark eyes and surmounted an aquiline nose which gave a Moorish touch to a physiognomy otherwise dominantly Celtiberian. Thick, well-trimmed hair that argued the punctual calls of a barber was parted gracefully above a high forehead; and the whole picture was one of striking intelligence and superior blood and breeding. (Lovecraft 2015b: 14)

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701 See Lovecraft (2015a: 390).

702 See Lovecraft (2015a: 456, 479).

703 See Lovecraft (2015a: 486). Compare with the ending in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, in which Randolph Carter wakes up at home in Boston to "the perfume of trellised vines [...] from arbours his grandfather had reared" (Lovecraft 2015b: 213).

704 See Lovecraft (2015a: 505).

705 See Lovecraft (2015a: 509, 515).

706 See Lovecraft (2015b: 14).

But not even a will and a mind as superior as this can stave off the inevitable decay that leads to the eventual complete disintegration of the doctor.

In "The Call of Cthulhu," the narrator Francis Wayland Thurston is the heir and executor of his grand-uncle George Gammell Angell, who was Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages at Brown University, and who set Thurston on the trail of the hidden Cthulhu cult. This culminates in Thurston's realisation that the eventual end of humanity at the hands of a rising Cthulhu is inevitable: "Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men."[707] This, of course, is a similar insight to the one with which the narrator of "Dagon" was faced. In "The Silver Key," the dream apparition of Carter's grandfather is that of a "grey old scholar, as vivid as in life," who "spoke long and earnestly of their ancient line, and of the strange visions of the delicate and sensitive men who composed it,"[708] which allows Carter to finally escape mundane reality back into the dreams of his childhood.

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward contains references to various gentlemanly characters such as "the famous wit" Dr. Checkley, as well as "another man of taste and breeding [...] Mr. John Merritt, an elderly English gentleman of literary and scientific leanings." Later there is the sinister Transylvanian nobleman Baron Ferenczy who is described as "a person [not] likely to appeal to correct and conservative New England gentlefolk."[709] Ward's own family is sufficiently well-born to employ a butler, who later resigns after an encounter with Joseph Curwen, since that was "no way for a young gentleman to look at an honest person."[710] The tale as a whole looks back to the eighteenth century, and involves the downfall of Ward, whose undoing was his "love of mystery and of the past."[711] Dr. Willett's defeat of Curwen at the culmination of the narrative achieves a temporary forestalling of future events (hinted at by Ward in his letter) that would otherwise have caused the end of the world in some manner. The same thing occurs in "The Dunwich Horror," in which the "erudite Henry Armitage (A.M. Miskatonic, Ph. D. Princeton, Litt. D. Johns Hopkins)" and his two professorial colleagues travel to the "repellently decadent" village of Dunwich, where the inhabitants "have come to form a race by themselves" after having "gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New England backwaters." In the

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[707] See Lovecraft (2015b: 55).
[708] See Lovecraft (2015b: 79).
[709] See Lovecraft (2015b: 230, 285).
[710] See Lovecraft (2015b: 298-299).
[711] See Lovecraft (2015b: 362).

end, the professors manage to prevent Old Whateley and his part-human grandson from achieving their design to "clear off the earth" in preparation for the return of the nebulous Old Ones (see also the further analysis of this tale in the next chapter).[712]

In "The Whisperer in Darkness," the narrator, Albert N. Wilmarth, Esq., is "an instructor of literature at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Massachusetts, and an enthusiastic amateur student of New England folklore." But it is the other protagonist of the tale, Henry W. Akeley, who is perhaps a more likely fictional stand-in for Lovecraft, as Akeley is "the last representative on his home soil of a long, locally distinguished line of jurists, administrators, and gentlemen-agriculturists."[713] Later, when Wilmarth travels into the Vermont wilderness, his impressions are familiar ones:

> I was entering an altogether older-fashioned and more primitive New England than the mechanised, urbanised coastal and southern areas where all my life had been spent; an unspoiled, ancestral New England without the foreigners and factory-smoke, billboards and concrete roads, of the sections which modernity has touched. There would be odd survivals of that continuous native life whose deep roots make it the one authentic outgrowth of the landscape – the continuous native life which keeps alive strange ancient memories, and fertilises the soil for shadowy, marvellous, and seldom-mentioned beliefs. (Lovecraft 2015b: 508)

It is change and modernity that is the enemy (of which immigration is merely a component, as previously stated), while, at the same time, the "continuous native life" is also threatened by the "odd survivals" that are brought to life by those who delve too deep due to curiosity.

In "The Shadow over Innsmouth," the female curator of the Historical Society in Newburyport is described as an "ancient gentlewoman," whereas the narrator is a university-educated young man who is going on a tour around New England for the purposes of "scenic, architectural, and antiquarian diversions." He is also trying to trace his links to old New England families, but the "decay and desolation" he encounters in Innsmouth is only a prelude to his own devolution.[714] In "The Dreams in the Witch House," the young protagonist Walter Gilman is a student of mathematics at Miskatonic University, and he is also the object of excessive deference from working class immigrants in the form of their

[712] See Lovecraft (2015b: 419, 433, 450).
[713] See Lovecraft (2015b: 468, 474).
[714] See Lovecraft (2015c: 167, 169, 224).

repeated references to "the gentleman" and "the young gentleman."[715] In "The Thing on the Doorstep," the likewise young protagonist Edward Derby is the product of a "private education and coddled seclusion" that has fostered "a strange, secretive inner life in the boy, with imagination as his one avenue of freedom." His inherited wealth allows him to live in the family mansion with his father's servants, as is also the case with the main antagonist, whose home is "a half-decayed mansion" in Innsmouth, where he employs sinister and half-human servants.[716]

"The Shadow out of Time" introduces the last in a long line of scholarly narrators, a married university professor at the commencement of the tale, whose parents are "both of wholesome old Haverhill stock,"[717] but the experiences he undergoes in the course of the narrative convinces him that there is no hope for the future of humanity. But he also finds some consolation in the fact that he has no concrete evidence for his belief, and he expresses the wish that no such evidence will ever be found (which would allow him to maintain his illusions), as he writes his account in the ship that is bringing him home. In "The Haunter of the Dark," finally, the protagonist Robert Blake, the last of Lovecraft's sensitive artists, is "a writer and painter wholly devoted to the field of myth, dream, terror, and superstition, and avid in his quest for scenes and effects of a bizarre, spectral sort," who creates his art in inspiring surroundings, "the upper floor of a venerable dwelling in a grassy court […] a cosy and fascinating place, in a little garden oasis of village-like antiquity." But he is inescapably drawn to a distant Gothic church marked by "[d]esolation and decay,"[718] and this becomes his downfall.

As can be seen from this lengthy, albeit incomplete, catalogue, there are few stories in Lovecraft's oeuvre that fall outside of this category and the essential elements it contains: gentlemanly characters whose outlook is characterised by cultural pessimism and a sense of loss and melancholy, and a concomitant desire to escape their situation. And at the same time, it was Lovecraft's own desire for escape that served as the basis for the depiction of the weird phenomenon that is almost always the main focus of the narrative. It is within this larger framework that all of Lovecraft's major themes must be sorted, and his pessimistic cosmic horror as well as his focus on Gothic decline are thus best regarded as

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715 See Lovecraft (2015c: 247-248, 253, 257, 263, 265).
716 See Lovecraft (2015c: 325, 329).
717 See Lovecraft (2015c: 364).
718 See Lovecraft (2015c: 452-453, 457).

outgrowths or further developments of the larger underlying pessimism that lies at the foundation of his thinking.

It is not difficult to find additional examples of these tendencies, such as the love the narrator in "Polaris" holds for his native land in the distant past, which is now long gone and lost, there having been "naught save ice and snow for thousands of years" where it was once located,[719] or the loss of the fairytale land of dreams to which Basil Elton may never again return because of his hubris in "The White Ship," or even the fall of the great city in "The Doom That Came to Sarnath." Closer to the real world there was once a time of "nobler, departed centuries" in "The Street," just as there still is a "charmed circle of New-England life and traditions" in "The Terrible Old Man," although this has also turned into "New England's self-satisfied deafness to the delicate overtones of life" in "The Unnamable."[720] For the old viol-player in "The Music of Erich Zann," his "world of beauty lay in some far cosmos of the imagination,"[721] as is also the case for Thomas Olney in "The Strange High House in the Mist," Olney being a philosophy lecturer who rebels against his own conventionality. "Despite a conservative training – or because of it, for humdrum lives breed wistful longings of the unknown," he decides to visit the strange cottage in the sky, in the process possibly bringing about a trend that will cause "quaint Kingsport with its climbing lanes and archaic gables to drag listless down the years,"[722] as yet another example of unavoidable decline.

The deeper understanding of Lovecraft's background that has now hopefully emerged will also lead to the important realisation that Lovecraft was never a pulp writer, at least not by choice or inclination. The artistic themes he wished to express had no place in, and did not fit inside the framework of, the formulaic action stories of the pulps – a fact that Lovecraft raged against with increasing bitterness throughout the late 1920s and the 1930s. He expressed this view repeatedly on many occasions to most of his major correspondents – the following rant from 1932 is merely one example among many that display the same sentiments:

> I have virtually abandoned the idea of attempting professional fiction contributions. The repeated rebuffs I receive from capricious asses like Wright, Babbittesque dolts like that drivelling Clayton, & conventional namby-pambys like Shiras of Putnam's have about

[719] See Lovecraft (2015a: 70).
[720] See Lovecraft (2015a: 118, 141, 398).
[721] See Lovecraft (2015a: 283).
[722] See Lovecraft (2015b: 90, 96).

> paralysed me into a helpless & disgusted inarticulateness; so that I resolved some time ago to chuck the whole loathsome mess & return to to the purely non-professional basis of pre-1923 days, when I wrote spontaneously & without the expectation of marketing, and allowed my junk to pile up for whatever disposal or lack of it the future might provide. […] I had reached the point where, except after a stimulating repudiation of degrading commercialism, I was absolutely unable to write any fiction at all, despite the most serious efforts. It was a case of either repudiating cheap standards & restrictions, or of remaining wholly tongue (or pen) tied fictionally. Most unfortunately, I haven't the cleverness to concoct ingenious conventionalities according to the commercial specifications of unimaginative editors. I have either to write the stories that are in me, or else keep quiet. And I'll be shot if I'll let any pox-rotted sensation-pander gag me! (Lovecraft 2019: 203)

A few months prior to his death, he succinctly expressed the necessary requirements for him to be able to produce his art – in the context of possibly writing a novel – as follows (emphasis in the original):

> [A] calm, unhurried programme & an absolute freedom from criticism or [external] directions form a pre-requisite to any major effort requiring concentration – that is, so far as I am concerned. What is more, the thing would have to have a *natural start* – a spontaneous raison d'etre. I've never yet set [sic] down deliberately with the idea of "writing some kind of a story". Nothing but hack tripe would ever come of that. What I write is written *because it has to be* – because the idea germinated of itself & demanded expression. (Ibid: 276)

When Lovecraft wrote fiction, his aim was to produce "a sincere piece of narrative self-expression," and not to descend into "literary whoredom."[723] He needed the unrestrained freedom of pure self-expression, and in this context it does not matter much if his corresponding gentlemanly notions about art (as previously detailed) were merely a pose or an excuse to cover the fact of his chafing at conventional restrictions, or a shield with which to protect himself against constant rejection, or the genuine article. What does matter is that he did indeed need to write freely, or else not write at all, and that the pulps were for this reason an entirely unsuitable outlet for his personal artistic aspirations. With this summary in mind, I will now conclude this thesis with a close reading of three of Lovecraft's short stories. The aim will be to examine how Lovecraft used language in order to achieve his aims and produce his communicative effects.

[723] See Lovecraft (2019: 277).

9. Close Reading

In this chapter I wish to bring attention to Lovecraft's use of language in connection with certain key elements such as his view of himself as a gentleman poet, his attempts to create mood and atmosphere in order to suggest or reimagine certain concepts and images, and his underlying cultural pessimism combined with Gothic and cosmic themes.[724] Lovecraft's work has mainly tended to be seen as pulp horror stories intended only to entertain, or as prototypical science fiction, or as philosophical musings on the position of mankind in a cosmic universe. But I argue that his work is better read, for the most part, as mood pieces written by someone who saw himself as an eighteenth-century gentleman poet in periwig and knee-breeches, feather quill in hand, expressing himself artistically to his selected peers. This was a conscious and deliberate self-image that consistently lay behind what Lovecraft was trying to communicate.

However, this is not to say that Lovecraft tried to write literature in the style of the eighteenth century, but, rather, that his deliberate self-image as a gentleman was grounded in that period, coupled with a later Romantic art for art's sake aesthetic viewpoint, and that he was thus concerned with expressing himself as a gentleman with this larger communicative aim in mind. And, as I have said in earlier chapters, Lovecraft's aesthetics was primarily concerned with such concepts as artistic sincerity, personal associations, working as a "hoax-weaver," and attempting to make the reader see what Lovecraft himself saw through the art of storytelling. Thus, he is best understood not as an embittered bigot spreading fear and hate, nor – with rare exceptions – as a starving pulp writer desperately trying to make money, nor even (although this is somewhat closer to the truth) as a resentful conservative lashing out against modernity and modernism. Instead, he was a self-proclaimed artist trying to evoke an emotional response in his readers, and that response revolved around the feeling that comes from experiencing the presence of something that has a strong impact (be it the vast outside, or

[724] In furtherance of this aim I will occasionally make use of semi-lengthy quotes in an effort to allow Lovecraft's words to speak for themselves. I believe it is more effective to show Lovecraft in action, so to speak, rather than to simply state that he uses a particular kind of language.

a regional landscape, or a sense of anticipation, or something else),[725] culminating in a riot of verbal imagery when certain realisations are finally brought home.

In an attempt to represent the different types of stories that Lovecraft was telling, as outlined in previous chapters, and taking into account the criticisms against him as presented in Chapter 1, I have selected the following three tales for analysis: "The Horror at Red Hook," "The Colour out of Space," and "The Dunwich Horror." As it happens, two of them are written in the third person, unusually for Lovecraft, but this is hopefully outweighed by the first-person account in "The Colour out of Space" – Lovecraft's cosmic tour de force that he regarded as his best work. "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Horror at Red Hook" are both primarily Gothic tales, although "The Dunwich Horror" also contains strong elements of the cosmic, but I have included "The Horror at Red Hook" mainly in order to contrast it with the other two titles. This is because the tale is something of a failure, and as such it stands as representative of Lovecraft in his rare pulp mode, attempting reluctantly to cater to a market out of economic necessity. Additionally, the three tales are of roughly equal length, compared to earlier ones that tend to be shorter and later ones that tend to be longer. As a final point, these three stories are chronologically clustered within a few years of each other in the second half of the 1920s, but they are nevertheless representative of several different periods in Lovecraft's career. "The Horror at Red Hook" belongs to his New York years, whereas "The Colour out of Space" was the culmination of his period of intense literary activity following his return to Providence, with "The Dunwich Horror" being a product of his subsequent final decade of mature writing.

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[725] Elsewhere and in other contexts this has been referred to as the sublime, following the thinking of Burke, Kant, Schopenhauer, and others. However, it is difficult to apply this concept to Lovecraft's fiction other than in a very general sense, given the distinction between beauty and the sublime that is inherent in it, and, more importantly, the fact that Lovecraft did not comment on it in his non-fiction. Also, Lovecraft (2014a: 365) explicitly rejected Kant's philosophy in the early 1920s, although this was not in the context of aesthetics. Schopenhauer's concept of the feeling of the sublime as something overpowering next to which the individual is as nothing is obviously of potential relevance, but it is unlikely that Lovecraft ever read *The World as Will and Representation* (see Chapter 3). Another important point is the association of the sublime with pleasure, which on a basic level corresponds to the feeling of awe that Lovecraft describes, but this leaves no room for the consequent feeling of horror. In short, these ideas may superficially have been part of Lovecraft's general philosophical background, but they were never made explicit in his own thinking.

9.1. "The Horror at Red Hook"

As the earliest of the stories under examination, "The Horror at Red Hook" is markedly different on stylistic grounds from the other two, belonging to Lovecraft's tortured New York period, in addition to which it was also written as an intentional pulp story. The narrative plays out across seven chapters, the first of which introduces the main protagonist, Thomas F. Malone, who is pointedly described as being "wholesome-looking" and "normal-featured."[726] He is, however, of Irish ancestry, and he is also a police detective (the stereotype of New York police officers being Irish was already current in Lovecraft's time), meaning that he is not the typical Anglo-Saxon gentleman one would expect in a Lovecraft story from this time. But he is nevertheless an educated Dublin University gentleman of integrity in his own right (and not a hard-boiled gumshoe), one who leans more on the side of the sensitive artist rather than the learned scholar: "In youth he had felt the hidden beauty and ecstasy of things, and had been a poet; but poverty and sorrow and exile had turned his gaze in darker directions, and he had thrilled at the imputations of evil in the world around."[727] This autobiographical detail is balanced out by Malone also having "the Celt's far vision of weird and hidden things, but the logician's quick eye for the outwardly unconvincing."[728]

Some examples of characteristic Lovecraftian prose already occur in the first chapter, as in the following lament, which sets Malone apart from ordinary people: "To hint to unimaginative people of a horror beyond all human conception – a horror of houses and blocks and cities leprous and cancerous with evil dragged from elder worlds – would be merely to invite a padded cell instead of restful rustication, and Malone was a man of sense despite his mysticism."[729] This is followed by a similar outburst: "What could he tell the prosaic of the antique witcheries and grotesque marvels discernible to sensitive eyes amidst the poison cauldron where all the varied dregs of unwholesome ages mix their venom and perpetuate their obscene terrors?"[730] Also, Lovecraft's growing resentment of urban sophistication is hinted at in a comment about the New Yorkers who had "scoffed" at Malone: "They had been very witty and cynical, deriding his fantastic pursuit of unknowable

[726] See Lovecraft (2015a: 480, 481).
[727] See Lovecraft (2015a: 482, 483).
[728] See Lovecraft (2015a: 482).
[729] See Lovecraft (2015a: 482).
[730] See Lovecraft (2015a: 482).

mysteries and assuring him that in these days New York held nothing but cheapness and vulgarity."[731]

Lovecraft's use of adjectives will be analysed in more detail in the section on "The Colour out of Space." Here I will only say that this usage is at this stage more pronounced than in later stories, with some illustrative examples in the quoted samples above. Overall there is more poetic rhythm than in stories from later periods, as in the two consecutive paragraphs in the second chapter in which are found all the following phrases containing parallel word pairs: "alleys and byways," "tangle and enigma," "sound and filth," "taste and substance," "captains and ship-owners," "material and spiritual," "shouting and singing," "lanes and thoroughfares," "order or reform," and "murder and mutilation."[732]

The second chapter of the story contains some markedly derogatory descriptions of immigrants,[733] but it also spells out an intended main theme of the story: "He would often regard it as merciful that most persons of high intelligence jeer at the inmost mysteries; for, he argued, if superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the very integrity of the universe."[734] Observing the immigrants and some of their customs leads Malone to assume that they must be "the heirs of some shocking and primordial tradition; the sharers of debased and broken scraps from cults and ceremonies older than mankind," and from reading Margaret Murray he knows about the survival "among peasants and furtive folk [of] a frightful and clandestine system of assemblies and orgies descended from dark religions antedating the Aryan world."[735] In this there are some obvious racial attitudes (amplified by Lovecraft's personal experiences in New York) on display, but I believe the larger issue is concerned with the reactions that follow from ignorant humans being confronted with something inexplicable. And although this point does not come to the fore so much in "The Horror at Red Hook" as it does in "The Dunwich Horror" and (particularly) "The Colour out of Space," it is nevertheless the case that it is humanity as a whole – consisting of both New Englanders and immigrants, both rural people and city people – that must face the unknown. Often the human individuals concerned do

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[731] See Lovecraft (2015a: 482). See also footnote 751.
[732] See Lovecraft (2015a: 484).
[733] As detailed earlier in Chapter 8 of this thesis.
[734] See Lovecraft (2015a: 483). This is also an earlier and more bombastic iteration of the opening paragraph in "The Call of Cthulhu," to be written a year later.
[735] See Lovecraft (2015a: 485).

this alone, but the point is that they are faced with the outside and not with each other.

Lovecraft sometimes amplified his own pictorially charged language by recurring references to some of his favourite artists,[736] as in the following anaphoric example: "Daily life had for him come to be a phantasmagoria of macabre shadow-studies; now glittering and leering with concealed rottenness as in Beardsley's best manner, now hinting terrors behind the commonest shapes and objects as in the subtler and less obvious work of Gustave Doré."[737] Having originally come across Doré's illustrations as a child, which was a contributing reason behind his developing interest in the weird (as detailed in Chapter 3), Lovecraft remained a lifelong admirer of the work of the various weird artists he came across.[738] However, he was never interested in art as such from a theoretical or historical perspective, and he had no interest in following the fashions. Instead, his interest lay solely in *what* was depicted, and in *how* it was depicted. And with respect to what was depicted, his interests were likewise solely limited to two pictorial groupings: 1) the weird and the fantastic, and 2) striking architectural and landscape scenery.[739] In

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[736] As Lovecraft (2015f: 108) said in 1928, "no author ought ever to write down so much as a sentence unless he can see clearly and visually with his fancy the scene he is writing about." In a corresponding manner Lovecraft often lamented his own inability to paint. See, for example, Lovecraft (2019: 387).

[737] See Lovecraft (2015a: 483). Compare with the mention of Salvator Rosa and Fuseli in "The Colour out of Space," both of whom were earlier (Baroque and Romantic) painters known for their powerful landscapes. Fuseli also sometimes depicted supernatural scenes.

[738] "Concerning Beardsley – bless your heart, I think I've seen every illustration he ever drew! I own the Modern Library book of his stuff. He was certainly a titan among the decadents of the 1890's, & Beerbohm has christened that whole age 'The Beardsley Period'" (Lovecraft 2016b: 110). This is an example of Lovecraft trying to find everything he could from and about an artist that interested him, similarly to how he collected his favourite authors such as Dunsany and Machen. This interest also extended to artists who were comparatively unknown, such as his friends and colleagues Clark Ashton Smith and Howard Wandrei (the younger brother of Donald Wandrei).

[739] In 1927, in a discussion on what he labelled as three different branches of art, Lovecraft (2018: 449) put Beardsley among the "purely decadent" artists, as one who produced a "glitteringly malevolent art" similar in kind to the poetry of Baudelaire. Lovecraft also frequently referenced the artist Sidney Sime, known for his illustrations of Dunsany's work. Lovecraft listed both Dunsany and Sime under the category of "fantastic art and literature of escape," whereas the third of the three branches was "individual art" that reflected "former ages" (ibid). With respect to landscape painting, Lovecraft (2019: 245) also expressed his admiration for this type of art on several occasions, as in the following example from 1934: "I don't know any pictures that move me more than the rural vistas of Ruisdael, Hobbema, Cuyp, & others whose names I can't recall. There are quite a number of these Dutch landscapes in the Pendleton house at the School of Design."

this, his interest in art corresponded exactly to his interest in literature.[740] Thus, in "The Horror at Red Hook," Lovecraft's reference to Beardsley and Doré is intended to further the impression of decadence that he is trying to evoke, whereas the references to Salvator Rosa and Fuseli that occur in "The Colour out of Space" are primarily intended to aid the visualisation of the scenery that Lovecraft is painting with his descriptions.

In the third and fourth chapters there is a tonal change when the narrative shifts from the building of atmosphere to the more prosaic and matter-of-fact details surrounding the case of Robert Suydam and Malone's investigation of it. There is only a light sprinkle here and there of typically Lovecraftian terms and phrases, such as the repeated use of the word "nameless," a reference to "a curious and ghastly stench," and a mention of "the blasphemous panels and inscriptions."[741] In the fifth chapter the language begins to escalate again, when the sailor who discovered the mutilated bodies of Suydam and his wife went "completely mad" and "ran simpering about the vessel till caught and put in irons."[742] This reaction was presumably caused by something that was also almost witnessed by the ship's doctor: "The open porthole, just before he turned on the lights, was clouded for a second with a certain phosphorescence, and for a moment there seemed to echo in the night outside the suggestion of a faint and hellish tittering; but no real outline met the eye."[743] This descriptive restraint, however, is entirely lost in the subsequent text.

Chapter 6 of the narrative contains the culmination of the events, in which an explosion of delirious imagery is presented to the reader when Malone is experiencing his vision. It begins with an emphasis on smells (compare with "The Dunwich Horror"), as in "betraying odours," "pungent incense," "charnel odour," and "all the stenches of the bottomless pit," after which Malone is dragged "down unmeasured

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[740] "[A]ll the arts would seem to be fundamentally related despite their profound differences in function & method. Each expresses a certain side of a single definite quality of the mind of highly evolved animal life; a quality best expressed as a *demand for the perception of modulated symmetry*. In practice, of course, this purely aesthetic demand is always mixed to an indefinite & inextricable degree with various factors of *association*, emotional & intellectual" (Lovecraft 2019: 355).

[741] See Lovecraft (2015a: 488, 489, 493). These repetitions and word choices are there to ensure that the rhythm and the mood is not entirely lost during the calmer and more mundane stretches of the narrative.

[742] See Lovecraft (2015a: 495).

[743] See Lovecraft (2015a: 495).

spaces filled with whispers and wails, and gusts of mocking laughter."[744] And then follows several paragraphs of steadily escalating language that rises relentlessly to a crescendo, although the piling on of baroque descriptions in this manner in fact dilutes the effect rather than strengthens it.

Some of it is poetic in a way that still echoes Lovecraft's early style: "Satan here held his Babylonish court, and in the blood of stainless childhood the leprous limbs of phosphorescent Lilith were laved."[745] But it immediately becomes too much: "Moloch and Ashtaroth were not absent; for in this quintessence of all damnation the bounds of consciousness were let down, and man's fancy lay open to vistas of every realm of horror and every forbidden dimension that evil had power to mould."[746] There is also no sign anywhere that the repeated references to Satanic evil are merely Malone's subjective impressions of something he does not understand. An early reference to "cosmic irony" is followed by a statement that "cosmic sin" has entered,[747] but nothing in the narrative so far suggests anything of the cosmic. Instead, this is Lovecraft's exploration of Murray's cult ideas in combination with his loathing of New York, the result of which becomes little more than an overblown pulp story.

The tale contains some examples of recurring imagery that can also be found in other stories by Lovecraft, such as the idea of unearthly music and a monstrous procession of non-human beings:

> All at once, from an arcaded avenue leading endlessly away, there came the daemoniac rattle and wheeze of a blasphemous organ, choking and rumbling out the mockeries of hell in a cracked, sardonic bass. In an instant every moving entity was electrified; and forming at once into a ceremonial procession, the nightmare horde slithered away in quest of the sound – goat, satyr, and Ægipan, incubus, succuba, and lemur, twisted toad and shapeless elemental, dog-faced howler and silent strutter in darkness – all led by the abominable naked phosphorescent thing that had squatted on the carved golden throne, and that now strode insolently bearing in its arms the glassy-eyed corpse of the corpulent old man. (Lovecraft 2015a: 500)

This can be compared with the similar (albeit described in a more restrained manner) processions in "Under the Pyramids" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (written in 1924 and 1931, respectively). And

[744] See Lovecraft (2015a: 497, 498).
[745] See Lovecraft (2015a: 499).
[746] See Lovecraft (2015a: 499).
[747] See Lovecraft (2015a: 482, 499).

later, when the unholy ceremony comes to an abrupt end, Suydam's corpse, which is "in a state of jellyish dissolution," collapses "to a muddy blotch of corruption,"[748] similarly to the fate of Dr. Muñoz in "Cool Air" (written in 1926 as the last of the New York stories).[749]

In the final chapter, in which the tale is quickly wrapped up, Lovecraft makes some belated and mostly unconvincing attempts to tie the concluding narrative to the theme of cosmic outsideness. The Satanic cult is exaggeratedly referred to as "a horror from the universe's very heart," and the point is made that nothing has really changed in Red Hook, since "the evil spirit of darkness and squalor broods on" and the cult is already creeping back.[750] It has always existed and it always will exist:

> Age-old horror is a hydra with a thousand heads, and the cults of darkness are rooted in blasphemies deeper then the well of Democritus. The soul of the beast is omnipresent and triumphant, and Red Hook's legions of blear-eyed, pockmarked youths still chant and curse and howl as they file from abyss to abyss, none knows whence or whither, pushed on by blind laws of biology which they may never understand. (Ibid: 504)

> Who are we to combat poisons older than history and mankind? Apes danced in Asia to those horrors, and the cancer lurks secure and spreading where furtiveness hides in rows of decaying brick. (Ibid: 505)

This, Lovecraft suggests, is at least partly due to reasons that are deterministic and biological in nature, having to do with devolution due to the decay of society.

In "The Horror at Red Hook," Lovecraft primarily communicated certain negative impressions he had gathered during his two years in New York. The tale was also an attempt to show that the ingredients of a weird fiction story could be extracted even from a background such as this,[751] but the result was not very successful. The tone and setting is primarily Gothic, albeit with some attempts at cosmic touches, but the evocation of the requisite atmosphere is at first marred by recurring swipes at immigration and later by a stylistic excess that becomes counterproductive.

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[748] See Lovecraft (2015a: 502).

[749] This tale was written a little over half a year after "The Horror at Red Hook."

[750] See Lovecraft (2015a: 504).

[751] "The tale is rather long and rambling, and I don't think it is very good; but it represents at least an attempt to extract horror from an atmosphere to which you deny any qualities save vulgar commonplaceness," Lovecraft (1968: 20) wrote in a letter to his colleague Frank Belknap Long in 1925.

9.2. “The Colour out of Space”

One of the first things noticeable in the opening paragraphs of “The Colour out of Space” is Lovecraft’s use of poetic rhythm to set up the atmospheric beginning of the story. Examples include the alliterative opening sentence: “West of Arkham the hills rise wild, and there are valleys with deep woods that no axe has ever cut” (west, wild, valleys, woods), and the repeated use of “there are” (anaphora) in the first paragraph: “there are valleys […] There are dark narrow glens […] there are farms, ancient and rocky[…]”[752] Later there is an example of another rhetorical device (chiasmus) in the following structure: “for no other name could fit such a thing, or any other thing fit such a name.”[753] Elements such as these, combined with the use of comparatively long sentences, all contribute to create a particular atmosphere that effectively transports the reader into a very specific regional setting.

This technique has its roots partly in Lovecraft’s technical skill as a poet and partly in his old reliance on Dunsany (more specifically, the biblical and fairytale-like style of the early Dunsany), traces and echoes of which are still discernable in the opening paragraphs of the tale: “And the secrets of the strange days will be one with the deep’s secrets; one with the hidden lore of old ocean, and all the mystery of primal earth,” and later: “And by night all Arkham had heard of the great rock that fell out of the sky and bedded itself in the ground beside the well[.]”[754] However, “The Colour out of Space” is decidedly not a Dunsanian tale, nor is the style at this late stage of Lovecraft’s development anything other than his own. The example above also echoes Lovecraft’s fascination with the vastness of the ocean (as a precursor to the vastness of space) and the immense stretches of time that recede into the forgotten past, both of these elements constituting clusters of imagery that frequently recur in other tales, as seen in Chapters 7 and 8.

Lovecraft has often been criticised on stylistic grounds for his over-reliance on adjectives, but it is perhaps not as commonly recognised that he also employs a similarly specific use of adverbs. Early representative examples include “the trees slope fantastically” and Ammi’s forefinger beginning “to point shakily and impressively.”[755] Later there are examples such as “a most detestably sticky noise,” “that detestably ancient

[752] See Lovecraft (2015b: 367).
[753] See Lovecraft (2015b: 369).
[754] See Lovecraft (2015b: 368, 371).
[755] See Lovecraft (2015b: 367, 370).

woodwork," "looked horrifiedly into," and "a gleamingly eruptive cataclysm."[756] Some characteristic adjective use also occurs, as in the following sentence: "These were not haunted woods, and their fantastic dusk was never terrible till the strange days."[757] It is not so much that Lovecraft overuses these stylistic elements (there are, in fact, not that many examples in the text under examination),[758] but that he carefully places them where they draw attention. They are intentionally intrusive but not jarringly so, in the sense that they might risk breaking the flow or the rhythm of the sentence, and that is the point. They sometimes feel wrong in the right way, if it makes sense to put it that way. In a way, this style comes close to catachresis, the intentional misuse of language, except that it is not really a case of misuse.

There are also certain words that have come to be regarded as typical of Lovecraft, due to the fact that they tend to be both recurring and unusual (sometimes sending complaining readers to the dictionary), which is why they stand out and become noticeable. The instances in "The Colour out of Space" are few and comparatively mild, however, merely including such examples as "blasphemous," "foetor," "loathsome," "noisome," "unnamable," "elder" (as in "elder mystery" and "elder secrets"), and "eldritch" (as in "eldritch dream-world" and "eldritch acres").[759] Lovecraft's sparing and selective use of these words, similarly to his use of other adjectives (and adverbs), is a key contributing factor in the creation of the specific atmosphere that is characteristic of his fiction.

"The Colour out of Space" being primarily a cosmic story, the initially unseen presence of something unknown from outside is hinted at from the beginning through the use of mood-creating language:

> The trees grew too thickly, and their trunks were too big for any healthy New England wood. There was too much silence in the dim alleys between them, and the floor was too soft with the dank moss and mattings of infinite years of decay. [...]

Upon everything was a haze of restlessness and oppression; a touch of the unreal and the grotesque, as if some vital element of perspective or chiaroscuro were awry. I did not wonder that the foreigners would not stay, for this was no region to sleep in. It was too much like a landscape of Salvator Rosa; too much like some forbidden woodcut in a tale of terror. (Lovecraft 2015b: 368-369)

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[756] See Lovecraft (2015b: 386, 387, 396).
[757] See Lovecraft (2015b: 371).
[758] Additional examples occur in some of the quoted text later in this chapter.
[759] See Lovecraft (2015b: 368, 371, 381, 382, 383, 385, 386, 389, 397).

The suggestion of the perspective being wrong is an example of Lovecraft's frequently recurring theme of alien geometry, and how the mere presence of an outside intrusion is enough to cause distortions in our perception of reality. This is followed by a hint about the nature of the intrusion, or, rather, its origin: "I vaguely wished some clouds would gather, for an odd timidity about the deep skyey voids above had crept into my soul."[760] Later, after the narrator has heard the story from Ammi (at this point yet to be presented to the reader), the same sentiment is repeated: "I hurried back before sunset to my hotel, unwilling to have the stars come out above me in the open; and the next day returned to Boston to give up my position."[761]

As the story begins to unfold, it quickly becomes clear that the meteorite that landed on the Gardner farm is no ordinary rock from space. It is a "weird visitor from unknown stellar space" and a "stony messenger from the stars," and it is "nothing of this earth, but a piece of the great outside; and as such dowered with outside properties and obedient to outside laws."[762] These cosmic hints gradually intensify, as the incomprehensible nature of the phenomenon keeps mystifying those who attempt to investigate it: "in time the professors felt scarcely sure they had indeed seen with waking eyes that cryptic vestige of the fathomless gulfs outside; that lone, weird message from other universes and other realms of matter, force, and entity."[763] And the insidious effects of this outside visitor not only linger but grow stronger, enveloping the hapless Gardners, who become victims to something they cannot see nor understand: "Stark terror seemed to cling round the Gardners and all they touched, and the very presence of one in the house was a breath from regions unnamed and unnamable."[764]

The main character of the tale, as is very often the case with Lovecraft, is thus not the narrator, nor Nahum Gardner, nor even Ammi, but rather the unseen colour from space, which is to say that the focal point of the narrative is on the weird phenomenon and the mental and emotional effects it has on those who observe or experience it. The narrator, in fact, serves entirely as a passive conduit, relating the story to the readers, and (unlike many of Lovecraft's other narrators) he is not even motivated by curiosity when he first approaches the blasted heath: "I felt an odd reluctance about approaching, and did so at last only because my

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760 See Lovecraft (2015b: 369).
761 See Lovecraft (2015b: 371).
762 See Lovecraft (2015b: 372, 373, 374).
763 See Lovecraft (2015b: 374).
764 See Lovecraft (2015b: 383).

business took me through and past it." And later he "walked circuitously back to the town by the curving road on the south."[765] But once he is safely out of the woods the narrator does experience some curiosity after all, but not to the extent that he wants to do any personal investigation other than to ask some questions: "In the evening I asked old people in Arkham about the blasted heath."[766]

The questions the narrator asks lead him to Ammi Pierce from whom he learns the rest of the story, and because this is a tale of strange events that happened to other people in the past, the narrator suffers no further consequences of his curiosity except for an unsettled mind and some troubling nightmares. This is emphasised by the repeating of his earliest impression: "When twilight came I had vaguely wished some clouds would gather, for an odd timidity about the deep skyey voids above had crept into my soul."[767] More worrying are the implications that follow from the suggestion that the blasted heath is slowly growing a little every year, and that "something terrible – though I know not in what proportion – still remains"[768] in the hills and valleys outside Arkham. The suggestions of lingering trauma are thus very muted, and it is instead Ammi who must pay a higher price for his own curiosity:

> For he had had an added shock that the others were spared, and was crushed for ever with a brooding fear he dared not even mention for many years to come. As the rest of the watchers on that tempestuous hill had stolidly set their faces toward the road, Ammi had looked back an instant at the shadowed valley of desolation so lately sheltering his ill-starred friend. And from that stricken, far-away spot he had seen something feebly rise, only to sink down again upon the place from which the great shapeless horror had shot into the sky. (Ibid: 396-397)

Ultimately this is Lovecraft once again suggesting that it is never over when it is over. Something always remains – or there is something worse still, yet to be revealed – and whatever surcease of horror there may be is only temporary and momentary.

Many of Lovecraft's tales are concerned with linkages to the past, and with strange survivals from archaic times. This is not a main theme in "The Colour out of Space," but there are nevertheless some relevant hints. Ammi is an old man who seems "worn and dismal," and whose "rambling voice scraped and whispered" as he tells his story to the narrator, and his

[765] See Lovecraft (2015b: 369).
[766] See Lovecraft (2015b: 369-370).
[767] See Lovecraft (2015b: 398).
[768] See Lovecraft (2015b: 399).

house “was a fearsomely archaic place, and had begun to exude the faint miasmal odour which clings about houses that have stood too long.”[769] A comparison can be made here between Ammi and the old men who sometimes appear in other stories, such as the ancient cannibal in “The Picture in the House” and the eponymous sea captain in “The Terrible Old Man.” In these examples, however, these old men, by virtue of their preternatural old age, occupy the place of the weird phenomenon that is almost always at the centre of the story, which is not the case with Ammi, who is simply an old recluse whose mind has cracked slightly from his experiences. A little later in the narrative there is mention of “the small island in the Miskatonic where the devil held court beside a curious stone altar older than the Indians,”[770] which brings to mind the similar structure in “The Dunwich Horror,” to which I will return later in this chapter.

The unnamed narrator is clearly an educated man, presumably a surveyor from Boston since he has been sent “into the hills and vales to survey for the reservoir.”[771] His education is also revealed when he assists Ammi in remembering certain details: “Often I had to recall the speaker from ramblings, piece out scientific points which he knew only by a fading parrot memory of professors’ talk, or bridge over gaps where his sense of logic and continuity broke down.”[772] And a little later: “Ammi had difficulty in recalling all these things, but recognised some solvents as I mentioned them in the usual order of use.”[773] However, this is mostly a necessary contrivance having to do with a problem that Lovecraft frequently ran into because of his use of narrators, namely how to transmit information of a sometimes overly detailed and intricate nature to the reader. But it is nevertheless clear that the person telling the story to the readers in “The Colour out of Space” is a typical Lovecraft narrator, in this case an upper middle class professional whose manners, if not his occupation, resemble Lovecraft’s own.

Ammi, by virtue of being a protagonist, is similarly contrasted against other “rustics” in the area: “He was far brighter and more educated than I had been led to think, and before I knew it had grasped quite as much of the subject as any man I had talked with in Arkham.”[774] The three

[769] See Lovecraft (2015b: 370).
[770] See Lovecraft (2015b: 371).
[771] See Lovecraft (2015b: 368).
[772] See Lovecraft (2015b: 370-371).
[773] See Lovecraft (2015b: 373).
[774] See Lovecraft (2015b: 370).

professors who arrive to study the meteorite[775] likewise display a typical attitude towards the locals:

> There was really nothing for serious men to do in cases of wild gossip, for superstitious rustics will say and believe anything. And so all through the strange days the professors stayed away in contempt. (Ibid: 377)

But Lovecraft is not taking the side of the professors in this, since the narration also hints at his continued rejection of urban sophistication (and his corresponding identification with the rural New England of the past) after his two years in New York:

> Nahum took some blossoms to Arkham and shewed them to the editor of the *Gazette*, but that dignitary did no more than write a humorous article about them, in which the dark fears of rustics were held up to polite ridicule. It was a mistake of Nahum's to tell a stolid city man about the way the great, overgrown mourning-cloak butterflies behaved in connexion with these saxifrages. (Ibid: 378)

Later, as the situation continues to get worse, it is still no use "in telling the city people at Arkham who laughed at everything."[776]

How is this attitude to be squared with the fact that Lovecraft always remained an arch-materialist and devoted science advocate in real life? Lovecraft on occasion had to defend himself against accusations of inconsistency stemming from the fact that he often seemed to attack science and scepticism in his stories, in which supernatural phenomena were presented as real with correspondingly shocking consequences for non-believers.[777] Lovecraft's response to this was that he was merely creating the aesthetic illusion of belief in something he could not get in real life, precisely because it did not exist. Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made between science itself and the people who practice it. Science is a tool, and the problem, if there is one, lies with the people who make use of this tool. Thus, in "The Colour out of Space," the point can be made that the intruding phenomenon is so alien that ordinary science cannot explain it, particularly if the individual scientists are "serious men" of the conventional "professor-doctor" type for which Lovecraft did not have much sympathy.[778] Only a science so advanced that it far exceeds what humans are capable of could begin to understand

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[775] There is an obvious Biblical link here (and a reversal compared to the Christian narrative) in the form of a "star" in the sky followed by the arrival of three wise men, but Lovecraft never does anything further with it.

[776] See Lovecraft (2015b: 384).

[777] See the section on escaping the limits of space, time, and natural law in Chapter 8.

[778] See the discussion on Lovecraft's rejection of the genteel tradition in Chapter 4.

what the alien intruder is, although, tellingly, the narrator (and not the conventional scientists) does offer some speculations at the end of the tale.

In order to conclude this discussion on "The Colour out of Space," I will now attempt to trace the way Lovecraft creates a gradual escalation in mood and tension in the build-up to the final revelations. This build-up starts from the very beginning, in the sixth paragraph, where there is an example of foreshadowing when the narrator crosses the blasted heath and sees "the yawning black maw of an abandoned well whose stagnant vapours played strange tricks with the hues of the sunlight."[779] Then follows a catalogue of increasingly detailed hints about the worsening alterations in the local flora and fauna. Tracks in the snow are "not quite right," bodily proportions seem "slightly altered in a queer way," the vegetation displays colours "that could not be put into any words," the insects are "not quite usual in their aspects and motions," and things are generally "impossible to describe."[780] At the same time gradual changes also occur in the Gardner family. At first they "took to watching at night – watching in all directions at random for something… they could not tell what."[781] Then comes a physical and mental deterioration that steadily worsens until only Nahum is left, with his wife locked in the attic and his three sons dead or disappeared. The culmination comes with Ammi's witnessing of Nahum's final disintegration, and as these events develop the descriptive language goes from the family at first only "failing curiously" to the final poignant statement: "That which spoke could speak no more because it had completely caved in."[782]

All this is the consequence of the unseen presence of a parasitic entity, the nearness of which is continuously hinted at throughout the narrative. In the early stages of his decline, Nahum "had grown used to the sense of something near him waiting to be heard."[783] Later, after the collapse of Nabby, "the poor woman screamed about things in the air which she could not describe":

> In her raving there was not a single specific noun, but only verbs and pronouns. Things moved and changed and fluttered, and ears tingled to impulses which were not wholly sounds. Something was taken away – she was being drained of something – something was fastening itself

779 See Lovecraft (2015b: 369).
780 See Lovecraft (2015b: 373, 376, 379).
781 See Lovecraft (2015b: 379).
782 See Lovecraft (2015b: 380, 388).
783 See Lovecraft (2015b: 378).

> on her that ought not to be – someone must make it keep off – nothing was ever still in the night – the walls and windows shifted. (Ibid: 380)

The fact that Nabby does not use nouns is precisely due to the fact that she cannot see or detect anything to which she can attach a label, even though something is always there. Thus, her use of language is another indication of the alien nature of the intruding presence. This becomes more explicit when, after Nabby and Thaddeus are screaming at each other behind locked doors in the attic, Merwin thinks that "they talked in some terrible language that was not of earth."[784] Later, Nahum repeats himself to Ammi: "Something was creeping and creeping and waiting to be seen and felt and heard."[785]

When Ammi goes on his final visit to the Gardner farm, he sees the "great bare trees clawing up at the grey November sky with a studied malevolence which [he] could not but feel had come from some subtle change in the tilt of the branches."[786] This impression, of course, is from Ammi's subjective point of view, the colour being perceived by him as "evil" due to its effects on its surroundings, while its actual motivations remain unknown throughout the narrative (meaning that its feeding is not necessarily intentionally malevolent).[787] This is emphasised in Nahum's final words: "dun't know what it wants […] it come from some place whar things ain't as they is here."[788] And it is repeated by Ammi during the final events: "It must be somethin' from away off in the sky […] It's some'at from beyond […] it come from beyond, whar things ain't like they be here[.]"[789]

The various elements detailed over the previous paragraphs lead up to the final culmination, when Lovecraft momentarily abandons the restrained style he has maintained for most of the narrative and unleashes the characteristically ecstatic descriptions for which the reader has been waiting. He sets the stage by presenting a calm, almost clinically precise statement to strengthen the effect: "It is necessary to premise that there was no wind at that hour of the evening." And then he begins:

> And yet amid that tense, godless calm the high bare boughs of all the trees in the yard were moving. They were twitching morbidly and spasmodically, clawing in convulsive and epileptic madness at the

784 See Lovecraft (2015b: 382).
785 See Lovecraft (2015b: 384).
786 See Lovecraft (2015b: 384).
787 See the earlier discussion in Chapter 5.
788 See Lovecraft (2015b: 387-388).
789 See Lovecraft (2015b: 391, 394).

> moonlit clouds; scratching impotently in the noxious air as if jerked by some alien and bodiless line of linkage with subterrene horrors writhing and struggling below the black roots. (Ibid: 392)

> It was a monstrous constellation of unnatural light, like a glutted swarm of corpse-fed fireflies dancing hellish sarabands over an accursed marsh; and its colour was that same nameless intrusion which Ammi had come to recognise and dread. (Ibid: 393)

> It was a scene from a vision of Fuseli, and over all the rest reigned that riot of luminous amorphousness, that alien and undimensioned rainbow of cryptic poison from the well – seething, feeling, lapping, reaching, scintillating, straining, and malignly bubbling in its cosmic and unrecognisable chromaticism. (Ibid: 395-396)

Here are the typically Lovecraftian adjectives and adverbs (as well as verbs and nouns), none of which feels out of place, and all of them are put to work to produce a culminating effect that heightens rather than destroys the moody atmosphere that has carefully been built up and maintained until this point. The process continues, and comes to an end, when the entity finally leaves the well:

> [I]n one feverish, kaleidoscopic instant there burst up from that doomed and accursed farm a gleamingly eruptive cataclysm of unnatural sparks and substance; blurring the glance of the few who saw it, and sending forth to the zenith a bombarding cloudburst of such coloured and fantastic fragments as our universe must needs disown. Through quickly re-closing vapours they followed the great morbidity that had vanished, and in another second they had vanished too. Behind and below was only a darkness to which the men dared not return, and all about was a mounting wind which seemed to sweep down in black, frore gusts from interstellar space. (Ibid: 396)

At the very last the narrator offers some speculations, suggesting that the entity is best described as some sort of gas, but that "this gas obeyed laws that are not of our cosmos," because it is "a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it; from realms whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes."[790]

Despite the fact that the setting is rather Gothic, particularly in the descriptions of the Gardner farm, it is clear that the primary emphasis in "The Colour out of Space" is on cosmic outsideness. Throughout the narration of the tale, Lovecraft's communicative intent is to create a feeling of great unsettledness and unease, stemming from the threatening nearness of something incomprehensible that emanates

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[790] See Lovecraft (2015b: 399).

from a universe that is likewise incomprehensible due to its vastness and strangeness. Nothing is clearly spelled out and nothing is really permanently resolved, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions aided only by the reactions and some vague speculations from the human characters.

9.3. "The Dunwich Horror"

"The Dunwich Horror" is a Gothic tale set in Massachusetts and spanning a time period of fifteen years. The story is told in ten chapters, the first of which is almost like a prologue, setting the stage for the subsequent events. The narrative begins with an atmospheric travelogue-like description of the New England region, in which Lovecraft draws on his own travels. The atmosphere is gradually built up through the use of characteristically Lovecraftian prose: "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 bull-frogs."[791] Other examples include the suggestion of a feeling of being "somehow confronted by forbidden things, with which it would be better to have nothing to do," and descriptive elements such as "the tenebrous tunnel of the bridge."[792]

The small village of Dunwich is a place apart, a strange and sinister survival from the past in its own right, characterised by great age and decay: "one […] wonders at the cluster of rotting gambrel roofs bespeaking an earlier architectural period than that of the neighbouring region."[793] This becomes explicit a little later: "Dunwich is indeed ridiculously old – older by far than any of the communities within thirty miles of it."[794] In the village itself "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," and the place was already being avoided in the time of the Salem witch trials: "Two centuries ago, when talk of witch-blood, Satan-worship, and strange forest presences was not laughed at, it was the custom to give reasons for avoiding the locality."[795] This has led to an advanced case of decadence and degeneracy through isolation and inbreeding,[796] the detailed description of which strongly contributes to establishing the Gothic setting.

[791] See Lovecraft (2015b: 418).
[792] See Lovecraft (2015b: 418, 419).
[793] See Lovecraft (2015b: 418-419).
[794] See Lovecraft (2015b: 421).
[795] See Lovecraft (2015b: 419).
[796] See the discussion on decadence and devolution in Chapter 8.

There are several instances of foreshadowing in the opening chapters, including the already quoted reference to unseen whippoorwills. A more notable example is Old Whateley's (ironic, as it turns out) boast that "some day yew folks'll hear a child o' Lavinny's a-callin' its father's name on the top o' Sentinel Hill," followed by a vague description of Wilbur having "some kind of a fringed belt and a pair of dark trunks or trousers on" when he is seen running up to the top of Sentinel Hill.[797] This, of course, is a reference to what is revealed when Wilbur later meets his end in the college library at Miskatonic University, this gruesome incident itself being foreshadowed through the repeated instances of Wilbur being attacked by dogs. There are also increasingly detailed hints about the importance of "the queer circles of tall stone pillars" on the wooded hills and mountains in the area, the purpose of these structures having something to do with the "old legends [that] speak of unhallowed rites and conclaves of the Indians, amidst which they called forbidden shapes of shadow out of the great rounded hills, and made wild orgiastic prayers that were answered by loud crackings and rumblings from the ground below."[798] But this is followed by the observation that "many ethnologists" believe the human remains found on Sentinel Hill to be Caucasian rather than Native American.[799] All these hints in combination with a slowly accumulating trickle of revealed information contribute to the gradual build-up of a specific atmosphere of brooding Gothic mystery.

As previously suggested in Chapter 7, the Gothic for Lovecraft had a particular regional colouring that was rooted in his surroundings and in the Puritanism of colonial history. Lovecraft made no secret of this, and he spelled it out in detail on occasion, as in the following quote from an autobiographical letter to an amateur journalism colleague in 1931:

> The only clear-cut New England emotion I had till about 1910 was one of Gothick *horror* – connected with the little brown farmhouses of the remote country, huddling furtively in the lee of overshadowing hills with great rocks. Their terrible age, potential secrecy, and frightful isolation from common thought and common ways haunted me fiendishly and uniquely. Puritanism – unnatural belief in monstrous powers – uncouthness – this was what provincial Yankeeism meant for me in youth. (Lovecraft 2018: 296)

[797] See Lovecraft (2015b: 423, 424).

[798] See Lovecraft (2015b: 418, 420).

[799] See Lovecraft (2015b: 421). The obvious suggestion here is that the stone circles have little or nothing to do with the Indians as such, and that the circles are instead ceremonial sites for the performing of human sacrifices by degenerate cultists.

Although this sense of the Gothic always remained, Lovecraft's attitudes changed dramatically as he reached adulthood, particularly in the wake of his antiquarian travels that began in 1922 and continued after his return from New York four years later. To illustrate this, the above quote can be contrasted with the following one from 1932: "Better a rustic Yankee with the tang of the soil – a legitimate outgrowth of the region – than a slickly educated city foreigner whose flawless English cloaks a complete lack of homogeneity with our thoughts, feelings, history, and institutions."[800]

For this reason the Gothic, like many other ingredients in Lovecraft's writings, was an atmospheric background element that suggested horror derived from age-old religious Puritanism, at the same time as the New England countryside and its people constituted an element of traditional continuity that was genuine, which is why Lovecraft identified with it. Thus, we can see that "The Dunwich Horror" leans more on the Gothic side, with its inherently dark elements amplified further by the decadence and degeneracy that comes with isolation from the rest of the region, whereas the rural people in "The Colour out of Space" are exactly the kind of "rustic Yankees" that Lovecraft regarded as "legitimate outgrowths" of a region in which they had lived continuously for centuries. The inhabitants of Dunwich do have a claim to "legitimate" status due to the fact that they seem to have lived in the region for a longer time even than their neighbours, but they have squandered this right because of the "unnatural beliefs" (going back to and beyond Puritanism, as well as being an unavoidable consequence of decadence) that have led them to dabble in the kind of forbidden knowledge that brings about the weird phenomenon at the centre of the tale.

The story proper begins to unfold in the second chapter, in which the Gothic setting is further strengthened through the description of Wilbur's mother and grandfather: "the mother was one of the decadent Whateleys, a somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of thirty-five, living with an aged and half-insane father about whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth."[801] Old Whateley's deteriorating mental state is also hinted at in references to his "clouded brain" and how he "discoursed incoherently" to his listeners.[802] The backwoods patois employed by the people of Dunwich is more exaggerated than in the case of Nahum Gardner and Ammi in "The

800 See Lovecraft (2018: 328).
801 See Lovecraft (2015b: 422).
802 See Lovecraft (2015b: 422-423).

Colour out of Space," examples including "He'd orter hev 'em as well sot as he kin," "They know it's a-goin' aout, an' dun't calc'late to miss it," and "I vaow afur Gawd."[803] However, the few lines of dialogue uttered by Wilbur suggest his dialect is just a trifle less pronounced than that of his mother and grandfather: "I calc'late I've got to take that book home," and "Let me take it along, Sir, an' I'll swar they wun't nobody know the difference."[804] Possibly this is another hint about his outside nature,[805] or it is a reflection of his precocious intelligence.

The above samples of dialogue from "The Dunwich Horror" bring up the question of Lovecraft's use of dialect in his fiction.[806] Mostly, it seems that he made use of an old Yankee dialect (on the comparatively few occasions when he did so) in order to provide both realism and a connection to the past:

> Rich and vital prose demands a faithful reproduction of what people actually say, no matter how the formal rules read. We may guard the purity of formal expository prose if we wish, but in any homely presentation of a homely theme we must practice a greater flexibility. When a writer places colloquialisms in his own mouth, it is generally for the purpose of establishing an intimate rapport betwixt himself and the subject he is treating. Thus one who writes much of old New England's byways may often advantageously allow himself to fall into the century-grounded (even if unclassical) idioms of these byways. (Ibid: 328)

This was in the context of commenting on the writings of columnist B. K. Hart in *The Providence Journal*, but it also gives an insight into Lovecraft's own approach with respect to dialect use in fiction. However, in a letter in 1929, Lovecraft stated the following:

> As for Yankee farmers – oddly enough, I haven't noticed that the majority talk any differently from myself; so that I've never regarded them as a separate class to whom one must use a special dialect. If I were to say "Mornin', Zeke, haow be ye?" to anybody along the road

803 See Lovecraft (2015b: 426, 430, 432).

804 See Lovecraft (2015b: 435).

805 However, the narrative also states that although there is an "elusive element" in Wilbur's speech, this "strangeness did not reside in what he said, or even in the simple idioms he used" (Lovecraft 2015b: 425).

806 Eckhardt (2011: 86-90), endorsed by Joshi (2013a: 377), has suggested that Lovecraft's use of a backwoods New England dialect derives from a single literary source, James Russell Lowell's *Biglow Papers* (a work of satirical poetry written in Yankee dialect, the first series of which was published in the 1840s), but this seems dubious to me. The use of dialect in fiction has a long history and was commonly used by many writers, and it therefore seems more likely that Lovecraft simply picked it up from his antiquarian reading in general.

> during my numerous summer walks, I fancy I'd receive an icy stare in return – or perhaps a puzzled inquiry as to what theatrical troupe I had wandered out of! (Lovecraft: 1968: 306)

At the same time, Lovecraft did come across still living varieties of the old Yankee dialect during his travels in rural Vermont in 1927 and 1928, the latter trip also providing part of the geographical inspiration for "The Dunwich Horror."[807] More importantly, one should note that Lovecraft says that a *majority* of rural people do not use a different dialect, meaning that there is a minority that still does. In "The Dunwich Horror" this indicates the isolation of the Dunwich community, whereas in "The Colour out of Space," which is set in 1882, the use of dialect instead strengthens the impression of an earlier time.

The Gothic theme continues in the detailed description of Wilbur's goat-like and Satanic appearance, which makes him "exceedingly ugly despite his appearance of brilliancy; there being something almost goatish or animalistic about his thick lips, large-pored, yellowish skin, coarse crinkly hair, and oddly elongated ears."[808] There is also a hint of the Greek god Pan in this description, which is further strengthened by a later direct reference (uttered by the character Henry Armitage) to Arthur Machen's novella *The Great God Pan*, which Lovecraft regarded as a weird fiction masterpiece. However, Pan may be popularly depicted as demonic to some degree, but he was never a "dark and goatish gargoyle,"[809] and one should therefore not make too much of this similarity.[810] This is particularly the case since there is not the slightest hint of a link to sexuality in anything that Wilbur says or does.

There is a repeated emphasis on bad smells throughout the tale in the form of words such as "stenches," "odorous," "stench-filled," and "foetid," and phrases such as "foul odours," "singular odour," "queer stench," "unholy and unidentifiable stench," "frightful stench," "monstrous odour," "unwonted stench," "peculiar stench," "stuff that smells awful," "ineffable foetor," "awful smell," "fearful smell," "indescribable stench," and "lethal

[807] As previously discussed in Chapter 6.
[808] See Lovecraft (2015b: 425).
[809] See Lovecraft (2015b: 433). Pan was goatish, of course, but not an ugly gargoyle.
[810] I can therefore not agree with critics such as Joshi (2013b: 719) and Derie (2014: 81) who suggest that "The Dunwich Horror" is an homage to (or even a pastiche of) Machen's novella. After all, a woman being impregnated by a deity is such a common theme in mythology that there is no need to postulate a specific source for it. Also, I do not see how the character of Helen Vaughan, due to her nature and actions, could be perceived as having any similarity whatsoever with Wilbur or his twin.

foetor."[811] This may be a partly autobiographical touch, given Lovecraft's sensitivity to smells, but it also gives an added realistic richness to the account. It is not just what you see and hear that matters, but also what you smell and feel, particularly when the smell is consistently wrong. And this latter aspect is connected to the alien nature of the weird phenomenon around which the narrative is constructed, a discussion to which I will return in a moment.

The Gothic atmosphere is still further strengthened through the introduction of Lovecraft's personally developed cult theme, which takes the tale beyond colonial Puritanism and into a (fictional) ancient past that is now lost to history. The links to a hidden cult are at first merely hinted at and then gradually revealed in more detail. In the second chapter there is a reference to "Candlemas, which people in Dunwich curiously observe under another name,"[812] although this other name is never revealed. The next hint comes "on Hallowe'en – [when] a great blaze was seen at midnight on the top of Sentinel Hill where the old table-like stone stands amidst its tumulus of ancient bones," followed by local talk of "the bygone magic of Old Whateley, and how the hills once shook when he shrieked the dreadful name of *Yog-Sothoth* in the midst of a circle of stones with a great book open in his arms before him."[813] In the next chapter there is again local talk of "Old Whateley's youth, and of the strange things that are called out of the earth when a bullock is sacrificed at the proper time to certain heathen gods."[814] And later there is this description: "It was here that the Whateleys used to build their hellish fires and chant their hellish rituals by the table-like stone on May-Eve and Hallowmass."[815]

The whole truth is finally revealed in the eighth chapter of the narrative, after Henry Armitage has managed to translate Wilbur's diary. This is when the first specific reference to "certain forbidden cults which have come down from old times" is made, these cults having "inherited many forms and traditions from the wizards of the Saracenic world."[816] This latter comment is a reference to Abdul Alhazred and the *Necronomicon*, introduced earlier in the story when Wilbur started on his

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811 See Lovecraft (2015b: 420, 422, 427, 428, 436, 438, 440, 441, 442, 443, 445, 446, 447, 455, 456, 457, 464). I have listed these words and phrases in the order in which they appeared.
812 See Lovecraft (2015b: 422).
813 See Lovecraft (2015b: 424, 425).
814 See Lovecraft (2015b: 428).
815 See Lovecraft (2015b: 447).
816 See Lovecraft (2015b: 449).

ill-fated quest. Then comes a list of ancient books, soon to become a customary atmospheric element in Lovecraft's tales from the 1930s, and the insight that the code used by Wilbur is "one of great antiquity, no doubt handed down through a long line of mystical experimenters."[817] Later, after the culmination of the narrative, when the class-conscious Armitage tries to explain in simple terms to the villagers what they have just witnessed, he makes a reference to "very wicked people and very wicked cults."[818]

However, despite the primarily Gothic setting and tone of "The Dunwich Horror," there are also some strong hints of cosmic outsideness running in parallel throughout the narrative. "Ye needn't think the only folks is the folks hereabaouts," is Old Whateley's response to local gossip about Wilbur's paternity, and this is later confirmed in the passage about the Old Ones in the *Necronomicon*, in which it is also made clear that Wilbur's appearance is a sign of his outside ancestry:

> 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. […] By Their smell can men sometimes know Them near, but of Their semblance can no man know, *saving only in the features of those They have begotten on mankind*; and of those are there many sorts, differing in likeness from man's truest eidolon to that shape without sight or substance which is *Them*. (Lovecraft 2015b: 433-434)

The odour that always accompanies the unseen presence of the Old Ones, or of things that are connected to them (such as Wilbur's twin or the stone circles on the hills), is one that "could not come from anything sane or of this earth,"[819] which is indeed the case, since the Old Ones are not merely from outer space but from some sort of parallel dimension that overlaps with the human reality.

The Gothic tropes are carefully intertwined with cosmic outsideness in the fifth chapter, when Wilbur arrives at the library and the earlier realism begins to give way to classic Lovecraftian touches in order to produce a steadily growing feeling of the impinging outside, which in this case is concerned with unseen dimensions more than the vastness of space. Armitage first notices the page in the *Necronomicon* from which Wilbur is copying his formula, which contains "such monstrous threats to

817 See Lovecraft (2015b: 450).
818 See Lovecraft (2015b: 466).
819 See Lovecraft (2015b: 427).

the peace and sanity of the world."[820] Then, when he is slowly beginning to put the pieces together, Armitage feels "a wave of fright as tangible as a draught of the tomb's cold clamminess," and Wilbur seems to him "like the spawn of another planet or dimension; like something only partly of mankind, and linked to black gulfs of essence and entity that stretch like titan phantasms beyond all spheres of force and matter, space and time."[821] He refuses to let Wilbur borrow the book because there is "too much responsibility in giving such a being the key to such blasphemous outer spheres."[822] Later, when Wilbur has left, Armitage muses to himself:

> Unseen things not of earth – or at least not of tri-dimensional earth – rushed foetid and horrible through New England's glens, and brooded obscenely on the mountaintops. Of this he had long felt certain. Now he seemed to sense the close presence of some terrible part of the intruding horror, and to glimpse a hellish advance in the black dominion of the ancient and once passive nightmare. (Ibid: 435-436)

> But what thing – what cursed shapeless influence on or off this three-dimensioned earth – was Wilbur Whateley's father? Born on Candlemas – nine months after May-Eve of 1912, when the talk about the queer earth noises reached clear to Arkham – What walked on the mountains that May-Night? What Roodmas horror fastened itself on the world in half-human flesh and blood? (Ibid: 436)

His curiosity and sense of danger thus aroused, Armitage begins to gather all the information he can find on the "formless presences around Dunwich," and he soon finds clues "to the nature, methods, and desires of the strange evil so vaguely threatening this planet."[823] This, of course, is Armitage's subjective point of view, but at the same time the information he finds does suggest that the threat is not wholly unknown on this occasion (since, as stated, "The Dunwich Horror" is primarily a Gothic tale). He does, in any case, develop a feeling of "acute spiritual fear,"[824] which is another instance in Lovecraft's work of a protagonist's initial curiosity leading to fear because of what he has learned. But it also leads to strengthened resolve: "Armitage knew he would be meddling with terrible powers, yet saw that there was no other way to annul the deeper and more malign meddling which others had done before him."[825]

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[820] See Lovecraft (2015b: 433).
[821] See Lovecraft (2015b: 434-435).
[822] See Lovecraft (2015b: 435).
[823] See Lovecraft (2015b: 436).
[824] See Lovecraft (2015b: 437).
[825] See Lovecraft (2015b: 453).

In the next chapter there is a marked increase in certain typically Lovecraftian stylistic elements when the Dunwich horror is about to emerge and Wilbur meets his end in the library. These elements include such phrases as "monstrous prologue," "grotesque trip," "shockingly nervous," "hideously significant," "damnably rhythmical," "foetid pool," "monstrous union," "mad piping," "teratologically fabulous," "foetid ichor," "monstrous blasphemy," "unholy anticipation," and "lugubrious howl."[826] When Wilbur's unearthly anatomy is revealed, Lovecraft makes the point of stating that it is not indescribable: "It would be trite and not wholly accurate to say that no human pen could describe it, but one may properly say that it could not be vividly visualised by anyone whose ideas of aspect and contour are too closely bound up with the common life-forms of this planet and of the three known dimensions."[827] This is another instance of Lovecraft making a precise initial statement before launching into lengthy descriptions, although in this case the descriptions are clinically detailed rather than atmospheric. They do include such terms as the classically Lovecraftian adjective "squamous" (meaning scaly), as well as a reference to "some cosmic geometry unknown to earth or the solar system."[828] Likewise, when Wilbur utters his last words, "the syllables defied all correlation with any speech of earth."[829]

The true nature of the cosmic threat is fully revealed in Wilbur's diary, the translation of which leaves Armitage "in a cold sweat of terror and a frenzy of wakeful concentration," due to the "truths and menaces to man's existence that he had uncovered."[830] This section of the narrative is one in which a little restraint in the reactions of Armitage and his colleagues might have been preferable, but Lovecraft's aim is to depict the utter desperation the three men experience once the implications of their findings become clear. Armitage in fact sinks into feverish nightmares, and even turns delirious after his translation is complete:

> His wilder wanderings were very startling indeed, including frantic appeals that something in a boarded-up farmhouse be destroyed, and fantastic references to some plan for the extirpation of the entire human race and all animal and vegetable life from the earth by some

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826 See Lovecraft (2015b: 437, 438, 439, 440).

827 See Lovecraft (2015b: 438-439).

828 See Lovecraft (2015b: 439).

829 See Lovecraft (2015b: 440). This is preceded by an earlier reference to "sound-producing organs unlike the run of mankind's" (ibid: 435), during Wilbur's conversation with Armitage.

830 See Lovecraft (2015b: 451).

> terrible elder race of beings from another dimension. He would shout that the world was in danger, since the Elder Things wished to strip it and drag it away from the solar system and cosmos of matter into some other plane or phase of entity from which it had once fallen, vigintillions of aeons ago. (Ibid: 452)

The interesting element here is the suggestion that the planet on which we live in fact originated somewhere else (and is thus currently in the wrong place), and that it is therefore we – and not the terrible things from outside – who are the trespassers who should be removed. This is somewhat similar to how, in the later "The Shadow over Innsmouth," it is the immortal fish-frogs and not decadent humanity who are the original and rightful masters of the planet.

This, then, is what the Whateleys hoped to achieve. They "meant to let them in," as Armitage shouts in his delirium, which confirms Old Whateley's dying words when he spoke of "them from beyont" and "the old uns as wants to come back."[831] However, the ultimate motivation of Old Whateley remains unclear (be it sheer madness, a desire for revenge for his outsider status, or the possible rewards offered to cultists in "The Horror at Red Hook"), as he would obviously have been destroyed with everyone else, had he lived to see his plans come to fruition. Wilbur, for his part, looks forward to some sort of future transformation:

> I wonder how I shall look when the earth is cleared and there are no earth beings on it. He that came with the Aklo Sabaoth said I may be transfigured, there being much of outside to work on. (Ibid: 451)

This can again be compared with "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and the transformations in that story of the hybrids into full fish-frogs.[832] Perhaps Old Whateley hoped for something similar.

The fact that it is never entirely clear, nor fully spelled out by an omniscient narrator, that the beliefs of the Whateleys (and the undisclosed motivations behind those beliefs) are completely accurate leaves a residual feeling of unresolved mystery. It is likewise not clear that an event like this has not happened before, nor that it will not

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831 See Lovecraft (2015b: 431, 452).

832 There is another unanswered question here, concerning the reason why the unknown Old Ones would need to create hybrids with humans. The narrative only hints that some sort of agents of a particular kind are needed on this side to open the gates, similarly to how Cthulhu needs cultists to prepare for his emergence from the Pacific (this is a necessary plot point to set the story in motion, but Lovecraft does not otherwise seem to have spent much thought on it). The excerpt from the *Necronomicon* contains a direct reference to Great Cthulhu, and also, interestingly, to the "ice desert of the South," which can be seen as an intertextual link to the at this point not yet written *At the Mountains of Madness*.

happen again. In fact, it *has* likely happened before, as suggested by the reference to "the Devil's Hop Yard – a bleak, blasted hillside where no tree, shrub, or grass-blade will grow."[833] A later repeated reference to this location makes it clear that the Devil's Hop Yard is not a foreshadowing glimpse of the consequences of the culminating events, in which "green grass and foliage wilted to a curious, sickly yellow-grey," after which "the vegetation never came right,"[834] but something else. This has happened before, and it will happen again. The victory achieved by Armitage and his colleagues was thus a temporary and rather hollow one, particularly since the actual saving of the world was achieved by the guard dog in the library when it killed Wilbur (ironically, given Lovecraft's preference for cats).

At this point it remains only to say something about certain class differences that are markedly emphasised throughout the narrative. These differences mainly come to the fore in repeated instances of hysterical fear and passiveness among the decadent villagers, as opposed to the take-charge capability of Armitage (albeit his initial breakdown during his research). As a cultured and learned gentleman, Armitage is a classic Lovecraftian protagonist from the great stories period, one that Lovecraft even confessed to identifying with during the writing of the tale,[835] and his resourcefulness is in marked contrast to the helplessness of the villagers. However, this also means that there are some actual human protagonists in this tale, unusually, who are not mere passive observers of the weird phenomenon. This appears to have been a development not initially foreseen by Lovecraft when he began working on the story.[836]

Examples of the reactions of the villagers to the Dunwich horror include a hired boy who is "almost convulsed with fright"[837] after having seen the prints left behind by the thing. This is followed by a reference to the experiences of a "fear-numbed family,"[838] after which "all the countryside was in a panic; and cowed, uncommunicative groups came and went."[839] The locals are now "too passive to organise for real

833 See Lovecraft (2015b: 421). Compare with the blasted heath in "The Colour out of Space."
834 See Lovecraft (2015b: 464, 465).
835 "[I] found myself psychologically identifying myself with one of the characters (an aged scholar who finally combats the menace) toward the end" (Lovecraft and Derleth 2013a: 158).
836 See the earlier discussion of this tale in Chapter 6.
837 See Lovecraft (2015b: 442).
838 See Lovecraft (2015b: 445).
839 See Lovecraft (2015b: 445-446).

defence," and there is only "a futile, ineffective gesture of loading muskets and setting pitchforks handily about."[840] Finally there is a "fright-mad voice"[841] shrieking on the telephone when the horror wipes out the Frye family, with none of the family members apparently making any attempt at escape (this is unlike the situation with the non-decadent Gardner family in "The Colour out of Space," in which the apathy of the Gardners is due to the draining effect of the intruding presence from outside).

When Armitage and his colleagues arrive on the scene, Armitage finds himself trembling "with the responsibility he felt to be his,"[842] since there is no one else to do what needs to be done. As the situation continues to deteriorate, the three professors are met by "a frightened group of more than a dozen men, running, shouting, and even whimpering hysterically."[843] One of the villagers explains that they came to find the men from the city "ter see what yew thought best ter dew," whereupon Armitage "saw that the time for positive action had come, and spoke decisively to the faltering group of frightened rustics."[844] It has to be said that the spectacle of a group of cowed backwoods villagers passively allowing themselves to be led into battle against an invisible monster by three college professors from the city is not exactly a highpoint in realism, but these depictions are nevertheless in line with some prevailing social attitudes that was a part of Lovecraft's background and that he sometimes gave expression to in his fiction.

These attitudes, in "The Dunwich Horror," once again revolve around the decadence of the isolated villagers. Their passiveness is not due to the fact that they are "rustics," but rather derives from their very low social status as a consequence of their backwoods degeneracy. The capability of Armitage, on the other hand, is a hallmark of his much higher social status, as he is a cultured scholar and well-bred gentleman with roots presumably going deep into New England's past. However, this can also be seen as pointing the way to Lovecraft's brief embrace of technocracy in the early 1930s, although this attitude should be contrasted with his belittling of the "professor-doctor" type, as previously mentioned in this chapter. The distinction here is one between a meritocratic elite (which, as we know, Lovecraft saw as preferable over a traditional aristocracy) as opposed to the conventional narrowness of thought that was characteristic of the stereotypical

840 See Lovecraft (2015b: 446).
841 See Lovecraft (2015b: 447).
842 See Lovecraft (2015b: 455).
843 See Lovecraft (2015b: 456).
844 See Lovecraft (2015b: 458).

genteel New Englander. Given that "The Dunwich Horror" was written in the late 1920s – prior to the changes in Lovecraft's social and political thinking in the 1930s[845] – the character of Armitage is perhaps best seen as a figure that straddles the border somewhat between the conventional (in some of his attitudes) and the elite (in his capability).

In the final confrontation with the horror, Lovecraft makes atmospheric use of indirect description in the same way as in "The Colour out of Space" (in which the culminating events are passively witnessed from a distance). This creates a sense of detachment that is important in order to maintain the atmosphere that has carefully been built up, and not have the narrative descend into the kind of "action" story that Lovecraft loathed. However, there is never really any typical acceleration in the kind of descriptive language that is often found in other stories. What there is instead revolves around the description of unearthly sounds, in contrast to the earlier repeated emphasis on inhuman smells:

> Without warning came those deep, cracked, raucous vocal sounds which will never leave the memory of the stricken group who heard them. Not from any human throat were they born, for the organs of man can yield no such acoustic perversions. Rather would one have said they came from the pit itself, had not their source been so unmistakably the altar-stone on the peak. It is almost erroneous to call them *sounds* at all, since so much of their ghastly, infra-bass timbre spoke to dim seats of consciousness and terror far subtler than the ear; yet one must do so, since their form was indisputably though vaguely that of half-articulate *words*. (Ibid: 463)

> From what black wells of Acherontic fear or feeling, from what unplumbed gulfs of extra-cosmic consciousness or obscure, long-latent heredity, were those half-articulate thunder-croakings drawn? (Ibid: 464)

These words – a "hideous croaking out of space"[846] – are retold in the text, in the process bringing Old Whateley's prophecy to a conclusion, albeit not quite in the expected manner.[847]

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[845] As discussed in Chapter 4, Lovecraft's thinking evolved during the 1930s to such an extent that he wished to do away with traditional social classes altogether. But even prior to this he had always been accepting of anyone, regardless of origin, who proved themselves deserving on meritocratic grounds of the status of elite professional or gentleman of integrity. Thus, there was nothing preventing a member of the educated elite from having originated in a low social class. The exception was those who were irredeemable due to decadence and degeneracy (aside from other concerns having to do with perceived racial or cultural incompatibility, see Chapter 8).

[846] See Lovecraft (2015b: 464).

To summarise, “The Dunwich Horror” is Lovecraft’s mostly successful attempt at communicating the personal atmospheric impressions he had gained from his travels in a particular New England region. At the same time, the Gothic setting of the story is intertwined with a feeling of cosmic outsideness that again, as in “The Colour out of Space,” revolves around an unsettling nearby presence of the unknown and the unseen. This time, however, and in keeping with the Gothic tone of the narrative, the unseen does not emanate from the vastness of interstellar space, but rather from something far more esoteric that can only be reached through the forbidden use of black magic.

9.4. Concluding Remarks

During the analysis of the three stories that have been the subject of this chapter, I have consistently tried to respect what I regard as Lovecraft’s communicative intent with his fiction. As Lovecraft himself once said: “I get the author’s idea now that I have read his explanation; but just what my final impression would have been without that guide, I am not egotist enough to say.”[848] Hopefully, at this late stage in the thesis, there is some possibility of “getting” Lovecraft’s ideas without being egotistic, and so I suggest once again that his communicative intent revolved mainly around the transmission of mood and atmosphere in order to generate certain corresponding emotional responses. The particular impressions that Lovecraft tried, and sometimes even needed, to communicate almost always had their source in his personal experiences (in this case his stay in New York and his travels around New England). And the resulting

[847] Is Lovecraft mocking religion (specifically the crucifixion of Jesus) when the horror is calling for its father? Wilbur was born on Candlemas, which is a minor Christian holiday, and his twin must obviously have been born on the same day, but this is not the birthday of Jesus. It is instead more likely that Lovecraft is simply hinting at certain ancient fertility festivals (since Candlemas falls nine months after May-Eve), in connection with the cult theme. Old Whateley dying on Lammas Night, similarly, is another reference to what was originally a pre-Christian harvest festival. The scene is thus little more than an in-joke, and cannot be considered a major theme in the narrative.

[848] See Lovecraft (2018: 329). This was a comment (in a letter to an amateur journalism colleague in 1932) on the poetry of Frederic Prokosch, a writer who had apparently defended himself in some manner against an unnamed critic. In the same letter Lovecraft also stated that a poet deals in “moods and impressions, usually pictorially symbolised,” and that a poet is “a man desperately driven to express in some way a series of insistent, unplaced impressions which relentlessly haunt him.” These statements can also stand as an “explanation” of Lovecraft’s fiction, since he always regarded his fiction writing as an outgrowth or continuation of his earlier work as a poet.

effect was brought about in part through the use of characteristically evocative language and in part through a style of narration that was focussed more on hinting than spelling out in detail what is happening and why it is happening. This was achieved successfully in "The Colour out of Space," for the most part successfully in "The Dunwich Horror," and not very successfully in "The Horror at Red Hook."

As far as style and language use is concerned, I have tried to show that Lovecraft (even as a fully developed storyteller in the second half of his career) always maintained his early emphasis on the poetic creation of mood and atmosphere. This continued to be true even as his mature style in the final decade of his life turned increasingly in a more realistic and contemporary direction. Important elements of poetically derived language use remained (as seen in "The Colour out of Space" and "The Dunwich Horror"), while the occasional excesses and extravagances (as seen in "The Horror at Red Hook") of his earlier periods as a fiction writer gradually disappeared. Hopefully this attempt at a close reading supports my argument, and with these final points in mind it is now time to turn to the summary and conclusion.

10. Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to suggest certain (to my mind) necessary correctives in the small field of Lovecraft studies, by showing that it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of an author's work by examining the author's life. The purpose has not been to present a revolutionary new reading of Lovecraft's fiction, an outcome that I do not believe can be fruitfully achieved, given the vast amount of critical and scholarly literature that already exists about Lovecraft (this, however, is not to suggest that there is no room for additional research, particularly since a significant amount of Lovecraft's correspondence still remains unpublished). Accordingly, with respect to my own contributions to Lovecraft scholarship, modest though they may be, I would suggest the following main points: An emphasis on certain thematic elements that extend beyond cosmic outsideness, a corresponding diminishing of other elements that I believe have been overemphasised by other commentators, and a recognition that Lovecraft's main goal with his writing was to express himself through images rather than thoughts, meaning that his aim was not to profess a cosmic view (or any other particular kind of view), but to recreate a certain mood or a particular atmosphere through the painting of what can perhaps best be labelled as intricate word pictures. This, however, was to be accomplished through suggestion rather than over-elaborate description.

This also means that Lovecraft's style, throughout its development, was in fact intended to be a precision instrument, with which every sentence was shaped with much care and every word chosen with great deliberation. This explains the lack of dialogue and character development and other such elements that tend to be regarded as essential in conventional fiction-writing. The success of this endeavour can perhaps best be gauged by acknowledging the simple fact that Lovecraft's weird fiction tales outlasted their creator, but this acknowledgement must also be tempered by the equally important recognition of Lovecraft's own constant dissatisfaction with his work. My personal view is that Lovecraft's style was indeed unique in some aspects, that no one has ever managed to replicate it perfectly, and that it undeniably succeeded in producing certain characteristic atmospheric effects.

I agree with Joshi and other critics of the cosmic school that Lovecraft's cosmic outsideness must continue to stand as his main contribution to literature. But I believe this recognition must be a

qualified one, and that it must be adjusted to incorporate a focus on Lovecraft's attempts to evoke the artistic *feeling* of cosmic outsideness, as opposed to his having attempted to develop what amounts to some sort of philosophical school of thought concerned with humanity's situation in an indifferent universe of incomprehensible size. I also believe that the followers of the cosmic school are incorrect in making this aspect of Lovecraft's literary production the one to be of sole overriding importance (particularly since the present-day understanding of cosmic horror and its implications has been developed to a point that, in its essentials, is very rarely to be found in Lovecraft's original work). The images that fuelled Lovecraft's literary creativity had their origin in a multitude of sources, and his writings were for this reason as firmly grounded in other matters, such as the Gothic elements in which he started out, coupled with a later traditional New England regionalism, as in the existential alienation that characterised his cosmic outsideness.

Little needs to be said about the idea that there is a definable "Cthulhu Mythos" embedded in Lovecraft's fiction, as this old concept was exploded long ago. And yet it apparently still needs to be emphasised that this is the case, since echoes of this misconception remain even today in some academic criticism (as, for example, in some writings by David Punter). Similarly, I cannot agree with those who follow Lévy in thinking that Lovecraft's life and thought was characterised by nihilistic hopelessness to the point where he was saved from self-destruction only by escaping into dreams that he then transformed into art. On the contrary, although Lovecraft's life was at times very difficult, he found the strength to persist through an identification with the traditional past, which, through the wilful and self-conscious maintenance of illusions, provided him with a sense of meaning in an ever-changing existence that he otherwise labelled as chaotic, painful, and pointless. I also believe that there has been resistance to (or more often lack of acknowledgement of) this aspect of Lovecraft's thinking, perhaps because of the continued stigma that is associated with the element of escapism that is also an inherent component of his attitude to life. But it was not into dreams or flights of imaginative fancy that Lovecraft escaped (except in the very earliest periods of his career), but rather into such aesthetic, architectural, and scenic elements of the traditional past as he could still find in the real world of the present. And what he saw in these elements, when he found them, served as a source of imaginative fuel for his fiction that was just as strong, if not sometimes more so, as his sense of cosmic outsideness.

Additionally, I believe the school of criticism that was inaugurated by Houellebecq with respect to Lovecraft's racial views to be misguided, as it was (and still is) grounded in a selective reading of Lovecraft's writings, which, furthermore, appears to take little account of context or background. It needs to be recognised that Lovecraft's racialism was rooted in the mainstream science and popular opinion of the day, and as such remained unexamined and largely irrelevant to his fiction. Aside from the occasional detail, there is little trace of Lovecraft's negative opinions on race and immigration in the majority of his work, and even his opposition to race-mixing is either subverted entirely or absorbed into the fictional issue of species-mixing for the purpose of promoting a cosmic viewpoint. As for Lovecraft's political views, his early support for fascism in the 1920s later developed into an idiosyncratic utopia he briefly concocted on paper in the early 1930s, which signified a desire for socialist welfare reform that he believed could only be implemented on the principles of an authoritarian technocracy, with some of the inspiration for this coming from his limited insight into Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy. He soon, in any case, abandoned these ideas in favour of the New Deal and Fabian socialism, with the consequent additional abandonment of his aristocratic class thinking, as well as his anti-Semitism, in the final years of his life. These developments, however, had little impact on his fiction.

Another common misconception that needs to be corrected is the popular emphasis on fear, not merely as a theme in Lovecraft's fiction-writing (in which, of course, it remains important), but as a strong motivating factor in his own personal life. But Lovecraft's interest in the emotion of fear appears to have had its source in his childhood nightmares, and in almost every other aspect it was instead curiosity, rather than fear, that motivated him both in real life and in his depiction of his autobiographical protagonists. In a similar context there is one other important misconception, regarding which there appears to be no critical awareness at all, and which concerns the theme of madness and what turns out to be the relative unimportance of it in Lovecraft's work as anything other than a frequently used storytelling device derived from Gothic fiction. This is realised once it is understood that the young Lovecraft is likely to have viewed his possible mental issues as a source of pride rather than shame, prior to the mature Lovecraft moving away from the matter entirely (he occasionally referenced his own perceived mental stability in later years), while still maintaining the theme of

madness as a tool to suggest the emotional impact of traumatic events on his narrators.

Following the above brief discussion concerning what I regard as necessary corrections to certain prevailing critical attitudes towards Lovecraft and his work, I will now present a final summary of my main conclusions. Despite his occasional protestations that he wrote only for himself, Lovecraft was undeniably a storyteller who wrote for an audience, albeit at first a small one. The audience was small because he approached his storytelling as a form of artistic self-expression (grounded in high culture aspects from the Georgian era, coupled with an aesthetic art for art's sake attitude), and it is a measure of his artistry that his work nevertheless also spoke to a larger popular audience that eventually came to embrace it.

At the same time, this suggests something of a mismatch between the stories that Lovecraft was trying to tell and the audience to which he was telling them – Lovecraft was a pulp writer who did not write pulp fiction – but in the end, he was successful in communicating what he wished to express (otherwise he would not be remembered today), albeit at first only to a limited section of his core audience. The wider audience more often heard what they wanted to hear, given the persistence of the critical and popular misunderstandings that still surround Lovecraft's work, ranging from the excesses of the Cthulhu Mythos to the recurring misrepresentations of Lovecraft as a person and a writer. There is a failure in communication here, but whether it lay with Lovecraft or with his readers must remain a question for another time.

In order to fully understand Lovecraft one must go back to his childhood and teenage years, when his formative experiences shaped his major interests and guided his intellectual development, and to his early surroundings, both his immediate local environment and also the larger social environment in which he grew up, and from which he absorbed certain lifelong attitudes of deep foundational importance. At the most basic level rests his cultural pessimism, derived from a larger intellectual trend going back into the nineteenth century and likely imbibed mainly from his reading, combined with his developing view of himself as a gentleman, modelled on the English gentleman of the eighteenth century, which also constituted much of the basis for his high art aesthetic thinking. His earliest fictional interests revolved around the Gothic novels and Poe, whereas his interest in astronomy laid the groundwork for his cosmic outlook, which was further developed in the wake of the astronomical breakthroughs regarding the size of the universe that

occurred in the 1920s. His cosmic outsideness (the vastness of the universe, and the concomitant insignificance of humanity) was born out of his cosmic pessimism (the ultimate meaninglessness of everything), which in turn was an outgrowth of his cultural pessimism (the irreversible decline and impending fall of the West).

This developing attitude was originally built on his philosophical reading, which centred on such elements as the pessimism of Schopenhauer and the general *fin de siècle* intellectual climate of the time (later reinforced by Spengler and Krutch), a belief in determinism derived from Nietzsche and Haeckel (which made his later impersonal concept of indifferentism possible), and the wilful maintenance of illusions as a way to find or create meaning, likely derived from Santayana and Nietzsche (which gave him a foundation on which to build his return to the traditional past after New York, as a bulwark against modernism). The concomitant communicative and possibly even therapeutic need to express these various ideas, images, and conceptions resulted in a vast amount of writing, in the form of his autobiographical tales, his essays and travelogues, and his autobiographical letters that were sometimes lengthier than his stories.

Thematically, Lovecraft's storytelling remained as concerned with the Gothic as with the cosmic throughout his career. His first story written as an adult was Gothic, as was his final story, and some of his recognised great works in between constitute prime examples of Gothic masterpieces in literature overall (such as "The Dunwich Horror"). His originality does tend to emerge most strongly in his cosmic fiction, but this does not suggest or imply that the remainder of his work should be ignored or dismissed, particularly since a significant number of his later stories are seamless blends of both the Gothic and the cosmic. With respect to other thematic concerns, the protagonists in Lovecraft's tales are mainly motivated by curiosity rather than fear (as previously stated), and the elements of fear and madness only enter into the picture as a consequence of too much curiosity. The twin aspects of awe and horror that underlie Lovecraft's cosmic outsideness obviously form a strong emotional response, but it was a response to the vastness and strangeness of a universe that Lovecraft regarded as endless and eternal, and not to something local and specific that he feared (or hated) about it.

Going back briefly to what I have said on Lovecraft's self-expression, it can be argued that the very deepest foundational current in Lovecraft's writing, underlying all the thematic concerns, stemmed from his artistic attempts to *express what he felt and saw*, whatever that in the end turned

out to be. This is also the primary sense in which his fiction is so closely tied to his life. Sometimes, particularly in some of his later stories, what Lovecraft saw and felt was indeed cosmic horror, but at other times it was something else. This is also why his later fully developed regionalism was so intensely autobiographical in nature, and it is likewise the obvious reason why he focussed so intently on New England and, particularly, on certain aspects of it, having to do with the untouched past, and the elements of that past that still remained.

The aim of this thesis has been to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of Lovecraft and his tales, by attempting to answer a simple question: What did Lovecraft try to communicate with his fiction? And the answer to this question is that Lovecraft aimed at sincere self-expression with his writing, which was to be accomplished through the successful capturing of certain moods and images that held deep aesthetic or associational significance for him. Always on a quest for beauty and truth, Lovecraft found what he searched for in a fictional escape from reality in youth and from natural limitations later in life. His escape was based on ideas of a traditional environment tied to the ancestral past, which provided the illusion of meaning for him in a chaotic and modernity-beset existence that was forever changing, while surrounded by the yawning gulf of an incomprehensibly vast cosmic outsideness without end. Lovecraft persistently viewed himself as an artist (never as a pulp writer), and he did not waver in this, not even in the few years in the early half of the 1920s when he attempted a literary career in New York. The failure of this attempt confirmed him permanently in his traditional high art view of literature, but it also resulted in a remarkable instance of personal growth, with the end result that Lovecraft transformed the conceptual space of weird fiction into something new, now widely known as cosmic horror.

The two pillars on which Lovecraft's mature fiction came to stand were the old Gothic fiction of the past and the new cosmic fiction of his own devising, and it is the resulting idiosyncratic brand of Gothic-infused cosmic horror that stands as his personal contribution to literature, in which are combined the elements of awe and horror as an emotional, artistic, and intellectual response to what Lovecraft saw as the true nature of reality (or, put differently, the cosmic element constitutes the awe and the Gothic element brings out the horror that is inherent in cosmic outsideness, which is to say that without the Gothic there would only be the cosmic and no cosmic horror). Slowly but steadily, the sensitive poet and dreamer who saw weird fiction as a form of poetic

self-expression grew into the seasoned storyteller, whose tales inexorably pulled away in the direction of literary novels (primary examples being “The Colour out of Space” and *At the Mountains of Madness*), and it is the great tragedy of Lovecraft’s literary life that no suitable outlet for his artistic efforts ever became available to him.

Appendix: Source Material

The relevant source material for this thesis has been extensive. In addition to several book-length biographies and other biographical writings,[849] there are also five volumes of collected essays and more than twenty volumes of collected letters, plus some additional collections that contain poetry and other miscellaneous writings. Added to this are the various short story collections that contain all of Lovecraft's collected fiction, including collaborations. As will become apparent, the vast majority of this material has its source in work outside of the academic world, although a few volumes have been published by university presses.

Biographical Material

The earliest biographical article written about Lovecraft appeared as early as 1915, long before Lovecraft had seen any of his fiction published professionally (and even before he had written any fiction as an adult). The article was called "Little Journeys to the Homes of Prominent Amateurs," written by one Andrew Francis Lockhart, and it was published in the *United Amateur* journal. Following Lovecraft's death in 1937, a flood of remembrances soon appeared from both fellow amateurs and professionals, and similar items continued to trickle in steadily over the subsequent decades.[850] Many of these reminiscences have been collected in a volume, *Lovecraft Remembered*, edited by Peter Cannon and published by Arkham House in 1998. A larger collection (with a good deal of overlap) was published in 2018 by Necronomicon Press as *Ave atque Vale: Reminiscences of H. P. Lovecraft*, edited by S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz.

There was also a special issue of *The Olympian* amateur journal devoted to Lovecraft in 1940.[851] Additional memoirs were collected in the Spring 1958 issue of *Fresco* (a quarterly published by the University of Detroit), and in a number of Arkham House collections of miscellanea,

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849 Some critical reactions to Lovecraft have been collected in Joshi (1980, 2010b). Other collections of critical essays include Simmons (2013), Sederholm and Weinstock (2016), Butts (2018), and Moreland (2018).

850 At first, many of them were published in various fan publications and fanzines such as the *Acolyte*.

851 This journal was originally published between 1906 and 1917 by Lovecraft's old friend Edward H. Cole. It was revived by Cole in 1940 for a special memorial issue devoted to Lovecraft (see Lovecraft 2007b: 267 footnote 7, 276).

edited by August Derleth: *Marginalia* (1944), *Something About Cats and Other Pieces* (1949), *The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces* (1959), and *The Dark Brotherhood and Other Pieces* (1966). Another collection, modest in scope, was *Rhode Island on Lovecraft*, edited by Donald M. Grant and Thomas G. Hadley, and published in a very small print run in 1945. Of slightly greater note is *Caverns Measureless to Man: 18 Memoirs of H. P. Lovecraft*, edited by S. T. Joshi and published by Necronomicon Press in 1996. Some additional critical essays and recollections can be found in *A Weird Writer in Our Midst* (2010), also edited by Joshi, and in several of the letter collections (see below) that are published by Hippocampus Press, which often include additional material written by Lovecraft's respective correspondents.

The first full-length biography of Lovecraft was *H. P. Lovecraft: A Biography*, written by L. Sprague de Camp (best known as a professional science fiction and fantasy author) and published in 1975. There has been some controversy over the years surrounding this volume, with allegations from some that de Camp was biased and unsympathetic towards his subject. The book was also, for obvious reasons, not as thorough in its research as later volumes (notably by Joshi), since the renaissance in Lovecraft scholarship was still in its infancy at the time. A couple of minor items had appeared before this: *Some Notes on H. P. Lovecraft* by August Derleth and *Exiles and Fabrications* by Winfield Townley Scott, the former a limited edition chapbook published in 1959, and the latter an essay collection with some material on Lovecraft published in 1961. Other minor items include *The Normal Lovecraft* by Wilfred B. Talman, printed in 600 copies in 1973, with essays by L. Sprague de Camp and Gerry de la Ree;[852] Frank Belknap Long's *Howard Phillips Lovecraft: Dreamer on the Nightside*, which came out the same year as de Camp's biography; *The Dream Quest of H. P. Lovecraft* by Darrell Schweitzer, which is a brief booklet published in 1978; and *H. P. Lovecraft: His Life, His Work* by Kenneth W. Faig, Jr., which is another small pamphlet, published in 1979. Among relevant minor items must also be listed *The Private Life of H. P. Lovecraft*, by Lovecraft's ex-wife Sonia H. Davis, published in 1985.

The foremost Lovecraft biographer at present is unquestionably S. T. Joshi, who has written many other relevant works in addition to the authoritative *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H. P. Lovecraft*, which was published in two volumes in 2010 (paperback edition in 2013). Prior to that, Joshi composed *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life* in 1996, which was also

[852] Talman's memoir is included in *Lovecraft Remembered*.

published in an abbreviated edition as *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H. P. Lovecraft in His Time* in 2001. Minor works include the biographical material in the *H. P. Lovecraft* volume in the Starmont Reader's Guide series in 1982, and the illustrated *H. P. Lovecraft: Nightmare Countries* in 2012.

A number of recent biographies by other writers have also appeared,[853] beginning with *H. P. Lovecraft: Master of Weird Fiction* by William Schoell in 2004. Others include *The Dream World of H. P. Lovecraft* by Donald Tyson in 2010, *The Curious Case of H. P. Lovecraft* by Paul Roland in 2014, *HP Lovecraft: The Mysterious Man Behind the Darkness* by Charlotte Montague in 2015, and *In the Mountains of Madness: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of H. P. Lovecraft* by W. Scott Poole in 2016. These are all minor works that give the impression of having been written mostly to cash in on the current Lovecraft vogue, and they are thus flawed, sometimes deeply so. This is especially the case with Tyson's effort, since Tyson proceeds from the assumption that magic is real and that Lovecraft was an unwilling "astral traveller" who received the inspiration for his work from a higher supernatural realm of some sort in another dimension. Roland follows a similar line, whereas Poole's book is haphazardly written and sensationalist in tone in some of its unfounded speculations on Lovecraft's sexuality. Montague's lavishly produced work is perhaps best suited as a coffee table book, but adds nothing new.

Finally, there are a number of documentaries about Lovecraft, including *Favourite Haunts: A Journey Thro' H. P. Lovecraft's Providence* (1990, 27 minutes), directed by William K. Desjardins; *I Am Providence: A Story of H. P. Lovecraft and His City* (1997, 28 minutes), directed by Agnieszka Taborska and Marcin Giżycki; a French/Belgian production called *The Case of Howard Phillips Lovecraft* (1998, 45 minutes), directed by Patrick Mario Bernard and Pierre Trividic; *The Eldritch Influence: The Life, Vision and Phenomenon of H. P. Lovecraft* (2003, 86 minutes), directed by Shawn R. Owens; *Lovecraft: Fear of the Unknown* (2008, 90 minutes), directed by Frank H. Woodward; and an episode of a Swedish series, *Skräckministeriet: Det inre monstret* (2009, 10 minutes), which includes a segment on Lovecraft with an interview with Joyce Carol Oates, among others. Then there is also *The H. P. Lovecraft Collection*, a series of DVDs containing films from previous years of the H. P. Lovecraft Film Festival, and some of the extra material on these DVDs is of potential interest. Needless to say, this list is not exhaustive.

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[853] A Lovecraft biography in graphic novel format by Sam Gafford and Jason C. Eckhardt, called *Some Notes on a Non-Entity: The Life of H. P. Lovecraft*, was published in 2017.

Autobiographical Material

A number of collections of Lovecraft's autobiographical letters – in which he recounted his life's story in response to questions from correspondents – have been published over the years, but in this study I will go to the original sources (or, rather, to the reproductions of them in the larger volumes of collected letters). I will, nevertheless, also make note of the various relevant autobiographical works and collections, as follows: *Some Notes on a Nonentity*, published by Arkham House in 1963 (this essay by Lovecraft was previously included in *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*, and has been republished in *Lord of a Visible World*, below, and in volume five of the *Collected Essays*); *Ec'h-Pi-El Speaks*, an autobiographical letter by Lovecraft, privately published by Gerry de la Ree in 1972 (also republished in volume five of the Collected Essays); *Lovecraft at Last*, a collection of autobiographical letters from Lovecraft to Willis Conover, edited by Conover, published in 1975 (a second edition with a new introduction by S. T. Joshi was published in 2002); *Autobiographical Writings*, a chapbook edited by S. T. Joshi and published by Necronomicon Press in 1992; and *Lord of a Visible World: An Autobiography in Letters*, edited by Joshi and David E. Schultz, and published by Ohio University Press in 2000. Of these volumes, the latter is by far the most authoritative and complete. Additionally, Lovecraft's most important autobiographical essays are collected in volume five of the *Collected Essays*.

The Letters

The first major collections of Lovecraft's correspondence were the five volumes of *Selected Letters* that were published by Arkham House between 1965 and 1976, edited by August Derleth, Donald Wandrei, and James Turner.[854] These collections contained only a small selection of Lovecraft's letters, and the letters were often reproduced in severely abridged form. They were also marred by a substantial amount of transcription errors. Nevertheless, the importance of these volumes should not be underestimated, as they were largely the reason for the surge of scholarly interest in Lovecraft that led to the boom in Lovecraftian scholarship from the 1970s onwards.

[854] These volumes were preceded by *Dreams and Fancies*, published by Arkham House in 1962, which was a small short story collection that also contained a number of letter fragments in which Lovecraft discussed his dreams.

A number of smaller collections published by Necronomicon Press followed, starting with *H. P. Lovecraft in "The Eyrie"* (1979), edited by S. T. Joshi and Marc A. Michaud. Other volumes include *Uncollected Letters* (1986), edited by Joshi; *Letters to Henry Kuttner* (1990), edited by Joshi and David E. Schultz; *Letters to Richard F. Searight* (1992), edited by Joshi and Schultz, with Franklyn Searight; *Letters to Robert Bloch* (1993), edited by Joshi and Schultz (a supplement to this volume was also published the same year); *Letters to Samuel Loveman & Vincent Starrett* (1994), edited by Joshi and Schultz; and *H. P. Lovecraft in the Argosy* (1994), edited by Joshi. This latter volume contains some very early letters by Lovecraft to *The Argosy* and *The All-Story*,[855] and also letters from others in response to Lovecraft's criticism of the sentimental stories written by Fred Jackson (see Chapter 2).

Since 2003, Hippocampus Press has published a new *Letters of H. P. Lovecraft* series, under the editorship of Joshi and Schultz. At the time of writing there are close to twenty volumes in this series, and these are the works that I have relied upon the most as the source material for this study. The series is numbered (beginning with volume six) as follows: 1. *Letters to Alfred Galpin* (2003), 2. *Letters to Rheinhart Kleiner* (2005), 3. *Essential Solitude: The Letters of H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth* (2008/2013, two volumes), 4. *A Means to Freedom: The Letters of H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard* (2009/2011, two volumes),[856] 5. *Letters to James F. Morton* (2011), 6. *Letters to Elizabeth Toldridge & Anne Tillery Renshaw* (2014), 7. *Letters to Robert Bloch and Others* (2015), 8. *Letters to J. Vernon Shea, Carl F. Strauch, and Lee McBride White* (2016), 9. *Letters to F. Lee Baldwin, Duane W. Rimel, and Nils Frome* (2016), 10. *Letters to C. L. Moore and Others* (2017), 11. *Dawnward Spire, Lonely Hill: The Letters of H. P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith* (2017), 12. *Letters to Maurice W. Moe and Others* (2018), and 13. *Letters to Wilfred B. Talman and Helen V. and Genevieve Sully* (2019). Additional collections have been announced at the time of writing, and there are several planned volumes to come in the future. Joshi (2013b: 1042) has estimated that a complete,

[855] *The Argosy* and *The All-Story* were early pulp magazines published by Frank Munsey, which the young Lovecraft read during his isolated years leading up to World War I, prior to his starting writing again as an adult, and long before he had developed his later aesthetic ideas.

[856] The 2011 reprint contains a new addendum. An alternative numbering of the Hippocampus volumes lists *Essential Solitude* as volumes 1-2 and *A Means to Freedom* as volumes 3-4. This is because new editions of *Letters to Alfred Galpin* (2003) and *Letters to Rheinhart Kleiner* (2005) were published in 2020, too late for me to make use of them, and these volumes also contain letters to some other correspondents. The two-volume *Letters to Family and Family Friends* was also published in 2020.

unabridged collection of all of Lovecraft's extant letters will fill approximately 25 volumes,[857] meaning that the source material for this study, despite its extensiveness, remains incomplete. But, happily, this also means that there is room for continued research in the future.

In addition to this, there are a some earlier authoritative collections, also edited by Joshi and Schultz, that were not published by Hippocampus Press. They include *Mysteries of Time and Spirit: The Letters of H. P. Lovecraft and Donald Wandrei* (2002),[858] *Fritz Leiber and H. P. Lovecraft: Writers of the Dark* (2003, edited by Joshi and Ben J. S. Szumskyj), *Letters from New York* (2005),[859] *O Fortunate Floridian: H. P. Lovecraft's Letters to R. H. Barlow* (2007), and *The Spirit of Revision: Lovecraft's Letters to Zealia Brown Reed Bishop* (2015, edited by Sean Branney and Andrew Leman, with an introduction by Joshi).

Finally, there are some small additional collections in the *Lovecraft Annual* series:[860] "Letters to Lee McBride White" in *Lovecraft Annual No. 1*; "Letters to Carl Ferdinand Strauch" in *Lovecraft Annual No. 4* (these first two collections are also included in volume eight of the *Letters of H. P. Lovecraft* series, see above); "Letters between H. P. Lovecraft and Orville L. Leach" (edited by Donovan K. Loucks) in *Lovecraft Annual No. 7*; "Letters to Farnsworth Wright" in *Lovecraft Annual No. 8*; "Letters to Marian F. Bonner" in *Lovecraft Annual No. 9*; "Postcards to Jonathan E. Hoag," as well as "Fragments of the Lost Letters of H. P. Lovecraft to Robert E. Howard," the latter unearthed by Bobby Derie, in *Lovecraft Annual No. 10*; and "H. P. Lovecraft in 'The Sideshow'" and "Letters to the Coryciani" in *Lovecraft Annual No. 11*. One other collection, "Letters to John T. Dunn," can be found in volume 38-39 of the *Books at Brown* publication (a scholarly periodical that was issued by the Friends of the Library of Brown University from 1951 through 1998). Most of this is now included in the Hippocampus Press series.

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857 In a post on his blog in January 2021, Joshi announced that the remaining volumes still to publish over the coming two or three years are *Letters to E. Hoffmann Price and Richard F. Searight*, *Letters to Woodburn Harris and Others*, *Letters to Hyman Bradofsky and Others*, *Miscellaneous Letters*, and *Letters to Frank Belknap Long*. The total will thus be 23 volumes in the Hippocampus Press series.

858 Now superseded by a new volume in 2019 from Hippocampus Press, *Letters with Donald and Howard Wandrei and to Emil Petaja*, which was published too late for me to be able to take advantage of it.

859 *Mysteries of Time and Spirit* and *Letters from New York* are volumes one and two, respectively, of the *Lovecraft Letters* series, published by Night Shade Books. No further volumes appeared in this series, but the two that were published serve as preliminary titles (now superseded) to the Hippocampus Press series.

860 Published by Hippocampus Press and edited by S. T. Joshi.

There are some notable gaps in Lovecraft's preserved correspondence. Almost all the letters from Lovecraft to his wife Sonia and to his close friend Samuel Loveman were later destroyed by their respective recipients (Sonia took a trunk containing the letters out into a field and burned them, after the final dissolution of her marriage to Lovecraft; in the case of Loveman it is unclear exactly how the letters were lost or destroyed,[861] except for the eight that still remain). Another long-time friend of Lovecraft's, W. Paul Cook, also destroyed the letters he had in his possession, for reasons that are likewise unclear. Other examples include most of the 200 pages of letters that C. L. Moore once had in her possession, which subsequently went missing at some point for unknown reasons, although all of Moore's letters to Lovecraft are still extant. The letters to Frank Belknap Long, on the other hand, remain in the hands of a book dealer who has refused to allow their publication (only fragments and extracts have previously been published).[862] In addition to this, many of Lovecraft's letters to Robert E. Howard were accidentally burned by Howard's father (despite this, the collected correspondence between Howard and Lovecraft still remains extensive enough to fill two large volumes). And there are also untold numbers of lost letters to obscure correspondents of whom little or nothing is known.

The Essays

Some of Lovecraft's non-fiction writing is available in the previously mentioned Arkham House collections of miscellanea,[863] but these volumes have since been superseded by the five definitive collections of essays, edited by S. T. Joshi, that were published by Hippocampus Press from 2004 to 2006: *Collected Essays Volume 1: Amateur Journalism* (2004), *Collected Essays Volume 2: Literary Criticism* (2004), *Collected Essays Volume 3: Science* (2005), *Collected Essays Volume 4: Travel* (2005), and *Collected Essays Volume 5: Philosophy; Autobiography and Miscellany* (2006). These were preceded by a volume called *Miscellaneous Writings*, published in 1995 by Arkham House and also edited by Joshi, with the help of James Turner. Also of interest here is *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, first published in 2000, with a revised and updated

[861] See Lovecraft (2018: 28-29).
[862] This is why, if an agreement has been or can be reached, the letters to Frank Belknap Long will be the final volume in the Hippocampus Press series.
[863] Another obscure source is *The Lovecraft Collectors Library*, which is a series of seven pamphlets published between 1952 and 1955 by SSR Publications. The first five pamphlets contain selected essays and poetry by Lovecraft.

edition in 2012, edited with a commentary by Joshi. This is Lovecraft's most famous essay, regarded as a seminal work in the annals of weird fiction scholarship.

The Poems

A selection of Lovecraft's poetry called *Collected Poems*, edited by August Derleth, was published by Arkham House in 1963 (this collection was reprinted by Ballantine in 1971 as *Fungi from Yuggoth and Other Poems*). Some of Lovecraft's poetry also appeared in the Arkham House collections of miscellanea,[864] and in various other minor volumes by different publishers over the years. The current authoritative edition containing all of Lovecraft's extant poetry is *The Ancient Track: The Complete Poetical Works of H. P. Lovecraft*, originally published in 2001 by Night Shade Books, with a revised second edition in 2013 from Hippocampus Press, both editions edited by S. T. Joshi. This new edition incorporates some additional poems that had previously been published in *Lovecraft Annual No. 3*. In addition to this there is an annotated edition of *Fungi from Yuggoth*, edited by David E. Schultz and illustrated by Jason C. Eckhardt, and published by Hippocampus Press in 2017.

The Stories

The earliest collections of Lovecraft's short stories were published by Arkham House only a few years after Lovecraft's death: *The Outsider and Others* (1939, this was also the very first book ever published by Arkham House) and *Beyond the Wall of Sleep* (1943). These volumes were never reprinted, and Lovecraft's (almost) complete fiction was instead first published in three volumes in the 1960s: *The Dunwich Horror and Others* (1963), *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels* (1964), and *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* (1965). There were severe problems with the textual accuracy in these editions, however, as S. T. Joshi discovered when he compared the published texts with Lovecraft's extant manuscripts at Brown University in Providence, and this eventually led to the first revised editions of the texts being published in the 1980s, corrected by Joshi. Further revisions by Joshi followed in the Penguin Classics editions that were published around the turn of the millennium: *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (1999, reprinted as a Penguin Modern Classics volume in 2002), *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories* (2001), and *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird*

[864] Except *The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces* (1959), which contains no poetry.

Stories (2004). Still more corrections by Joshi were incorporated into Lovecraft's *The Complete Fiction* (2011), a one-volume edition published by Barnes & Noble.[865] The currently most authoritative version in regards to textual accuracy is the *Collected Fiction: A Variorum Edition*, edited by Joshi and published by Hippocampus Press in three volumes in 2015, in celebration of the 125th anniversary of Lovecraft's birth, with a fourth volume (containing Lovecraft's revision work and collaborations) in 2017.[866]

A number of Lovecraft's stories were written in collaboration with other authors or as revisions for various clients (this being the primary way in which Lovecraft supplemented his modest income), and these stories were previously collected in a two-volume edition edited by Joshi and published by Arcane Wisdom Press in 2012 as *The Crawling Chaos and Others* and *Medusa's Coil and Others*. Also of interest are a number of annotated editions that contain selections of Lovecraft's fiction with extensive commentary. These include *The Annotated H. P. Lovecraft* (1997) and *More Annotated H. P. Lovecraft* (1999), edited by Joshi (the latter volume co-edited by Peter Cannon) and published by Dell, and *From the Pest Zone* (2003), edited by Joshi and Schultz and published by Hippocampus Press. Of particular interest is the mammoth *The New Annotated H. P. Lovecraft* (2014), edited with a foreword and notes by Leslie S. Klinger, with an introduction by Alan Moore, and published by Liveright. This was followed by a second volume, *Beyond Arkham*, in 2019 (which I have not examined for this thesis).

In addition to the many titles mentioned here, Lovecraft's fiction has also been printed and reprinted in literally hundreds of other volumes and editions over the years. Needless to say, I have not included any such titles in the bibliography, save for a few chosen exceptions that contain material of interest, usually introductions, by various notable authorities.

[865] This edition, in turn, is the corrected second edition of Lovecraft's *The Fiction*, published in 2008, which contained numerous typographical errors and misprints.

[866] It should be noted that this corrective work has sometimes been ignored, as in the case of the Oxford University Press edition (Lovecraft 2013b) edited by Roger Luckhurst.

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