

Fear Maketh Man: The Influence of H. P. Lovecraft's Fears on His Work

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ABSTRAKT

Obsah tejto bakalárskej práce sa bude zabývať mentalitou Howarda Philipsa Lovecrafta a tým, ako jeho chronický strach zo sveta spôsobil, že Lovecraft sa stal jedným z najuznávanejších autorov hororovej literatúry. Jeho strach ovplyvnil všetky aspekty jeho života, ako aj jeho zmýšľanie, a dopomohol k vzniku celosvetovo známych diel, ktoré v posledných rokoch čelia obrovskej popularite. V tejto práci bude rozobraný jeho strach a diela, a dokázané, že tento strach bol všadeprítomný, a Lovecraft ho dokázal využiť na to, aby vo svojich čitateľoch vzbudil rovnaký pocit úzkosti a strachu z nepoznaného.

Kľúčové slová: H. P. Lovecraft, strach, Cthulhu, fóbia, kozmický strach, analýza textu, horor

ABSTRACT

The content of this thesis will deal with the mentality of Howard Philips Lovecraft and how his chronic fear of the world has made Lovecraft one of the most respected authors of horror literature. His fear has influenced all aspects of his life, as well as his mindset, and has helped to create world-famous works which have been facing huge popularity in recent years. This thesis will discuss his fear and works, and prove that this fear was omnipresent and Lovecraft was able to use it to evoke the same sense of anxiety and fear of the unknown to its readers.

Keywords: H. P. Lovecraft, fear, Cthulhu, phobia, cosmic fear, text analysis, horror

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Fear is something that is present in every sentient being. It has been with humanity since its infant stage, deeply rooted in our genetic code. It protects us and dictates our basic survival instincts.

So why does the phrase "Fear Maketh Man" apply to the works of Lovecraft? The original quote "Manners Maketh Man" comes from the motto of William of Wykeham, whose quotation was then included in a book by his friend, William Horman, called *Vulgaria*. The proverb entertains the idea that politeness and good manners are essential to humanity¹. The same applies to fear as one of the first and most crucial aspects of our development.

Lovecraft was a master of conditioning fear through his writings. He established a dark uncomfortable setting, creating the vision of horror and terror through his morbidly visual descriptions of primordial entities and detailed actions. For this, Lovecraft became known as the father of modern horror. In his time, he was practically unknown and remains unknown to this day. However, thanks to the internet, he has recently experienced a boom in popularity due to the change of mentality and interests of the younger generation of adults known as Generation Y or millennials. He has begun to appear in popular media such as comics and has been inspiring countless stories and movies, one of them being an Oscar-winning film *The Shape of Water* by Guillermo del Toro, inspired by H. P. Lovecraft's novel "The Shadow Over Innsmouth".

Lovecraft himself defends his perverse focus on fear in the introduction of his work *Supernatural Horror in Literature* with the words:

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."²

In this thesis, I will introduce the psychological notions and concepts of both fear and phobias, explore how both affect the human mind, and the way humans think and perceive the world when subjected to fear or when they are under its influence. Related to this is the existence of nightmares as an offspring of dreams and fear.

In the second chapter, I will introduce Howard Phillips Lovecraft as a man and as an author. Although he was an extremely intelligent and a spectacular writer, Lovecraft's deeply

¹ *Farlex Dictionary of Idioms*. s.v. "manners maketh man."

² H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 1041.

internalised xenophobia and his own fear of the unknown have shaped his persona – something that he was well aware of – this fear was used to shape the vast universe in his fiction. One of my aims is to research Lovecraft’s interests as well as his many fears and how they have influenced what he wrote about.

Lastly, I will analyse several of Lovecraft’s short stories individually: “The Call of Cthulhu”, “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”, and “Dunwich Horror”. I will provide a short summary of the story and then follow up with a proper analysis on the occurrence of fear in each story and then finally describing how Lovecraft’s fears reflect in each of them, and how they shape the main character, the world around them, and the strange occurrences.

The main aim of this thesis is to introduce Lovecraft’s fears and to analyse how his mental state affected the way he wrote. I will argue on the topic of his mentality directly shaping today’s concept and understanding of Lovecraft’s fiction and what essentially gave a new name to modern-day horror, sparking the controversial era of Lovecraftian mythos featuring his nightmare-ish beings.

*"I am Providence."*³

H. P. Lovecraft



*That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die.*



Figure 1 Lovecraft by @enzotriolo.ink

source: <https://ko-fi.com/post/Lovecraft-tribute-L4L5W5P5>

³ H. P. Lovecraft, *Lord of a Visible World: An Autobiography in Letters*, ed. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 192.

1 FEAR

Fear is the most basic primitive human emotion. It is a powerful and primal survival mechanism that keeps us alive. Arguably, it is the first emotion that our ancestors have ever experienced along with the need to sexually reproduce.

In an evolutionary sense, fear is vital and incredibly complex. We can distinguish two types of responses to fear:

- a) *biochemical*
- b) *emotional*

Biochemical reactions are universal to every being, regardless of their origin, age, or state. When faced with fear, the stimuli trigger a “fight or flight” response, also known as acute stress response, in our brains. The fight or flight survival mechanism (Fig. 1) forces us to either take action and deal with the situation or flee. This mechanism surfaced with the recognition of fear in early humans and developed all the way into the modern ages. Nowadays, we are able to take control of some situations willingly despite our fight or flight response being the polar opposite⁴.

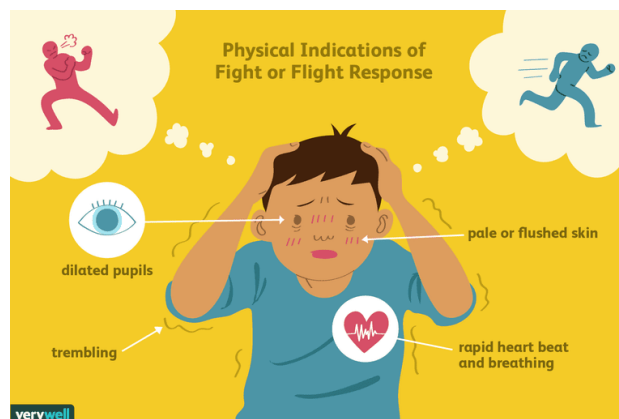


Figure 2 Fight or flight mechanism, Illustration by Joshua Seong. © Verywell, 2018.

Emotional reactions vary from person to person, depending on their personalities and ways of dealing with their fears and stress. However, emotional reactions can also be positive.

Fear triggers the heightened presence of adrenaline and stimulates similar hormonal reactions we experience when we are excited⁵.

In the past, fear was learnt through personal experiences, such as being attacked by

⁴ Lisa Fritscher, “The Psychology Behind Fear,” Verywell Mind (Verywell Mind, September 15, 2019), accessed on November 12, 2019, <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-psychology-of-fear-2671696>.

⁵ Lisa Fritscher, “The Psychology Behind Fear,” Verywell Mind (Verywell Mind, September 15, 2019), accessed on November 12, 2019, <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-psychology-of-fear-2671696>.

another creature, being exposed to lightning that has set a tree on fire, or anything that has threatened the survival of earlier humans⁶. While the same theory of learning fear still resides within us, over time an evolutionary trait has been observed. Such a phenomenon is called anticipation, defined by Merriam-Webster as the act of preparing for something⁷.

Any fear-inducing stimuli might provoke an automatic fight-or-flight reaction. Why do humans fear encountering a dangerous animal, despite having no real chance of meeting one? It is hard to find a wild animal in a large city, yet many people are still anticipating fear in the event that such an encounter might happen. This particular anticipation is called conditioned fear or prepared stimuli.⁸

1.1 Psychology of fear

In his inaugural article *Coming to Terms with Fear*⁹, Joseph LeDoux talks about the research he has conducted on the topic of fear and how the brains of humans learn what to be afraid of. He claims that his colleagues and him have originally thought the process of learning fear and responding to it to be done by the same “fear system”.

However, LeDoux quickly claims the theory to be false, using Pavlovian Fear Conditioning as an example.

I. P. Pavlov was a Russian physiologist and behaviourist most known for his experimentation on habit conditioning with dogs, also known as Pavlov’s Dogs.¹⁰ The Pavlovian Fear Conditioning is an experiment, where fear was conditioned in animals and humans by the repeated use of a neutral cue - conditioned stimulus¹¹ - followed by a negative stimulus. When the subjects were later exposed to the neutral cue, they would associate it

⁶ Arash Javanbakht et al., “Instructed Fear Learning, Extinction, and Recall: Additive Effects of Cognitive Information on Emotional Learning of Fear,” *Cognition and Emotion* 31, no. 5 (2016): pp. 980—7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2016.1169997>.

⁷ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “anticipation,” accessed on December 12, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anticipation>.

⁸ Arne Öhman and Susan Mineka, “Fears, Phobias, and Preparedness: Toward an Evolved Module of Fear and Fear Learning.,” *Psychological Review* 108, no. 3 (2001): pp. 483—522, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.108.3.483>.

⁹ Joseph E. LeDoux, “Coming to Terms with Fear,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 8 (2014): pp. 2871—2878, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1400335111>.

¹⁰ Saul McLeod, “Pavlov’s Dogs,” Pavlov’s Dogs Study and Pavlovian Conditioning Explained | Simply Psychology (Simply Psychology, October 8, 2018), accessed on November 11, 2019, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/pavlov.html>.

¹¹ *Collins Dictionary*, s.v. “conditioned stimulus,” a stimulus to which an organism has learned to make a response by classical conditioning, accessed on April 13, 2020, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/conditioned-stimulus>.

with the negative stimulus, exhibiting a fear-conditioned response.

In the article, LeDoux states that according to him, fear occurs through raw neural materials. The outcome is simply a combination of multiple raw neural materials in different quantities and from different sources, varying from person to person, tied together by danger awareness (based on the raw neural materials). He clearly argues that fear arises from the threat or a challenge of the personal well-being of our sentient brain.

However, David H. Barlow describes anxiety as something different. In his book *Anxiety and Its Disorder: the Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic* he calls it “the shadow of intelligence”¹², emphasising that many philosophers and psychologists think of fear (turned into anxiety) as something that humans wouldn’t be able to live without. According to them, it serves as a way of protection. He uses a short story by M. F. K. Fisher titled “The Wind Chill Factor” as an example of the notion of fear being the shadow of intelligence. In the story, the main character, Mrs Thayer, is left alone in her friend’s cottage during a raging storm. She wakes up from a dream in panic yet she is aware the panic is not present because of the fear of the dark or the storm. Rather than that, she is experiencing the urge to run away from nothing, despite knowing it would mean a certain death if she ran out into the storm. Barlow calls it a paradox – the primal need to run from safety, masked as danger, into real danger being a survival instinct.

1.2 Phobias

Phobias are classified as an anxiety disorder - a persistent type of anxiety where one anticipates a future threat that is potentially dangerous, often when it comes to survival. Phobias often cause various degrees of distress and discomfort. Some phobias are harmless, some might result in nervous breakdowns or severe anxiety and panic attacks.

Anxiety disorders dealing with phobias are often divided into three categories: specific phobias, social phobias, and agoraphobia¹³.

Specific phobias are tied to a specific object of fear and are most likely to develop during childhood. They produce a fearful and anxious reaction even if they do not directly threaten one’s survival. The reactions can range anywhere from a simple fear reaction to complete

¹² David H. Barlow, *Anxiety and Its Disorder: The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2004), p. 1.

¹³ Sadie Dingfelder, “Distinguishing between Phobias,” *American Psychological Association* 36, no. 7 (2005): p. 98. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/julaug05/distinguishing>.

body paralysis. In worse scenarios, phobias can lead to a medical emergency¹⁴.

Social phobias, such as the fear of being watched, answering the phone, being in the centre of attention, or fear of talking to strangers often cause extreme pressure and stress in social situations, resulting in a social anxiety disorder.

Agoraphobia is generally described as a fear of open or closed spaces but we can talk about it as a fear of “situations you cannot escape from”. One subtype is claustrophobia or the phobia of small or narrow spaces. These phobias usually appear in advanced age and can affect a person’s life to such an extent that the person can be prevented from living a normal life in society.

1.3 Influence of fear on mental wellbeing

In some cases, fear is dangerous for both the brain and the body. In a physical sense, it can result in the shutdown of many vital functions, most regularly the cardiovascular system, or in weakening the immune system. However, a positive physical effect of fear is the sharpening of our senses and the enhancement of the production of adrenaline.

When it comes to mental health, fear can escalate into chronic phobias, paranoia, or cause the development of the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In other cases, it can lead to depression, anxiety, and insomnia.¹⁵

In extreme cases of fear, it can damage the hippocampus, the part of the brain that deals with memory, which can lead to long-term memory loss or manic amnesia. Other damages to the brain can result in the damage of emotion regulation (causing the person to be susceptible to negative and impulsive behavior), decision-making, and thinking.¹⁶

A special case of fear manifestation are nightmares. Nightmares are vivid in nature and appear in the REM phase during one’s sleep. Nightmares occur after prolonged exposure to stress, anxiety, or in cases when people suffer from a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nightmares are characterised as “extremely frightening dreams”, negative in nature, and besides fear are often featuring signs of distress, anger, and grief.

¹⁴ S. Dingfelder, “Distinguishing between Phobias,” *American Psychological Association* 36, no. 7 (2005): p. 98. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/julaug05/distinguishing>.

¹⁵ Jaime Rosenberg, “The Effects of Chronic Fear on a Person's Health,” AJMC, November 11, 2017, accessed on December 3, 2019, <https://www.ajmc.com/conferences/nei-2017/the-effects-of-chronic-fear-on-a-persons-health>.

¹⁶ Jaime Rosenberg, “The Effects of Chronic Fear on a Person's Health,” AJMC, November 11, 2017, accessed on December 3, 2019, <https://www.ajmc.com/conferences/nei-2017/the-effects-of-chronic-fear-on-a-persons-health>.

This thesis will primarily deal with nightmares induced by trauma. These types of nightmares are a part of the re-experiencing cluster and very common for people that suffer from PTSD. Studies reveal trauma-induced nightmares in 60% of people diagnosed with PTSD. PTSD nightmares consist of three clusters¹⁷:

- a) re-experiencing the event (in nightmares and in flashbacks)
- b) avoiding stimuli that would trigger the trauma
- c) hyperarousal (insomnia, tension)

¹⁷ Victor I. Spoormaker, Michael Schredl, and Jan Van Den Bout, "Nightmares: from Anxiety Symptom to Sleep Disorder," *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 10, no. 1 (2016): pp. 19—31, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.smr.2005.06.001>.

2 H. P. LOVECRAFT

Most of the information currently available on H. P. Lovecraft has been summarized in the many books of S. T. Joshi and the wonderful biography by L. Sprague de Camp, which have become the primary sources of this chapter.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890, in Providence, Rhode Island to a traditional well-off New England family. They were traditional in the sense of being a distinguished family of strong ancestry. From his mother's side, the family line reached way back into the 17th century. From his father's side, the Lovecraft family extended to the Middle Ages in England. Some Lovecrafts have emigrated to the United States in the 19th century and H. P. Lovecraft's paternal lineage was amongst them¹⁸. As a result of that, the Phillips-Lovecrafts have still thought about themselves as "proper English semi-nobility".

However, ever since Lovecraft was young, their household was in a lasting state of financial decline. On top of that, at the turn of the centuries, the rich city of Providence has experienced financial stagnation. The combination of these declines has, in particular, shown on the state of the Phillips-Lovecraft house which suffered more than just a chipping façade and a broken roof. Despite everything, Lovecraft loved his house and hoped, that one day, he would be able to buy it with his own wealth¹⁹.

The Phillips-Lovecraft household suffered. Not only was their money in decline and their house in shambles, but in 1893, Lovecraft's father, Winfield Scott Lovecraft, was admitted to an asylum, the Butler Hospital in Providence, after suffering a paralytic attack (nervous breakdown resulting in paralysis). The Butler Hospital became his final resting place. Five years later, in 1898, Winfield Scott Lovecraft succumbed to tertiary syphilis²⁰.

Predictably, neither Lovecraft or his mother could handle that. His mother, Sarah Susan Phillips Lovecraft, was traumatised. She took her son and returned to the Phillips family house. Her mental health has worsened and between her states of emotional sobriety, she alternated between being overprotective of her son and being emotionally distant. In those trying times, Lovecraft found a replacement for his father in his grandfather, the wealthy industrialist Whipple Phillips.

In his youth, Lovecraft received formal schooling and attended the Slater Avenue

¹⁸ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 9.

¹⁹ H. P. Lovecraft, "Letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, 16 November 1916," in *Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft I (1911-1924)*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1964), pp. 29—42.

²⁰ L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 17.

School and Hope Street High School, though due to his poor health, he had to withdraw from his studies in 1903 without receiving a diploma.

Despite that, Lovecraft was naturally curious – he lived next to a library and had access to numerous scientific texts. He was especially interested in chemistry and astronomy. Unfortunately, simply put, Lovecraft was a mathematical anti-talent. It resulted in halting further progress in his scientific studies and his lack of knowledge in sciences has shown in his writing. Some examples of that are non-Euclidean geometry or the principles of freezing – air-conditioning – in his story “Cool Air” where Dr Muñoz is a decaying corpse that is kept alive by keeping the temperature in his apartment below 0.

Overall, this resulted in Lovecraft only having basic skills and knowledge. Consecutively, it led him to be unable to find a stable job²¹.

In 1918, Sarah was admitted to a mental asylum after reportedly seeing “monsters in the shadows”. It led people to believe that she is crazy. Though, thanks to the early 20th century mental healthcare, the actual diagnosis remains unknown as Sarah was simply diagnosed with “hysteria” – a common diagnosis for most women, also called the “mad-woman disease”²². Left untreated, Sarah died three years later and Lovecraft spiralled deep into depression²³.

But Lovecraft, despite his lack of general skills, was a phenomenal writer and learnt how to put his feelings on a paper. Even until then, he had several stories to his name, but after the death of his mother, he began writing his infamous story “The Call of Cthulhu” which gave life to the “Cthulhu Mythos” and the universe crafted around it. He finally managed to publish the story in 1926.

The year 1926 was big for Lovecraft in more ways than one. Two years prior, in 1924, Lovecraft married Sonia H. Greene, a one-shot writer from Ukraine. The two met during their time at the United Amateur Press Association, which Sonia was a president of for a certain time. It was not a happy marriage. Lovecraft was not happy. Upon marrying Sonia, he moved to her apartment in Brooklyn. Back then, Sonia was a businesswoman and worked as a manager of a large department store.

²¹ L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 227.

²² John A. DeLaughter, “Mommie Dearest: H.P. Lovecraft's Descent into Maternal Madness,” *Lovecraft eZine*, November 14, 2013, accessed on November 11, 2020, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/11/14/mommie-dearest-h-p-lovecrafts-descent-into-maternal-madness-by-john-a-delaughter/>.

²³ L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 169.

Lovecraft hated Brooklyn. In fact, he hated any place that was not his hometown of Providence. This hatred was amplified by the fact that Brooklyn was a borough of immigrants – especially before the 1930's when the "Great Migration" happened²⁴. Naturally, Lovecraft's xenophobia made him distrustful of the city and its inhabitants²⁵. The source of this information was his wife, Sonia, who said:

"Whenever we found ourselves in the racially mixed crowds which characterize New York, Howard would become livid with rage. He seemed almost to lose his mind."²⁶

Sonia had eventually lost her position as a manager and was forced to leave Brooklyn to pursue a career elsewhere. In 1926, Sonia and Howard divorced and Lovecraft fled Brooklyn.

One could say that Lovecraft was overwhelmed by the horror of the steadily growing population of Afro-Americans. Upon moving back to Providence, Lovecraft wrote and lived off his dwindling family inheritance in his family's old house²⁷. In 1937, H. P. Lovecraft succumbed to intestinal cancer at the age of 46.

He died being nearly unknown.

Throughout his life, Lovecraft lived off being an author and an editor, but he was never able to sustain himself. And yet he still wrote and wrote to no end. Not only stories but also letters. Lovecraft was in contact with many aspiring writers and acquaintances from his circle. Some of those included Donald Wandrei and August Derleth, two younger authors who had been tutored by Lovecraft. L. Sprague De Camp, Lovecraft's biographer, estimated that Lovecraft wrote some 100,000 letters in his lifetime²⁸ and most of them have been recovered and can now be found bound in five volumes of *Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft*. In fact, it was Wandrei and Derleth who have put these books together. Both were close acquaintances of Lovecraft's.

In his letters, Lovecraft revealed a lot more about himself than he had in his books. He was critical of the works of many authors, addressing open letters to several renowned ones.

²⁴ "History of Brooklyn - Early 20th Century," accessed on March 17, 2020, <https://www.thirteen.org/brooklyn/history/history4.html>.

²⁵ L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 267.

²⁶ Lin Carter and Gervasio Gallardo, *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the "Cthulhu Mythos"* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p. 45.

²⁷ Donald Burleson, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft," in *H. P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 13.

²⁸ L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. xii.

One such author was Fred Jackson. On one hand, Lovecraft received an enormous backlash from Jackson's fans, but on the other, the feud his letter caused led him to be invited into the United Amateur Press Association. In 1914, Lovecraft accepted the invitation²⁹.

What was fascinating about Lovecraft and his letters was not only the amount of personal information that he shared, but also the fact that Lovecraft seemed to be fond of impersonating various personalities and characters in his letters.

His letters were often long and many times, he used pseudonyms of made-up personalities when writing them. Those which appeared the most often were Lewis Theobald and Theobaldus (or Theobaldus the Tearful)³⁰.

In addition, those letters signed under made-up pen-names have also been addressed to people who used pseudonyms themselves and wrote under the pretence of being someone else. Thus, that is the proof of Lovecraft's fondness for role-playing. One such recipient, his aunt Mrs F. C. Clark, was often addressed as "My daughter," or "My dear daughter Lillian."³¹

In addition, Lovecraft was so addicted to sending letters that in his later years, when he truly began to struggle with money, he would skip meals in order to afford to send his letters.

Taken from Lovecraft's letter to James Ferdinand Morton, dated May 16 1926, these words now lie engraved upon his tombstone and on a plaque upon his house.

"I am Providence, and Providence is myself – together indissolubly as one, we stand thro' the ages;
a fixt monument set aeternally in the shadow of Durfee's ice-clad peak!"³²

2.1 Lovecraft's fears

Besides his "quirks", Lovecraft was infamous for his fears. As an individual, Lovecraft has suffered since his early childhood. As it was mentioned overhead, both of Lovecraft's parents have been considered mentally unstable to a degree and died when Lovecraft was relatively young.

Not only did he suffer physically as a result of his poor health, but Lovecraft has also

²⁹ S. T. Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H P Lovecraft in His Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), pp. 75—76. Accessed on April 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjhg7.

³⁰ H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft II (1925-1929)*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1965).

³¹ H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft II (1925-1929)*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City: Arkham House, 1965).

³² H. P. Lovecraft, *Lord of a Visible World: An Autobiography in Letters*, ed. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 192.

suffered mentally. He was diagnosed with chronic depression and anxiety, and as a result, he often experienced night terrors and hallucinations³³.

Before his mother's institutionalization, she mentioned seeing figures in the shadows and sometime after, Lovecraft admitted to being plagued by similar visuals. These strange sights have been attributed to Lovecraft's insomnia and sleep paralysis. Sleep paralysis, in particular, is a state of sleep that occurs during the REM phase. The individual cannot move their body whilst their mind is awake and experiencing hallucinations³⁴.

However, Lovecraft has managed to utilize his constant nightmares and hallucinations. Despite the numerous fears that sprang up from his consciousness, Lovecraft's imaginative mind did not let those go to waste and in many, if not all, cases, his stories took shape from his fears.

As Luc Sante wrote in his article "The Heroic Nerd":

"The things that did not frighten him would probably make a shorter list."³⁵

Lovecraft was afraid of nearly everything. Perhaps the most notable fear of Lovecraft's was his unconditional fear of the ocean and anything connected with it. Be it marine life or seafood in general. Lovecraft was able to put his own horrors on paper and create monsters and deities that came from the ocean. Not only were the monsters marine, but they were also invertebrates and made of a gelatinous mass, playing into two more fears that Lovecraft had.

The brilliance of Lovecraft's monsters comes from the author's ability to provide grotesque yet vague descriptions of said monsters. Part of them comes from his own imagination, his fears, while the other is solely up to the reader and their own imagination and fears.

Almost comically, Lovecraft had a plethora of strange fears that cannot be explained by anyone. Amongst the most ridiculous things, Lovecraft was afraid of salad and potentially most plants. A theory suggests that this fear resulted in Lovecraft having little to no vegetables in his diet. He often talked about his dietary habits in his letters. His distaste for vegetables has appeared in a letter to J. Vernon Shea, sent on 30th October 1931. Other amusing fears include the fear of temperatures below zero, countryside, deserts, non-

³³ S. T. Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H P Lovecraft in His Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001): p. 368. Accessed on April 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjhg7.

³⁴ Brian A. Sharpless and Karl Doghramji, "Sleep Paralysis," *Sleep Paralysis*, 2015, pp. 71—92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780199313808.003.0006>.

³⁵ Luc Sante, "The Heroic Nerd," *The New York Review of Books*, accessed on April 19, 2020, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2006/10/19/the-heroic-nerd/>.

Euclidean geometry, percussion instruments, obese people, the colour grey, mists, whistling, and whispering.

Non-Euclidean geometry, in particular, was something that Lovecraft did not understand. Since he has never progressed in his mathematical and scientific studies, he has misunderstood how this sort of geometry functions, yet he has included it in his stories. An explanation is provided in the fascinating study done by Benjamin K. Tippet which focuses on the space-time curvature of the city of R'lyeh which appears in the story "The Call of Cthulhu"³⁶.

There are many more fears that Lovecraft suffered from, some more common, like rats ("The Rats in the Walls"), or the fear of old age. Lovecraft was also afraid of dogs and had once written an essay, titled "Cats and Dogs", on why he thinks cats are better than dogs. He himself had a cat, which was given an unsightly name, and had once sat in his chair for nearly 9 hours simply because his cat had fallen asleep in his lap and he did not wish to disturb it³⁷. Lovecraft's fear of dogs appears, for example, in "The Dunwich Horror", where Wilbur hates dogs, and they hate him and are afraid of him in return.

But two fears that truly define Lovecraft are his xenophobia and his nihilistic concept of cosmic fear.

Firstly, his xenophobia should be commented upon. H. P. Lovecraft was first and foremost an undeniable racist. At the beginning of the 20th century, racism was nothing unusual but Lovecraft's deep-set hate went beyond the social concept of race³⁸. Calling him xenophobic is the closest we can get to cataloguing him. If we were to get into detail, Lovecraft was afraid and hated anything and everyone beyond his hometown of Providence who was foreign, was not heterosexual, white, male, educated, or who came from a poor or an improper background.

On top of that, as L. Sprague de Camp calls it, Lovecraft was "ancestor-conscious"³⁹. Being from a family with a strong and pure heritage, Lovecraft put great emphasis on social

³⁶ Benjamin K. Tippet, "Possible Bubbles of Spacetime Curvature in the South Pacific," University of New Brunswick, n.d., <http://titaniumphysicists.brachiopemedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Rlyeh.pdf>.

³⁷ John DeLaughter, "Lovecraft's Views on Cats (and Dogs), Their Function in His Selected Works, and Their Relevance for Today," Lovecraft eZine, October 10, 2013, accessed on March 22, 2020, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/10/10/lovecrafts-views-on-cats-and-dogs-their-function-in-his-selected-works-and-their-relevance-for-today/>.

³⁸ Phillip Smith, "Re-Visioning Romantic-Era Gothicism: An Introduction to Key Works and Themes in the Study of H.P. Lovecraft," Literature Compass, 2011, pp. 830—839. <https://mla.hcommons.org/deposits/objects/mla:508/datastreams/CONTENT/content>.

³⁹ L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 11.

hierarchy and class. Therefore, we can call Lovecraft a “classist”. Some of Lovecraft’s friends were Jewish or homosexual (namely, Samuel Loveman was both) but he was willing to overlook that as long as they were educated and had a respectable family background.

His xenophobia plays an important role in many of his stories, even though it is usually the racial construct that plays a larger role. This can be observed in many of Lovecraft’s stories where antagonists are usually of different skin colour and uneducated. One such example can be found in “The Call of Cthulhu” where the narrator’s uncle Angell reportedly dies after being pushed over by a dark-skinned sailor. Similarly, most of the cultists and the cult’s victims in the story are described as being of different skin colour.

Secondly, Lovecraft’s concept of cosmic fear and horror and his nihilistic approach to the existence and purpose of mankind in the world plays a great role in this context.

The general idea behind this fear is that mankind is nothing but a speck of dust in the great cosmos and bears no significance in the general matter of things. Lovecraft was greatly interested in astronomy to the point he even wrote amateur astronomical articles. That is where his idea and fear came from.

The concept of Cosmicism embraces and deals with the vastness of the universe. It is closely tied with existentialism and the depression that comes with the realisations that humans are insignificant⁴⁰. Lovecraft’s cosmos is embodied by the deities that he has created – a pantheon of beings that come from the outer space to conquer and destroy humanity. Most of his characters seek out knowledge of cosmos but their journeys always end up tragically⁴¹.

This Lovecraft-influenced idea gave way to the genre we commonly refer to as “cosmic horror”. It is not only a literary genre, but spans across other media. A perfect example of this would be the movie *Prometheus* by Ridley Scott, which is said to be heavily influenced by Lovecraft’s story “At the Mountains of Madness”⁴². In the movie, a crew of humans embarks on a journey across space to figure out the origin of mankind, hoping to meet their makers.

⁴⁰ Caleb Griego, Sean Keeley, and Chandler Ford, “Human Insignificance Proves to Be the Biggest Horror,” *The Heights*, February 22, 2016, accessed on March 22, 2020, <https://bcheights.com/2016/02/21/112548/>.

⁴¹ Chris Murray and Kevin Corstorphine, “Co(s)mic Horror,” in *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. David Simmons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 157—191.

⁴² Mike Davis, “Is ‘Prometheus’ a Lovecraftian Movie?,” *Lovecraft eZine*, June 14, 2012, accessed on March 22 2020, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2012/06/13/is-prometheus-a-lovecraftian-movie/>.

3 ANALYSIS

For this thesis, the analysis of Lovecraft's works is crucial. Despite being afraid of many things, Lovecraft utilised his phobias and used them to create over a hundred stories. Writing was his only way of venting comfortably – having an outlet for his fears and coping with them - and resulted in him shaping many characters after himself.

3.1 “The Call of Cthulhu”

According to the introduction by the editor of *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction*, S. T. Joshi, “The Call of Cthulhu” was written in the summer of 1926 while the idea and the synopsis of the plot have been dated to the summer of 1925. Joshi mentions that Lovecraft could not write the story immediately when he had the idea in 1925, seeing that he had to wait until he had travelled back to his hometown of Providence in New York.

Joshi mentions the writing to be a synthesis of several other works from which Lovecraft had gained inspiration, such as A. Merrit's “The Moon Pool”, Maupassant's “The Horla”, and several others, including theosophical texts and the sonnet “The Kraken” by Robert M. Price. Lovecraft has, however, combined his inspiration from these works into something new that became entirely his.

In the sixth chapter “Spectral Literature on the Continent” of his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft further muses about his choices of inspiration drawn from these works. “The Horla” is where his inspiration for the Elder God Cthulhu came from. In the text, Lovecraft had expressed his fascination with the author's apparent madness and his “...morbid outpourings of a realistic mind in a pathological state...”. The work features “an invisible being who lives on water and milk, sways the minds of others, and seems to be the vanguard of a horde of extraterrestrial organisms arrived on earth to subjugate and overwhelm mankind”⁴³.

The story was initially not allowed to be published – it was rejected by both magazines that he has submitted it to – *Weird Tales* and *Mystery Stories*.

In 1928, upon a suggestion of one of his writer friends, Donald Wandrei, it was resubmitted to *Weird Tales*. The magazine has published the story in its February issue after hearing Wandrei mentioning that Lovecraft was thinking of submitting it elsewhere.

The story is a narration of the memories of the central character Francis Wayland

⁴³ H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, ed. E. F. Bleiler (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1973), p. 23.

Thurston. Much like Lovecraft himself, Francis was a well-educated white New Englander with a prominent background and “proper” breeding.

As the story opens, it is revealed that Francis recently came into possession of his grand-uncle’s notes after his mysterious death. His uncle, George Gammell Angell’s, was a renowned professor at Brown University in Providence. Francis suspects that Angell’s death was not natural and that there was more to it than just Angell’s age and the report of the witnesses that have claimed Angell was shoved by a “nautical-looking negro” and has later died after a steep descent from a hill. Francis briefly wonders whether there was more to his death.

Francis discovers Angell’s secret notes and a bas-relief statuette among them, describing it as something otherworldly and hybrid of nightmarish origin. Later, it is discovered that this statue portrays one of the Old Gods, Cthulhu. A series of investigations and witness reports lead to terrific and horrific conclusions that leave Francis uncomfortable, jostled, and wishing for death.

Angell’s notes speak of a series of strange occurrences that have happened over the course of three months. Simultaneously, people all around the globe have witnessed the same dreams and nightmares, have gone insane, or have died mysteriously. Francis discovers that the statuette he has found among his grand uncle’s notes was made by a student at the Rhode Island School of Design named Henry A. Wilcox, whose presence is found within the manuscript, providing the context for the appearance of the bas-relief clay statuette. Wilcox says that it has come to him in a strange dream and that his hands have crafted the icon unconsciously while he was half-asleep.

His knowledge and presence of cult-related information is further denied in Angell’s notes, simply blaming Wilcox’s imagination on the “startling fragments of nocturnal imagery”⁴⁴ or simply said, the nightmares that Wilcox has suffered from. Angel and Wilcox meet several times during which the student speaks of his strange dreams of the sunken city of R’lyeh. After the artist fails to meet him again, Angell notes that Wilcox has become delirious and fallen ill. The doctor tasked with taking care of him has reported Wilcox speaking about monstrous nonsense.

Miraculously, sometime later, Wilcox gets better and stops having the dreams entirely. Professor Angell, therefore, conducts interviews with various people of different classes,

⁴⁴ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 358.

finding out that the working class was unaffected, scientists have suffered nightmares, and the artists and poets have been nearly completely incapacitated by the sheer amount of horror, reporting that they have dreamed of the same sunken city.

This instance, however, was not the first time that Angell had come across the name Cthulhu. Prior to this incident, Angell had attended a conference of the American Archeological Society in New Orleans where he met detective Legrasse. Legrasse has brought in a statuette that he has confiscated from one of his latest raids involving the Louisiana swamp-dwellers who have reported their women and children going missing.

Upon further investigation, Legrasse finds out that the missing squatters have been used as a sacrifice for a ritual during which a hundred men, all of non-white background, danced around a pyre in a ring around a hill upon which a monolithic statue stood. The saner of the cultists are arrested and Legrasse interrogates one of them – a man named Castro – who seems enthusiastic to share his knowledge on the lore of the mythos.

Castro speaks of the Great Old Ones, dormant gods that once ruled the world but are currently dead and waiting for their revival in the sunken city of R'lyeh. They can communicate with people through their dreams, hence the creation of the cult. He also sheds light on the strange inscriptions that both Legrasse and Angel came across, translating them as: "In his house at R'lyeh, dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."

Based on this, and the realization that his uncle must have been freaked out by hearing Cthulhu's name again, Francis decides to conduct his own investigation. Between Angell's notes, he finds an old clipping from a newspaper article, dated to the same time as Wilcox's delirious episode. The article is about a Norwegian man named Johansen, who had been found adrift upon a ship in the middle of nowhere.

The article sheds little to no light on the topic and therefore, Francis journeys to Oslo to meet the man, but finds out that Johansen has recently passed away under less than fortunate circumstances. He bribes his wife into letting him read Johansen's manuscripts to find out what had truly happened.

Johansen had sailed with his crew aboard a ship named *Emma* that got attacked by another ship *Alert* full of Kanakas⁴⁵. Johansen and his mates have won the battle but lost their ship, thus they boarded *Alert* and sailed the ocean until they came across an uncharted

⁴⁵*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "kanaka," (native) workers of colour originating from around the Pacific Ocean, accessed on January 29 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kanakas>.

island that had not been on their maps. The sailors seem perplexed by the sight of non-Euclidean⁴⁶ architecture and the massive door that they come across. They decide to open it and unknowingly free the god Cthulhu. Several of the sailors end up dead on the spot. Johansen and one another sailor manage to escape and board the *Alert* but end up being followed by the god. Johansen's crewmate went insane after staring at Cthulhu for too long while Johansen tried to desperately make the engine work faster, an effort during which he managed to ram the ship through Cthulhu's gelatinous body.

The damage done to the god has allowed Johansen to escape the island, which has promptly disappeared under the sea. It is later revealed that this mysterious island was, in fact, the top of R'lyeh. When the *Alert* reaches civilization, Johansen is found shaking on board with his dead comrade, clutching a relief statuette of Cthulhu in his hands.

On his way home, Francis finishes reading Johansen's notes. All the information obtained from those texts confirms his fears. Somewhere in the world, the Cult of Cthulhu still exists. He becomes paranoid and frantic. He knows that they will come after him now just like they have after Johansen and Angell. He knows too much and that will lead to him being killed by the cult sooner or later.

3.1.1 Lovecraft's fears in "The Call of Cthulhu"

The most prominent fear present in "The Call of Cthulhu" is Lovecraft's unfathomable fear of the ocean and what lives in it – marine life and invertebrates alike. The design of Cthulhu, much like most of the Great Old Ones comes from aquatic imagery. Cthulhu is described by Lovecraft in "The Call of Cthulhu" as "a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind."⁴⁷ The sentence is followed by the character of Francis describing Cthulhu as a grotesque mixture of a cephalopod, a dragon, and a human.

This fear, called *thalassophobia*, is commonplace and springs from



Figure 3 The Statue of Cthulhu by Steve Mockus

⁴⁶ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "non-Euclidean," not in accordance with Euclid's elements, geometry placed on a curved surface, accessed on January 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/non-euclidean>.

⁴⁷ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 362.

the vastness of the ocean. Until now, only 5 per cent of the ocean have been explored⁴⁸ and the presence of the unknown in the depths appears as a key element in most of Lovecraft's stories.

Even though Cthulhu is widely associated with water, in this story it is revealed that while he does have some aquatic features, the ocean is primarily his prison, not dwelling. The Old Ones have been cast into the depths of the ocean where they would lie asleep until their time comes. Cthulhu acts as a guardian to the city of R'lyeh, watching over the other gods. Henceforth, this is why he is considered to be the main god – despite being imprisoned, he was the only one to remain conscious. Lovecraft used this to touch upon the idea of nihilism and the meaninglessness and minuscule size of the humans in the vastness of the universe. It is what came to be known as the notion of Lovecraft's "cosmic fear".

Another present fear is that of non-Euclidean geometry. Due to his "poor constitution for math" which had left him with no progress in the field of science - geometry included. In particular, non-Euclidean geometry is impossible to witness in real life. The geometry works only with specific curvature – warped onto the surface of a sphere. In layman's terms, if one were to look at an object from two slightly different angles, the object would be visible in one angle but warp and "disappear" in the other⁴⁹.

To add on to the appearance of Cthulhu, he is said to be made of a gelatinous substance, something that Lovecraft was largely unsettled by due to his poor education in the field of sciences as well, perceiving its existence as something not natural.

His xenophobia played a great role in the story as well. Angell was said to be killed by a black dock-worker and the cult surrounding Cthulhu is made primarily of people of other races and skin colours. However, the cultists are comprised of white people as well, many of which come from a poor background or have no education.

To counter Lovecraft's more than obvious racism, the character of Johansen becomes a polar opposite. He had been turned into a hero after massacring a group of natives and coming back from his strange encounter alive. He can be considered trustworthy in the eyes of Lovecraft, and by extension Francis, simply because he comes from a respectable background and is Norwegian, therefore white.

⁴⁸ US Department of Commerce and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "How Much of the Ocean Have We Explored?," NOAA's National Ocean Service, January 1, 2009, <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/exploration.html>.

⁴⁹ David W. Henderson and Daiana Taimina, "Encyclopædia Britannica," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, January 15, 2017, accessed on April 24, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/science/non-Euclidean-geometry>.

3.2 “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”

The short story “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” was written and published towards the end of Lovecraft’s life in the winter of 1931. In the story’s introduction, Joshi describes the process of its creation as Lovecraft’s “experiment”. He argues that originally, Lovecraft wanted to write the story in a “different (unknown) manner” to see what works best for him⁵⁰. The original draft of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” still exists in fragments and is available online or in collections of Lovecraft’s works.

The main premise of the story originates from within Lovecraft’s love for decay and obscurity but as Joshi states, minor details drawn from other works can be observed, namely Irvin S. Cobb’s “Fishhead” and Algernon Blackwood’s “Ancient Sorceress”.

Besides that, Lovecraft’s main inspiration for the story was his personal experience – shortly before writing it, he had found that he is part Welsh from his grandmother’s side⁵¹. This information took him by surprise. As it has been mentioned in the second chapter, Lovecraft had always been proud of his pure New England ancestry. Therefore, hearing that he was part Welsh had been a devastating blow.

According to the information provided by Joshi, the story was, unsurprisingly, rejected from *Weird Tales* twice. In the end, it was published by the Visionary Publishing Company in 1936 as a “crudely bound booklet”⁵².

The story opens up to the narrator talking about a confidential secret – supposed happenings between the years 1927 and 1928. It talks about raids and arrests as well as the deliberate bombing and burning of a port village Innsmouth over a liquor war. The report speaks of supposedly empty houses in a desolate state being destroyed. Further reports from dubious news sources talk about a submarine delving into the depths of the ocean, torpedoing the Devil Reef and whatever lies beyond it.

The narrator is revealed to be Robert Olmstead, a young man whose roots lie in New England, who has recently embarked on a coming-of-age journey. He reveals that he is seeking to get in touch with his roots. His mother was born and raised in New England, therefore that is why he begins his genealogic journey there.

⁵⁰ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 807.

⁵¹ H. P. Lovecraft, “Letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, 22 June 1917,” in *Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft I (1911-1924)*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1964).

⁵² H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 807.

He only hears of Innsmouth on his way to Arkham. He only seeks the cheapest ways of travelling around, namely by trains, coaches, or trolleys. Since the fare from Newburyport to Arkham is too high, the agent at the train station offers him the option to take a coach to Innsmouth instead. Robert is curious and asks about the town. The agent explains that a century ago, Innsmouth was a wealthy town on its way to becoming a city but after the plague, most of its population was wiped out. Nowadays, the town lives off fishing and lobstering, trading only with the nearby places. The agent also mentions the presence of a gold refinery, run by a man nicknamed Old Man Marsh, grandson of Obed Marsh, a well-known sailor who traded with the South sea islanders.

The agent also reveals that Old Man Marsh took to shutting himself in his house as a result of developing a skin condition in his late ages, though his descendants look vaguely normal. There, Robert learns of the traditional Innsmouth look – ashen complexion, large bulbous eyes, flappy skin. Marsh’s descendants look normal but Marsh himself has been said to develop a skin condition.

To make the situation even more strange, the ticket agent mentions the rumours surrounding the people of Innsmouth. For one, he speaks of the devil worship and the strange ritual practices, and then of the jagged cliff in the ocean called the Devil’s Reef. It is generally believed that is where the mad Obed Marsh began his practices.

After being thoroughly exposed to the lore of Innsmouth, Robert conducts a research in the Newburyport Local Library, where he is kindly allowed to view a collection of ancient gold. Amongst the various items, he finds a tiara that reminds him of the ancient Maya, Sumerian, and Aztec civilisations. The proprietor, Miss Tilton, informs him that the item was auctioned off by a drunken Innsmouth man. She theorises that it is from captain Obed Marsh’s pirate collection and henceforth that is why the Marshes keep making offers of purchase to her. Tilton also informs Robert of the perfectly justified rumours of devil-worship. She supports the theory, speaking of a quasi-pagan religion – “The Esoteric Order of Dagon” – worshipping Dagon, the fish god. In the Ancient Sumerian mythology, Dagon was a Mesopotamian (nowadays Semitic) God of fertility and harvest. He was half-man and half-fish and he rose from the water, able to adapt and walk on land. His fish-half was supposedly the symbol of fertility and reproduction. Lovecraft adapted Dagon into his own mythos as a literal fish god. Dagon firstly appeared in his short story “Dagon” and later on in many others as a leader of the Deep Ones, an amphibious vaguely humanoid race of beings.

Once the time comes, Robert takes the bus to Innsmouth, being the only passenger alongside the ugly bus driver with bulging eyes, receding hairline, and smelling of fish. This makes him understand what the “Innsmouth look” really means.

When he comes to Innsmouth he finds it quite empty. The young people he meets look relatively normal, but the older they get, the more “fishy” they begin to look. He also describes them as inhospitable and giving him strange looks.

Robert wanders into the local store, which is run by a young student from Arkham. They talk and the boy warns him about the strange people and the churches. He advises him to avoid them at all costs and that if he wants to know more about Innsmouth, he should bribe the local drunkard, Zadok Allen. Since Robert has a few hours to spare for his evening bus, he takes the boy up on his offer and after receiving a map, he seeks out Zadok. He bribes the man with a bottle of whiskey, which gets Zadok talking.

Many years ago, Obed had journeyed towards the southern isles because he heard of a wealthy island with a surplus of fish. From the Kanaka chief, Obed finds out that the people there are sacrificing young people twice a year for the favours of some underwater fish community, known as the “Deep Ones”, which in return rewards them with fish and wealth. After that, the Kanakas got the offer to mate with the fish people. At first, they have declined but changed their mind when they have been told that their mixed descendants, upon returning to the water, would never die. The change would happen progressively. As young, they would look human but throughout their life, they would progressively begin to resemble their fish ancestors and then return to the water.

Obed maintains the gold trade with the Kanakas. One day, however, the island is set on fire by their neighbouring island. Since Obed’s other trade routes are not prosperous enough, the situation grows dire. Without the trade with the Kanakas, Innsmouth will be in ruins. Facing this reality, Obed lures the fish people out of the water to make a deal with them, much like the Kanakas had. He renounces Christianity and begins worshipping Dagon. The people of Innsmouth don’t like it – they soon begin to notice the disappearances of young people. It leads to Obed and his cult getting arrested. A couple of weeks later, the Deep Ones come out of the water and begin massacring the people of Innsmouth in a fit of rage due to the lack of sacrifices. This comes to be later blamed on a strange plague or an epidemics of sorts. Obed is said to go crazy before seizing control over Innsmouth, encouraging the surviving people to copulate with the fish people. He himself takes a second wife (one of the Deep Ones by the name of Pht'thya-l'y) and they have three kids together – only one of

which looks normal. The normal-looking daughter is sent to study in Europe, and later goes on to get married in Arkham.

Towards the end of his storytelling, Zadok is growing frantic, saying that the Deep Ones have been coming out of water lately and hiding things underneath the old houses. He also mentions “shoggoths” (or in this story “shaggoths”), strange underwater beings that are said to play a big role in overtaking the human race. Zadok then freaks out because he thinks he sees something coming out of the water (the narrator describes Zadok seeing strange waves approaching the dock). He tells Robert to get out of the town because now they [the Deep Ones] know that he knows too much, and promptly runs away.

That evening, Robert wants to take the bus to Arkham but is informed that it has sudden engine trouble therefore he has to stay at the fittingly named Gilman hotel. Upon arriving, he notices that the bolt lock from his door had been removed, so he decides to fix it before turning in for the night. He has a hard time sleeping and eventually wakes up to the sound of someone trying to break his door down. Having no other choice, he escapes out of the window. Once he is back on solid ground, he hides and from his hiding place, he sees a mob of fish people leaving the Gilman hotel with lanterns and weapons. Robert tries to escape but quickly realises that all of his escape paths will be blocked by the Innsmouth folk.

Having no other choice, Robert follows an abandoned train track whilst imitating the heavy limp of the fish people of Innsmouth. Once he reaches the train track, the townsfolk are lurking nearby so he decides to hide in the bushes. They do not leave immediately and Robert is forced to wait. He ends up passing out and wakes up several hours later when the townsfolk are gone. Realising that, as a matter of fact, this is his only opening, he runs all the way back to the city of Arkham. In Arkham, Robert alerts the authorities.

Together, Robert and the city’s police force conduct a raid on Innsmouth. The village is bombed and the Devil’s Reef is destroyed with a torpedo. Once the village falls, the forces and Robert retreat back to Arkham. There, Robert begins a genealogical research on his roots. He finds out that his grandmother was one of Obed’s children, coincidentally the “normal-looking” one. That also means that he too shares the Innsmouth-typical fish-genes.

After his findings, Robert begins to have strange dreams about his fish grandmother who speaks to him in the language of the Old. She tells him that his destiny is to live underwater with the rest of their kin. She does not forget to mention that one day, the fish-folk will rise up and consume the surface world, and once the Old Gods are awake, they will worship them.

When Robert wakes up, he recalls the dream and instead of being repulsed, he finds himself sympathising with the idea. Later, when he sees himself in the mirror, he realizes that he has begun to acquire the traditional fish-y look. From this, we can draw the conclusion that the look is either somewhat tied to the strange prophetic dreams, or is a result of the acceptance of one's fate.

Simultaneously, Robert realises that one of his cousins, Lawrence, had been previously diagnosed with a strange illness and is currently held in a sanatorium. The wrap-up of the story sees Robert realising that his cousin suffers no illness. In fact, Lawrence had accepted his Innsmouth fate a long time before Robert even knew. His next step will be breaking his cousin out of the sanatorium so that they can join their kin in the deep waters.



Figure 4 Shadow Over Innsmouth, art by Thomas Schaffer

source: <https://thomasschaffer.artstation.com/projects/eA4ew>

3.2.1 Lovecraft's fears in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth"

"The Shadow Over Innsmouth" largely springs from Lovecraft's fear of the unknown when it comes to racism and xenophobia. It must be understood, that while Lovecraft's hatred could have been a simply excused as being commonplace in the 1920s, the choice to write about it and explore it was entirely his.

Lovecraft was fascinated with the unknown. He used racial prejudice and hate to come up with the existence of Innsmouth and its inhabitants. To give this context, we must look at the historical situation in Lovecraft's time. The 20s have been a period of immigration into the States. Many Americans, Lovecraft included, have feared the immigrants and what would happen with their country after they would allow these "alien people" or "others" into their country.

In "Dystopia as Utopia: Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the Unknown Content of American Horror Literature", Paul Buhle acknowledges this situation and speaks of Lovecraft as "[Lovecraft] acknowledging the advantages of allowing immigrants into the country and dealing with the change" and in the same work, S. T. Joshi too comments on the undeniable existence of racism with the words:

“It is undeniable that there is a racist substratum to the story: the horror that Lovecraft wishes us to feel at the notion of humans interbreeding with fish-frog monsters is a symbol for the miscegenation that he abhorred among human races.”⁵³

This is summarised in the thesis of Erika L. Mutter, who speaks of the inevitable – Lovecraft’s fear of interracial relationships and the children, that will be the product of them. She, much like Buhle, argues that the people only had two choices – to let the crisis result in madness, or to attempt to create a “new world outside the known universe”⁵⁴.

The whole debate makes a full circle and brings us back to Lovecraft’s xenophobia and fear of interbreeding. In “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” he puts the inhabitants of Innsmouth in the position of immigrants, or the “aliens”. He describes them through the people of Newburyport, who speak of the Innsmouth people as the “evil others”. Their prejudice appears in the sense of stereotypical hatred regarding their unusual appearance and being different. From the way the people speak of the Innsmouth people, it is clear that none of them had ever visited the city. This way, he compares the New York immigrants to “smelly unamiable deep-sea aliens”.

In the same way, Lovecraft was a “product of his time”. His xenophobia was not as much racially-oriented and could be more attributed to eugenics, or the selective breeding of humans⁵⁵. His hatred was not limited to skin colour, but rather than that, the breeding. Lovecraft himself was proud of his well-groomed pure New England descent. He felt distaste for everyone who was not a white educated male with social standing and money, putting emphasis on one’s ancestry. In the story, aside from being a product of cross-breeding with the Deep Ones, the Innsmouth people were hinted at having discoloured skin and living in dilapidated houses. It was most likely a hint at what would happen were people to mix with the “others” – a decaying and degenerate society.

In another thesis titled “Racism and fear in H.P. Lovecraft’s The Shadow over Innsmouth”, Mattias Pettersson brings the reader’s attention to a minor detail that was easily missed in the story. He attributes this fear of a decaying society to the appearance of a

⁵³ S. T. Joshi and Paul Buhle, “Dystopia as Utopia: Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the Unknown Content of American Horror Literature,” in *H.P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), pp. 118–131.

⁵⁴ Erika L. Mutter, “Explaining the Unexplainable: A New Cultural Outlook on H. P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos,” Pell Scholars and Senior Theses. 2013. https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=pell_theses.

⁵⁵ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “eugenics,” accessed on February 2, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eugenics>.

swastika in the story⁵⁶. The symbol has appeared on one of the stones in Zadok's story when Obed interacted with the Kanakas. The Kanaka were native Polynesians who had mixed with the Deep Ones, and had thus "doomed" their kind.

As the beginning of the subchapter suggests, another take on Lovecraft's fear is him finding out that his grandma was Welsh by descent. It can be directly found in the story as Robert finding out his grandmother was one of the descendants of the fish-people. Generally, Welsh people are known for their fishing industries, so there is no doubt where the comparison came from. In the story, Lovecraft writes Robert accepting his tainted ancestry, though it is unclear whether Lovecraft himself had ever come to terms with his own. A part of this would also be Lovecraft's fear of having tainted blood in the sense of him being afraid of inheriting genetic illnesses from his ancestors. His family bloodline had a predisposition for many genetic illnesses, whether they were physical or mental. Predominantly, it was schizophrenia-induced madness. Both of his parents have succumbed to this.

This fear is hinted at in two instances in the story, both presented by the narrator, Robert Olmstead. It is widely known that all of Lovecraft's characters have many biographical characteristics as Lovecraft was prone to writing himself into the story and oftentimes presenting the main character as his own surrogate. In the story, Olmstead says two things, in particular, that hint at the fear of madness:

1. "The mere telling helps me to restore confidence in my own faculties; to reassure myself I was not simply the first to succumb to a contagious nightmare hallucination."⁵⁷
2. "Where does madness leave off and reality begin?"⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Mattias Pettersson, "Racism and fear in H.P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow over Innsmouth*," Karlstads Universitet, 2016. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:904039/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

⁵⁷ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 808.

⁵⁸ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 852.

3.3 “The Dunwich Horror”

In the preface of “The Dunwich Horror” in *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction*, S. T. Joshi labels the story as extremely popular with readers after it has been released in *The Weird Tales* in April of 1929. It was written in the summer of 1928 after Lovecraft returned from his tour of Massachusetts where he had visited several places that have become the inspiration for Dunwich. In his letters to August Derleth⁵⁹ he mentions several locations alongside with the approximate location of Dunwich. Lovecraft wrote that Dunwich is located near the city of Wilbraham in Massachusetts. In the fictional universe, it is said to be located northwest of Arkham by the Miskatonic Valley.



Figure 5 The Dunwich Horror Illustration from *Weird Tales* (April 1929), scan by SFFaudio

Both Arkham and the Miskatonic Valley are fictional places that appear in the story. The real-life locations that Lovecraft mentioned in his letters were the Sentinel Elm Farm which gave its name to the Sentinel Hill, which is an important centrepiece in the story; and the Bear Den cave, which appears in the story under the same name.

On top of that, Joshi mentions Lovecraft’s inspirations. Certain elements in the story are said to be derived from similar works – the two mentioned by Joshi, in particular, are Arthur Machen’s “The Great God Pan” and Algernon Blackwood’s “The Wendigo”.

The story opens with a lengthy introduction to the rural town of Dunwich, which seems to be stuck in the past century. It is in a desolate state and isolated from society. Dunwich is infamous for its inbreeding families – the Whateleys being the most known. The head of the family is Old Whateley also known as Wizard Whateley for his strange collection of ancient occultist books and ritualistic practices that he and his daughter, Lavinia Whateley, practice atop of the Sentinel Hill. Sentinel Hill towers behind the village and is important to the

⁵⁹ H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft III (1929-1931)*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1971), pp. 442–443.

Whateley family because on top of it is a ring of stones inlaid with bones. The stones are where Old Whateley and Lavinia have been said to be spotted, running naked through the woods and chanting in strange languages.

“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.”⁶⁰

In the story, Lavinia is described as the “shapeless”, “half-deformed” and “unstable”⁶¹ albino daughter of Old Whateley. After a strange turn of events, Lavinia turns out to be pregnant and gives birth to a boy. No one knows of his existence until one of the villagers sees him and spreads the gossip. The encounter immediately raises a question about his paternal ancestry. This question becomes one of the core points of the story’s climax - an important puzzle piece.

Wilbur Whateley is said to be a hideous child that ages three times as fast as a normal child. At the age of 11 months, Wilbur is said to be able to walk and talk. The villagers say he resembles a goat, referring to his unusually hairy face. By the age of 4 years, Wilbur appears to have the body of a 15-year-old. Wilbur is also hated by dogs around the village and they snarl and snap their jaws at him whenever he comes too close, therefore he takes to carrying a gun to shoot them in case they attack him.

At that point, the villagers realise that there is something strange happening at the Whateley house. Old man Whateley starts doing carpentry work around the house. He boards up one of the sheds by the house and begins to buy livestock, cows especially. His herd, however, does not grow and instead the cattle appear to be downright anemic with strange marks on their necks.

Several months later, Old Whateley boards up the second story of the house after opening the shed, building a tall ramp that reaches the second story from the side. In that time, the house is visited by Earl Sawyer who sells Old Whateley's cattle. He ends up finding the shed empty and smelling of a foul stench.

...when Earl Sawyer once stepped within after a cattle-selling call on Old Whateley he was quite discomposed by the singular odour he encountered—such a stench, he averred, as he had never before smelt in all his life except near the Indian circles on the hills, and which could not come from

⁶⁰ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 654.

⁶¹ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), pp. 642—643.

anything sane or of this earth. But then, the homes and sheds of Dunwich folk have never been remarkable for olfactory immaculateness.⁶²

He does not deem it important and leaves the estate. Nonetheless, people that come to visit the estate begin to notice strange sounds and foul odour coming from the second floor and after one of those visits, Wilbur and old man Whateley renovate again. This time, they knock out all the walls on the second floor and relocate all their belongings to the first floor.

Shortly after the renovation, Old Whateley suffers a cardiac arrest and becomes bed-bound. Wilbur calls him a doctor but the old man passes away. Before his death, however, he points Wilbur to his old book collection with the words:

More space, Willy, more space soon. Yew grows—an' that grows faster. It'll be ready to sarve ye soon, boy. Open up the gates to Yog-Sothoth with the long chant that ye'll find on page 751 of the complete edition, an' then put a match to the prison. Fire from airth can't burn it nohaow. Feed it reg'lar, Willy, an' mind the quantity; but dun't let it grow too fast fer the place, fer ef it busts quarters or gits aout afore ye opens to Yog-Sothoth, it's all over an' no use. Only them from beyont kin make it multiply an' work...Only them, the old uns as wants to come back...⁶³

In his dying monologue, he tells Wilbur to seek out the “Necronomicon” and recite one of the spells found there. The “Necronomicon”, or the “Book of the Dead”, is a fictional literary work of Lovecraft’s that appears in many of his stories. It is said to have been written by a mad Arab man from Syria going by the name Abdul Alhazred⁶⁴. It contains the lore on the Old Gods, including various rituals and spells. Unfortunately, Wilbur finds the crucial page missing and begins researching nearby universities for another copy of the book.

In the meantime, his mother, Lavinia, starts being afraid of her own son and after Wilbur forbids her to leave the house, the mad woman goes missing without a trace. Wilbur does not mourn and instead boards up the rest of the house, breaks down all the inner walls and floors, and relocates all his possessions to the shed. Afterwards, he seeks out the “Necronomicon” at the Miskatonic University. The librarian, doctor Henry Armitage, is immediately suspicious of the weird man. By now, Wilbur is 10 feet tall and described as looking like either a monkey or a goat with a fuzzy beard and bulging eyes.

⁶² H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 640.

⁶³ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 642.

⁶⁴ “Necronomicon,” The H.P. Lovecraft Wiki, n.d., accessed on February 2, 2020, <https://lovecraft.fandom.com/wiki/Necronomicon>.

Armitage finds out that Wilbur asked for the Necronomicon in order to find information on forbidden rituals, the Old Gods, and most importantly, a deity called Yog-Sothoth. Therefore, he refuses to lend the book to Wilbur when the man asks and after Wilbur leaves, he calls to every library in the vicinity of the university and informs them of Wilbur's search, forbidding them from lending him the book.

Several days later, Armitage wakes up to the sound of the university's watchdog barking and howling. By the time he is out of bed, the rest of the university's academic personal has gathered in the courtyard. Together, they follow the sound of the dog's howls to the library where they find a dying Wilbur pinned down by the dog. Here it is revealed that Wilbur was never human in the first place – only his head and his arms bear human resemblance. His torso is covered in scales, he has the legs of a goat, a tail, is hairy and hooved, and there are tentacles protruding from his waist, as well as eyes on his hips. Overall, he does not maintain human appearance. After his death, his body turns to ash, revealing that he never even had a skeleton and was made of an unidentifiable mass.

After witnessing this horror, Armitage begins to research the Whateleys and their connection to Yog-Sothoth. He does this with the help of Wilbur's diary that remained after he turned to ash. In his narration, Armitage mentions that he has never read anything as horrible and ends up burning the diary after he is done with it. The research takes about a month and halts when he and his colleagues read about the Dunwich Horror in the local newspapers.

Dunwich is rapidly falling prey to something. The Whateley house collapses on itself one day and whatever was trapped inside, now starved, breaks free and terrorizes the village. The hired servant boys of some of the wealthier families report seeing the grass moving and trees falling on their own. The first living prey to the monster become the Freys. At first, something kills their cattle. When Armitage arrives several days later, the Frey house is destroyed and the family is found dead. Thanks to Wilbur's diary, Armitage and his colleagues Morgan and Rice are ready to take on the monster. From Wilbur's notes, they found out that the monster is invisible and can only be made visible with a special powder and the only way to get rid of it is to recite the spell found on page 751. Rice has brought the unspecified powder while Morgan has a gun for protection.

The trio rallies with the villagers. Armitage gives his telescope to one of the villagers by the name of Curtis, who observes the monster as it climbs up Sentinel Hill towards the rock formation. Armitage and his colleagues await it on top and when the monster draws near, Rice blows the powder on it to make it visible so Armitage could recite the spell. At

the village, Curtis sees the monster's face once the powder lands on it and promptly collapses, screaming.

After Armitage finishes the spell, the monster begins to sizzle and scream in a foreign language no one understands. In the end, shortly before its body is struck by lightning and it disappears, it speaks a few English words:

“Eh-ya-ya-ya-yahaah — ’yayayayaaaa..ngh’aaaa..ngh’aaaa..h’yuh..h’yuh..HELP! HELP! ..ff—ff—ff—FATHER! FATHER! YOG-SOTHOTH!”⁶⁵

Once it's gone, the professors return to the village where Armitage explains that a barn-sized monster could not exist on this plane of existence (or in this reality) and that he has sent it back where it came from. Shortly after, Curtis wakes up, and in panic, he tells the others what he saw through the telescope. He claims that he saw a face on the monster – deformed and with bulging eyes just like the Whateleys.

The story concludes with Armitage solving the mystery of the Dunwich Horror thanks to the knowledge he has learned through his research. The monster was Wilbur's twin brother and the Whateleys kept it locked in the house, feeding it until the time was right.

But as to this thing we've just sent back—the Whateleys raised it for a terrible part in the doings that were to come. It grew fast and big from the same reason that Wilbur grew fast and big—but it beat him because it had a greater share of the outsidersness in it. You needn't ask how Wilbur called it out of the air. He didn't call it out. It was his twin brother, but it looked more like the father than he did.⁶⁶

3.3.1 Lovecraft's fears in “The Dunwich Horror”

As it was described in both of the previous works, no Lovecraft story would be complete without the presence of xenophobia. In “The Dunwich Horror”, this fear plays a vital role and is personified as both Wilbur and his brother. Both are a product of the union between Yog-Sothoth and Lavinia. With this, Lovecraft has, once again, hinted at the dilution of one's blood. Lavinia's children were both of mixed blood and both were regarded as monsters. This fear was a result of Lovecraft being afraid of the mixing of races. In this sense, Yog-Sothoth and Lavinia could be regarded as an “interracial” couple.

⁶⁵ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 666.

⁶⁶ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 667.

However, Lovecraft's fear of sex and women does not put Lavinia in the forefront of the story. Instead, she is used simply as a vessel and cast aside. Despite having an important role of carrying Yog-Sothoth's children, she was abandoned as a character and "let go". Lovecraft had simply dismissed her, much like any other female character in his stories⁶⁷. This "horror feminae" and fear of sex has dramatically shaped most of Lovecraft's life. It has been proven that Lovecraft was asexual and much of his fears considering this aspect confirm that Lovecraft was afraid of the human body and its functions⁶⁸.

As it was mentioned before, Lovecraft tended to base the main characters on himself. Wilbur is a young man from a wealthy and renowned family but what is interesting is that animals, most importantly dogs, are afraid of him. In reality, it was Lovecraft that was afraid of dogs and rather preferred cats. During his life, he had a cat, but went as far as to name it a very degrading name (a racial slur). Another projected fear was that of insanity and poverty. Both of these men were from relatively rich families and had a history of madness in their bloodline, therefore both of these fears have been perfectly justified. Throughout his life, Lovecraft was unable to find work due to his lack of marketable skills and whatever money was left from his family's inheritance was dwindling quickly. On the other hand, the Whateleys' wealth was no longer as prominent as it had once been – the family lived in a crumbling house which went through remodelling every time the Dunwich Horror grew bigger. Most of their finances went into buying cattle and after Old Whateley died, Wilbur's finances have plunged.

"The Dunwich Horror" focuses mostly on the more spiritual approach of fear. The fear of unknown and cosmic fear is presented as the relationship between a human and cosmos. The story uses a nihilistic approach when describing Wilbur and the inhabitants of Dunwich in comparison to the Elder Gods. The Elder Gods, the cosmos, are immense and eternal while the human life is short and fleeting. Therefore, the humans should look upon both as something of greater importance – something that should be respected and feared. On the other hand, in their eyes, man is nothing. The Gods, the universe, are indifferent to the feeble human life. This uncanny "cosmic fear" is traditional for Lovecraft. When he was younger,

⁶⁷ Gina Wisker, "'Spawn of the Pit': Lavinia, Marceline, Medusa, and All Things Foul: H. P. Lovecraft's Liminal Women," in *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft*, ed. David Simmons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 31–54.

⁶⁸ Bobby Derie, "Great Phallic Monoliths: Lovecraft and Sexuality," in *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales: The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror*, ed. Justin Everett and Jeffrey H. Shanks (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), pp. 105–106.

Lovecraft studied astronomy. He was so fascinated that he even wrote several amateur articles in his early adulthood and even wanted to be a professional astronomer. He then proceeded to explore the universe in many of his stories. Lovecraft's fear of the cosmos is fully justified. After all, how would anyone feel when presented with the phenomena of cosmic significance beyond their comprehension? According to Lovecraft - afraid and in awe. The principle of Lovecraft's cosmic horror is a play on the reader's imagination – his own was colourful and it can easily be observed in his writing and the peculiar monsters he has created. Lovecraft suffered from night terrors and was reportedly haunted by strange visuals and shadows. He then used these visions to create one of the most popular horror myths there is nowadays.

In one of his letters, Lovecraft himself says:

“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.”⁶⁹

With this sentence, he draws one's attention to the fact that no matter how little or how much he describes something in his works, everyone's imagination will come up with their own horrid picture. In fact, the less description he offers, the more one's brain will work on creating something that appeals to their own fear.

In “The Dunwich Horror”, Lovecraft's own fears shaped Wilbur's brother – he took the form of an invisible shapeless mess with too many eyes, mouths, and tentacles that emitted a putrid smell. It is why everyone will imagine different things and aspects of the Dunwich Horror, tailored to their own fears and inconveniences.

⁶⁹ H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft III (1929-1931)*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1971), p. 174.

CONCLUSION

Whether Lovecraft was a good or bad author is a subjective opinion. What is, however, given, is the fact that he was an important presence in literary history. Lovecraft redefined the previous Gothic Horror genre and shaped the perception of the modern-day horror.

Despite his popularity only rising in the past three decades, Lovecraft has accumulated a large fan-base of people of all ages. His writing inspired many popular franchises throughout all media.

In his time, Lovecraft was a nobody. He was a sickly man with poor physical and mental health, thoroughly racist, and had no skills. His fan-base was only small then, though he kept correspondence with many aspiring authors and critics.

Lovecraft's outstanding ability was that of being able to embrace his fears and use them when he was writing his stories. The words he wrote were just as true as they were made up. It was the fact that Lovecraft has experienced said fears that made him able to describe everything in details that were so believable and invoked identical fears in his readers.

On top of that, a part of his success also comes from the fact that his fears were nothing too uncommon. He used the concept of the "fear of the unknown" as well as the fear of the known. He himself has said:

"No new horror can be more terrible than the daily torture of the commonplace."⁷⁰

In conclusion, fear makes a man. It shapes us if we let it. However, whether it shapes us negatively or positively is up to us. We can let our fears control us, or we can embrace them.

Lovecraft has embraced his fears by writing about them. It is unclear whether it has truly helped him while he lived, but after his death, his literary works are celebrated and praised. Stephen King is one of Lovecraft's biggest fans and many of his books have been inspired by Lovecraft. Just as Lovecraft was inspired by the works of Edgar Allan Poe a century ago. Nowadays, these three are considered to be the pioneers of the horror genre and there is no denying that.

⁷⁰ H. P. Lovecraft, "Ex Oblivione," in *H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction*, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), pp. 131—132.

*“The most merciful thing in the world,
I think,
is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents.”⁷¹*

H. P. Lovecraft

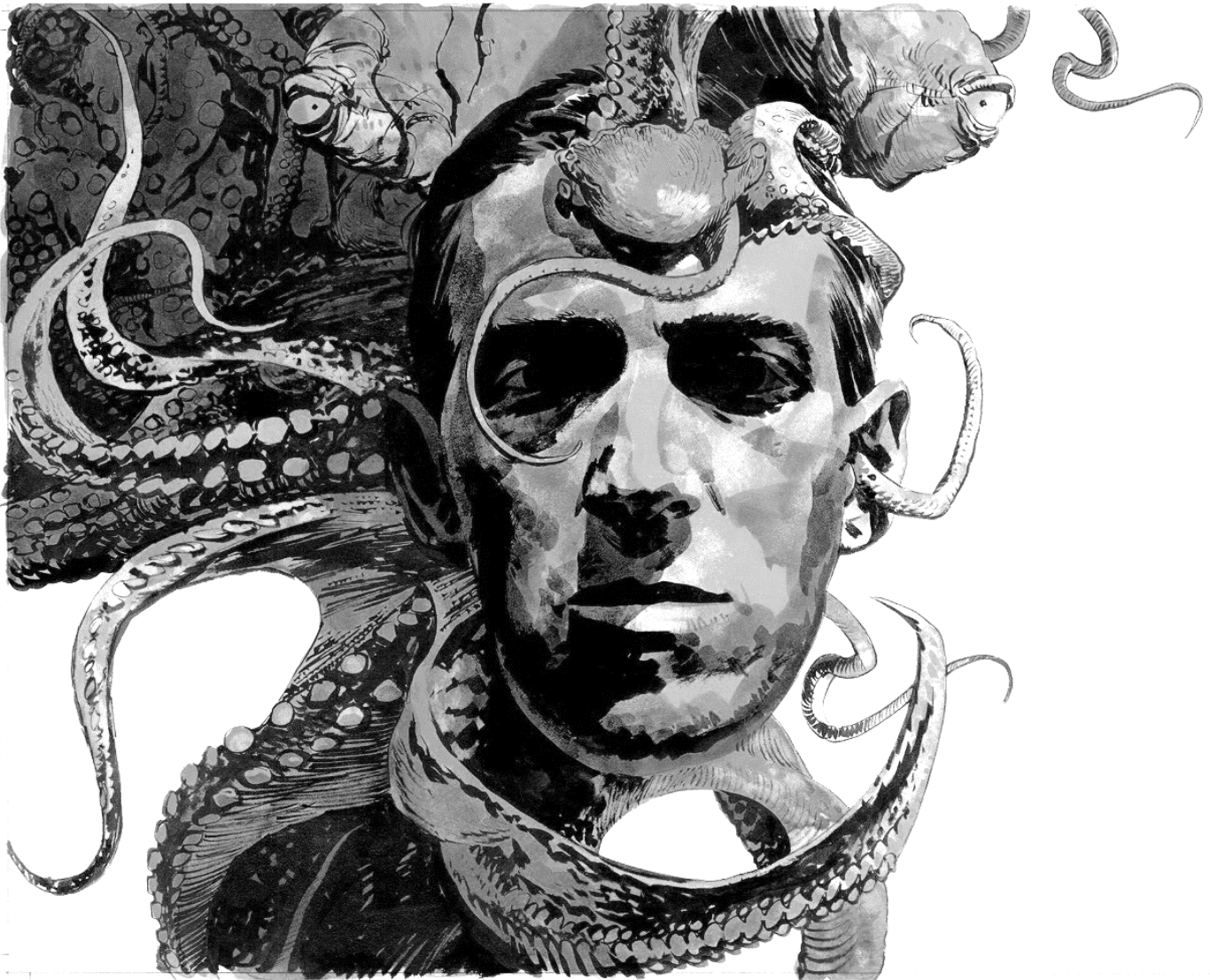


Figure 6 Lovecraft by Shane Phillips

source: <http://whatnotisms.blogspot.com/2012/04/four-authors-by-sean-phillips.html?zx=9a7029c5ee0d0dc>

⁷¹ H. P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu,” in H. P. Lovecraft: The Complete Fiction, ed. S. T. Joshi (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 2011), p. 355.

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