

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of Ain Temouchent - Belhadj Bouchaib



Faculty of Letters, Languages and Social Sciences

Department of Letters and English Language

Science and Religion in H.P. Lovecraft's Works: Case Study
The Shadow over Innsmouth

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for a
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilisation*

Submitted by:

Meskine Abderrahmane

Supervised by:

Mrs HASSAIENE

Board of Examiners

President:	Mrs YAHIA	MAA	Ain Temouchent University
Supervisor:	Mrs. HASSAIENE	MAA	Ain Temouchent University
Examiner:	Mrs. KERSANI	MAA	Ain Temouchent University

Academic Year: 2022/2023

Declaration

I, Meskine Abderrahmane, Hereby declare that this extended essay “Science and Religion in H.P. Lovecraft’s Work, Case of Study: *The Shadow over Innsmouth*” was written by me, under the supervision of my teacher Mrs. Hassaiene. This work is to be submitted to the department of English letters and language in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master’s degree in British Literature and Civilization.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my father, who molded me into the man I am proud to have become. To my mother, my brightest beacon of hope. And to my excellent supervisor, as well as the amazing teachers, and lovely classmates who accompanied me through my journey at the University of Ain Temouchent Belhadj Bouchaib.

Acknowledgement

Above all I am incredibly grateful to Allah for keeping me motivated and inspired throughout this stride. Then, for the excellent supervision on the part of my teacher Mrs. Hassaiene, who sculpted this extended essay beautifully with dexterous and resourceful writing skills. Her incredible role in making this work cannot be overestimated. I am also grateful for the members of the board of examiners; Mrs. Yahia, and Mrs. Kersani who whipped this extended essay into shape with their final corrections.

Last but not least, I am grateful for my teachers, and the wonderful people at the level of the English department, and for my fellow class mates who accompanied me throughout this incredible journey. I doubt I will be able to forget anyone of you. Thank you so much and godspeed you all.

Abstract

Religion and science have been a source for inspiration for many ages, going back to the Sumerians. Even prior to that, mankind has always been and always will be terrified and fascinated by the unknown and the incomprehensible. Lovecraft, one of the most terrifying writers in history, tackles this issue in his essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature” by stating “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (1). Religions and Gods have always represented both the unknown and the most powerful plot devices and characters in fiction. On the other hand, science and its practitioners are the investigators and the discoverers of truth, armed with ceaseless curiosity and hunger for knowledge. Lovecraft’s *The Shadow over Innsmouth* perfectly encapsulates this battle between science and religion and the effect of this battle on the human psyche in a way that is not researched on often. The purpose of this work is to focus on science and religion in literature, not as contradicting connotations, but on how each of them influences our aesthetics individually. The second aim is to introduce an author who’s considered a titan of horror, H.P. Lovecraft, the father of cosmic horror, and how he depicts science and religion in one of his most seminal novellas *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

Keywords: Religion, Science, incomprehensible, fear, Gods, curiosity, knowledge, human psyche.

Résumé

La religion et la science ont été une source d'inspiration pendant de nombreuses années, depuis les Sumériens. Même avant cela, l'humanité a toujours été et sera toujours terrifiée et fascinée par l'inconnu et l'incompréhensible. Lovecraft, l'un des écrivains les plus terrifiants de l'histoire, aborde cette question dans son essai intitulé "*L'horreur surnaturelle dans la littérature*" en déclarant : "L'émotion la plus ancienne et la plus forte de l'humanité est la peur, et le type de peur le plus ancien et le plus fort est la peur de l'inconnu" (1). Les religions et les dieux ont toujours représenté à la fois l'inconnu et les intrigues et personnages les plus puissants de la fiction. En revanche, la science et ses praticiens sont les investigateurs et les découvreurs de la vérité, armés d'une curiosité et d'une soif de connaissance incessantes. *L'Ombre sur Innsmouth* de Lovecraft résume parfaitement cette bataille entre la science et la religion et ses effets sur la psyché humaine d'une manière qui ne fait pas souvent l'objet de recherches. L'objectif de ce travail est de se concentrer sur la science et la religion dans la littérature, non pas en tant que connotations contradictoires, mais sur la façon dont chacune d'entre elles influence notre esthétique individuellement. Le second objectif est de présenter un auteur considéré comme un titan de l'horreur, H.P. Lovecraft, le père de l'horreur cosmique, et la manière dont il dépeint la science et la religion dans l'une de ses nouvelles les plus marquantes, *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (L'Ombre sur Innsmouth).

Mots-clés : Religion, Science, incompréhensible, peur, Dieux, curiosité, connaissance, psyché humaine.

ملخص

لطالما كان الدين والعلم مصدر إلهام لعصور عديدة، يعود الأمر إلى السومريين. حتى قبل ذلك، كان الإنسان دائماً مرعوباً ومفتوناً بالغامض والغير قابل للفهم. يتناول لوفكرافت، أحد أكثر الكتاب المرعبين في التاريخ، هذه المسألة في مقاله "الرعب الخارق في الأدب" عن طريق القول "إن أقدم وأقوى عاطفة للإنسان هي الخوف، وأقدم وأقوى نوع من الخوف هو الخوف من المجهول" (1). الأديان والآلهة تمثل دائماً كل من المجهول وأقوى أجهزة الحكمة والشخصيات في الخيال. من ناحية أخرى، العلم وعلمانه هم المحققون والمكتشفون للحقيقة، مجهزون بفضول لا ينضب وجوع للمعرفة. يجسد رواية لوفكرافت "الظل في إنسموث" هذه المعركة بين العلم والدين وتأثير هذه المعركة على النفس البشرية بطريقة لا تدرس كثيراً. الغرض من هذا العمل هو التركيز على العلم والدين في الأدب، وليس كمعانٍ متناقضة، ولكن على كيفية تأثير كل منهما على جمالياتنا بشكل فردي. الهدف الثاني هو تقديم مؤلف يُعتبر عملاقاً في فن الرعب، ه. ب. لوفكرافت، أبو الرعب الكوني، وكيف يصور العلم والدين في واحدة من رواياته الأكثر بلاغة "الظل في إنسموث".

الكلمات الرئيسية: الدين، العلم، غير قابل للفهم، الخوف، الآلهة، الفضول، المعرفة، النفس البشرية

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Epigraph

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

—H.P. Lovecraft

General Introduction

General Introduction

Religion and science have been a prolific font of inspiration for literature throughout history. From the birth of civilization to current days, from the epic of Gilgamesh, which features the first ever god defying character in fiction to the dozen sci-fi novels that are released each year. Our relationship with the gods, the celestial, and everything metaphysical, and with the natural desire to discover and conquer the sciences, has been a topic of art for ages. And the intricacies of our observable and non-observable universe have always fascinated our kind.

With that being said, the term religion in literature is often a connotation to an unwavering attachment to a set of irreducible beliefs, naturally and directly contradicting “the scientific way”, which dictates that we must take every belief we have tentatively and always question everything. Thus, science and religion are often depicted as contradicting forces in fiction. This does not mean that this research is to partake in the argument between science and religion. Through this work, we seek to study how the argument itself may have influenced a certain literary work, or if a piece of literature is a reflection of the author’s argument and beliefs with respect to science against religion.

Among the most fascinating depictions of the battle between the scientist and the unknown can be found in H.P. Lovecraft’s writings. This is what motivates this research work. Through his collection of tales, Lovecraft asks the question whether this incredibly vast universe can be understood through our sciences, and whether the human mind could really comprehend such knowledge. But on the other hand, he was a sharp critic of religion, replacing in his tales our real world religions with fictional cults and alien deities with nature and motives incomprehensible to the human mind. Among his most seminal works is *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. It is the main case of study of this work for how perfectly it encapsulates the battle of the scientific researcher against an enigma shrouded in superstitions.

Due to the nature of Lovecraft's collection of tales, being very similar in terms of plot, and themes, this work would be remiss if it didn't also mention examples from other stories, However, the bulk of this work will focus on Lovecraft as an author, and his interesting depiction of science and religion in one of his most famous novellas; *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, this novella contains fascinating ideas about the nature of human curiosity and the dangers of superstition, the unknown, and metamorphosis. It tells the story of a young antiquarian traversing the mounds of superstition to reveal the source of degeneracy in a decaying town called "Innsmouth". He is hungry for knowledge, but despite how much research he does and data he collects, he is never quite close to learning the truth about what made the titular town so infamous, and shunned. His scientific curiosity leads him nowhere than peril.

This research work is based on three primary questions that are assimilated into three chapters, and they are:

- 1- How is faith and by extension the supernatural and the superstitious represented in the novella?
- 2- How are science and the scientific curiosity represented in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*? And what does the twist in the ending supposed to convey?
- 3- To what extent was Lovecraft influenced by religion, and how does he represent it in his tales?

After reading the novella multiple times and doing further research on the author and his literary philosophy, we have reached these hypotheses;

Firstly, the story could be interpreted as a tale against blind faith and superstition. From the first chapter, the novella hints at a difference in the beliefs between the educated and the

simple minded, presenting the former as logical conclusions, and the latter as mere superstitious ramblings. Lovecraft has always been a man of science and a sharp critic of religion.

Secondly, his message behind *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. could be a glorification of the unstoppable human curiosity, and portraying the dangers of superstition. The ending, however, conveys a contradictory message, because the protagonist's scientific curiosity leads him into a dangerous territory. Even though he reaches his goal of uncovering the mysteries of "Innsmouth", he does so at the expense of his sanity, for he is left severely deformed both mentally and physically. This leads us to believe that Lovecraft's ultimate message behind the novella is; the importance of caution when threading the unknown.

Finally, it is possible that Lovecraft may have been influenced by paganism while writing *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. That could be seen throughout the events where the reader learns about the Pagan cult that took over the Christian churches in the titular town. This is also true for the final moments of the story where the author quotes a psalm from the bible of John, with this he further emphasizes a religious tone to the protagonist's transformation in the final moments, and amplifies the horror of the scene. But in his other works, Lovecraft appears to be inspired by oriental mysticism.

The present research work is composed of three main chapters. The First Chapter will deal with the representation of Science and religion in literature. It will tackle the various archetypes through which the holy man and the scientists are represented. The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to Lovecraft, his childhood, his literary philosophy, and the sub-genre of horror which he created. Lastly, the chapter will deliver a short summary of the story which emphasizes on the most important themes and aspects that will be tackled in the next chapters.

The Second chapter will be delving into how science and the scientific curiosity are represented in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. In the story, the protagonist is represented as a cautious yet curious researcher, who has been engulfed by the enigma of the town of “Innsmouth” and the superstitions that surround it. The story itself is generally understood as a tale about degeneracy, which is a theme that is represented by the monstrous figures and repulsive looks of the “Innsmouth” denizens. It could also be interpreted as a cautionary tale against the dangers of blind faith and superstitions, and a tale about the scientific curiosity of humans. The chapter will attempt to give *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. a broader dimension of understanding of these mentioned issues.

The Third Chapter will study the depiction of religious concepts in the universe of Lovecraft i.e. God, the concept of ascension, and the concept of holy books. In the second part of the chapter, the researcher will delve into the similarities between Sufi motifs and some of the main concepts that Lovecraft implements in his tales, in addition to tenets that represent his philosophy. In the end, the aim of this extended essay as a research is to achieve a deeper understanding of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, and shed light on some of the angles that are less studied, which are the themes of unfaith, and superstition, and ultimately give the novella an extra layer of meaning.

In conclusion, the work aims to study Lovecraft’s relationship with religion, and the depiction of scientific curiosity in his works. Despite announcing his denouncement of faith at an early age, Lovecraft still found in religion a font of inspiration. The depiction of religion in his work, however, is dark and pessimistic, even caricaturesque in some instances. He takes religious concepts and molds them in a dark re-iteration according to his pessimistic views on the universe. Lastly, Lovecraft has had a curious relationship with Islam, more specifically the

mystic side of the religion. At a young age, he read *The Arabian Nights* and *Vathek*, and the influence of these two stories on his aesthetic development is obvious. After he denounced Christianity he expressed how he found in this faith no inspiration, unlike the colorful and magical world of oriental mysticism.

In terms of methodology, this work uses the qualitative research in collecting data and sources, both primary and secondary, with the first chapter containing the most amounts of secondary sources due to the broad nature of the topic dealt with in the first part. However, as the research delves into Lovecraft as an author it is important to rely also on his essays, and letters, in order to have a deeper understanding of the author's influences and worldviews. Lovecraft was a loquacious letter writer, estimated to have written almost 15 letters per day during his adult life. In terms of structure and citing sources, the 7th edition of MLA was employed in this research. Finally the guidance of the supervisor was taken with utmost consideration throughout the entirety of this work.

Literature Review

Lovecraft is one of the most influencing authors on popular culture and the sci-fi genre. As such his works and literary philosophy have been, and still are, subject to many studies, and a source of attraction for scholars. He could be considered among the authors whose life has been documented the most thoroughly. Among the scholars who played a major role in the documentation of Lovecraft is S.T. Joshi. He is considered among the most prolific scholars interested in Lovecraft. He is famous for editing the author's letters and essays, and for his thorough biography, *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of Lovecraft*. This work tackles the Lovecraft family lineage, and follows the author from birth to his death in incredibly precise details. It also tackles all of his seminal novellas and the inspiration behind them, and sheds light on lesser known works, including the unpublished ones

When dealing with Lovecraft's most famous works, S.T. Joshi delves into the inspiration behind it in thorough details, mentioning even the state of the market at the time Lovecraft wrote his tales, which might have influenced his writing post and pre to the publication of a certain story; such is the case *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. Joshi's work is also notable for focusing on the worldviews of Lovecraft and what might have influenced them. He takes into consideration these views while tracing the inspiration behind Lovecraft's works. Because of this, critics such as Harold Bloom and Joyce Coral Oates consider *I Am Providence* as the definitive Lovecraft biography.

Lovecraft is also famous for writing an incredible amount of letters, estimated by L. Sprague de Camp to be nearing 100,000 in number (H.P. Lovecraft: A Biography 15), so roughly 15 letters every day of his adult life. However, there are only 2000 letters of his that are used in

academic research. Published in 5 volumes, *Lovecraft: Selected letters (I to V)* edited by S.T. Joshi, these books give more insight to Lovecraft's personal life and a deeper understanding to his fictional works.

When it comes to his fictional works, Lovecraft is often studied as an atheist writer, with analysis that aims to emphasize his skeptical and pessimistic views. Perhaps due to the overwhelming amount of atheist writings made by Lovecraft, the theological side of Lovecraft's fiction is neglected. Hence why, there is not enough research on the influence of religion and mythology on the aesthetic development of his work. However, there is a notable work by Ian Almond that delves into that side of Lovecraft's universe. "The Darker Islam within the American Gothic: Sufi Motifs in the Stories of HP Lovecraft" by Ian Almond is among the very few contributions that investigate the Islamic mysticism influence on the creation of Lovecraft's fictional universe. It highlights the similarities between the Sufi beliefs and Lovecraft's stories, and the concepts he takes over from the mysticism over to his own writing style and even his philosophy (8-12).

The focus of this research is to study the representation of science and religion in Lovecraft's works, by tackling *The Shadow over Innsmouth* as a main case of study, although it is important to also reference other Lovecraft's work due to the similarities his tales share. Lovecraft has always been a proud science man, an inspiring astrologist, and a sharp skeptic of religion. This is reflected in the way the protagonist of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, Olmstead, is written. He is depicted as the curious researcher archetype. Just like the author, he is skeptical of superstition and the supernatural, and he has a ceaseless sense of scientific curiosity.

Religion on the other hand is rarely portrayed in Lovecraft's tales, and when it is mentioned, it is often mentioned in a cynical manner. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, religion is almost nonexistent in the story, but the author mentions that a Christian church has been overtaken by an alien cult, which plays a major role in the plot of the story. However, as Almond demonstrated in his work, there is certainly an influence by religion and mysticism on Lovecraft's aesthetic development (9). The aim of this research is to study that influence.

Lovecraft's stories are seldom studied individually, due to many reasons. One of which is the similarities his novellas and short stories share in terms of plot, and themes. His most seminal stories appear to follow a recurring formula of scientific curiosity against incredible odds. Hence why, this work, while mainly focusing on *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, its themes and characters, it will also include examples from other novellas, such as *The Dunwich Horror*, *The Call of Cthulhu*, and *At the Mountain of Madness*.

These four novellas are considered to be his magnum opus. Each novella still holds on to its own unique themes and atmospheres. Due to the fact that scholars choose to study Lovecraft's work as a collection, a gap is created, and some of the strong themes in Lovecraft's stories are neglected. In the case of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, two of the strongest themes in the story are the scientific curiosity, and metamorphosis, both represented through the protagonist, Olmstead. However, there are very few works that tackle this angle of the novella.

The story of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is mainly understood by scholars, such as Joshi, to be a cautionary tale against degeneracy and race mixing, which is not a difficult conclusion to arrive at considering Lovecraft's unfortunate history of racism. However, if the influence of mythology and religion on Lovecraft's writing is taken into consideration, *The Shadow over*

Innsmouth acquires new depths of understanding. For example, the transformation of the protagonist will start to make sense as a metamorphosis, or an ascension rather than degeneracy. Olmstead's transformation in the end is perhaps the most important moment in the story. The scene of his metamorphosis is charged with a religious atmosphere. It reaches its peak when the protagonist quotes a psalm from the Bible of John the moment of his transformation with religious zeal. The aim of this research is to shine some light on this lesser studied side of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

On the subject of the representation of science and the scientist in fiction, Haynes Rosalyn's prolific book *From Faust to Strangelove: Representations of the Scientist in Western Literature* gives thorough insight on the perception of the general public of science and the scientist throughout the 19th and 20th history, it also highlights the influence of this on how the scientist was represented in western literature. This is done by analyzing the relationship between the dynamic opinion of the non-scientist class of society, and their love and hate relationship with science research and discoveries. In order to first understand why the representation of science and religion in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is so unique, we must first analyse the different archetypes through which they are represented in other works of literature.

Chapter one: Science and religion in Literature, and an Introduction on Lovecraft

1.1. Science and religion in Literature

1.1.1. Brief History

1.1.2. Science in Literature

1.1.3. Religion in Literature

1.2. H.P Lovecraft and the Cosmic Horror

1.2.1. H.P. Lovecraft's Early Life and Inspiration

1.2.2. Cosmic Horror

1.2.3. Cosmicism

1.3. *The Shadow over Innsmouth.*

Introduction

Throughout history, Religion and Science have been a source of inspiration for every color of art. Up until now, archeologists continue to unearth centuries old masterpieces of bygone eras inhabited by humans whose mind were troubled by the same theological questions that trouble us today. These masterpieces of fiction tell a variety of stories about men working together along with, defying, or becoming gods. The aim of this chapter is not to tackle the debate between Science and Religion from an either side; however, it is to present a brief historical background on the debate, and to demonstrate how Science and Religion are represented in fiction. The second objective of this chapter is to introduce a titan of American horror, H.P. Lovecraft, and give a brief summary of one of his most famous works *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

1.1. Science and Religion in Literature

1.1.1. Brief History

Throughout history, the relationship between science and religion has been subject to many continued debates. Theologians have hitherto defended their stand that is based on two main propositions. The first of which presents science and religion not as contending forces but rather complementary ones. Each of them is concerned with a single aspect of human needs. The first one answers the need for human curiosity to uncover the secrets of the observable world, and the other answers to the philosophical and spiritual questions. Two different windows that look at the same world, but show different aspects and answer different questions.

The second proposition presents science as supplementary to religion, which means that it should be conducive to scientific inquiry. According to theologians such as John Hedley Brooke,

the contradictions then appear only when the scientific beliefs trespass their boundaries. There have been of course many varieties of these two positions throughout history according to the faith in question and the time.

On the other side of the debate, the opposition was quick to point out that these two propositions serve only to limit and regulate scientific research. They believed that it forces scientists to abide by the religious laws as a prerequisite to scientific research. They argued that the faster science progresses the more contradictory it becomes to the aspects of theistic religions, such as the evolution theory, and also their explanation for the evolutionary psychology of human phenomena such as, love, morality, and altruism for example. According to the secularists, It is impossible for science and religion to coexist let alone be complementary to each other, for the simple fact that their epistemic attitude are conflicted, the scientific attitude revolving around forming beliefs based on empirical investigations, holding these beliefs tentatively, and constantly criticizing and testing it in the search for a better alternative, while the religious attitude revolving around blind faith.

Historically speaking, however, places of worship were often considered as places of knowledge and research as well. The Catholic Church, for example, has been a patron for scientific research and on the other side of the globe. The same goes with the khalifa, the Muslim princes and the Mosques. One the most shining examples of this is The University of Al-Karaouine which was founded by Fatima Al-Fihri and is considered the oldest university in the world. It was also a place for worship and spiritual education. Researchers such as Muhammed Abdul Jabar Beg have even attributed religion as the birthing point of science in the Middle East and the golden Islamic age of science.

When the Islamic education was introduced to his disciples by the Prophet through the process of da‘wah (‘call to Islam’), it was as though a whole people went to school to read, write and memori[z]e their first primer, al-Qur’an. Among the celebrated teachers of the Qur’an in early Islam, were ‘Ubadah ibn al-Samit, Mus‘ab ibn ‘Umayr, Mu‘adh ibn Jabal, ‘Amr ibn Hazm , and Tamim al-Dari. These teachers were sent to various parts of Arabia and beyond. Islamic education begins with the lessons of the Qur’an. It is a religious duty and an obligation for every Muslim to preach and teach to his fellow Muslims and non-Muslim acquaintances what he knows of the Qur’an and the Traditions (The Origin of Islamic Science 24).

This is historically accurate, as the conquests of the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) have ushered to the golden Islamic age.

Researchers have argued that the fact that we have a continued debate is in itself an evidence that science and religion can be compatible, and cannot be separable “[i]ndeed, if they were really totally different, no contrast between them could occur, because a contrast implies a common ground on which the opposition could manifest itself, some points of friction where the respective points of view come to a clash” (Aggazi 4). In other words, if Science and Religion weren’t directly related, there would be no points of arguments to make for either of them.

Thus began the systematic study of science and religion in the West in 1960s, and the interdisciplinary became a recognized field that studied the relationship between science and religion, and aims to prove the compatibility of science and religion, and demonstrate how religion can be conducive to science. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* was the first ever journal dedicated to this discipline.

Most scholars interested in the field were theologians, or philosophers with interest in science, or scientists who believe in religion, all set on a mission to challenge the belief that science and religion were inherently incompatible, and the idea that scientific progress is always associated with secularism. Ian Barbour and Thomas F. Torrance are considered to be the pioneers of this interdisciplinary, Barbour's *Issues in Science and Religion* is one of the most pivotal works in the field for setting out several enduring themes. Authors from the 80s and 2000s developed the contextual approach, for example in 1991 John Hedley Brooke's *Science and Religion* was published which offered a detailed study of the historical relationship between science and religion.

One would be remiss, however, if they consider the conflict of science and religion as the burden of the theologians, the philosopher, and the scientist alone. It is in fact something which continues to trouble all humans down to the minutest slice of society, and everyone has his own way of dealing with this conflict according to their respected social class. Whether someone is on the science side or the religion side or somewhere in between, it is always reflected on how we deal with the aspects of our lives and the work we produce, such as art and literature, which is the main focus of the next section.

1.1.2. Science in Literature

The representation of science in literature has varied in nature depending on the time period, for example authors throughout the 19th and early 20th century wrote about every aspect of the human experience but were also well informed in history, science, sociology, etc. even though the term science fiction was not a thing by then. Post-modern and modern authors, however, were greatly influenced by the rise of modern science, as such; they wrote all sorts of

speculative literature that told the stories of possible time travel, dystopian futures, the dangers of AI, nuclear energy, etc. This variety was also reflected on the protagonists of these novels who were often scientists.

Seekers of knowledge, conquerors of science, and revealers of truth have been portrayed in a sorts of manners in fiction throughout the decades, from Dr. Faust to Dr. Henry Jekyll, Victor Frankenstein to Danforth and Dyer, and countless other examples, fiction has no shortage of mad and immoral scientists, virtuosos of alchemy detached from the real world and obsessed with their laboratories, or even heroic physicians, and other archetypes. All of these examples, however, share one single common feature, which is the promethean desire to challenge nature and risk their lives, defy the gods and risk eternal damnation, and do whatever it takes with no regards to morality in order the figure out the intricacies of their world and get a better insight at into the working of nature for the sake of knowledge and discovery.

Scientists in fiction have represented the pursuit of knowledge and scientific curiosity of the human nature, but also its stubbornness and pride, as such; these characters are often vilified during the time when our trust in science is low “Fictional scientists are expression of their creators’ response to role of science and technology in a particular social context and thus are interesting in their own right ; but when viewed chronologically they achieve an additional historical significance both as ideological indicators of the changing perception of science over some seven centuries and as powerful images...” (R. Haynes 16). The way the scientist is depicted in contemporary literature speaks directly to the way science and progression was seen in a particular era.

There are some cases of scientists and science in literature who are especially curious ones, such as in many of Lovecraft's works, through his narrative style, he depicts his protagonists in desperate situation where they find themselves face to face in the end of the story with an acquired knowledge which they regret discovering, his characters, however, don't belong to the typical, mad, and dogged, scientist either. They are instead calm, calculative, and don't often let their emotions cloud their judgment and lead them into committing regrettable mistakes, but despite this, they are often met with a terrible faith in the end, and the secrets they discover leaves them at the edge of madness. Their demise comes not due to a fault they made, but from powers beyond their control, their sole mistake is the natural human curiosity.

1.1.3. Religion in Literature

Religion and literature are inseparable; for ages, religion has been a source of inspiration, and what is fiction but a direct reflection of the contemporary period's paradigm and dogmas, which the author comforts and reassures to, or viciously criticizes and challenges. We cannot consider religion as merely a theme in literature when it has been directly nurturing and influencing the human imagination.

Religion provides literature with vast and rich materials. Its sacred books themselves constitute great literature and also furnish materials for great literature. The translation of the Bible into Gothic by Ulphilas not only preserved the Bible, but also helped to create and to perpetuate literature...It is also to be remembered that the institutions of religion had been, for thousands of years, the custodians of the most precious treasures of literature. The medieval period was dark and damaging to humanity's highest interests as in times of war not only are the laws silent, but also literature. It was the monks who

preserved the manuscripts of ancient Greece and of Rome, copying and re-copying and commenting until the invention of printing. (Chaudhary 2)

From the ancient epics of antiquity, such as the Iliad of Homer to the Mahabharata and Ramayana of Hinduism to the contemporary novel from the 18th century to this day, we can see three colors of religion represented in fiction.

Firstly, religion as a form of comfort and hope, and in this case, religion is represented in the form of gods as patrons for the protagonist, assisting and helping them in their journey, such as Athena with Odysseus and Krishna with the Pandavas, or as a form of faithful protagonists who's faith in their religion is the source of their comfort and strength. It is worth mentioning that this case of representation is the rarest of the three

Secondly, as a form of discord and evil, in this case, religion is represented in the form of an angry or evil god or a dogmatic believer. In the case of the villainous deity, they are boastful, spiteful, and unforgiving, they subject any minor act of defiance with cruel punishments, and they represent the grim and cruel nature of religion according to the author. While in the case where religion is represented as a human character, they are often characterized by their dogmatic behavior and hypocrisy, and in most cases, they are exposed for their scandals in the end; they represent the hypocrisy of religion according to the authors. There are also cases where religion is represented as a mixture of the two, but in all cases the protagonist is characterized as a rebellious defiant representing the author's rejection of the ruling paradigm. Some of the shining examples are; the Greek pantheon in the Iliad, Victor Hugo's Claude Frolo, And Dicken's Mr. Chadband.

Lastly, religion as a force that should not be trifled with, in this case, the gods in the story transcend what the humans' morality code, they are neither good nor bad but they follow a system of their own which the other characters in the story do not comprehend and that is part of what makes them dangerous. In H.P Lovecraft's work, the gods represent an impossible reach for human curiosity, and every attempt made to understand them is met with a terrible end. They are also the representation of our own insignificance against the universe. In George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* the god who is shown directly interfering the most with the characters of the story, The Lord of Light, is the at the same time the most enigmatic and misunderstood and the characters who interfere with it are shunned and feared by society.

The last case is especially a curious one; it is the most recent one, especially in English literature, corresponding with a rise in the scientific discoveries and especially in the field of astronomy, and it seems that the more we discover from the universe we live in the stronger our sense of insignificance against its sheer vastness increases, and the looser and more enigmatic our relation with god becomes.

1.2. H.P. Lovecraft and the Cosmic Horror

1.2.1. H.P. Lovecraft Early Life and Inspiration

Howard Philippe Lovecraft was born in Providence, Rhode Island on August 20, 1890 to one of the oldest families in town. His mother was a wealthy aristocrat from a family with rumors of inbreeding in their background, and his father was a traveling salesman suffering from a disease that would later be identified as syphilis. When Howard was three years old his father was sent to a lunatic asylum after a nervous breakdown induced by his undiagnosed disease. The old man lived for another five years, but Howard never saw him again.

Howard and his mother have moved in to live with his uncle; they both tried their best to give Howard a relatively normal life despite the setback caused by his father's absence. Though, they couldn't fill the hole or prevent the psychological damage that his father's accident caused. When he was at the age of 6 he began having acute nightmares that would leave him paralyzed for days, preventing him from attending school most of his life. The influence of his gloomy childhood is apparent in Lovecraft's work, for example, *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. and *The Dunwich Horror*, two of Lovecraft's popular stories; both have a theme of families hiding dark secrets in their lineage.

When Lovecraft wasn't attending school he was spending his time in his uncle's library, which was stacked with scientific journals and valuable books, such as Edgar Allan Poe's, who Lovecraft has described as "his god of fiction", and "The Arabian Nights", the latter have left a particularly curious impression on Lovecraft, he wrote on one of his letters

Then again—how many young Arabs have the Arabian Nights bred! I ought to know, at the age of 5 I was one of them. I had not then encountered Graeco-Roman myth, but found in Lang's Arabian Nights a gateway to glittering vistas of wonder and freedom. It was then that I invented for myself the name of Abdul Alhazred, and made my mother take me to the Oriental curio shops and fit me up an Arabian corner in my room. (6)

Abdul Alhazred is also the name of one of the most pivotal characters in H.P. Lovecraft's mythos.

Human's investigating the ruins of a long bygone civilization and discovering ancient cities is also a recurring theme in Lovecraft's stories, and that's another instance of "The Arabian Nights" direct influence on him. However, S.T. Joshi, one of Lovecraft's most famous scholars,

and the writer of his monumental biography “I Am Providence” has made a curious observation: “The legendary Irem (or Iram), City of Pillars, caught Lovecraft's imagination enough to be mentioned several times in his stories. However, oddly enough, it is not to be found in the Andrew Lang edition of the Arabian Nights that Lovecraft read as a child” (Lovecraft's Library: A Catalogue). And no other versions of “The Arabian Nights” were found in Lovecraft’s library after his death. This leaves Lovecraft’s interest in the orient an incomplete mystery; and an under-researched part of his life.

Lovecraft considered himself an amateur astronomer; he often visited the astronomical observatory in providence, His obsession with the stars and what lays beyond the observable universe have inspired him to adapt a philosophy of human insignificance, powerless, and doom, which later will be labeled as “Cosmicism”.

Lovecraft died on March 15, 1937, Providence. Leaving behind a legacy of at least 60 short stories that fused cutting edge technology with traditional horror, and what is estimated to be a hundred thousand letters. His influence has reached beyond horror genre and even literature, from the writers of “Batman” to Steven King, there’s even a section in Pluto named after one of his monsters. After his death, his name became an adjective for the type of horror he inspired, which is the Lovecraftian horror also known as “Cosmic horror”.

1.2.2. Cosmic Horror

After the World War, there was a huge shadow cast on the genre of literature; the horrors of the war has left humanity desensitized to fantastical folklore of fiction, they were no longer frightened by ghosts and werewolves, people have seen real horror. By the time Lovecraft has begun writing in the 1970 he set himself on a mission to bring a new kind of terror in the genre

of horror that it emphasized on the indescribable, the unknown, and elevates these elements to a cosmic level in order to show the insignificance of the human kind against the sheer vastness of the universe. And bring a new genre of horror, the likes of which humanity has never seen before.

This new Lovecraftian horror aims to shatter the comfortable notion that we humans are the masters of our world, and to reveal the truth about of powerlessness against the unknown, In one of his essays he explains that the fear of the unknown has burdened humanity since the dawn of time “[t]he oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown... The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part.” (Supernatural horror in literature 1). This idea that we are terrified of what we cannot understand is at the core of every Lovecraft’s novella and short story.

The Lovecraftian horror, or interchangeably “Cosmic Horror”, is a genre of literature which emphasizes the fear of the indescribable, and incomprehensible, and the vulnerability of the human mind against these forces. It often uses scientific elements to respond to the scientific progress of the era. In his most famous stories for example, *The Call of Cthulhu* earth is revealed to be under the influence of an indifferent god whose mere sight sends humans dwelling in madness, in *At the Mountain of Madness* a group of scientists discover that humanity was created by an old race of aliens as a joke or a mistake and that our existence amounts to nothing compared to civilizations that existed before us, and in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* the protagonist discovers that he’s part of an old race of sea-creatures that are destined to rule over

humanity someday in the future, and there is no way to stop them, and in “The Color Out of Space” a strange meteor changes a normal farm into an alien hellscape.

So rather than gore, or other elements of shock, the cosmic horror lies in what is not directly portrait, and leaves it instead to our imagination. And rather than recognizable monsters, there are indescribable gods, but less of a deity and more of a force, for whom humanity is mere plaything. And at the end of a Lovecraftian story, whether the protagonists survive or not, they are left with a deep sense of maddening existentialism.

This literary genre came as a result of Lovecraft’s frustration with the state of the horror genre in his time; he often criticized the literature of his time and called it, optimistic, naive, and idealistic, as such, while reading cosmic horror we are not left with a feeling of triumph or satisfaction at the end, but instead a feeling of cosmic indifference, that we are nothing but mere dusts in a sea of black nothingness. Lovecraft’s type of literature mirror exactly is philosophical views on the universe which he labeled as “Comicism”.

1.2.3. Cosmicism

Cosmicism is a philosophical worldview that emphasizes the insignificance of humanity against the universe, and the universe’s indifference towards our existence. It was developed by H.P. Lovecraft who made pessimistic view on the universe a core to his writings. His stories often depict the human search for an ultimate truth as ridiculous and futile, and their struggles, and achievements are ultimately meaningless in the grand scheme of things, because the cosmos is vast and hostile and humanity is but a tiny, fleeting moment in its presence. The universe is also portrayed as containing arcane secrets and incomprehensible forces. In Lovecraft’s stories, when the protagonist comes in contact with these forces and secrets either by glimpsing at them

or reading about them; he is either inflicted with madness from the revelation, or sent into a state of deep depression.

There is a similar concept to that of the veil in Sufism mysticism, which also states the existence of a veil that keeps us from seeing a metaphysical world, it also possible to look past the veil from a Sufi perspective but those who do go mad from the revelation. Cosmicism contains then a dark re-iteration of the Islamic mysticism of Sufism. While in the latter the veil hides a beautiful harmonious world of metaphysics, in Cosmicism and cosmic horror the “veil” hides a dark reality that shouldn’t under any circumstances be looked upon by humans.

1.3. The Shadow over Innsmouth

The story is presented to us as a form of a flash back by an unnamed character. In Lovecraft’s notes the protagonist is referred to as Robert Olmstead who tells us about the depopulation and bombing of a fishing town called “Innsmouth” by the US government. He notices the extensive force which the government resorted to for such a small town and the enormous number of arrests of the denizens of Innsmouth who seemingly received no trials. The events of the story of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* are his personal experience in that town.

Olmstead was on an antiquarian tour of New England when he stumbled upon an exotic piece of jewelry in a museum. He learns that its source is a nearby seaport called “Innsmouth”. Olmstead was fascinated by the mysterious and remarkable design of the piece that he decided to learn more about its source, this is the first example of Olmstead scientific pursuit.

Olmstead learns that that for a hundred years the town was shrouded in stigma and superstition. A lot of people tell a lot of stories “about old Captain Marsh driving bargains with the devil and bringing imps out of hell to live in Innsmouth. Some other tales were about some

kind of devil-worship and awful sacrifices in some place near the wharves that people stumbled on around 1845 or thereabouts” (Lovecraft 3), which despite Olmstead’s scientific attitude, they increase his curiosity. One thing he notes is how suspicious the natives from anyone who shows too much interest in “Innsmouth” while clerk and library men merely discouraged him to go to “Innsmouth”. He states that “In the eyes of the educated, Innsmouth was merely a case of civic degeneration” (6), and that intelligent people lean towards a pirate theory of what happened to Innsmouth, while the rest believe rumor of a devil worshipping cult.

It is not until Olmstead visits Innsmouth and meets a character named Zadok that he learns the truth about the town. Zadok goes on a drunken rambling about what truly had happened. He confirms a lot of the superstitions around the town, mainly the one about the cult that took over the church that brought fish hybrid monsters from the depth of the ocean. The latter, throughout the years, started marrying with the citizens of the town. Olmstead doesn’t want to believe any of what the drunken man says, but he decides that he has heard enough and that it is time to leave Innsmouth. He is attacked by the fish-hybrid monsters at night but he makes a narrow escape.

In a final cosmic twist, Olmstead discovers that his family lineage goes back to Innsmouth and that his ancestors were the ones responsible for what occurred there. He even starts metamorphosing into one of the fish-hybrids, and in the very final moments of the story, Olmstead celebrates his transformation and plans to return back to Innsmouth. Cosmic horror is a strong theme in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, but the novella is more famous for the atmosphere it creates and the strong themes of degeneracy it presents, which is a reflection of the author’s regrettably racist attitude that stains his legacy. The theme of degeneracy in relation to the

author's racist beliefs, and Darwinism will be discussed in greater details in the following chapter.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter is space for the debate between Science and Religion, and by extension the supernatural that has been represented in fiction in every way. However, every now and then, there is an artist whose work is considered a landmark in its respected field, and their name becomes an adjective for the type of fiction they inspired. In the case of horror literature in the post-modern world no discussion is complete without the mention of H.P. Lovecraft. Throughout the chapter, he is presented as one of the greatest who terrified the world with his art. It is demonstrated that his works have so penetrated pop culture that his monsters have transcended horror itself. What makes his writing so unique is his approach to the supernatural and depiction of the human mind's vulnerability against the vastness of the universe, and to science and our scientific curiosity, especially in the novella selected, *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

**Chapter Two: The Scientific Curiosity and Social Degeneracy
in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.**

2.1. Science in Cosmic Horror

2.2. Skepticism and the Scientific Curiosity in the Novella

2.2.1. Olmstead the Unique Scientific Pursuer

2.2.2. Message on Skepticism and Unfaith

2.3. Themes of Degeneracy and Darwinism

2.3.1. The Innsmouth Look

2.3.2. Darwinism in Innsmouth

Introduction

The Shadow over Innsmouth is one of Lovecraft's strongest stories, and according to the typical Lovecraftian standards, it is widely considered to be one of his most experimental works as well. It is a tale of the scientific curiosity of men, traveling through the mists of superstitions, a journey of data-harvesting and learning in order to cast away the shadow off of a town fallen way past the point of salvation into decay.

The aim of this chapter is to study the novella as a form of an atheist-writing, and as a cautionary tale against superstitions and degeneracy. Through this chapter, the researcher will try to figure out what is the meaning behind the protagonist's revelation in the end.

2.1. Science in Cosmic Horror

As the progenitor father of cosmic horror, H.P. Lovecraft was an avid reader. When he wasn't attending school, he spent his day reading through his uncle's scientific journals, he was specifically fond of geology and astrology. We can see the effect of this directly reflected on his style of writing, as he often goes into scientific explanations that span a chapter or longer in some instances, or describing the compound material of his imagined worlds in such a manner that only someone with knowledge on geology could fully appreciate. Hence why cosmic horror has attained a strong relationship with science and before it was given the name "cosmic" it was only referred to as Sci-fi horror.

H.P. Lovecraft's protagonists are often scientists or educated people who possess a strong sense for learning the truth and uncovering mysteries, because to him, the unexplored and mysterious is "Pleasure" as he explained in the entrance to his 1921 essay: "[p]leasure 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” (1). He believes that human curiosity cannot be held back. So as any atheist who’s interested in science, he understood that science is the only viable language that humans possess which can help us translate the universe and understand the world as we live in it

In a 1918 letter written to Maurice W. Moe, a good friend of Lovecraft, but a devout Christian, which always caused friction between the two. He wrote:

In your eyes, man is torn between only two influences: the degrading instincts of the savage, and the temperate impulses of the philanthropist. To you, men are of but two classes—lovers of self and lovers of the race. To you, men have but two types of emotion—self-gratification, to be combated; and altruism, to be fostered...You are forgetting a human impulse that, despite its restriction to a relatively small number of men, has all through history proved itself as real and as vital as hunger—as potent as thirst or greed. I need not say that I refer to that simplest yet most exalted attribute of our species—the acute, persistent, unquenchable craving TO KNOW. (135)

Here, Lovecraft is accusing his friend -and by extension, his faith- of close-mindedness. That his religion, for some reason, does not acknowledge one of the strongest human impulses, which is our scientific curiosity, which Lovecraft regards as a force that cannot be tamed, and to him it is as vital to humanity as hunger.

Paradoxically however, Lovecraft also believes that the sciences will someday lead us to our demise and that our minds cannot possibly comprehend everything in our universe, and oftentimes the revelation of the truth is punishing. As he expressed in one of his letters: “to the scientist there is the joy in pursuing truth which nearly counteracts the depressing revelations of truth” (1965-76 Selected Letters 134). So even as a science man, Lovecraft has a pessimistic view on the capabilities of the human brain, and the theme of the human mind’s inferiority against the vastness of the cosmos is a reoccurring one in almost all of Lovecraft’s stories, whether the setting was a decaying fishing town or in the mountains of the Antarctic. And it is perhaps most aptly summarized in the opening of his most famous work *The Call of Cthulhu*.

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (1)

This paradoxical conflict between Lovecraft’s beliefs and the message that can be understood from his writing are apt for the his philosophy of “Cosmicism”, and a backbone of the Lovecraftian horror, i.e. cosmic horror, in addition to this, the theme of the scientific curiosity leading men into a dark corner of reality and depressing revelation which sends them into madness; where they feel a crushing insignificance against the vastness of the world they live in is at the core of almost every Lovecraft story. And among these men is the protagonist of *The*

Shadow over Innsmouth., Olmstead, who is a great example for a truth seeker discovering a maddening revelation.

2.2. Skepticism and Scientific Curiosity in the Novella

2.2.1. Olmstead the Unique Science Pursuer

The story of *The Shadow over Innsmouth.* is narrated to us for the most part through the memory of the unnamed protagonist, who later in one of the author's notes is named Olmstead, as he recalls his terrifying experiences. He begins the first chapter by telling us about the depopulation and bombing of an unremarkable town called Innsmouth, which Olmstead had visited before. The town was small and before the events of the story it didn't cause any harm or stir any attention, but Olmstead emphasizes however on the excessive force through which the government conducted the operation for such a an unremarkable town, and how unusually big the number of arrests was, which all went without trials nor any information about the allegations.

Olmstead makes another remark which is that these anomalous acts conducted by the government have went unnoticed by most of the population, and only those who paid attention to them are the educated people “[u]ninquiring souls let this occurrence pass as one of the major clashes in a spasmodic war on liquor. Keener news-followers, however, wondered at the prodigious number of arrests, the abnormally large force of men used in making them, and the secrecy surrounding the disposal of the prisoners” (*The Shadow over Innsmouth* 1). Right from the start, the novella hints at a distinction between what the layman and the educated think on the matter of Innsmouth.

Olmstead then admits that something had made him flee out of the town after his visit in a frantic horror and go to the police station, and that his attestation is what consequently caused the government to take actions against Innsmouth. He declares that he's beginning to narrate what he experienced in that town and thus the storytelling quickly and smoothly shifts into the first person perspective.

The character of Olmstead does not deviate much from the other Lovecraftian heroes; he's calculative, sharp and most importantly possessing a ceaseless sense of curiosity and hunger to learn the truth. But where Olmstead does differ from the other protagonists is that in the events of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. he is in the centre of the story. Lovecraft's protagonists traditionally play the role of a discoverer who arrives after the most pivotal events in the story have occurred millions of years ago as it is the case in *At the Mountain of Madness*, or an investigator who gathers together pieces from an old mystery which makes the plot of story like in the *The Call of Cthulhu* or some variation of this sorts, But in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. it is Olmstead who's attestation triggers the governments to move, and it is his arrival at the town which invokes the cult members from their hideouts and out of the sea. The novella centres on his travel to Innsmouth, and the events of the story are his own flashbacks narrating his experiences with the town.

It is the character of Olmstead which drives the plot of the story instead of just experiencing the ramifications of some other factors that occurred before the events of the story had happened; such is the case with the other Lovecraft stories. But if Olmstead drives the plot, then what drives Olmstead is his scientific curiosity. And this is true to all the lovecraftian protagonists. Lovecraft thrusts the heroes of his stories into situations where they are face to face

with an awe inducing mystery. But no matter how frightened they are, they cannot stop moving forward, driven by an unbridled desire for learning and discovery.

Olmstead has plainly expressed that something was pulling him further and further into discovering more of Innsmouth, no matter how scared he got, no matter how strong the decaying scent of the town gets, or no matter how loud the creaking sound of monsters is, when he says: "It must have been some imp of the perverse - or some sardonic pull from dark, hidden sources - which made me change my plans as I did" (17). This "sardonic pull" is simply Olmstead's sense of curiosity preventing him from leaving the town without answers.

In the novella, Olmstead meets 4 characters all of which have their own story to tell about what had happened in Innsmouth that turned it into such an infamous town, throughout the eyes of the protagonist, the readers follow the mystery, he represents our curiosity that which grows stronger and stronger with every page turn as Olmstead learns a little more about the town. But also he represents Lovecraft himself, either by design or by nature, Olmstead's mundane realism mimics Lovecraft's own habits and even diet, by design as in Lovecraft has intentionally written Olmstead in a self-inserting way, he too is an avid antiquarian which a ceaseless hunger for knowledge and learning. This might be related to the reason why Olmstead's case is different from Lovecraft's traditional characters.

One hypothesis for the uniqueness of Olmstead and *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. is that Lovecraft might have had a specific market in mind, and that made him experiment with. A week after finishing he wrote to one of his friends:

I don't think the experimenting came to very much. The result, 68 pages long, has all the defects I deplore—especially in point of style, where hackneyed phrases &

rhythms have crept in despite all precautions. Use of any other style was like working in a foreign language—hence I was left high & dry. Possibly I shall try experimenting with another plot—of as widely different nature as I can think of—but I think an hiatus like that of 1908 is the best thing. I have been paying too much attention to the demands of markets & the opinions of others—hence if I am ever to write again I must begin afresh; writing only for myself & getting into the old habit of non-self-conscious storytelling without any technical thoughts. (Lovecraft and Derleth 419)

Evidence to this hypothesis is the fact that the first and only action sequence Lovecraft has ever written exists in the last chapters of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. which tells us that Lovecraft was indeed trying out something new with this particular story, perhaps aiming for a market with better pay, however, there isn't any more documented evidence to support this hypothesis. What we can safely deduce, however, is that this experimentation is what compelled Lovecraft to write a character that would appear more human. And that his reclusive nature didn't help him write a character that mimics any other human more than himself.

All in all, Olmstead is an echo of Lovecraft's scientific zeal and curiosity. And it doesn't just reflect on Olmstead's character but every aspect of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. as well, despite it being one of the lesser "cosmic" stories it still delivers a message on the human scientific pursuit, while also containing themes of superstition, social degeneration, and even atheism.

2.2.2. Message on Skepticism and Unfaith

When Lovecraft reached 9 years of age he declared himself an atheist. After reading through scientific volumes as well as methodological books such as Hindu, Egyptian, and Teutonic mythology and experimenting with their beliefs, he finally came to adopt the scientific way. In a 1922 essay titled “A Confession of Unfaith” he explained in great details how he came to be a skeptic and materialistic and how he changed from a typical orthodox Christian to an agnostic pagan to a complete rejecter of every faith he’s ever encountered in his readings. He attributes his lack of faith to his highly analytical mind and skeptical attitude

[I]n 1899 it was a compendious treatise on chemistry in several pencil-scribbled “volumes”. But Methodology was by no means neglected. In this period I read much in Egyptian, Hindu, and Teutonic mythology, and tried experiments in pretending to believe each one, to see which might contain the greatest truth. I had, it will be noted, immediately adopted the method and manner of science! Naturally having an unemotional mind, I was soon a complete skeptic and materialist. (20-21)

With this notion in mind it gets easier when we try to interpret *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. as a story of the young researcher traveling through the shadows of superstition and rumours in order to learn the truth. Even the word “Shadow” in the title sounds to have been chosen to invoke a sense of mystery, ambiguity, and unclearness. The title, *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. is not chosen by accident; for throughout the tale it is used with provocative variations. We first encounter it when Olmstead, after hearing the account of the ticket agent, states: “That was the first I ever heard of shadowed Innsmouth.” This mildly ominous usage then successively becomes “rumour-shadowed Innsmouth” (Joshi 885).

Right from the first paragraph, the novella hints at the fact that there is a difference between what people think about the matter of Innsmouth depending on their social class, for example. The only people who show any skepticism about the government's unusually loud and costly acts against the small and unremarkable town of Innsmouth are the educated people, as it is stated in the story: "[u]ninquiring souls let this occurrence pass as one of the major clashes in a spasmodic war on liquor. Keener news-followers, however, wondered at the prodigious number of arrests, the abnormally large force of men used in making them, and the secrecy surrounding the disposal of the prisoners" (1), while the simple minded ones simply dismissed the entire matter as a war on drugs, completely disregarding the unusual acts of the government, Lovecraft specifically uses a specifically a derogatory term, "uninquiring souls", to describe these people

Another instance of this binary between what the layman and the educated think about "Innsmouth" happens during Olmstead's conversation with the unnamed security agent and Miss Tilton the curator of the museum, we hear most of rumours around Innsmouth from the agent who specifically declares that he doesn't believe in any of the superstitions surrounding the town even though they entertain and somewhat interest him, he goes on for a three pages long narration of what the stories that the natives ramble about. While Miss Tilton on the other hand simply dismisses the rumours around Innsmouth as a mere case of "degeneracy" without any written dialogue in the story, and she tells Olmstead to not get too busy with the superstitions around Innsmouth.

She instead offers a popular theory of "pirates" which is what the educated people subscribe to. "[S]he made it clear that the pirate theory of the Marsh fortune was a popular one among the intelligent people of the region. Her own attitude toward shadowed Innsmouth - which she never

seen - was one of disgust at a community slipping far down the cultural scale” (7). Olmstead naturally leans towards the theory which Miss Tilton tells him about.

Nevertheless, Olmstead, although interested in hearing more and more about Innsmouth with no regard to the source and nature of the information he gets, whether there were rumours or a historical and logic based facts, he takes all information with a great sense of skepticism and analysis which leads to learning the truth about Innsmouth in the end. Olmstead’s attitude towards the superstitions surrounding Innsmouth is reminiscent of Lovecraft’s attitude towards faith and mythology, in the sense that he would give them a fair ear and read through them with great interest, while at the same time taking everything he reads tentatively and keeping a skeptic and analytical standpoint.

Lovecraft takes the theme of unfaith to a higher degree with the depiction of Christianity in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. or more precisely lack thereof. In the story, the church of Innsmouth is over taken by an esoteric and alien pagan religion which completely dominates over the denizens of the town and eradicates Christianity. In “A Confession of Unfaith” he writes that among the reasons which turn him into an agnostic when he was young, other than the absurdity of the faith, was the fact that he found no inspiration in Christianity, while at the same time finding colors in the eastern faiths, he states: “when I was told what I really knew before, that “Santa Claus” is a myth. This admission caused me to ask why "God" is not equally a myth...The absurdity of the myths I was called upon to accept, and the sombre grayness of the whole faith as compared with the eastern magnificence of [Mohammedanism], made me definitely an agnostic” (19).

With that in mind, we can safely deduce that Lovecraft’s rejection of Christianity didn’t come from his unfaith alone, but also his frustration with the un-inspiring faith, while at the same

time he found inspiration in other pagan methodology and oriental spiritualism which are reflected in his writing. Lovecraft's relationship with religion will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter

2.3. Themes of Degeneracy and Darwinism

2.3.1. The Innsmouth Look

Many scholars, most prominently S.T. Joshi, have labeled "Innsmouth" as a cautionary tale of degeneration, and hazardous miscegenation. It is a fair statement and not a difficult conclusion to arrive at when we take into consideration Lovecraft's vehement racism which extended to the point of fear, and how the denizens of Innsmouth are described in the story, "furtive" and "uncanny" (8). They look almost like normal humans; yet, one will feel an unexplained feeling of uneasiness just from the mere sight of these folks, "almost everyone had certain peculiarities of face and motions" (9). Olmstead labels the unappealing look of the denizens as the "Innsmouth look".

Before the end of the story, Olmstead learns that "Innsmouth" was a case of "Civic degeneracy". A community fell into decay due to some unwholesome miscegenation with a "foreign blood" brought by the sailors from Asia, the South Sea, and Africa, which caused the denizens of Innsmouth to acquire that unappealing physiology. And as the years went by, the town became more and more isolated due to the denizens' unfriendly nature on one hand, and the hate that they attract from foreigners due to their unappealing looks and furtive behavior. These two factors caused the plague of "the Innsmouth look" to carry on to many generations through years of inbreeding.

Lovecraft also implies that the racial prejudice against the town of Innsmouth is not only justified, but also necessary in some sense. For instance, the dialogue of the agent: “but the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice - and I don't say I'm blaming those that hold it.... I guess they're what they call 'white trash' down South - lawless and sly, and full of secret things” (4-5), and also from the way he antagonizes the denizens, they themselves do not like anyone who isn't from Innsmouth, and will result to hostility against anyone who is inquisitive about their secrets.

Another thing to consider is that the body horror that is the hybrids of Innsmouth contributes to the terrifying atmosphere that Lovecraft has definitely wished to achieve. The way he describes them as having chinless faces, hairless scalps, wrinkled necks, and grayish skin, makes it is obvious that Lovecraft does not wish to make the reader sympathize with the denizens of Innsmouth whatsoever. With such repulsive description, he further emphasizes their degeneracy and the dangers of inbreeding.

The Shadow over Innsmouth. is then a blatant reflection of Lovecraft's racism and hatred of miscegenation. However, the ending directly contradicts Lovecraft's message about miscegenation and racial prejudice. This is due to the fact that as the readers reach the final chapters they learn that the denizens of Innsmouth, repulsive as they may be, are in fact superior to humans, being able to live forever unless slain, and in the story, they are even referred to as “gods”.

In the end, Olmstead, begins digging through his family lineage and discovers that his great-grand-mother was the progenitor of the degeneracy in “Innsmouth”. And in a twist of fate he begins acquiring the “Innsmouth look” which he has been repulsed by. He buys an automatic

weapon in order to end his life, but he is stopped by dreams of returning to Innsmouth. In the very final paragraph Olmstead celebrates his metamorphosis and looks forward to his return to the town. The question which remains then is the one related to wondering about the message behind the end of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, and more precisely, Olmstead's transformation, which can be either seen as degeneration or an evolution.

2.3.2. Darwinism in Innsmouth

It is no secret that Lovecraft was an avid reader of the nineteenth-century scientific works that tackled the matter of race, and evolution. Darwin, Ernest Haeckel, and Thomas Henry Huxley are of the main chief influencers on Lovecraft's philosophy. Much of Huxley's and Haeckel's works were found in Lovecraft's library, and although that is not the case for Darwin's work, the three writers were cited in miscellaneous works by Lovecraft (Joshi 239). The evolution theory has also reduced the human being from a sacred creature to a mere animal, which no doubt has direct influence on Lovecraft's philosophy of "Cosmicism" which is based entirely on the insignificance of humanity. It is reasonable then to study *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. from a Darwinist focal point, which aims to understand the Metamorphosis that occurs in the novella as a form of evolution.

According to Darwin's *The Descent of Man* "The Quadrumana and all the higher mammals are probably derived from an ancient marsupial animal, and this through a long line of diversified forms, either from some reptile-like or some amphibian-like creature, and this again from some fish like animal. In the dim obscurity of the past we can see that the early progenitor of all the Vertebrata must have been an aquatic animal" (389). That is to say, the progenitors of

all life came out of the depth of the ocean, which is exactly what is said about the fish monsters of “Innsmouth”, the “Deep Ones” (The Shadow over Innsmouth 20).

When the mystery behind the town finally unravels, Zadok, the second most important character in the story, and one who will be analyzed in greater details later in this research work, gives an almost chapter long monologue about what had happened in “Innsmouth”. He was an eyewitness to the chaos that ensued and knows more than any ordinary human about the “Deep Ones”. He says a very curious line when referring to them, which is “that everything alive come aout o' the water onct an' only needs a little change to go back agin” (21). This is a potential reference to Charles Darwin’s theory mentioned above, which means that the monsters of “Innsmouth” are not a mere case of “Civic degeneracy” (The Shadow over Innsmouth 5), but rather the progenitors of life and the final chain in the evolution.

Elevating Olmstead’s transformation in the end of the story to a status of an “ascension” to a higher state of being, and his final monologue and the very last line of the novella celebrates it “in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory for ever” (47). It is very easy to feel as if the entire novella is a mere build up for this very final moment. As discussed above, Olmstead is a representation of Lovecraft’s resistance against degeneracy and superstition. However, the fact that the protagonist celebrates his transformation is a direct contradiction to the supposed message behind the story. Which raises more questions than it answers.

Unfortunately, Lovecraft was not satisfied with *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.. He didn’t believe that his experiments with the novella were successful. Over time, he grew more and more tired with it, refusing to even hand it out for publishing. As such, there are almost no comments

on *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. from Lovecraft himself. So we can only speculate on what ideas he was wishing to support with the story, and what the meaning behind the ending is.

Conclusion

In summary, the novella seems to be a reflection of Lovecraft's agnostic emotions manifested as a form of a cautionary tale against superstition and blind-faith, but it is unfortunately stained with the author's racism and prejudice; this is one of the main concerns of this chapter. In addition to this the idea of "The Innsmouth Look" which might have been intended as an evolution rather than degeneracy, does not excuse the shadow of racism that looms over the story. However, it does give the novella another dimension of complexity. The chapter also stops at the messages that Lovecraft may have wished to send, which seem to be contradicting, specifically the ending portion of the novella. As we dive into a more theological point of view of Lovecraft's work in the next chapter, we notice that contradictions continue to appear at every corner.

Chapter Three: The Dark Re-iteration of Religious and Mystic Concepts in Lovecraft's Works

3.1. The Lovecraftian Gods

3.2. Ascension through Metamorphosis

3.3. Lovecraft's Unholy Books

3.4. Oriental Mysticism in Lovecraft's Stories

3.4.1. The Veil in Lovecraft's Universe

3.4.2. Madness, Between Sufism and Cosmicism

Introduction

Even though Lovecraft was, publicly at least, a through on through atheist till his death, his weird fiction is embedded with religious and mystic concepts and motifs. They were a fountain of inspiration for the author which played a great role in molding his aesthetic development. The representation of religion, and mysticism -the supernatural in general- in Lovecraft's stories are cynical parodies of the faiths, sometimes even burlesque. This fits his literary philosophy of "Cosmicism" perfectly, which emphasizes on the indifference of an absurdly vast universe towards humanity, and the insignificance of the latter. In order to portray this in his literature, Lovecraft resorts to a dark-reiteration of some of the religious concepts to perfectly convey his pessimistic and absurd views on reality.

This last chapter will focus on this angle in the relationship between Lovecraft and religion, starting with his various deities who are often referred to collectively as "The Great Old Ones" or "The Outer Gods". They are present or referred to in almost every Lovecraft stories. Next, the chapter will tackle the instances where regular humans ascend to a greater state of beings through metamorphosis, which elevates them from mere mortals to a status closer to the Lovecraftian gods than humans. This chapter will also delve into the link that connects all of Lovecraft tales together which are the fabled books that serve as the holy tomes of his bizarre universe. The final part of this chapter will tackle the similarities between Lovecraft's stories and the oriental mysticism of Sufism, which are concepts from Sufism that Lovecraft implemented in his philosophy and literary aesthetic.

3.1. The Lovecraftian Gods

Often referred to as either “The Great Old Ones” or “Outer Gods” to distinct them from the Gods that humans worship, the Lovecraftian gods are a race of primordial beings, indescribable in form, and incomprehensible in nature, portrayed as both benign and malignant. They live far beyond the reach of the human technology, science, and even imagination. There is a pantheon of multiple gods that sometimes interfere indirectly or indirectly in the events of Lovecraft’s stories, and they are worshiped extensively by esoteric cults, other races of aliens and monsters.

Any attempt conducted by humans to understand these gods leads to disastrous consequences. According to Lovecraft’s school of “Cosmicism”, humanity and all of its 6 thousand years of civilization is nothing but an insignificant and fleeting moment in the infinite cosmos of the universe, a grain of sand on a sea of nothingness, as such, any attempt made to understand the universe is ridiculous according to Lovecraft, because the world is simply too vast for the humans to comprehend. The enigmatic past is inexplicable and the grim future is so far ahead, while humanity is trapped in the middle clinging to a ridiculous delusion of “human superiority”.

The Lovecraftian Gods represent in literature the grim pessimism of his philosophy, which he perceives as the dark reality of t. As such, any contact his protagonists make with these gods, no matter how little it is, be it a fleeting glimpse at their indescribable form, or even from reading one passage too far, will result in them becoming mad from the revelation, sobbing or giggling hysterically, or ending up in a deep state of depression.

The “Outer Gods” and “Great Old Ones” of Lovecraft are a manifestation of his pessimistic philosophy, and his dissatisfaction with the religions of the real world, which he found grey and uninspiring, or too demanding of its followers. According to him the fact that religions demand sacrifices and commitment is a testament to their falsehood, because if they were true they would demand from their followers the pursuit of knowledge and progress instead of conformity, as he wrote:” If religion were true, its followers would not try to bludgeon their young into an artificial conformity; but would merely insist on their unbending quest for truth, irrespective of artificial backgrounds or practical consequences” (68).

Thus, the Lovecraftian gods are completely indifferent to human, race unlike the other earthly gods whom he perceived as “Little earth gods” who “demand faith contrary to reason and Nature” and whose “tinsel emptiness” provide their worshippers “interests and connections” (12). As such, Lovecraft’s deities exist far beyond the reach of humans and do not require their worship; but they stir their “unbending curiosity”. Nonetheless, it is another reason why Lovecraft likes to write about curious characters, researchers, data collectors, and scientists.

The Lovecraftian gods are always vaguely described in his stories. Characters often only read the description of these deities, or see visions of them in their dreams, or in some cases come in contact with statues or other artifacts that depict them, but their description is always obscure and ambiguous. Like in the Islamic religion, God transcends all things in the universe, including every descriptive term that humans know. Thus we cannot apply physical qualities and attributes to him. In a similar vein, Lovecraft’s deities exist beyond the reach of the human understanding, as such when his protagonists attempt to describe an “Outer God” or a “Great Old One” they can only apply their own fears, the result is a description of an alien monstrosity that resembles nothing they have seen before.

When these deities are described that moment is often used as the culmination of the horror elements in the story. For example, in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. Lovecraft alludes to the existence of “The Deep Ones” through the tiara¹ that the protagonist encounters. On it he sees engravings of “fabulous monsters of abhorrent grotesqueness and malignity” (7), and that is the first and final moment that these monsters are described. Until the last act of the story where Olmstead comes face to face with them. This formula is a recurring one in almost every Lovecraft story. The element of the horror begins in a slow, atmospheric manner setting up a tone for surge of a dramatic description, where Lovecrafts lets loose his twisted imagination for a cut and clear goal, which is perfectly picturing the protagonists’ state of madness upon witnessing these gods, and making the reader in awe, but terrified, and disgusted by them

Another thing to note is the strong and hideous terms H.P. Lovecraft resorts to when he’s describing his deities; “abhorrent” “grotesque” “malignant” as it is the case in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. and in other stories “abomination” and “blasphemous” are always recurring. These descriptions create an atmosphere of ugliness, and unholiness that is a stark contrast to how religions often describe god. In Abrahamic religion, for example, god is capable of violence but his love for his creation is infinite. In Lovecraft’s universe Gods are malignant and indifferent to human existence. In Christianity, humans are created in the image of god, in Lovecraft’s universe, the gods are either indescribable or “abhorrent” and “grotesque”.

This is an intentional dark re-iteration of the concept of god by Lovecraft that is clearly inspired by his frustration of all religion, who he thought to be a conformist’s coping mechanism, and a frustration of the literature during his time, which he believed to be under the influence of a “naively insipid idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic

¹ The tiara is the piece of jewelry that fascinates Olmstead, it is first mentioned in page (6)

literature to uplift the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism” (1). This dark re-iteration of religious concepts extends beyond just merely defiling the description of god, but even one of the major moments in the Abrahamic religion which is the nativity of Jesus.

One of Lovecraft most powerful deities is “Yog-Sothoth” who is said to be all-knowing and can bring knowledge of everything in exchange of human sacrifices. However, in a similar fashion to the most beings in the Lovecraft universe, any contact with “Yog-Sothoth” leads to disastrous consequences. In one of Lovecraft’s most essential stories, *The Dunwich Horror*, this deity plays a major role in the plot, in a similar manner to the nativity of Jesus; the “Outer God” conceives two children with a mortal woman, a young boy with abnormal deformities, and an unnamed monstrosity. The first grows up in an abnormally fast period of time and becomes a curious researcher until his untimely demise, while the second one rests hidden from the public sight.

Lovecraft’s gods are a reflection of the author’s twisted psyche. They are portrayed as indifferent to the human race, due to the author’s agnostic views, far beyond the reach of our understanding yet still influence the characters in malignant ways, due to the author’s pessimistic views. And finally, they are fascinating and enigmatic despite their abhorrent nature, due to the author’s fascination with the cosmos and the unknown. When these components mix together, the results are hideous monstrosities that influence the dreams of humans, and mirror their gods in a dark and blasphemous way.

3.2. Ascension through Metamorphosis

The ascension through metamorphosis is the concept of a character undergoing physical and mental changes that ultimately end with them achieving a higher state of body and mind. It is

a common theme in literature and mythology. It reflects the human desire to transcend their limitation, in mythology; it is directly linked to the enlightenment of the spirit. For example, in Greek mythology, the goddess Athena is born from the head of Zeus a process that symbolizes divinity and wisdom. In Hindu religion, Vishnu in an endeavor to achieve his ultimate goal to preserve the universe, undergoes several transformations. In modern literature, it is often linked with a character's own psychological growth; their metamorphosis often correlates with their own understanding of themselves, and their place in the world.

In Lovecraft's stories, the theme of metamorphosis involves characters undergoing physical and mental changes often without their own volition that leads to horrific transformations and madness. It is linked to the broader theme in Lovecraft's stories which is cosmic horror. *In The Dunwich Horror*, the most central character in the story, Wilbur, undergoes a series of mutations that go in parallel with the transformation of psychological state.

His mind matures in an abnormally fast period of time while his body undergoes the metamorphosis, the culmination of which results in Wilbur acquiring a hideous body, but a brilliant mind as he finally understands his purpose in life. The character's physical change and his psychological state are closely linked. His metamorphosis is also linked to Lovecraft's literary philosophy of Cosmicism, the idea that humans can transform into a monstrous figure without their own volition taps into the fear of the unknown, and that knowledge in Lovecraft's universe= comes with a heavy price, either with madness, horror, or both.

In a similar vein, the protagonist of *The Shadow over Innsmouth.*, Olmstead, also undergoes a metamorphosis in the very final and most important moment of the story. After his narrow escape from Innsmouth, Olmstead begins investigating his family lineage. He discovers a

disturbing and life altering secret, which is that one of his family members is directly linked to Captain Marsh, who is the man that brought the “Deep Ones” fish hybrids to Innsmouth. After the disturbing revelation that his family was linked with the “Deep Ones” through marriage pacts, Olmstead begins noticing that his own body is metamorphosing. The ending has a sense of irony to it. Throughout the novella the creatures are described in a loathsome way, and the protagonist in particular has expressed a deep hatred and disgust for them, only for him to transform into the thing he hated the most in the story (Lovecraft 11).

Throughout history, metamorphoses in literature have been used in a variety of manners and for a many purposes. In Ovid’s writings for example, the theme represented the character’s external struggles, while in modern ages the theme has become more intimately related to psychology and internal struggles, as such, it is not plausible to designate it to a certain role or purpose. However, when we study the use of metamorphosis in storytelling throughout history we can safely say that it is directly linked to the author’s own psychology

A careful combing through of representative texts suggests its use and development throughout history is closely aligned with the development of the concept of the "self-consciousness". By tracing the path of self-awareness that writers typically employed throughout different periods of history, we discover a relationship between self-consciousness and the manner in which metamorphosis is employed as a literary technique. In times when literature is marked by authors writing their self-conscious fears into their characters, as in Roman and (to a much greater extent) modern times, we notice metamorphosis and a character’s psychological state to be closely linked; in moments in history in which artistic output is dominated by oppressively restrictive and extremely powerful outside

sources, as in the Middle Ages, metamorphosis is almost universally an externally driven punitive action if it occurs at all. (Giovanniello 5)

In Lovecraft's case, the metamorphosis is often only perceived as a metaphor for degeneracy. Scholars such as S.T. Joshi discard it as a mere reflection of Lovecraft's racist tendencies, racial prejudice, and his fear of miscegenation. However, that would be a surface level study of Lovecraft's own self-consciousness. This theme accepts different interpretations and dimensions in Lovecraft's story when we truly take into consideration his literary philosophy of "Cosmicism". There are many cases of transformation in Lovecraft's stories, but Olmstead's and Wilbur's are especially curious. They both can be interpreted as ascension to a greater form of being, rather than the degeneration of the human body and mind. In order to see this interpretation, we must look at these two examples from the lens of Lovecraft's own literary philosophy, and his misanthropic attitude, rather than his racist and miscegenation tropes.

When we take a closer look at the universe that Lovecraft created, there seem to be a hierarchy of beings, similar to the *Scala Naturae*, or the "The Great Chain of Beings", which is a concept made by Plato and Aristotle then later developed by the Christian church in the Middle Ages. It is essentially a hierarchy of beings that ranks beings, from God, to other celestial beings, to humans... etc. Lovecraft has implanted a similar scale that ranks the creatures of his myths (Davies 6), from the "Outer Gods" to the less powerful and important beings, and perhaps as a form of self-loathing, pessimism, and misanthropy, humans land on the lowest spot in Lovecraft's hierarchy.

Thus, when we look at Olmstead and Wilbur's transformation through the lens of Lovecraft's philosophy and by applying the "religion and mythologies' ideas as influences on Lovecraft, one can read Lovecraft as portraying atavistic metamorphoses as anabatic and thus

associated with ascension, rather than katabatic and associated with descent” (Davies 2) ; and the transformation of these two characters will make more sense as an ascension to a greater state of being, rather than a degradation. An apotheosis, which is the glorification of an individual to a divine level, only in Lovecraft’s universe, the divine is dark, hideous, and blasphemous.

Another thing to take into consideration is that, even though the forms that Olmstead and Wilbur become after their transformation are hideous, it is stronger, and smarter than their human forms. We know that the “Deep Ones”, which are the monsters which Olmstead becomes a hybrid of, are physically stronger, and more civilized than regular humans. They are immortal, and have been worshiped as gods. Their hideousness stems only from Lovecraft’s own hideous view at the universe, and his tendency to defile otherwise concepts that are supposed to be beautiful and pure such as, ascension.

Olmstead’s transformation in particular has a unique layer of complexity, in a form of religious motif hinted at in the final dialogue “I shall plan my cousin's escape from that Canton mad-house, and together we shall go to marvel-shadowed Innsmouth. We shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to Cyclopean and many-columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory forever” (47). Olmstead celebrates his metamorphosis with religious zealously and even parodies the 23rd psalm “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”. It’s an eerie moment that uses a dark re-iteration of a religious text in order to amplify the horror of an already shocking ending.

He celebrates his imminent return to the ocean, which is a place that Lovecraft considered as mysterious and captivating as the stars, more enigmatic and mysterious than anything else on this planet “more wonderful than the lore of old men and the lore of books is the

secret lore of ocean. Blue, green, gray, white or black; smooth, ruffled, or mountainous; that ocean is not silent...; for ocean is more ancient than the mountains, and freighted with the memories and the dreams of Time” (37) . There’s a poetic value to the ending, which is that even though Olmstead celebrates his close return to the ocean which is, in the literal sense, a descent into a dark abyss. However, he achieves a full understanding of his identity and purpose in the world, which makes his metamorphosis essentially ascension (The Shadow over Innsmouth 47).

The story of Olmstead is just a tiny bit of a rich mythos that makes up the universe which Lovecraft has created; that universe which is one of the most bizarre and compound fictional worlds in literature. Lovecraft’s stories, specifically his most famous ones, seldom go to explanations about the details of this universe, even though they belong to it. The reason is that each one of them, although belonging to the same setting, exists alone in of itself as an independent story, with its own distinct plot and settings. But even though Lovecraft’s stories might be dissimilar from one another, there’s one thing that links them all, and is present or referenced in almost every Lovecraft story. He refers to it as “The Book of the Dead”, “The Necronomicon” which is essentially, the holy book of Lovecraft universe.

3.3. The Lovecraftian Unholy Books

Lovecraft connects his collection of stories together through the frequent mentioning of books, grimoires, and tomes, in almost all of his stories. These books contain what Lovecraft refers to as “forbidden knowledge” about the secrets of his universe, as well as incantations and esoteric rituals that allow contact with Lovecraft’s evil deities. As a plot device, they are often used to solve the mysteries in the stories. These texts are portrayed by Lovecraft as enigmatic, and alluring to the curious mind, but at the same time extremely dangerous and can threaten

someone's sanity if they read a passage too far. They are often written in archaic forms of known languages, Arabic, Greek, Latin, and English, or in some instances in some fictional alien alphabets unbeknownst to the human race.

As for the actual content of what is inside these manuscripts and tomes, other than incantations and spells, they contain descriptions of the outer world, which Lovecraft sometimes refer to as "the void". They help those who can handle their insanity navigate through this void as a guide book. Finally, they contain detailed description of the "Great Old Ones" and "Outer Gods" which are, in Lovecraft's universe, deities so far beyond the human body to reach, and almost impossible for the human mind to perceive. As such, reading these books and manuscripts almost always results in madness, or an acute pessimistic depression for the reader

These books are heavily influenced by real world occultism, cryptography, and alchemy. Lovecraft even references some of the real world esoteric and archaic books in his stories, such as the "Turba Philosophorum" in alchemy, the "Cryptomensys Patefacta" in medieval cryptography, "The Daemonolateria" in witchcraft, and even religious books, such as the "Zohar". It is important to note that even though these texts might have been a direct influence to his writing, Lovecraft never actually read almost any of these books, as none of them was found in his library after death. He simply extracted most of the names from the "Encyclopedia Britannica"

Among these books, there is one single tome that is the most infamous, and pivotal text in the Lovecraft universe, which is, "The Necronomicon". The word roughly translates to the book of the dead, but the book also has a different name, "Kitab Al'Azif" translated from Arabic to the book of music. The first name could have been copied from the "Astronomicon", a book about

celestial phenomena by the Greek Poet Marcus Manilius. It is also believed that the word “Necronomicon” “came to Lovecraft in a dream; and when he, whose Greek was at best rudimentary, later attempted a derivation of the term, the result was wildly inaccurate. In interpreting the term, however, one must at least take note of Lovecraft’s mistaken derivation. In order to account for a Greek title to a work by an Arab, Lovecraft later claimed that the Necronomicon was the Greek translation of a work in Arabic entitled *Al Azif*” (Joshi 505-6).

The word, “*Al Azif*”, “the music” possibly carries a more personal attachment to Lovecraft. In a 1927 letter, he wrote to one of his friends that “once a Syrian had the room next to [his] and played eldritch and whining monotones on a strange bagpipe which made [him] dream ghoulish and incredible things of crypts under Bagdad and limitless corridors of Eblis under the moon-cursed ruins of Istakhar” (116). Ever since he was young, Lovecraft was tormented by acute nightmares that were so severe; he was able to channel these fears into his writings

The bulk of what he wrote, he had already envisioned in his dreams. It was his way to voice his rejection of the contemporary canon and “frankly slip back through the centuries and become a myth-maker with that childish sincerity” by going out of this world when he writes with “mind centered not in literary usage, but in the dreams [he] dreamed when [he] was six years old or less—the dreams which followed [his] first knowledge of Sinbad, of Agib, of Baba-Abdallah, and of Sidi-Nonman” (Lovecraft 165). It is no secret that Lovecraft was fascinated, since birth, by the oriental and its mysticism, thanks to *The Arabian Nights* and *Vathek* that shaped his imagination and enriched it

The oriental influence on Lovecraft and his work reaches greater heights when we delve into the author of “The Necronomicon”. He is one of the most central figures in Lovecraft’s stories, the mad Arab “Abdul Alhazred”, who is as infamous as his fabled book. The name “Abdul Alhazred”, which carries no etymological meaning in hindsight, was a name that Lovecraft invented initially for himself after he had read the Arabian Nights. The latter is one of the seminal books in his aesthetic development, as he admits in one of his letters:

Then again—how many young Arabs have the Arabian Nights bred! I ought to know, since at the age of 5 I was one of them. I had not then encountered Graeco-Roman myth, but found in Lang's Arabian Nights a gateway to glittering vistas of wonder and freedom. It was then that I invented for myself the name of Abdul Alhazred, and made my mother take me to the Oriental curio shops and fit me up an Arabian corner in my room. (8)

The name then carries a personal significance to Lovecraft himself, as much as it is important to the universe he had created. The character of “Abdul Alhazred” is the Lovecraftian prophet, and the “Necronomicon” is his holy book.

As for what is actually written in that holy book, it is filled with incantations, occult hand signs, passages describing Lovecraft’s deities and other creatures, Ergodic literature, and various cryptograms, all scattered through dozens of Lovecraft’s stories. He himself has never published or even attempted to write the full book, as he stated on one letter “As for bringing the Necronomicon into objective existence—I wish indeed I had the time and imagination to assist in such a project...but I’m afraid it’s a rather large order—. If anyone were to try to write the Necronomicon, it would disappoint all those who have shuddered at cryptic references to it”

(Lovecraft 418). What Lovecraft did release, instead, was a pseudo-scientific history of the fabled book, which traces its origins to Yemen, and follows its journey from there, to Greece, to the modern age USA.

Even though the book was never actually written in reality, that didn't stop "The Necronomicon" from achieving the cult status it did. It is one of Lovecraft's creations that absolutely transcended its author, from weird fiction, to pop culture, and even to the infamous world of occultism. The book itself has become a staple in horror fiction throughout the years. It has been featured in comic books, TV shows, and movies. Its fame was so vast that it obscured its author in some periods of time, and when rumors started circulating that the book was real, "The Necronomicon" gained notoriety as the most dangerous book in the world.

The Second most referenced series of texts in the Lovecraft mythos are "The Pnakotic Manuscripts" of fragments. They are cited in 11 of his tales, but in spite of the frequency; very little is known about these texts as Lovecraft quotes scarcely from them. They are supposed to predate human existence, hence why they feel more enigmatic and alien than "Al Azif". As for the content of these manuscripts, they contain records of earth pre-humanity, stories and tales of their own, and untranslatable sections written in a language unbeknownst to the human race.

Part of what makes these two texts intriguing is how similar they are to the actual books that they reference, in the sense that in both cases, they are meant to interpret bizarre, alien, potentially hostile, but extremely alluring mysteries. Similar to real world religious books, they are translations of ~~our~~ interactions with the divine and its interference with the real world. They are seen as tools which are supposed to help understand what lies beyond the earth, and deliver believers closer to the absolute and most powerful, whether it was a single god, benevolent or

otherwise. What makes “The Necronomicon” particularly curious is the aura of oriental mystic surrounding the texts. It is no secret that oriental magic and mysticism were by no small margin an influence to the aesthetic development of Lovecraft and even his philosophy. A closer look at some of the Sufi concepts and their similarities to the tenets of Cosmicism exposes a closer relationship between Lovecraft’s philosophy and the Islamic mysticism.

3.4. Oriental Mysticism in Lovecraft’s Stories

Orientalism sits at the core of Lovecraft’s tales. It is an influence that has been stuck with the other since a very early age, and one that he referred to in multiple letters. One only needs a simple glance at Lovecraft’s bizarre science fiction to notice the influence of The Arabian Nights and Vathek on the creation of his own world. Besides, even though the author’s white supremacist views stain his 100 and more stories lead to othering the exotic orient, and representing it in dangerous albeit fascinating manner.

Paradoxically, Lovecraft has, since he was young, considered the orient to be a more magnificent source for inspiration contrary to the “somber greyness” of the Christian faith. He confessed in an essay entitled “Confession of the Unfaith” that at some point of his life he “formed a juvenile collection of Oriental pottery and objets d’art, announcing [him]self as a devout Mussulman and assuming the pseudonym of “Abdul Alhazred” (19). Lovecraft has never stated that he has read or even known any Islamic, or Sufi books. However, when put in parallel, his literary philosophy and some of the concepts from the Islamic mysticism, a deeper relationship between the two comes to light. Some of these concepts is the veil or (el hijab, meaning the veil in Arabic).

3.4.1. The Veil in Lovecraft’s Universe

In Islamic mysticism, the veil refers to the human incapability to perceive the metaphysical world. It is a concept that hides worlds of celestial beings from the human eyes in order to protect them from its unspeakable magnificent. The physical forms of the veil are various in numbers. They are made of light and darkness, according to Sufis, and it is possible for curious metaphysical seekers to look past beyond these veils if God wills it. According to Ibn Alarabi: “God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were He to remove them, the glories of His Face would burn away everything perceived by the sight of His creatures” (qtd. in C. Chittick 346). The veil then hides the ultimate truth about the universe and Allah, and while this truth is magnificent and beautiful, it is equally dangerous. It is not meant to be discovered by the simple minded.

Lovecraft implements a similar system to the universe he has written, where the truth about the “Outer Gods” and the other alien entities is kept well hidden from the human sight. For example, in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. every social class has its opinion about what happened in the titular town, but the truth was in fact so far beyond anybody’s imagination, and in order to learn it, Olmstead had to undergo a radical psychological change, that was in parallel with the transformation of his body (46-7). The author uses the moment of the unveiling as the culmination of the horror in the story. It is often the most important moment in the plot, where the protagonist learns the ultimate secret of his journey. The consequences of this revelation are often associated with a deep psychological change, depression and madness. It is a formula that is present in almost every Lovecraft tale (46).

The concepts of “the dark truth”, “forbidden knowledge”, and “the incapability of the human mind” lay at the core of Lovecraft’s agnostic philosophy of Cosmicism, and they are reflected in his writing “Lovecraft carries over into his own work this religious idea of the

overwhelming truth, a truth so extraordinary, so intense that it requires a veil to preserve the sanity of the observer... To rend this veil aside is indeed to risk madness” (Almond 9). Lovecraft’s philosophy of Cosmicism differs from Sufi mysticism. While in Sufism the veil hides a beautiful truth reserved only for those willing to sacrifice to seek discovering it, in Lovecraft’s tales, the veil hides a hideous universe and a depressing reality. His protagonists are not left with glee after quenching their curiosity, but they are rewarded instead with a melancholic truth (Almond 12).

Lovecraft mocks the universe he lives in. Perhaps due to self-loathing or perhaps due to hopelessness. He does this through a dark re-iteration of a Sufi concept which emphasizes on the beauty of what lays beyond the veil that keeps humans from the mythaphysical world. In addition to this, in Lovecraft’s stories, the veil keeps a melancholic reality about the human insignificance in this vast universe. Through this dark re-iteration Lovecraft emphasizes his agnostic, and cosmic views, which stresses on belittling humanity and what it achieved, against a vast universe indifferent to its existence. As such the endeavors of the Lovecraftian protagonist to understand the world he lives in always end in madness.

3.4.2. Madness Between Sufism and Cosmicism

In antiquity, madness has been regarded as the results of a closer interaction with a higher force of being. This is the case of the gods and other celestial beings, who grant mortals wisdom and deep insights, which results in their “madness”, and thus they were praised for it; in Phaedrus Plato wrote:

[I]s madness superior to a sane mind, for the one is only of human, but the other of divine origin. Again, where plagues and mightiest woes have bred in certain

families, owing to some ancient blood–guiltiness, there madness has entered with holy prayers and rites, and by inspired utterances found a way of deliverance for those who are in need; and he who has part in this gift, and is truly possessed and duly out of his mind, is by the use of purifications and mysteries made whole and exempt from evil, future as well as present, and has a release from the calamity which was afflicting him. (qtd. in Perry 5)

Even though the status of purity and respect that madmen had in antiquity have deteriorated throughout the following ages thanks to the breakthroughs made in science and psychology, many cultures, religions, and mysticisms carried over that notion into their beliefs. Shamans, madmen, fools and Dervishes have been either regarded as fascinating individuals with deep psychological insights, and the results of what happens when the simple mind gazes into what is spiritually prepared for, or have been feared and shunned for their eccentricity.

In Sufism mysticism, the holy fools, or the “Dervish”, or simply “Al Majnun” meaning the madman in Arabic, are regarded as the result of what happens when a soul tries to acquire more knowledge of God than it is spiritually prepared for. The rationality and normalness according to Sufism keeps people from seeing god. Sufi mysticism is based on the concept of the indescribability of god, and the feebleness of the simple, unprepared human mind against the magnitude of the metaphysical world. Thus “Al Majnun” or the madman is the fate awaiting any man that is unprepared, spiritually and mindfully. It is the fate awaiting the one who gazes beyond the “veil” that protects the simple and unprepared human mind from the magnificent yet dangerous reality.

What is curious is that Lovecraft also carries over this notion of the indescribability of god and what lies beyond the human simple mind. In fact, the feebleness of the human mind is one of the tenets in Lovecraft's philosophy of "Cosmicism" and it is a recurring theme in his tales: "The illusion of homely, everyday domestic life lies like a veil across the unspeakable truth of Lovecraft's universe – for the minority of truth-seekers who push too far, a darker reality soon comes to the surface" (Almond 12). It is often the truth-seekers that face the worst fates in Lovecraft stories. Ironically, they are rewarded with madness for their curiosity. In the *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, for example, Olmstead transforms both physically and psychologically. He celebrates his metamorphosis with religious zeal as he turns into something which he despises.

However, there are instances in Lovecraft's tales where madness does not come as a result of scientific curiosity. Instead, it inflicts a normal person innocent from any inquisitive attempts to unveil the dark mysteries of the universe. The fate of these characters is in a way more tragic than the curious protagonist's; one of the most interesting madmen of Lovecraft is Zadok Allen from *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, who is undoubtedly the second most central and important character in the novella.

Zadok Allen the drunkard, is one of the few remaining humans living in the town of Innsmouth, according to him. He is the only human who lived old enough to witness the massacres and abnormalities that occurred in that town and survived them, only in body, however. His mind has been damaged beyond repair after witnessing the horrors of Innsmouth. His tragedy made him a fount of knowledge, and the only available source of history regarding Innsmouth, and as such; he is the second most pivotal character after the protagonist from both the storytelling, and the narrative perspectives. The 96 years old senile was an extremely

cautious individual and Olmstead had to loosen his tongue with booze first in order to learn from him.

What Zadok tells Olmstead is information that couldn't have been acquired through any amount of data collecting, and it is the actual truth about what happened in Innsmouth. For this important moment, Lovecraft dedicates almost the entirety of chapter three for Zadok's dialogue, written in a dialect that was supposed to mimic New England's "Yankee Dialect", but which later the author admitted to be made up. Even though the monologue seems out of place, and for that it has been criticized, today most scholars agree that: "Zadok's speech is undeniably effective in both supplying the necessary historical backdrop of the tale and in creating a sense of insidious horror. Zadok occupies a structurally important place in the narrative" (Joshi 883).

The lengthy monologue is an effective way to portray the madness and horror of the moment. Besides, the use of the made-up dialect is meant to reveal the ultimate secret, which the novella was building up for up to that point. From a storytelling perspective, the goal of the protagonist which he has been eagerly searching for, and clinging onto every thread to reach it, makes the character of Zadok Allen and his monologue seem like a poetic mockery that reflects Lovecraft's cynical attitude, and pessimistic views, and fits right in his absurd universe.

Conclusion

When put in parallel to the real world religions, the Lovecraftian representation of the faiths appear to be a cynical mockery. This constitutes a central focus in this chapter. Together with this, the chapter highlights the fact that although the author was admittedly inspired by some religions, this is can be proven through reading his stories, which the researcher attempted to showcase and illustrate. His dark and blasphemous representation of gods and celestial beings

mirror his twisted and troubled psyche, his disappointment of the real world faiths, but also reveal his poor understanding of them. The final concern of this chapter, is the study of Lovecraft's curious close relationship to the Islamic mysticism, which is unfortunately built only on speculations and parallel examination between his writings, aesthetic and Sufism. Due to the lack of any documents and sources that directly link Lovecraft with Sufism, this part of his fictional world is still shrouded in mystery and subject to more research.

General Conclusion

Science and religion have been represented in a gradient of good and evil. They have been a font of inspiration to humanity for millennia, and it is irrational to try and separate either from art in general and literature specifically. There comes a moment in history when a piece of work or an entire literary philosophy appears to be unique to the extent that it becomes a benchmark and a source of inspiration for generations of predecessors. In the American horror scene, Lovecraft's mythos was and still is that benchmark, and although niche, Lovecraft's works have penetrated popular culture so deeply, his creations transcend the horror genre.

One of the points of attraction in one of his seminal writings, *The Shadow over Innsmouth* which is the focus of the present research work, is the way he represents Science and religion. He makes it sound paradoxical and at the same time curious. His work is built entirely on the notion of the scientific curiosity of men, in parallel with the indifference of a vast universe towards humanity: a universe which is impossible to comprehend by the human mind, thus portraying the human endeavor to uncover the mysteries of this world as meaningless and futile.

Another concern in this research work was to shed light on the fact that outside fiction, Lovecraft was through and through an atheist, and a science man. He has always encouraged scientific research over blind faith, and he was a sharp skeptic and critic of religion. In his stories, however, he punishes his protagonists for their scientific curiosity, either through madness, depression, or more horrific fates. Such is the case with Olmstead, who spends the entire events of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. trying to uncover the mysteries of the titular town. His reward was a terrifying transformation and a mind breaking revelation.

A bit far from science, the researcher tried to draw the readers' attention towards the fact that the entire story of Olmstead is a message about unfaith, superstition, and the curiosity of

mankind. Right from the first paragraph, the novella tells the reader about the divide between what the educated class and the simple minded people think on the matter of Innsmouth. As Olmstead begins his data collecting, the people who he encounters all dismiss the supernatural tales about the titular town as mere superstitious ramblings. The story itself is then a cautionary tale against the stupidity of superstitions and a message on unfaith. It becomes clearer when the church in Innsmouth gets overtaken by a pagan cult. Lovecraft has talked about how paganism is more honest than Christianity, although not in a spiritual manner but in the fact that it is more in touch with human animalistic tendencies.

Where the paradox occurs in *The Shadow over Innsmouth.*, which is an essential part which this research has shed light on, is in the very final scene of the story. When Olmstead transforms into one of the monsters he despised so much. The novella itself is understood by scholars to be a message on miscegenation a phenomena Lovecraft regarded as disastrous for the white race. This appears through the depiction of the Innsmouth folks in the story. They are rumored to have been the product of intermarriage between white men and an unidentifiable race from Asia and Africa. They are described as dangerous and foul both mentally and physically. Olmstead refers to their ugly features as “The Insmouth Look”. We learn in the end that the intermarriage rumors are false, and that the monsters of Innsmouth are closer to gods than the humans are, elevating them to a higher status. Thus, there appears to be two possible interpretations to the ending, and what the message behind it could be.

One possible interpretation lies within the story itself and it is highlighted within the intricacies of chapter of the present research work. It is the expression of Lovecraft racist views and fear of miscegenation and Olmstead’s transformation in the end which is a warning against that. The second explanation is that *The Shadow over Innsmouth.* is a reflection of Lovecraft’s pessimistic

ideology of Cosmicism. Olmstead's transformation is thus a mockery of the human form. The argument for the second proposition is the fact that the form which Olmstead transforms into is more capable than humans, ugly as it might be. Thus his transformation is ascension rather than degeneracy.

One more concern in this extended essay is the space given to show that Lovecraft's universe is entirely based on a dark-reiteration of religion into a more blasphemous and evil version of the faiths. From the way he depicts gods, who mirror the real life god in their might only, to the unholy books that describe them. It is no surprise then that the concept of ascension, which is supposed to be a holy and beautiful occurrence, elevating characters into a higher and more celestial status, is defiled in Lovecraft's story. Instead of turning to a god, or an angel, the form that Olmstead required after his ascension is hideous, scary, and blasphemous.

Lovecraft does not just take over concepts into his stories from religions only, but also mysticism as well, more specifically, Sufism. The influence of this aspect of Islamic mysticism, which is regarded as more metaphysical and magical than the main branch of the faith, on Lovecraft's aesthetic development can be observed in a lot of his stories and even in his philosophy. His writing depicts the inaccessibility of the universe, and forbidden knowledge available only for a selected few of truth seekers, just like what Sufism dictates. Unfortunately, Lovecraft himself never mentioned Sufism, and there is no direct influence that could be traced from Islamic mysticism to Lovecraft.

The fact that there are not enough documents that could link the two together, other than some letters where Lovecraft admits to have been greatly influenced by an oriental magical atmosphere attributed to The Arabian Nights, cannot be denied. That can be seen positively for it

can the gate through which further research can be done. At the same time, this can be seen as an open door for more speculation. And unless some text related to Lovecraft emerges, which specifically relates the author to the Islamic mysticism, any attempt at studying the relationship between the two will only lead so far. This is due to the fact that because there just are not enough texts and evidence that link the two together. To the eyes of someone who read a bit on Sufism, he will find its influence embedded in Lovecraft's bizarre and eerily mystical mythos. However, the link that connects the two remains invisible to us to a great extent. This simply opens more space for further research.

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Synopsis:

Lovecraft's unique writing style and the atmosphere he creates in his writing, still intrigues researchers and inspires artists to this day, it is what made his work so popular and well appreciated despite his reclusive character and racial prejudice. Just like any writer, his works and the messages behind them are subject to different interpretations. However, with regard to science and religion, and Lovecraft's stand in the debate between the two, it appears that, in the eyes of Lovecraft, what he deems as the absolute truth about the universe is a forbidden secret that is not meant to be discovered or interpreted neither by sciences or religions. The void created by a lack of purpose inside Lovecraft's psyche, against the unforgiving notion that the universe is vast, uncaring, and seemingly empty –according to his philosophy- gave birth to hideous monstrosities loosely referred to as “God”, and a hopeless universe where the human fortitude is futile. While this nihilistic philosophy is a font for incredible art, one must keep in mind that in reality, nothing comes from nothing.