H.P. Lovecraft and the Creation of Horror

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Tämän työn tarkoituksena on tarkastella sitä, kuinka kauhu syntyy H.P. Lovecraftin pienoisromaanissa *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936, suom. *Varjo Innsmouthin yllä* 1989). Lovecraftin kauhutarinoissa tiivistyy hänen kosminen maailmankuvansa, jonka mittakaavassa ihmisellä ja hänen suuruudenkuvitelmillaan ei ole mitään merkitystä. Lovecraft-kriitikko Donald R. Burlesonin käsityksen mukaan Lovecraftin lähestymistapa fiktioon on ”ironisen impressionistinen.” Käsite viittaa ihmisen kykyyn havaita oma merkityksettömyytensä juuri niiden aistien kautta, joiden vuoksi ihminen pitää itseään erikoislaatuisena olentona. Yksi kauhuelementti Lovecraftin tarinoissa onkin se, kuinka päähenkilön kauhukokemus paljastaa tälle ihmisen merkityksettömyyden kosmisessa ajan ja paikan mittakaavassa. Kauhukokemuksen synnyttämä tunnereaktio on tarinoissa tärkeämpi kuin sen aiheuttaneet ihmiskuntaa muinaisemmat hirviöt, koska lukija voi tuntea kertojan kauhun ja epävarmuuden olemassaolonsa perusteista uskomatta itse hirviöihin.

Lovecraftin filosofiaan perehtyneelle Timo Airaksiselle hirviöt ovat juuri vain luomuksia, joihin lukija tukeutuu selittääkseen itselleen kauhun tunteensa. Kauhu syntyy tuntemattomien kauhujen maailman kohtaamisesta ja tätä seuraavasta identiteetin menetyksestä. Käsiteltävänä olevan tarinan päähenkilö joutuu kohtaamaan myös oman itsensä, josta on tullut osa tuntematonta ja siksi kauhistuttava. Lovecraftin kielenkäyttö luo kauhutunnelmaa, ja hän ajaa lukijan hämmentävän tyhjyyden kokemuksen partaalle viljelemällä outoja adjektiiveja. Lovecraft tekee kielestä osan kauhistuttavaa tuntematonta.

Lovecraftin tarinoissa kauhu syntyy myös menneisyyden voimasta tunkeutua nykyhetkeen ja ahmaista se sisäänsä. Esi-isien synnit seuraavat raamatullisen kirouksen lailla sukupolvelta toiselle, eikä Lovecraftin henkilöhahmoilla ole mahdollisuutta paeta menneisyyden kauhuja nykyhetken nautintoihin. Ajalla ei ole merkitystä tällaisessa kaoottisessa maailmassa. Jäljelle jää vain nimetön kauhu. Työssä käsiteltävän tarinan loppu poikkeaa Lovecraftin kaavasta, jonka mukaan vain hulluus tai kuolema pelastaa ihmisparan, joka kohtaa maailman todelliset kasvot. Kauhutunnelma ei kuitenkaan ole yhtään sen vähäisempi. Tarinan loppu yhdistää kauhun ja riemun hämmentävällä tavalla. Kauhukokemusten kertaaminen muuttaa kertojaa ja auttaa häntä hyväksymään uuden identiteettinsä. Kertoja luopuu ihmisidentiteetistään kokien suurta kotiinpaluun iloa, kun taas lukijalle tämä loppu on kauhun huipentuma. Myös ihminen voi muuttua hirviöksi vieläpä riemuiten petoksestaan ihmiskuntaa kohtaan.

Noël Carroll kehittelee omaa kauhun filosofiaansa, joka antaa uuden näkökulman myös Lovecraftin kauhuun. Lukijan kauhun kokemus ja siitä nauttiminen ovat sydämen paradokseja. Ristiriitaisesti ihminen kokee kauhua lukiessaan tarinaa, joka kertoo fiktiivisistä, keksityistä tapahtumista, ja jopa nauttii siitä. Kauhun synnyttää ajatus hirviöstä, joka rikkoo kulttuurisia kategorioita ja sekoittaa ihmisen lokeroidun maailman. Pelkkä ajatus hirviöstä ei kuitenkaan sido lukijaa uskomaan sen todelliseen olemassaoloon, kuten jotkin kauhukokemuksen selitykset antavat ymmärtää. Myös Lovecraftin tarinoiden kauhu toimii, vaikka lukija kieltäytyy uskomasta edes hirviöiden olemassaolon mahdollisuuteen. Pelkkä ajatus hirviöistä ja tarinan päähenkilön suhteesta niihin riittää luomaan kiehtovaa kauhua. Kauhu kiehtoo, koska se kuvaa tuttua maailmaa, joka yhtäkkiä muuttuu vieraaksi ja vaaralliseksi.

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1. Introduction: H.P. Lovecraft and the Weird Tale

> To think that I, Hecker, have thrown away years of talent merely rewriting the work of a man whose idea of a climax was to have the narrator write down his screams as a monster destroys him! Whose idea of wordplay and alliteration was to write of ghouls and gugs and ghasts! Whose poetry was even more noxious than his prose, and whose work could only find publication in the shabby pages of *pulp magazines*![1]

Above are the frustrated words of one Helmut Hecker as he finds himself involuntarily rewriting Howard Phillips Lovecraft's (1890-1937) horror stories.[2] Hecker's words caricaturise Lovecraft's particular style of writing. They also portray the undermining attitude that many people have had, and still have, towards Lovecraft's texts. On the one hand, as Donald R. Burleson points out, literary criticism has afforded "relatively little attention" to his work despite its great popularity.[3] S.T. Joshi, on the other hand, notes that critical analysis of weird fiction has been concentrated "in the surprisingly able hands of non-academicians."[4] This is probably due to the "critical disrepute" of the

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[1] Chet Williamson, "From the Papers of Helmut Hecker," *Lovecraft's Legacy*, eds. Robert E. Weinberg and Martin H. Greenberg (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, Inc., 1990) 169. Emphasis original.

[2] Mr. Hecker has just realised that he is under the influence of Lovecraft's reincarnated spirit residing in his cat.

[3] Donald R. Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy 5 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983) ix.
Henceforward, I will refer to this work parenthetically as B.
A list of abbreviations can be found at the end of the list of works cited.

[4] S.T. Joshi, *The Weird Tale: Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood, M.R. James, Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 3.

weird tale in the 20th century.[5] Accordingly, Lovecraft has been of greater interest at the grass roots level than in the realm of literary criticism. Furthermore, Lovecraft has received the recognition that he deserves only after his death. This is partly due to the "many quirks of fate and his own mismanagement of his career," which refer to Lovecraft's hypersensitivity to criticism, and his inability to find a good, appreciative publisher, among other reasons.[6] Had he been more confident about his work, he might have been able to publish it in more "respectable" forums than the diverse pulp magazines, such as *Weird Tales*. Although he passed away in poor and obscure conditions, convinced of his complete failure as a writer, "he is now hailed not only as the equal of Edgar Allan Poe, but as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century."[7]

Joanna Russ thinks that the traditional literary analyses relying, for example, on Freudian concepts of sex and aggression, do not exactly fit H.P. Lovecraft and his texts.[8] His horrors are *cosmic*, and thus, they are not based on "the fear of retribution for specific acts or impulses."[9] Humans are not meaningful enough to raise a monstrous vengeance on themselves for any specific acts. For Lovecraft, "the worst human fears" are related to "displacement in space and time . . . [which implies] a concern with the

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[5] Joshi 1990, 3.
Joshi defines the weird tale as a horror (or fantasy) story that is *"the consequence of a world view*," rather than a genre (Joshi 1990, 1, emphasis original). This was the case at least in the period 1880-1940, and Lovecraft used the term as an umbrella for the field of supernatural horror (Joshi 1990, 1).

[6] Darrell Schweitzer, introduction, *Discovering H P. Lovecraft*, Starmont Studies in Literary Criticism 6 (Mercer Island: Starmont House Inc., 1987) xii.

[7] L. Sprague de Camp, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996) dust jacket text, "Biographies," *The H.P. Lovecraft Archive*, Donovan K. Loucks, 7 Jan. 2002, 29 Jan. 2002, <http://www.hplovecraft.com/study/bios/hplabio.htm>.

[8] Joanna Russ, "Lovecraft, H(oward) P(hillips)," *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers*, 3rd ed., eds. Noelle Watson and Paul E. Schellinger (1981; Chicago: St. James Press, 1991) 504.

[9] Russ 504.

conditions of being, not with particular acts or situations."[10] This means that his horrors are more sophisticated, having to do with the relationship between all humankind and age-old horrors that surge unexpectedly on the placidity of the everyday world. The horrors are meaningless in the sense that they do not arise for any specific reason. This is in agreement with Lovecraft's view of the insignificance of humankind. The unsuitability of more traditional literary tools can thus be explained by the untraditional nature of the world that Lovecraft presents in his texts. It is difficult to apply human concepts to a text that describes things and phenomena that leave so little room for what is human.

Lovecraft was an avid reader. Paradoxically, as Joshi points out, he keenly absorbed "the highest aesthetic fruits of western culture," like Greek and Latin literature, or Shakespeare, but he also went through "the cheapest dregs of popular fiction."[11] Lovecraft did not regard the weird fiction published in dime novels and pulp magazines as "genuine literature" (J 33). However, he always defended the literary value of the weird tale as such (J 15). As he writes in the opening lines of his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature,"

> The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form.[12]

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[10] Russ 504.

[11] S.T. Joshi, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life* (West Warwick: Necronomicon Press, 1996) 33. Henceforward, I will refer to this work parenthetically as J.

Joshi's Lovecraft biography is an excellent and thorough piece of work. There are significant insights into Lovecraft's life and work, and their interrelatedness. As T.E.D. Klein remarks on the book's cover, "Lovecraft has finally found his Boswell: erudite, insightful, comprehensive, and—for a change—sympathetic. It's probably the first biography that Lovecraft himself would have approved of."

[12] H.P. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 2:* Dagon *and other Macabre Tales* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 2000) 423.

Lovecraft dismisses the criticism discharged against the weird tale. He points his finger to the "naively insipid idealism" that, rather than appreciating "aesthetic motive," requires a "didactic" literature to lead the reader toward "a suitable degree of smirking optimism" (SUP 423). Attempts at making readers happy are at war with Lovecraft's view of literature and the world that are closely intertwined. Literature must not give a false image of a meaningful and reasonable world since there is no such world. Thus, it can be said that Lovecraft is honest in not depicting a rosy red world in his writing. However, some people want to ignore "life's unruliness" and "unmanageability."[13] They are drawn to the type of literature criticised by Lovecraft because they prefer a less unsettling type of literature than that of Lovecraft's. They prefer happy endings in which good beats evil that Lovecraft does not provide.

In Lovecraft's opinion, mood and atmosphere are more important than the plot in a weird tale (B 15). Lovecraft states that "the final criterion of authenticity" of a weirdly horrible tale is that it creates a certain "sensation" (SUP 427). If a horror story aims at teaching, or producing "a social effect," or contains a natural explanation of the horrors described, it is not "a genuine tale of cosmic fear" (SUP 427). Lovecraft mentions Mrs. Anne Radcliffe and Charles Brockden Brown as examples of writers fallen into the trap of natural explanations of horrors (SUP 438). Many narratives do have certain "atmospheric touches" to fulfil the conditions of supernatural horror (SUP 427). However, a weird tale must be judged, according to Lovecraft, not by the writer's

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Henceforward, I will refer to this work parenthetically as SUP.

In this comprehensive essay, Lovecraft discusses the history of horror literature, and his views on writing weird fiction.

[13] Kirk J. Schneider, *Horror and the Holy: Wisdom-Teachings of the Monster Tale* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993) 76.

Henceforward, I will refer to this work parenthetically as S.

intentions, or the mechanics of the plot, but by "the emotional level which it attains at its least mundane point" (SUP 427). Lovecraft sets a test for "the really weird," the question "whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening" (SUP 427). There must be an "atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces" that gives an impression of "a malign . . . defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons from unplumbed space" (SUP 426).

Mood and atmosphere are everything for Lovecraft, and he follows his principles in his writing. He is able to create the atmosphere necessary for a tale of cosmic horror. His tales are weird in more senses than one, which makes them quite haunting. The atmosphere creates an expectation of dread, the core of which is not self-evidently defined. The weird mood makes the reader scared, but he or she chooses "an *ad hoc* monster" that can be "defeated and buried."[14] This means that the monsters in Lovecraft's stories, as horrible as they are, are not the true objects of fear. They only function as a symbol of a deeper fear, the fear of the unknown. Thus, people can be scared by horror stories even though they refuse to believe in the existence of a horrifying monster portrayed in a story. The monster is the form that a person's feeling of horror takes when he or she is unable to point to any more "rational" source of horror. Lovecraft's short novel *The Shadow over Innsmouth*[15] remains a horror story

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[14] Timo Airaksinen, *The Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft: The Route to Horror*, New Studies in Aesthetics 29 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1999) 114.
Henceforward, I will refer to this work parenthetically as A.

[15] H.P. Lovecraft, *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3:* The Haunter of the Dark *and Other Tales* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1994).
Henceforward, I will refer to this story parenthetically as SOI.

even if the reader discredited the whole idea of the fishfrog monsters, the race of the Deep Ones.[16] The horror of the story lies in the monstrousness of the narrator, the transformation of a human being into something unknown, and in the implications of this change for all humans. Who can tell who ends up becoming a monster?

Noël Carroll criticises Lovecraft's "aesthetics of suggestion."[17] In Carroll's opinion, defining horror itself in terms of "cosmic fear" really indicates an aesthetic preference for one type of horror" instead of classifying the phenomenon properly (C 219, note 27). He thinks Lovecraft's approach turns the concept of horror into "an honorific or evaluative term" that reflects "achievement against a certain aesthetic standard" (C 219, note 27). However, this, should we say Lovecraftian standard could be seen as a good point of departure for writing horror. It is explicitly rejected, though, by some horror writers, such as Clive Barker, who prefer to show everything to the last detail, rejecting the attraction of suggestion (C 219, note 27). Blood and pieces of flesh seem to be of greater importance than a subtle, creeping horror that leaves all questions unanswered.

It seems that even some of Lovecraft's later imitators have ignored their master's touch of atmospheric horror, just planting his monsters in new contexts and leaving the real essence of his weird tales behind. Some stories in the collection *Tales*

This was one of the first stories that I read by Lovecraft, and it fascinated me profoundly because of the surprisingly strong sensation of horror that it raised despite my rejection of the mere possibility of there being such things as fishfrogs.

[16] Fishfrogs are South Sea hybrids, immortal monsters that Captain Obed Marsh introduced in Innsmouth.

Innsmouth, like Arkham and Newburyport later in the text, are part of Lovecraft's fictional New England that he created as the stage of his stories.

[17] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or the Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 219, note 27.

Henceforward, I will refer to this work parenthetically as C.

out of Innsmouth[18] illustrate this remarkable lack of attention. Fishfrogs borrowed from *The Shadow over Innsmouth* are present in more or less original form in these tales. However, for one familiar with Lovecraft's original tale, these "new" monsters seem hardly horrifying in their non-cosmic environment. These stories lack the atmosphere of cosmicism and Lovecraft's original use of language that are essential for creating a chilling experience of Lovecraftian horror. The horror has to be explored and turned into a literary triumph, just as horror transforms into joy in the end for the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. Borrowing the contents of a story is easy, but imitating an original style is another thing. In the anthology *Lovecraft's Legacy*, compiled in honour of Lovecraft's centennial, there are some stories that have achieved Lovecraft's original atmosphere, even without his monsters.

Lovecraft did not appreciate writings in which human passions, conditions and standards are transferred as such to other worlds or other universes, as if every culture were like that of the writer's (B 13). According to Lovecraft,

> To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all . . . when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown . . . we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold.[19]

Every human idea is put under question in Lovecraft's world. It is a good illustration of Lovecraft's negligence of human concerns. It reveals the essence of Lovecraft's skill to create horror. The horrors that he writes about cannot be explained away by human

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[18] Robert M. Price, ed., *Tales out of Innsmouth: New Stories of the Children of Dagon* (Oakland: Chaosium Inc., 1999).

[19] A letter of Lovecraft's, quoted in B 13.

Lovecraft was a prolific letter writer. He practically lived through his letters, which is probably why his output of fiction remained limited, compared to the vast number of letters that he wrote in his lifetime (A 4).

concepts because of the invalidity of those concepts. However, some critics have not correctly understood Lovecraft's cosmicism. What Joshi terms one of Lovecraft's "distinctive contributions to literature" has been seen as a flaw by some critics (J 652). In Joshi's opinion, the lack of "'normal' human characters and relationships," and the characteristic coldness, impersonality, and remoteness of Lovecraft's stories are, in fact, the virtue of his fiction (J 652). A writer "cannot be cosmic and human at the same time," and Lovecraft preferred the cosmic side of the equation, quite successfully (J 652).

Another feature that has been seen as a flaw by some, and a virtue by Joshi, is Lovecraft's "tin ear for dialogue" (J 652). In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, for example, the ticket agent and the town drunkard Zadok Allen have pages of room to tell their tales almost uninterrupted. In Joshi's opinion, "the absence of idle chatter" in Lovecraft's stories is a great virtue in that it creates great concision (J 652). There is no chitchat to interrupt the development of the horrifying atmosphere. It also "shifts the focus of the tale from the human characters to . . . the weird phenomenon" that is the real "hero" of Lovecraft's tales (J 652). As Joshi writes, "Lovecraft boldly challenged that most entrenched dogma of art—that human beings should necessarily and exclusively be the centre of attention and aesthetic creation—and his defiance of the 'humanocentric pose' is ineffably refreshing" (J 652). Joshi also notes that colourful characterisation would have been "detrimental" to Lovecraft's cosmic outlook that minimised humans to atoms and molecules.[20] If humans were heroes in Lovecraft's world, he would not be a cosmic writer, and his tales would cease to be weird and horrifying. Furthermore, Lovecraft's work does have "genuine emotional resonance" in

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[20] Joshi 1990, 207.

"the poignancy with which Lovecraft's characters react to the perception of cosmic insignificance" (J 652). This cosmic insignificance is a core element in Lovecraft's fiction, and it could hardly be expressed efficiently if the story's world functioned in an ordinary way, and if people acted in a normal, social world.

Writing about the deepest fears of humankind, such as the utter meaninglessness of existence, or the loss of identity, Lovecraft raises important questions concerning the conditions of being. Therefore, he is entitled to the same literary attention as any writer who has something profound to say about the world. Lovecraft has his own peculiar style of expressing his ideas, and that style, along with the contents of his thoughts, deserves attention although they have not pleased all readers. I find Lovecraft's work worth profound literary study. It can be asked what it is in Lovecraft's stories, in particular, that induces horror, and why, in general, people are horrified by what they know does not exist in the physically real world. These questions presented themselves to me when I first read Lovecraft. By exploring them, I hope to contribute to the study of Lovecraft, and of horror in general. My purpose here is to look at how Lovecraft's world of thought and his style of writing contribute to the creation of horror in one particular story, *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

I will structure my exploration of Lovecraftian horror on four elements, each giving a view to explaining the experience of horror. The first one is Donald R. Burleson's idea of *horror by implication* that refers to the *meaning* of horrors from the point of view of humankind. Lovecraft's view of the world is especially significant at this point. The second one is Timo Airaksinen's notion of the process of *transmutation*, the loss of identity when facing the unknown. Ilkka Mäyrä's discussion of the

(post)modern self is useful in this context.[21] The disintegration of identity implies a lack of means of expression, to the experience of which Lovecraft's peculiar use of language contributes. Thirdly, I will discuss a prominent theme in Lovecraft's horror, *the past engulfing the present*.[22] In Lovecraft's world, time has little meaning, and thus, the past can mix with the present, turning also a person's life inside out. I will here look at the "strange happy end" (A 207) of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. It displays an interesting contradiction between horror and joy that increases the horrifying effect. In his introduction to *Tales out of Innsmouth*, Robert M. Price brings forth an interesting view concerning the contradictory nature of this ending that, I think, deserves some attention.[23]

The ending of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* combines the three elements creating horror described above. There is horror in the implications of the narrator's change. He has also been transformed in more senses than one when confronting his self, and his fishfrog heritage. The past has reached the present, also engulfing the reader. He or she can be horrified at what he or she knows could never happen. I will close my treatise by a more general explanation of the experience of horror, *the paradox of the heart*.[24] According to Carroll, it lies at the core of the experience of *art-horror*.[25]

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[21] Ilkka Mäyrä, *Demonic Texts and Textual Demons: The Demonic Tradition, the Self, and Popular Fiction*, diss., Tampere Studies in Literature and Textuality (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 1999).
Henceforward, I will be referring to this work parenthetically as M.

[22] Burleson discusses this prominent theme in Lovecraft's work. As Lovecraft himself writes, "The reason why *time* plays a great part in so many of my tales is that this element looms up in my mind as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe. *Conflict with time* seems to me the most potent and fruitful theme in all human expression." H.P. Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. S.T. Joshi (Sauk City: Arkham Publishing House, Inc., 1995) quoted in B 15. Emphases original.

[23] Robert M. Price, introduction, *Tales out of Innsmouth: New Stories of the Children of Dagon* (Oakland: Chaosium Inc., 1999).
Henceforward, I will refer to this work parenthetically as P.

[24] The expression is attributed to John and Anna Laetitia Aikin (C 10).

Carroll presents two paradoxes the first of which, the paradox of fiction, explains how people can be scared by what they know does not really exist. Secondly, the paradox of horror explains why they are drawn to repeat the horrifying experience that should appear to be unpleasant instead of something worth seeking. It can also be asked why readers are drawn to Lovecraft's weird writing that portrays such a gloomy world that gives no comfort. Kirk Schneider's ideas concerning the positive effects of horror fiction are interesting in this context.

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[25] Carroll defines the experience of *art-horror* as follows: "Saying that we are art-horrified by Dracula means that we are horrified by the thought of Dracula where *the thought of such a possible being does not commit us to a belief in his existence*" (C 29, emphasis added). Furthermore, he claims that it is "an emotional state" rather than a form of firm belief in something (C 35).

2. Horror by Implication

Lovecraft's view of the world was not one of the most cheerful ones. He found the cosmos "a pointless, random collocation of atoms, winding down toward total entropy like an expiring clock" (B 12). By his thirteenth anniversary, Lovecraft was "thoroughly impressed with man's impermanence and insignificance," and four years later, he had shaped his cosmic view of the world.[26] He was quite young, then, when he sensed what the world meant, or more exactly did not mean, for him. If nothingness is all there is, even a person becomes a "non-entity," as Lovecraft used to call himself (A 195). He applied his views of himself as a human to other people as well:

> How arrogant of us, creatures of the moment, whose very species is but an experiment of the *Deus Naturae*, to arrogate ourselves an immortal future and considerable status! . . . How do we know that that form of atomic and molecular motion called 'life' is the highest of all forms? Perhaps the dominant creature—the most rational and God-like of all beings—is an invisible gas![27]

This illustrates how little Lovecraft appreciated human aspirations to greatness. In his world, humans are "incidental and wholly insignificant" (B 12). This is because "all human actions are judged on the scale of both temporal and spatial infinity of an unknown and aimless cosmos."[28] On such a scale, humans necessarily present themselves as of little meaning. However, Lovecraft was not unhappy because he thought that "one may as well enjoy beauty and aesthetic stimulation and the warmth of friendship even in a meaningless world" (B 12). He did have many friends and

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[26] H.P. Lovecraft, "A Confession of Unfaith," *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. S.T. Joshi (Sauk City: Arkham House Publishers, Inc., 1995) quoted in J 79.

[27] A letter of Lovecraft's, quoted in J 170.

[28] Joshi 1990, 171.

correspondents, and he enjoyed long walks. He had a life despite his scepticism concerning the human condition.

Lovecraft's world of thought is of ample significance when considering the world of his fiction. As Joshi puts it, Lovecraft's view of the world is "worth examining in some detail" in order to see "how precisely and systematically the fiction is an expression of it."[29] Lovecraft's cosmic view of the world influences the way he describes the world of his stories. When Lovecraft's protagonists face strange phenomena and creatures, they become aware of humanity's utter meaninglessness on the scale of the universe, and they are horrified by that revelation. This horror is for the reader to share. When the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* discovers the existence of the fishfrogs, his[30] conception of the world is revolutionised. He expresses his anxiety after the horrifying night that he spent in Innsmouth, fleeing the fishfrogs:

> It was the end, for whatever remains to me of life on the surface of this earth, of every vestige of mental peace and confidence in the integrity of nature and of the human mind. Nothing that I could have imagined . . . would be in any way comparable to the demoniac, blasphemous reality that I saw—or believe I saw. (SOI 454.)

His insecurity about the state of the world illustrates the shattering consequences of coming face to face with the unreal reality. His world has become empty, devoid of secure standing points. This is quite common in Lovecraft's stories. As another narrator of Lovecraft's describes his feelings and the strange world revealed to him after his ordeal with a certain horrible book:

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[29] Joshi 1990, 171.

[30] The narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is male, but it is also practical to use the male pronoun to refer to Lovecraft's protagonists in general since there are virtually no female characters in his stories.

Ben P. Indick has written an article about the handful of women in Lovecraft's stories, but he concludes that none of them is significant in any way as they tend to remain archetypical New England figures. Ben P. Indick, "Lovecraft's Ladies," *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer, Starmont Studies in Literary Criticism 6 (Mercer Island: Starmont House Inc., 1987) 84.

> *Nor could I ever after see the world as I had known it*. Mixed with the present scene was always like a little of the past and a little of the future, and every once-familiar object loomed alien in the new perspective brought by my widened sight. From then on I walked in a fantastic dream of unknown and half-known shapes; and with each new gateway crossed, *the less plainly could I recognise the things of the narrow sphere to which I had so long been bound*.[31]

Donald R. Burleson, who is an important Lovecraft critic, writes incisively on Lovecraft's weird fiction, discussing his work from many viewpoints. He aptly describes how Lovecraft's fiction reflects his worldview. Burleson defines the Lovecraftian condition of human existence as

> [the] terribly ironic predicament of being sufficiently well-developed organisms to perceive and feel the poignancy of their own motelike unimportance in a blind and chaotic universe which neither loves them nor even finds them worthy of notice, let alone hatred or hostility. (B 12.)

He introduces the beautiful concept of *ironic impressionism* to describe the essence of Lovecraft's approach to fiction. The attribute *ironic* is in place when talking about the way people become aware of their insignificance. Lovecraft effectively presents his ideas through "the human capacity for fear and other emotional responses" (B 14). It means that he reduces the sensitive human being to self-understood insignificance "by the implications of the glimpses of what lies beyond his previous understanding of the cosmos" (B 14). *Impressionism* refers to the "act of perceiving and feeling and pondering the implications of glimpsed external realities" (B 14). People experience horrors that are a key to greater revelations of human existence. In fact, the horrors themselves are not as central as the reactions to them. The greatest source of horror is not just the monster, "some unspeakable external reality" (B 14). Rather, it is the

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[31] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Book," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 2:* Dagon *and other Macabre Tales* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 2000) 416. Emphases added.

protagonist's emotional response to that reality, his awareness of human helplessness and insignificance in the scheme of the universe (B 12).

The monsters in Lovecraft's stories are not there just to scare the reader by their ugliness and weirdness. Their existence suggests a great deal more. "The awesome implications" of their existence are more devastating to the human mind than their horrible form, or formlessness, as the case may be (cf.on page 30 below) (B 14). The idea of *horror by implication* refers to the revelation of humankind's insignificance in relation to age-old creatures. As Joshi writes, "[the] mere existence [of a monster] is more horrifying than its actions or attributes, for by manifesting itself in the real world it embodies the quintessential phenomenon of the weird tale—the shattering of our conception of the universe."[32] Lovecraft expresses the notion that civilisations of foreign "entities" intellectually superior to humans actually "allow *us* to dwell on the planet by *their* sufferance."[33] Readers do not have to believe in the supposed reality of ancient monsters, but they have no means of fighting against the horrible suggestions made by Lovecraft. They can try to deny their plausibility by philosophical reasoning, but these attempts may be doomed to failure. They have to sympathise with the narrator's fear, and be horrified by the mere thought of the monsters. If such horrors were possible, where would it leave humankind?

In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the implications of the narrator's discovery of the Deep Ones are horrifying in two contrasting aspects. On the one hand, the idea is awful from the viewpoint of all humankind that there could exist such monsters in a small, quiet-seeming seaport town. In addition, they can be called up almost anywhere

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[32] Joshi 1990, 191.

[33] Joshi 1990, 189. Emphases original.

in the world by anyone with "a funny kind o' thingumajig," and the right sort of incantations (SOI 418). What is more, they are ready to spread all over the world once they have gained a new foothold on human-inhabited soil. They lost Innsmouth but the next time they will rise, it will be "a city greater than Innsmouth" (SOI 462). Thus, their existence poses a threat to human existence. This threat, in a sense, gives meaning to humankind that is otherwise quite meaningless. Nothingness could hardly be threatened by anything. On the other hand, the existence of the Innsmouth monsters is even more significant to the narrator himself since he is about to become one of them. When he shall go to live under the sea, he will be one of the Deep Ones instead of being their victim. Horror turns into joy, which, in turn, increases the horror experienced by the reader. This is because, in a sense, the narrator has betrayed the reader as well as all humans.[34] He gave the impression of hating the fishfrogs but is now delighted to become one of them. Doing so, he gives up his human identity, which is a deep source of horror, that will be discussed in section three below.

Lovecraft's horror by implication is quite powerful. He has the talent of making the reader feel the insignificance of human aspirations. He or she can ponder, along with the narrator, the consequences of confronting the other face of the world, a monstrous existence that is impossible to comprehend. Because of the horrifying experience, the world is not the same, secure place for the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* as it was before. He can no longer trust his own senses, or memory, and he tries to avoid thinking of the implications of what he saw.

> I have tried to hint what it was in order to postpone the horror of writing it down baldly. Can it be possible that this planet had actually spawned

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[34] Maria Ihonen, teacher's comments, Saijamari Männikkö, "Ennakoinnit H.P. Lovecraftin kertomuksessa 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth,'" essay, Johdatus tekstianalyysiin, Department of Literature and the Arts, University of Tampere, spring 2001.

> such things; that human eyes have truly seen, as objective flesh, what man has hitherto known only in febrile phantasy and tenuous legend? (SOI 454.)

Fantasy seems to have become reality. Everything that the narrator thought he knew about the world is shattered into pieces. New, petrifying knowledge replaces old structures of conception. He is alone with this knowledge, and telling his story is the only way for him to make the burden of the horror lighter. He must overcome his "disinclination or repugnance toward stating the exact details of the horror he experienced."[35] Only by conquering his fear, and articulating what he has seen, can he cross the boundaries of his privacy "so that social control can take over" (A 208).

The Shadow over Innsmouth is an exceptional story by Lovecraft in that the authorities act when they hear the narrator's story (SOI 382). However, even in this story, there are no suggestions that the public was very much interested when they heard about the raids and arrests in Innsmouth, dismissing it as a war on liquor (SOI 382). In a normal Lovecraftian world, people are left alone with their private horrors, and their great trust in social control is invalidated (A 209). Nobody believes or cares what they have experienced. They remain lonely and isolated like any other human being in their private universes. In this sense, Lovecraft is almost subversive (A 209). He rejects strong reliance on society and its safety nets, reliance on other human beings for help in a time of need. He seems to have taken western individualism, independence, and integrity to the extreme, suggesting that a person is inherently alone. This could be seen as an existentialist twist in Lovecraft's thinking. When this kind of person is confronted by the incomprehensibility embodied in monsters, and other horrors, he is

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[35] Fritz Leiber, Jr., "A Literary Copernicus," *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer, Starmont Studies in Literary Criticism 6 (Mercer Island: Starmont House Inc., 1987) 12.

even more alone in the world. Knowledge becomes individual in nature, not shareable with others because of the impossibility of understanding the experiences of others.

Knowledge, or the lack of it, is of importance for Lovecraft. He proposes the "notion of the hideousness concealed just beneath the surface of things," ignorance of which is the only thing that prevents the surge of insanity (B 71). As "The Call of Cthulhu" begins,

> 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. … some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality … 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.[36]

While knowledge is "in itself morally neutral," it can be the source of "profound psychological trauma."[37] The truth does not set a person free, but instead "condemns him to a waking nightmare of unrelenting horror."[38] The horrific experiences of Lovecraft's protagonists reveal to them their smallness in the world, which can be shattering to a human being who considers himself the self-sufficient centre of the universe. For the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the world ceases to be the secure and comfortable place that it used to be. Revelation of the real state of the world has changed everything for him, his view of the world as well as himself.

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[36] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3:* The Haunter of the Dark *and Other Tales* (London, HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1994) 61.

Around this story was centred the "Cthulhu Mythos" by August Derleth after Lovecraft's death. According to Richard L. Tierney, the mythos is Derleth's invention even though Lovecraft did the groundwork by creating god-, demon-, and servitor-like creatures. Derleth associated Lovecraft's creations with Christianity, even introducing the dichotomy of good and evil, which Lovecraft the atheist would never have done. Richard L. Tierney, "The Derleth Mythos," *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer, Starmont Studies in Literary Criticism 6 (Mercer Island: Starmont House Inc., 1987) 65-67.

[37] Joshi 1990, 207.

[38] Friday Jones, *Images from H.P. Lovecraft's* Dagon, 9 Jan. 2002, <http://www.fridayjones.com/dagon_pics.html>.

The "ironic capability" to become aware of one's insignificance is central in Lovecraft's work, and it "constitutes an effect virtually unprecedented in literature" (B 14). It increases the experience of horror as the reader is sucked into a world of meaninglessness. It can be an interesting experience to ponder on the possibility of complete lack of meaning while being able to accept this meaninglessness. The experiences of the characters in horror fiction can be compared to a person's situation in conditions where there is no possibility to control one's environment, or the near future, and where a feeling of fearful helplessness develops because of the circumstances.[39] Lovecraft's protagonists, for example, face horrors they could never have imagined to be possible. They have no means to cope with such unexpected situations, and thus they are horrified, and nearly, or completely driven mad, as the case may be. Such fearful helplessness and incapacity on the part of the narrator affects the reader as well. He or she can share the state of helplessness in the face of a horrifying revelation.

Lovecraft's weird tales are not just any horror stories. They do not provide any conviction of a secure future because the horrifying experiences have just revealed the emptiness of the world. However, I do not know any readers to have killed themselves over desperation caused by Lovecraft's fiction. For some people, it can in fact give new fruitful thoughts to ponder over. In addition, if the reader comes to share Lovecraft's views of a meaningless world, it can be triumphant to overcome the feelings of emptiness as Lovecraft did, and enjoy the world in all its insignificance. In Darrell Schweitzer's opinion, "Lovecraft's uncontrollable horrors from other dimensions or

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[39] Joseph Grixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989) 154.
Here Grixti discusses Bruno Bettelheim's account of his experiences in Dachau.

distant space can only be confronted with stoic fatalism."[40] Fighting his implications would be a source of more anxiety. Surrendering to Lovecraft's world would instead open a door to fascination, and a new way of looking at the world, and oneself as a human being. Exploring the unknown does not necessarily lead to the annihilation of human identity, as Airaksinen suggests in the following section. It can also be constructive if horror stories are seen to have a tendency towards a re-discovery of "the unity of the self and other," as Rosemary Jackson puts it.[41]

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[40] Darrell Schweitzer, *The Dream Quest of H.P. Lovecraft*, The Milford Series: Popular Writers of Today 12 (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1978) 61.

[41] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981) 52.

3. Facing the Unknown

Timo Airaksinen has an aesthetic-philosophical point of departure in his discussion of both Lovecraft's fictional and non-fictional writing, that is, a portion of his voluminous letters. Airaksinen aims at a "philosophical reading of literature and authorship" (A vii). Since Lovecraft's philosophy is present in his literary work, an aesthetic method is the best when approaching it, in Airaksinen's opinion (A vii). His approach is quite refreshing in fact. I think his book is an important contribution to Lovecraft scholarship. It brings out most clearly the philosophical questions of what it means to be human that greatly concerned Lovecraft. In his discussion on Lovecraft's philosophy, Airaksinen concentrates on Lovecraft's conception of the fear of the unknown. He also touches on issues of human identity and individuality, or more exactly the loss of them.

In the western part of the world, people are used to seeing themselves as individuals who possess "selves" that are "preferably clear-cut conceptions of who they are, what they want and why" (M 54). The notion of a 'self' is often seen as synonymous to individuality (M 54). Mäyrä continues:

> Individuality carries enormous ideological and legal weight in our culture. Economic and legal institutions are based on the assumption that citizens are autonomous individuals, in full possession of themselves, and therefore also legally responsible for their actions. (M 55.)

The great significance of individuality brings with it the burden of fears of losing it. This has given ground to the idea of the postmodern 'loss of self,' and its constituent symptoms of "insecurity, alienation and dislocation" (M 9, note 24). Bruce Kapferer points to the fears of losing individual identity that haunt the postmodern western world. Egalitarian ideology that prevails in American democratic individualism, for example, contains the fear that "the individual will be consumed, obscured, and will

lose its identity in more inclusive orders [such as hierarchies] and that those who command such orders will negate the autonomy of the subordinates."[42] This fear is expressed in "the incessant assertion of the sanctity of individuals [and] their uniqueness."[43] If humans are subsumed in the same hierarchy with ancient monsters that have no interest, or respect for human existence, the result is pure horror. If humankind means nothing, then, individuals have even less significance. The grounds for human superiority and integrity are lost.

In modern horror stories, monsters are confronted, and their voices heard, instead of them merely being viewed from a distance (M 18). This applies to Lovecraft as well. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, in particular, the monsters are both viewed from afar, as they pursue the narrator through the town in the night, and confronted within oneself when the narrator discovers his new identity as a fishfrog. As Jackson writes, "The demonic [in modern literature] is not supernatural, but is an aspect of personal and interpersonal life. . . ."[44] Furthermore, "otherness is established through fusion of the self with something outside, producing a new form, an 'other' reality."[45] Mäyrä agrees with her, saying "When supernatural elements are adopted in modern horror, these "evil powers" tend to maintain an uncanny link with the self of the protagonist, or victim (M 124). This is very true for *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. The fishfrogs are a threat to human society, as well as to the individual narrator. Lovecraft

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[42] Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*, Smithsonian Series in Ethnographic Inquiry 7 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988) 15.

Kapferer is an anthropologist, and he discusses 20th century western individualism in the context of nationalism.

[43] Kapferer 15.

[44] Jackson 55.

[45] Jackson 59.

could be said to have been ahead of his time, a postmodern writer, when he suggests that human identity is in danger when facing unknown horrors bursting from nowhere for no reason (A 183). Even though he rejected the dichotomy of good and evil, Mäyrä's line of argumentation can still be applied to Lovecraft. His creations are essentially non-human, and the monsters threaten everything that is human, even from inside of a person.

Lovecraft seems to comment on the fact that people have a craving for solid individuality, "a practical *need* for a self" (M 58, emphasis original). Human individuals are encompassed, engulfed, by weird phenomena that take control over their lives. For example, the memory of the great Cthulhu in "The Call of Cthulhu" haunts the narrator of that story to the point that he knows he has to die because he knows too much. He does not even dare to share what he knows because of the implications of that knowledge (cf. page 20 above). "The Haunter of the Dark" is an even more striking example. The protagonist is haunted by a creature that he unintentionally set free from its prison tower, and he is finally killed by the sight of it closing in on him. As the protagonist's final notes imply, he is losing his touch with himself, as well as the world: "My name is Blake—Robert Harrison Blake of 620 East Knapp Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. … I am on this planet...."[46] These characters face the unknown outside in the form of horrible creatures. The narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* also has to face the inside of himself, as well as the transformed outside world. In the process, all these characters are transmutated into something else. They cease to be the rational

[46] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Haunter of the Dark," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3:* The Haunter of the Dark *and Other Tales* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1994) 300.

individuals that they are supposed to be according to western ontology. They are consumed by nothingness, included in a hierarchy where humans are on the lowest step.

In Airaksinen's opinion, all of Lovecraft's fiction concerns the loss of innocence "in a world that becomes ever more incomprehensible" because of the weird phenomena intruding upon the familiar world (A 23). The greatest source of horror is the unknown, that is also manifested in a person's self (A 31). Lovecraft conveys the idea that a human being loses his or her sense of identity in the face of the horrifying unknown (A 101). The unknown, a monster for example, affects a person, and it gives him or her knowledge of "something intolerable" (A 188). It makes him or her aware of the true state of the world and him/herself. This is followed by the realisation of one's identity being lost, "a full metamorphosis of the recipient self," as Airaksinen philosophically describes the process (A 188).

The loss of identity is a horror in itself (A 37). As Lovecraft describes this experience in a story of his,

> No death, no doom, no anguish can arouse the surpassing despair which flows from a loss of *identity*. Merging with nothingness is peaceful oblivion; but to be aware of existence and yet to know that one is no longer a definite being distinguished from other beings—that one no longer has a *self*—that is the nameless summit of agony and dread.[47]

The experience of unprecedented horror is so powerful that it makes a person lose his or her sense of self, which is "the ultimate human evil" (A 101). However, if a person loses his or her contact to his or her nature as a human being, the situation is even more horrifying (A 35). The transformed being "may still qualify as human," whereas a monster does not (A 35). The narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is still human when he returns from his horrifying journey. However, after his transformation into a

monster, and he ceases to be part of the human race. Therefore, people are afraid of "the transmutation of our person into something else . . . becoming a non-entity" (A 195). After coming to contact with the unknown, be it one's self, or the state of humanity, there is only nothingness. The self is lost, as well as any confidence in old conceptions of the world.

Lovecraft often leaves his narrators without a name, just as nameless as his horrors (A 183). The vulnerability of these "nameless wanderers" is extreme because of their anonymity (A 183). As Airaksinen describes their situation, "They are nobodies who desperately cling to something they think they are" in order to survive in a world that has become unfamiliar (A 183). They are on the way of losing their identities, facing their own nothingness. The narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* literally loses his human identity as a consequence of his visit to Innsmouth. He faces his self, and his fishfrog heritage. As he recounts his Innsmouth experience, "He is already insane or without his human identity" (A 190). Partly, he is already one of the fishfrogs although he writes his story in order to become aware of it. It can be argued that telling the story is important for the narrator because in the process of telling his story, he tells himself who he is, thus creating a self-identity (M 59).[48]

A protagonist that is haunted by a monster, "still clings to the hope that he is an independent modern mind, and individual, yet the archaic magic of the monster is with him, controlling his thoughts" (A 190). He finds his "life-plan and identity . . . collapsing or becoming meaningless" (A 96). Airaksinen thinks this is parallel to the

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[47] H.P. Lovecraft and E. Hoffman Price, "Through the Gates of the Silver Key," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 1:* At the Mountains of Madness *and Other Novels of Terror* (London: Voyager/HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1999) 527. Emphases original.

[48] Interest in "the narrative construction of selfhood" has gained ground, probably due to the deracination of a firm belief in "the self as a real, essential substance of a person" (M 59).

fate of Lovecraft's language. He explains Lovecraft's lack of critical attention by the fact that, as a cult figure, Lovecraft and his texts are not "open to everyone, especially not to those who classify and canonize literature" (A 82). Airaksinen also describes his language as "too anti-humanistic to be readable," because of which Lovecraft "cannot be read as a literary author" (A 82). However, complex language could also be considered a challenging object of study instead of an obstacle for analysing and understanding a text. As Joshi observes, hardly "any good writer is 'easy' to read" (J 653). He continues,

> it takes effort and intelligence to read it. . . . Those who call Lovecraft 'verbose' because of this density of style are antipodally wrong: in fact, this density achieves incredible compactness of expression . . . There is rarely a wasted word in Lovecraft's best stories; and every word contributes to the final outcome. (J 653.)

Lovecraft's particular style is, though, the greatest source of controversy in his work (J 652). It could be thought of as 'heavy' by those who are not used to "verbal and atmospheric richness" (J 653). In Joshi's opinion, there is "a heightened rhetorical element" in Lovecraft's texts (J 652). It is intended, however, as "a kind of incantation whereby the atmosphere generated by language creates an awed sense of the strange reality of the unreal" (J 652-653). I agree with Joshi on this point. Lovecraft's peculiar use of language can also be felt in the translations of his work even if they were not the very best. His language is almost hypnotising, drawing the reader into the strange world of his stories.

Language has a double role in Lovecraft's texts. On the one hand, he uses suggestive language to induce a sense of cosmic horror, but on the other hand, language is not sufficient to describe the horrors. Lovecraft's description techniques include a mixture of vagueness and detail. He leaves many things unmentioned because his horrors are unnameable. The scarcity of photographic description leaves room for the

reader's imagination (B 23). Burleson also says the "avoidance of excessively photographic and revelatory description" gives "durability" and "re-readability" to his fiction (B 45). The horrors in Lovecraft's stories are usually, then, "subtly suggested and not painted in sharp or garish detail," as many other horror writers prefer to do (B 45). The reader is not given a full picture but vague details that only hint at what the narrator really saw. According to Burleson, the "designedly sparse description" of horrors "simply shows that what is important is not any objectively detailed picture of the creature, but rather the narrator's emotional response" (B 23). This type of description increases the experience of horror. Lovecraft is also able to evoke feelings of fear and disgust that are so strong that when a monster appears, it does not need a particular description to elicit horror (A 92). As Airaksinen says, the atmosphere of expectation created by language "is supposed to do its work," which it does indeed (A 92).

The travel agent's description of the Innsmouth people prepares the narrator, and the reader, for the journey into the shadows of the small town:

> There certainly is *a strange kind of streak* in the Innsmouth folks today—I don't know how to explain it, but *it sort of makes you crawl*. You'll notice a little in Sargent if you take his bus. Some of 'em have queer narrow heads with flat noses and *bulgy, stary eyes that never seem to shut*, *and their skin isn't quite right*. Rough and scabby, and the sides of their necks are all shrivelled or creased up. (SOI 387. Emphases added.)

The depiction is vague, and the source of horror remains indefinable. It implies that something is not quite right with the whole place and its people. The description is so vague and suggestive of something odd that the reader wants to follow the narrator to find out what it is that is wrong. Once in Innsmouth, the narrator sees a shape crossing the doorway of an old church, now turned into the lair of The Esoteric Order of

Dagon.[49] This description is full of vague suggestions of something horrible. It is not quite clear what is so horrible about the shape that the narrator sees. It still creates a persisting sense of horror and unnaturalness.

> an onrushing image of sharp intensity and unaccountable horror . . . had seized me *before I knew what it really was*. The door of the church basement was open, revealing a rectangle of blackness inside. And as I looked, *a certain object crossed or seemed to cross* the dark rectangle; burning into my brain a momentary conception of nightmare which was all the more maddening because *analysis could not shew* [*sic*] *a single nightmarish quality* in it. (SOI 401. Emphases added.)

Carroll points out that Lovecraft's "vague, suggestive, and often inchoate descriptions of the monsters" give a strong "impression of formlessness," at which Lovecraft aims in many of his stories (C 33). A more vague description is often more powerful than a detailed one.[50] As Russ thinks,

> the commonest, strongest image, and the one readers seem to remember best is the shapeless, monstrous, indescribable 'entry' . . . whose most terrifying characteristic is its structurelessness . . . the insistence on the indescribableness of the threat seem[s] to point to experience so personally archaic it is felt as pre-verbal. . . .[51]

Structurelessness implies indescribability. According to Jackson, "Lovecraft's horror fantasies are particularly self-conscious in their stress on the impossibility of naming this unnameable presence. . . ."[52] In addition, "the endeavour to visualize and verbalize the unseen and unsayable" inevitably fails, but draws attention to the "difficulty of utterance," which is one of Lovecraft's most powerful ways of creating horror.[53]

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[49] This is a quasi-religious order dedicated to the worship of Lovecraft's creations, present in some other stories as well.

[50] "The Colour out of Space" is probably the best of Lovecraft's stories. The atmosphere is at its thickest, and the core of horror is as formless as possible, a weird colour out of space.

[51] Russ 505.

[52] Jackson 39.

[53] Jackson 39.

Sometimes, though, Lovecraft does give a more detailed description of his monsters, as in the case of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. In the night, trying to escape the fishfrog creatures, the narrator sees "the bestial abnormality of their faces and the dog-like sub-humanness of their crouching gait" (SOI 448). Everything about the fishfrogs is abnormal and repellent. They are disgustingly weird creatures.

> That *flopping or pattering* was monstrous—I could not look upon the degenerate creatures responsible for it. . . . The horde was very close now—*the air was foul with their hoarse snarlings*, and the ground almost shaking with *their alien-rhythmed footfalls*. (SOI 452. Emphases added.)

The following anatomical depiction may not be quite as powerful as the more suggestive ones above. However, it is useful in giving a fuller picture of these particular monsters, and in eliciting feelings of nausea in the reader, which is an important element of art-horror, in Carroll's opinion (C 22, cf. on page 52 below).

> their predominant colour was a greyish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad they had no more than four limbs. Their croaking, baying voices, clearly used for articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked. (SOI 454.)

They are so monstrous that it is hard to believe they were once human. The description reveals the degeneration and corruption that has befallen the bodies of the Innsmouth people. Here, the disgusting details give the feeling of nauseating horror whereas the more vague descriptions above raise a mixture of curiosity and anxiety. The mixture of these two kinds of description makes the story so haunting. There is tension between vagueness and detail.

One curious feature of Lovecraft's style of description is "his power to make *place* almost sentient" (B 86, emphasis original). In Joshi's opinion, Lovecraft's strong

sense of place might be related to his love for his native Providence. It gives Lovecraft's fiction "textural depth and realism" (J 650). Inanimate things, especially houses, have human characteristics in Innsmouth. When the narrator wanders through the streets of the deserted-seeming town, he sees

> the black, *gaping* windows of deserted hovels, many of which leaned at perilous and incredible angles through the sinking of part of the foundations.[54] Those windows *stared* so spectrally that it took courage to turn eastward toward the waterfront. . . . The sight of such endless avenues of *fishy-eyed* vacancy and death . . . start up vestigial fears and aversions that not even the stoutest philosophy can disperse. (SOI 408. Emphases added.)

The universal "furtiveness and secretiveness" of the place and its people also give the narrator a "sensation of being watched from ambush on every hand by sly, staring eyes that never shut" (SOI 410). When he is "running frantically," looking for a way out of Innsmouth, he passes "the *yawning* black doorways and *fishily staring* windows" (SOI 444-445, emphases added). Everything, both people and places, in Innsmouth seem to have the same fishy eyes, which is not a pleasant thought. It gives a haunting image of a cold, damp, and deserted town where "normal" has little room, least of all during the night. As Joshi puts it,

> Lovecraft never achieved a greater atmosphere of insidious decay than in "The Shadow over Innsmouth:" one can almost smell the overwhelming stench of fish, see the physical anomalies of the inhabitants, and perceive the century-long dilapidation of an entire town in the story's evocative prose. (J 500.)

When the narrator arrives in Innsmouth, he realises he has "come *face to face* with rumour-shadowed Innsmouth" (SOI 398, emphasis added). Burleson points out that it could be argued that "face to face" is not a good metaphor "because a town does

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[54] This description has a hint of Lovecraft's favourite phenomenon plaguing the locations of his creation, that is, abnormal and twisted non-Euclidean geometry.

not have a face" (B 174). However, Innsmouth is not an ordinary town and *does* have a face of its own, the characteristic "Innsmouth look" of the people living there, their bulging and staring fish-like eyes that never even seem to blink (SOI 462). In addition, the wording "face to face" hints at the ultimate developments of the narrator's own face (B 174). He faces Innsmouth as he approaches the town, and he faces the truth about himself when he sees himself in the mirror.

The use of more or less accurate adjectives is part of creating Lovecraftian horror. Lovecraft has a habit of piling up adjectives even when describing ordinary things. For example, the narrator receives "a *fly-specked* magazine from the *evil-visaged* clerk at the *rickety* stand beside his desk" (SOI 432, emphases added). Because of this style of writing, Lovecraft has sometimes been "undeservedly" accused of *adjectivitis* (B 23). Burleson does not agree with this criticism because he emphasises the emotional response to horrors (B 23). Joshi also wonders on what grounds Lovecraft's use of adjectives has been judged so negatively. There should not be any "canonical number of adjectives per square inch that are permissible and the slightest excess is cause for frenzied condemnation" (J 153). He defines this kind of criticism as "merely a holdover from an outmoded and superficial realism that vaunted the barebones style of a Hemingway . . . as the sole acceptable model for English prose" (J 153).

Airaksinen, on the other hand, thinks that this adjectivitis is "the most disturbing and damaging feature" of Lovecraft's fiction, defining it as "his compulsive habit of attaching an adjective to every noun" (A 91). In his opinion, the always well-mannered Lovecraft did not behave so well when it comes to rhetoric (A 92). He thinks the reader "can hardly be expected to react favorably" to the piles of adjectives (A 91). Airaksinen admits, though, that Lovecraft's "adjectival mist" can also be a source of horror, which makes it functional (A 94). As has been stated above, horror is rooted in

the unknown. When adjectives are piled up one after another, it "incites an expectation of the unknown," which, then, contributes to the generation of a horrific atmosphere (A 94). Peter Cannon thinks that through his "concentrated adjectival and alliterative bursts" Lovecraft attempts "to invoke the awesomeness of time and space," which he does quite well.[55]

I think Lovecraft's skilful choice of words, including adjectives, is one reason why his stories are so powerful. For example, when the narrator tries to escape Innsmouth, he wonders at the huge number of his pursuers:

> Whence could come *the dense personnel of such column* as I now beheld? *Did those ancient, unplumbed warrens teem with a twisted, uncatalogued, and unsuspected life?* Or had some unknown ship indeed landed a legion of unknown outsiders on *that hellish reef*? Who were they? Why were they here? And if such a column of them was scouring the Ipswich road, would the patrols on the other road be likewise augmented? (SOI 451. Emphases added.)

Lovecraft's language does its work. The questions raise new questions as they are left unanswered. Lovecraft uses weird wording to heighten the strangeness of the creatures that are after the narrator. He knows how to manipulate language to the reader's ultimate horror.

According to Airaksinen, language fails the victim when he passes into something that is "beyond our experience, a nothingness about which we cannot say anything" (A 7). The narrator is left all by himself with a confusion of emotions (A 7). The sense of cosmic awe is more poignant when a sole individual is faced with nothingness. This is probably why Lovecraft preferred an isolated character. The reader also shares the horror of being beyond all language and expression when he can identify

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[55] Peter Cannon, *H.P. Lovecraft*, Twayne's United States Authors Series TUSAS 549 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989) 15.

with the isolation of the narrator. However, although the lack of expressive means might give the feeling of being thrown into another world, “Everything happens inside our world, since no other worlds exist” (A 159). This world is “infinitely more complex” than it seems, and it is impossible to know how deep the rabbit whole goes (A 159). Finally, when the truth is revealed, it is too late to escape the horrors of cosmic dimension (A 159). No benevolent god exists to redeem the hopeless souls that have been confronted by the cruel reality of the world. As Airaksinen points out, even vices like drinking, drugs, womanising or sports do not provide an escape, only madness and death do (A 207). Lonely individuals bereaved of their identity and means of expression is a horrifying image.

4. The Past Engulfing the Present

Time is irrelevant when horror takes over. As the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* says, "suddenly all thoughts of time were blotted out" (SOI 401). Without time, there is only emptiness and free fall. In Lovecraft's world, the past engulfs the present moment, reaching the hopeless individual who cannot hide from his heritage in the present. People carry within them dark and ancient heritage that cannot be hidden or forgotten. The past has the force to change the course of a person's life. Burleson states that in Lovecraft's stories there is

> the notion that in a foreordained way the past will reach forward and engulf the unfortunate soul whom the blind cosmos has chosen to place on the treadmill of cosmic cycles of time. For such a person, the present is not a place in which it is possible to hide from the past. (B 26.)

There is an "unthinkable continuity" between the past and the present (B 170). Ancient horrors have the power to survive the flow of centuries that should have erased them, and they "obtrude unexpectedly" on the present moment (B 44).

The idea of the past engulfing the present is quite interesting. For modern, future-oriented people, such domination of ancient history is likely to be horrifying. The theme is also quite an old one. For example, the "myth" of Gothic horror centres around "an anxiety about boundaries."[56] In horror stories, many thresholds are crossed as "The dead are going to visit the living, the past is invading the present, madness is starting to mix with reason" (M 115). The past with all its mistakes forces itself upon the present and insists on being confronted. For people, time travel is impossible, but all that they, or their ancestors have done follows them regardless of time or place, as a wicked rumour follows its target. There is, for example, a fate-like element directing the

narrator's actions in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* 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" (SOI 411). He is not in control of his life because the past, the shadow over Innsmouth, haunts him, and orientates his actions.

In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the past, and ancient heritage play an important part. It is a story of a young man who visits the sordid town of Innsmouth and discovers the existence of the monstrous creatures living in the sea. They have mixed with the local humans, causing their offspring to transform from human to fishfrog with the coming of age. Usually, the horror should end in this discovery. However, Lovecraft extended the scope of this story, and the fishfrog heritage turns out to be a skeleton in the narrator's closet. His maternal great-great-grandmother was one of the creatures, and the narrator realises that he himself is about to become one of them. The narrator experiences glimpses of memory-like feelings, and finally, fantastic dreams reveal to him his heritage, what his family tree actually includes. He comes to realise who, or more exactly, what he really is. The revelation of his identity is most powerful.

Memory, dreams, and heritage are elements through which the haunting past may express itself. Elusive memory is a common theme with Lovecraft. Although he did not believe in ancestral memory as such, "he found it an irresistible fictional device" (B 173). He manages to make the reader share the "maddening effort to remember, to know what it is, under the surface of things, that one must—yet cannot bear—to remember" (B 37). Burleson calls this the "Lovecraftian obsession" with the idea that something horrible from the past "maddeningly eludes the memory," just waiting for an opportunity to "obtrude on the conscious mind and shatter one's complacency" (B 37).

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[56] Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) quoted in M 115.

Some memory-like thoughts may refuse to be remembered, while others may force themselves upon a helpless mind. Horrifying memories lurk ever close to the mind. The "elusive tauntings of ancestral memory" can be seen to represent the impossibility of escaping ancient heritage that forces itself to be "reckoned with in the present" (B 172).

As the narrator studies a tiara-like object associated with Innsmouth at the Newburyport Historical Society, he experiences strange feelings. He sees in his fascination at the thing "a curiously disturbing element hardly to be classified or accounted for" (SOI 392). He experiences "olfactory disgust," and a "feeling of menace and repulsion amidst this rich, unaltered survival from the past" (SOI 400). He feels his uneasiness has an "equally potent source residing in the pictorial and mathematical suggestion of the strange designs" (SOI 392).

> The patterns all hinted of *remote secrets and unimaginable abysses in time and space*, and the monotonously aquatic nature of the reliefs became almost sinister. Among the reliefs were fabulous monsters of abhorrent grotesqueness and malignity—half ichthyic and half batrachian[57] in suggestion—which one could not dissociate from a certain haunting and uncomfortable sense of *pseudomemory*, as if they called up some image from deep cells and tissues whose retentive functions are wholly primal and awesomely ancestral. At times I fancied that every contour of these blasphemous fishfrogs was overflowing with *the ultimate quintessence of unknown and inhuman evil*. (SOI 392-393. Emphases added.)

Despite his unpleasant first impression, he finally decides that there is no "reason why I should have felt that shuddering touch of evil pseudomemory" (SOI 401). However, he does have a reason. Later in the story, as his ancestry is revealed, it becomes clear why he should have had such shudderings. His family possesses similar pieces of jewellery, which he must have seen at an earlier point in his life (SOI 459). His reaction to the tiara was the result of forgotten memories lurking in his mind.

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[57] These adjectives refer to fish and frogs, respectively.

In Innsmouth, the narrator is confused when he observes the physique of the locals. The strangeness of the Innsmouth folk is indefinable. The narrator lacks the proper words to describe his feelings aroused by the looks of the people. His impressions only suggest that there is something more behind it all. He says, "For a second I thought this typical physique had suggested some picture I had seen, perhaps in a book, under circumstances of particular horror or melancholy; but this *pseudo-recollection* passed very quickly" (SOI 399, emphasis added). Although the memory-like feeling soon passes, it has implications that are even more profound for the narrator. He has seen similar faces in his family photos. As he looks at these same photographs later in the story, he is horrified by the resemblance between his relatives and the Innsmouth folk. A vague and distant memory turns into reality.

> Now, after years of their passing, I gazed at their pictured faces with a measurably heightened feeling of repulsion and alienation. I could not at first understand the change, but gradually a horrible sort of comparison began to obtrude itself on my unconscious mind despite the steady refusal of my consciousness to admit even the least suspicion of it. It was clear that the typical expression on these faces now suggested something it had not suggested before—something which would bring stark panic if too openly thought of. (SOI 459.)

The slow and delaying words lead the reader toward a realisation of what is about to happen. He or she can share the feeling of almost remembering, almost knowing what it is that haunts the narrator. The horror of it is as close as the realisation of the narrator's identity. It is almost like a bad dream.

Airaksinen states that Lovecraft's tales report objective events and invite the reader not to participate but to gaze (A 25). Thus, Lovecraft's fiction is "descriptive and as such anti-subjective" (A 25). Airaksinen thinks that this makes his stories "cold and detached" and their horror "inhuman" (A 25). Because of the impersonality of Lovecraft's universe, "*Characters belong to a landscape*, and so the story is about the events which it reports," not the characters themselves (A 25, emphasis added). The

characters are the background, and as such, they rarely take an active part in the events. Therefore, Lovecraft's stories are dreamlike in their detachment. Moreover, he was of the opinion that "the best weird tales are those in which the narrator or central figure remains (*as in actual dreams*) largely passive, & witnesses or experiences a stream of bizarre events which . . . flows past him, just touches him, or engulfs him utterly."[58]

Although dreams do play a role in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, Lovecraft deviated a little from the formula of total detachment and immobility. The narrator of this particular story is more active than usual in Lovecraft's stories, "battering through doors, leaping through windows" on his way out of Innsmouth (J 498). He shows exceptional initiative in struggling to escape Innsmouth, and his pursuers. In a more traditional Lovecraft story, he would have remained in his hotel room, screaming, "they are coming, they are coming! …" As the narrator of "Dagon" puts it in the closing lines of his account, "The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. It shall not find me. God, *that hand*! The window! The Window!"[59] This story ends here, leaving the reader pondering what exactly happened to the narrator. However, Burleson points out that the escape from Innsmouth is not a "'premature' climax" because there is a worse horror in line, as is not uncommon in Lovecraft's world (B 176). In this case, it is the revelation of the narrator's true self.

Besides the stories being dream-like, dreams have a role of their own in Lovecraft's texts, like dreams within a dream. In Lovecraft's Dunsanian phase,[60]

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[58] A letter of Lovecraft's, quoted in J 499. Emphasis added.

[59] H.P. Lovecraft, "Dagon," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 2:* Dagon *and other Macabre Tales* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 2000) 17.

[60] Lord Dunsany (1878-1957), the Irish master of the weird tale, influenced Lovecraft's weird writing to a significant degree especially in the period 1919-1921 (B 221). Imitating Dunsany was in fact "a learning experience" for Lovecraft through which he could find his own style of saying what he had in

dreams were quite important as a form of travel, and they have taken on other roles in his later stories. Dreams can be seen as a representation of the things people feel they should remember if they only could. As Airaksinen points out, in dreams "We think we should know more than we know," just as the narrator feels his unknown past lurking at the thresholds of his mind (A 204). Language can fail when trying to describe the world of dreams, the realm of the impossible. As Joseph Conrad describes beautifully the phenomenon of dreaming in his "Heart of Darkness:"

> "It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey *the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams*…." . . . "We live, as we dream alone…."[61]

Dreams were quite significant for Lovecraft. He received "ideas, pictures & moods" from his dreams that he then used as material for his stories.[62] Schweitzer suggests that "Lovecraft dwelled so long on the fears [and nightmares] of his youth that after a while they became familiar, no longer frightening, and ultimately he fell in love with them."[63] It could be said that horror turned into something more positive for him when he mixed the world of his dreams with that of waking. He was able to profit from his gloomy dreams by making them part of his writing. In comparison, the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* profits from his dreams as well when they show him the way to his new, ever-lasting life as a fishfrog.

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mind. Darrell Schweitzer, "Lovecraft and Lord Dunsany," *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. Schweitzer, Starmont Studies in Literary Criticism 6 (Mercer Island: Starmont House Inc., 1987) 97.

[61] Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," *Youth and Two Other Stories*, 1902, Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927, *Reforming the Heart of Darkness: The Congo Reform Movement in England and the United States*, ed. Jim Zwick, 9 Jan. 2002, <http://www.boondocksnet.com/congo/congo_heart01c.html>. Emphasis added.

[62] H.P. Lovecraft, "Story-Writing," *Discovering H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. Darrell Schweitzer, Starmont Studies in Literary Criticism 6 (Mercer Island: Starmont House Inc., 1987) 47.

[63] Schweitzer 1978, 19.

The narrator feels that, in his dreams, "there was much more than I could remember, but even what I did remember each morning would be enough to stamp me as a madman or a genius if ever I dared write it down" (SOI 461). They give him a feeling of a "frightful influence . . . seeking gradually to drag me out of the sane world of wholesome life into unnamable [*sic*] abysses of blackness and alienage" (SOI 461). The nightmares seem real and are as frightening as his experiences in Innsmouth. They are a miniature horror story within a horror story. However, the narrator's attitude towards these dreams will change, exceptionally for a Lovecraft story, to a less maddening direction: "The tense extremes of horror are lessening, and I feel queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them. I hear and do strange things in sleep, and awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror" (SOI 462). The dreams help the narrator to accept his change into a fishfrog, and he vehemently backs away from suicidal inclinations (SOI 463). However, in Airaksinen's opinion, in such a situation, suicide would be logical because the narrator is not a person anymore (A 187). In addition to his identity, he is about to lose his human nature, a proof of which is the fact that he is unnaturally drawn to the water. However, these dreams influence the narrator, helping him to accept the state of things that has been revealed to him through his dreams.

After all his "portentous ancestral-memory dreams," the narrator begins to realise that he is about to have the Innsmouth look, the staring eyes of the Innsmouth denizens (B 176). His health and appearance begin to deteriorate: "Some odd nervous affliction had me in its grip, and I found myself at times almost unable to shut my eyes" (SOI 461). His eyes will become permanently open in the end, both literally and symbolically. He will become physically unable to shut his eyes, and in another sense,

his eyes have opened to the truth about himself. As the narrator begins to realise what lies in his family's past, his life becomes "a nightmare of brooding and apprehension" and "hideous truth" is mixed up with what is possibly insanity (SOI 460). It is his heritage looming in the background that forces itself on his mind to be reconciled with. The dark heritage of the past takes over "the modern scion of the family" in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* as in other stories of family degeneracy written by Lovecraft, such as "The Rats in the Walls"[64] (B 57). Although the narrator escapes the sordid town of Innsmouth and its monsters after the first near confrontation with them, he cannot escape his heritage.

"Any family may degenerate," and family secrets turn out to be unbearable, writes Airaksinen (A 49). A monster in the family tree was a favourite theme of Lovecraft's.[65] It suggests an unknown monstrousness hidden in any human being. According to Joshi, the horror in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* rests in the dichotomy between fishfrogs and humans being illusory.[66] Lovecraft might be saying here that the "efforts to preserve civilization" are doomed to fail because of "the sins—or blunders—of our ancestors."[67] There could even be seen the biblical idea of fathers' sins being avenged on one generation after another. There is "a kind of willful cosmic payback," a corruption that "slowly ensnarl[s] and smother[s] those within its grasp" (S 54). In *The*

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[64] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Rats in the Walls," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3*: The Haunter of the Dark *and Other Tales* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1994).

[65] Stories of this category include, besides *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, "The Rats in the Walls" and "The White Ape."

It can be argued whether the fact that Lovecraft's father died of syphilis in a mental institution affected him in any way, or even gave him the idea of "progressive, inherited degenerative change" within a family (B 172). Joshi disagrees with such views, saying Lovecraft hardly new the real nature of his father's illness (J 15). However, it can be argued that exactly this ignorance caused him to fear he might die the same way, and inspire him to use the theme of family degeneracy in his horror stories.

[66] Joshi 1990, 225.

[67] Joshi 1990, 225.

Shadow over Innsmouth, the narrator's great-great-grandfather married a non-human creature, thus initiating a family curse. Great-great-grandfather Obed Marsh could also be seen to have betrayed his ancient New England heritage, deeply cherished by Lovecraft, by bringing an outlandish wife in town, and thus creating a permanent disruption in respectable tradition. Lovecraft was a cultural traditionalist who might have wanted to warn people about "the ruinous effects of miscegenation" (J 498).[68]

The trip to Innsmouth turns into a journey into the narrator's self. According to Airaksinen, travel is a necessary condition for change (A 189). However, when change equals full metamorphosis, travel is oriented in an unwanted direction (A 189). The narrator of "The Dunwich Horror" "takes *the wrong fork* at the junction of the Aylesbury pike,"[69] which choice dictates his "unhappy fate" (A 227). Because of economic considerations, the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* takes the Innsmouth detour on his way to Arkham. This is a wrong fork in his life when considering a happy life with a normal human identity. However, this story concludes with "a strange happy end" (A 207).

In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, Lovecraft brings the loss of identity in the face of the unknown to a more concrete level. The narrator changes both mentally and physically after confronting the reality of the monsters, and his own monstrousness. Exceptionally, the loss grows into a gain, and horror turns a more benevolent face on the narrator. Airaksinen writes that "in some rare cases, we may correctly identify ourselves as what we have become and accept the fact," which is the remarkably calm

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[68] Joshi notes that there was a racist strain in Lovecraft's thinking that can be seen reflected in the narrator's expectations that the reader share his disgust at "the physical grotesqueness of the Innsmouth people," just as Lovecraft used to comment on "the 'peculiar' appearances of all races but his own" (J 498).

and happy end of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (A 207). The narrator finds his identity, whereas the reader may feel he is forced to give up his natural identity of a human being. However, the narrator is no longer fully human, and so he does not necessarily share human fears, including anxiety about losing human identity. The narrator does not simply submit to his fate as a monstrous hybrid but is thrilled by it (J 499-500). This augments the reader's horror, since "not merely his physical body but his mind has been ineluctably corrupted" (J 500).

Safe at home, the narrator still gets "an odd craving to whisper about those few frightful hours in that ill-rumoured and evilly-shadowed seaport of death and blasphemous abnormality" (SOI 384). Telling the story helps him "to reassure myself that I was not simply the first to succumb to a contagious nightmare hallucination" (SOI 384). Furthermore, it helps him to make up his mind "regarding a certain terrible step which lies ahead of me" (SOI 384). He anticipates his gradual transformation: "Perhaps it is madness that is overtaking me—yet perhaps a greater horror—or a greater marvel—is reaching out" (SOI 456). To the narrator it may be a great marvel to transform, but to the reader it appears as a horror. This line of writing could be seen as hinting at his future transformation into one of the Deep Ones, and his step to go to live in the sea. Another such reference occurs when, as he avoids seeing the monsters flow by, the narrator says, "I put every ounce of will-power into the task of holding my eyelids down" (SOI 452). There could be seen an ironic reference to the narrator's future inability to shut his eyes.

Robert M. Price criticises those "two or three cosmetic half-sentences" that are intended, retrospectively, to be read as hints of future events (P viii). In his

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[69] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror," *The H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3:* The Haunter of the Dark *and Other Tales* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 1994) 99. Emphasis added.

narratological opinion, there is "a vast and plumbless chasm . . . yawning between the narrating I and the narrated I" (P viii). He sees a contradiction in the supposed time of narration. In this kind of story, the narrator tells his tale at a distance, and thus, the narrating I has a different perspective from that of the narrated I (P vii). Price sees a problem in the "lack of coherence in the implied scene of narration" where the reader is expected to imagine the narrator "undecided between his familiar 'land-lubber's' perspective and his new fishy outlook until the actual telling of the tale itself decides him" (P viii). Price does not see any "discernible transition," or anything that would prepare the reader for the sudden change of heart on the part of the narrator (P viii). In his opinion, this should undermine the horrifying effect of the final transformation of the narrator. Schweitzer also sees "serious lapses in logic" in Lovecraft's text, such as the fact that Zadok Allen has lived to see his 96th year even though he knows too much about the fishfrogs' dealings.[70]

However, in my opinion, there is no disturbing contradiction. That kind of argumentation seems to be based on a type of reading and interpretation that can be compared to watching a movie with the sole aim of trying to find any mistakes that the filmmakers have made, as if those mistakes would spoil the whole movie. As will be pointed out in connection with the suspension of disbelief discussed on page 56 below, the reader is not supposed to question the logic of the story's world, meaning, in this case, the way the narrator chooses to tell his tale.[71] Furthermore, why would a reader

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[70] Schweitzer 1978, 43-44.
However, Schweitzer has ignored the fact that Zadok Allen took oaths of secrecy that bought him his freedom to live, though not to talk (SOI 425).

[71] I think the narrator's last dream is where the change occurs. The description of the dream ends in the following words: "This was the dream in which I saw a shoggoth for the first time, and the sight set me awake in a frenzy of screaming. That morning the mirror definitely told me I had acquired the Innsmouth look" (SOI 462). The next paragraph continues: "So far I have not shot myself as my uncle Douglas did. I bought an automatic and almost took the step, but certain dreams deterred me. The

expect normal human logic in a story whose world, though being this world, is itself a lapse from the point of view of that logic? However, if there is a contradiction in time, it makes sense if one thinks of Lovecraft's fascination with this kind of a phenomenon (cf. footnote 22 on page 12 above).

Utter confusion of then and now is a source of horror instead of a disturbing contradiction that would spoil the story. A contradiction in time does not, necessarily, affect the horrific atmosphere at all, but rather increases it. Furthermore, the contradiction does not exist to a reader who plunges into Lovecraft's world for the first time, waiting for the horrible end. I think great tension is created by the narrator's delays in revealing all the facts. According to Maria Ihonen, he is honest in not colouring his earlier life in the light of his new identity, describing the events in the right order, and only now and then unconsciously anticipating his final conversion.[72] The building up of horror does not suffer from the supposedly complete surprise of the ending. On the contrary, there is an additional element of horror. Lovecraft could be seen to use the device of *confirmation* rather than revelation here, which means that the ending is an anticipated "convincer."[73] The reader has all along expected the outcome revealed at the end, and the confirmation of his or her anticipations increases the horror. Furthermore, the ending is a shocking reversal toward all that is inhuman as the narrator is prepared to give up everything to become "an evil, occultist, and human sacrificing fishfrog."[74] The ultimate horror comes from the fact that the reader has learned to trust

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tense extremes of horror are lessening. . . ." (SOI 462). The tense changes from past to present, which, I think, marks the shift from recounting past events to the present moment of writing.

[72] Ihonen.

[73] Leiber 11.

[74] Ihonen. My translation from Finnish.

the narrator and share his disgust, and now the narrator betrays this trust, and shocks the reader by his reversal.[75]

According to Burleson, the revelation, or confirmation, of the narrator's fishfrog identity "is one of the most powerful in all of Lovecraft's fiction" (B 176). It is that indeed. Although the reader might have guessed where the story is headed, it is still horrifying to realise what the narrator has become. The narrator has not been able to "avoid heredity catching up with him."[76] As Joshi puts it, "there are few moments in all literature that provide a reader with such a complex network of emotions—horror, bafflement, pity, sublimity, and much else besides" (J 652). The story and its conclusion, in particular, are Lovecraft's "greatest union of internal and external horror" (J 499). He manages to make the narrator's fate "inexpressibly tragic," as well as to hint at "the awesome horrors that threaten the entire planet" (J 499). There is a collision of horror and joy. Exceptionally for a Lovecraftian horror story, the revelation of the narrator's true being is joyous for the narrator himself. He does not end up in a mental institution as the narrator of "The Rats in the Walls" does. Instead, he plans to rescue his cousin from one, and he rejoices in the idea of the fishfrogs gradually creeping into human society (SOI 462-3). As Joshi beautifully expresses it, "The cosmic and the local, the past and the present, the internal and the external, and self and the other are all fused into an inextricable unity" (J 500). So are horror and joy, fear and fascination. It is a paradox of the heart.

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[75] Ihonen.

[76] Cannon 93.

5. The Paradoxes of the Heart

Noël Carroll attempts to write a comprehensive philosophy of horror in the spirit of Aristotle (C 9). He combines philosophy of art with philosophy of the mind, and raises questions about the (underestimated) value of popular culture. Carroll has a more theoretical, non-specific point of departure to the analysis of horror. He analyses two paradoxes of the heart, which are interesting also in connection with Lovecraft. Lovecraft writes about fantastic monsters, such as the Deep Ones, the great Cthulhu, the Shoggoths, and the Great Old Ones, that one could unlikely believe to exist in this world. Nonetheless, his stories are experienced as horrifying, on the one hand because of the implications of the monsters' existence, and on the other hand because they are the manifestations of the horrifying unknown, as discussed in sections two and three above. The paradox of horror, in turn, poses the question why people enjoy horror. Why are readers fascinated by ugly monsters, such as those created by Lovecraft?

According to the paradox of fiction, humans can be genuinely horrified by things that they know do no exist, that are impossible. The paradox of fiction is the inconsistency between a reader's fear and his or her knowledge (C 79). The structure of the paradox is concentrated in three propositions that seem true individually, but contradictory when combined:

1) We are genuinely moved by fiction.
2) We know that that which is portrayed in fictions is not actual.
3) We are only genuinely moved by what we believe is actual. (C 87.)

In Carroll's opinion, "the often unstated cause of our perplexity" concerning the paradox of fiction is the presupposition that only *real* horrors can move anyone (C 87). However, imagined horrors can and do move readers and filmgoers and attract them from one year to the next. If people are able to experience fear unrelated to their own

security, for example fear for the victims of an earthquake, then it should also be possible for them to be afraid for fictional characters (C 76).

Carroll discusses three theories concerning why horror fiction affects people, and refutes two of them. In his opinion, the illusion theory, on the one hand, "saddles the audience with false beliefs" (C 86). It claims that readers would have to believe in the reality of the horrors in question because otherwise, they could not really be horrified (C 86). The pretend theory, on the other hand, "burdens us with make-believe emotions," assuming that readers are merely pretending to be horrified (C 86). The illusion and pretend theories of emotional response to fiction have the common premise of assuming that people would have to believe in the exemplary Green Slime in order to be afraid of it (C 80). However, this is contrary to Carroll's ideas about why people are honestly horrified by fiction. The thought theory, that Carroll supports, claims that "actual emotion can be generated by entertaining the *thought* of something horrible" (C 80, emphasis added).[77] Therefore, readers *can* be authentically horrified by the Green Slime because the thought of it does not subscribe them to its existence (C 86). Carroll finds this the most acceptable explanation because it "keeps our beliefs respectable and our emotions genuine" (C 86). It explains quite well why people can be afraid of non-existent monsters. They are able to think about various horrors, imagine them, and be emotionally affected by the thought. This thought is possible without belief in its object.

When it comes to fiction, it is not reasonable, in Carroll's opinion, to think that emotional response would require belief in the reality of its source (C 79). For example, Lovecraft's readers are aware of the fictionality of his creatures, but nonetheless, they

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[77] Carroll emphasises the meaning of the word *thought*. He contrasts it with belief, saying belief is assertive, and thought non-assertive. Both do have propositional content but, as concerns thoughts, the content is merely entertained without committing oneself to the truth of it. (C 80.) Cf. Carroll's definition of art-horror above, note 25 on page 13.

are horrified. Carroll explains this through "the propositional content" of Lovecraft's texts. His readers are horrified by the *idea* of the creatures since their thoughts about them are based on Lovecraft's suggestions (C 82). This is close to Burleson's idea of horror by implication. It is not the belief in the existence of the monsters that is the source of horror, but the thought of them, or of the implications of their possible existence referred to by Lovecraft.

According to Carroll, readers are given models of how to react to the horrors that they encounter (C 17). The readers are supposed to "parallel" the emotions expressed by the characters, and share their "emotive evaluations" of the monsters as "fearsome and impure," without committing themselves to any belief in the reality of the monsters (C 53). Thus, the readers' feelings of fear and disgust are responses to the *thought* of monstrous entities, and the "evaluative states" of the protagonist (C 53). Carroll rejects the term *identification* when talking about sharing fears with fictional characters. In his opinion, readers do not "duplicate" their minds but rather "assimilate" their situation, part of which is the character's assessment of his circumstances (C 95). Identification would in fact suggest fusion, which, in turn, would hint at the duplication of emotional states (C 96). This fits well with my own experience of Lovecraft's horror. The monsters seem more than unlikely to exist, but emotions of fear and horror are present nonetheless. It is, again, the thought of the creatures, and the position of the narrator, that evokes them. However, with Lovecraft, language also plays an important role in inducing a sense of horror, as has been explained in section 3 above.

If the thought of a monster is frightening, why is this so? According to Carroll, a monster is a creature "not countenanced by contemporary science" (C 37). Even ordinary animals, such as sharks, that turn murderous are included in this category because they have ceased to be the animals they used to be (C 37). Thus, they are

categorically monsters, and they transform the world by their monstrousness. Schneider points out that if the setting of a story is already from the beginning "unfathomable," as in most fairy tales, then the story does not produce a horrific effect (S 8). On the other hand, when a credible setting suddenly turns "otherworldly," the story's "shock-value" becomes greater (S 8). As for monsters, in myths they are a natural part of the world. Contrastively, in horror stories they are "disturbances of natural order," and they "breach the norms of ontological propriety" (C 16). The monsters are "un-natural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature," and "challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking" (C 34). In addition to being "threats to common knowledge," they usually "render those who encounter them insane, mad, deranged" (C 34). However, for the readers of horror fiction, they could have a more positive effect besides that of making them horrified. They can help to deal with certain cultural anomalies. They can become the focus of a feeling of horror otherwise chaotic, or without a clear focus.[78]

Besides responding to similar kinds of fear, different monsters have similar emotional impact. Their fearfulness could be summed up in certain common features that are usually present in horror stories. Monsters are regarded as not only fearful but also "repellent, loathsome, disgusting, repulsive and impure . . . metaphysical misfits," and they elicit disgust from fictional characters and readers alike (C 54). When it comes to monsters,

> threat is compounded with revulsion, nausea, and disgust. . . . horror novels and stories [tend] to describe monsters in terms of and associate them with filth, decay, deterioration, slime and so on. The monster . . . is not only lethal but . . . also disgusting. (C 22.)

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[78] Cf. Airaksinen's *ad hoc* monster discussed on page 7 above.

Monsters are *both* threatening *and* impure (C 28). Otherwise, they would raise only fear *or* disgust instead of art-horror that Carroll defines in terms of both "threat and disgust" (C 28).

The threat manifested in the monster may be born of the monster merely being lethal, but it can also raise fear "psychologically, morally, or socially," by destroying one's identity, the moral order, or by advancing "an alternative society," as Carroll phrases it (C 43). All three conditions apply to the Innsmouth fishfrogs. They first shock through their mere existence, shattering conventional conceptions of the world. Then, they become the narrator's family, giving him a new identity. The fishfrogs have also breached the human taboo of miscegenation, thus disrupting the moral order. Finally, they plan to conquer the world when the time is right (SOI 462). They threaten human existence.

Impurity of the monsters, on the other hand, conveys "a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories" (C 43). Some monsters are created through fusion, which means, on the physical level, that the creatures "transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine," etc. (C 43). The Deep Ones are human beings grown into a combination of fish and frog through genetic degeneration. Because of their impurity and transgression, they spread "irredeemable pollution" on the ground on which they pass (SOI 452). Everything in the creatures is weird and disgusting. The feeling of revulsion only increases.

> I thought I was prepared for the worst . . . My other pursuers had been *accursedly abnormal*—should I not have been ready to face a strengthening of the abnormal element; to look upon forms in which there was *no mixture of the normal at all*? (SOI 453. Emphases added.)

The narrator tries to avoid seeing all the details, but he fails and meets a worse horror as he watches the monstrous creatures pass by "in a limitless stream . . . surging inhumanly

through the spectral moonlight in a grotesque, malignant saraband of fantastic nightmare" (SOI 454).

The narrator's nightmarish experiences seem indeed fantastic, a creation of a disturbed mind. However, Lovecraft has the skill to induce a genuine feeling of horror in the reader, despite the implausibility of the contents of his stories. The reader may at first refuse to believe in the possibility of there being ancient monsters still treading the earth. The lack of other witnesses should make it easy to explain the horrors away as the imaginings of an upset mind.[79] The "web of character isolation" has drawn itself quite tightly around the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* when he finds the grocery store closed with its human attendant gone (B 175). With him, the narrator has lost "his only link with sanity and the outside world" (B 175). Isolation from other normal people gives room to doubts about the narrator's credibility. Lovecraft thus offers his readers "a rational 'out'" if they want to "discount the story as not having happened" (B 19). Just as the narrator, the reader may try to "give my thoughts as neutral and practical a cast as possible" in the middle of weird, impossible events (SOI 429).

According to Burleson, "the writer must lead the way with a realistic backdrop which serves as a foil to the unreal eventualities" (B 15). As Grixti writes, a writer has an arsenal of "conventional and stylized patterns of story-telling" with which he or she can give the impression that "possibilities of experience are about to be explored in a familiarly reassuring manner."[80] Lovecraft, for example, often uses the form of a report that gives an impression of formality, and even normalcy, and where the reader does not

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[79] It is a favourite twist of Lovecraft's to leave his protagonists isolated, and additionally, make them lose all evidence of their experiences. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, Zadok Allen disappears, leaving nobody to confirm the narrator's story (SOI 453). These devices are discussed in more detail by Burleson.

[80] Grixti 165.

have much contact with the characters (A 183). *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, for example, begins with an almost official-like paragraph that convinces the reader that a normal person is about to recount his experiences:

> During the winter of 1927-1928 officials of the Federal government made a strange and secret investigation of certain conditions in the ancient Massachusetts seaport of Innsmouth. The public first learned of it in February, when a vast series of raids and arrests occurred, followed by the deliberate burning and dynamiting—under suitable precautions—of an enormous number of crumbling, worm-eaten, and supposedly empty houses along the abandoned waterfront. Uninquiring souls let this occurrence pass as one of the major clashes in a spasmodic war on liquor. (SOI 382.)

Lovecraft's stories are those of "scholarly, intelligent men whose scepticism was relentlessly overcome by proof that 'nameless horrors' existed."[81] Lovecraft's skill centres in "making the incredible seem credible."[82] When a sceptic narrator allows himself to accept the existence of unimaginable horrors, the reader cannot help agreeing with him. The tension between belief and doubt creates a tension that helps the stories "enigmatically to stick in the mind and haunt the reader" (B 19).

According to Schweitzer, Lovecraft writes "with conviction" about things that are "more believable than ghosts and goblins" on a subconscious level because "the Night Fears are still with us."[83] In his opinion, Lovecraft's fiction will have a meaning for his readers at least as long as humankind's outlook stays fundamentally the same, and monsters remain in the realm of the unreal and the impossible.[84] Lovecraft touches a chord in the human mind. He uses "a rational, mechanistic context" to bring the

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[81] Robert Bloch, "Introduction: An Open Letter to H.P. Lovecraft," *Lovecraft's Legacy*, eds. Robert E. Weinberg and Martin H. Greenberg (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, Inc., 1990) xiv.

[82] Bloch xv.

[83] Schweitzer 1978, 61.

[84] Schweitzer 1978, 61.

readers to the edge of an abyss, "and then dropped them over."[85] Robert Bloch defines "the real secret of a good Lovecraft story" as "its ability to create a temporary suspension of disbelief."[86] Lovecraft imbued his stories with a sufficient amount of realism so that the reader is "emotionally prepared to 'suspend disbelief' at the moment necessary, when the unreal horror enters and gives the illusion of violating cosmic law" (B 15). *The suspension of disbelief* means the creation of a tension between what the reader cannot believe but ends up fearing. The concept is used to describe the situation where

> a reader becomes involved in a story and doesn't question the story world or its characters even though the reader knows rationally that none of the events or person [*sic*] recorded in the story can actually occur. The reader allows the writer to tell the story and does not demand that the writer stick to events and people that can only happen in "real life."[87]

Readers can sympathise with a protagonist, regardless of whether the objects of his or her horror are real or imagined. The situation is horrifying, and readers can imagine what it would be like if they were there. Carroll rejects this phenomenon, though, suggesting that the suspension of disbelief would require people to accept monsters as real and actual (C 65). He interprets the term letter by letter, taking the suspension of disbelief to mean the transformation of disbelief into full belief, as if it were a question of a clear dichotomy. I think his own concept of art-horror fits well in the middle ground. Being horrified at the thought of a monster without committing

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[85] Schweitzer 1978, 61.

Cf. Ihonen's view on how the reader learns to trust the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* who then suddenly betrays his audience by his reversal (page 48 above).

[86] Bloch xv.

[87] Samuel T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: Or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, Vol. I, London, 1817, "The Willing Suspension of Disbelief," *Welcome to Writing and Literature on the Internet*, Keith Morgan Geekie, Johnson County Community College, 9 Jan. 2002, <http://www.jccc.net/~kgeekie/disbelief.htm>.

oneself to any belief in its reality is like letting the writer lead the way, letting him or her tell the story, and let oneself be carried along.

The reader is given a possibility to sympathise with the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* when he refuses to believe straightforwardly the town drunkard Zadok Allen's stories about Innsmouth. He thinks "little useful data could be gained from him since his stories were all insane, incomplete hints of impossible marvels and horrors which could have no source save in his own disordered fancy" (SOI 406). Zadok can be considered the most unreliable source of information because of his drinking. Nevertheless, the narrator cannot help being moved by what he hears: "The old man's whisper grew fainter, and I found myself shuddering at the terrible and sincere portentousness of his intonation" (SOI 416). He tries to explain the contents of Allen's story by allegory and imagination:

> The insane yarn I was hearing interested me profoundly, for I fancied there was contained within a sort of crude allegory based upon the strangeness of Innsmouth and elaborated by an imagination at once creative and full of scraps of exotic legend. Not for a moment did I believe that the tale had any really substantial foundation; but none the less the account held a hint of genuine terror. . . . (SOI 420.)

However, after the night of horrors in Innsmouth, the narrator has to believe Allen's stories concerning the history of the town, the old man's doubtful credibility notwithstanding. Furthermore, even if the narrator, and his source seem highly untrustworthy, this impression is not convincing enough for the reader totally to discredit the story, and not to experience horror.

In Joshi's opinion, the *specificity* of Lovecraft's work is "something that goes beyond mere realism, although realism is at its foundation."[88] Lovecraft's realism

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[88] Joshi 1990, 193.

"heightens the weird by contrast."[89] Lovecraftian stories were made to disturb the audience profoundly by making it, at least emotionally, believe the unbelievable. Lovecraft's realistic beginnings grow in importance as a narrative proceeds, reminding the reader about the near plausibility of the account of events, and finally, the story leads the reader "to the other side of reality" (A 152). Lovecraft's writing manages to close the gap between the worlds of the reader and the narrator, and thus, a unique experience of horror is created.

The paradox of horror refers to the problem why people are drawn to horror fiction, how people can be attracted by what is repulsive (C 160). Some critics have only emphasised the role of *either* repulsion *or* attraction in horror fiction (C 160). Carroll criticises these kind of one-sided approaches because, according to him, it should not be forgotten that horror as a genre includes "a curious admixture of attraction and repulsion" (C 161). Lovecraft's literary theory suggests that cosmic fear attracts "because it confirms some instinctual intuition about reality" that the cultural conventions deny (C 219, note 27). Carroll distinguishes Lovecraft's cosmic fear from ordinary fear. Ordinary fear is distasteful, and would naturally be avoided; whereas cosmic fear is synonymous with awe, "fear compounded with some sort of visionary dimension" (C 163). However, Carroll criticises Lovecraft's way of knitting together the genre of horror and his own worldview, in which cosmic awe seems to have replaced ordinary religion (C 163).

Carroll discards the analogy between art-horror and religious experience, and he offers an alternative even to larger theories trying to explain the paradox of horror, like psychoanalysis (C 167). He says the attraction of horror is rooted in the interplay of curiosity and fascination (C 195). As Carroll puts it, "horror attracts because anomalies

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[89] Joshi 1990, 193.

command attention and elicit curiosity" (C 195). Lovecraft's horror attracts because it gives rise to curiosity and fascination. It fascinates because it gives such a different view of the world but in a way which does not drive the reader into the desperation that his protagonists face. It could be argued that fear in a protagonist generates a more positive feeling of awe in a reader. Thus, the fears of the protagonist and the reader differ in a crucial respect. In addition, the idea of age-old monsters dwelling on the earth is interesting even if the reader personally discredits their existence.

If one follows Schneider's interpretation, the effects of horror fiction on the reader are close to the effects of the realisations of human smallness and isolation that Lovecraft's protagonists have to face. He describes how horror makes people dive under the surface of everyday things, exposing the core of humanity's conditions of being, which is comparable to Lovecraft's achievements in his texts. "Daunting though it may be . . . [horror] cuts through all our comforts, from the obvious to the sublime, and unveils our *rootlessness* (S 2, emphasis original). However, Schneider thinks, quite interestingly, that while exposing human rootlessness, horror "suggests a way to *handle*" it (S 2, emphasis original). He is of the opinion that classic horror stories imply that what promotes human well being is, in fact, the encounter with the "microcosmic context" of existence, not its denial or passive acceptance (S 62). Acknowledgement of the state of things can even fortify the human mind against "hopeless despair" because taking the world as a disorderly place from the outset can even give "a stronger position to account for and adapt to impending crises" (S 77).

People are equipped with an imagination that allows them to travel to the unknown and confront the hideous. Horror is a way of exploring the boundaries of culture as well as the self. Surviving the horror of confrontation can lead to a more fruitful understanding of oneself and one's surroundings. Schneider introduces the

concept of *wonderment* to refer, not to lethargic resign in the face of a world revealing its chaos, but curiosity, interest, and search for a cause or object (S 101). Horror leads the reader through chaos to a more orderly world, that is, if the reader is prepared for the journey. Enjoying horror is a way of exploring the darker side of the world, safely from one's own couch.

6. Conclusion: The Creation of Horror

> The time to begin writing is when the events of the world seem to suggest things larger than the world . . . Space and time become vitalised with literary significance when they begin to make us subtly homesick for something "out of space, out of time." . . . There is no real author who has not stood in awe and expectancy before some fragment of an earthly scene . . . whose glorified contours bring up with sweetly maddening poignancy a haunting, ineluctable sense of cosmic memory; of having known that scene and others akin to it in other lives, other worlds, and other dreamlands.[90]

A writer's task is to communicate what he or she has seen, and experienced. The narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* begins to write down his experiences because he wants to reveal the truth about the world, and ultimately himself. He defies "the ban of speech" laid upon the occurrences in Innsmouth (SOI 383). He uses frail human language that nearly fails him at points when he is forcing himself to write down word for word what he has seen. He tries to break his isolation, and in a sense, he succeeds in this task because he finds his new self and his membership in the fishfrog community. By writing both letters and fiction, Lovecraft managed to break his isolation, and find his way to the hearts of his fans.

I have attempted to show how Lovecraft creates horror in his short novel *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. My emphasis has been on the thematic side of the creation of horror. One answer to the question how Lovecraft manages to create such disturbing horror is his philosophical conception of humanity's total insignificance. His cosmic worldview imbues his tales with a sense of meaninglessness. The stories show a universe with little concern for humanity since they are founded on "the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or

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[90] A letter of Lovecraft's, quoted in B 16.

significance in the vast cosmos-at-large."[91] These conditions of being are reflected in Lovecraft's fictional world. Related to Lovecraft's view of the world is Burleson's concept of ironic impressionism that describes how humans perceive their insignificance through the very same senses that they believe are the grounds for their special status in the universe. Human characters are reduced to onlookers of horrors, incapable of really dealing with them. Lack of genuine dialogue with other people emphasises their isolation and loneliness in the universe. However, Lovecraft's horrors have a deeper meaning than there first appears to be. In a world where nothingness prevails, insignificance itself gains meaning when a human being, through his adequate enough senses, realises his position in the universe. The sense on meaninglessness gives a frame of reference for human existence.

The existence of horrific monsters implies human insignificance. In comparison with age-old monsters and their civilisations, people's achievements are inferior. People are powerless, whereas creatures from other worlds and other times have the force to change the course of things on earth. They are able to affect the lives of ordinary people who have had, thus far, no idea of what there can be beneath the solid surface of everyday life. A lonely person comes upon an unexpected truth on a New England tour, at the threshold of his coming of age. The discovery of the Innsmouth fishfrogs has two faces for the narrator, the realisation of human insignificance, and the discovery of his unknown fishfrog self. To the reader, this experience itself is more significant than the monsters through which the insignificance is realised. The monsters are only the creations of a writer, and they function as a

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[91] A letter of Lovecraft's, quoted in B 13.

symbol of ontological horror. Therefore, the reader can share the horror of meaninglessness without believing in the monsters.

For Airaksinen, the monsters are also only creations with which the reader and the narrator can explain their experiences of horror. The horror resides in the confrontation with the unknown, and the consequent loss of identity. The unknown is both outward and inward. On the one hand, the monsters are manifestations of the horrifying unknown outside the human being, and the rest of humankind. On the other hand, unknown monstrousness is also part of the narrator's self. The presence of monstrosity raises the frightening question whether there is hidden monstrosity in all humans. Facing the unknown inside or outside humans is horrifying. For the narrator, the discovery of fishfrogs is horrifying, and he loses his sense of security about the world, and himself. He can feel the change creeping over him with the deterioration of his health, and the weird dreams about a kingdom in the depths of the sea. His identity transforms into something hideous and unknown along with his physical body. Horror is generated in seeing, from a distance, a person change into something less recognisable, less human (A 183). Reading a story of such change is, therefore, a story of horror. The loss of identity in the face of the unknown is a great source of horror because it touches on issues that are bothering modern human beings. People need to know who they are, and whether the identity that they have is stable or not. They may also wonder what their conditions of existence are. Facing the other side of reality, and losing one's identity in the process, raises fundamental questions of what it is to be human.

Horror is also generated in the power of the past to obtrude on the present. The sins of forefathers biblically remind of their existence any scion of the family who is foolish enough to do detailed genealogical research. As Russ states, a sense of

"ontological insecurity" is born when "the conditions of existence are themselves fearful, when such basic ontological categories as space and time break down. . . ."[92] Humanity's ordering principle, time, breaks down in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. The past engulfs the present, and thus it becomes the present. As time structures collapse, there is no contradiction between what the narrator was, is, and will be, between the narrator then and now. His selves have become one. The source of horror lies in the collapse of conventional, secure categories, such as the past and the present, as well as human and monster. This collapse of time can be seen to have another facet as well. When eternity mixes with the present, as it does in religious thinking, the resulting chaos may seem like a horror. Time becomes suddenly something unfamiliar, almost non-existent. For Lovecraft, contradiction in time was a source of horror. However, time that is connected with, and engulfed by eternity can also be seen as a manifestation of the sacred.[93] Then, earthly time diminishes in importance. For the narrator, eternity is now reality as he has become an immortal fishfrog, and it ceases to be a horror for him.

Horror is fascinating. Paradoxically, horror fiction appeals to readers. Readers are horrified by the non-existent and the impossible. Experiencing horror and enjoying the sensation are paradoxes of the heart. Carroll's philosophy of horror provides a viewpoint on Lovecraft's horror as well. Horror is generated by the monsters that breach familiar conceptual categories. The thought of such creatures does not commit the reader to any belief in their existence, though. Lovecraft's horror is effective even though the reader refuses the mere possibility of his monsters. The implications of

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[92] Russ 504.

[93] Tommy Hellsten, *Elämän paradoksit: saat sen mistä luovut* (Helsinki: Kirjapaja Oy, 2001) 149.

Lovecraft's suggestions are horrifying, and fascinating enough to induce a profound sense of horror in the reader.

Lovecraft combines the above three elements of horror with success in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, that is, horror by implication, transmutation in the face of the unknown, and the past engulfing the present. The narrator is doomed to confront these in his own life on the pages of his story. The reader's share is the paradoxes of the heart. It can then be asked whose horror the monsters, and the implications of their existence, are in the end, the narrator's, or the reader's. Whose horror is it, and whom does it affect? The answer could be that the narrator experiences the horrors, and the reader can share them through the text, knowing they are fictional. On the one hand, for the narrator, everything in his life grows into horror, whereas the reader can combine fear with fascination because the story is not real for him or her. The reader, on the other hand, can watch the familiar world turn into a strange and weird one, and thus explore other possible worlds, pulling the blanket a little closer to the ears for the horror and excitement.

Lovecraft's texts do not provide readers with self-evidently "happy endings" and relief. However, the narrator manages to tear apart the shadow over Innsmouth. Dreams and writing help him accept what he is about to become. He survives the horror of confronting the monsters looming under the calm surface of the earth, and his heart. What was, at first, a horror to him becomes a bright future. He is bold enough to see his change as a chance instead of a threat.

> I shall plan my cousin's escape from that Canton madhouse, and together we shall go to the marvel-shadowed Innsmouth. We shall swim to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to

> Cyclopean and many-columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory for ever. (SOI 463.)[94]

Fear and fascination are combined in the ending of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. It interestingly deviates from Lovecraft's "go mad, or die" formula that usually follows the confrontation with the other face of the world. However, the horrific atmosphere is even stronger because of it. The ending combines horror and joy in a fascinating manner. The narrator gives up his human identity with pleasure, whereas for the reader, the contrast of horror and jubilation is a source of even greater horror. He or she is a helpless onlooker who can do nothing but be horrified at what the narrator experiences, watching his life flow by, without being able to touch it, and change its course.

Lovecraft's weird use of language, especially adjectives, is also part of creating horror. It contributes to the creation of the horrific mood in the stories, giving the reader a confusing sense of weirdness. Thus, the language becomes a part of the unknown. Lovecraft defamiliarises language. Defamiliarisation can be seen as "another word for 'originality.'"[95] His suggestive language is also a key to his late acknowledged success, but also a source of controversy. I think Lovecraft's use of language in the creation of the horrific atmosphere would deserve a treatise of its own, as do the realistic beginnings and the unreal endings of his stories.

I have attempted to give a picture of cosmic horror and its effects on the reader through Lovecraft's writing. In conclusion, I would say that Lovecraft had the skill to create chilling and disturbing horror, whatever the ultimate source of horror is thought to be. All of the above-described features function to create horrors that stick to the

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[94] Burleson points out that this extract is "a delectable parody of the ending of the 23rd Psalm" (B 176). The narrator receives a kind of baptism that gives him immortality as he becomes a fishfrog, and dives into the sea.

[95] David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd; London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1992) 55.

readers' minds. Lovecraft's realisations of humanity's insignificance related in his stories are horrifying and powerful. As Joshi neatly puts it,

> We are *not* the centre of the universe; we do *not* have a special relationship with God (because there is no God); we will vanish into oblivion when we die. It is scarcely to be wondered that many readers and writers have been unable to endure these withering conceptions. (J 653.)

Lovecraft's texts have too often been underestimated in literary value because his work was first published only in deprecated pulp magazines. Too many critics have ignored Lovecraft's ability to create an experience of estrangement that can be both liberating and vexing, depending on the reader. Readers can be shocked, and want to return to their own safe worlds, or they can identify with Lovecraft, sharing his relief in cosmic insignificance.

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List of Abbreviations

- A (Airaksinen)
- B (Burleson)
- C (Carroll)
- J (Joshi 1996)
- M (Mäyrä)
- P (Price)
- S (Schneider)
- SOI (*The Shadow over Innsmouth*)
- SUP ("Supernatural Horror in Literature").