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From Imitations to Lovecraftian Narratives The Main Differences between Lovecraft's Early and Later Stories *

Abstract

Howard Phillips Lovecraft is among the most prominent weird fiction writers. His works have such high prestige that in many cases texts discussing the genre do not describe the specific qualities that elevated his narratives above the stories of other writers. Most comparative works in Lovecraft studies either examine his effect on contemporary media or discuss the thematic concerns of his earlier and later stories. While most of Lovecraft's early stories show similarities with the narratives of his precursors, some already contain important elements that differentiate him from other weird fiction writers. To clearly define what distinguishes his most important works from that of Edgar Allan Poe or Arthur Machen, it is important to examine how these writers used the themes that are also present in Lovecraftian narratives. The most important differences lie in the use of the theme of forbidden knowledge and in the central theme to which it is connected. In Lovecraft's later stories, forbidden knowledge does not open up opportunities for human beings to defy the rules of nature for selfish ends; instead, it reveals that the laws created by humanity to describe nature are faulty or at least inadequate when applied to the whole of existence. The central theme of the nature of self-knowledge deals with the dreadful feeling this newly gained knowledge evokes in human beings, since they need to redefine their identity as they are displaced from their position at the center of the universe.

1. Introduction

It would be hard to find an article or book on weird fiction which does not mention Howard Phillips Lovecraft's name. His later narratives, such as "The Call of Cthulhu" and *At the Mountains of Madness,* are credited as landmark works of the genre and of horror literature in general. In describing weird fiction, many studies refer to essays written by Lovecraft, such as "Supernatural Horror in Literature", "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" and "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction", which highlights his importance in the process of defining this genre.

In the light of this, there is no question about the fact that Lovecraft had a great impact on weird fiction; however, when he is discussed in the context of the history of the genre, introductory texts often regard his position matter-of-factly and do not describe the reason that elevated his narratives above *most* of his precursors' and contemporaries' stories (Edgar Allan Poe is an exception in this case). The atmospheric approach to storytelling was already present in Poe's oeuvre and Arthur Machen's "The Great God Pan" already featured an indescribable otherworldly being before Lovecraft even started writing. This could create a feeling of puzzlement in anyone who just started to explore the world of Lovecraft studies, because it makes it is hard to grasp what makes a narrative distinctively Lovecraftian; what are those elements that cannot be found in the stories of Poe, Machen, Algernon Blackwood, etc.

* BA Thesis. Supervisor: Korinna Csetényi.

Most comparative analyses found in the issues of the *Lovecraft Annual* and in books edited by the most well-known Lovecraft scholar, S. T. Joshi, focus on the effects of Lovecraft on contemporary media or they detect differences and similarities between Lovecraft's earlier and later narratives. The latter approach could actually be quite helpful in deciding what defines Lovecraftian weird fiction, as his earlier narratives are heavily reliant on his precursors' aesthetics. Of course, the impact of these writers can also be seen in later, classic Lovecraftian narratives, such as *The Shadow Out of Time,* but in these stories Lovecraft was finally able to find his own artistic voice.

However, simply relying on the differences found between earlier and later narratives does not give a full picture. In many cases, the central idea of later stories can already be found in Lovecraft's earlier, but more progressive narratives: his philosophical standpoint regarding the place of humanity in the grand scheme of things (Burleson 2011, 139). The term "Lovecraftian" cannot be properly defined without a discussion of this thematic concern.

To make a clear distinction between Lovecraft's later stories and the works of other writers who influenced him, first I am going to explore the current state of Lovecraft studies regarding the definition of weird fiction, and the similarities and differences between Lovecraft's earlier and later stories. The main focus of this first section is going to be the discussion of the thematic concerns of Lovecraft's narratives, as most scholars are of the opinion that even though these stories share the same thematic concerns, later narratives use them in a more unique way. In the next section, I am going to apply the synthesized theory developed in the previous section on earlier narratives to illustrate *how* the shared themes are used in them. Then, I am going to examine how the same themes are used in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" and Arthur Machen's "The Great God Pan", and detect the similarities between these narratives and later Lovecraftian stories to separate the characteristics of later works, where the impact of Machen and Poe can still be felt. Finally, I am going to analyse several later narratives and define what distinguishes them from his earlier writings and the works of his precursors.

2. Lovecraft's thematic concerns and story-telling methods

China Miéville states that between 1880 and 1940 weird fiction was extremely popular and he defines the genre within this particular era[1]. While Miéville on many occasions refers to several of Lovecraft's essays and uses examples from Lovecraft's stories, it is important to note that his goal is not to define Lovecraftian weird fiction, but to explore the common characteristics of Lovecraft's and his contemporaries' weird fiction narratives. Other prolific weird fiction writers from this era include Algernon Blackwood, Arthur Machen, Clark Ashton Smith and William Hope Hodgson (Miéville 2009, 510).

Miéville argues that these writers, without an exception, all describe the fantastical elements of their stories with heavy "adjectivalism" (Miéville 2009, 512), meaning that the weird entity or event is only vaguely describable with human language, as the weird elements in these stories have absolutely no connection to the ordinary world, and therefore human languages have no words to depict them adequately (Miéville 2009, 512). Miéville states that with the inclusion of the weird elements in their narratives, these writers intended to create a feeling of "awe"

[1] It would be hard to define the genre as a whole since it is relatively new and it is still evolving. Contemporary weird narratives already seem to deviate from the formula established at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. For further information on contemporary weird fiction narratives, see Matt Cardin's comparative article, "The Master's Eyes Shining with Secrets: H. P. Lovecraft's Influence on Thomas Ligotti" and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's essay entitled "The New Weird".

(Miéville 2009, 510) in the reader, but he also highlighted the feeling of anxiety also apparent in these works, which could be traced back to the newly formed modern capitalist social order and the horrors of the First World War (Miéville 2009, 513).

While Miéville does not intend to characterize weird fiction writers individually, he calls attention in his essay to the misogyny in Machen's "The Great God Pan", and to the racism in Lovecraft's stories in connection with the main anxieties of the era. Miéville implies that the anxiety found in the center of Lovecraft's body of work is his own fear of "'inferior' races" (Miéville 2009, 513) and miscegenation (Miéville 2009, 513). Miéville supports his statement by referring to Michel Houellebecq's book, entitled *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life,* which S. T. Joshi marked as a problematic work. Joshi states that several lines to which Houellebecq refers cannot be found in any versions of Lovecraft's narratives and in many cases Houellebecq exaggerates. Joshi concludes that while Houellebecq's book sheds light on a rather problematic element in Lovecraft's body of work, it is important to note that "racial hatred" (Joshi 2018, 49) is not the main concern of Lovecraft's fiction, as Houellebecq argues (Joshi 2018, 49). Consequently, in light of Joshi's article, the same argument by Miéville should also be treated cautiously.

Miéville also highlights the atmospheric storytelling of weird fiction narratives, referring to Lovecraft's "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction". Miéville states that weird fiction tales use plot only as an excuse to explore certain weird concepts and ideas and their main concern is the awe and the anxiety these concepts and ideas evoke in the protagonists and in the reader (Miéville 2009, 510). Focusing on defining the meaning of the weird, the anxiety lying behind such fiction and the storytelling of these tales, Miéville does not discuss the thematic concerns of weird fiction narratives. Fortunately, the thematic concerns of Lovecraftian narratives are discussed by several other authors.

Donald R. Burleson states that there is a central theme in the majority of Lovecraft's oeuvre, which he calls "the nature of self-knowledge" (Burleson 2011, 139). According to Burleson, this central theme deals with the psychological and emotional results of an individual's realization of his/her unimportance in the vastness of time and space, and of the exploration of one's true origin, identity or pre-determined future, which were hidden before. He argues that in Lovecraft's fiction most of the recurring themes are all derived from or connected to this central theme (Burleson 2011, 139).

In my opinion, the theme of "the nature of self-knowledge" contains two additional themes listed by David E. Schultz. These are the themes of "the loss of, change in or transposition of identity" and "the relative unimportance of humans (or any other entities, for that matter) when seen from a cosmic point of view" (Schultz 2011, 209). Interestingly, Schultz does not indicate that any of these themes would be central in Lovecraft's writing career. Instead, he argues that only the stories written between 1926 and 1935 could be termed as Lovecraftian narratives, as in Lovecraft's early stories his "cosmic outlook" (Schultz 2011, 209) is either only vaguely expressed or entirely absent (Schultz 2011, 209). Therefore, Schultz's essay claims that the theme of "the relative unimportance of humans [...] when seen from a cosmic point of view" is central not in Lovecraft's body of work, but in understanding what made Lovecraft's artistic vision unique in his later years.

Along with this central theme, Burleson listed five recurring minor themes in Lovecraft's narratives, and "the theme of forbidden knowledge, or merciful ignorance" (Burleson 2011, 140) is missing from Schultz's list. Yet Schultz also highlighted that in later narratives merciful ignorance plays an important role, as the narrators often face the dilemma of whether to share their knowledge with the rest of humanity or not, and in many cases they wish to forget what

they learned about the existence of a weird entity or entities, even though it is impossible to erase from their memory what they experienced or saw (Schultz 2011, 223–224).

The exploration of knowledge in Lovecraft's narratives is a crucial point in S. T. Joshi's "'Reality' and Knowledge: Some Notes on Lovecraft's Aesthetic", in which he claims that the change in Lovecraft's attitude towards knowledge in his fiction is indicative of his growth as an artist. Joshi states that in his early stories, such as "The Other Gods", Lovecraft uses the "hubris theme" (Joshi 2014, 111) in the same manner as it was used in ancient Greek narratives. Joshi defines this in the following way: with the increase of knowledge, vanity also increases in the individual, leading him/her to believe that he/she is above the Gods, or the laws of nature. This belief, Joshi further explains, results in the abuse of knowledge and science, which has disastrous consequences for the individual. This use of the "hubris theme" originates from Lovecraft's fondness for Lord Dunsany's fiction, which Joshi characterizes as moral tales rooted in European folk mythology. However, Joshi interprets the presence of the "hubris theme" in a different manner in later narratives. In such works as *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Shadow out of Time,* the action of seeking knowledge does not imply disastrous consequences for the individual only but also for humanity, for Earth, or for the entire universe.

Another difference regarding knowledge in Lovecraft's early and later narratives is the presence of an "amoral" (Joshi 2014, 113) knowledge. In certain stories, such as "The Call of Cthulhu", where characters are unable to cope with the forbidden knowledge they gained, Lovecraft does not depict the said knowledge as something malevolent; he merely emphasizes the imperfect nature of the human mind, which is not suited to perceive everything within the universe and wholly understand it. In such stories, it does not ultimately matter whether humankind gains knowledge regarding a hidden truth or not, because in either case humans are unable to have an impact on the thing or event they learned about since they are too small and too insignificant in the grand scheme of things to make a change (Joshi 2014, 113).

Another theme connected to the central one of "the nature of self-knowledge" is "the theme of illusory surface appearances" (Burleson 2011, 140). Burleson states that Lovecraft sometimes deals with the idea of a horrible reality hiding behind the surface of the world and how the protagonists catch a glimpse of this world lying beyond the one that is comprehensible to humans (Burleson 2011, 140). In discussing Lovecraft's artistic intent, Joshi calls attention to Lovecraft's wording when explaining his main goal with his stories in his "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction". Lovecraft did not intend to depict aliens as supernatural beings, but wanted to create the *"illusion"* (Joshi 2014, 105) of the supernatural (Joshi 2014, 105). The strange events and beings encountered by Lovecraft's protagonists are not above the rules of nature, but are their extensions (Joshi 2014, 106). This notion can also be connected to the concept of amoral knowledge as its danger does not lie in its evilness, but in the fact that it reveals truths belonging to a different realm of existence, which are incomprehensible to the human mind. Therefore, the possession of this knowledge could cause madness (Joshi 2014, 113).

Burleson notes that the "theme of forbidden knowledge, or merciful ignorance" may overlap with "the theme of unwholesome survival" (Burleson 2011, 140), which deals with the past bleeding into the present either through creatures with seemingly unnatural lifespans or through the consequences of past events still apparent in the present. This theme combines in itself the themes of the "revivification of the dead" and "the survival of the ancient in the modern times" (Schultz 2011, 209). In exploring further overlappings among themes, Burleson explains that "the theme of denied primacy" (the realization that the reign of humankind on Earth is only a temporary state of the planet) is strongly connected to "the theme of unwholesome survival", and he also states that "the theme of oneiric objectivism" (the notion that dreams may be as real

as the real world itself) overlaps with "the theme of forbidden knowledge, or merciful ignorance" (Burleson 2011, 140).

Regarding dreams in Lovecraft's narratives, Joshi argues that Lovecraft's intention was not to blur the line between dreams and reality, but to suggest that during dreaming, his protagonists are able to catch a glimpse of other realms of existence (Joshi 2014, 107). Schultz lists three additional themes, termed by Lovecraft himself, one of them being the theme of "dream-life" (Schultz 2011, 209). The other two are the themes of "cosmic 'outsidedness'" and "strange shadow" (Schultz 2011, 209). Schultz's list also includes the themes of "madness", "decay and degeneration", "key and gateway" and Lovecraft's "antimythology" (Schultz 2011, 209) (a recurring feature in Lovecraftian narratives, where entities that were believed to be fictional creatures from ancient mythology are proven to be real) (Schultz 2011, 222).

Contrary to Burleson, Schultz's aim in his essay was not to list the recurring themes in Lovecraft's oeuvre, but to illustrate how Lovecraft rewrote his older stories in his later narratives and also to explain how he managed to rewrite these tales with greater artistic success. Schultz also examined these questions from a biographical standpoint, arguing that Lovecraft's stay in New York had an immense effect on his writing, as it broadened and strengthened his connection to the outside world. Consequently, Lovecraft's protagonists changed from "outsiders" and selfish, eccentric "thrillseekers" into well-respected academics, who deeply care about the fate of humanity (Schultz 2011, 219).

Another important aspect of Lovecraft's later narratives is their credibility provided by their storytelling method. Schultz states that while Lovecraft's technique of narrating his tales through fictional newspaper articles, journal entries, memoirs and the likes is already present in several of his earlier narratives, such as "Dagon", or the "The Statement of Randolph Carter", it is most prominent in his later narratives (Schultz 2011, 220).

3. Lovecraft's Tales Preceding "The Call of Cthulhu"

Lovecraft's "Cool Air" deals with the themes of "unwholesome survival" and the "revivification of the dead": eighteen years before the events of the short story, Dr Torres reanimated Dr Muñoz, fulfilling Dr Muñoz's wish. Talking to the narrator, who was a neighbour of the scientist and occasionally visited him, Dr Muñoz only vaguely refers to Dr Torres' death; however, at the end of the story he confesses that Dr Torres was killed by shock, caused by the process of the reanimation and by the realization that the deterioration of the flesh cannot be completely stopped. The consequences of the use of forbidden knowledge also affect Dr Muñoz: at the end of the narrative he finally meets his horrible end, which was caused by the inevitable deterioration discussed in the narrative. In this story, the "hubris theme" appears in the same didactical way as it does in Lord Dunsany's narratives, in the sense that the possessors of forbidden knowledge use it to play God and to defy the rules of nature, which ends in disaster for them.

"Herbert West—Reanimator" contains the same themes as "Cool Air", but uses them for a slightly different effect. Dr Muñoz used forbidden knowledge to escape death and lengthen his life; however, Herbert West only used it to satisfy his curiosity, not caring about the fiendish beings he unleashes upon the world. The narrator witnessed West's strange experiments, which consisted of the reanimations of dead bodies and severed body parts. Contrary to "Cool Air", "Herbert West—Reanimator" has an unreliable narrator. Since no one else has seen the gruesome and unbelievable death of Herbert West (his creations took revenge on him for forcing them back into existence to live in mutilated/deteriorated bodies), the narrator is stigmatized

as a mad person by society, while in "Cool Air" many people have seen the horrible remains of Dr Muñoz.

Although in "Cool Air" and "Herbert West—Reanimator" "the theme of unwholesome survival" is connected to that of the "revivification of the dead", in the case of "Dagon", it is connected to the theme of "the survival of the ancient in the modern times". The narrator of "Dagon" finds himself on a seemingly uninhabited island which reeks of rotten flesh. Soon he learns that the island probably emerged from the ocean in the recent past and the smell is caused by the carcasses of dead sea animals. As he explores the island, he encounters a giant, prehistoric, half-fish, half-human creature. The notion that there are prehistoric terrestrial entities in the oceans hints at "the theme of denied primacy". The narrator fears the day on which the island reemerges from the ocean, since he has realized the fragile nature of the reign of humankind on Earth and that humans are not at the center of existence. This fear suggests the central theme of "the nature of self-knowledge".

Schultz points out that contrary to later narratives, the protagonist and narrator of "Dagon" is isolated from the rest of humanity, as he sees the gigantic fish-like humanoid creature alone on an isolated island and writes his memoirs on the events locked in a room (Schultz 2011, 213). The unreliable narration of early stories (Schultz 2011, 223) is also present in "Dagon": the narrator confessed that he used morphine to ease the dread caused by his memories of the events on the island (thus the theme of "merciful ignorance" also emerges). The implication of suicide at the end of the story further emphasizes the unstable nature of the narrator.

Burleson states that the title of "The Statement of Randolph Carter" already hints at the ambiguous nature of the plot, as it does not refer to the actual happenings of the story, but highlights the fact that the narrative is told by Randolph Carter (Burleson 2009, 19). Carter's reference to police investigations further strengthens his unreliability, as detectives and officers have not found anything that would verify his statements.

In this story, the theme of the "key and gateway" unleashes indescribable horrors upon the characters. Randolph Carter's friend, Harley Warren, is well-read in occult literature and possesses a mysterious key that opens a portal in an ancient cemetery and he invites Carter to explore its mysteries together. As Warren encounters "the *thing*" (Lovecraft 1999, 10) behind the gates, he states that what he is seeing is *"terrible—monstrous—unbelievable", "too utterly beyond thought",* and *"no man could know it and live"* (Lovecraft 1999, 11). When Carter hears the voice of "the *thing",* he gives a description in the form of a question to the officers, with extreme "adjectivalism". When trying to describe the voice he heard, he lists the following adjectives: "deep; hollow; gelatinous; remote; unearthly; inhuman; disembodied" (Lovecraft 1999, 13). Both descriptions emphasize the otherworldliness of the weird entity. Its extraordinary nature and the fact that it seems supernatural in the light of the plot rather than an extension of the laws of nature are in line with the typical approach of Lovecraft's earlier narratives.

The notion that the existence of a weird entity does not defy the rules of nature can be observed in Lovecraft's "From Beyond", which pays a lot of attention to "the theme of illusory surface appearances". An unnamed narrator tells the story of a dreadful meeting with a former colleague, called Crawford Tillinghast. Tillinghast is in horrible shape at the time of the events of the story, and the narrator also notes that his servants have vanished from his house. Tillinghast contacted the narrator in order to inform him about his great scientific breakthrough. He built a machine that reactivates the pineal gland in the human brain, which is a dormant sensory organ. After Tillinghast switched on the machine, the narrator first sees ultraviolet rays, then realms beyond the material world and finally, he starts to see jelly-fishlike creatures floating in the air. Near the end of the story, Tillinghast informs the narrator that there are even more horrible entities in this newly discovered realm and that these absorbed all

his servants. Tillinghast emphasizes their weirdness as he states that "they come out of places where aesthetic standards are—*very different*" (Lovecraft 2005, 29) and the narrator's frantic reaction to Tillinghast's remark that one is "just over" his "left shoulder" (Lovecraft 2005, 29) further strengthens the notion of their terrible, indescribable nature. The narrator shoots at the machine and faints. After he wakes up, investigators explain that Tillinghast died in a heart attack, and they think that he murdered his servants. The doctors who examine the narrator state that the he was hypnotized. The theme of "merciful ignorance" emerges as the narrator wishes he could believe the doctors and the officers but since the bodies of the servants were never found, he doubts the rational explanation of the investigators.

Tillinghast's statement, "space belongs to me" (Lovecraft 2005, 29), suggests the "hubris theme" in connection with "the theme of forbidden knowledge", as the statement strongly implies that he feels empowered by the fact that he discovered new realms of existence. Yet, a simple heart attack kills him at the end of the story, which was possibly caused by his shock of hearing the loud noises made by the narrator's gun while he was shooting.

In discussing the aftermath of these events, the narrator refers to certain newspaper articles. S. T. Joshi points out that in many cases the story refers to existing locations and family names (Joshi 2009, 405–407), placing it in a world similar to the one we live in in almost every aspect, except for the fantastical element.

Lovecraft's "The Outsider", with its nightmarish storytelling, is the direct opposite of "From Beyond". The nameless narrator's latest memory is that he found himself in the ruins of an old castle surrounded by impenetrable, dark woods; he has no recollection of his identity and has only faint memories of human beings. He had never seen sunlight before the events of the story, as the trees grew way above the castle. Only one tower was tall enough to reach beyond the trees, which he climbs to finally catch a glimpse of what is above the forest. After the climb, he enters a ball, where people stare in his direction in horror and then start to flee. The Outsider learns that he has been dead for a long time and somehow he returned to life. The story deals with the theme of "the survival of the ancient in the modern times" through the character of the Outsider, and the theme of "the nature of self-knowledge", as the Outsider learns the truth about his horrible identity.

4. The Precursors of Lovecraft

"Ligeia" is among Edgar Allan Poe's most well-known supernatural gothic stories. Lovecraft's early narratives show many similarities with it, proving that they are heavily reliant on Poe's artistry; however, they also show some features that are not present in Poe's aesthetics. Most characteristics of the story-telling of weird fiction narratives listed by Miéville and some of the thematic concerns of Lovecraft noted by Schultz and Burleson are present in "Ligeia".

Like the weird fiction narratives written between 1880 and 1940, "Ligeia" also focuses on the dreadful atmosphere of the story, giving long descriptions of the strange, ghost-like features of Lady Ligeia and of the gruesome details of the building where the narrator moved with his second wife; however, it is important to note that the story does not use the "adjectivalism" of later weird fiction narratives. The reason for this is that even though "Ligeia" features events and beings that are out of the ordinary (the figure of Lady Ligeia could be seen as a ghost, while the ending could be interpreted as the possession of Lady Rowena's body by Ligeia), these were already present in European folklore and Christian mythology. Miéville highlights that the tentacle became the most iconic body part of weird creatures, because it has never or only rarely been used in constructing fictional beings before. Weird fiction narratives feature events and

beings that would not only be out of the ordinary in reality, but that are also unprecedented in any fiction written before (Miéville 2009, 512) and there is no such element in Poe's story.

The story of "Ligeia" is told in the first person by the opium-addict main character, whose presence makes the narrative ambiguous, leaving room for multiple interpretations. As reality is hardly distinguishable from hallucinations, his point of view is connected to "the theme of oneiric objectivism". The figure of the unreliable narrator is also present in Lovecraft's early tales, as in many cases it is suggested that the narrators were victims of paranoia, hallucinations or hypnotization.

A common thematic concern of "Ligeia" and Lovecraft's narratives is "the theme of unwholesome survival"; however, whether it merely features the theme of "revivification of the dead" or together with "the survival of the ancient in the modern times" depends on interpretation. If we interpret Lady Ligeia as a ghost from the beginning of the narrative (this would explain her ghoulish appearance), then it features the theme of "the survival of the ancient in the modern times". On the other hand, if we accept the narrator's memories of her death as true, and it was him who poisoned Lady Rowena, then the story ends in the "revivification of the dead".

Another overlapping theme of "Ligeia" and Lovecraft's tales is "the theme of forbidden knowledge". However, contrary to some early Lovecraft stories, such as "Dagon", "Ligeia" does not include the notion of "merciful ignorance". It is either the narrator or Ligeia who uses the results of her metaphysical studies for selfish reasons. If it is the narrator who poisoned Lady Rowena, his goal was to reanimate Ligeia, while if the perpetrator was Ligeia, she wanted to return from the unknown to the material world. In either case, the act defies the rules of nature, as the story does not connect the forbidden knowledge possessed by Ligeia to contemporary sciences. This suggests that the forbidden knowledge is not something that is incomprehensible to human beings, but something immoral to possess, as its possessor is able to defy the rules of the material world. Therefore, these characters do not wish to forget their hard-won knowledge. This notion is in line with the "hubris theme" found in Lovecraft's early tales. Herbert West and Crawford Tillinghast have done their research in order to satisfy their curiosity, and Dr. Muñoz in "Cool Air" intended to escape death. However, Poe's story uses the "the theme of forbidden knowledge" in a manner that cannot be found in Lovecraft's oeuvre.

Jules Zanger, when discussing the nature of forbidden knowledge in several of Poe's narratives, concludes that it is connected to the central theme of Poe's work, which is the theme of human mortality (Zanger 1978, 542). Interestingly, while some of Lovecraft's early characters, such as Herbert West and Dr. Muñoz, fought against mortality, this theme of the fear of death and the realization of human mortality are not central in these stories. Poe's central theme is different from Lovecraft's central theme of "the nature of self-knowledge", and this proves Burleson's argument regarding Lovecraft's early narratives: even though these stories are heavily reliant on Poe's aesthetics, there is still something distinctively Lovecraftian at their core.

However, it was not only Poe who had an immense effect on Lovecraft's artistic vision. When the narrator saw drops of poison fall into Lady Rowena's drink in "Ligeia", along with "the theme of oneiric objectivism", "the theme of illusory surface appearances" also emerges, as the reader begins to question which parts of the story were true and which parts were opium-induced hallucinations. These themes resurface at the end, when another unnatural event, Lady Ligeia's return, takes place. However, Poe does not seem to suggest the existence of another disturbing reality masked by the world as constructed by human senses. This is the main concern of Arthur Machen's "The Great God Pan".

In the beginning of first chapter of "The Great God Pan", Dr. Raymond explains his new findings to his friend, Clarke. He refers to the material world as nothing "but dreams and

shadows" and states that "[t]here *is* a real world" (Machen 2018, 10); however it could only be reached by surpassing the limitations of human perception. In order to make the crossing possible, he performs an experiment on his wife. He believes that by making an extremely small cut in the tissue of her brain, she will see "the great god Pan" (Machen 2018, 10). The experiment proves to be successful, as after her waking Mary opened her eyes and "wonder fell upon her face" (Machen 2018, 15). Seconds later it turned into "the most awful terror" (Machen 2018, 15) and she was left in a catatonic state. Dr. Raymond explains that the sight was too much for her.

The scientists in Lovecraft's early narratives show similarities with the figure of Dr. Raymond; however, this type of character is not Machen's own; its presence in horror narratives could be traced back to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Similarly to Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Raymond, Herbert West, Crawford Tillinghast and Dr. Muñoz all use science without any moral concerns. Despite the similarities, the "hubris theme" is not applicable to Dr. Raymond's use of forbidden knowledge, since he does not receive the punishment fitting his crime. While Frankenstein aimed to make a contribution to mankind with his findings, Dr. Raymond, Tillinghast and Herbert West used science only to satisfy their thirst for knowledge and Dr. Muñoz used it to gain a kind of immortality.

The presence of "amoral" knowledge is questionable in the case of "The Great God Pan". On the one hand, it is explained in the story that Mary's catatonic state was a product of her immense shock caused by the sight of realms and beings vastly different from the material world. On the other hand, the reader also learns that Mary was raped and impregnated by a being from the other side and the offspring of this union, Helen Vaughan, is actively hostile towards humans. James Goho calls attention to Machen's distaste of "modernity [...], atheism [...], materialism, and science" (Goho 2014, 28), which strongly suggests that Machen intended his story to be read as a cautionary tale about the dangers of modern sciences, as the otherworldly is reached through neuroscience. This notion, however, makes the weird not supernatural, but the extension of natural laws, which is similar to Lovecraft's aim with the depiction of fantastical elements of his stories. Goho also highlights the gnostic worldview of Machen's tales, stating that in his weird stories "the world beyond is not sacred but evil" (Goho 2014, 30), which further weakens the possibility of the presence of "amoral" knowledge.

The theme of forbidden knowledge reemerges in the fragmented narration of the last chapter, overlapping with the theme of "antimythology". One of the fragments refers to an ancient ruin where there is a writing on a pillar referring to a marriage between a human being and a god named Nodens. While historians are clueless about what the writing actually means, in light of the previous events of the story, it could refer to similar events that happened in the past. Even though these events were believed to be mythical, they are ultimately proven to be real, which suggests that humankind is in the state of "merciful ignorance". This notion was later incorporated into a great number of Lovecraft's stories.

Editor Aaron Worth noticed several references to contemporary events, such as the Jack the Ripper murders, in Machen's story and also existing street and family names in London and in other locations (Worth 2018, 353–356). Machen, aside from the fantastical elements, depicted his fictional world as close to reality as possible. The same attention to realistic details can also be detected in several of Lovecraft's narratives.

Goho interprets Machen's story in a religious way, stating that it is about the coming of the Antichrist in the character of Helen Vaughan, in which case "the great god Pan" is Satan (Goho 2014, 35) (the mother's name is the same as the name of the mother of Christ). This gnostic vision of "The Great God Pan" is in opposition with the "cosmic outlook" of Lovecraft's later stories.

5. "The Call of Cthulhu" and Later Narratives

Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" is the turning-point of his writing career, where his style, distinct from Poe and Machen is finally fully developed. According to Burleson, the opening lines of the narrative already hint at the theme of forbidden knowledge and merciful ignorance (Burleson 2011, 145), while Schultz claims that they emphasize the narrator's feeling of "responsibility to his fellow human beings" (Schultz 2011, 219). Burleson connects the mentioning of "terrifying vistas of reality" (Lovecraft 1999, 139), which become accessible with the forbidden knowledge, to "the theme of illusory surface appearances". In the second paragraph, "the theme of unwholesome survival" or the theme of "the survival of the ancient in the modern times", emerges, and it is also suggested that the dread of the narrator does not originate in a single event, but in the "accidental piecing together of separated things" (Lovecraft 1999, 140). The themes and motifs introduced here are all connected to the central theme of "the nature of self-knowledge", the theme of "cosmic 'outsidedness'", or the themes of "the relative unimportance of humans [...] when seen from a cosmic point of view" and "the loss of, change in, or transposition of identity", as the narrator believes that the forbidden knowledge discussed in the story could lead to humankind's realization of the meaninglessness of their actions in the grand scheme of existence. He also implies that this realization could lead to the collective madness of humanity.

The narrator, Francis Wayland Thurston, claims that the chain of events leading to his dreadful realization began when he inherited certain documents from his late grand-uncle, Professor George Gammell Angell. Along the documents was a box, which contained seemingly unrelated newspaper articles, accounts, a manuscript and a bas-relief. The theme of "oneiric objectivism" also appears in the story since Thurston learns from the manuscript that the bas-relief was made by an artist who saw the strange model of the statue in his dreams. Similar pieces were found in the possession of unrelated primitive tribes, who worshipped the alien figure as a god-like being all around the globe.

By further investigating the strange connections discussed in the documents, Thurston acquires another manuscript, written by a sailor named Gustaf Johansen. This narrative reveals that the alien being, named Cthulhu, seen in dreams by many people and worshipped by several tribes, is actually a living being. This revelation can be connected to the theme of "anti-mythology", as at that point the existence of the alien, prevously believed to be a mythological, fictional being by anthropologists, is finally proven.

Cthulhu's material appearance is wholly alien to humans: the bas-relief of Cthulhu portrays a "pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings" (Lovecraft 1999, 141), while Johansen's manuscript suggested that Cthulhu "cannot be described—there is no language for [...] such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order" (Lovecraft 1999, 167). Thurston's statement that "[t]he stars were right again, and what an age-old cult had failed to do by design, a band of innocent sailors had done by accident" (Lovecraft 1999, 167) suggests that Cthulhu is not a malevolent being invading people's dreams in order to gain followers, but that it is a mere accident that some people were able to sense it in their dreams. Even the place where Cthulhu is waiting surpasses human comprehension, and evokes "the theme of illusory surface appearances" with its complicated geometry. For example Johansen mentions "an angle which was acute, but behaved as if it were obtuse" (Lovecraft 1999, 167).

Joshi convincingly argues that the forbidden knowledge is "amoral" in "The Call of Cthulhu", since nobody gains anything from the terrible revelation; it simply cannot be used by human beings. The collective madness it could cause does not come from its malevolence but

from the fact that the human mind is not capable of dealing with such knowledge. Therefore, the "hubris theme" does not apply in this case, which proves that "The Call of Cthulhu" is an outstanding narrative. (Joshi 2014, 113)

Even more incomprehensible and indescribable are the horrors in "The Colour Out of Space", in which the weird entity's physical manifestation is nothing more than a distinctive colour, which is "unlike any known colours of the normal spectrum" (Lovecraft 1999, 175). The entity arrives in a meteorite from outer space. The substance of the meteorite disappears after its arrival, but its glowing colour, which turns out to be a living entity, stays for a longer period of time on the land where it crashed into Earth. The Colour feeds on the beings living in a farmstead until nothing remains of them but "[f]ive eldritch acres of dusty grey desert" (Lovecraft 1999, 197). At the end of the narrative, people see it leaving the farm and it is described as a "riot of luminous amorphousness", which is also "undimensioned" (Lovecraft 1999, 196), emphasizing the alien nature of the entity.

As the old man, who tells the narrator the story of the Colour, and some other people watch the entity going up into the sky, they are left with a forbidden knowledge which is different from the forbidden knowledge appearing in the early tales of Lovecraft. Joshi states that in tales like "The Colour Out of Space" and "The Call of Cthulhu", Lovecraft expresses his standpoint that it is better to stay in a state of merciful ignorance if there is something out in the world endangering humanity about which nothing can be done (Joshi 2014, 113).

However, in some stories the narrators' judgement on the possible outcome of events in light of their newly gained knowledge leads them to record their knowledge to inform humanity about certain dangers. Such is the case in the novella entitled *At the Mountains of Madness,* in which Professor William Dyer reports his experiences regarding his expedition to Antarctica in order to reveal the dangers hiding on the continent and to dissuade other explorers from further examinations.

After a short separation from the main group of explorers, Professor Lake and his colleagues find several specimens of a prehistoric species unknown to humankind; among them many were unharmed. They report their findings to the main group led by Professor Dyer; however, after a while they lose contact with Dyer's group. When the main group travelled to the location where Professor Lake and his men examined the bodies, a horrific scene awaits them. With one exception Professor Lake's men are all murdered, the damaged specimens of the ancient race are buried and the unharmed specimens vanished from sight.

The theme of "antimythology" emerges in the story as the research group names the newly found race the Elder Things since they heavily resemble mythical creatures of the same name (the source of these myths will be discussed later). Later the researchers realize that the murders were not committed by the missing man from Professor Lake's group, but by the unharmed specimens of the Elder Things. However, Professor Dyer does not consider their actions as aggression towards humanity, but as acts of self-defence: "what had they done that we would not have done in their place?" (Lovecraft 2001, 330). The Elder Things are not depicted as malevolent creatures but as entities of "another age and another order of being" (Lovecraft 2001, 330). This notion places the story in an amoral universe, which is a key feature of Lovecraftian narratives (Joshi 2014, 114). If we look at the events from a more objective perspective, the murder of the research group shifts from being a horrendous crime to a tragic event for both the research group and the Elder Things, because the alien beings wake up only to realize that their species left the cities in which they originally lived and probably their whole race were eradicated.

Professor Dyer does not refer to the surviving specimens of the Elder Things as the dangers awaiting the explorers of Antarctica. The professor and another explorer found and entered the

Antarctic city of the Elder Things where they found carvings and bas-reliefs on the walls. From these artworks, they learned that the Elder Things created a life-form on earth which the narrator named the "shoggoths" (Lovecraft 2002, 300), after the mythical creatures found in the *Necronomicon*. Originally, the shoggoths were made to serve the Elder Things; however, with time some of them rebelled and started a war against the Elder Things. Professor Dyer and his collegue found the corpses of the Elder Things that escaped from Professor Lake's camp and they were murdered in the same manner as the shoggoths killed their enemies during the war. Not long after, the two men encountered a living shoggoth.

Joshi states that Professor Dyer's main concern goes beyond his anxiety caused by the newly gained forbidden knowledge about the insignificance of humankind. He feels that it is his duty to stop explorers before they accidentally let loose a shoggoth to prey on humanity (Joshi 2014, 112). Apart from the shoggoths still living in the ruins of the ancient Antarctic city, there is something even more dangerous in the mountains. Even the Elder Things did not fully understand this *thing,* and when Danforth (who explored the city of the Elder Things along with Professor Dyer) sees it at the end of the narrative, he goes mad in an instant. This suggests that the *thing* in the mountains is something utterly alien and weird, and it should not be uncovered by human beings because our mind is incapable of comprehending it.

The revelation that there are still living shoggoths in the Antarctic cities and that the Elder Things were roused from their sleep while being subjected to various forms of examinations is connected to "the theme of unwholesome survival", while the fact that the Elder Things came to Earth long before the dawn of humankind is an example for "the theme of denied primacy" in the story. The emotional impact reaches its climax when it is revealed that all living organisms known to humans are derived from entities created by the Elder Things and the ones from which humans developed were made to serve as food for their creators. Thus, the above mentioned themes are also connected to the central theme of "the nature of self-knowledge".

Throughout the novel, many references are made to Lovecraft's other narratives. As Professor Dyer and Danforth study the history of the Elder Things, it is revealed that the Elder Things fought against the Mi-Go race, which first appeared in *The Whisperer in Darkness,* and the spawn of Cthulhu (the Great Old Ones), which implies that the creature encountered by Johansen in "The Call of Cthulhu" is only one member of a whole race. When Danforth catches a glimpse of the *thing* in the mountains and begins to speak incoherently, he refers to Yog-Sothoth, which was mentioned in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and "The Dunwich Horror" and he also refers to the colour out of space, which appears in the narrative of the same name. The narrator first learned of the Elder Things from the *Necronomicon,* a book that appears in many Lovecraft stories. Professor Dyer himself later reappeared in *The Shadow out of Time*.

In *The Shadow out of Time* the narrator, Professor Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee, learns that the strange dreams he sees night after night are actually his own memories of things he experienced in a different body while the original possessor of that body learnt about humankind, disguised in Peaslee's body. The being that exchanged bodies with the Professor was a member of the Great Race of Yith, an alien species resembling both plants and animals, which was able to project its consciousness through time and space and collected knowledge on various civilizations that existed, exist or will exist in the universe. The Great Race of Yith is in no way malignant towards other species, as the specimens of other races with which the members of the Great Race exchanged bodies were allowed to explore their cities in their temporary bodies and gain knowledge from the vast libraries of the Yithians. The concept that the weird experiences of the protagonist were not the result of malignancy or benevolence, but simply of another race's thirst for knowledge places the story in an amoral universe.

From the narration we learn that the members of the Great Race projected their consciousness into the bodies of another race in order to save their civilization when their home planet was destroyed. The body which was temporarily inhabited by the narrator was actually not a Yithian body but a prehistoric terrestrial body, which is of a race more ancient than humanity. This idea calls to mind "the theme of denied primacy".

Traces of the theme of "antimythology" can be detected when Professor Peaslee suggests that certain parts of the *Necronomicon* were likely inspired by the accounts of people who, similarly to him, had memories of exchanging bodies with a Yithian creature. When his consciousness was projected into the past, the Professor met several human beings from past and future civilizations with whom members of the Great Race exchanged bodies. He also met captives from other alien civilizations, including members of the Elder Things.

The intertextual references of the narrative extend beyond Lovecraft's oeuvre, as the narrator states that he also met three members of "the furry pre-human Hyperborean worshippers of Tsathoggua" and "one from the wholly abominable Tcho-Tchos" (Lovecraft 2005, 359), referring to works of Clark Ashton Smith and August Derleth. Along with the *Necronomicon,* he also mentions other fictional works, used in the narratives of Robert Bloch *(Cultes des Goules, De Vermis Mysteriis),* Robert E. Howard *(Unaussprechlichen Kulten)* and Clark Ashton Smith *(Book of Eibon).*

When *The Shadow out of Time* was written, the many connections between Lovecraft's and other writers' stories clearly suggested that these narratives take place in the same fictional universe. However, it is important to mention that the "Cthulhu mythos" as depicted in board games and other products of contemporary pop culture, is not faithful to the original intentions of Lovecraft's world-building. These products depict the Great Old Ones as malevolent entities, primarily aiming to destroy humanity and are founded upon the concept of the duality of good and evil. Joshi states that this notion comes from August Derleth's interpretation of Lovecraft's oeuvre, which is based on Christianity. This is in opposition to Lovecraft's intentions, which were rooted in his materialistic philosophy (Joshi 2014, 601).

In *The Shadow out of Time,* the narrator discovered fragments of information regarding the "utterly alien" (Lovecraft 2005, 364) nature of the Great Old Ones. Professor Peaslee states that "[t]hey were only partly material—as we understand matter" (Lovecraft 2005, 364), highlighting the inadequacy of human languages and raising the question whether words can describe *everything* within the boundaries of existence. He further adds that "their type of consciousness and media of perception differed wholly from those of terrestrial organisms" (Lovecraft 2005, 364) to emphasize the vast difference between human beings and the Great Old Ones. To further explain their weirdness, he claims that "their senses did not include that of sight; their mental world being a strange, non-visual pattern of impressions" (Lovecraft 2005, 364). This characeristic of the Great Old Ones is connected to "the theme of illusory surface appearances", as it suggests that the world as we know it is only an interpretation of reality made by our mind and not reality itself. These lines might be the most ambitious use of this theme in Lovecraft's oeuvre as they not only suggest that there is more to the world than what human perception is able to process, but question the concept itself by which the human brain understands reality mentally (colours, shapes, sounds, smells, tastes, etc.). The notion that the Great Old Ones interpret reality in a wholly different manner, which is unimaginable to human beings, further emphasizes their "amoral" nature, which has already been explored in "The Call of Cthulhu". The war between the Great Old Ones, the Great Race of Yith and the Elder Things was not a battle between good and evil, but a battle between three completely different races, all of them fighting for survival. The narrative not only strengthens their amoral nature in describing this war, but also strips the Great Old Ones of their godly status (given by human beings in "The

Call of Cthulhu") as the narrator learns that they were temporarily defeated with electricity by the Yithians. Consequently, the peril of their awakening does not lie in their malignancy but in their territorial needs. Humanity appears to them as ants appear to humans. They are not hateful towards us, but they do not welcome other species in the areas they claim as their own (in this case Earth).

In order to decide whether he was suffering from a mental breakdown or he has real memories of visiting a prehistoric civilization, Professor Peaslee visits an archaeological excavation in Australia, where he was invited by the head of the research group, Robert B. F. Mackenzie. He read about Professor Peaslee's visions of ancient cities in psychological journals and saw connections between the ruins, the legends of the aboriginal Australians and Peaslee's account of the strange dreams he saw.

As professor Peaslee, together with his son and Professor Dyer, travels to Australia, he realizes that his dreams are real memories. In the ruins he finds a text written in his own handwriting and he hears a voice which is highly reminiscent of the voices of the Great Old Ones as described in the various accounts on them. The problem is that these events happened while he was isolated from the rest of the group and he lost the text on his way back to the camp. Peaslee's account of his frantic escape from the ruins as he heard the voice of the Great Old Ones further questions the reliability of the narration as he states that "[a]ny further impressions belong wholly to the domain of phantasmagoric delirium" (Lovecraft 2005, 393).

It is important to note that similarly to Francis Wayland Thurston and Professor Dyer, Professor Peaslee is responsible not only for himself but his actions could also have an impact on the whole planet. The forbidden knowledge he gained carries horrible revelation both for himself and for the rest of humanity, and it is his responsibility to stop the excavation in Australia since its continuation could release the Great Old Ones from their prison.

6. Conclusion

Lovecraft's earlier and later narratives share many thematic concerns; however, most of the time they utilize them differently. The central theme of the nature of self-knowledge appears on the level of the individual in his early narratives, which are heavily reliant on Poe's aesthetics and narrative strategies. The realization of the narrator of "The Outsider" is only his concern, as the rest of humanity is not affected by the fact that he has died a long time before the events of the story. In other early narratives, such as "Cool Air", "Herbert West—Reanimator", "The Statement of Randolph Carter" and "From Beyond", the forbidden knowledge is dangerous for anyone who intends to use it; however, humanity is safe from the perils depicted in these narratives as long as they do not try to use this knowledge for their own selfish reasons. The knowledge gained by the narrator of "Dagon" could influence humankind, but similarly to other early narratives, it is strongly suggested that he is a victim of a kind of hallucination.

The theme of madness, or the unreliability of narration, is more pronounced in Lovecraft's early tales compared to his later narratives. In that regard, "The Outsider" is not comparable to other stories, as its textual world resembles that of nightmares and not our reality. In the case of "Herbert West—Reanimator", "The Statement of Randolph Carter", "From Beyond" and "Dagon", the question of whether the happenings discussed by the narrators are real or not is unresolved. In "From Beyond" it is suggested that the narrator was hypnotized, while in the other three stories it cannot be clearly decided if they are mad or sane. Among the early tales analysed in this thesis, "Cool Air" is the only exception regarding the theme of madness as other people were also witnesses of the horror described in the story together with the narrator.

Isolation is a key term in discussing the credibility of Lovecraft's narrators, as the four unreliable narrators discussed previously all experienced weird events or saw weird entities alone (or their companion died). In "The Call of Cthulhu", Francis Wayland Thurston examines different accounts of various professionals, including professors and detectives, which are all connected to one phenomenon: an alien being hiding somewhere in the oceans of the Earth. Throughout the events of *At the Mountains of Madness*, the credibility of Professor Dyer's account is not only strengthened by the fact that he was surrounded by other professionals, but also by the fact that his account could be connected to both Thurston's and Professor Peaslee's memoirs. Professor Peaslee, with psychologists and archaeologists on his side, questions the realness of his memories with scientific methods and suggests the possibility that they might be the products of some kind of a temporary psychosis; however, the researchers cannot deny the existence of the Great Race and the Great Old Ones on Earth in prehistoric times. The only point in *The Shadow out of Time* when the narrator's account can be considered unreliable is when he is isolated from the rest of the research group.

It is also important to emphasize that the "hubris theme" of early tales is absent from later narratives. Instead, these present the forbidden knowledge as "amoral", meaning that it does not serve selfish purposes: it does not defy the rules of nature (only the ones created by human beings to describe nature as they comprehend it), nor does it bring actively malevolent forces towards humanity. (Joshi 2014)

What differentiates Lovecraft's later narratives from his early tales and the works of Poe and Machen is the amorality of the world depicted in them. Contrary to Machen's gnostic view in "The Great God Pan", where the entity hiding behind the world of human beings brings punishment to humans for entering its realm, or to Poe's evil Ligeia, who intends to reenter the material world at the cost of a human life, the Great Old Ones are simply members of an alien species that tries to survive in the cosmos in the same manner as humanity. The moral values of humankind are non-existent for them. The rules defied by their existence were created by human beings.

With this notion, Lovecraft's materialistic philosophy is fully represented in his later narratives, distinguishing his vision and artistry from that of Poe and Machen. While the influence of his precursors is still detectable in these later, distinctively Lovecraftian stories, he was able to bring something into them which was clearly a part of his identity: his attitude towards modern sciences (the notion that there is no danger in knowledge itself, only in the way how humanity uses it) and his materialistic interpretation of the human condition. Through his changing of the style of other writers, the effects of these narratives also changed. As Zanger stated, the main concern of "Ligeia" (and several other narratives of Poe) is the tragic nature of mortal human life (Zanger 1978, 542), while Machen expressed his anxieties regarding the advancement of sciences and the possible disaster it could lead to in his stories. Lovecraft, on the other hand, focused both on existential dread and awe as modern sciences continued to shed more and more light on the secrets of the cosmos. In Lovecraft's materialistic worldview humankind has to face what Burleson termed as "the nature of selfknowledge", as they satisfy their thirst for knowledge. Redefining one's place and identity in the grand scheme of things is a painful process; however, it is not the product of the malevolence of the universe, it is the price humankind has to pay to experience awe or the sublime.

However, in later narratives it is suggested that merciful ignorance is preferable when there are obvious threats to humanity. Joshi states that this is also the case when the knowledge concerns humankind's indefensible position against a certain entity, as in the case of "The Colour out of Space", as "it is better to preserve the illusion of our safety" (Joshi 2014, 113). Professor Dyer in *At the Mountains of Madness* intended his memoir to serve as a warning to humanity, and

so did Professor Peaslee in *The Shadow out of Time*. Thurston in "The Call of Cthulhu" felt that it was his responsibility to save the rest of mankind from the horrible revelation he had, so he locked away his writing. Later narrators of Lovecraft deeply care about the fate of humanity, while the early narrators tend to focus only on their own suffering (Schultz 2011, 219).

In conclusion, there are three main traits of Lovecraftian narratives. The first one is the presence of Lovecraft's materialistic worldview, which places the narrative in an amoral world, where humanity is not at the center of the universe but only one of the many species trying to survive in the cosmos. Connected to this concept, the second trait is the way the theme of forbidden knowledge is used. Generally, forbidden knowledge is morally wrong in horror narratives, as its use always brings punishment to the user by a higher power. In Lovecraft's stories, the forbidden knowledge is amoral, it does not defy the rules of nature, only the ones that are human constructs, and it forces humanity to redefine them. The third feature is the figure of the narrator. First-person narrators are all unreliable to a certain extent; however, in later Lovecraftian stories, the involvement of professionals, or their accounts, and their sceptic approach maximize their credibility. It is also important to note that his narrators are not wallowing in their sufferings. They take steps to prevent any catastrophes whenever it is possible, and when it is not, they carefully consider the question of whether it would be beneficial to share their knowledge with humanity or not. My aim in the present thesis was to highlight those characteristics of Lovecraft's later narratives (considered as classics of weird fiction), which clearly distinguish them both from the tales of his predecessors and from his early narratives heavily influenced by them.

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