



University of
Stavanger

FACULTY OF ARTS AND EDUCATION

MASTER'S THESIS

Programme of study: Master in Literacy Studies	Spring semester, 2016 Open
Author: Kurt Øystein Slåtten (Author's signature)
Supervisor: Eric Dean Rasmussen	
Thesis title: Humans in a Hostile Cosmos. Science, Cosmicism and Race in H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos	
Keywords: H.P. Lovecraft Weird Fiction Horror literature Fantasy literature Speculative realism	No. of pages: 107 + appendices/other: 9 Stavanger, May 11. 2016 date/year

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the “Cthulhu Mythos”, which is a fictional universe created and developed by American Weird Fiction writer H. P. Lovecraft. The study focuses primarily on Lovecraft’s philosophical idea of “cosmicism”, which is the notion that the human species is small, transient and insignificant in relation to the cosmos. Many critics and scholars recognise that cosmicism is an important factor in the Cthulhu Mythos. As this study demonstrates and discusses, the otherwise pessimistic and non-anthropocentric implications of cosmicism can be renegotiated through interpretations of how certain elements and themes in the Mythos stories, such as religion, culture and aesthetics, are presented and framed.

Before treating the implications of cosmicism, I discuss representations of modern science and scientific rationales in the stories. Lovecraft attained the idea of cosmicism through scientific studies and his interpretations of contemporary scientific theories. In the Cthulhu Mythos, the representation of cosmicism is bound up with representations of modern science, which is a central element in the fiction. The scientific procedures and investigations in the stories tend to bring about frightening and disillusioning implications of how humans are threatened by malevolent cosmic entities, rather than the empirical and enlightening understanding about cosmos and reality that was sought in the first place. As different cosmic elements are brought into the stories, Lovecraft employs a suggestive and “de-literalising” language to convey the protagonists’ limited understanding of these, and the confusion and fear that eventually develops into existential horror as they realise humanity’s fragile and threatened position in the cosmos.

Lovecraft’s controversial xenophobic and racist views are reflected in some of his fiction. The extent to which these views are reflected in the Cthulhu Mythos is not clear, however. Some argue that it is reflected there more subtly and allegorically, and that racism is significant as an underlying motivation to the Mythos stories. I assess the possibility of reading some of Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos fiction as an allegory on immigration and miscegenation at the end of the thesis. There I argue that although it is possible to read the Cthulhu Mythos as reflecting race views figuratively and allegorically, this unnecessary in order to attain a useful understanding of the fiction and its literary context. This understanding is better achieved through reading the Cthulhu Mythos as a fictionalised representation and possible renegotiation of cosmicism and its implications.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1. Thesis statement and general introduction.....	4
1.2. Research questions and methods.....	8
1.3. The main themes and content of Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos.....	11
1.4. Review of the primary texts.....	14
1.4.1. “The Colour out of Space”.....	14
1.4.2. “The Dreams in the Witch House”.....	16
1.4.3. “The Shadow over Innsmouth”.....	18
2. Science in the Cthulhu Mythos	21
2.1. The “deadly light” of empirical knowledge.....	21
2.2. Descriptions of the indescribable.....	24
2.3. Modern science and human perception in “The Colour out of Space”.....	27
2.4. De-literalised effects rather than actions.....	31
2.5. Science merges with witchcraft in “The Dreams in the Witch House”.....	35
2.6. Describing extra-dimensional and cosmic realities.....	40
3. Cosmicism and the Cthulhu Mythos	45
3.1. Lovecraft’s philosophy of cosmicism.....	45
3.2. Cosmos in the Cthulhu Mythos	50
3.3. The protagonists’ relation to religion, tradition and culture.....	56
3.4. Some anti-humanist perspectives on the Cthulhu Mythos.....	61
3.5. The literary function of the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon.....	65

3.6. An aesthetical perspective on reality	69
4. Race in the Cthulhu Mythos	76
4.1. Lovecraft’s views on race, immigration and culture	76
4.2. The role of coloured and racially mixed characters in Lovecraft’s fiction.....	81
4.3. «The Shadow over Innsmouth» as an allegorical representation of miscegenation.....	86
4.4. Cosmicism and race in the Cthulhu Mythos.....	92
4.5. The end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” – Happily ever after?.....	97
5. Conclusion	104
6. Notes	111
7. Bibliography	112

1. Introduction

1.1. Thesis statement and general introduction

In the present thesis I analyse and discuss a selection of the fiction of the American Weird Fiction author Howard Philips Lovecraft (1890 – 1937), aiming to develop an understanding of the role and significance of his idea of “cosmicism” in the part of his fiction that is known as the Cthulhu Mythos. The Cthulhu Mythos refers to a fictional universe created and developed by Lovecraft. The idea of cosmicism is based on the view that “...common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large.” (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 244), and as such it entails a non-anthropocentric and pessimistic worldview. Because Lovecraft derived this view from his scientific studies and knowledge, I approach the matter of cosmicism by focusing on how Lovecraft challenges and problematises modern science as a means for humans to gain empirical knowledge and understanding about reality. From there I discuss whether the Cthulhu Mythos is to be seen as a nihilistic and “anti-humanist” literature due to its underlying theme of cosmicism, or whether it is possible to use the Cthulhu Mythos literature to renegotiate the implications of cosmicism. I also discuss the significance and meaning of the representations of race issues that appear throughout the fiction, both in direct description and in possible allegorical representations. Lovecraft’s well known racism is a highly controversial aspect of his popular reception today. By assessing the significance of his race views in relation to the Cthulhu Mythos and cosmicism I seek for an understanding of how these views may have influenced his fiction, and how they are reflected in his stories.

The majority of Lovecraft’s fiction belongs to a literary genre called Weird Fiction, and the stories he wrote – mainly short stories ranging from a single page to almost novel length in a few cases - were submitted to and published in low-brow pulp magazines specialising on this type of fiction, such as *Weird Tales*. Only after his death was his work detached from the pulp fiction niche and published in independent book volumes. The pulp magazines were generally seen as vulgar and cheap, and his close affiliation with these and their narrow author- and reader communities for a long time hindered him from becoming read and appreciated outside a small circle of readers and authors of similar types of fiction.

However, as Lovecraft's stories became especially popular among the readers of the magazines, he managed to build up a wide circle of literary acquaintances with whom he regularly corresponded.

Weird Fiction is recognised as a loosely defined subgenre of Science Fiction that is based largely on elements of horror and the macabre as well as fantasy. Weird Fiction narratives are normally situated in the real world, and focus on revealing the existence of supernatural elements or alien beings whose existence upsets the notion of the world and reality as it is normally perceived and experienced by humans. Modern Weird Fiction author China Miéville asserts that "This obsession with numinosity under the everyday is at the heart of Weird Fiction." (2009: 510). "Numinosity" here refers to the element of the supernatural or alien that is central to the narratives. As such, a typical Weird Fiction narrative contains certain "numinous" elements that are not distinctly present from the start, but divulged and brought into the narratives as the plot develops. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos is a clear example of this, as these stories are usually concerned with revealing the existence of various extra-terrestrial beings that are either part of or in league with a set of transcendent deities – I refer to these deities as the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon – that are disinterested in humans at best, intent on wiping out humanity at the worst. Miéville explains that these entities of Lovecraft's invention "are a radical break with anything from a folkloric tradition" (2009: 512), because instead of reflecting any traditional representations of monsters from Western folklore such as vampires and werewolves, Lovecraft's invented entities are often amorphous to the point of the indescribable, being presented as conglomerations of different animalistic traits and geometrical shapes such as cones and barrels. Miéville further asserts that the revelation of these numinous elements in Lovecraft's stories is so central that plot becomes secondary to this. (2009: 512). This means that the numinous elements and beings in Lovecraft's stories are so central to the narratives that the plots of the stories are invented primarily to frame the presentations of these.

Due to his long and active affiliation with the pulp magazine communities, Lovecraft became one of the most productive letter-writers in history, writing an estimated 75 000 to 100 000 letters in his lifetime (Hanegraaff 2007: 96), many of which were addressed to the magazine publishers as well as other pulp writers and readers. The letters that are preserved today reveal not only much about his thoughts on fiction and aesthetics, yet also show some very nihilistic sentiments and an extreme racial hatred which has been and is still a source of controversy. His written correspondence also reflects his interests and knowledge in many

different fields, such as contemporary science, folklore, antiquarianism and architecture. Lovecraft derived much of the inspiration for his fiction from his autonomous studies in these fields.

His interest in science is of special relevance in relation to his fiction, and it was from this that he derived the pessimistic idea of cosmicism that is fundamental to the Cthulhu Mythos fiction. Lovecraft was especially interested in astronomy and physics, and as he received no formal tutoring in these disciplines, he gained his knowledge from reading scientific books and journals and attending occasional seminars. He thus kept himself up to date on contemporary science, and played upon his knowledge in many of his stories, often referring to complex scientific principles and procedures briefly and matter-of-factly without any clarifying explanation for the uninitiated reader. In some stories he incorporated and treated scientific matters that were avant-garde or under serious study at the time, such as non-Euclidian geometry in “The Call of Cthulhu” (1926)¹ and other stories, arctic exploration in “At the Mountains of Madness” (1931), and astrophysics in “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1932). Although he proved himself to be up-to-date by invoking complex contemporary science and referring to several (then) living top-scientists such as Albert Einstein and Willem de Sitter in his stories, he at the same time revealed little about the extent of his own knowledge and understanding of the scientific matters at hand, trusting the reader to understand his scientific allusions and scientific terminology.

Critics have different opinions as to whether Lovecraft’s fiction is communicating a sense of nihilism and meaninglessness whereby it stresses humanity’s insignificance in the universe, or whether it may suggest a relief to this idea. The French author Michel Houellebecq, in his book *H.P. Lovecraft - Against the World, Against Life* (2008), argues that Lovecraft’s stories reflect his generally pessimistic and hateful worldview, and are meant to create a sense of horror in presenting a universe that is not only meaningless, which is the basic idea of cosmicism, yet also fundamentally hostile to humans. This understanding of Lovecraft’s fiction is similar to that of Mark Lowell (2004), who also points to how Lovecraft seeks to invoke horror by “revealing” the cosmic irrelevance and insignificance of humanity. Based on this, Lowell calls Lovecraft an “anti-humanist” (2004: 49), which is also a response to an article by theologian Robert M. Price, called *Lovecraft: Prophet of Humanism* (2001). Lowell denies that any positive implications for humanity can be derived from Lovecraft’s fiction. Price, however, indeed calls Lovecraft a humanist in his article, arguing that although Lovecraft clearly thought humanity to be without any real value or integrity in the universe,

and that modern science could only be a tool to uncover this, his fictional world contains significant indications of how to cope with such a meaningless reality by means of imagination and aesthetics. Houellebecq, despite his largely nihilist assessment of Lovecraft's fiction, also acknowledges in the preface to the second French edition of his book that Lovecraft showcases a strong sense of aesthetic perception of reality in his fiction, especially in depictions of nature (2008: 25).

The relation between Lovecraft's race views and his fiction is also widely discussed by scholars and critics. As made abundantly clear in several of his letters, Lovecraft entertained some extremely racist views, especially during and after the time he spent living under poor conditions in New York from 1924 to 1926, where he had to live close upon immigrants from different parts of the world. The racist sentiments he expressed extended far beyond any gentlemanly contempt towards non-whites that would have been acceptable at the time, to the point where he refused to acknowledge certain coloured and non-Anglo-Saxon people as humans, and suggested mass killings of non-whites would be necessary to get rid of the, in his opinion very problematic, presence of coloured people in the U.S. (Houellebecq 2008: 107). However, his racism did allegedly abate in his last years, as he turned to a more accepting stance towards immigration and multiculturalism (Evans 2005: 125).

The issue of Lovecraft's racism is of relevance to the thesis as it is not only divulged in his letters, yet also reflected in several of his stories. Non-Anglo-Saxon characters and different kinds of indigenous peoples are often being depicted in negative ways and presented as antagonistic and evil in Lovecraft's fiction. The significance and meaning of this has been discussed by critics, especially as some, like Houellebecq (2008), and Lovecraft scholar and biographer S.T. Joshi (2001), see significant pieces of his fiction as representing racial hate allegorically through the violent encounters between human protagonists and non-human antagonists. Houellebecq pays very close attention to Lovecraft's negative stance on immigration. He claims that Lovecraft's extreme racial hatred is central to understanding some of his greatest works, and that central figures and themes in the stories are to be understood as representations of Lovecraft's negative feelings towards immigration and cultural mixing (2008: 99-109). Some however, like Associate professor of Folk Studies Timothy H. Evans (2005) and scholar on American radicalism Paul Buhle (1976) have argued that some Mythos stories Lovecraft wrote in the 1930's reflect and communicate an ameliorating turn in Lovecraft's stance on race, immigration and cultural elitism. The Weird Fiction story "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (1931) is especially frequently discussed as an

allegorical rendering of race issues such as immigration and miscegenation. Both Evans (2005) and Buhle (1976) interpret this story as reflecting an accepting stance on these matters, while Joshi sees it as a “warning” against racial mixing (2001: 305).

When Lovecraft died in 1937, he still had a very limited readership and his fiction was virtually unknown outside the pulp-fiction domain. After his death, however, his fiction became gradually detached from this niche, as his works were published in independent volumes, and thus reached a larger audience. In 2005, Lovecraft got his own Library of America volume, marking his “ultimate canonization” (Joshi, S. T. as cited in Eil 2015). As of today, Lovecraft has attained “the highest levels of critical and cultural success” (Eil 2015), and his fiction has had an enormous impact on popular culture, inspiring not only other significant writers of fiction such as Stephen King and China Miéville, but also horror movies, computer games, musical artists, art and more. With the increase in literary recognition, his fiction has been subject to a wide range of academic scrutiny, making him a highly relevant writer today, not only in popular culture, but also in academia.

Lovecraft’s racism is still today a highly problematic aspect of his popular reception. This is clearly evidenced by recent controversies that have arisen concerning the World Fantasy Award (WFA) trophy, which is modelled in the likeness of Lovecraft, and nicknamed “The Howard” after him. In 2014, more than 2500 people signed a petition to remodel the trophy because of they felt Lovecraft’s well-known racist beliefs were undermining the award. This issue has recently sparked heated discussions in online blogs and on social media on the relevance of Lovecraft’s controversial views in regard to his popular reception (Eil 2015). Although Lovecraft’s racism is clearly and unambiguously expressed in both letters and fiction, it is debatable to which degree these views influence, and are reflected in the Cthulhu Mythos, which contains most of his highest regarded works of Weird Fiction.

1.2. Research questions and methods

In the present thesis I aim to answer the following research questions:

1: It is known that Lovecraft derived his pessimistic views on humanity and cosmos from his scientific knowledge and amateur studies (cf. Joshi 2001: 60). How does Lovecraft

challenge and problematise modern science as a means of gaining empirical knowledge in the Cthulhu Mythos stories?

2: How is Lovecraft's philosophical idea of cosmicism and its implications reflected and communicated in the Cthulhu Mythos stories?

3: Price (2001) and Evans (2005) assert that despite the Cthulhu Mythos stories thematising the cosmic insignificance of humanity, culture, traditions and aesthetics represent human values that retain their meaning and integrity for humans despite the implications of cosmicism. Is this view expressed or suggested in the actual Mythos stories – and if so, how?

4: If Lovecraft's views on race and immigration are so central and fundamental to the Cthulhu Mythos as Houellebecq insists (2008: 108-109), race may also be a relevant factor in relation to the idea of cosmicism that underlies the Mythos. What role do race issues or racial conflict play in the Cthulhu Mythos? What is the function and meaning of the actual representations of racial others in the stories? What implications can be derived from reading "The Shadow over Innsmouth" as an allegory on immigration and racial mixing?

The discussions in the thesis are based on my own close readings and analyses of a selection of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos fiction, primarily "The Colour out of Space" (1927), "The Dreams in the Witch House" (1932) and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (1931), from which significant excerpts will be explained and discussed, as well as the overall plots and events. I keep my discussions in dialogue with critical and academic readings and interpretations of these and other Lovecraft stories. I thereby relate my findings and my interpretations to those of recent works on Lovecraft's fiction.

I first discuss the representations of modern science in the Mythos with reference to the stories "The Colour out of Space" and "The Dreams in the Witch House". Both of these Mythos stories are good examples of how modern, (then) contemporary science as a means of gaining empirical knowledge is challenged when humans meet and try to account for the cosmic, numinous elements in the stories. "The Colour out of Space" stands out in being especially concerned with the scientific elusiveness of the cosmic element in the story, and demonstrates how the visual perception of the humans in the story proves insufficient to make sense of the cosmic element. Unlike "The Colour out of Space", the story "The Dreams in the Witch House" relies largely on the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon as an antagonist cosmic element. This is perhaps the Mythos story that makes the most specific references to

contemporary scientific discoveries and debates, primarily those of astrophysics, and provides as such a clear example of how Lovecraft actively played upon recent scientific discoveries and theories in his fiction.

In discussing representations of modern science and human perception in these stories, I work closely with the book *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (2010) by philosophy professor and speculative realist Graham Harman. In this book, Harman analyses one hundred short excerpts from Lovecraft's "great texts", that is, eight Mythos stories that Houellebecq asserts to be the best and most central of Lovecraft's oeuvre (Houellebecq 2008: 40-41). Among these are the three I primarily discuss in the thesis. Harman is especially interested in how Lovecraft uses language to actualise the impossibility of objective perception of objects while focusing strongly on conveying the subjective impressions of the narrators and protagonists in the stories. To Harman, Lovecraft is relevant for his strictly non-empirical approach to outlining objects, experiences and events that are related to the cosmic elements in the fiction. As such, Harman's close readings and analyses focus largely on how Lovecraft uses connotation bearing words and phrasings, and combines different associations and connotations to suggest rather than describe the traits and peculiarities of the cosmic and numinous elements in the stories. Through these suggestive indications, Lovecraft maintains the impossibility of crossing the figurative "gap" between objects' intrinsic qualities and human perception.

I discuss representations of Lovecraft's cosmicism in the Cthulhu Mythos stories by demonstrating direct statements Lovecraft made in non-fiction, some letters and a notable essay, as well as in Mythos stories, regarding cosmicism and its implications for humanity. I also discuss how cosmicism is reflected in the representations of science and human perception in the "The Colour out of Space" and "The Dreams in the Witch House", by conferring the views Lovecraft demonstrated in direct statements with the events and outcomes of the stories, and the narrators' and protagonists' assessments and reflections of these.

I approach research question 3 by presenting and discussing some of the nihilist (Houellebecq 2008) and anti-humanist (Lowell 2004) interpretations of Lovecraft's Mythos fiction, and confer these with paragraphs and statements within the stories that reflect the narrators' own thoughts and interpretations of the plot events and their implications. To contrast Houellebecq and Lowell's assessments, I discuss the ideas proposed by Price (2001)

and Evans (2005), who argue that Lovecraft accentuates certain values, such as religion, culture and tradition to be relevant and important despite the suggestions of cosmicism that arise in the stories. I relate these discussions to some notable excerpts from Lovecraft's Mythos stories in which elements of religion, culture and tradition are brought up and described.

I approach the race questions by assessing explicit racist statements and expressions in Lovecraft's correspondence as well as some Weird Fiction stories he wrote during his stay in New York. I also discuss how racial others and racially mixed people are characterised in the Cthulhu Mythos, and what role they play there. Thereupon I assess the possibility of interpreting "The Shadow over Innsmouth" as an allegory on immigration and racial mixing, and discuss what such interpretations imply for the Cthulhu Mythos and cosmicism. Here I look at both the main plot of the story as a possible allegory on immigration and racial mixing as suggested by Joshi (2001: 305), and the end chapter of the story, which Evans (2005: 125) and Buhle (1976: 126-127) claim to represent an acceptance of immigration and cultural mixing.

I treat the topics related science, race and immigration with reference to the actual state of these issues in the U.S. and Europe in the time Lovecraft lived and wrote the Mythos stories, and to statements and ideas he expressed in his letters. The work *A Dreamer and a Visionary : H. P. Lovecraft in His Time*, by Lovecraft biographer S.T. Joshi will be a prime reference for Lovecraft's non-fiction statements and throughout.

1.3. The main themes and content of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos

Many of Lovecraft's Weird Fiction stories are loosely interrelated in what has become known, both to literary scholars and fans, as the Cthulhu Mythos. The Cthulhu Mythos-stories are connected by recurring themes and common fictional characters, non-human beings, locations and artefacts, among other elements. Although Lovecraft invented the Mythos itself, the term was not invented by him, but by August Derleth, one of Lovecraft's fellow pulp-writers and correspondents (Joshi 2001: 244). Several other writers of horror and Weird Fiction have contributed to the Mythos, a trend that started in the pulp-fiction community while Lovecraft

was still writing and continues today. In the present thesis, however, only Lovecraft's own Mythos stories will be discussed.

There is no clear consensus as to how exactly the Cthulhu Mythos is to be defined, and thus there are different opinions as to how many of Lovecraft's stories are to be seen as part of it. Professor of the History of Hermetic Philosophy, W. J. Hanegraaff, asserts that

The so-called "Cthulhu Mythos" central to most of Lovecraft's mature horror fiction is based upon the idea that in very ancient times our earth was inhabited by a race (or several races) of intelligent beings who are utterly alien to anything known to science, or imaginable by the human mind.

(Hanegraaff 2007: 92-93)

With this, Hanegraaff points to the fictional history underlying the Mythos stories as a basis of definition for the term. This history is not completely and coherently outlined in any of Lovecraft's fiction, but significant particulars of it are revealed and elaborated upon in some of Lovecraft's latest and longest stories, such as "At the Mountains of Madness" (1931) and "The Shadow out of Time" (1935). Although few other Lovecraft stories are clearly connected to these two and to the fictional history that they present and elaborate, intertextual hints, references, and recurring fictional characters, places, objects and extra-terrestrial entities are to be found in many of them. This intertextuality relates the stories to each other, and to the larger idea about civilizations of originally extra-terrestrial entities that inhabited the world in an age before mankind and that in some cases survive in certain remote areas and places on earth.

Mark Lowell, in his short treatise on the Cthulhu Mythos (2004), gives a slightly different definition, as he proposes that the Mythos stories are qualified by how they evoke horror, namely by relying on a revelation of "humanity's insignificance in the universe" (2004: 47- 48). This definition is perhaps a bit broader than Hanegraaff's, as it points to a recurring and recognisable theme in Lovecraft's fiction, instead of relying on fictional details, such as names of places and entities that are recurring elements in many of the stories, yet not necessarily equally central in all of them.

Lovecraft scholar and biographer S. T. Joshi states that the Mythos is characterised by certain plot-devices that Lovecraft uses to convey the philosophy behind his fiction. (Joshi 2001: 244) These plot-devices are mainly the named extra-terrestrial entities and cosmic

deities that occur in several stories, named works of fictional occult lore concerning these, and a set of geographical locations and towns (mostly in New England), in which many of the stories take place. Joshi further explains that the philosophy that Lovecraft proposes in the Mythos stories is “cosmicism” (2001: 244) – also called “cosmic horror” by other scholars, such as Patricia MacCormack (2010). Cosmicism is a non-anthropocentric view of the world and reality that Lovecraft elaborates upon in his stories as well as in his letters, such as the below cited from 1927:

Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form— and the local human passions and conditions and standards— are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. 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 local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all.

(Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 244)

This clearly reflects the idea of “humanity’s insignificance in the universe” that Lowell (2004: 47- 48) identifies as a defining element to the Mythos. It must be noted, however, that Lovecraft here asserts that *all* his tales adhere to this philosophical principle, and that indeed he did not use the Mythos term himself, or categorise his stories, as his contemporary August Derleth and other scholars and fans have done, or attempted to do. Yet as a certain amount of his stories are especially concerned with the protagonists’ revelation of humanity’s cosmic insignificance, and contain recognisable and named elements and entities that create a certain intertextuality and thematic concord between them, it might be useful, as scholars and fans tend to do, to see these stories as interrelated, and pieces in a larger puzzle that contains both a fictional history, and a general theme that is based on the above mentioned philosophical motive. This idea of cosmicism as a fundamental principle draws Hanegraaff and Lowell’s definitions of the Mythos closer, with the former focusing on the history of the world as non-anthropocentric, and the latter pointing to the horror of the idea of a non-anthropocentric universe, which is fundamental to the philosophy of Lovecraft’s cosmicism.

According to S. T. Joshi, the Weird Fiction story “The Call of Cthulhu” from 1926 is the “first significant contribution” to the Cthulhu Mythos, and a story that contains almost all

of the Mythos' characteristic elements (2001: 243). I do not understand this to mean that it is the first Mythos story Lovecraft wrote. Indeed, some of its characteristic elements can be found as early as the short story "Dagon" from 1917, where the protagonist, shipwrecked in the Pacific on what appears to be a piece of seafloor that has risen above the water due to volcanic activity, discovers a gigantic monolith whose inscribed pictures reveal that it belongs to a pre-human civilisation of anthropoid amphibian beings. Brooding on the implications of this observation, and the possible submarine survival of the amphibian beings, the protagonist lapses into insanity. "The Call of Cthulhu", however, is perhaps the first of Lovecraft's stories to present the different Mythos elements in a clear and comprehensible relation to each other, thus providing a literary fundament upon which later stories will be built, and earlier stories, such as "Dagon", may be better understood. As such it is a story that provides a good model for most of the Mythos elements discussed above, and one that I will refer more to in the following discussions about the significance and function of some of these elements in relation to cosmicism.

1.4. Review of the primary texts

1.4.1. "The Colour out of Space"

The short Weird Fiction story "The Colour out of Space" (1927) demonstrates how human perception and modern science are rendered unable to account for non-earthly elements and to guard against these when they prove to be dangerous. Donald R. Burleson explains that in addition to being among the best regarded works of Lovecraft, both by the author himself and his readers, the story is especially significant in the way it treats the limits of human understanding about the cosmos, and thereby "raises questions not only about categoricity and systematization but about the oppositions of light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance." (Burleson 1993: 48). This is brought about by the way the cosmic, numinous element in this story, an entity made of a never-before seen colour from outer space, upsets human perception and eludes all scientific explanation while gradually poisoning and deforming all organic matter in its vicinity.

The story is set in New England, in a rural area outside the fictional town of Arkham. The narrator is a surveyor who is sent to inspect the area, as a water reservoir is to be

constructed there. Upon discovering that the reservoir will cover a barren, seemingly burnt-out valley locally known as “the blasted heath”, he decides to inquire into the history of the place. Most of the locals being reticent, he seeks out an old man named Ammi Pierce who lives alone in a cottage not far from the blasted heath, though outside the prospective lake of the water reservoir. Pierce seems relieved at the prospect of flooding the blasted heath, and begins to narrate the tale of how that place came to be. His narration, as retold by the surveyor, constitutes the main part of the story.

Ammi Pierce relates that in June 1882 the place was struck by a meteorite which landed close to the well of the Gardner farm, the only abode in the valley, where lived Nahum Gardner with his wife and three sons. Three professors from the (fictional) Miskatonic University of Arkham were summoned to inspect and study the meteorite. Upon finding that its substance seemed soft, luminous, constantly warm and shrinking in size, they took a sample back to the University for testing. The tests are described in a detailed manner and with reference to various scientific procedures, and it is revealed that the sample, among other peculiarities, displayed “...shining bands unlike any known colours of the normal spectrum...” (Lovecraft 2005: 344). The scientists were very baffled by this, and perfectly unable to explain any of the substance’s qualities or peculiarities despite their thorough studies.

In the time following the meteor-strike, the flora and fauna of the valley started to change. Plants and crops grew deformed, inedible, and assumed indescribable colorations before turning into greyish powder. Wildlife appeared mutated, and domestic animals became physically deformed and died. Nahum Gardner assumed that the meteorite had poisoned the soil, and that all these peculiarities were attributable to this poison. During this period of general disintegration and decay, Nahum Gardner’s wife and one of his sons turned insane and were locked up in different rooms in the attic. The other two sons went missing. Thaddeus, the mad son, died, and as Ammi Pierce was visiting the farm, he found that Gardner’s wife is seemed to be consumed by “strange colours”, reminiscent of the abovementioned “shining bands”. It is implied that he put her to death out of mercy. Nahum himself was very sick at this point, and died after disclosing that the “colour”, which now appeared to be considered an entity in itself, was residing in the well, and contaminated everything from there. Ammi fled and returned later with an investigation party. They found the skeletons of the two missing sons in the well, and shortly after the colour itself started pouring out of it. They fled from the place, and upon looking back from a distance, saw the

colour shooting off into space. Ammi however, noticed that a fragment of the colour failed to follow the rest and fell back into the well.

The surveyor is very troubled by the tale, and glad that the place, along with the remains of the incidents described in Ammi's tale, is to be flooded. It is implied, however, that the remains of the "colour" are still in the well, and may infest the water of the reservoir.

In this story, the conflict between science and a malevolent, or at least very dangerous, extra-terrestrial entity is raised to a symbolical level, as, for instance, the concept of light – traditionally representing science and enlightenment – turns into a means of revealing the limits of human perception, or the "eclipse of knowledge" as Burleson puts it (1993: 50). Thus, "The Colour out of Space" stands out as a clear example of how science as a means of enlightenment and understanding is challenged in Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, and rather turns into a means of revealing and establishing an impression of cosmicism on the part of the narrator. In the thesis, this story is analysed and discussed with focus on the role played by science and scientific investigations of the alien element that is the meteorite and the "colour out of space". These matters are specifically discussed in relation to this story by Burleson (1993) and Harman (2010: 78-97). Evans also makes an example of this story in his discussion about representations of culture and traditions as human values in Lovecraft's fiction, and demonstrates how the rustic New England landscape in this story becomes an important aesthetic element and cultural symbol here, that is threatened by both the destructive influence of the colour, and by the prospective water reservoir (2005: 122).

1.4.2. "The Dreams in the Witch House"

The short Weird Fiction story "The Dreams in the Witch House" (1932) stands out in presenting a correlation rather than opposition between advanced science - primarily complex mathematics and physics -, and the doctrines of occultism and witchcraft.

Walter Gilman, the protagonist of this story, is a student of mathematics and folklore at the Miskatonic University of Arkham. He resides in the attic of the so-called "Witch House" in Arkham, where a woman named Keziah Mason lived in the late 17th century. Accused of witchcraft during the Salem Witch Trials, she had mysteriously escaped prison in 1692, only leaving behind some geometrical drawings on the walls of the cell. The attic room of the Witch House is also geometrically peculiar, with a slanting wall and ceiling constituting

some odd angles at the point where they meet. Gilman suspects that these geometrical shapes serve a certain magical purpose, as was testified by Keziah Mason during her trial. She had claimed that by the aid of certain “lines and curves” (Lovecraft 2005: 655), one could get access to other dimensions. Absorbed by his studies of these matters, Gilman starts having nightmares about being approached in his bed by Keziah Mason and her small rat-like familiar, Brown Jenkin. He also has several dreams about floating through some kind of extra-dimensional space, and alighting briefly on other planets. Although he somehow attains a very deep and “intuitive” understanding of physics and complex mathematics during his stay in the attic, Gilman believes that he is going insane. Furthermore, he dreams one night of being taken by Keziah and Brown Jenkin to a small compartment above the ceiling of his room, where a mysterious “black man” – later revealed to be the malevolent Mythos deity Nyarlathotep - wants him to sign a large book. In another dream, he accompanies the witch, her familiar and Nyarlathotep as they abduct an infant in the town. However, finding his feet muddy upon awaking, and reading about the abduction in the newspaper, he understands that he has not been dreaming. On the night of the day after that, which is Walpurgis Night, he dreams of being taken to the space above the attic room again, where Keziah is about to sacrifice the child. He manages to stop her, and strangles her, but Brown Jenkin finishes the sacrifice before Gilman kicks him into an aperture near the wall.

After this incident, Gilman’s fellow lodgers find him slightly wounded and deaf on the floor of his room. He is attended by a doctor and sleeps on the couch in another room the following night. As he suddenly starts screaming, the other lodgers rush in to find him being eaten from the inside by Brown Jenkin, who afterwards disappears into a hole in the wall.

Consequently, the house is abandoned and later demolished. Behind the walls, the workers find the skeletal remains of Keziah Mason, Brown Jenkin, several children, as well as various items such as books on black magic, a sacrificial knife and a broken, blood-stained metal bowl. All of which, implicitly, pertains to children sacrifice as part of occult rituals and witch Sabbaths.

This story is a clear example of how Lovecraft breathes life into certain “demonised” values and concepts, as explained by Hanegraaff (2007: 98-99) – in this case witchcraft - and relates this to actual, (then) contemporary science. Thus, the notion of modern science as “enlightenment” is challenged when related to a more or less opposite doctrine, namely witchcraft. Witchcraft has traditionally been viewed from a religious or superstitious

perspective, and this is upheld in the story, alongside its close relation to modern physics. It is therefore debatable whether this story discredits modern physics as a means of gaining empirical knowledge about reality, or whether it lends credence to witchcraft as a means of comprehending a scientifically complex aspect of reality. In this story, it is not science per se that fails to account for the cosmic elements, rather the protagonist student who fails to keep science on his side in being confronted with the cosmic and occult powers of Keziah Mason and the Mythos pantheon. This story is discussed with focus on the role of science, and scientific investigation, as with “The Colour out of Space”, yet in a slightly different perspective, as science in this story may seem to merge with the occult rather than be opposed to or incompatible with it, thus challenging the traditional view of science as “enlightenment” that reduces occult entities and powers to superstition.

1.4.3. “The Shadow over Innsmouth”

“The Shadow over Innsmouth” is open to be read as an allegory on race conflict and miscegenation, as argued by S.T Joshi (2001: 305). Houellebecq, who is very concerned with how Lovecraft allegedly was motivated by racist sentiments when writing his fiction, states that this “may be the most frightening of Lovecraft’s tales”, as it is founded on the idea of “genetic degeneration” (2008: 75).

The unnamed protagonist of this story is sightseeing alone in New England. He decides to spend a day in the seaside town of Innsmouth, after hearing unsettling rumours about it. The town, once extremely prosperous due to its successful gold refinery and vast and exotic trade-relations, is now dilapidating and in a state of utter decadence. The people of Innsmouth are said to be of queer appearance and very furtive, and they are thought to be engaged in devil-worship. Also, there is an ill-reputed reef in the waters outside the town called “Devil Reef” on which Captain Marsh, who was the head of the town and its affairs in its heyday, as are his descendants now, was said to alight to deal with demons.

Concerning the strange physical appearance of the townspeople, racial mixing is suggested, as the seafarers of the town may have brought home indigenous women from pacific islands on their trade-journeys. Upon taking a local bus to the town and seeing the people for himself, however, the protagonist does not find the “Innsmouth look” to be characteristic of any specific race or ethnicity – rather slightly reminiscent of the facial traits

of fish and frogs. Although his sightseeing interests are primarily antiquarian and architectural, he decides to bribe Zadok Allen, an elderly local drunkard, into relating what he knows about the town's history.

According to Allen, Captain Obed Marsh once discovered that an island tribe in the Pacific were very prosperous because of their relations with the "Deep Ones", a race of immortal aquatic beings – most probably of extra-terrestrial origin (Evans 2005: 124) - who demanded human sacrifice in change for large amounts of fish, gold and jewellery. These Deep Ones do also mate with humans, creating offspring that are born human yet turn gradually into Deep Ones when they are grown up. Marsh managed to set up a similar deal with the Deep Ones in Innsmouth, which boosted the town's fortune and enabled the inhabitants to start refining and exporting gold. After some time, in 1846, the people of Innsmouth revolted and ended the commerce with the Deep Ones. The Deep Ones then attacked the town from their lair in the Devil Reef, killing more than half the population and subduing the rest to mating with them and worshipping such deities as Dagon and Cthulhu in accordance with the Deep Ones' religion. The town is still in this state, with most of the inhabitants, the descendants of Obed Marsh included, being offspring of the human – Deep One interbreeding.

Allen suddenly breaks off his narration, claiming that they have been seen talking and that the protagonist must escape. As the protagonist gets back to the bus, he finds that it has broken down. He is compelled to stay the night in a most unsavoury hotel, and being apprehensive, he bars the doors. When someone tries to break into his room at night, he flees through a window and races through town with several people following and searching for him. He hides in the outskirts of the town and manages to get a good glimpse of the followers. Upon seeing that they are not human, but fish and frog like monsters – Deep Ones no doubt – he faints.

The protagonist manages to get back to Arkham and Boston, and reports his experiences to the authorities. After inquiring into the matter, police forces raid the town, arrest inhabitants and demolish buildings. The Devil Reef is torpedoed, and the town is left nearly uninhabited.

As the protagonist starts to study his ancestry some time after these events, he finds to his horror that he is related to the Marsh family, and thus has Innsmouth blood in his veins. Seeing himself slowly attaining the "Innsmouth look" as he grows older, he considers suicide.

Yet after having visions in his dreams of the Deep Ones' city under the sea, he turns to accept his fate and starts to look forward to moving into the city and begin his new life as an immortal Deep One.

In discussing race in Lovecraft's fiction, Houellebecq explains that it is not one race in particular that is horrifying to Lovecraft as a racist, but the "notion of the half-breed (2008: 112), i.e. the people representing a mix between one's own race and another. From this point of view, the human-Deep One spawn in the story may be seen to represent the racist's horror of seeing one's own race being overcome by and unified with another. In the thesis, this issue is discussed in relation to some of Lovecraft's thoughts about race and immigration, as revealed in his letters, and in relation to how race and immigration issues were developing in the U.S. at the time.

Evans pays especially close attention to what happens in the end of the story, where the protagonist's change of being and perspective may be seen as representing a turn to acceptance towards racial and cultural mixing. Evans claims that this reflects Lovecraft ameliorating his racism and turning to accept, reluctantly perhaps, immigration and cultural hybridity as inevitable and necessary (2005: 125). Buhle similarly sees this event as demonstrating the possibility of renovating western society through the influence of non-western culture (1976: 127).

2. Science in the Cthulhu Mythos

2.1. The “deadly light” of empirical knowledge

Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos-stories usually relate how human protagonists, often scientists or academics of some sort, are confronted with various non-human antagonist beings. Such beings may belong to the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon - a set of named cosmic deities that transcend time and space -, humans or humanoid creatures who are in league with or worship these, certain extra-terrestrials that inhabited earth before the advent of mankind, or other beings from outer space; all of which are coexisting within the universe of the Mythos. The outcome of the confrontation is almost never optimistic or wholesome for the protagonists, as the antagonistic beings pose a threat that is both physical, in that they often hurt or kill humans, and existential, in that their very existence reveals a new aspect of reality in which humanity is not central or superior in any way. Out of this confrontation comes the protagonists’ realisation of humanity’s cosmic insignificance, which is not only a theme recognised and discussed by critics and scholars, but is also explicitly expressed in several of Lovecraft’s letters and stories.

Science is a central element in all the Mythos stories, as the protagonists employ their knowledge of science and (then) modern scientific methods to analyse and seek explanation for their experiences. Yet science largely fails in this, as it becomes clear that the antagonistic entities elude scientific explanation or appear as belonging to a more complex scientific reality than humans can comprehend, in that they for instance transcend three-dimensional reality or have physical qualities that have no reference in the world as it is perceived by humans. A recurring idea in the Mythos-stories is that science will ultimately only reveal humanity’s insignificant and transient position in the cosmos, and thus bring about a depressed dark age instead of enlightenment. This sentiment is clearly expressed in several of the Mythos stories, most famously in the often-cited opening paragraph to “The Call of Cthulhu” (1926), the story from which the Mythos is named:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each

straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

(Lovecraft 2005: 167)

Being the very first paragraph of the story, this may appear as a statement from the author himself. It soon becomes clear, however, that this is a statement from the story's fictional narrator, reflecting his thoughts and views about humanity, science, and scientific progress after having discovered or "pieced together" evidence that a gigantic, immortal and malevolent alien entity named Cthulhu is being worshipped by savage tribes all over the world, and, residing for the time in a sunken city in the Pacific sea, will rise to conquer humanity when the stars are in a certain position. The pessimistic thoughts that are related in the opening are a product of the narrator's success in probing into the otherwise scattered and archived evidence of the alien entity and its tribal cults. Thus, this story is one of several examples where Lovecraft builds a story upon a form of scientific investigation, and shows that the outcome of this is only a set of horrifying facts that the protagonists would rather not be acquainted with.

Although this paragraph reveals the thoughts of the story's fictional narrator, it clearly reflects the pessimistic views that Lovecraft himself entertained, and show that these views are programmatically inserted into the story, being stated directly and not only implied by the events and the outcome of the narrative. In this paragraph it is clearly expressed that ignorance is bliss, in the sense that being ignorant of scientifically accessible cosmic realities and the "frightful position" humans hold in the cosmos is what is best for them. The revelations or discoveries that may be attained upon "piecing together" empirical knowledge are so disturbing that they may be maddening, and thus the "light", or the symbolical illumination of scientific enlightenment is here a "deadly light" from which one should rather flee. A "dark age", that is, to my best understanding, an era of minimal scientific insight and progress – symbolically "dark" if one follows the symbolical understanding of "light" as scientific enlightenment – will be an era of "peace and safety" because humans may live free from the disturbing empirical knowledge of a reality in which humanity has no significant position, and where the only gods or higher spiritual beings are a group of malevolent cosmic entities, such as Cthulhu, that may easily subdue or wipe out humanity at their own will. The

opening paragraph of “The Call of Cthulhu” thus demonstrates that Lovecraft openly and programmatically implemented the idea of cosmicism into his fiction and used it there as a “fundamental premise”, as he called it, (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 244) for the Cthulhu Mythos universe.

Yet having expressed his disillusioned and pessimistic view of science and the horrible consequences of scientific delving into the unknown, the protagonist of “The Call of Cthulhu” reflects a bit more about the universe and its contents before going into the actual narrative. He states that

Theosophists have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents. They have hinted at strange survivals in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism.

(Lovecraft 2005: 167)

With this, he shows that the “terrifying vistas of reality” that science will ultimately disclose are not completely unheard of. Theosophists have already “guessed at” the proportions of space, and may thus have inferred the implications of humanity’s relative transience and microscopic cosmic significance. The “strange survivals” that they have “hinted at” are to be understood as the cosmic entities of the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon – beings whose existence, as the story proceeds to demonstrate, can be divulged by a scientific and systematic “piecing together of dissociated knowledge”. In discussing this passage Harman explains that the philosophy of Theosophy is a form of religious mysticism that has ancient and “intellectually respectable roots”, but that is often associated with mediums, Ouija boards and spiritual séances because of its development in modern times (2010: 56). Here Lovecraft lends some credence to this highly unscientific discipline in showing that theosophists have anticipated certain truths about cosmos that modern science has not yet disclosed.

Having lent credence to theosophists as authorities on cosmos, Lovecraft proceeds to use this credence to solidify the point made in the preceding paragraph about the relative insignificance of humanity. Yet, as Harman explains, Lovecraft rejects the “bland optimism” of these modern mystics, to ensure that the sense of horror that drives from these implications remains intact (2010: 57). This shows that Lovecraft is liable to refer to unscientific sources such as theosophists and, in other stories, such as “The Dreams in the Witch House”, “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” (1927) and “The Haunter of the Dark” (1935), occultists and

practisers of witchcraft, to contrast or challenge modern science as a exclusive means to gain knowledge about cosmos and the Mythos entities. However, as the first paragraph of “The Call of Cthulhu” shows, it is science and scientific delving that will bring about the “frightful” revelations about humanity’s place and significance in cosmos (Lovecraft 2005: 167). The theosophists, in addition to having generally less credibility than modern science, can endow their findings or views with a sense of optimism, while the scientific, empirical knowledge of this purports pessimism and fear exclusively.

2.2. Descriptions of the indescribable

It is widely recognised among readers and critics of Lovecraft that the non-human extra-terrestrial entities that are present in the stories are primarily characterised by their being impossible to describe in exact detail. However, as literary critic Mark McGurl explains, it is very typical for Lovecraft to first state the utter impossibility of describing the cosmic entity, and then make a verbose, though linguistically creative attempt at outlining *why* the entity is indescribable (2012: 545-546). From this there inevitably arises a description that does not give a satisfactory or complete impression of the appearance of the entity described, but that gives a sense of what Lovecraft famously called “the *general outline* of the whole” (Lovecraft 2005: 169) in outlining the appearance of Cthulhu. The physical characteristics of the cosmic entities are usually outlined by creative analogies and juxtapositions of perfectly unrelated and possibly contradictory physical traits. The unreliability and subjectivity of the fictional narrator as describing agent is also often admitted or even stressed. This can be exemplified by how Cthulhu from “The Call of Cthulhu” (1926) is first described when the narrator discovers an artistic clay-tablet rendition of the being: “If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing.” (Lovecraft 2005: 169) The narrator has here just started to look into his deceased uncle’s investigation of the mysterious “Cthulhu Cult” that seems to have sprung forth in various indigenous tribal groups around the entire world. The clay-tablet depicting Cthulhu is made by a young artist who for a period, among many other artists and “psychically hypersensitive” (2005: 170) people, had been having vivid and unsettling dreams about Cthulhu and his dwelling in a city sunken in the pacific ocean.

Harman shows that this description should not be understood to simply mean that the monster looked like an octopus, a dragon and a human caricature at the same time (2010: 24). Although the entity reminds the narrator of these things, all at once, the highly subjective description does not allow the entity to be simply reduced to a set of animal and human-like qualities; for it is indeed the “somewhat extravagant imagination” of the speaker that “yields” these images, not the object itself. Also, they are not plainly physical traits, but rather representative of “the spirit of the thing”, and what exactly that means, is not explained. As this is part of a very subjective presentation, I understand the “spirit of the thing” to refer rather to the impression the object has on the speaker than its actual physical appearance. Harman suggests that both “the spirit of the thing” and “the general outline of the whole” stress the impossibility of reducing the entity to a “bundle” of conjoined physical traits (2010: 58-59). However, outlining the entity by means of conjoining different physical traits may be the closest the human observer can come to reflecting how the entity appeared to him.

Even though this description is vague, subjective and unreliable, the distance between the object and the discerning human is made even greater by the fact that the above quoted description of Cthulhu is only an eye-witness account of an artistic pictorial rendition of the being. The rendition is possibly unfaithful to the real object, as it is made by a human being who might be unable to capture its appearance with exactness (the artist is even mentally unstable), and whose impression of the object might be as subjective as that of the above quoted narrator. When Lovecraft thus works to characterise the object in as indirect and subjective terms as possible, he creates what Harman calls a “gap” between the “vaguely relevant” description and the indescribable entity (2010: 24). This figurative gap between description and its object is very often maintained when the Mythos entities or other cosmic elements are at play in Lovecraft’s stories, and helps ensure that the Mythos elements, because of their unearthly origin, appear as imperceptible or at best semi-perceptible and semi-comprehensible to humans.

Harman calls this method of elevating the object above the possibility of being characterised as a combination of literal elements a “de-literalizing gesture” (2010: 24), and proceeds to state that creating such a significant gap between the described object and the imperfect description given by the narrator is a characteristic stylistic trait of Lovecraft’s writing: “...one of Lovecraft’s special gifts as a writer is a keen awareness that even his own original words are already just the paraphrase of a reality that eludes all literal speech.” (2010: 54). This means that when Lovecraft presents and develops the numinous elements of his

Weird Fiction narratives, he is constantly working from the premise that these elements defy description and human comprehension to such a degree that all his prose is merely “paraphrasing” the beings and events in the insufficient terms of human language. Furthermore, it is not only the beings themselves that are subject to being de-literalised; Lovecraft also employs this technique in presenting alien items, environments and cities, and in describing or outlining non-static elements such as events that occur in relation to or because of the de-literalised beings.

A clear example of how Lovecraft de-literalises a non-static event can be found towards the end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. When the unnamed narrator of the story looks back at the horde of Deep Ones that have been chasing him through the town and have now just lost track of him, he states that

What I saw—or fancied I saw—was a disturbing suggestion of undulant motion far to the south; a suggestion which made me conclude that a very large horde must be pouring out of the city along the level Ipswich road.

(Lovecraft 2005: 643)

The fallibility of the observation is quickly stressed as the narrator corrects himself on having actually seen what he here describes, and admits to possibly “fancying” he saw it. What he sets out to describe is not a single entity, but rather the motion of the horde of Deep Ones surging out of Innsmouth. Calling this a “disturbing suggestion” he first stresses his subjective negative impression of what he observed, and then implies that this was not actual undulant motion, but something that resembled or “suggested” such. As the term *undulant* more typically refers to the motion of waves in substantial bodies of water (*unda* means wave in Latin), it is not, I find, completely out of place in a description of a compact mass of amphibian beings moving along. However, this choice of words upsets the notion of the Deep Ones as individual anthropoid entities, and as Harman explains, turns the attention to “the horde as a whole” (2010: 193). This shows how Lovecraft alters the impression of the appearance of the Deep Ones, while keeping the description indefinite and vague, and maintaining the “gap” between description and object by pointing out the unreliability and subjectivity of the narrator and the fact that “undulant motion” is only a suggestion, or paraphrase of what was actually observed, because the actual observation could not possibly be put into words.

When Lovecraft puts forth these de-literalised descriptions and constantly keeps the cosmic entities removed from the possibility of being fully perceived and comprehended by humans, he de-centralises human perception and human perspective in the meeting between the cosmic and the earthly. As humans are thus unable to attain a deep understanding about these elements, it is uncertain to which degree science can help them in this. For although it is stated in the opening paragraph to “The Call of Cthulhu” that “...the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality...” (Lovecraft 2005: 167) it is possible that these “vistas of reality” are nothing more than implications and probabilities suggested by scientific findings, and not certain and unquestionable facts.

2.3. Modern science and human perception in “The Colour out of Space”

In “The Colour out of Space”, the characterisation of the extra-terrestrial antagonist entity is taken to an even more “de-literalised” degree than is the case with the characterisation of Cthulhu. Here, the entity is not represented as a dense and hardly explicable conglomeration of animalistic traits and physical shapes, but rather as something that is fundamentally incompatible with the visual perception of humans, that is, our perception of light and colour.

“The Colour out of Space” relies heavily on the lack of information about the extra-terrestrial entity in order to make it appear elusive as well as extremely dangerous to the human protagonists. It remains unclear throughout the story whether the meteor brought with it one or several alien entities (it will here, however, for the sake of convenience, be referred to in the singular), what its physical characteristics are, whether it is sentient, and whether there is any intelligent purpose and plan behind the meteor crash and the disastrous incidents that follow. That the alien comes with the meteor is clear from the course of events and the information given in the story. Whether it is part of the meteor’s own substance or only encapsulated in it, however, is not made clear, although the alien entity remains – hidden in a well - after the remains of the meteor itself evaporate. The alien is not given any name or referred to in any specific terms in the story, and, until the end of the story, it is not directly observed by any of the characters. Up to then, only its harmful effects on the landscape, animals and people of the Gardner farmstead is observed and described. These effects are

initially ascribed to the meteor itself, which naturally seems to be the only extra-terrestrial and extraordinary element present.

A scientific approach to the meteorite is quickly established in the narrative, as a team of researchers from the (fictional) Miskatonic University of Arkham are summoned to inspect it shortly after impact. Their procedures and findings are recounted in detail, largely in scientific terms. They study a specimen of the substance of the meteorite by introducing it to different liquids and solvents, heating it, and testing its plasticity. To their bafflement, they find that the specimen retains a high temperature for a long time, only cooling off slightly as it shrinks in size; although soft and malleable, it is a metal of sorts, and magnetic as such; it glows in the dark, and perhaps most curious, "...upon heating before the spectroscope it displayed shining bands unlike any known colours of the normal spectrum..." (Lovecraft 2005: 344) This idea of colourations that are outside of the "normal spectrum" visible to humans is repeated several times in the story, and recurs both in descriptions of the alien entity itself, which seems to consist of nothing more than a concentration of this colour, and in descriptions of the meteor's and/or the alien's unhealthy influence on all plants, animals and people in the vicinity.

Despite their thorough studies of the meteorite's substance, the Miskatonic professors are left unable to draw any scientific conclusions or form any theories about why it behaves and appears as it does. Instead they are left to form the conclusion that "It was nothing of this earth, but a piece of the great outside; and as such dowered with outside properties and obedient to outside laws." (Lovecraft 2005: 346) "Outside properties" and "outside laws" here refer to conditions of outer space that are so far removed from the conditions on earth that humans, whose perception and comprehension of reality is confined to earthly conditions, cannot possibly attain a working comprehension of anything that is native to this "great outside". This reflects how Lovecraft works to achieve "the essence of real externality" (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 244) that he stated to be essential in working with, non-earthly, cosmic elements in fiction (cf. p. 13)². Despite being an element of such "externality" that it is not comprehensible to humans, the humans in the story still endeavour to endow their observations and experiences with meaning, and Ammi Pierce tries to communicate all of it in as fitting terms as possible.

Nahum initially suggested that the meteorite had poisoned the soil of the valley, as the crops harvested after the meteor strike proved inedible despite having attained a "phenomenal

size and unwonted gloss” (Lovecraft 2005: 347). It is possible to simply infer that the substance inside the meteorite, with its luminosity and strange elemental properties, is poisonous, i.e., that its harmful effect on organic matter is chemical. Donald R. Burleson, in his analysis of the story, suggests that it is a blight or a poison brought by the meteorite that is affecting vegetation, animals and humans alike, and leaves it at that (1993: 49). However, no clues are given in the story as to what the properties of such a poison would be, and the idea of poison does not develop throughout the story. No natural and plausible explanations are given when, following the decay of the crops, mutated wildlife appears, such as a woodchuck whose body “...seemed slightly altered in a queer way impossible to describe...” (Lovecraft 2005: 348); livestock become sick, disintegrate physically and fall to pieces upon dying; the aforementioned “colour(s)” outside the normal spectrum pervades the vegetation before everything turns to greyness; Nahum Gardner’s wife goes insane, and two of his sons disappear, later to be found dead in the well. The scientific rationale has been dropped after the unsuccessful studies of the Miskatonic scientists, and the peculiarities of the meteorite and the “colour” are now left to be assessed and characterised in such terms as the narrator may see fit to convey his impressions of these. The way he describes the colour’s effect on the flora around the farmstead the spring following the meteor-strike makes a clear example:

No sane wholesome colours were anywhere to be seen except in the green grass and leafage; but everywhere those hectic and prismatic variants of some diseased, underlying primary tone without a place among the known tints of earth. The Dutchman’s breeches became a thing of sinister menace, and the bloodroots grew insolent in their chromatic perversion.

(Lovecraft 2005: 350)

As Ammi here recounts how the extra-terrestrial “colour” started to infect the landscape around the Gardner farm, and became reflected in various plants and flowers, his descriptions stay well within de-literalised terms. This shows in the way he refers to the colour, which in itself is perfectly impossible to imagine because of its lack of reference among the colours known to the human eye. When he calls the unknown element an “underlying primary tone” instead of simply a colour, he implies that this hue is a reference for other colours, in being a universally present “primary tone” and not a deviant and superimposed secondary tone. Seeing this unknown colour as a reference point for other colours and tones, however, is impossible as long as it cannot be described or imagined. Harman also points out the

paradoxical coupling of the adjectives “hectic” and “prismatic” as upsetting the description of this “tone”. “Prismatic” suggests that there is a gradual and overlapping variations in the different shades and “hectic” suggests that the variations are many, varied and striking (2010: 88). Not only would it be difficult for the reader to sort out how the notions of “hectic and prismatic” may be juxtaposed, but considering that this applies to an unheard-of alien colour renders the attempt futile. It is symptomatic of the de-literalised description to suggest that the nearest one can come to a faithful description is by means of juxtaposing incompatible qualities and thereby leaving the description to depend on a paradox. Although it could be inferred that this paradoxical phrase is due to a slip on the author’s part, Harman states that the phrase “seems chosen precisely because it is unthinkable” (2010: 88), which is to suggest that Lovecraft intended the “colour out of space” to appear thus paradoxical and impossible – by earthly and human notions at least.

In addition to these de-literalised characterisations, this description also conveys some of the subjective and negative impressions of the narrator toward the colour and its effects on the flora. This shows in the way he states that there were no “sane wholesome colours” around, a phrase that suggests that he sees the undefined colour and variants of it as “insane and unwholesome” – an observation that endows the object of the description with negative connotations. This notion is strengthened when the colour is said to be “diseased”, an adjective that in no way aids the visualising of the colour, but that conveys a clear sense of unwholesomeness on its part. Specific plants also convey a sense of negativity, if not hostility, as one species display “sinister menace” – implying a sense of threat -, while other appear “insolent”, thus implying a hostile or threatening appearance. As it is not clearly conveyed how these negative impressions are derived from the fact that the plants change colour, these phrases tell more about the subjective experience of the narrator than about the actual appearance of the plants. This allows the plants to stay on the far side of the descriptive “gap”, while the focus shifts to the feelings and impression of the eyewitness who gives the account, and thus starts to communicate a sense of horror and repulsion that he derives from these observations and the events that followed.

Burleson understands these negative reactions of the colour to represent the humans’ insistency on maintaining and preserving their notion of normality (1993: 49). The colour represents an abnormality that challenges the notion of colours as humans perceive them. For, as Burleson explains, the colour spectrum is a system that contains all the colours and shades that humans can perceive; although it shades off into the invisible – ultraviolet and infrared -,

it remains theoretically and scientifically comprehensible. The “colour out of space” does not belong outside of the spectrum in the same way as these, because it is not invisible, yet not in any way comprehensible either. The result of this is that it renders the entire colour spectrum, a basic system for human perception, insufficient and useless (1993: 49). I understand this to mean that when this extra-terrestrial colour pervades the landscape and alters the appearance of flowers, wildlife, livestock and even humans, it poses an existential threat to humans (as well as, gradually, physical) in that it forces them to abandon their understanding of normality that is based on how they perceive the world. In posing such an existential threat, the colour is perceived as being foreign, hostile and deviant. Although the humans cannot relate to the colour in terms of science or perception, they can manage to relate to it in terms of acceptance, and categorise the colour as “wrong” and “unwholesome” because it does not belong to the landscape, not even the planet, that it is now intruding upon. Lovecraft has thus managed to make the cosmic element in the story, the colour, appear as hostile and antagonistic largely because of its de-literalised and indescribable nature. The actual harm it does to the flora, the fauna and the humans of the area happens after this.

2.4. De-literalised effects rather than actions

On his deathbed, Nahum Gardner reveals in an incoherent fever-like verbal spasm that there is “something” in the well that is behind all the organic corruption around the farm, and has lured two of his children into the well, and made his other son and his wife insane. He implies that it is the “colour” itself that is in the well, in the form of a sort of gas. The observations made by Ammi Pierce and the investigating party later affirm this, as the being pouring out of the well is described as a “shapeless stream of unplaceable colour” (Lovecraft 2005: 363). Hence the alien itself, as an entity, does not have a physical and tangible form, and is essentially incompatible with human understanding, as it is, in its essence this incomprehensible “colour out of space”. In addition to this, the entity does not *do* anything else besides shooting back into space at the end; all the harm it causes are *effects* without any clear actions or discernible causes - the “abduction” of the two children is not clearly acted out by the entity, as it is not explained how they happened to end up in the well or how exactly they died. It is only implicit that they ended up there because of the colour. As stated by Patricia MacCormack, (the colour) “is threatening as affect and not as act” (2010: “Gate

3”, para. 6), and therefore it is not clear at all if the entity does these things by malevolent purpose; it could simply be that it is somehow extremely dangerous to all earthly organic matter due to some inherent properties that do not agree with organic life on earth, and has no other purpose than to get back home again. This uncertainty, however, is, as Joshi explains, a crucial plot device to this horror story (2001: 256), and the nature of the alien being is thus open to interpretation.

The role of the alien in the story is then to act as a mostly passive dangerous force whose effects are incomprehensible as well as harmful, and whose essence at best is to be characterised as a completely novel colour that appears in gaseous form. Like Cthulhu, the entity is described in terms that refuse concreteness and clarity, yet even more so, as this entity cannot be reduced to a single being or character with a name, intelligence, purpose, cult, or any of the other appliances that Cthulhu enjoys. What is also special with the alien entity in “The Colour out of Space”, is that it is not only the being itself which is de-literalised, but also its effects on organic matter – and it is in fact mostly in descriptions of affected beings that the de-literalising appears in this story.

An example of how the actual harmful effects of the entity are de-literalised can be found in the description of how the cows at the farm become physically destroyed by the influence of the colour: “Certain areas or sometimes the whole body would be uncannily shrivelled or compressed, and atrocious collapses or disintegrations were common.” (Lovecraft 2005: 353) With this, Harman explains that the pairing “shrivelled *or* compressed” suggests, through the conjunction “or”, that these two states are so like each other that the one could stand for the other; this, however, is not the fact, as “shrivelled” and “compressed” have so different meanings that they should not occur together (Harman 2010: 94). What happens to the cows can therefore not be understood as “shrivelling”, “compression” – these are merely terms that are used to substitute the actual, inexplicable event. The very damage that the colour does to the cows is of such an incomprehensible nature that it would have to be outlined in terms that are paradoxical and impossible. As this description is not concerned with the actual visual appearance of the “colour”, such as was primarily the case with the plants, but rather with a physical transformation in the cows, it is clear that it is not only the visual appearance of the colour that defies human perception – it can also affect its surroundings in such ways that physical changes in shape and form become de-literalised.

Also in this case are there some words that convey the narrator's subjective negative assessment of the event. The adverb "uncannily" and the adjective "atrocious" are integral to the description, and serve to make it appear as coloured by the narrator's feeling of disgust and horror. In this sense these words function the same way as the negative connotations suggested in the description of the plants. However, Harman also claims that as what happens to the cows is so paradoxical and impossible, the negative feeling that the narrator expresses upon recounting this, conveyed by the words "uncannily" and "atrocious", is what serves to make the event seem credible (2010: 94). I understand this to mean that it is not primarily the sense of negativity that is expressed that is significant here. It is rather the sense of humanity and human emotion. For as neither the narrator nor the listener – nor, presumably, the reader – can relate to or imagine what actually, physically happened to the cows, all humans could be able to relate to the sense of disgust and fear that would naturally attend upon such an observation. Thus it becomes possible to see the negativity and the impression of "hostility" that is attached to the colour as establishing a sense of sympathy and understanding on the part of the humans. This comprehension would not at all derived from any scientific or empirical assessment of the colour, but from the possibility of categorising it as a source of fear and repulsion – and thus as an antagonist.

Nahum Gardner's wife is the first of the humans in the story who is affected by the colour. Her symptoms are initially not visual, as is the case with the vegetation and the livestock, but mental. Her behaviour upon losing her mind is first described in the following way:

In her raving there was not a single specific noun, but only verbs and pronouns. Things moved and changed and fluttered, and ears tingled to impulses which were not wholly sounds. Something was taken away—she was being drained of something—something was fastening itself on her that ought not to be—someone must make it keep off—nothing was ever still in the night—the walls and windows shifted.

(Lovecraft 2005: 351)

The first sentence here states that there were oddities in the way she spoke. As her verbal "raving" contains verbs and pronouns, but no specific nouns, it is clear that it lacks the substance that would make it comprehensible, coherent and meaningful. What follows in the description seems to be an attempt at paraphrasing her talk. This paraphrase substitutes the lack of nouns with indefinite nouns such as "things", "something", and "it". However this

would be expressed without these words, and only by the means of verbs and pronouns is unclear. The fact that her talking is here paraphrased and not recounted verbatim may suggest that there is supposed to be certain qualities to Mrs. Gardner's raving that makes it impossible to recapitulate in a better way than by paraphrase, such as is the case with the colour being reflected in the vegetation, and with its harmful effect on the livestock.

The actual paraphrase that Ammi gives on recounting the event is not particularly coherent or clear in its meaning either. It is not clear what the "impulses" that seemingly impressed the ears despite not being "wholly sounds" are, or how these are to be interpreted. Somehow she also gets the impression that "something" is taking hold of her physically, "fastening itself", and draining her. As both the thing that takes hold of her and that which is being taken away from her are referred to as "something", it is utterly impossible to understand what either of these may be, or whether they may even be differentiated, as they are referred to in the same terms. "The walls and windows shifted" can be understood to mean that she is hallucinating and seeing movements in her surroundings that are not there, and that she thus thinks that the walls and windows are undergoing some kind of change. Here, however, it must be remembered that she did not use any actual nouns in expressing herself, and that therefore, this must be a mere interpretation derived from her speech and behaviour. How close such an interpretation and a paraphrase come to representing her impressions and hallucinations cannot be made clear. This shows how her entire experience of becoming insane is de-literalised to such a degree that it cannot be communicated in representative and just terms. Upon becoming insane due to the colour's influence she has, figuratively, moved to the far side of the "gap", and thus even her own description of the experience is beyond the perception and comprehension of the witness.

From these incidents I infer that the alien entity in the story is not only spreading death and decay around the farmstead, yet also spreading the very de-literalising that makes objects and entities appear incomprehensible to humans, both those in the story and those reading it. Taking into account the scientists' failure to understand what the alien, both the meteorite and the "colour", is, and its passive and destructive powers, I understand the cosmic element in the story as representing an empirical reality that is so foreign to humans and earthly conditions that it cannot possibly be comprehended. And as it starts to pervade the area and become reflected in everything from vegetation to affected humans, it demonstrates that this sense of incomprehensibility is able to spread and transform common sights and experiences

into de-literalised realities – a development that eventually leaves the entire area a desolate “blasted heath” and all the animal and humans on the farm dead. As Burleson (1993) explains,

(...) the light, the systematically unassimilable color, associates itself not with life and knowledge but with “the grey brittle death,” the eclipse of knowledge, the demonstration of the inadequacy of what purports to be knowledge, the potentially terrible consequences of new knowledge, the reduction of living minds (...) to an ashen residue.

(Burleson 1993: 50)

Burleson here shows how the colour can be interpreted in symbolical terms, where “the light”, i.e. the “shining bands” that are the colour, which otherwise represents illumination and enlightenment turns negative and portends an “eclipse of knowledge” which I understand to be the incomprehensible and de-literalised nature of the colour and its effects. This interpretation clearly reflects the symbolical use of “light” in the opening paragraph of “The Call of Cthulhu”, where scientific revelations about cosmos are called a “deadly light” (Lovecraft 2005: 167) from which humans must flee in order to continue living in peace. Following this symbolical use of “light”, it is possible to see the events that take place in “The Colour out of Space” as representing the consequences of looking into the “deadly light” which is the disillusioning and horrifying knowledge of certain cosmic realities. This I believe is what Burleson means by referring to the colour as associated with “the potentially terrible consequences of new knowledge” (1993: 50).

2.5. Science merges with witchcraft in “The Dreams in the Witch House”

Modern science is also at play in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, yet here it appears in a very different way than in “The Colour out of Space”. The main antagonist in this story is Keziah Mason, a woman who possesses an enormous scientific knowledge that is not only extremely complex, but also presented as being related to a doctrine that is usually regarded as un-scientific, if not opposed to science, namely witchcraft.

The concept of witchcraft belongs to a diverse field of study that is commonly referred to as the occult. *Occultus* means “concealed” or “secret” in Latin, and as a concept or field of

study, “the occult” encompasses all that is or has been regarded as secret and esoteric knowledge. The online Collins English Dictionary primarily defines occult as “of or characteristic of magical, mystical, or supernatural arts, phenomena, or influences” (Occult n.d). Being thus concerned with topics such as magic and supernatural powers, occult studies have often been viewed unfavourably both from scientific and religious perspectives. In Lovecraft’s fiction, the occult is not exonerated from such views, yet the fateful consequences that follow when the protagonists get involved with occult studies show that, in the Cthulhu Mythos, witchcraft and occult studies are not mere superstition, but as pertaining to reality as science – if not more.

Occult elements such as witchcraft or black magic are not rare in Lovecraft’s fiction, and “The Dreams in the Witch House” is one of several Mythos stories that are concerned with the occult as a dangerous and threatening force, and portray the study of such elements as catastrophic to the protagonists. Beside “The Dreams in the Witch House”, examples of this can be found in “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” (1927) in which a young student of the occult uses his knowledge to resurrect an ancestor of his who was an infamous necromancer, that is, one who communicates with or resurrects the dead. The resurrected necromancer kills the young student, and, as the two are of similar physical appearance, he manages to impersonate him while taking up again the atrocious necromantic work he was conducting in his previous life. A similar fate befalls the protagonist of “The Haunter of the Dark” (1935), who is killed by an unnamed entity that he accidentally summons when investigating the old headquarters of an esoteric sect called “The Church of Starry Wisdom”.

As pointed out by W.J. Hanegraaff, the antagonistic forces of the Cthulhu Mythos often create associations to beings and elements that are traditionally viewed as “evil” and dangerous in Christian doctrine, such as pagan idols, demons, and occult elements such as witchcraft (2007: 98). A clear example of this is the presence or at least mention of ancient Semitic deities such as Dagon (in “The Shadow over Innsmouth) and Lilith (in “The Horror at Red Hook (1925)), alongside Lovecraft’s own inventions, such as Cthulhu. Moreover, in bringing occult lore – both real and fictional - and black magic into his narratives, Lovecraft also makes use of an entire concept that is traditionally viewed as opposed to Christian doctrine. Hanegraaff calls such elements “others” or “the demonized other”, and explains that these represent “everything “we” consider unacceptable and incompatible with our own basic values” (2007: 97). Christianity, because of its long and deep-rooted tradition in western thought and culture, may well be regarded such a basic value, and thus everything that is

unacceptable and incompatible with that belongs to what is here called the “other”, or “demonized other” if it has been viewed by Christians as coming from, or belonging or pertaining to demons and the devil.

The concept of witchcraft, which is strongly at play in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, is one such “demonised other”, and has been stigmatized to the point where (supposedly) innocent people have been executed because of even very small suspicions of their knowledge and association with the doctrine. Lovecraft clearly plays upon this in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, where the witch Keziah Mason is indeed a survivor of the Salem witch trials that took place in Massachusetts in the late 17th century. What is exceptional in this story, however, is not witchcraft as an antagonistic element, but the fact that what was supposed to be “black magic” by the inquisitors of Salem, turns out to be, as the protagonist Walter Gilman suspects and investigates, indeed complex mathematics and physics, applied in such a way that the witch manages to access another dimension and traverse time and space (hence her unlikely presence in the story, which is set some time in the 1920’s), by physically drawing or constructing certain geometrical shapes and angles and interacting with these.

I find the relation between the occult and the highly scientific to be a crucial matter in this story, and it is especially the role and significance of modern science that is being twisted here, as it is brought into relation with the magical and supernatural aspects of the occult. In commenting on the role of witchcraft in this narrative, Harman goes as far as stating that “One of the crowning perversities of Lovecraft’s vision is found in his treatment of the relation between science and the occult.” (2010: 195) This, he explains, is because Lovecraft tends to wipe out the distinction between what is real science and occult knowledge, or black magic. This reflects back to the opening paragraph of “The Call of Cthulhu”, where it is stated that science is not indeed wholesome enlightenment, but a means of discovering certain truths about reality that are too horrifying to be bearable for humanity. In this respect, witchcraft, occult studies and, as mentioned in “The Call of Cthulhu”, theosophy, seem to pertain to the same, as they give access to understanding about the malevolent beings that, unbeknownst to most of its inhabitants, permeate the world of the Cthulhu Mythos. Therefore, witches and scientists pose a similar threat to humanity, as both are endangering “the sanity of earth-life”, by possessing the means of discovering these beings (Harman 2010: 195). As such, Keziah Mason has something in common with the scientists of the Mythos, and students of science,

such as the protagonist, Gilman, namely that they all move toward some recognition of the futility of human existence, and the existence of the Cthulhu Mythos-pantheon.

Keziah Mason is further assimilated to modern scientists as the scope of her scientific knowledge is, in part, revealed. To explicate that she is indeed extremely advanced in her knowledge (in relation to the standing of the relevant sciences when the story was written in 1931), and without going into any particular scientific details to prove this, Lovecraft states that she had insight into “mathematical depths perhaps beyond the utmost modern delvings of Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein and de Sitter” (Lovecraft 2005: 656). All of these are mathematicians and theoretical/quantum physicists that were at work in the early 20th century, and alive when the story was written. Lovecraft has thus made it clear that Keziah Mason, by the aid of “occult” knowledge, has gained an understanding of physics that rivals the greatest and (at the time the story was written) most advanced minds in the field, more than two centuries prior to them. The existence of other dimensions than the commonly familiar three (height, width, depth) was and is still a centre of attention for several mathematicians and physicists, and this is brought up in “The Dreams in the Witch House”. Following his nightly interdimensional travels with Keziah Mason, Gilman acquires “an intuitive knack for solving Riemannian equations” (Lovecraft 2005: 661). Harman explains that some these equations are concerned with extra-dimensional space, and could not possibly be “intuitively” understood, as humans are only able to distinguish three dimensions (Harman 2010: 198). Gilman, however, has spent time traversing other dimensions, and has therefore a better understanding of these than his classmates, who have only learned about this from textbooks. From this it becomes clear that the occult practises of Keziah Mason is a shortcut to comprehending some extremely complex aspects of modern physics and that one may possibly attain deeper understanding of this through occult studies than through scientific studies.

Although Keziah Mason possesses and utilises a great knowledge of modern physics, it is important to bear in mind that her character cannot possibly be reduced to that of a misunderstood scientist. The appellation “witch”, which may bear multiple connotations to folklore and the occult, still fits her well after her connection with the realm of modern science has been revealed, as she, towards the end of the story, sacrifices an infant on Walpurgis eve as part of a ritual. She is also constantly accompanied by her familiar Brown Jenkin, a small rat-human hybrid being, and she is visited by Nyarlathotep. This is one of the core antagonist figures in the Cthulhu Mythos, a deity who acts as a messenger or envoi for Azathoth, often disguised as a human being. Azathoth is also central among the Cthulhu

Mythos deities that Lovecraft invented. He is never more than mentioned briefly in the stories, and little is revealed about him besides the fact that he is an embodiment of pure chaos and resides in a void beyond time and space (cf. Lovecraft 2005: 674). Keziah Mason has some contact with Azathoth through Nyarlathotep, yet it is not revealed what this contact entails; it might be that she is worshipping him or learning something from him, although why and to what end – if there is any – is left unexplained. However, when the student Gilman is visited by Mason in his dreams, he learns that by prying into the same occult and mathematical matters that she has studied, he is obliged to follow her, and:

He must meet the Black Man, and go with them all to the throne of Azathoth at the centre of ultimate Chaos. That was what she said. He must sign in his own blood the book of Azathoth and take a new secret name now that his independent delvings had gone so far.

(Lovecraft 2005: 664)

The Black Man is Nyarlathotep, who is disguised as a dark skinned male human (though with Caucasian features), and the “delvings” are Gilman’s joint studies in complex mathematics and occult lore. From this arises the suggestion that there is an intimate connection between these two fields. Harman’s comment that this connection is “One of the crowning perversities of Lovecraft’s vision...” (2010: 195) seems less harsh, I find, as it becomes clear that the connection indeed suggests that modern physics and infant sacrifice pertain to the same end, which is some kind of affiliation with the malignant Mythos deities. What may be the benefits of such a commerce is not hinted at either; only is it clear that the studies Gilman are conducting leaves him obligated to continue on the premises of Nyarlathotep and Azathoth, and become, as Keziah Mason, one of the antagonists, with a “new secret name” and a binding contract in some “book of Azathoth”.

By conceding to this arrangement, Gilman would have become part of the “demonised other”. The idea of signing a “contract” in his own blood with the antagonist deities and then continuing his studies on their premises, which include witch Sabbaths and infant sacrifice, brings up strong connotations of witchcraft as an evil and satanic practise. When Hanegraaff discusses the idea of the “demonised other”, he also brings up the scientific aspect of the Mythos antagonists: “Not only does Lovecraft play upon the various “others” of monotheism and Christianity (paganism, magic, demonology, witchcraft and so on), he does the same with those of modern rationality and science.” (2007: 99). What Hanegraaff means here, is that

Lovecraft actively uses religiously charged connotations in presenting the antagonists of the Mythos, and that he also uses their incompatibility with rationality (their de-literalised qualities), and the impossibility of categorising or accounting for them scientifically to make them appear as opposed to rationality and science. Keziah Mason is a singularly clear example of how Lovecraft combines these two modes of alterity, as she is both endowed with associations of witch-hunts and Satanism, as well as being in possession of a significant scientific knowledge that she not only seems to have gained from her occult studies, but also uses actively in her practise of witchcraft. Through this symbiotic relationship between witchcraft and modern physics, Lovecraft gives credibility to witchcraft as a real and functioning practise in the Cthulhu Mythos, while modern physics, although not deprived of credibility and function, appears to be so intimately related to witchcraft that through the practise of this, one may gain an understanding of physics that is deeper than that of those who only practise modern science.

2.6. Describing extra-dimensional and cosmic realities

On the theoretical level, it is clearly possible to attain a certain comprehension of Keziah Mason's studies and work. This is shown when Gilman suddenly exceeds his fellow students' knowledge and understanding about Riemannian equations and similar complex issues, because of his nightly extra-dimensional travels with Keziah Mason and Brown Jenkin. When he is actually experiencing these travels, however, the descriptions of space, objects and entities turn highly de-literalised and fantastical instead of scientific and mathematical:

All the objects - organic and inorganic alike - were totally beyond description or even comprehension. Gilman sometimes compared the inorganic masses to prisms, labyrinths, clusters of cubes and planes, and Cyclopean buildings; and the organic things struck him variously as groups of bubbles, octopi, centipedes, living Hindoo idols, and intricate Arabesques roused into a kind of ophidian animation.

(Lovecraft 2005: 659)

There are some references to mathematical (geometrical) entities – prisms and cubes – here, yet these are not described in any way, and as it is stated that Gilman “sometimes compared”

inorganic things in the extra-dimensional space to such entities, it is clear that they are not prisms and cubes, but that prisms and cubes are the closest three-dimensional analogies he can use to outline them. His understanding of these matters is, as already shown, intuitive, and therefore it is possible that he cannot make any explanations based on logic, but has to rely on analogies and his imagination, which, as the excerpt above demonstrates, is quite vivid. He manages, however, to differentiate the entities he encounters as inorganic and organic, based on whether they are moving by themselves or not. It is possible that the organic entities are other living beings travelling or existing in the extra-dimensional space, as he states that some of these things suddenly appear or disappear, and as their motions sometimes indicate that they “notice” him. With these, too, he creates analogies to various earthly entities, deliberately choosing multiple-limbed beings such as octopi, centipedes, and Hindoo idols (these are often fashioned with several sets of arms, or even animal traits, such as Ganesha, the Elephant-headed god of, among other things, science and wisdom) as referees.

Here Gilman describes a de-literalised environment where perfectly unrelated objects such as geometrical figures and submarine and insect entities appear next to each other, yet where these things are only such by analogy, because their actual appearances, as Gilman experiences them, cannot be described due to the inability of the human mind to comprehend the extra-dimensional reality he is accessing. The role of de-literalising in this story is, as in “The Colour out of Space”, to stress the incompatibility of science and human comprehension with the de-literalised elements. Humans are not able to comprehend these elements, yet may access and experience them, which shows that although they are beyond human perception, they are still “real” in the stories. The fact that humans cannot comprehend these elements is perfectly irrelevant as “...common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large.” (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 244). It is symptomatic of the de-literalised elements in the Cthulhu Mythos that they generally seem to apply to the antagonists, belonging to the appearance and effects of the antagonist itself, as in “The Colour out of Space”, or to an aspect of reality accessible primarily to the antagonist, as in this story. It is therefore debatable whether the sense of antagonism proceeds, in any degree, from the incompatibility of the de-literalised elements with human reality, or this is merely added to it.

In one of his dreams, Gilman follows Keziah Mason and Brown Jenkin - or what appears to be them – through the extradimensional space and travels to what appears to be an enormous, non-human city on another planet. Being suddenly situated in such an unearthly

environment, Gilman discovers that other physical and geometrical conditions are the standard there.

The pavement from which he easily raised himself was of a veined, polished stone beyond his power to identify, and the tiles were cut in bizarre-angled shapes which struck him as less asymmetrical than based on some unearthly symmetry whose laws he could not comprehend.

(Lovecraft 2005: 669)

Not only is the pavement constructed in a type of stone foreign to Gilman's experience, they are also cut into tiles in a manner that he cannot fully comprehend. Calling the shapes of these "bizarre-angled" does not show any of Gilman's otherwise thorough understanding of geometry. The explanation to this seems to be that the tiles are not necessarily asymmetrical, which could have been comprehensive, but belonging to laws of symmetry that apply on this foreign planet, yet not at all on earth. As Harman points out, it is strange that Gilman should be unable to account for these shapes when he has in fact gained so much knowledge about extra-dimensional space from his experiences in the witch house that he surpasses all the other students in his class in understanding non-Euclidean geometry and other aspects of complex physics (2010: 203). The reason, I infer, is that the knowledge Gilman demonstrated in the classroom was purely theoretical, framed in well-known terms of mathematics and geometry. When he suddenly finds and observes a piece of such unearthly and deviant geometry, he is seemingly unable to use his knowledge to account for this, which could suggest that the equations he had been proposing and discussing at the university may indeed have been wrong, or insufficient because they failed to account for the physical conditions that applies in other parts of space, but not on earth. Harman interprets it as Gilman "is unable to cross the limits imposed on all human access to reality." (2010: 203), which I understand to mean that despite his theoretical erudition, Gilman is hindered by his human, three-dimensional perspective that is used to, and confined to understanding the conditions on earth. As such the conditions of this environment are outlined in de-literalised terms, because that is the closest to how Gilman actually perceives these.

Although being solicited by Keziah Mason and "The Black Man" Nyarlathotep to sign a contract with them and accompany them in carrying out an infant sacrifice in the cramped compartment above his room, Gilman resists and tries to stop the sacrifice. He attacks Keziah and strangles her with a crucifix, seemingly killing her. He also kicks Brown Jenkin into an

aperture by the wall, but realises too late that the monstrous being had managed to fulfil the sacrifice while he was busy struggling with the witch. In the delirium that follows this realisation, Gilman manages for the first time to access the extra-dimensional space without being enticed into it by Keziah Mason. This is necessary to him, because there is no physical way out of the compartment. How exactly he does this is not revealed, but it is stated that “Confused memories mixed themselves with his mathematics, and he believed his subconscious mind held the *angles* which he needed to guide him back to the normal world—alone and unaided for the first time.” (Lovecraft 2005: 685). This suggests that he here enters into the extra-dimensional space solely through a mental exercise that involves focusing on certain abnormal and non-three dimensional angles that only his subconscious is able to hold on to. This feat involves none of the theoretical understanding about extra-dimensionality that Gilman showed earlier, but suggests that he goes beyond his scientific knowledge and relies on an intuitive understanding of physics that he has derived from his dream experiences with Keziah Mason. As such, this event can be seen as suggesting that he has started to learn to employ his understanding of physics in the same way as Keziah Mason did. Gilman, however, has not agreed to follow her further in this as he is disgusted and horrified by everything from her appearance to her acts of witchcraft that somehow pertain to physics in an even more advanced manner than he can comprehend without partaking in it.

As such, Gilman’s violent resistance in the loft compartment represents a breaking away from Keziah Mason and her work. Where he might initially have been enticed by curiosity and interest because of his studies and fascination with the witch, he has now become disillusioned and disgusted with her acts and the implications that infant sacrifice pertains to some end that is related to the extra-dimensional travels that he has been studying and partaking in. His deed is soon avenged by Brown Jenkin, however, who finds Gilman sleeping, badly hurt and exhausted from the events, on a couch in another apartment in the witch house the following night. Brown Jenkin takes Gilman’s life in a most physical manner, and when the other lodgers rush to the scene to see why Gilman had been screaming, the matter is briefly outlined as follows: “It would be barbarous to do more than suggest what had killed Gilman. There had been virtually a tunnel through his body—something had eaten his heart out.” (Lovecraft 2005: 687-88). As Harman points out, Lovecraft is rather hypocritical in his description of Gilman’s death, as he first states that giving more than a suggestion about this would be “barbarous”, and then immediately proceeds to give far more than a suggestion, and presents a clear and physical description of the matter (2010: 213). This event stands out

in being outlined in a clear manner that, despite its morbidity, in no way defies visual representation through de-literalisation or vagueness. As such, this event creates a contrast to all the de-literalised and semi-explicable interdimensional dream travels Gilman has done throughout his stay in the witch house. I interpret this as signifying that when Gilman decides to break with Keziah Mason and refuses to take the required step into an existence such as hers by signing a contract in “the book of Azathoth”, he is set up for a destruction that is so physical and straightforward that it serves to accentuate the finitude of his non-cosmic, non-de-literalised human existence.

Physical destruction of humans also takes place in “The Colour out of Space”, where for instance Nahum Gardner, having become infected by the colour and thus mentally enfeebled, “caves in” on the kitchen floor after a short period of physical “disintegration” similar to what the cows went through (Lovecraft 2005: 359). It is my understanding that such cases of physical, blunt demise that humans often meet in the Mythos stories serve to contrast the numinous existence of such cosmic entities as the “colour out of space” or Cthulhu or Nyarlathotep. As these beings transcend reality as perceived by humans, they attain a sense of infinitude, which is supported by the fact that it is never suggested that they have any temporal or spatial origin, or that they are bound to die or disappear in any way. The brief and confined physical existence of humans as contrasted to the seemingly infinite existence of the Mythos entities can be understood as reflecting, in a concretised manner, how the narrator of “The Call of Cthulhu” sees human existence as “transient incidents” in the cosmos (Lovecraft 2005: 167). However, as “The Dreams in the Witch House” has suggested, there is a possibility for humans in the Cthulhu Mythos to transcend this ordinary human existence, such as Keziah Mason has done, and become part of that which is beyond human perception and scientific measuring and comprehension. What Gilman’s fate would have been if he signed Azathoth’s contract and took on a new name and identity according to the obligation set upon him, remains unknown. It can be conjectured, however, that the existence he then would have entered into would have been so foreign to human perception and experience that it could only have been recounted through de-literalised paraphrase.

3. Cosmicism and the Cthulhu Mythos

3.1. Lovecraft's philosophy of cosmicism

The Cthulhu Mythos is largely founded on the philosophical idea of “cosmicism” which consists in the notion that humanity is utterly insignificant in and in relation to the cosmos-at-large, and the implications that are to be derived from this. This is reflected in the above quoted letter from 1927 (cf. p. 13), in which Lovecraft asserts that human emotions, thoughts, and any anthropocentric perspective are irrelevant and meaningless in a cosmic perspective, due to humanity's relatively microscopic position in time and space (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 244). It is also reflected in the opening paragraph to “The Call of Cthulhu”, in which the narrator states the futility of human scientific aspirations, and the frightening consequences that will attend upon discovering empirical truths about a cosmos that contains such powerful and malevolent beings as Cthulhu (Lovecraft 2005: 167). Due to this, it is my understanding that this idea of cosmicism is a founding principle of the Cthulhu Mythos. However, I also find that in turning this view into fictional representations of confrontations between humans and cosmic entities, Lovecraft opened for the possibility of renegotiating the negative and pessimistic implications of cosmicism, and its significance for humans.

Lovecraft stated in an essay called “A Confession of Unfaith” from 1922 that he started developing the idea of cosmicism from the age of thirteen, having attained the idea that humanity is cosmically insignificant from his amateur astronomy studies (Joshi 2001: 60). As Lovecraft thereby gained a certain impression of the vastness of the universe, and the relative infinitesimality of earth and humanity's existence, both spatial and temporal, he attained a view that humanity is so small, in relation to the rest of the cosmos, that from a cosmic perspective, human history, knowledge, religion, etc., is completely irrelevant and meaningless. To elaborate this, Joshi explains that

Having sloughed off any belief in deity as scientifically unjustified, Lovecraft was left with the awareness that humankind was (probably) alone in the universe— at least, we have no way to establish contact with extra-terrestrial races— and that the quantitative insignificance of the planet and all its inhabitants, both spatially and temporally, carried with it the corollary of a qualitative insignificance.

(Joshi 2001: 60).

This explanation I understand to mean that, as humanity is insignificant and meaningless from a cosmic perspective, Lovecraft deduced that a human perspective cannot ameliorate this, because the cosmic perspective, being larger and more objective – perfectly objective due to its probable lack of life - has more authority than any human, anthropocentric perspective. As a worldview, cosmicism is essentially non-anthropocentric, in the sense that the cosmic perspective on humanity simply functions as a scientific and empirical justification of non-anthropocentrism. Although Lovecraft had been developing the idea of cosmicism since his youth, it was not until the latter part of his literary career, from 1926 and onwards (Joshi 2001: 182) - from the time he wrote “The Call of Cthulhu” that is - that he started to implement this programmatically into his fiction and use it there as a source of creative output. As the idea has merged with the fiction, it has become more open to interpretation, and though Lovecraft made explicit statements about his views in certain letters and non-fiction texts, it is possible to challenge the pessimism and negativity of cosmicism through interpretations of events in the Mythos stories.

Being a scientifically based pessimistic worldview, Lovecraft’s cosmicism, as he expressed it in his letters and essays, such as the above quoted, may be understood as a variant of- or extension to the nihilism that had developed in European – primarily Russian - literature and philosophy in the 19th century. Although it was originally bound up with revolutionary anti-authorial political views, nihilism is now most commonly understood as an existential view that human life and existence is not in any way meaningful and valuable (Pratt n.d.: section 1.). The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is regarded a highly significant and influential spokesman for this existential nihilism, as he argued not only for the reality of nihilism, but also saw it as necessary, and ultimately unavoidable, that modern humans should adopt this view and actively reject and destroy all values, especially religion and morality, upon acknowledging their meaninglessness (Pratt n.d.: section 2.). This insistency on the meaninglessness of human existence and thereby human values echoes the idea of cosmicism. Yet there is a difference in that in cosmicism, this view derives from a recognition of the relative insignificance of humanity in relation to the rest of the universe, whereas the existential nihilism of Nietzsche posits that values are human inventions, and therefore have no real, absolute existence outside the human mind (Wilkerson n.d.: section 4). As such Nietzsche’s nihilism is concerned with the relationship between individual humans and the external world, whereas cosmicism is concerned with the relationship between

humanity as a whole and the entire universe. It is in any way clear that Lovecraft attained a nihilist view from what he saw as the inherent meaninglessness of the universe and reality. In a 1923 letter he stated that “I have no opinions— I believe in nothing ... My cynicism and scepticism are increasing, and from an entirely new cause— the Einstein theory.” (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 182).

As this statement shows, Lovecraft understood the “Einstein theory”, the theory of relativity that Albert Einstein proposed in 1905, to provide him with a scientific backup for his pessimistic cosmicism. This was seemingly because the theory suggests that time and space, or “spacetime” is not universally uniform. In physics spacetime is time and space seen as a single continuum due to the fact that any event that happens always does so both in time and space. Time and space are therefore not seen as separable units, but as two interlinked aspects of physical reality. The idea that spacetime is not universally uniform means that units of time and space here on earth may not appear the same way if situated in other parts of the cosmos, because they would be affected and altered by the specific gravitational conditions present (cf. Ridpath 2012). In his letter, Lovecraft goes on to explain how this, in his view, overrules all human perspective, which is based on and limited to how things are viewed on earth:

All is chance, accident, and ephemeral illusion— a fly may be greater than Arcturus, and Durfee Hill may surpass Mount Everest— assuming them to be removed from the present planet and differently environed in the continuum of spacetime. There are no values in all infinity— the least idea that there are is the supreme mockery of all.”

(Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 182)

The fact that units of fixed size and measurement on earth may be altered and appear different if, hypothetically, removed from earth and situated somewhere else in spacetime seemingly leads Lovecraft to infer that measurable qualities and entities on earth are to be seen as illusory because of the relativity of their properties and appearance. This again shows how he sees an earth-centred and anthropocentric perspective as inferior to a larger, cosmic perspective. From this notion he asserts that human values do not exist in the cosmic perspective, and are thus irrelevant. The last sentence of the above quote also shows Lovecraft’s contempt toward any notion that human values have any interest or meaning in a larger perspective, “in all infinity” which may be understood as the supposed infinity of cosmos, as opposed to the transience of earth and humanity. Joshi, however, remarks that

these conclusions on Lovecraft's part in relation to the Einstein theory are groundless, and suggests that they betray Lovecraft's lacking comprehension of the matter (2001: 183). Lovecraft exact understanding of Einstein is not possible to assess, but in relation to cosmicism, it is important and significant that he saw his ethical view, his view that human values are cosmically irrelevant, as supported by advanced contemporary science, and therefore subject to empirical assessment.

Due to Lovecraft's focus on humanity's cosmic insignificance and his pessimistic view of scientific progress, which he saw as being fated to ultimately reveal this insignificance empirically, several readers and critics of Lovecraft have understood both his non-fiction and his fiction to represent an intense and unmitigated contempt towards all human progress and development, scientifically, culturally and genetically. Michel Houellebecq is especially clear in stating how he views Lovecraft and his fiction as pessimistic and completely disillusioned with the world and life through scientifically grounded assumptions about the universe:

Few beings have ever been so impregnated, pierced to the core, by the conviction of the absolute futility of human aspiration. The universe is nothing but a furtive arrangement of elementary particles. A figure in transition toward chaos. That is what will finally prevail. The human race will disappear. Other races in turn will appear and disappear. The skies will be glacial and empty, traversed by the feeble light of half-dead stars. These too will disappear. And human actions are as free and as stripped of meaning as the unfettered movement of the elementary particles. Good, evil, morality, sentiments? Pure "Victorian fictions." All that exists is egotism. Cold, intact and radiant.

(Houellebecq 2008: 32)

Houellebecq presents Lovecraft as a nihilistic type who sees any "human aspiration" as hopeless, and arbitrary values such as "Good, evil, morality, sentiments" as outdated "Victorian fictions". All this stems from the notion of humanity's transient and insignificant position in a cosmos that is "nothing but a furtive arrangement of elementary particles", in other words, a chaos behind which there is no plan or intentionality whatsoever.

Houellebecq's view here is rather one-sided, and does not admit any positive implications for humans – unless perhaps he sees egotism as a positive quality, a means to

cope with meaninglessness. I find his view to be rather hyperbolic in its insistency on disillusionment and contempt towards human life on Lovecraft's part, and I will show in my discussion of cosmicism in the Cthulhu Mythos that there are significant elements to it that Houellebecq here misses, such as religion, culture and aesthetics, elements that other critics have used to argue that Lovecraft's worldview is far more complex than simply nihilistic and hateful. For even though Lovecraft clearly expressed contempt towards human values in the above quoted letter from 1923, the Cthulhu Mythos stories that he wrote in the years following show other sides of the matter, and suggest that certain human values retain their significance despite the cosmic perspective on humanity.

When Hanegraaff (2007) discusses the possibility of viewing the Cthulhu Mythos as a nihilistic literature, he argues that there is an important distinction between "radical nihilism" and "romantic nihilism" in this respect. He explains radical nihilism with reference to "the last man" in Nietzsche's book *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Hanegraaff 2007: 106-107). Nietzsche presents "The last man" as a contemptible human being who seeks only to live safe and content without reflecting about life or seeking any higher meaning. He thinks himself perfectly happy, having rid himself of all worries, and also of all aspiration, creativity and will to change. "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" — thus asks the last man, and blinks." (Nietzsche 2003: 11). When Hanegraaff sees Lovecraft as representing "romantic nihilism", he seems to posit this as a nihilistic antithesis to Nietzsche's depressing vision of "the last man"; the romantic nihilist is searching for meaning despite all, not seeking to shelter himself with ignorance and shallow contentment (Hanegraaff 2007: 107). It must then be allowed that Lovecraft was not concerned with abandoning all values because of cosmicism and its implications, but sought to find and maintain values in spite of it.

Lovecraft clearly stated in the above quoted 1923 letter that he believed "in nothing", as a true nihilist. Yet, his repeated statements about the dangers of scientific probing, the "deadly light" that he speaks of in the opening to "The Call of Cthulhu" (Lovecraft 2005: 167), as well as the suggestion that ignorance may be more valuable than knowledge - "the peace and safety of a new dark age" (2005: 167), demonstrate that he intended to portray scientific progress as unwholesome to humans exactly because it would lead inevitably to realising and acknowledging the nihilist implications that come from the empirical knowledge that humanity is cosmically insignificant. What primarily sets Lovecraft's sentiments apart from Nietzsche's nihilist view, is that according to Nietzsche, the acknowledging of nihilism should be followed by a "re-evaluation of all values", i.e. the deliberate creation of new

values to take the place of the old, rejected ones. “Revaluation of all values: that is my formula for the highest act of self-reflection on the part of humanity, which has become flesh and genius in me.” (Nietzsche 2007: 88) he proposed in *Ecce Homo*, a book in which he works to explain and interpret his own philosophy and his development as a thinker. He hereby posits the act of reevaluating human values as the highest and most laudable moment of existential self-awareness for humans – in clear contrast to the resigned attitude of “the last man”. On Lovecraft’s part, it seems that he viewed certain established and traditional values such as Christianity and aesthetics to be more valuable and wholesome to humans as these would substitute nihilism and cosmicism’s lack of values with the illusion of values. He can thus be seen as representing Hanegraaff’s “romantic nihilist” (2007:107) who strives towards meaning despite his knowledge of the meaninglessness of the universe. I discuss representations of these values in the Cthulhu Mythos further in the end of this chapter.

3.2. Cosmos in the Cthulhu Mythos

Modern science is in the Cthulhu Mythos presented as being a means of attaining empirical knowledge that would lead humans to a nihilistic disillusioning with humanity and existence. In addition to this, modern science is portrayed as being unable to account for and explain empirically the numinous realities that exist outside the notion of most humans. Yet these numinous elements in the stories, such as the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon, are primarily what convey to humans the sense of existential horror that usually disillusiones them and drives them to insanity. It can thus be seen that science and scientific investigation works to present humans with enough empirical knowledge to imply, but not explain and rationalise the existential problems that are to be derived from the fact that humanity is threatened by such beings.

In considering Ammi’s tale about the meteor-strike and its horrifying aftermath in “The Colour out of Space”, the surveyor reflects about the nature of the colour and the implications of its scientific elusiveness.

What it is, only God knows. In terms of matter I suppose the thing Ammi described would be called a gas, but this gas obeyed laws that are not of our cosmos. This was no fruit of such worlds and suns as shine on the telescopes and photographic plates of

our observatories. This was no breath from the skies whose motions and dimensions our astronomers measure or deem too vast to measure. It was just a colour out of space—a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it; from realms whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes.

(Lovecraft 2005: 368)

The possibility of understanding the colour is bluntly dismissed by the statement “only God knows”. The surveyor develops his assessment of the colour’s origin and properties by pointing to a tentative reality that exists beyond that reality which is known and observable to humans, even through the use of advanced telescopes and other scientific apparatuses and procedures. His reasoning is not that there is a fundamental difference in the laws of physics between the conditions of earth and those of the rest of space, from the other planets of our galaxy and beyond these, but that there is a difference between what he calls “our cosmos” and that cosmos which, with the meteorite and the colour as proof, may be inferred to exist beyond that. As the colour out of space is seen as a “messenger” from such a “beyond” cosmos, it can be inferred that the surveyor sees the colour as a proof of the existence of cosmic realities that are beyond the known, scientifically assessable cosmos. As such, all deliteralised properties, such as the colour has demonstrated, originate from parts of the universe that are so remote to our own that they are not even endowed with the same laws of physics that this world, “our cosmos” is.

Despite the complete foreignness of this tentative cosmos, the surveyor clearly invests the idea of such with connotations of horror and repulsion. The colour was not just a sample from another cosmos, it was a “frightful messenger”, a proof of a reality that is not only foreign to humans, but inherently horrifying to them. This is not only because the colour proved harmful and destructive, but also because it implied the existence of a cosmic reality that is so alien to humans that it would necessarily horrify them, “stun the brain” if perceived with “frenzied eyes”. It is clear from this that the knowledge of this reality pertains rather to insanity and fear than positive amazement and fascination. Yet by its harmful effects the alien colour itself may also be understood as representing a “cosmic hostility”, a sense of extra-terrestrial threat and danger, towards humans; hostile not because the colour is malevolent - there are no actual indications of that - but because brutally destroying humans and other

earthly organic matter, by means of an empoisoning of some sort, appears to be an inherent quality to it.

The basic principle of cosmicism that human perspective does not apply to larger cosmic realities shows clearly in the way the colour, a testament of such a cosmic reality, is de-literalised and presented as only semi-perceptible and incomprehensible to humans. However, it is the damage the colour causes to the humans in the story, physical and mental, that is the core of the plot. Descriptions of this, and people's reactions to it, are what constitute the story as told by the eyewitness Ammi Pierce. While the problems related to perceiving and understanding the colour are significant as demonstrations of the cosmic alterity of the colour, it is its role as antagonist, as a dangerous and perhaps hostile cosmic force that demonstrates how Lovecraft has managed to turn the idea of cosmicism as he expressed it in his non-fiction, into fiction, and made it into a plot element, a source of horror and suspense instead of merely pessimism and existential disillusioning.

The antagonistic role of the colour also shows how, in the Cthulhu Mythos, Lovecraft turns the idea that humanity is cosmically insignificant, into an idea that humans are directly threatened by things that exist outside their own world, and outside their own understanding. This threat is unknown to most humans, but Cthulhu Mythos stories often focus on and climax with the protagonists' realisation of this threat. In this way, Lovecraft turns the pessimistic and depressing implications of cosmicism into "cosmic horror", and invests his protagonists with a fear of the cosmic realities instead of, or in addition to, a disillusioning such as Lovecraft himself expressed. It is therefore clear that although Lovecraft used cosmicism as a basic principle on which he based the ideas of his fiction, cosmicism in the Cthulhu Mythos is strongly marked by a sense of hostility and antagonism on the part of the cosmic elements that the cosmicism he expressed in his non-fiction lacked. Thus as an antagonist, the colour functions as a concrete representation of Lovecraft's negativity towards scientific progress. Although Lovecraft primarily saw this as a source of pessimism and indifference, as evidenced for instance by his estimation of the implications of the Einstein theory, he sought to make this more concrete in his fiction, and make the cosmic elements represent an actual danger to humans, and not only a source of meaninglessness. This concretisation of scientific issues is also very clear in "The Dreams in the Witch House", where the Einstein theory and other theories of (then) contemporary physics are referred to directly and used as reference points for the antagonists and their actions.

As Burleson points out in his interpretation of the story, the colour challenges human perception and renders it insufficient as a means to categorise and make order of reality (1993: 49). This leads to a situation where humans see their entire perspective on reality, which is limited to that portion of the cosmos that they inhabit and can observe, as directly threatened by a remote, cosmic reality. This situation reflects cosmicism as an intruding notion that expresses itself through becoming observable and undeniable. As the presence of the colour becomes as impossible for the humans in the area to ignore as to comprehend, the terms by which it is assessed as abnormal and deviant become redundant as the very notion of normality is challenged and suggested to be a matter of subjective perspective (Burleson 1993: 49). It is highly typical for the Cthulhu Mythos antagonists to upset human perception and thus also their notion of normality, yet “The Colour out of Space” stands out as one of few Mythos stories that does not mention any of the typical Mythos deities as a source of what I have here termed “cosmic hostility”. Cosmicism in this story is thus derived from a plot element that is not immediately linked to a greater literary context, and whose origin and intentions – if there are any - remain unknown throughout. The lack of definite intentionality on the part of the alien colour makes it impossible to ascertain whether it is to be seen as a being that is inherently hostile or merely dangerous. In many other stories, such as “The Dreams in the Witch House”, the cosmic antagonist element is related to a greater whole, which is the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon, and is thereby given a greater sense of intentionality.

“The Dreams in the Witch House” develops further the role of modern science as a source of fear and danger to the protagonist. The Einstein theory is also brought up in this story, in which Einstein is mentioned as one of those physicists that the witch surpasses in understanding and knowledge (cf. Lovecraft 2005: 656). Gilman, who because of his nightly interdimensional travels with Keziah Mason has attained a deep and intuitive understanding of complex physics, is debating Einstein’s theory in a class at the university, and there it is even suggested that spacetime itself is not universal, but limited to a certain portion of the universe.

One afternoon there was a discussion of possible freakish curvatures in space, and of theoretical points of approach or even contact between our part of the cosmos and various other regions as distant as the farthest stars or the trans-galactic gulfs themselves—or even as fabulously remote as the tentatively conceivable cosmic units beyond the whole Einsteinian space-time continuum.

(Lovecraft 2005: 661)

This is similar to the idea the surveyor in “The Colour out of Space” expresses, that there is a cosmos (or several) that is so remote to our own that it possesses entirely different physical conditions. This excerpt makes it clear that in such a reality, not even spacetime, as Einstein conceived it, applies. In contrast to “The Colour out of Space”, this story is also concerned with how human beings may use this knowledge, and the hypothetical “freakish curvatures in space” to travel freely and bodily between completely different and extremely remote points in the universe. As is revealed, however, accomplishing this requires not only a deep understanding of physics, but also of the occult.

It is through the occult elements in the story, Keziah Mason’s practice of witchcraft, that a link to the elusive “Cthulhu Mythos” pantheon is established, as the witch communicates with the Mythos deities through what is perceived as black magic. Instead of presenting Keziah Mason and her work as something of completely unknown origin, such as the colour in “The Colour out of Space”, Lovecraft connects her character and her abilities to the antagonist deities Azathoth and his “messenger” Nyarlathotep, and shows that this connection was seen as devil-worship during the Salem witch trials. Although their actual intentions and aims are not divulged, these entities here become representatives of a “cosmic hostility”; especially Nyarlathotep, who is physically present in the story, and, among other things, aids Keziah Mason in abducting the infant for sacrifice, and solicits Gilman to sign a contract that, implicitly, would turn him into a being like Keziah Mason. The hostility of this entity is reflected both in its actions, such as guiding the abduction of the child, but also in the way the protagonist refers to him, having inferred that he is the same being that he has read about in certain occult books: “There was the immemorial figure of the deputy or messenger of hidden and terrible powers—the “Black Man” of the witch-cult, and the “Nyarlathotep” of the *Necronomicon*.” (Lovecraft 2005: 378). This being is thus established as a representative of the cosmic hostility that is even more clearly symbolised by the “demon sultan” Azathoth:

What kept him from going with her and Brown Jenkin and the other to the throne of Chaos where the thin flutes pipe mindlessly was the fact that he had seen the name “Azathoth” in the *Necronomicon*, and knew it stood for a primal evil too horrible for description.

(Lovecraft 2005: 664)

The *Necronomicon* is a fictional occult book of ancient Arabic origin that Lovecraft invented and often alluded to in his Mythos fiction, often in the same sentence as actual, existing works on occult topics. Lovecraft also encouraged other Weird Fiction writers to allude to this book – and in exchange he made allusions to theirs – thus endowing the *Necronomicon* with such a strong sense of historical verisimilitude that it is even today believed by many to be real, and regularly sought after in public libraries (Harman 2010: 108). In the Mythos, this book functions as an authoritative reference about the Mythos entities, as the present quote demonstrates. The book is always hard for the protagonists to procure, few copies exist, and reading in it is very perilous to any human’s sanity due to its horribly suggestive contents that are not recounted verbatim, but usually alluded to in such indirect manners as is the case with Azathoth here. However, as Gilman many of the Mythos protagonists have a faint knowledge about the existence and content of the book. The Mythos stories seldom reveal more of the *Necronomicon*’s content to the protagonists than what they already know. The events and experiences rather confirm its contents, which surely would seem incredible to them at first, to be as true as that of any book of natural science.

As Lovecraft brings in these deities and lets them represent an antagonistic “cosmic hostility” towards humans, it becomes clear that the Cthulhu Mythos relies heavily on a numinous or spiritual - in the sense of being transcendent or beyond ordinary human perception - aspect of reality to convey its cosmicism. Lovecraft frequently talked about these beings in his correspondence with other Weird Fiction writers and urged them to help perpetuate them by referring to them in their own stories, but he never argued for the actual existence of such beings, and even though some contemporary readers of his were actually convinced that these entities were real, Lovecraft clearly scorned all belief in higher powers (Price 2001: 26). As the Mythos beings largely come from and belong to a reality that is “beyond” the world of humans because of its extreme remoteness, it can be understood that their numinous qualities are not derived from anything divine, but from the fact that fundamental premises of physics - the properties of time and space - do not apply or are radically different there. As such they function as living, acting representatives of this reality that humans, for the sake of their sanity, would be better off not knowing the least about.

After encountering Keziah Mason in his dreams, and carrying out such interdimensional travels as had been discussed in hypothetical terms at the university (cf. Lovecraft 2005: 661), Gilman becomes aware that he is obliged to travel to “the throne of Azathoth at the centre of ultimate Chaos” (Lovecraft 2005: 664) because of his studies, and

must furthermore abandon his entire identity and sign a certain contract with the Mythos deities. His apprehensions and fears stemming from the little he has learned about the Mythos entities in his studies of the occult deter him from this. Gilman has developed a strong sense of fear and repulsion that is directly related to his studies in physics, because these studies are turning out to be inseparable from the occult, which is the witchcraft of Keziah Mason and the ominous suggestions Gilman has derived from the *Necronomicon*. Cosmicism is thus reflected in the revelations of empirically founded suggestions about a cosmic reality that is frightening to humans both because of its extreme alterity, as shown in “The Colour out of Space” (cf. p. 50-52), and because of its being peopled with beings that are both aware of humanity’s existence, and in some cases, as Cthulhu as Nyarlathotep show, malevolent toward humans and intent on manipulating and subduing them for their own use. What exactly this use entails is never made clear, but as I will further show and discuss in chapter 4, it can be inferred that it pertains to little else but the spreading and perpetuating of the chaos and meaninglessness that is the “core” of the Mythos universe and personified by “...the mindless entity Azathoth, which rules all time and space from a curiously envired black throne at the centre of Chaos” (Lovecraft 2005: 674).

3.3. The protagonists’ relation to religion, tradition and culture

Despite the significance of the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon in the stories, it is important to note that a certain religious, primarily Christian aspect is often present, largely as a means of creating connotations and bases of estimation by which the protagonists can assess and relate to their experiences with the numinous cosmic elements. Although the protagonists are not usually Christians, at least not explicitly, they often base their thoughts and estimations of the antagonistic Mythos elements on a Christian conception of good and evil, and often refer to the Mythos entities using religiously charged negative adjectives such as “hellish”, “blasphemous” and “daemoniac”. In “The Colour out of Space” for instance, when the colour has come to a certain point in infecting the flora around the Gardner farmstead, it is stated that “...the roses and zinneas and hollyhocks in the front yard were such blasphemous-looking things that Nahum’s oldest boy Zenas cut them down.” (Lovecraft 2005: 352). As de-literalised qualities have rendered the communication of objective impressions impossible, these flowers are cut down because their strange and unearthly appearance is seen as

“blasphemous”, that is, ungodly. A Christian assessment and understanding of the Mythos elements is frequently expressed by other, less central characters and groups of people in the stories as well. This is exemplified by the workmen in “The Dreams in the Witch House” who, having discovered the remains of Brown Jenkin in the ruins of the witch house at the end of the story, go to church to burn candles to celebrate the creature’s demise. Also, in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, the Innsmouth people initially believed that the Deep Ones were demons and inferred that Captain Marsh went out to what they consequently called “Devil Reef” to deal with the Devil. As such both protagonist and minor characters and people in the Mythos stories tend to refer their experiences with the numinous cosmic entities to a Christian understanding of what is right and good.

This shows that, despite Lovecraft’s atheism, which is fundamental to cosmicism, Christianity is allowed to play a significant role in the Cthulhu Mythos, and adds to it a perspective by which the protagonists and the other humans in the stories may assess the beings they meet. Christianity allows them to categorise the Mythos beings religiously easier than according to science, which always fails to account for the beings empirically. Thus, when an empirical understanding becomes impossible, they may relate to the beings as “evil”, “hellish” and so forth, and create strong religious connotations that connect them to their own world and understanding. As the Mythos beings are thus categorised as “demonised others”, they are estimated in a way that lets the protagonists view them as “evil” and incompatible with the traditional values of Western culture (Hanegraaff 2007: 97).

This view is further established and concretised with the alleged existence, within the Mythos, of historical Semitic deities that have a history of representing creeds that were opposed to Judaism and early Christianity. This adds to the religious aspect of the Cthulhu Mythos, in that it helps further establish a sense of opposition between Christianity and the Mythos deities. Several different Semitic deities and figures such as Dagon (the prime deity of the Deep Ones), Lilith (a central figure in “The Horror of Red Hook” (1925)), and Ashtoreth (also mentioned in “The Shadow over Innsmouth” (Lovecraft 2005: 619)) are brought into the narratives, often by mentioning only. When these beings take on the role as “demonised others” in the narratives through their religious and cultural connotations (Hanegraaff 2007: 97), they help establish a sense of conflict on the ideological and religious level, where Christianity is on the side of the protagonists due to its role as a means of estimating the Mythos entities and endowing them with negative cultural connotations. As these entities are usually no more than mentioned in the stories, and implied to be related to the Mythos entities

in some way, I understand their role to be mainly to create and maintain these associations and connotations.

The role of Christianity is important in understanding how cosmicism works in the Cthulhu Mythos, because it gives the protagonists a mode of reference for their experiences that is spiritual and ethical rather than scientific, and therefore also subjective instead of objective and empirical, which always turns out impossible. Modern science is fundamental to the idea of cosmicism, as is shown for instance by Lovecraft's interpretation of the Einstein theory, but in the Mythos, its role tends to fade away as it loses its power to provide any empirical understanding of what is going on, and especially as it is shown that the Mythos universe extends beyond scientific realities and the cosmos that is known and observable to humans. The religious aspect is then left to account for the beings and experiences to a certain degree, and serve as a human basis of measurement and estimation. With this, Lovecraft brings in a religious aspect to the fiction that is not relevant to his real-life scientific understanding of cosmicism, but that functions as a literary device as it brings the central conflicts and protagonist – antagonist confrontations in the stories up to a level where it may be seen as a dichotomy of good and evil. This would not be relevant if the universe was, as Lovecraft held it to be, completely devoid of intentionality or higher powers. Unlike the Mythos deities, however, the Christian God, Jesus, angels or any other representatives of Christianity are never actually present in the stories. There is never any clear divine intervention in the Cthulhu Mythos that helps or saves the protagonists. Therefore, Christianity does not play the role of an active “good” force that is allied to the protagonists, and that brings the conflicts in the story up to a religious level, a battle between Christianity and the Mythos deities. The role of Christianity is, in my understanding, mainly to uphold a perspective of “good versus evil” in the Cthulhu Mythos that is lacking in the strictly scientifically based view of cosmicism that Lovecraft entertained.

Christianity is not only a significant religious aspect of humanity in the Cthulhu Mythos, it is also an important part of the human culture that regularly comes under threat in the stories. It is well known that Lovecraft was very concerned about preserving New England culture and traditions, and some critics, like Evans (2005) have argued that this is widely reflected in Lovecraft's fiction. Although he was an atheist, Lovecraft admired Christian Puritans and saw their culture as a vital part of New England culture. Houellebecq attributes Lovecraft's inclination towards puritanism to the fact that both he and the puritans entertained an aversion towards life, not because they agreed about anything religious (Houellebecq 2008:

117). Lovecraft also expressed his thoughts about the Puritans from an aesthetic perspective as well as confirming that they had a certain disdain towards life in common:

And as for Puritan inhibitions – I admire them more every day. They are attempts to make of life a work of art – to fashion a pattern of beauty in the hog-wallow that is animal existence - and they spring out of that divine hatred of life which marks the deepest and most sensitive soul.

(Lovecraft as quoted in Houellebecq 2008: 117).

Lovecraft saw the Puritans as making their life which they disdained with a “divine hatred” into art, and thus making it aesthetically appealing through their strict moral inhibitions. Although Puritans themselves may not have agreed that the aim their conduct was to make their existence into “a work of art”, I find it significant that Lovecraft, as an atheist, would not acknowledge the Puritan faith, which is a form of Christian Protestantism, yet would sympathise with an attempt to turn life into an illusory artifice, even though this attempt was a religious one. Considering that Lovecraft admired and sympathised with Puritans, and in this respect seemed to view their religious worldview as less significant than their life-denying attempts to turn their lives into something artificially meaningful, it may be inferred that Lovecraft implemented Christian elements into the Mythos because they are part of what he seemed to view as a positive, meaningful illusion. For although he was an atheist, he clearly expressed that he derived no values or sense of meaning from his cosmic views (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 182). Lovecraft greatly favoured aesthetics, yet from a cosmic perspective, aesthetics are not in any way meaningful or valuable. As I demonstrate in section 3.6, a significant function of the Cthulhu Mythos is to contextualise aesthetics in relation to a cosmic perspective.

Furthermore, in discussing the significance and functions of culture and traditions in Lovecraft’s fiction, Evans states that the fiction derives horror both from portraying the loss of tradition, and from suggesting that from a cosmic perspective, tradition is meaningless (2005: 101). Thus, an important role played by the representations of human culture and traditions in the Cthulhu Mythos, is to be under threat by the cosmic entities. This threat is particularly poignant as culture and traditions are important human values whose functions are, among other things, to furnish people with a sense of meaning and integrity. This applies for religious views, as these are part of culture, but Evans also points to folklore (2005: 101), architecture (2005: 102), and language (2005: 104) as significant markers of tradition and

culture that Lovecraft was interested in and passionate about. As Evans also suggests, the Mythos raises a question of whether traditions and culture are meaningful at all, as they are viewed from a cosmic perspective, or with the implications of cosmicism in mind (2005: 101). Also, representations of tradition and culture in the Mythos are often revealed to be inwardly corrupted by cosmic forces, so that their sentimental value to the protagonists is challenged and often nullified, leaving them with a strong sense of disillusioning and loss.

In “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, Lovecraft portrays a New England town that outwardly seems very well preserved architecturally, and therefore appears especially inviting to the protagonist, who, like Lovecraft, is very concerned with New England traditions, such as colonial architecture. This illusion is broken when the inhabitants of this town are revealed to be corrupted both religiously, as they have abandoned their Christian creed in favour of the Deep Ones’ paganism, and genetically, as they have been interbreeding with the Deep Ones, and thus become human-Deep One hybrids. Although the architecture that the protagonist is especially interested in is a static quality of the town, a quality that does not change perceptibly throughout the story (though the town is in a state of dilapidation), and that seems to have been unchanged for some time, the changes the human population has undergone ruins his view of Innsmouth completely, and disillusiones him on account of its significance as a representation of traditions and culture. The Deep Ones may have ensured the outward preservation of the town, yet they have corrupted the inhabitants, and pose therefore a threat to Innsmouth and New England culture and traditions by undermining these from the inside. A clear example of this, is the fact that the Esoteric Order of Dagon has taken over the Masonic Hall of Innsmouth, an important cultural structure, and are using the nearby church, which is in a miserable state of decay, for their own pagan rituals (Lovecraft 2005: 602). Thus, the Deep Ones have corrupted both the architecture of Innsmouth and the religion of its inhabitants. As the Deep Ones, with their Dagon and Cthulhu worship are representatives of the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon, and thus act as a cosmic element in the story, the corruption they are spreading and the threat they are posing to humanity can be seen as representing the “cosmic hostility” that is at the core of cosmicism as it appears in the Mythos fiction. As the cosmic hostility targets not only humans themselves, but also their culture, the existential threat posed by the cosmic antagonists becomes more acute and more definite than the sense of existential terror that the protagonists feel upon discovering the existence of the cosmic beings.

It can be seen that when the protagonists refer to their experiences with the cosmic in religiously charged terms, they are seeking refuge in a cultural reality in which humanity is both central and seen as having access to a divine reality, which is God. Thus when Hanegraaff points out that these descriptions and adjectives “are effective simply because they invoke the feelings of horror inspired by pagan deities and demonic beings in the minds of traditional Christian doctrine” (2007: 98), it can be seen that the connotations that arise from these terms serve to accentuate how the antagonists are seen as a threat to humans’ view of themselves as part of a greater whole. This greater whole is not only a religious vision of heaven and redemption, but also the culture from which this religion has sprung forth. As humans gain a sense of unity and integrity through culture and traditions, representations of these become important markers of humans’ sense of existential meaning and integrity. As representations of culture and tradition are threatened by cosmic entities, such as the Deep Ones, the humans face an existential threat that implies a sense of meaninglessness that is related to human society rather than cosmos. When this happens, the larger cosmic threat, the sense that humanity at large has no significance in the cosmos, becomes secondary to the more local sense of cultural threat. This cultural threat, however, can also be interpreted as a concretised, more poignant and relatable representation of the cosmic threat, which may be too grand for humans to fully realise and perceive.

3.4. Some anti-humanist perspectives on the Cthulhu Mythos

Based on the negative implications of the Cthulhu Mythos, and the generally pessimistic outcomes of the stories, some readers and critics of Lovecraft have interpreted it as being bleak and nihilistic - a literature that is rigidly anti-humanist and devoid of any positive implications for humanity whatsoever. Among these are Mark Lowell, who insists that the pantheon of the Cthulhu Mythos, and all its other named entities, characters and items are “merely window dressing” (2004: 48) to the fiction, and that the Mythos is basically a “perversion” of mythic literature. This view he explains in the following way:

At their core, mythos stories contain a perversion of what Joseph Campbell called the mythic cycle, or the monomyth. In the monomyth, a herald calls a hero into a realm of myth and the unconscious where he confronts various tribulations and emerges with a

boon for his fellow men. However, for Lovecraft and his imitators, this realm of myth contains only sorrow, insanity, and death; by entering it one realizes the truth of humanity's insignificance in the universe.

(Lowell 2004: 48)

As shown in section 1.3, Lowell identifies the protagonists' realization of "the truth of humanity's insignificance in the universe" (2004: 48) as a crucial and defining function of the Cthulhu Mythos stories (2004: 47). So far I agree with his view, and this is also the founding principle of Lovecraft's cosmicism, the philosophical idea that underlies the Mythos. However, Lowell also states here that the Mythos, being a "perversion" of literary mythic cycles, is limited strictly to negative and pessimistic factors - "only sorrow, insanity, and death" (Lowell 2004: 48). Interpreting the Mythos one-sidedly like this, Lowell argues that the Mythos stories typically end with the destruction, physical or at least mental, of the narrator: "Ultimately, Lovecraft's narrator is destroyed by what he has learned. The narrator cannot survive what he has learned." (Lowell 2004: 49) This is the core of the "perversion" that he understands the Mythos to be, namely that the protagonists gain nothing positive at all from their experiences in the Mythos world, and die in some way or other or go insane from their realisations and experiences³. Although this "destruction" of the protagonists – more often mental than physical - is undeniably characteristic of how Mythos stories tend to end, Lowell seems to ignore that there are highly significant matters taking place along the way that add other aspects to the Mythos. For it is usually not existing in the Mythos world that is so frightening and dangerous to the protagonists; it is most often probing too far and seeking to discover certain things – pursuing hints and indications about the existence of Cthulhu for instance - that proves to be disastrous to them.

Lowell, however, leaves his brief assessment of the Mythos on this pessimistic note and concludes his essay abruptly by stating that "Lovecraft's myth world is cold and negative, with no place for humanity in it." (Lowell 2004: 50). I find this assessment to be far too one-sided and unconstructive to be of any help in understanding the Mythos and the role of cosmicism. As Lowell here rejects the Mythos fiction as "cold and negative" he rules out the possibility of interpreting it as containing any sense of positivity on the part of the human protagonists that contrasts and challenges the negativity that derives from cosmicism. As such Lowell seems not to find any other message in the Cthulhu Mythos than pessimism and meaninglessness. Because he sees the fiction as lacking any positive implications for

humanity and only focuses on death and destruction, he is able to assert that Lovecraft was an “anti-humanist” (Lowell 2004: 49) which I understand to mean that he sees Lovecraft as actively rejecting the value of all human interests and human existence through his fiction. Furthermore, in stating that the Mythos has “no place for humanity in it” (Lowell 2004: 50), it should seem that he understands it to be perfectly value-neutral, as values and perspectives about negativity and positivity are primarily human inventions. Yet, as Lowell also clearly states that the Mythos world is “negative” (2004: 50), he does not see it as value-neutral, which would have been a rather nihilist assumption, but merely as rejecting and lacking all positivity, and being completely negative to humans as a result of this.

This interpretation is largely similar to that of Houellebecq (2008), who throughout his book argues that Lovecraft was mainly inspired by disillusioning and hate towards life and the world when writing his fiction – hence the subtitle of Houellebecq’s book, *Against the World, Against Life*. Houellebecq recognises that Lovecraft turned his worldview – here called cosmicism, though Houellebecq does not use this term – into a source of creativity and used it thus as a fundamental idea upon which he constructed his Mythos fiction. According to Houellebecq, however, Lovecraft used the fiction to translate his own indifference into hostility: “The universe, which intellectually he perceived as being indifferent, became hostile aesthetically” (Houellebecq 2008: 118). I have shown earlier how Lovecraft used the Mythos pantheon to create a sense of evil and antagonism that differentiates the fiction from his letters and essays, where he rather argued for the nonexistence of any divinities or higher beings (cf. p. 54-55). Yet, when Houellebecq further states that “...he succeeded in transforming his aversion for life into an *effective* hostility.” (Houellebecq 2008: 119), he either does not acknowledge the fact that there are two sides to the conflicts that arise in the stories, and that the “hostility” - I have termed this “cosmic hostility” because of its usually extra-terrestrial origin, and affinity to the principle of cosmicism – belongs to the antagonists; or, Houellebecq is only focusing on the fact that the antagonists tend to “win” at the end of the stories, that is, they wipe out the protagonists or leave them mentally scarred from fright and existential disillusioning.

Although it is undeniable that the antagonists of the Cthulhu Mythos usually subdue or destroy the protagonists (physically or mentally), both Houellebecq and Lowell tend to ignore the significance of events that happen and sentiments that are expressed throughout the stories when these do not concur with how the stories end. Lowell derives his pessimistic assessment of the Mythos mainly from the fact that the protagonists are ultimately “destroyed” by what

they learn when they probe too far into certain matters, scientific and cosmic (Lowell 2004: 49). Houellebecq argues that Lovecraft's protagonists chiefly play the role of "victims" to the antagonists, because the protagonists represent values such as intellect and the pursuit of knowledge, while Lovecraft's universe is founded on barbarism and evil (Houellebecq 2008: 111). These values "win" in the end, as the protagonists with their intelligence, knowledge and refinement, are inferior to such entities such as Nyarlathotep and Cthulhu, who are superior in many attributes, from size and strength to human followers, with their barbaric cults of infant-sacrificing witches and primitive tribal worshippers. The intelligence and learning of the protagonists, their primary personal traits (Houellebecq 2008: 111), are rendered useless when they discover that these cannot help them understand or cope with the Mythos entities, or worse, oblige them to take their part and renounce their humanity.

Both Lowell and Houellebecq may surely find an abundance of passages and quotes in Lovecraft's Mythos stories that would support their negative interpretations – and as I will show, there are also many significant passages and sentiments stated by the protagonists that contradict them. The narrator of "The Call of Cthulhu" is a useful example of one who, as Lowell puts it, is "destroyed" mentally by his discoveries and findings when probing into the existence of Cthulhu and its worldwide cult of worshippers:

Johansen, thank God, did not know quite all, even though he saw the city and the Thing, but I shall never sleep calmly again when I think of the horrors that lurk ceaselessly behind life in time and in space, and of those unhallowed blasphemies from elder stars which dream beneath the sea, known and favoured by a nightmare cult ready and eager to loose them on the world whenever another earthquake shall heave their monstrous stone city again to the sun and air.

(Lovecraft 2005: 191)

Johansen is a Norwegian sailor whose eyewitness account of Cthulhu emerging from his sunken city furnishes the narrator of the story with the concluding piece of evidence that purports the existence of such an unbearably frightening cosmic reality. The "Thing" is Cthulhu, which he saw, and drove back into the sunken city by ramming into it with the prow of his ship, thus postponing Cthulhu's advent and possible world-domination. Although it often happens that the protagonists harm the cosmic entities like this (cf. Gilman's fight with Keziah Mason for instance), they never conquer them completely or end their tales as victors against the cosmic antagonists. They only postpone their own destruction, or temporarily

trade their physical annihilation with a mental one. This excerpt also serves as an example of how, in Houellebecq's view, the protagonists are victimised in the Mythos (2008: 111). The narrator of "The Call of Cthulhu", who has spent his time and energy "piecing together" this narrative, is left horrified and mentally scarred from his findings, and lives in fear of the advent of Cthulhu that he knows will come some time. The narrator, a typical example of the "pure intellects" that Houellebecq claims these characters to be (2008: 111), is now living in fear of a worldwide and barbaric "nightmare cult" of Cthulhu-worshippers. This cult may be superior to him in knowledge and understanding of the cosmic realities, as they have a connection to Cthulhu based on one-way telepathic messages that it transmits from its lair; and as they worship this entity, they are possibly subject to its favour and mercy and may, unlike all other humans, survive its coming.

The protagonists of the Cthulhu Mythos discover too late that ignorance is bliss, and are left to regret their forays into the unknown. "If heaven ever wishes to grant me a boon, it will be a total effacing of the results of a mere chance which fixed my eye on a certain stray piece of shelf-paper." (Lovecraft 2005: 186-187) says the narrator of "The Call of Cthulhu", thus expressing a wish to rid himself of his frightening knowledge about Cthulhu. Yet as long as they retain their ignorance of the cosmic realities that underlie the Mythos, they still have certain values that matter to them, such as an aesthetic appreciation of art and nature. It is because of his portrayals of aesthetic worldviews as alternatives to attaining a pessimistic "cosmic perspective" through scientific probings that Price (2001) calls Lovecraft "a prophet of humanism". Lowell and Houellebecq, being mostly concerned with the ultimate outcomes of the Mythos stories, both ignore these elements in their assessments of the Mythos, and have thus arrived at much darker conclusions about it than Price has, and are not able to see him as a humanist, rather as an anti-humanist.

3.5. The literary function of the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon

In his assessment of the Cthulhu Mythos, Lowell states that the figurative "abyss" that the narrators of the Cthulhu Mythos get insight into, and from which they derive the notion of humanity's cosmic insignificance, is to be understood as the "human unconscious" (Lowell 2004: 49). Lowell does not proceed to explain what exactly he means by this, but based on his

view on the Mythos, I understand the “human unconscious” to mean the aspect(s) of reality that are outside the perception, attention and knowledge of humans, thus not part of their consciousness. I have shown how Lovecraft’s cosmicism derives the notion of humanity’s cosmic insignificance from attaining a non-anthropocentric cosmic perspective on the universe and reality. Although the symbolised “human unconscious” that Lowell speaks of may be seen as compatible with this non-anthropocentric perspective, if I understand it correctly, Lowell insistency on ignoring the Mythos pantheon as a significant element to the Mythos fiction renders his interpretation of it rather one-sided.

To exemplify his view, Lowell brings in and discusses the short story “The Music of Eric Zann” (1921). This story, like “The Colour out of Space”, is a Mythos story that does not allude to the Mythos pantheon in any way, and is to be defined as a Mythos story because of its cosmic theme rather than its mention of any Mythos characters and/or items, which Lowell would call “window dressing” (2004: 48); and it is in fact because the story lacks such elements that Lowell finds it especially suitable as an example. For in his view, the pantheon and all the usual proper names of the Mythos are “distractions” and do not add anything more to the Mythos (2004: 48). Without these “distractions”, Lowell interprets the story with reference to the protagonist’s “journey” into the Mythos and focuses on how, with the enigmatic Eric Zann as a twisted version of a mythic “herald”, i.e. a guide who leads the protagonist into the myth world (Lowell 2004: 48), the protagonist is summoned into a fantastic reality in which nothing positive awaits him, and where everything he achieves and learns pertains to his destruction only.

“The Music of Eric Zann” tells of how the narrator, an impoverished man living in an apartment building in a singular and quaint street, hears a strange man called Eric Zann playing his viol in an upper-floor apartment at night. The narrator is haunted by the strangeness of the music – which is a strongly de-literalised element here due to its defying all “earthly” musical scales and structures – and seeks to get into Zann’s apartment to see him and hear him play. Zann grants him this, and the narrator, in addition to being very perplexed by the man’s playing, realises that Zann’s room has no view of the city in which they live; from his window the narrator looks straight into “...the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music...” (Lovecraft 2005: 22). Realising the unearthly and inhuman origin of the music, and of Eric Zann himself, the narrator flees in horror, and is never able to find the apartment building or the street again.

In his recapitulation of the story, Lowell focuses on how the narrator is driven towards Zann and his music by curiosity and fascination. It is when he pursues this that he enters the Mythos world, Lowell states, where he inevitably meets with the realisation of humanity's cosmic insignificance (Lowell 2004: 48). As the narrator and protagonist is moved towards the cosmic elements in the story by his curiosity and fascination with them, it is clear that he himself is responsible for his fate, although he does not realise the horrible implications of Zann and his music until it is too late. As most of the Mythos stories in some way are centred on the protagonists' probings into the unknown cosmic elements, and their realisations and discoveries that follow, it can safely be inferred that as in "The Music of Eric Zann", human curiosity and fascination with the unknown is a common protagonist mentality in the Mythos stories. This shows clearly in how the protagonists of "The Dreams in the Witch House" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" are propelled forward by curiosity and fascination with what will eventually turn out to be "evil" and dangerous to them - modern science combined with occult studies and antiquarianism respectively. When Houellebecq states that the role of the protagonists is only to perceive, sensually and acutely, what is going on (Houellebecq 2008: 68), he misses the significance of their curiosity, which is an important psychological element in the stories that make the antagonist active partakers in the plots, and not just passive "perceivers".

However, later in his book Houellebecq also acknowledges that the intellectual motivation of the protagonists is a significant factor, and claims that pursuing this is their only goal in life: "Renouncing all human joy, they become pure intellects, pure spirits striving towards a single goal: the search for knowledge." (Houellebecq 2008: 111). I find it rather hyperbolic to state that these characters renounce "all human joy" when in fact they usually have a strong intellectual passion for whatever their speciality or field of study may be. It is unmistakably true, however, that their passion never turns out to be a source of profit to them in the end, and that their curiosity never leads them to anything wholesome. Curiosity and intellectual prowess are not presented as great virtues in the Cthulhu Mythos, although these are perhaps the most common personal traits of the almost completely undifferentiated and homogenous protagonists of the stories.

Lowell goes on to identify the very source of the protagonists "destruction" as "the human unconscious", and applies this idea to Lovecraft himself by stating that "Lovecraft saw the abyss, the realm of the human unconscious, as revealing the true irrelevance of humanity in the greater scheme of things." (Lowell 2004: 49-50). He views the founding idea of

cosmicism from largely the same perspective that I have outlined earlier, namely that of the non-anthropocentric quality of cosmos. Lovecraft himself stated that he derived his cosmicism from an external source, i.e. his studies of the cosmos, whose vastness and general emptiness may be seen as the same “abyss” that Lowell interprets as symbolising “the human unconscious”. Yet when Lowell chooses to disregard the entire Mythos pantheon and all the other entities and items associated with it, and calls these “distractions” (2004: 48), he simplifies the Cthulhu Mythos. The symbolical “abyss” that Lowell identifies and interprets as symbolical in “The Music of Eric Zann”, is clearly the black void outside Zann’s window that frightens the narrator away and leaves him mentally scarred. Normally, however, in the Mythos stories, this “void”, or reality that exists outside of the knowledge of common humans, is peopled with other beings, such as Cthulhu, Keziah Mason, Nyarlathotep or the Deep Ones. When taking this into consideration, it becomes clear that what is seen by Lowell as “the human unconscious” is not simply a mindless emptiness, but a reality in which other forms of consciousness exist, and in which there is a sense of “cosmic hostility” or malevolent intentionality that expands the idea of humanity’s cosmic insignificance and turns it into a literary idea.

Without these other beings, the sense of antagonism in the Cthulhu Mythos would be less systematic than it is now, and could appear more as a fictional re-invention of Lovecraft’s indifference and scepticism than as a fiction that actually contextualises these sentiments. For with the whole Mythos pantheon and its human and monstrous adherents on earth, the fiction attains a thematic sense of “good versus evil”, with protagonist and antagonist characters. Both Lowell and Houellebecq seem to ignore this in their assessments of the Mythos. Although Houellebecq repeatedly stresses the significance of conceptualised “evil” as an omnipresent quality in the Mythos stories (cf. Houellebecq 2008: 111), he misses an important factor in ignoring that which may be interpreted as “good” and which is represented as a contrast to this. For the Cthulhu Mythos, in fact, contains significant suggestions about values and matters that may ameliorate this pessimism and make the non-anthropocentric cosmic reality seen bearable to humans.

3.6. An aesthetical perspective on reality

Although some have interpreted Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos as a pessimistic and anti-humanist fiction, others have gone far in arguing that it implies significant positive views on humanity despite the bleak and pessimistic implications of the cosmicism upon which it is based. American theologian Robert M. Price argues that Lovecraft is a "Prophet of Humanism" (2001), and justifies this view by demonstrating the significance and implications of aesthetics in the Mythos fiction. Having acknowledged that Lovecraft saw humanity as universally insignificant (2001: 28), Price explains that as Lovecraft could not find a source of ethics in any ontological or objective worldview, he derived ethics from aesthetics (2001: 28-29). This means, according to Price, that although the universe may have no inherent, higher meaning for humans, there is still "a powerful reason to keep going, and that is simply to enjoy the captivating beauty of all around us." (2001: 29), which means that aesthetics alone can provide existence with all the sense of meaning and purpose it needs in order to be valuable to humans.

As many other readers and critics, Price sees "hapless scientific delvings" as the source of negativity in the stories (2001: 27), because of the pessimistic implications of the findings that are brought to light. Yet Price also points to an aesthetic aspect of this, as he states that "Scientific curiosity stems from the awe and wonder we feel contemplating nature. And awe and wonder are aesthetic emotions." (2001: 29). This means that Lovecraft's protagonists, in delving scientifically into cosmic and earthly matters, be it a meteor from outer space, multidimensionality and the occult or antiquarianism, are driven by the aesthetic motivation that is their curiosity about the world. When regarded as an aesthetic motivation as Price argues, curiosity itself is to be seen as a positive quality. This would contradict Lowell's understanding of curiosity as a dangerous motivation. Yet understanding curiosity on the part of the protagonists as something dangerous is not unjustified. The fulfilment of this curiosity is never in any way satisfactory, because what the protagonists always discover is to them a source of horror and existential disillusioning. The "aesthetic" motivation of curiosity is thus ruined when its fulfilment, that is, the discovery of a cosmic truth, or at least the implication of it, turns out to be frightening, dangerous and in no possible way aesthetically pleasing.

For humans, then, to maintain a sense of meaning within the world of the Mythos would necessitate the creation and perpetuation of an illusion that can substitute the

frightening and depressing empirical knowledge of the cosmic realities. I have demonstrated in section 3.3 how the protagonists relate to the Mythos entities by investing them with religious connotations where ordinary perception and a scientific rationale fails, and how this enables them to relate to these elements subjectively. Price also points to the significance of a religious worldview, and argues that this is an important source of aesthetics when it comes from one's imagination instead of conviction (2001: 27-28). It is possible for an atheist, Price claims, to voluntarily adopt a religious worldview, and thereby invest one's life and world with an aesthetic sense of meaning which religion offers to its believers, without "making the sacrifice of the intellect that religion imperiously requires" (2001: 28). This clearly echoes Lovecraft's view of the Puritans, who he admired for their "attempts to make of life a work of art" (Lovecraft as quoted in Houellebecq 2008: 117). Creating an artificial meaning to life and existence which enables one to refer all existential questions and issues to God or another spiritual factor is an example of an illusion that can substitute empirical knowledge about the world.

In the Cthulhu Mythos, Christianity appears to be no more than a human illusion that is never supported by any evidence, empirical or divine. Yet this illusion may be a very important means for creating a positive sense of meaning in the Mythos. As far as the Mythos entities and the cosmic realities that threaten and frighten the protagonists can be related to in religious terms, they can be categorised as "evil" and seen as part of a reality in which good and evil forces are mutually present. This would be what Price calls "the imaginative dimension" of religion (2001: 28), which is a view of reality that furnishes everything with a sense of meaning and aesthetic potency. The protagonists of the Mythos stories do not, however, resign completely to any religious illusions. It is too late for that when they have pursued empirical truth too far, and thereby attained knowledge that is too horrible for them to bear - if they survive the confrontation with the cosmic forces at all. Thus it is clear that they cannot simply back away from their experiences and consciously adopt any illusions about reality. Their fault is in pursuing empirical knowledge in the first place, when they would have benefited more from living in an aesthetical illusion, and for instance satiated their need for aesthetic fulfilment religiously, instead of through scientific curiosity, which as Price claims, originates from humans "awe and wonder" in contemplating nature (2001: 29).

Lowell directly rejects Price's assessment of Lovecraft by stating that "...Lovecraft was, in truth, an anti-humanist, convinced of humanity's irrelevance" (Lowell 2004: 49). Lowell does not comment on Price's arguments here, and makes no explanation as to how he

assesses Price's views on the significance of aesthetics in Lovecraft's fiction. Houellebecq, however, in his preface to the second (1998) French edition of his book, ameliorates his own stance somewhat, and acknowledges in retrospect that he has not paid due attention to the stylistic aesthetics of Lovecraft's fiction, and has thus been ignorant of a significant aesthetic aspect of it (2008: 25). He does not take religion into contemplation in this respect, but explains that Lovecraft at times gives a strong poetic sense, "a luminous depth that is altogether rare" (2008: 25) to his writing. Houellebecq exemplifies this by drawing attention to how Lovecraft invokes a strong aesthetic aspect when he depicts a tract of rustic scenery in the Cthulhu Mythos story "The Whisperer in Darkness" (1930).

Albert Wilmarth, the protagonist of this story, a professor of literature and amateur folklorist, is travelling to a rustic area in Vermont, New England, to investigate some alleged encounters with a group of extra-terrestrial beings called the "Mi-Go" who come from the planet "Yuggoth" (which in fact turns out to be Pluto, which had been discovered earlier in 1930). On his way to the lodging of Henry Akeley, the man who claimed to have encountered the Mi-Go, and who solicited him to come investigate the matter, Wilmarth reflects at some length on the natural beauty of the landscape around him:

Besides, there was a strangely calming element of cosmic beauty in the hypnotic landscape through which we climbed and plunged fantastically. Time had lost itself in the labyrinths behind, and around us stretched only the flowering waves of faery and the recaptured loveliness of vanished centuries—the hoary groves, the untainted pastures edged with gay autumnal blossoms, and at vast intervals the small brown farmsteads nestling amidst huge trees beneath vertical precipices of fragrant brier and meadow-grass. Even the sunlight assumed a supernal glamour, as if some special atmosphere or exhalation mantled the whole region. I had seen nothing like it before save in the magic vistas that sometimes form the backgrounds of Italian primitives. Sodoma and Leonardo conceived such expanses, but only in the distance, and through the vaultings of Renaissance arcades. We were now burrowing bodily through the midst of the picture, and I seemed to find in its necromancy a thing I had innately known or inherited, and for which I had always been vainly searching.

(Lovecraft 2005: 456)

Houellebecq sees this excerpt as poetic because of its highly sensual focus and claims that it opens for "a philosophical perception of the world" (2008: 25). The descriptions in this

excerpt are far from empirical and realistic, and as Houellebecq also uses this excerpt to point out the aesthetic aspect of the writing, I understand “a philosophical perception” to refer to the highly subjective and reflecting focus here, by which the protagonist narrator invests his experience with many different positive aesthetic connotations.

Among these connotations, I find it significant to note that Wilmarth sees a “cosmic beauty” in the landscape. By referring to the scenery in terms of the “cosmic”, he broadens the sense of aesthetic pleasure and implies that it is not limited to the earthly qualities of nature alone, but applies to his view of cosmos as well. Following this, he invokes some grand associations to the passing of time, as he sees himself surrounded by “the recaptured loveliness of vanished centuries”, as if the scenery is detached from his own time and reflects some bygone time to which he attaches a particular sense of emotionality and nostalgia. He cannot relate this reminiscence to anything earthly save “the magic vistas” he has seen in the far background of renaissance paintings. Here he brings in a direct reference to the aesthetics of art, and by means subjective mediation of his experience, establishes a link between art and real life, as he interprets his surroundings to reflect art. Seeing himself in the very midst of a picture, which is an object of aesthetic pleasure, he finds here something unnamed that he has been searching for in vain. Following the ideas presented above, that artificial sources of aesthetic pleasure may be implemented into real life (cf. p. 59), it may be interpreted that what Wilmarth “finds” in this landscape is a basis of aesthetic perception that makes nature appear meaningful and pleasing to him. This is not derived from scientific curiosity, which always turns out fatal in the Mythos, but from a perpetuation of the highly subjective and immeasurable impressions of “supernal glamour” and “magic”.

As Wilmarth refers to the scenery using terms that are related to the supernatural, he demonstrates clearly that the landscape is not an object of scientific interest to him. With such terms as “supernal glamour” and “atmosphere of exhalation” he stresses the, to him, elusive and fantastical qualities of the landscapes as specific sources of pleasure. It is also significant that he here refers to the “necromancy” of the experience as a positive quality. As necromancy can refer to communication with the dead (Necromancy n.d), it is possible to interpret this as referring to Wilmarth’s sense of bygone times coming to life before him; it is also possible that this is intended as simply another term for “magic”, as it may be read as synonymous with that (Necromancy n.d). In any way, it is clear that Lovecraft uses this term to create a certain connotation to magic and the supernatural, and leaves Wilmarth’s assessment of his experience to rest on that.

When Lovecraft sets his stories in rural areas of New England, he always takes care to elaborate on the aesthetics of its natural landscape. Few passages are so meditative as Wilmarth's experience of the Vermont landscape. Usually Lovecraft outlines the natural landscape of the rustic areas in shorter passages, yet a subjective and allusive focus is highly common.

West of Arkham the hills rise wild, and there are valleys with deep woods that no axe has ever cut. There are dark narrow glens where the trees slope fantastically, and where thin brooklets trickle without ever having caught the glint of sunlight.

(Lovecraft 2005: 340)

These are the opening lines of "The Colour out of Space". I find it especially notable that Lovecraft opens this horror story about a meteor strike and a semi-perceptible alien that spreads sickness and death by going directly into describing the nature of the rustic area outside his fictional Arkham. This is a clear contrast to how, in "The Call of Cthulhu", for instance, he opens by musing about the frightening and destructive consequences of scientific delving. Here, too, he evokes a sense of subjective wonder, in stating that "the trees slope *fantastically*", while maintaining that this scene is untouched by humans – "deep woods that no axe has ever cut". This adds to the sense of naturalness of the landscape, and the fact that it is untouched by humans can thus be understood as an aesthetically positive quality to it.

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that a significant portion of the particular landscape is completely destroyed, and turned into a desert, a "blasted heath", not by any human intervention, but through the influence of the alien, the "colour" from space. By extension, it is revealed that the entire area is to be filled with water to serve as a reservoir for Arkham. Evans sees this depiction of natural beauty as significant in the story primarily because this is an element that is marked for destruction (2005: 122). He explains further that "Ammi Pierce's love for the landscape in which he has lived his entire life (and by extension, Lovecraft's love for the New England landscape) makes that landscape's transformation all the more disturbing" (2005: 122). As the landscape that the characters are connected to becomes threatened, they become threatened themselves (2005: 122), which means that the threat towards nature that appears here can be seen as an extended representation, or symbolisation of the threat that is primarily directed towards humans. As the natural scenery is invested with sentimental value, its prospective or possible loss functions as a clear representation of how the cosmic elements in the stories can threaten not only to destroy

humans, but also destroy what is valuable and meaningful to them, such as the nature of their native areas. The value of nature is thus stressed when it is threatened. This value still relies on aesthetics, as it is through its aesthetic qualities that it is outlined in the stories, not through its pragmatic value to the rustic New Englanders, for instance, who surely live off this landscape as a source of food and materials.

These descriptions of nature are also highly significant as contrasts to all the different de-literalised descriptions and outlines that are presented throughout the Mythos stories. Neither the highly subjective descriptions of nature nor the de-literalised descriptions of alien landscapes or cosmic entities such as Cthulhu or the colour from space pertain in any way to creating any clear, detailed and naturalistic outlines. Both these types of description are coloured by subjectivity, yet an important distinction here, I find, is that the descriptions of nature represent the imagination and aesthetic connotations of the speakers, while the de-literalised descriptions reflect their bewilderment and fear upon experiencing something that does not belong to the world as they know it. The protagonists attach a sense of positivity to nature by descriptions such as those quoted above, and a sense of negativity to the cosmic elements, by de-literalised descriptions that primarily convey confusion and repulsion. When the protagonists resort to using connotation-bearing, often religiously charged terms about their experiences to convey their negative impressions, it may be interpreted that they are referring themselves to a sense of aesthetics, whereby they simply categorise the cosmic or antagonistic elements as aesthetically negative. Thus, when Wilmarth has started to comprehend the dangers and horrors that are related to his sojourn in Akeley's house he refers to the lodging as "the haunted farmhouse among the daemoniac hills" (Lovecraft 2005: 476). With this, he attaches a strong sense of hostility not only to the aliens that allegedly inhabit the area, but also to the very farmhouse, which is now "haunted" for being harassed by the aliens at night. The hills, that he earlier described in praising and positive terms, are now reduced to "daemoniac hills", as his impression of the entire area is ruined by his new knowledge of the frightening cosmic entities that reside there.

What has changed here is not the quality of the hills themselves, but the protagonist's perspective on them. This perspective changes naturally when Wilmarth starts to associate the area with fear and danger. Yet this story goes a bit further in suggesting that the very sense of aesthetics is a matter of perspective that may be subject to change, so that what is normally viewed negatively may be seen in a positive light by a turn of perspective.

When Wilmarth arrives at the lodging of Akeley, the latter states that he has managed to communicate with the Mi-Go, and has come to see them in a completely different way than before by considering things from their perspective. Akeley is therefore determined to travel with the aliens to their native planet, so as to learn more about them. He tries to convince Wilmarth that the alien world of Yuggoth, although undoubtedly frightening to ordinary humans because of its unearthliness, is only so by subjective perspective, not empirically.

But remember—that dark world of fungoid gardens and windowless cities isn't really terrible. It is only to us that it would seem so. Probably this world seemed just as terrible to the beings when they first explored it in the primal age.

(Lovecraft: 2005: 462)

With this, Akeley points subjective perspective of humans as a negligible factor when considering cosmos. He thus presents an aesthetic consideration of reality that is not anthropocentric, but suggests that humans and other intelligent beings may have completely different and incompatible views on what is aesthetically pleasing, based on what they are accustomed to. By realising this, Akeley may change his own perception of what is aesthetically pleasing, and start regarding the alien landscape of Yuggoth as beautiful instead of terrifying.

The story takes a significant turn, however, as it is revealed that these sentiments are not actually communicated by Akeley himself, but by one of the aliens, who cleverly impersonates Akeley. Because of this, these ideas are not allowed to develop any further in the story. The alien seems to be using these arguments as a means to convince Wilmarth to come with them to Yuggoth freely, by making this experience seem intriguing and worthwhile to him. Having realised the truth behind this, however, Wilmarth flees and suggests that this might have been a trap set up to eradicate him, because he knew too much about the Mi-Go. It is further implied that Akeley is already taken by them, for the same reason. This is also reminiscent of “The Dreams in the Witch House”, where Gilman finds himself obliged to follow Keziah Mason and comply with Nyarlathotep's wish that he signs a contract with Azathoth, all because he has attained too much knowledge about them and their reality. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the implications of these situations in relation to aesthetics and cosmicism may be better understood by considering the end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, where the protagonist actually chooses to side with the antagonists for his own greater good.

4. Race in the Cthulhu Mythos

4.1. Lovecraft's views on race, immigration and culture

A large quantity of Lovecraft's surviving correspondence demonstrates that he was an outspoken racist with a strong belief in the racial supremacy of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic peoples. These views have made him gain controversy accumulatively with popular recognition and fame, as evidenced recently by the disputes on whether it is tolerable to have his name and sculptured likeness representing the World Fantasy Award (WFA) (Eil 2015). Among those who have questioned the trophy is Nigerian-American Science Fiction author Nnedi Okorafor, who won the award in 2011 with the novel *Who Fears Death*. Okorafor thereby became the first black writer to win the award. On her blog, Okorafor states that she started questioning the trophy upon discovering a small poem Lovecraft wrote in 1912, called "On the Creation of Niggers" (Okorafor 2011). The poem is a short musing about the Olympian gods' creation of mankind, animals and "niggers" - the latter representing a middle ground between the two former. The poem ends with the lines "A beast they wrought, in semi-human figure, / Filled it with vice, and called the thing a Nigger." (Lovecraft as quoted in Okorafor 2011), thus clearly demonstrating a view that blacks were sub-human and morally inferior. Because of Lovecraft's explicit racist views, as they are reflected in this poem and elsewhere, Okorafor argues that he would not be likely to support any black writer, and may thus be unfitting to represent the WFA (Okorafor 2011).

Lovecraft's race views and the WFA trophy have since then been discussed heatedly in social media, and the WFA board has seen it necessary to reconsider using Lovecraft's image and name on the trophy due to this. In 2014, thousands of people signed petitions both to remodel the trophy and to keep it as it is (Eil 2015). In November 2015, the decision was made to remodel the trophy due to many writers and former WFA winners seeing it as an offensive legitimisation of Lovecraft's well known race views. The decision has been strongly criticised by Lovecraft biographer and double WFA winner S.T Joshi among others, who sees this as representing "a craven yielding to the worst sort of political correctness." (Joshi as quoted in Flood 2015).

In addition to such explicit pieces of racist literature as the above quoted 1912 poem, Lovecraft expressed his views on race clearly in several letters he wrote, and it is therefore possible to form an understanding of what he saw as the main issues with race and immigration in the U.S. in his time. It is clear that Lovecraft saw miscegenation, that is, intimate relations between people of different races and the conception thereby of mixed-race offspring (Young 2007) as a possible threat towards whites and white culture (cf. Evans 2005: 109). Some claim that these views are reflected more subtly in the Cthulhu Mythos, in such pieces as “The Shadow over Innsmouth” which Joshi sees as a fictional “warning” against miscegenation (Joshi 2001: 305). I will therefore assess this view, to see what grounds there might be to justify a racist interpretation of this story. Houellebecq has also argued that Lovecraft’s racism and his worries about miscegenation and non-white immigration into the U.S. are have inspired central figures in the Cthulhu Mythos, such as the Mythos pantheon and other extra-terrestrial antagonist inventions (2008: 107). Seeing racism as the most significant motivation behind Lovecraft’s work, Houellebecq claims that despite it being well noted, its significance is indeed largely underestimated (2008: 108). If this view is justifiable, it could mean that race issues are such a central factor in the Cthulhu Mythos that a good understanding of it, and the cosmicism upon which it is based, could not be attained without accounting for the race elements - not only those that are explicit, by description, but also those possibly implicit, by allegorical representation.

In the 1920’s and 30’s, it would not be extraordinary for a respectable American citizen to be critical and negative towards miscegenation, though different opinions on the matter were held. Negative views were thought to be scientifically justified, as some studies that were carried out at the time demonstrated alleged correlations between race and intelligence, where immigrants of different ethnicities were “proven” to be of lower intelligence than the white American majority. In 1917, it was reported in *The Survey*, an American scientific journal, that two in five immigrants, hereunder sixty percent of all Jewish immigrants, were “feeble-minded” (Schrag 2010: 80). Although these studies were highly biased and poorly carried out, an impression that immigrants were inherently of lower intelligence than the white population was entertained by many. Following this, it was believed that miscegenation would spread unwanted traits inherent in the non-whites and thereby degenerate the population. Through mixed-race relationships, then, it was thought that an “inferior generation” would issue (2010: 77-78). From this pseudo-scientific basis there emerged a view that the overall quality of a race could be controlled and maintained through

selective and planned breeding where people with unwanted traits, usually due to what was believed to be racial genetic heritage, would be prohibited from reproducing and mixing with those of “better” genes. This idea, called eugenics, was also popular among many conservatives in Europe, and a crucial point in the race policy of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist party.

Being concerned with cultural preservation and white supremacy in American and Western society, Lovecraft expressed some sympathies with Hitler, who at the time was urging Europe to racial cleansing and the institution of white Aryan dominance based on beliefs that other races were inferior and should not mingle with the white, neither culturally nor genetically. In a 1933 letter to his acquaintance J. Vernon Shea, Lovecraft expressed the following views on Hitler:

(Hitler’s) vision is of course romantic & immature, & coloured with a fact-ignoring emotionalism (...)⁴ There surely is an actual Hitler peril - yet that cannot blind us to the honest rightness of the man’s basic urge (...) I repeat that there is a great & pressing need behind every one of the major planks of Hitlerism - racial-cultural continuity, conservative cultural ideals, & an escape from the absurdities of Versailles. The crazy thing is not what Adolf wants, but the way he sees it & starts out to get it. I know he’s a clown, but by God, I like the boy!

(Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 360)

Lovecraft’s view of Hitler is not uncritical, but rather divided. As Joshi points out, Lovecraft did not agree with Hitler’s views that it was primarily the spreading of Jewish genes that were threatening European society, and that therefore, anyone with Jewish blood was a threat (Joshi 2001: 360-361). This extreme racism upon which Hitler’s beliefs were founded is possibly what Lovecraft referred to as “fact-ignoring emotionalism” here. If so, it is possible that Lovecraft saw the “scientific” justifications of ethnic and genetic segregation as problematic. However, Lovecraft was very concerned with the cultural consequences of immigration and miscegenation. He points to “racial-cultural continuity” and “conservative cultural ideals” as important and just motivations behind Hitler’s policy.

Being a devoted cultural preservationist, Lovecraft was generally negative towards great and sudden changes in society (Joshi 2001: 363), and saw the immigration and growing cultural heterogeneity that was taking place in the U.S in the 1920’s and 30’s as

threatening the otherwise stable society. In accordance with Hitler, Lovecraft was convinced that Jews were attaining a strong influence on Western culture, and were hindering the preservation and development of white “Aryan” traditions. In another letter written to Shea in 1933, Lovecraft exemplified this with what he claimed to be Jewish dominance of the literary community of New York. According to him, Jewish authors and publishers were setting the standards for American literature, and were thus making a culturally “rootless literature” take precedence of tradition-bearing “Aryan” literature (Lovecraft as quoted in Joshi 2001: 362). This shows how Lovecraft saw immigrants and cultural others as a threat to his society, and to himself, who was not only a preservationist, but also, as a Weird Fiction writer, a representative of American literature.

Lovecraft’s views on miscegenation and culture are brought up by Evans (2005), who argues that Lovecraft’s depictions of culture under threat, which are usually representations of New England culture and traditions, reflect a fear that immigrants would destroy the American culture that Lovecraft was strongly attached to. This “destruction” would be brought about by the immigrants interbreeding with white Americans and creating a “mongrel” race that would not conserve American culture and traditions (Evans 2005: 109). This would accord with the above presented idea that Lovecraft’s views on miscegenation were more concerned with preserving culture than by preserving human genes. Evans demonstrates that Lovecraft was interested in actively preserving cultural markers, with reference to a letter from 1923, where Lovecraft among other things states that

It is for us to safeguard and preserve the conditions which produce great abbeys, and palaces, and picturesque walled towns, and vivid sky-lines of steeples and domes (...) ⁵ take them away and we have nothing which a man of taste would care to live for.

(Lovecraft as quoted in Evans 2005: 110).

Although Evans claims that Lovecraft moderated these views in the 1930’s, they may provide a background for the thoughts he expressed with reference to Hitler and cultural preservation. As latter quote demonstrates, Lovecraft preservationist ideas were strongly founded on aesthetic views, and he was concerned that the loss of cultural markers would take away what “a man of taste” such as himself “would care to live for”. He points to the importance of preserving “the conditions” that allows the production of such cultural markers. These “conditions” may very well be, partly at least, the white homogenous society that he preferred to the ethnical diversity that was developing in the U.S.

Houellebecq points to Lovecraft's period of living in New York, from 1924 to 1926, as a defining point in his literary career, as Lovecraft there saw non-white immigrants living under poor conditions and was repulsed by their behaviour and appearance (Houellebecq 2008: 106). As I demonstrate in the following section, Lovecraft clearly reflected these sentiments in the stories "He" and "The Horror at Red Hook" that he wrote in 1925. Houellebecq, however, claims that the racism and hatred Lovecraft discovered in New York would permeate his writing and be reflected more subtly in the Mythos stories that he wrote from 1926 and onward (2008: 103). Houellebecq suggests that Lovecraft's vision of a great and frightening alien city that occur from time to time in the Mythos stories is derived from his disillusioned view of New York (2008: 103). Representations of such alien cities are to be found in some late and central Mythos stories such as "At the Mountains of Madness", "The Shadow out of Time" and "The Dreams in the Witch House" (cf. p. 41-42). What sets these cities apart from other Mythos towns and cities, such as Innsmouth and Arkham, is the fact that the former cities are founded and peopled by non-human extra-terrestrials, whereas the others have a human history and have become infused with Mythos elements through certain events; Innsmouth, for instance, became invaded by the Deep Ones after Captain Marsh summoned them there.

The alien cities have completely extra-terrestrial, non-human backgrounds and histories. A large portion of "At the Mountains of Madness", for instance, is concerned with divulging the alien, pre-human history of the enormous city that is discovered in Antarctica. As the protagonists study the inside of the (seemingly) abandoned city, they find some pictorial reliefs that outline the history of the city and its inhabitants, and are greatly disturbed by its cosmic implications. Following Houellebecq's argument, this city could be seen as a fictional representation of New York, as Lovecraft experienced it, with the horror the protagonists feel upon discovering its unhuman origin reflecting Lovecraft's horror upon discovering how foreign culture had influenced New York. Houellebecq does not, however, explain exactly what stories he sees as representing race issues on a deeper, allegorical level, and to what extent they do so. I understand his argument to be that Lovecraft's race fears had a significant impact on the texts he wrote after returning from New York (cf. 2008: 103), and that therefore, it is important to recognize the significance of race issues in relation to Lovecraft's fiction.

Although it could be possible to search for allegorical representations of race issues in any of Lovecraft's Mythos stories, and through interpretation argue for such, I will focus on

“The Shadow over Innsmouth” as a possible race allegory. This is because this story is more directly concerned with a human – non-human conflict than many other stories, and represents the clash of human and non-human cultures, whereas other stories focus more on outlining alien cultural aspects, history and architecture by itself, and presenting the protagonists’ reactions to this. “The Shadow over Innsmouth” has also been interpreted as one of the most significant and exemplary of Lovecraft’s stories in relation to racial conflict and miscegenation.

4.2. The role of coloured and racially mixed characters in Lovecraft’s fiction

Despite his racist views, Lovecraft frequently included non-white and non-Anglo-Saxon characters in his fiction. As has been noted by several critics and scholars, such as Harman (2010: 60) and Joshi (2001: 220), his racism shines clearly through in the way he describes the non-Anglo-Saxon characters in the tales, and in the role they play. Non-Anglo-Saxon people of different kinds figure frequently in the Cthulhu Mythos, yet they usually play their part on the side of the cosmic, antagonist entities. As such they may for instance be in a devout religious or spiritual relationship with Cthulhu or some of the Semitic deities that Lovecraft often mentioned in his stories, or in a morbid symbiotic relationship with the Deep Ones that live beneath the sea.

The antagonistic racial others in the stories are usually groups of people, not distinct individuals, and they are often portrayed as having a deeper understanding of- and affinity to cosmos and the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon than the protagonists have. In “The Call of Cthulhu”, much of the information the narrator collects about Cthulhu comes from police investigations and interrogations of members of “Cthulhu Cults”, that consist mainly of non-whites and racially mixed people, and whose rituals and behaviour are outlined with reference to African voodoo practices, among other things.

...the prisoners all proved to be men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, gave a colouring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult. But before many questions were asked, it

became manifest that something far deeper and older than negro fetichism was involved.

(Lovecraft 2005: 181)

These cultists have been arrested in New Orleans, by police forces interrupting what seemed to be “voodoo orgy” that frightened locals (Lovecraft 2005: 179). As is common when Lovecraft introduces whole groups of non-Anglo-Saxons into his narratives, the group here is stressed to be consisting of different ethnicities, of vaguely specified origin, and moreover of “mixed-blood”, meaning that they cannot be seen as belonging to one specific ethnic group or nationality. What exactly is meant by “a colouring of voodooism” is unclear, but having established an association to a non-white practice of magic, Lovecraft discards this element by showing that it is not in fact voodoo or “negro fetichism” (sic.) they are practicing, but “something far deeper and older” (2005: 181), which will turn out to be Cthulhu worship. As Harman demonstrates, Lovecraft’s technique here is to first invest the idea of voodoo magic with negative associations, suggesting for instance that “It was voodoo, apparently, but voodoo of a more terrible sort than they had ever known” (Lovecraft 2005: 178), before asserting that Cthulhu worship is indeed far more frightening than any voodoo practise (Harman 2010: 63). Lovecraft thus outlines his fictional cult with reference to real-life practises, and ensures that the real-life elements in question are endowed with the necessary connotations to make it effective as a means of comparison. He also ensures that voodoo practises are associated with non-whites, and having thus established a sense of otherness and danger that relates to non-whites, he demonstrates that the same applies for the Cthulhu Cult, only on a more horrible level: “...a dark cult totally unknown to them, and infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles.” (Lovecraft 2005: 175).

The non-Anglo-Saxons in Lovecraft fiction are also in some cases portrayed as antagonists per se, that is, by representing a threat to American culture and traditions, an impression Lovecraft entertained strongly after living some time in New York (Houellebecq 2008: 102). This contrasts the way the non-Anglo-Saxon and racially mixed people are related to the cosmic elements in stories such as “The Call of Cthulhu”, and demonstrates that Lovecraft not only used racial others in his fiction because they served as human representatives of the Mythos entities, but also because he could use them to represent a threat to the protagonists and their culture and traditions. Lovecraft made this the main theme of his

short story “He” (1925) in which he characterises non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants as a threat to the culture and urban life of New York.

...the throngs of people that seethed through the flume-like streets were squat, swarthy strangers with hardened faces and narrow eyes, shrewd strangers without dreams and without kinship to the scenes about them, who could never mean aught to a blue-eyed man of the old folk, with the love of fair green lanes and white New England village steeples in his heart.

(Lovecraft 2005: 147-148)

As this story largely reflects Lovecraft’s own experiences and feelings upon living in New York, and studying the city for its cultural heritage and antiquarian peculiarities, it can be interpreted as a fictionalised statement about Lovecraft’s view on immigrants and their influence on American culture and society. Joshi explains that Lovecraft here presents a sort of “sociology of New York” (2001: 223) where the immigrants are outsiders defined by their lack of kinship to the city and its culture, such as the white have, who share a cultural heritage with the Dutch and English who founded the city (2001: 224). As they have a certain influence upon its development, however, the immigrants here present a threat to the cultural identity of New York. “He” suggests a link between urban decadence and immigration, exemplified for instance by what appears to be a description of the Jazz music that was developing at the time, and that originates from ethnic African music. “...the pounding of fevered kettle-drums, the clatter of obscene crotala, and the maniacal moaning of muted horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen.” (Lovecraft 2005: 154). Lovecraft carefully invests the entire description of the music with negative connotations, such as “obscene crotala”, “maniacal moaning”, and culminates by associating the melodies with filthiness, “an unhallowed ocean of bitumen”. That the music is supposed to represent an unwholesome element here is clear from the description. The music also serves to represent the culture of the immigrants, and in that respect it is an element of antagonism, given the sense of cultural threat on the part of the immigrants that Lovecraft shows in this story, and possibly, as a dedicated preservationist and racist, means to “warn against” through the medium of Weird Fiction.

The role of coloured immigrants as primary antagonists with connection to the Mythos pantheon is developed further in “The Horror at Red Hook” (1925). This story is set in New York, and Red Hook is an actual area of Brooklyn, not far from where Lovecraft lodged at the

time. Thus, according to S.T. Joshi, Lovecraft describes this slum with some accuracy in this story (Joshi 2001: 220). Given the fact that Lovecraft wrote this story while residing in the actual area he describes, it is possible to see this as a fictionalised representation of Lovecraft's concerns with immigration and the insurgence of foreign cultures in America. Yet "The Horror at Red Hook" mixes the two representations of non-Anglo-Saxon antagonism that I have demonstrated, as the immigrants in this story are both connected to cosmic antagonist forces, and represent a cultural threat as immigrants and representatives of non-western culture and traditions.

"The Horror at Red Hook" is a short story that mainly focuses on the doings of a poor multi-ethnic population in the Red Hook area. The ethnic-groups are described harshly and unflatteringly throughout, with several claims that they are sub-human and "half apes" in appearance as well as conduct. A group of illegal Kurd immigrants are at the centre of action in the story, and as police investigates the reasons and means for the human-smuggling that is going on in the area, it is discovered that the immigrants are gathering for the sake of forming a religious community based on the worship of ancient Semitic deities such as Lilith, Astaroth and Moloch among others (cf. Lovecraft 2005: 141).

Lovecraft describes the Red Hook area as "...the polyglot abyss of New York's underworld..." (2005: 127), and thus conveys clearly his negative feelings towards it. He goes on to accentuate the ethnic diversity among the immigrants, "...Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements..." (2005: 128), and points out that there were better times when there were only white Anglo-Saxon and Nordic settlers and the area looked more wholesome and pleasing (2005: 128). This is reflected in the portions of early 19th century architecture in the area. The immigrants are not only characterised as mean and repulsive, but also as criminals and murderers: "...from the smuggling of rum and prohibited aliens through diverse stages of lawlessness and obscure vice to murder and mutilation in their most abhorrent guises" (Lovecraft 2005: 129). With this, Lovecraft ensures that their sense of antagonism and repulsiveness is not only based on arbitrary views about their ethnicity and culture, but also on actual crimes and acts of violence that they commit. This serves to make the immigrants appear highly unsympathetic and dangerous, and gives the protagonist policeman some definite and unquestionable reasons for suspicion and negative judgement towards the immigrants.

Yet the immigrants of this story are also associated with certain religious practices and peculiarities: "...Malone could not help recalling that Kurdistan is the land of the Yezidis, last survivors of the Persian devil-worshippers" (Lovecraft 2005: 133). The fact that this "devil-worship", as part of a ritualistic creed is threatening to establish itself in New York, is made especially unsavoury as it is revealed that there is a link between the worst elements of crime on the part of the immigrants, and their religious practises. The immigrants have abducted some Caucasian children, "...blue-eyed Norwegians from the streets toward Gowanus" (Lovecraft 2005: 140), implicitly for the sake of religious sacrifice. Whether there is any specific reason for the immigrants to abduct Caucasian children is not revealed, but as their ethnicity (Norwegians) and racial traits (blue-eyed) are stressed, it may be inferred that their racial traits are intended to seem a matter of importance. Thus, the religious interests of the immigrants, which is here given a strong sense of "demonised" otherness through its religious connotations, is linked directly to race differences. The conflict in this story may therefore be interpreted as a race conflict that is raised to a religious, if not cosmic level, as race and ethnicity is presented as being significant in relation to antagonism and the worship of malevolent deities.

In the view of such characterisations of non-Anglo-Saxons that appear in "The Call of Cthulhu", "He", "The Horror at Red Hook" and others, it is undeniable that Lovecraft used his race fears actively as a plot element in his fiction, and thereby set up protagonist - antagonist conflicts that are based on issues of culture clashes and immigration. Houellebecq develops his idea that the protagonists in the Cthulhu Mythos play the role of "victims" to the antagonist further in relation to representations of race, as he points out that the tribal groups and cults of non-Anglo-Saxons and racially mixed people are clear opposites to the solitary, white, Anglo-Saxon intellectual protagonists who end up as victims for their lack of means to resist the Mythos entities and their adherents (Houellebecq 2008: 109, 113). It is thus important to note that the racial others here attain antagonistic traits both by the threats they represent themselves, and by their relations to the Mythos entities, such as Cthulhu. It is their affinities to the larger frame of the fiction, the Mythos entities and the other cosmic elements, that make their role in the Mythos become a relevant factor in relation to the implications and meaning of cosmicism.

4.3. «The Shadow over Innsmouth» as an allegorical representation of miscegenation

According to Joshi, “The Shadow over Innsmouth” is Lovecraft’s “greatest tale of degeneration” (2001: 305), with its representation of human genetic degradation and subsequent physical transformation through the Deep Ones influence. Joshi further claims that the story is “...clearly a cautionary tale on the ill effects of miscegenation...” (2001: 305). With this, Joshi sees the story as conveying a racial political message, a warning, on top of being a piece of Weird Fiction entertainment. Like Joshi, Houellebecq also sees “The Shadow over Innsmouth” as representing real-world issues related to genetics, and that genetics thus functions as a “theoretical framework” here (2008: 75). From this I understand that he sees the idea of genetics, and the possible references to that, as making the story more scientifically relevant. From these perspectives it becomes possible to see the story as a fictional representation of the (in Lovecraft’s view) negative effects of miscegenation, which were actual real-world issues that were studied and discussed at the time, politically as well as scientifically.

The idea of miscegenation is in fact brought up and treated early in the story, as the unnamed protagonist is talking to a ticket agent in Newburyport, Massachusetts. The protagonist wants to go from there to the (fictional) town of Arkham, where he intends to carry out some antiquarian and architectural studies for his own amusement and pleasure. The ticket agent in Newburyport suggests that he could go by bus in order to save some expenses, but warns that the bus route will take him directly through Innsmouth on its way, a town of ill repute among the people of Newburyport and environs. As the ticket agent explains the (supposed) grounds for people’s negative view on Innsmouth, some significant details are revealed. Firstly, the ticket agent states that people outside Innsmouth dislike them because of certain racial traits: “...the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice...” (Lovecraft 2005: 591). These traits are, among other things, “queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, stary eyes that never seem to shut” (2005: 591). The idea of miscegenation is established as it is further suggested that Captain Marsh “brought home some odd specimens” (2005: 591) from his south sea travels in the 1820’s and 30’s, implicitly women from pacific Islands with whom some of the townspeople had children, thus creating a generation of racially mixed inhabitants.

The ticket agent goes on to explain that there is something to the overall appearance of the Innsmouth people that make them vaguely frightening and disturbing. The alleged mixing of foreign blood has had a negative impact on their appearance, as they have become highly unpleasant to look at. Referring back to the possible pacific source of this, he states that “Gawd knows they’ve gotten to be about as bad as South Sea cannibals and Guinea savages.” (Lovecraft 2005: 593). He is clearly ill-disposed towards these ethnic groups, thus showcasing some of the “race prejudice” himself, and sees the Innsmouth people as approaching these in unpleasantness. This view was not uncommon at the time the story was written, and echoes the one I brought up in section 4.1, that miscegenation was unwanted by many as it was thought to result in a qualitatively inferior breed. Furthermore, the ticket agent also sees the Innsmouth people’s habits and behaviour as characteristic of racially “degenerated” people, and states that “I guess they’re what they call ‘white trash’ down South—lawless and sly, and full of secret doings.” (Lovecraft 2005: 593). “White trash” is a slang term that designates poor lower class white people, especially in the southern states in the U.S (White trash n.d), and with this, the ticket agent expresses a negative impression of the respectability and social status of the Innsmouth people. By using the term “white trash” he connects this sentiment with race too, even though it refers to whites – yet perhaps not necessarily ethnically homogenous whites.

As the protagonist, who is intrigued by what he has heard about the town from the ticket agent, goes on to collect information about Innsmouth from other locals and at the library, he is met with general reticence. Having discovered little but repulsion and disinterest toward Innsmouth on the local people’s part, he concludes that “in the eyes of the educated, Innsmouth was merely an exaggerated case of civic degeneration.” (Lovecraft 2005: 594), which would mean that the people of Innsmouth have become physically degenerated to the point where their appearance disgusts other people, such as the ticket agent’s view has proven. After procuring some information about the town’s history at the Newburyport Historical Society the Protagonist is left to make his own observations and conclusions about the Innsmouth people.

The first Innsmouth native the protagonist describes in detail, is the bus driver who takes him to the town. Being immediately struck by a sense of disgust towards this man, the protagonist tries to explain his aversion with reference to his physical traits. His aspect is representative of what he has already heard from the ticket agent: a flat nose and bulging eyes, and he also notices, among other things, his greyish skin, uneven gait, and large hands with

short, curling fingers (Lovecraft 2005: 598). He tries to refer these traits to race, as he has understood that the Innsmouth people are (supposedly) racially mixed, but fails to alight on a satisfying conclusion:

Just what foreign blood was in him I could not even guess. His oddities certainly did not look Asiatic, Polynesian, Levantine, or negroid, yet I could see why the people found him alien. I myself would have thought of biological degeneration rather than alienage.

(Lovecraft 2005: 598)

Having here suggested that the man's physical traits could seem to stem more from "biological degeneration", due to a disease perhaps, or, as Harman suggests, inbreeding (2010: 183), than from foreign genes - "alienage" - the protagonist leaves the whole matter of race and miscegenation on this inconclusive note, and goes on to focus on the town itself, and its history.

From this point on the matter of miscegenation in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" develops into the highly unrealistic idea of human- non-human interbreeding which results in (seemingly) human offspring that transforms gradually into Deep Ones over time. In order to further discuss this story as a representation of Lovecraft's racism and worries about the consequences of miscegenation, it becomes necessary to see the human - non-human relationship in the story as allegorical of an entirely human white – non-white relationship. This would mean that the role of the Innsmouth people remains largely the same, given that they all are white New Englanders with a common cultural (American colonial) and genetic (Caucasian) heritage, while the Deep Ones come to represent racial and cultural "others" that intrude upon and mix with the white Americans through immigration. Not only are the Deep Ones clearly differentiated genetically from the Innsmouth people, but their culture is also an important aspect of their alterity, as this strongly influences and changes the culture of Innsmouth.

At the time the story is set, the Deep Ones have for several decades had a significant and possibly irreversible influence on Innsmouth. Therefore it must be understood that when Joshi sees this story as allegorically "warning" against miscegenation (2001: 305), it does so by presenting the negative effects and consequences of racial mixing at a late stage, when hardly any of the original genes or culture is left in the town. Almost all the inhabitants of the

town have Deep One blood in them, and are therefore attaining the repulsive “Innsmouth look” that, as it turns out, more resembles the physical traits of fish and frogs than any human racial traits. This they have directly from the Deep Ones themselves, who are outlined as de-literalised monstrosities with fish and froglike qualities: “...fabulous monsters of abhorrent grotesqueness and malignity—half ichthyic and half batrachian in suggestion...” (Lovecraft 2005: 595). Using zoological terminology, the narrator uses the terms “ichthyic” and “batrachian” to refer to the physical traits of fish and amphibians, respectively. Hence the bulging eyes that seemingly do not close, flabby hands, greyish skin and other traits that are particular to the “Innsmouth look”. Thus, the “Innsmouth look” can be seen as a representation of the physical traits racially mixed people. Yet as it has been clearly stated in the story that these traits are not in any way applicable to any specific race, this has to be allegorical, following the idea that the Deep Ones represent foreign immigrants.

The original motivation for the Innsmouth people to summon the Deep Ones to their town, was to benefit from them economically, as Captain Marsh and his men had discovered that some pacific island tribes were conducting human sacrifice in exchange for an abundance of fish and gold from the Deep Ones. By establishing a similar trade relation in Innsmouth, Captain Marsh made the Deep Ones come there and start inhabiting the “Devil Reef” outside the town. It is thus through establishing a mutually lucrative relation with the Deep Ones that these got an opportunity to take over the town. As the Deep Ones were physically stronger, less morally scrupulous, and larger in number than the Innsmouth people, they managed to become the dominant part in the relation. When the Innsmouth people rebelled against sacrificing their own to the Deep Ones, the Deep Ones invaded the city and forced some of the people to mate with them instead, thus starting the genetic takeover of the town. As this made the offspring of the Innsmouth people become gradually transformed into Deep Ones, this arrangement was beneficial to them. With this takeover, the Deep Ones turned the relation with Innsmouth into a benefit for themselves, and nullified the interests of the Innsmouth people.

The Deep Ones had already, at this point, gained a strong influence on the cultural identity of Innsmouth, as the people had to turn to worship the gods of the Deep Ones, primarily “Father Dagon” and “Mother Hydra” (cf. Lovecraft 2005: 622), in order to maintain the income of fish and riches. Because of this, it can be understood that an important part of the benefit for the Deep Ones in their relation with Innsmouth, if not the entire benefit, was that they got the possibility to influence the town culturally and religiously. This influence

would make the Innsmouth people largely assimilated to the Deep Ones culturally and behaviourally. However, when they rebelled against the “trade agreement”, of which this religious conversion seemingly was an important part, the Deep Ones started to enforce the interbreeding, thus making the assimilation physical and genetic. When this had been carried out, the people entered into a state complete of submission to the Deep Ones, and the cultural religious influence was strengthened. Thus the “Esoteric Order of Dagon” is still alive and working when the protagonist of the story enters the town.

Having established cultural and religious dominance in Innsmouth as well as made their non-human genes permeate the human community, the Deep Ones are wholly in charge of the town and the inhabitants. This shows that the town’s ill repute stems from a completely alien influence, which, following Joshi’s view (2001: 305), can be seen as allegorical of a foreign human influence.

Lovecraft’s primary concern about immigration and miscegenation was its cultural implications, as he saw immigration and miscegenation as threats to his own culture (cf. Evans 2005: 109). I therefore believe that in reading “The Shadow over Innsmouth” as an allegorical “warning” against miscegenation as Joshi presumes (2001: 305), it would be most convenient to focus on the cultural implications that are raised in the story, and relate these to miscegenation. Thus an important aspect of the humans’ relation with the Deep Ones is the rather morbid “trade agreement” that they have established between themselves. This could represent any trans-ethnic or trans-cultural commerce where both parts benefit mutually from their relation. What “The Shadow over Innsmouth” seems to point out, as a warning, then, is the fact that one of the parts may gain dominance over the other, thus turning all the benefits towards itself and leaving the other subdued and without benefits. As Houellebecq has shown, Lovecraft often portrays those representing cultural refinement as being victimised by, and thus inferior to, those representing “the basest of species” with their barbarism and “bestial impulse” (2008: 109). Following this, it may be seen that this story reflects how the more barbaric and uncivilised part (with their demand for human sacrifice to Dagon for instance) subdues the more cultivated part (with their Christian culture and economical demands), through sheer force. From this, it can be seen that “The Shadow over Innsmouth” portrays the negative effects of establishing a mutual dependence between culturally and ethnically differentiated groups, and that Lovecraft suggests that miscegenation and cultural takeover on the stronger and more “uncivilised” and barbaric part may happen because of this.

Despite their strong cultural and genetic influence, the Deep Ones have had a seemingly preservative influence on Innsmouth, as the buildings have been left unchanged since the Deep Ones' takeover, and no new structures built. As the protagonist observes, the town is full of significant New England tradition markers such as colonial church buildings with "once beautiful Georgian steeples" (Lovecraft 2005: 604). However, most of the churches are at this point abandoned or used for the pagan worship of the Deep Ones' deities instead of God, as is also the case with the town's former Masonic Hall. As such, all these culturally important buildings are now dilapidating and have lost their original use and cultural significance, both to the townspeople who once used these buildings for Christian purposes, and to the protagonist, who associates such buildings with Christianity and American culture. This can be seen as reflecting the views Lovecraft expressed when he stated that the conditions that allow such cultural markers to be produced must be maintained in order to preserve a meaningful cultural landscape (Lovecraft as quoted in Evans 2005: 110). In this respect, the Deep Ones' influence have altered these "conditions", i.e. cultural, religious and genetic homogeneity, so significantly that no new, culturally significant structures can appear in Innsmouth. This can be understood as the traditional American society that Lovecraft felt attached to, and saw as being threatened by immigrants (cf. p. 79). Ultimately, the danger of losing the cultural "conditions" consisted in possibly losing all aesthetic meaning that, to the original population, made the society and its culture worth living for (Lovecraft as quoted in Evans 2005: 110).

In all, I do not find it impossible to see the human – Deep One relation and conflict in the story as allegorical of what may be Lovecraft's extremely negative vision of racial miscegenation and its cultural implications. As demonstrated, a "warning" can be deduced from the story, and it would fit in with Lovecraft's views on immigration and miscegenation. After some time of equality, one part, being more prone to violence and cruelty, gains the upper hand on the other and begins a cultural and, through miscegenation, genetic takeover, thus "colonising" the other part's area and, in assimilating it to their own conditions, brings it into a state of decay where all cultural symbols have lost their former integrity and meaning to the original population. This would leave the population in the state Lovecraft envisioned in his 1923 letter, where the people are unable to derive any sense of aesthetical meaning from their cultural markers (Lovecraft as quoted in Evans 2005: 110).

It must be noted, however, that Lovecraft treats the matter of miscegenation directly and at some length in the beginning of the story, and seems to reject it. As shown, the

protagonist cannot conclude that the “Innsmouth look” is to be explained with reference to human interracial relationships. Miscegenation, or human interracial relationships, are exactly what the allegorical reading would suggest that the story represents. It is possible, I infer, to see that Lovecraft intended to reject the entire idea of human miscegenation when treating this matter so thoroughly only to reject it and leave it unmentioned for the rest of the story. This would ensure that the focus stays on the non-human and cosmic elements in the story, and that it will be seen as more concerned with cosmicism and its implications than race and miscegenation. However, as a certain significance of race in the Cthulhu Mythos has been established in other stories, such as “The Call of Cthulhu”, I will proceed to assess the significance of race issues in relation to cosmicism.

4.4. Cosmicism and race in the Cthulhu Mythos

When presenting actual groups of non-Anglo-Saxons or racially mixed people in his fiction, Lovecraft often takes care to endow these with associations of barbarism, uncivilised culture and heathen religious practices. This is true for among others the Cthulhu Cult and the pacific tribe, the Kanakys, that Captain Marsh and his men meet in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, and from which they learn how to summon the Deep Ones and sacrifice to their gods in exchange for fish and riches. It is through their religious practices that these groups are put in relation to the cosmic elements of the Mythos, as they tend to worship the deities that are central to it.

As shown in section 3.5, an important function of the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon is to establish a definite sense of “evil” in the narratives, thus investing what Lovecraft saw as cosmic indifference with a strong sense of cosmic antagonism. When the groups of racial others in the narratives worship these beings and are in allegiance with them, they attain a clearly antagonist role themselves. What is significant about this, is that these groups of people take on the role as human representatives of the cosmic forces in the stories. As the Cthulhu Mythos is largely founded on the idea that humans are threatened, physically and existentially, by cosmic entities, hence the idea of “humanity’s insignificance in the universe” (Lowell: 2004: 48), it becomes possible to ask whether this applies to *all* of humanity, or whether it may be that the cultists and other human “representatives” are exempt from this

threat in some way or other. If so, it could be necessary to see the Cthulhu Mythos as differentiating races on a fundamental level, so that Lowell's claim that "Lovecraft's myth world is cold and negative, with no place for humanity in it." (2004: 50) would have to be changed to "with no place for modern, civilised whites in it" (for example), in order to represent the situation more accurately.

The function of the Cthulhu Cult is to keep alive the knowledge and veneration of Cthulhu and the other "Great Old Ones". These are cosmic entities that came to earth and ruled it before humanity came into existence, and who, having lost their power for a long time, are now lying imprisoned in various hidden structures under the sea and the ground, waiting for the stars to be in the right positions, so that they may come back again and regain world-dominance. As they cannot break free on their own, they need beings from the outside to help them. They have therefore, through telepathy, inspired people all over the world to form these cults and be ready to liberate Cthulhu and the other Great Old Ones when the stars are right (Lovecraft 2005: 182). It is revealed that Cthulhu and the other Great Old Ones focused their attention on the "sensitive" members of humanity in order to gain influence among them, as well as worship and eventually help in becoming liberated from their dwellings (2005: 182). What exactly lies in the word "sensitive" is not clear, yet is clear that non-Anglo-Saxons and racially mixed people are primarily among the "sensitive" who are susceptible of being affected by the Great Old Ones' telepathic promptings. This might be understood either as a mental keenness or heightened sense of imagination on the part of these people, as it is revealed that various American artists and poets report having had vivid and strikingly similar dreams that seem to be influenced by Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones (2005: 173). Also, it is made clear that insane and mentally unstable people are affected as well (2005: 174), which could be understood to suggest that susceptibility to the telepathy of the cosmic beings stems from unhealthy mental conditions. What these things imply for the Cthulhu Cult in general, whether it consists of mentally keen or mentally unstable people, or both, and whether this is supposed to stem from their genetic composition, is therefore unclear. What is clear, however, is that common white denizens, "New England's traditional "salt of the earth"" (2005: 173) are the least affected, or "sensitive", which further establishes the sense that race and ethnicity is an important factor here.

As to whether the members of the Cthulhu Cult will benefit from their worship and allegiance to Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones, and thus be better off than other people when or if these beings regain world dominance, it is stated in "The Call of Cthulhu" that "Then the

liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.” (Lovecraft 2005: 183). From this it is clear that the “benefit” to humans is that barbarism and uncivilised behaviour will be perpetuated and fuelled by the cosmic beings. Although the cultists can be seen as having a greater “cosmic significance” than other humans as they will be instrumental in liberating the Great Old Ones and bring earth under their control, it is now clear that the ultimate goal of this is not in any way spiritual or meaningful. The ultimate goal is chaos and barbarism. As shown, Lovecraft has established a sense of barbarism and uncivilised culture on the part of the Cthulhu Cult by associating them with voodoo practises. From this it can be gathered that the non-Anglo-Saxons and racially mixed are presented as being susceptible of influence from the cosmic beings also because they represent civilisation in a lesser degree, and are thus more attuned to the chaos and overall barbarism that Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones will establish when - or if - they come back. As the above quote makes clear, all civilisation, order and stability will be abandoned then, in favour of chaos and “a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom” (2005: 183). This reflects Houellebecq’s view that white, modern intellectuals in the Cthulhu Mythos are “victims” to the barbaric and uncivilised cultists and other non-white antagonist “torturers” (2008: 109), and that this portrays the fall of civilisation at the hands of evil cosmic forces (2008: 113).

Another significant point is made in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, where it is revealed that among the Kanakys who originally started to have commerce with the Deep Ones, there were also some who bred with them, although seemingly of free will. Zadok Allen, the elderly Innsmouth drunkard who relates these facts, states “When it come to matin’ with them toad-lookin’ fishes, the Kanakys kind o’ balked, but finally they larnt something as put a new face on the matter.” (Lovecraft 2005: 616) To the Kanakys, there is seemingly a “benefit” in becoming a Deep One, as this gives them immortality and the ability to live both on land and under water. Therefore some of these people have seen this as a desirable fate. It is possible that some of the Innsmouth people saw this the same way, but as it had to be forced on them it can be gathered that they were by nature more reluctant to commit to this. It is clear, however, that mating with the Deep Ones and thus abandoning humanity altogether and becoming immortal is not a racial privilege. It was merely the pacific islanders who first learned about this, and who seemingly were most positive toward committing to the idea of joining the Deep Ones. Following Houellebecq’s view (2008: 109) this can be interpreted as

being related to their nature and uncivilised culture, and thus be seen as representative of their behaviour and mind-set, which may be conditional to culture and ethnicity.

It is, however, undoubtable that certain groups of non-whites, such as the Kanakys, or racially mixed people such as the Cthulhu Cult are aware of the things that are going on outside of the “normal” recognition of humans, and are more apt to communicate with the Deep Ones, for instance, or receive telepathic messages from the Great Old Ones than the protagonists and white people in the Mythos generally are. This could possibly be because the non-whites’ less civilised and culturally refined ways of life are more akin to the chaos that the cosmic beings represent. There is also a fundamental difference in how the protagonists and the racial others perceive the cosmic entities, and how they thus regard the implications of cosmicism that are raised in meeting these. The non-Anglo-Saxons and racially mixed groups seem not to be so disillusioned and horrified by the notions of humanity’s cosmic insignificance, such as the protagonists are, but rather accept and embrace the existence of cosmic entities such as Great Old Ones and the Deep Ones and see their advent as a source of possibilities to themselves, and not a source of despair and horror. The Cthulhu Cultists will in fact “enjoy themselves” in an “ecstasy and freedom” (Lovecraft 2005: 183) when the Great Old Ones come. The Kanakys seem to desire the possibility of changing into Deep Ones, with the benefits that brings. There is an important difference, however, in the implications of the two matters; for whereas the Cthulhu Cult will abandon all civilisation and order in favour of the chaos represented by the cosmic entities, the Kanakys will abandon humanity altogether and become such beings themselves. That there is a connection between these stories is made clear at the end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, as it is stated that the Deep Ones, too, await the coming of Cthulhu (2005: 652). It must be noted however, that although race is a significant element in both of these stories and in relation to cosmicism, the whole matter of race eventually becomes nullified in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, as the Kanakys and later the Innsmouth people abandon humanity altogether, and thereby renders the whole race question irrelevant, as this is only concerned with humans - unless this move is seen as allegorical on race issues.

As shown in the preceding section, it is possible to see “The Shadow over Innsmouth” as an allegory on immigration and culture clashes, and thus, as Joshi suggests, see the story as a “a cautionary tale on the ill effects of miscegenation...” (2001: 305). I have demonstrated that preserving cultural values and sources of aesthetic pleasure is an important motif in the Mythos, and in relation to cosmicism, as these matters can supply humans with the illusion of

meaning in a non-anthropocentric and fundamentally meaningless universe (cf. section 3.6). In an allegorical reading of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, it becomes possible to see the Deep Ones as representing a foreign colonising force that undermines the culture of the other part and thereby takes away their sources of meaning and integrity. This puts the race-allegory in touch with the idea of cosmicism, and it could also be seen that the allegorical reading of the story extends the possibility that chaos and barbarism is more in tune with the cosmic forces than refinement, progress and modernity, as it is clearly the less refined and morally scrupulous part that gains the upper hand and subdues the other part.

This points back to the fact that in the Cthulhu Mythos, meaninglessness and chaos are core qualities of the universe, and represented by the cosmic entities, the antagonists. This fact, which is the base principle of cosmicism as it appears in the Mythos, is especially clear in how the deity Azathoth is characterised in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, as a “mindless entity (...) which rules all time and space from a curiously envired black throne at the centre of Chaos.” (Lovecraft 2005: 674). The beings that represent barbarism and lack of cultural refinement and civilisation are more attuned to this reality of mindlessness and chaos than modern, civilised people, and therefore more naturally in touch with the cosmic forces in the Mythos. Race then is rather a secondary issue in relation to cosmicism. I find that it can rather be deduced that what Lovecraft intends to “warn” about here, is the loss of civilisation, culture and meaning, and the spread of barbarism, cruelty and meaninglessness as cosmicism is realised and accepted. For although the ones that first and foremost represent these matters in the Mythos are coloured non-Anglo-Saxons and racially mixed people, “The Shadow over Innsmouth” can be seen as demonstrating that even modern New Englanders can succumb to barbarism and cultural degeneration under certain conditions. And although the Innsmouth people had their reasons for inviting the Deep Ones to their town, and for sacrificing to their gods and accepting their religion and culture, the unnamed protagonist of the story puts the questions of cultural integrity and cosmicism in a unique perspective, as he himself decides to accept his fate and become one of the Deep Ones.

4.5. The end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” – Happily ever after?

The peculiar ending to “The Shadow over Innsmouth” has been discussed by many critics, and its implications and meaning are controversial aspects of the Cthulhu Mythos fiction (Evans 2005: 125). The events that conclude this story stand out in the Mythos, as it is clear that the protagonist, instead of going insane from fear of what he learns, as is common, turns to accept and even embrace it. Because of this, “The Shadow over Innsmouth” can be interpreted as a Mythos story that ends with a suggestion of “happily ever after”, which makes it unique in terms of how it treats the protagonist- antagonist confrontation and the implications of cosmicism that arises from this. “The Shadow over Innsmouth” is therefore a significant Mythos story as it challenges the meaning and implications of cosmicism in a singular way. However, the turn of events that takes place here is not completely unprecedented and isolated, as it is hinted towards, yet not fulfilled, in some other Mythos stories.

The final chapter of the story tells how the protagonist, in the time after his escape from Innsmouth, starts to investigate his ancestry. To his great unease, he finds some clues and hints that suggest that his family has ties to Innsmouth. On probing into this, he learns that he is in fact a descendant of Captain Obed Marsh himself, meaning that he has Deep One genes. He tries to suppress this knowledge for some time, yet eventually he begins to slowly acquire the “Innsmouth look”. Facing this, he considers committing suicide to escape his fate, something his uncle had done several years before. However, he starts to have visions in his dreams where he sees the Deep Ones’ great submarine city, Y’ha-nthlei, and meets some of his ancestors who now have completed their transformation and are living happily under the sea. There they are awaiting the advent of Cthulhu, which will allow them to invade human cities again, in a larger scale than was the case before, when they took over Innsmouth. The protagonist is initially frightened by his dreams, but over time he starts to feel attracted to Y’ha-nthlei and the idea of living there eternally. As the story ends, the protagonist is planning to help his cousin escape from a mental institution, as he gathers that he, too, must be undergoing the transformation and that this is the reason he is hospitalised. The protagonist ends his narrative on an auspicious note, stating that he intends to take his cousin with him to Innsmouth, swim out to the “Devil Reef” and dive down to Y’ha-nthlei.

Although this turn of events stands out in the Cthulhu Mythos, the idea of the protagonists joining the antagonists by sacrificing their human identity in favour of a new (possibly) inhuman existence arises in other stories as well, yet it is not carried out in any other story. An example of this is found in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, where Gilman learns that he is obliged to “sign in his own blood the book of Azathoth and take a new secret name” (Lovecraft 2005: 664) because he has gone too far in studying the link between modern physics and witchcraft. As shown, Gilman does not comply with this, and is killed shortly after trying to break up the infant sacrifice Keziah Mason and Brown Jenkin are conducting. Another notable example is in “The Whisperer in Darkness”, where the protagonist learns from an alien impersonating his acquaintance Henry Akeley, that he may come with them to the distant planet Yuggoth (Pluto) if he lets the aliens surgically remove his brain and store it in a vat that is connected to some technological devices that allow his senses and cognitive faculties to remain intact and working while he can survive the space travel and the conditions on Yuggoth. The alien explains that the sunless and alien landscape of Yuggoth is not frightening in itself, as the protagonist would naturally find it. This is merely a human’s perspective on it; and perspective is arbitrary and may be changed voluntarily (Lovecraft 2005: 462). The exact consequences and implications of conceding to the cosmic entities’ requests are left unrevealed in these stories, as the protagonists choose not to comply. Therefore “The Shadow over Innsmouth” brings about some unique revelations that are especially significant in relation to the role of aesthetics in the Mythos.

In section 3.6 I demonstrated that there are indications both in Lovecraft’s letters and in his fiction that he saw it as meaningful for humans to resort to aesthetics instead of “scientific delving” to achieve a valuable sense of meaning in a universe that is inherently meaningless, or even hostile, to humans. This can be achieved through adhering to traditions and culture, maintaining an aesthetic view on nature, or even becoming religious, even though this may be nothing more than an illusion. For in a meaningless universe, the illusion of meaning is valuable and necessary. The protagonists can relate to their surroundings by investing them with positive or negative aesthetic associations. Thus the meaningful elements, such as the nature of rustic New England, are presented as aesthetically pleasing and meaningful whereas the cosmic elements related to the antagonists are characterised by negative associations, often religiously charged as such. “The Shadow over Innsmouth” showcases this on several occasions, and also shows how the protagonist’s perspective on the antagonist elements in the story develops and changes as the events in the narrative develop.

This is especially clear in how, throughout the narrative, the protagonist refers to the town in similar yet significantly differentiated terms. Having first started gathering some vaguely unsettling information about the town, and still feeling a strong sense of curiosity towards it, he refers to it as “rumour-shadowed Innsmouth” (Lovecraft 2005: 599). Later, having listened to Zadok Allen’s story of how the Deep Ones came to the town and took over, and being rather incredulous of this though frightened of its implications, he calls it “fear-shadowed Innsmouth” (2005: 626) and shortly after “blight-shadowed town” (2005: 627). Then, having just awakened on the ground outside the town after being chased by the townspeople and the Deep Ones through half of the night, he refers to it as “evil-shadowed Innsmouth” (2005: 647). The adjective “shadowed” is a stable factor here, and its function is significant. It is maintained throughout that there is something elusive and unclear about the whole town, hence it is “shadowed”. This escalates from the curiosity and the impressions conveyed by the rumours he hears in the beginning, to the fear and repulsion he feels when the cosmic elements, the Deep Ones, their gods and their doings in Innsmouth are related to him, and to the sense of antagonism and evil he attributes to these when he sees and experiences the truth of the matter for himself. Yet in the last paragraphs this changes significantly as he changes his perspective on Innsmouth and the Deep Ones:

I shall plan my cousin's escape from that Canton mad-house, and together we shall go to marvel-shadowed Innsmouth. We shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to Cyclopean and many-columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory for ever.

(Lovecraft 2005: 653)

It is especially significant that the protagonist here has turned to viewing the otherwise frightening town as “marvel-shadowed”, thus reflecting his original sense of curiosity and wonder that compelled him to enter the town and investigate it. A strong sense of aesthetics is here established, and it can be seen that the protagonist here views the town with aesthetical admiration, such as Wilmarth viewed the Vermont countryside in “The Whisperer in Darkness”. This would represent the highly subjective perspective, the “philosophical perception of the world” that Houellebecq points to as being the means whereby one may see Lovecraft’s work as poetic (2008: 25). As the diction in “The Shadow over Innsmouth” becomes filled with suggestive descriptions of Innsmouth and Y'ha-nthlei that are based on the protagonist’s dream visions, it may be argued that the narration turns rather poetic towards

the end, especially as the aesthetical perception of these elements becomes highly significant. Yet although “The Shadow over Innsmouth” reflects some of the same ideas and sentiments that arise in relation to aesthetics in such stories as “The Whisperer in Darkness”, it is clear that “The Shadow over Innsmouth” represents this on another level, as the aesthetic perspective here is attained after the cosmic elements have been confronted. As I have shown, the sense of aesthetic meaning is usually eradicated when this happens, and therefore not prying into the existence of the cosmic elements in the first place would be a premise for retaining one’s sense of integrity and meaning in the Mythos universe. It seems therefore that “The Shadow over Innsmouth” can be read as a “solution” to this issue. However, the exact significance and implications of the end of this story are debatable and subject to interpretation.

Paul Buhle treats this event as an allegorical representation of contemporary cultural issues that concerned Lovecraft (1976: 127). This reflects the reading of the human – Deep One conflict as an allegorical representation of miscegenation and the cultural implications that arise through that. Buhle’s interpretation of the story’s end can be seen as a counter-argument to the possibility of seeing the story as a “warning” against miscegenation as Joshi suggests (without taking the turn of events at the end of the story into consideration) (2001: 305). Buhle states that

Extrapolating Lovecraft’s implications from his limited narrative forms, one can suggest a perception that that the human recognition of forces outside the Western heritage would provoke a shock of (self) awareness: the result would be either madness or the course toward a new existence.

(Buhle 1976: 127)

“The course toward a new existence” seems to be exactly what takes place in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. This would mean that a certain “cultural revolution” is implied as it is suggested that it is possible to abandon one’s own culture and heritage and take on another through a change of perception – allegorised as the protagonist’s transformation into a Deep One. The ethnic cultural interpretation of the human – Deep One conflict is maintained by Buhle when he sees the latter as representing “forces outside the Western heritage (1976: 127). With this, Buhle goes on to argue that Lovecraft here started to imply, through his fiction, that human existence cannot possibly be limited by the structures of society (1976: 129). I understand this to be what he means by “a shock of (self) awareness” (1976: 127) that

would challenge humans existentially and open a “course toward a new existence” (1976: 127) for those able to handle the fact that one’s society, with its culture and traditions, is negligible and just as good and meaningful as any other. This would be a clear antithesis to the view expressed by Lovecraft in his earlier quoted 1923 letter, where he states that the representations of one’s own inherited culture are vital to “a man of taste” (Lovecraft as quoted in Evans 2005: 110).

Evans states that the turn of perspective that takes place at end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” can be seen both as representing the ultimate stage of the “corruption” that the protagonist goes through in becoming a Deep One, and as representing a view that “alien traditions may be as valid as New England traditions” (2005: 125). Evans argues for the latter, as he sees the stories as representing a turn in Lovecraft’s racist and cultural elitist views (2005: 125). He summarises his assessment by stating that “In this story he mourns the loss of New England traditions while at the same time he is learning to accept new cultures, acknowledging a future in which hybrid people and cultural forms may be recognized as the norm.” (2005: 125). Following this view, it becomes possible to see the end of the story as an ideological conversion on Lovecraft’s part, similar to what Buhle suggests, where Lovecraft can be seen as abandoning cultural elitism in favour of pluralism (1976: 127). Although Joshi does not treat the significance of the ending of the story in his recapitulation of it, he makes a relevant remark about the protagonist, who he claims is among the most well rounded characters in Lovecraft’s fiction, and that moreover his personality and antiquarian interests clearly reflects the personality and interests of Lovecraft himself (2001: 306). This could be seen as supporting the suggestion that the story represents the sentiments and meanings of Lovecraft, which Joshi identifies solely as a “warning” against miscegenation (2001: 305). As he leaves out the significance and implications of the story’s ending, Joshi thereby misses a possibly ameliorating argument that Evans argues for.

Despite the possibility of seeing the end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” as implying an ameliorated view on culture mixing on Lovecraft’s part, I find that it is important to note that the sense of “cosmic hostility” and threat towards humanity is still maintained at the very end of the story. As it is made clear that the Deep Ones will pay tribute to Cthulhu when he comes back to rule the earth, and that they will invade human towns or cities again - “It would be a city greater than Innsmouth next time. They had planned to spread...” (Lovecraft 2005: 652). This puts “The Shadow over Innsmouth” in clear relation to “The Call of Cthulhu” within the Mythos. And “The Call of Cthulhu” has already outlined what the future

may look like if Cthulhu and the other Great Old Ones regain their power: chaos and general barbarism will prevail. If it is to be understood that the protagonist of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” is now becoming part of a hostile Deep One force that plans to carry out “genetic conquest” against humanity in a large scale, it is clear that in abandoning his humanity and turning into a Deep One, he has likewise turned into an enemy of humanity and a representative of “cosmic hostility”. The only thing that ameliorates this, is his own perspective on the matter, which is conveyed as he outlines his prospects in highly positive, almost poetically aesthetic terms.

Keeping thus the larger thematic frame of the Cthulhu Mythos in mind, I find it more natural to concede to the first view about the end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” that Evans brings up, namely that it represents the ultimate corruption of the protagonist as he turns into a Deep One (Evans 2005: 125). Both Buhle and Evans see the end of this story as representing an ameliorating turn in Lovecraft’s perception of foreign culture and culture mixing. However, I find it significant that the Deep Ones are not presented as “misunderstood” or having other intentions than was originally revealed; they still plan to take over human cities and side with Cthulhu when, or if, he arises. As such, Lovecraft’s “acceptance” of cultural mixing is not necessarily to be seen as auspicious if expressed in allegory here. Yet, it is not to be denied that several significant Mythos stories Lovecraft wrote at this time (1930-31) and onward present a more nuanced and possibly sympathetic view of the aliens that have come to earth at some pre-human point in history and established societies and cities there. This could apply for the Deep Ones, as their point of view is to a certain degree presented in the end of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. It is, however, more clearly the case with the extra-terrestrial beings that inhabited Antarctica in a time before humanity, and whose history is largely revealed in “At the Mountains of Madness”, and the “Great race of Yith” who inhabited the deserts of Australia in remote times, and whose history and culture is outlined in “The Shadow out of Time”. Regarding this “sympathetic turn” in Lovecraft’s writing, Harman argues that this undermines the fiction and takes away the effectively horrifying sense of otherness and unknowability otherwise associated with the cosmic entities in the stories (2010: 148). With this, I understand Harman to mean that he sees Lovecraft as sacrificing horror and suspense, valuable literary elements in Weird Fiction, in favour of communicating, or at least admitting a change of perspective on his own part, in which he largely abandons the sense of enmity he felt against other cultures threatening his own, thus losing a possibly important motivation behind his fiction.

As the implications of the ending of “The Shadow over Innsmouth” are, as shown debatable and relying on interpretation, I find it the most useful not to read this as part of the “sympathetic turn” Lovecraft was about to actualise in his stories. As long as the sense of “cosmic hostility” is maintained, the thematised dangers of scientific delving and the limits of empirical knowledge remain relevant in the fiction and help keep the philosophical foundation in place. With this, the need to establish an aesthetic perception of the world, as described in section 3.6, which is Price’s reason for styling Lovecraft a “Prophet of Humanism” (2001), remains intact and urgent. This is a theme that is directly concerned with the implications and significance of cosmicism that underlies the Mythos fiction. Therefore, I find that reading Mythos stories as allegorical of cultural issues, immigration and miscegenation, should be secondary to the actual implications of cosmicism that are brought up and treated in more direct terms as humans are confronted with antagonistic and dangerous extra-terrestrial entities.

5. Conclusion

My first research question asks how Lovecraft challenges and problematises modern science as a means of gaining empirical knowledge in the Cthulhu Mythos stories. In chapter 2 I demonstrate that the Mythos stories are often based on scientific investigations related to the cosmic and antagonistic beings and elements in the stories. Yet despite their scientific approach to the cosmic elements in the stories, the protagonists are unable to attain any comprehensible and clarifying results by which they gain a useful understanding of what they are observing or experiencing. The reason that the cosmic elements in the stories are scientifically inaccessible to humans seems primarily to be that these cosmic elements, such as the colour in “The Colour out of Space” and the extra-terrestrial city Gilman visits in “The Dreams in the Witch House”, belong to a cosmic reality that is so far removed, not only from planet earth, but also from “our cosmos” as the narrator of “The Colour out of Space” puts it (Lovecraft 2005: 368), that entirely different laws of physics are the rule there. Yet as cosmic elements from this “beyond cosmos” by chance enter the world that is visible and comprehensible to humans, they do not assimilate their qualities to the conditions there, but retain their external qualities to such a degree that humans cannot perceive and understand them. Likewise when Gilman observes the unearthly city in one of his inter-dimensional dream-travels, his perception does not alter in a way that allows him to comprehend the principles of the “unearthly symmetry” that is the standard there (Lovecraft 2005: 669). This is because human perception is based on and limited to the conditions of for instance colour, three-dimensionality and physics such as they appear on earth.

To demonstrate that human perception is in the way of gaining a useful and objective comprehension of the cosmic elements, Lovecraft uses the de-literalising technique (cf. Harman 2010: 24) in setting up quasi-descriptions of these. Through de-literalising, Lovecraft effectively conveys a sense that the cosmic elements have qualities that are so foreign to human experience that suggesting paradoxical juxtapositions of physical traits and creating highly suggestive and subjective paraphrases is the closest one can possibly come to outline them with reference to ideas that are known and understandable to humans. Thus when the cosmic elements and entities appear to humans, it becomes impossible to maintain any sense of objectivity which would be necessary in order to approach, study and account for the cosmic elements scientifically. Lovecraft thus ascertains that in the Cthulhu Mythos, only a

limited part of the universe and reality is scientifically accessible and comprehensible to humans. When beings from outside this part of the universe appear to the humans in the Mythos, the humans quickly abandon all scientific, objective rationale, and instead start referring to the cosmic elements in terms that reveal subjective impressions of fear and repulsion. Although the cosmic beings often hurt and kill humans, these negative subjective impressions are established from the moment the beings prove to be objectively inaccessible, which I understand to suggest that primarily, it is the idea of being confronted with an aspect of reality that is incomprehensible that is frightening to the humans in the Cthulhu Mythos. The physical threat the beings pose is thus secondary to the existential issue that arises when humans find themselves unable to perceive and account for external elements that intrude upon and become part of their own reality.

It is also clear that in the Cthulhu Mythos, knowledge about the cosmic entities, such as the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon, is not exclusively accessible to scientists who probe into the matter, often more or less inadvertently. It is for instance revealed in “The Call of Cthulhu” that mystics, such as theosophists have a certain understanding of the existence of the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon (Lovecraft 2005: 167). “The Dreams in the Witch House” reveals that the witch Keziah Mason has gained her vast knowledge about physics and interdimensional travels through her practise of witchcraft. It is also through witchcraft that she has become allied to the central Mythos deities Nyarlathotep and Azathoth. The knowledge of Keziah Mason exceeds that of advanced physicists such as Albert Einstein and Willem de Sitter, and as it is suggested that her knowledge both comes from and pertains to her relationship with the Mythos deities and her practise of witchcraft, Gilman’s own similar studies turn out to be frightening and repulsive to him rather than enlightening. As such it becomes clear that in the Cthulhu Mythos, modern science, however advanced, is not the only, and seemingly not the most efficient means of gaining knowledge about reality and the universe. However, despite not being able to account for their experiences scientifically, the protagonists become furnished with enough empirical evidence to get a sense of the frightening implications of their scientific probings into unknown, cosmic realities.

My second research question asks how Lovecraft’s philosophical idea of cosmicism and its implications are reflected and communicated in the Cthulhu Mythos stories. As the opening paragraph to “The Call of Cthulhu” shows, Lovecraft translated his idea of humanity’s cosmic insignificance into a literary theme, and it is my understanding that this theme is fundamental to the Mythos stories, and thus, as Lowell claims, a defining element of

the Cthulhu Mythos (2004: 47). As I demonstrate in chapter 3, Lovecraft uses the antagonist cosmic beings in the Mythos to turn the sense of meaninglessness and insignificance that he derived from his astronomical studies into a sense of threat towards humans, a “cosmic hostility”. As such, there is a certain sense of intentionality on the part of the cosmic beings in the Cthulhu Mythos. The fact that this intentionality proves to entail a strong malevolence towards humans - a threat that is rendered especially acute by the vast destructive powers of the Mythos beings - places humanity in a very weak and hopeless position. This sense of weakness and hopelessness is closely related to the implications that may otherwise be derived from cosmicism, that is, from seeing humanity as transient and insignificant in the universe. In the Cthulhu Mythos, humans find themselves threatened both physically, by the dangerous and often malevolent cosmic beings, and existentially, by understanding that in relation to these beings, humanity inherits a small, transient and fragile position in the cosmos.

As I also demonstrate in chapter 3, however, there are certain significant elements in the Mythos related to religion, culture, traditions and aesthetics that appear to suggest that humanity has a certain basis of meaning and integrity of their own, which in my understanding becomes accentuated rather than rendered meaningless in the confrontations with the cosmic beings in the Mythos.

This leads to my third research question, which asks whether Price (2001) and Evans (2005) may be right in seeing culture, traditions and aesthetics as representing human values that retain their meaning and integrity for humans despite the implications of cosmicism. As shown in section 3.3, the humans in the stories often refer to the cosmic elements and beings in terms that are charged with negative religious connotations and associations. This is not because Christianity or any religion – except perhaps the Cthulhu Mythos pantheon, which may be worshipped religiously - is supposed to appear as true or real in the Mythos. To the protagonists, the value of Christianity seems to consist in providing the ability to categorise and estimate the cosmic elements subjectively and culturally when an objective scientific comprehension proves unattainable. Hanegraaff shows how Christianity in the Cthulhu Mythos functions as a source of connotations and associations that conveys a sense of evil and antagonism on the part of the cosmic beings (2007: 98). As Christianity thus functions as a source of common understanding and reference to the protagonists and the other humans in the stories, I understand the Christian associations in the Mythos to have a cultural rather religious function. Lovecraft also expressed admiration for the Puritans for the reason that

they used their religious views to create a sense of aesthetical meaning to life, while they considered all other aspects of human existence to be worthless and contemptible (Lovecraft as quoted in Houellebecq 2008: 117).

An aesthetical view that derives from a religious perception of reality is also the core of Price's argument, as he sees Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos as reflecting a view that aesthetics are more valuable than empirical knowledge (2001: 29). Such aesthetic views are clearly reflected in the way pieces of New England nature and cultural heritage are described in the Mythos stories. As these descriptions are charged with aesthetically positive associations and feelings, they create a clear contrast to the de-literalised and subjectively unfavourable descriptions of the cosmic elements and beings. Houellebecq (2008) and Lowell (2004) do not pay attention to the aesthetical aspect of the Cthulhu Mythos that Price points to here – with the exception of Houellebecq's later review of Lovecraft's style (2008: 25) – and as such they conclude rather that Lovecraft is primarily communicating his hatred towards life and the world (Houellebecq 2008: 117-119) and is to be seen as an “anti-humanist” because he made his views on humanity's irrelevance the sole message and moral in the Cthulhu Mythos (Lowell 2004: 49-50). My understanding is that Lovecraft rather communicates a rejection of empiricism and the striving towards objective knowledge through his depictions of the futility of modern scientific delvings, and suggests through his depictions of culture and nature that a subjectively imaginative and aesthetical perspective on reality is more valuable and worth retaining.

As Houellebecq and Lowell's assessments have shown, Lovecraft's cosmicism is susceptible to be interpreted as a variant of nihilism, due to its insistence on the relative insignificance of humanity and all human interests. In this respect I find it useful to regard Lovecraft as a “romantic nihilist” who seeks for meaning despite his knowledge, as Hanegraaff suggests (2007: 107). The Cthulhu mythos can thus be seen as reflecting both Lovecraft's views on the possible objective insignificance of everything human, while trying to convey a sense of subjective value and meaning that derives from the preservation and cultivation of the culture and traditions that humans have already established and developed. In this respect I find it worth noting that Lovecraft seems to a “solution” to his cosmicism by advocating a view that is the polar opposite of that of Friedrich Nietzsche. For whereas Lovecraft was a cultural preservationist who wanted to maintain and cultivate the values that derived from the established culture of his people, Nietzsche called for the active rejection and destruction of all old values, and the creation of new ones. As a cultural preservationist,

Lovecraft saw the insurgence of foreign cultures into the U.S. as a primary threat to society and himself. This concern seems to have been closely bound up with the racist sentiments Lovecraft entertained.

My fourth and last research question asks what role race issues or racial conflict play in the Cthulhu Mythos. Hereunder I ask what the function and meaning of the actual representations of the racial others in the stories are, and what implications may be derived from reading “The Shadow over Innsmouth” as an allegory on immigration and racial mixing.

Lovecraft’s well known racism is undeniably reflected in some of his fiction. Lovecraft made some notable racist texts, such as the early and very explicit example from 1912, the poem “On the Creation of Niggers”, and the stories “He” and “The Horror at Red Hook” he wrote in New York in 1925. These two stories clearly reflect his negative views on the immigration and growing cultural diversity he saw there. In these texts, Lovecraft made non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants the antagonists, and in “The Horror at Red Hook” he also made a link between their culture and “cosmic hostility”, as evidenced by the Kurd immigrants in who, among other things, abduct Caucasian children with the implicit aim of sacrificing these to ancient Semitic deities. As such he made these immigrants represent a sense of antagonism that would later, in the Cthulhu Mythos, be primarily represented by extra-terrestrial beings and deities.

Most Cthulhu Mythos stories are not explicitly concerned with race issues and depictions of immigrants and non-Anglo-Saxons. However, “The Call of Cthulhu” shows that there is a certain correlation between groups of primitive non-Anglo-Saxon and racially mixed people, and worship of the Cthulhu Mythos deities. Lovecraft does not establish a racial conflict in the story, but seems rather to suggest that those who more closely represent primitiveness and lack of civilisation and refinement are more attuned to the chaos that the cosmic Mythos deities represent, than the white, civilised and learned protagonists. As such I find that it is not the racial identities of the cultists that primarily make them attuned to the influence of Cthulhu and the “Great old ones”, but rather their uncivilised and primitive ways of life. This reflects Houellebecq’s view, who sees those characters representing education and refinement as victims to those representing barbarism and cruelty (2008: 109). In the Cthulhu Mythos, however, refinement and civilisation are never extricable from Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage in this respect, and Lovecraft does not make any significant differentiation between barbarism and racial alterity. The Deep Ones can be seen as representing an

antithesis civilisation and culture as represented by the protagonists, yet this also helps to make the Deep Ones susceptible of being interpreted as figurative representations of racial others and immigrant culture such as Lovecraft depicted these in the New York stories from 1925.

After the two New York stories and “The Call of Cthulhu”, immigrants and racial others do not play significant role in Cthulhu Mythos stories. To see the Cthulhu Mythos as representing race issues then, requires to see the themes and motifs of the stories as symbolical or allegorical representations of Lovecraft’s race views.

As I demonstrate in section 3.3 “The Shadow over Innsmouth” can well be read as an allegorical representation and “warning” against immigration, miscegenation and cultural mixing, and contrarily, by focusing on the end chapter, as an allegorical representation of Lovecraft’s slowly ameliorating stance on those issues. Yet although it is possible to make sense of the story as a fictional representation of race views that Lovecraft held, I do not find this allegorical reading to be necessary in order to see the story as a meaningful part of the Cthulhu Mythos. Reading the story as a “warning” against miscegenation requires looking away from the fact that the idea of miscegenation is suggested and discarded in the early part of the story. As the narrator and protagonist thus rules out the possibility of inter-human miscegenation as an explanation for the “Innsmouth look”, this warning allegory, though a possible interpretation, becomes superfluous. Furthermore, when the protagonist is compelled to either take his life or accept his fate and turn into a Deep One, I find that this does not alter the role of the Deep Ones as antagonists in the story, but rather shows how the protagonist becomes an enemy of humanity himself, which represents a victory on the part of the Deep Ones, who seemingly aim to overcome all of humanity through this manner of genetic takeover. This threat towards humanity does not differentiate races and reflects clearly the “cosmic hostility” of the Deep Ones, and thereby also the underlying cosmicism that is fundamental to the Mythos. As such I find that it is more constructive to use this opportunity of seeing the story, the end chapter included, as a representation of cosmicism rather than racism.

The ongoing controversies with the WFA trophy demonstrate that Lovecraft’s racism is a well-known and problematic aspect of his popular reception today. It is not possible to deny the presence of racist sentiments in Lovecraft’s writings, both non-fiction and fiction, although it is clear that from the poem “On the Creation of Niggers” in 1912, to the Cthulhu

Mythos stories of the late 20's and the 30's, the race sentiments become less explicit and less focused in Lovecraft's fiction. However, the possibility of understanding the Cthulhu Mythos as motivated by hate and fear towards immigrants and non-Anglo-Saxons is held open by some, like Houellebecq (2008: 107). Thus it becomes difficult to argue that the Mythos reflects an ameliorating of Lovecraft's racism such as Evans (2005) and Buhle (1976) suggest, as both this and Houellebecq's view depend on the subjective interpretation and allegorical and symbolical readings of the texts. As such it is my suggestion that interpretative faculties should rather be used to further develop an understanding of the existential implications of cosmicism that arise in the Mythos. As demonstrated in sections 1.3 and 3.1, cosmicism is also an idea that Lovecraft clearly wanted to express and treat in his Cthulhu Mythos fiction. Contrarily I have not found any indications that Lovecraft intended to programmatically reflect and treat his race views in the Cthulhu Mythos fiction.

As for the undeniable fact of Lovecraft's racism, it is clear that it is necessary to initiate a constructive discussion on how a celebrated author's problematic views on such topics as race should be received and treated today. Although some, as Joshi for instance, argue that Lovecraft's race views should not be relevant in relation to the WFA trophy (Flood 2015), the reactions of others, such as that of Okorafor (2011) show that his views are felt to be problematic as the WFA trophy may be seen as not only representing Lovecraft as an accomplished author of fiction, but also as legitimising or trivialising his well-known race views. In this thesis I have not been able to propose a solution or an ameliorating explanation to the race issues that appear in Lovecraft's fiction. Despite some weighty arguments rely on interpretations that I find superfluous and unnecessary, the race views appear clear and solid in several of Lovecraft's central stories. As Lovecraft's popular recognition continues to grow, this issue will most likely remain a minor but significant part of his reception and literary legacy. As such I find Okorafor made a good point in stating that "What I *know* I want is to *face* the history of this leg of literature rather than put it aside or bury it." (2011). The discussions that arose with the controversies about the WFA trophy will probably subdue as the trophy is remodelled. Yet it remains to see what the trophy will look like in 2016, and whether new controversies and discussions will arise then.

6. Notes

- 1- Brackets behind titles of stories tell what year, approximately, the Lovecraft stories were written, or completed if they were begun and completed in different years. This information is derived from the chronology in *The Library of America anthology* (2005: 811-821), and from S.T. Joshi's *Lovecraft biography* (2001). Many of Lovecraft's stories were published several years after composition, some even posthumously. Therefore the time of publication does not necessarily reflect the time of composition and the chronology of the stories, and would be of less relevance here.

- 2- Lovecraft wrote this letter in 1927, the same year he wrote "The Colour out of Space". It is thus possible that the views he express in the letter are meant to be reflected especially clearly in this story.

- 3- If the narrator and protagonist is the same, the protagonist does of course not die, as he would then be unable to recount the story in retrospect. Some stories, however, are told in third person, such as "The Dreams in the Witch House", and some are told by a witness, such as Ammi Pierce in "The Colour out of Space". This is possibly because the most central protagonist character(s) die in these stories.

- 4- Joshi's omissions.

- 5- My omission

7. Bibliography

Buhle, P. (1976). "Dystopia as Utopia: Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the Unknown Content of American Horror Literature". *The Minnesota Review*, 6(1), 118 – 131.

Burleson, D. R. (1993). "Lovecraft's The Colour out of Space". *The Explicator*, 52(1), 48 – 50. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>.

Eil, P. (2015, August 20). "The Unlikely Reanimation of H.P. Lovecraft". *The Atlantic*. Retrieved March 31, 2016 from <http://www.theatlantic.com>

Evans, T. H. (2005). "A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft". *Journal of Folklore Research*, 42(1), 99-135. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>.

Flood, A. (2015, November 11). "HP Lovecraft Biographer Rages against Ditching of Author as Fantasy Prize Emblem". *The Guardian*. Retrieved April 29, 2016 from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/>

Hanegraaff, W. J. (2007). "Fiction in the Desert of the Real: Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos". *Aries*, 7(1), 85-109. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>. DOI: 10.1163/157005906X154728

Harman, G. (2012). *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*. Alresford: Zero Books

Houellebecq, M. (2008). *H.P. Lovecraft - Against the World, Against Life*. (D. Khazeni, Trans.) London: Gollancz. (Original work published 1991)

Joshi, S. T. (2001). *A Dreamer and a Visionary - H. P. Lovecraft in His Time*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press [Ebrary version]. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com>.

Lovecraft, H. P. (2005). *Tales*. P. Straub (Ed.). New York: Library of America

Lowell, M. (2004). "Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos". *The Explicator*, 63(1), 47 – 50. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>.

MacCormack, P. (2010). "Lovecraft through Deleuzio-Guattarian Gates". *Postmodern Culture*, 20(2). [Electronic journal. Document URL: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1429526672?accountid=17260>] Retrieved September 23, 2015

McGurl, M. (2012). "The Posthuman Comedy". *Critical Inquiry*, 38(3), 533-553. Retrieved from <https://scholar.google.no> DOI: 10.1086/664550

Miéville, C. (2009). "Weird Fiction". In Bould, M., Butler, A. M., Roberts, A., Vint, S. (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. 510-515. Oxon: Routledge.

"Necromancy". (n.d.). In *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved March 24, 2016 from Dictionary.com website <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/necromancy>

Nietzsche, F. (2003). *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. (T. Wayne, Trans.) New York: Algora Publishing. [Ebrary version]. Retrieved from <http://www.ebrary.com.ezproxy.uis.no> (Original work published 1883-1891)

Nietzsche, F. (2007). *Ecce Homo*. (D. Large, Trans.) Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Ebrary version]. Retrieved from <http://www.ebrary.com.ezproxy.uis.no> (Original work published 1908)

“Occult”. (n.d.). In *Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition*. Retrieved February 15, 2016 from Dictionary.com website
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/occult>

Okorafor, Nnedi. (2011, December 14). “Lovecraft’s Racism & The World Fantasy Award Statuette, with Comments from China Miéville”. [Online blog post]. Retrieved April 29, 2016 from <http://nnedi.blogspot.no/2011/12/lovecrafts-racism-world-fantasy-award.html>

Pratt, A. (n.d.). “Nihilism”. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. ISSN 2161-0002. Retrieved April 24, 2016 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/>

Price, R.M. (2001). “H.P. Lovecraft: Prophet of Humanism”. *The Humanist*, 61(4), 26 – 29. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com>.

Ridpath, I. (2012). “Curvature of spacetime”. In *A Dictionary of Astronomy*. (2. rev. ed.) Oxford University Press. Retrieved April 26, 2016 from <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199609055.001.0001/acref-9780199609055-e-889>.

Schrag, P. (2010). *Not Fit for Our Society : Immigration and Nativism in America*. London: University of California Press, Ltd. [Ebrary version]. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com>.

“White trash”. (n.d.). In *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved April 01, 2016 from Dictionary.com website <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/white-trash>

Wilkerson, D. (n.d). “Friedrich Nietzsche (1844—1900)”. In *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. ISSN 2161-0002. Retrieved April 27, 2016 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nietzsch/#H4>

Young, L. (2007). “Miscegenation”. In *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved April 29, 2016 from <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192804396.001.0001/acref-9780192804396-e-272>.