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UNDERSTANDING H.P. LOVECRAFT'S ANXIETY NARRATIVES THROUGH MEDICAL HUMANITIES

Büke Sağlam

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze H.P. Lovecraft's psychological problems and traumas to understand the true meaning behind his narratives that he wrote between the years 1905 and 1935. Lovecraft's narratives, stemming directly from the author's life, fears, anxieties, and traumas, are more than fiction and can be considered as a means to reach the hidden corners of his complex mind. Therefore, I argue that deciphering these writings as anxiety narratives will be giving a new insight about the author as well as mental illness in general.

To do so, Lovecraft's life and his literary philosophy, cosmicism, are explored, with a specific attention to the concepts of (existential) anxiety, fear, and phobia, which were predominant themes/affects in both Lovecraft's life and his narratives. The interdisciplinary field of medical/health humanities—more specifically, narrative medicine—is used while analyzing the representation of anxiety in author's writings. Depression, dissociation, paranoia, OCD are also analyzed for a complete portrayal and understanding of Lovecraft's anxiety disorders. This dissertation also approaches COVID-19 from a Lovecraftian perspective to discuss its psychological effects on the individuals, and finally examines the possibility to address the author's narratives from a posthumanist perspective. Therefore, this dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach and uses various theories, ideas, and philosophies such as existentialism, phenomenology, schizoanalysis, as well as critical medical humanities, narrative medicine and posthumanism to accurately analyze Lovecraft's writings. In doing so, it aims to investigate the role of narrative in representing and depicting mental illness.

Keywords: H.P. Lovecraft, cosmicism, anxiety, fear, narrative medicine, mental illness, medical humanities, health humanities.

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Dedicated to complex minds that are not cared enough to be understood.

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INTRODUCTION

Howard Phillips Lovecraft is one of the most controversial figures of the twentieth century, whose popularity has grown radically in recent years. Although his sexist, racist, and xenophobic remarks come to mind when his name is first heard—and therefore has long been avoided—he is now more popular than ever due to his narratives which inspire recent trends such as object-oriented ontology, posthumanism and antihumanism, as well as media studies, or more specifically, game studies. However, this dissertation offers a different perspective, approaching Lovecraft's narratives as illness stories rather than mere fiction.

1 OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Lovecraft's literary philosophy, cosmicism, is the core concept of this dissertation due to its crucial role both in the author's worldview and in his narratives. Indeed, analyzing cosmicism is important for having a deeper understanding of what inspires, disturbs, and psychologically and philosophically influences the author. And because at the heart of cosmicism lies anxiety, this dissertation examines every possible aspect (phenomenological, existential, psychological, neurobiological) of this affect. Anxiety is indeed unfathomable and enigmatic and for this reason it has always been an intriguing concept for different disciplines. As long as there is humanity, there is anxiety, and this might explain the timelessness of Lovecraft's works. Also, it is both a collective and an individual affect and can be analyzed both as a subject and an object. Lovecraft represents all these aspects of anxiety in his narratives but interpreting them as mere fiction makes a deeper analysis impossible. In other words, the author's narratives cannot be fully understood without truly knowing his life and personality.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that the aim of this dissertation is not giving a diagnosis to Lovecraft but quite the opposite: it tries to free him from misunderstandings and misinterpretations in order to make an accurate analysis of himself and his narratives.

Another equally important aim of this dissertation is to explore the representation of mental illness through narratives. Mental illness is difficult, in every sense. It is difficult to have it, to make sense of it, to talk about it, to represent it, as well as to truly understand it. Although unfathomable, it is still very open to judgment, labelling and categorization. However, every person experiences mental illness in their own unique way and it is important to truly understand this individual phenomenon. Although it is impossible to accurately represent or completely make sense of this "thing," most of the time the language is used either to talk or to write about it. Thus, the mental illness—albeit limited—finds a place in objective reality apart from the individual's mind.

It is this complex nature of mental illness that draws me to make an analysis of Lovecraft's narratives using medical/health humanities. What is interesting is that the meaning of his narratives changes when the reader knows about the author's life in detail. Although they may seem like horror stories at first glance, knowing about Lovecraft's life offers us a new world to analyze. Indeed, a repetitive pattern is seen in these narratives. Moreover, this pattern points to the natural in supernatural and all of a sudden non-human elements become all too human. I was also intrigued by the possibility of making an updated analysis of the author's possible mental illness(es) and their embodiment through his narratives, as well as to see the role, power, and limits of language in representing such abstract concepts. In this sense, the use of medical/health humanities has become almost inevitable.

Medical humanities is a rapidly developing interdisciplinary field and is mainly about caring, understanding, and empathizing with different conditions and personal experiences of human beings. A more technical definition is given by Anne Whitehead and Angela Woods in

The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities: "The medical humanities, we claim, names a series of intersections, exchanges and entanglements between the biomedical sciences, the arts and humanities, and the social sciences" (Whitehead et al. 2016, 1). By its very nature, this field focuses on the vulnerabilities inherent in every human being. In other words, instead of interpreting these vulnerabilities as problems to be avoided or cured, or as negative and alien elements, this approach embraces and seeks to thoroughly understand the phenomena that make people human. Thus, it challenges the contrast between healthy and sick, strong and weak, functional and dysfunctional, by treating these features as different parts of the same whole. In this way, it also aims to address concepts that are considered undesirable and therefore marginalized or ignored by the system. Therefore, it was crucial to use the medical humanities approach when examining the layers of Lovecraft's mind and their reflections on his art. More specifically, this dissertation adopts a critical medical humanities approach and especially draws on narrative medicine. On the other hand, it is important to clarify the reason I chose to use the term "medical/health humanities" rather than "medical humanities" or "health humanities." In 2014, inspired by Paul Crawford's argument and his creation of the International Health Humanities Network (2010), Therese Jones, Delese Wear and Lester D. Friedman adopted the term "health humanities" instead of "medical humanities" for its "more encompassing, contemporary and accurate" (Jones, Wear, and Friedman 2014, 25) connotation. However, the term medical humanities is still in use and because narrative medicine is originally linked to the medical humanities approach, I decided to preserve both terms. Today we see both of them used separately or together (as mental & health humanities), and while this change seems like a simple modification, I support Jones et al.'s decision of choosing a term that includes a wider audience and is more aligned with the goals of the discipline.

As already pointed out by prominent Lovecraft scholars S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz, and as can also be easily noticed by an avid reader, Lovecraft's narratives draw heavily on

autobiographical elements. He was writing primarily for himself, and although he never became famous in his lifetime, he continued to write until his death. In this sense, this dissertation is in parallel with contemporary criticism. However, it goes one step further and aims to understand both Lovecraft and his narratives even more profoundly and accurately with the help of current theories and new approaches. As mentioned before, even today I believe that Lovecraft does not receive the level of attention he deserves; in fact, he tends to be shunned both because of his problematic worldview and because of the weird, unfathomable, and unrepresentable nature of his narratives. Indeed, although many attempts have been made to bring his works or style to the big screen, very few have actually succeeded.[1] In the video game industry, however, his style achieved great success. As seen in many new and old examples, such as "Bloodborne," "Amnesia: The Dark Descent," "Soma," and "The Sinking City," the Lovecraftian style proved its compatibility with this format. Still, his name[2] remains the biggest obstacle to wider recognition and research. Indeed, this was another reason why I chose this author and his narratives to analyze. In today's world, which is becoming more hateful, detached, and apathetic with each passing day, there is a tendency to ignore or cover up the undesirable, which, I believe, only serves to increase hatred, disconnection, and indifference. For this reason, I find it crucial to explore the undesirable in order to further analyze the avoided layers of the human mind that can tell us a lot about the importance of perception. Indeed, I argue in this dissertation that what we essentially see in Lovecraft's narratives is the distortion of perception. Literary representations of this distortion become clearer when the author's writings are interpreted as anxiety narratives and analyzed accordingly. Lovecraft uses elements of the weird to depict these anxiety-inducing objects or situations, and although anxiety in his narratives seems to stem from external stimuli, upon closer examination, it is understood that it is actually the human mind that distorts reality and thus creates anxiety. Like a cataract, anxiety descends like a veil over the eyes of the beholder. Indeed, another important point I analyze in this dissertation

is this fluid and mischievous nature of anxiety. By challenging the boundaries that separate us from the outside world, anxiety deludes our perception of reality; in such a way that we can no longer be sure of its origin. Moreover, this dissertation is also informed by the idea that anxiety doesn't come alone; most of the cases it brings dissociation, paranoia and OCD with itself and it is possible to find the metaphorical (or sometimes direct) representations of all these elements in Lovecraft's narratives.

Finally, this dissertation was mostly written during the coronavirus pandemic, which inspired me to compare the anxiety derived from COVID-19 to Lovecraftian anxiety, and I finally found that there are more similarities between the two than I thought. Indeed, cosmicism is more than just a literary philosophy; it takes its source from an inherent anxiety shared by all humans, and it is this uncanny familiarity that attracts and affects the reader. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that a new and unknown virus evokes a feeling similar to that of a cosmic entity found in the author's narratives. The fact that the pandemic coincided with the writing process of this dissertation was, in a way, beneficial for the thesis; in my interview with the clinical psychologist Dr. Ceren Koç I found the chance to ask about the patient profile and reactions of patients during this period in order to compare them with the reactions of protagonists in Lovecraft's narratives. In this way, the anxiety caused by cosmicism became more concrete and gained a more empirical aspect.

2 METHODOLOGY

Different approaches, ideas, theories, and disciplines were needed to make a throughout analysis of the author's anxiety narratives. Therefore, in addition to using Rita Charon's narrative medicine and adopting Arthur Frank's concept of the wounded storyteller to provide a basis for my analysis, this dissertation also draws on a) Søren Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Stefano Micali, to name a few, to better understand the philosophical aspect and

phenomenology of anxiety, b) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis to mainly discuss dissociation, c) Rosi Braidotti, Francesca Ferrando, Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, among others, to analyze the role of posthumanism and object-oriented ontology in understanding Lovecraft's anxiety narratives, d) Werner Heisenberg's philosophical interpretation of quantum physics, as well as e) psychology and neurobiology to better understand the system of anxiety.

Since this dissertation draws heavily on medical humanities, the use of humanities in medical curriculum in Spain is also worth mentioning. As Josep E. Baños and Irene Cambra-Badii state in their article, there has been an interest in the discipline in recent years: "In recent years an interest in the use of humanistic disciplines has increased in the medicine degree. This fact has been accompanied by a recognition of the importance of ethical and professional values in students of all health sciences as an inevitable necessity of their university education" (Baños and Cambra-Badii 2020, 49).[3] A very similar remark was made by Guido Giarelli while discussing the state of medical humanities in continental Europe: "In continental Europe the situation of medical humanities is quite varied: since the originally Anglo-Saxon denomination has arrived only recently, it is often necessary to look under other names to find something" (Giarelli 2020, 442). He further states:

> In Spain the situation is quite similar to that of Italy, with a limited and selective inclusion of medical humanities in the curriculums of faculties of medicine, as shown by a comparative analysis [22]: it is present in 39 Spanish universities, 9 of which are private (compared to 42 Italian universities, 3 of them are private). The three main disciplines offered appear to be the same, with a little difference: history of medicine is offered in 33 Spanish universities (41 Italian), philosophy (mainly bioethics) in 35 Spanish universities (31 Italian), medical anthropology in 11 Spanish universities (12 Italian).[4] (443)

Finally, I used interview as one of my research tools, as it allowed me to ask specific questions to various scholars, who are authorities in their fields (neurobiology, psychology, and physics) to learn more about areas in which I have limited knowledge as well as to compare

different perspectives. As a result, this dissertation is divided into six chapters and begins with a theoretical examination of anxiety to analyze the concept of cosmicism and its representation in Lovecraft's narratives.

3 STRUCTURE

Chapter one, "Understanding the Concept of Cosmicism," explores the concepts of anxiety and fear and analyzes the phenomenology of anxiety and its representation through cosmicism. In this chapter I discuss Kierkegaard's approach to anxiety by comparing it to Lovecraftian anxiety to better understand the existential aspect of this affect. In addition, the role of medical/health humanities in analyzing the author's anxiety narratives is discussed. Here I especially use the narrative medicine approach and Frank's concept of wounded storyteller to examine the characteristics of the narrator in Lovecraft's narratives. On the other hand, quantum mechanics and its meaning in relation to reality is discussed using mainly Heisenberg's philosophical interpretation because of its effect on the author's anxiety.

Chapter two, "Dissociation as a Result of Anxiety," discusses the neurobiological aspect of anxiety through Sapolsky's lectures and work. The focus of this chapter is dissociation caused by anxiety and I use the protagonist of *Black Swan*, Nina Sayers, as a case study to further understand this phenomenon, as well as to compare and contrast it with the representation of anxiety in Lovecraft's narratives. To do this I rely on both Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis and their concept of body without organs, and two models of DID (SCM and PTM) for a better understanding of dissociation.

The third chapter, "COVID, Anxiety and Cosmic Horror," focuses on the theme of control and its link to anxiety by exploring COVID's psychological effect on humans. Moreover, it compares Lovecraftian anxiety with the anxiety caused by the pandemic, thus turning cosmic horror into a more tangible and experienceable affect in our everyday life. The data I gained

from this empirical approach and interviews have served a deeper understanding of cosmicism. This chapter also examines the unknown and discusses man's troubled relationship with it. Analyzing the relationship between the concepts of the unknown, control and anxiety gives an idea to approach Lovecraft's narratives properly.

The fourth chapter, "Trauma, Madness, and Changing Perspectives," explores H.P. Lovecraft's life and analyzes his traumas and physical and mental illnesses that inspired him to form his literary philosophy. In particular, prominent Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi guides me to explore and understand every detail about the author's life in order to make an accurate analysis of his narratives. Knowing these details was crucial to finding their metaphorical projections in Lovecraft's writings, which eventually confirmed my hypothesis that these narratives could be considered illness stories rather than mere fiction. In this sense, this chapter provides a critical examination of his selected works through medical/health humanities and analyzes the author's possible mental disorders and physical problems with the help of current scientific developments.

Chapter five, "The Question of Love, Fear, and Anxiety," focuses specifically on the role of Lovecraft's mother in the author's psychological development, using Harry Harlow's ideas on affection, mother love and mother-infant bonding. The aim of this chapter is to analyze Susan and her relationship with her son in order to see if she had an effect on the author's anxiety. Without using Freudian psychoanalysis, I here rely solely on developmental psychology to explore the meaning of motherly comfort in general and more specifically to analyze the meaning of Susan and her representation in the author's anxiety narratives. Exploring love was necessary to better understand anxiety and the medical/health humanities approach allowed me to find and analyze the literary representations of this very complex affect in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives.

Finally, the last chapter, "Brave New Ecology and its Discontents: Limits of Anxious Body," also draws on the medical/health humanities and examines the anti-narrative elements found in Lovecraft's writings to analyze the representation of anxiety and its accuracy. In addition, this chapter discusses various posthumanist approaches, such as the ideas of Francesca Ferrando and Rosi Braidotti, Timothy Morton's concept of hyperobjects and Donna Haraway's Chthulucene, to understand if it is possible to approach Lovecraft's anxiety narratives from a posthumanist perspective. Here I also analyze the ecophobia present in the author's narratives and examine its connection with his anxiety.

As a result, this dissertation aims to analyze every aspect of Lovecraft's anxiety and its literary representation in his narratives, using mainly narrative medicine, to gain a deeper understanding of both the author's psyche and the use of literature to represent mental illness.

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[1] As asked by a Reddit user: "Why there have been so few good Lovecraft movies?." Another user, "neobushidaro" replies, echoing Lovecraft's argument: "Format is wrong. The human mind can terrify itself better than any external stimulus because only a person's subconscious knows where all of the panic buttons are and how to hit them in the right order."
https://www.reddit.com/r/Lovecraft/comments/ymq5o/why_have_there_been_so_few_good_lovecraft_movies/

[2] As seen in the example of *Lovecraft Country*, the author's name is enough for making an association with racism.

[3] Translated from the original text written in Spanish: "En los últimos años ha crecido el interés por el empleo de las disciplinas humanísticas en el grado de Medicina. Este hecho se ha acompañado de un reconocimiento de la importancia de los valores éticos y profesionales en los estudiantes de todas las ciencias de la salud como una necesidad ineludible de su periodo de formación universitaria."

[4] Translated from the original text written in Italian: "In Spagna la situazione è abbastanza simile a quella italiana, con una inclusione limitata e selettiva delle *Medical Humanities* nei curricula delle Facoltà di Medicina, come risulta da un'analisi comparata [22]: esse sono presenti in 39 università spagnole, di cui 9 private (rispetto a 42 italiane, di cui 3 private). Le tre principali discipline offerte risultano essere le stesse, con qualche differenza: storia della medicina è offerta in 33 università spagnole (41 italiane), filosofia (principalmente bioetica) in 35 spagnole (31 italiane), antropologia medica in 11 spagnole (12 italiane)."

1 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF COSMICISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter of this dissertation, my aim will be to analyze the concepts, problems and ideas that enabled H.P. Lovecraft to bring his anxiety narratives to life. Interpreting and examining Lovecraft's stories using narrative medicine is important not only to discover the true meaning of his stories and redefine him as an author, but also to better understand author's psyche. To do so, I will start by discussing the concept and phenomenology of anxiety, using the ideas of Kierkegaard, which will help me to define the elements that create Lovecraft's narratives.

His literary philosophy, cosmicism, will be further examined with the concept of reality. Advances in physics and the emergence of quantum mechanics not only worried Lovecraft in real life, but also shaped his narratives and philosophy. This new reality, which is inherently uncertain, probabilistic, and random, was creating a stark contrast with Lovecraft's scientific materialism. As S.T. Joshi suggested:

> It is hardly worth remarking that Lovecraft's wild conclusions from Einstein, both metaphysical and ethical, are entirely unfounded; but his reaction is perhaps not atypical of that of many intellectuals—especially those who couldn't understand the precise details and ramifications of relativity—at the time. (Joshi 2013, 688)

Therefore, some of the main aspects of relativity and quantum mechanics and their meaning for our reality—as well as the meaning of reality itself—will be clarified by analyzing the ideas of Einstein, Heisenberg, and Bohr.

1.2 Cosmicism, Anxiety and Fear

The Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard is one of the first and most important names when it comes to the analysis of fear and anxiety. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, he resembles anxiety to dizziness:

> Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness. (Kierkegaard 1980, 61)

Anxiety, then, derives from the realization of one's freedom of choice or free will. In other words, the realization that one has complete control over his decisions gives him a sense of anxiety. So, this idea *seems* to contrast with the idea that associates anxiety with a sense of loss of control.[1] Another important point Kierkegaard made was pointing out the difference between fear and anxiety:

> The concept of anxiety is almost never treated in psychology. Therefore, I must point out that it is altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility. For this reason, anxiety is not found in the beast, precisely by nature the beast is not qualified as spirit. (42)

As it will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapters, anxiety mainly differs from fear by not having a specific object although both emotions create similar physical responses. As Stefano Micali suggests in his book *Phenomenology of Anxiety*:

> The essential characteristic of anxiety resides in its lack of reference to any object: anxiety is anxiety of no-thing. Kierkegaard emphasizes the essential role of anxiety in the ambiguous process of self-identification. The objectlessness of anxiety means initially a latent, dreamlike anticipation of the spirit. (Micali 2022, 3)

According to Kierkegaard, anxiety derives from the spirit and, therefore, is one of the fundamental traits of a human being. Thus, instead of seeing anxiety as a psychological disorder,

he approaches it as an inherent element which separates human beings from the animals. As he further states:

> Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit. (…) What, then, is man's relation to this ambiguous power? How does spirit relate itself to itself and to its conditionality? It relates itself as anxiety. (Kierkegaard 1980, 43–44)

In addition to being inherent, anxiety also points to the human being's complex and contradictory nature: "Anxiety shows that the human being is from the onset out of balance in dealing with their own opposed tendencies between finite and infinite, between possibility and necessity" (Micali 2022, 3). However, the dualism doesn't end here. The human being's relation with anxiety is as contradictory as his/her own nature. Kierkegaard defines spirit both as a "hostile" and a "friendly" power and this creates a continuous inner conflict: "Nor can man sink down into the vegetative, for he is qualified as spirit; flee away from anxiety, he cannot, for he loves it; really love it, he cannot, for he flees from it" (Kierkegaard 1980, 44). Anxiety, which essentially derives from one's free will, also shows one's limits of control and freedom with its persistent and torturous existence. Micali comments on one's relationship with anxiety as follows: "On the one hand, we are not masters of our anxiety—as an affect it is not in our power. It happens that we feel anxious in an unpredictable way. On the other hand, we interact with our anxiety: we can respond to it in various ways" (Micali 2022, 182). This semi-freedom, again, brings about the question of responsibility. As Kierkegaard states:

> But he who becomes guilty through anxiety is indeed innocent, for it was not he himself but anxiety, a foreign power, that laid hold of him, a power that he did not love but about which he was anxious. And yet he is guilty, for he sank in anxiety, which he nevertheless loved even as he feared it. There is nothing in the world more ambiguous; therefore this is the only psychological explanation. (Kierkegaard 1980, 43)

This statement is important and worth analyzing for its relevance regarding Lovecraft's representation of his own anxiety. Before its analysis, however, it is necessary to look at one

last concept, cosmicism, the platform Lovecraft used to metaphorically express both his anxiety and his relationship with it. In *I am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*, S.T. Joshi[2] defines cosmicism as:

> At once a metaphysical position (an awareness of the vastness of the universe in both space and time), an ethical position (an awareness of the insignificance of human beings within the realm of the universe), and an aesthetic position (a literary expression of this insignificance, to be effected by the minimizing of human character and the display of the titanic gulfs of space and time). (Joshi 2013, 686)

While the concept of cosmicism, its true meaning and representation will be continuously examined throughout this thesis, the brief definition above will help to highlight some of the main points that I will concentrate on.

1.3 Lovecraft's "Anxiety Narratives"

The reason I prefer to call Lovecraft's weird and fantasy stories "anxiety narratives" is because of their deeply personal nature.[3] Taking a closer look at his texts, it is possible to see a deeper layer shaped by Lovecraft's personal life, mental problems as well as his ideology, philosophy, and scientific developments of the period. Anxiety hides itself in the realization of one's own insignificance in a macroscopic world. Therefore, it is possible to state that anxiety arises from the awareness of one's freedom and that this awareness causes one to realize the limits of freedom and its insignificance in the vast universe.

Returning to Kierkegaard's account on being both guilty and innocent due to anxiety, a similar situation can be observed in Lovecraft's love-hate relationship with anxiety. Anxiety both tortures and artistically nourishes Lovecraft, and this bitter dependence parallels what Kierkegaard describes. As Micali asks:

> How can one become guilty through anxiety? We become responsible in a profoundly ambiguous way because our responsibility is passive in nature; we consent to the phantoms of anxiety—attracted, almost enchanted by them, we

> believe in its most unlikely apparitions/appearances. We become guilty of anxiety only by listening to it. Anxiety is presented here as an alien power that attracts and misleads us, misleads us by attracting us and attracts us by misleading us. (Micali 2022, 182)

That is why cosmicism means more than just a literary philosophy; it becomes the artistic manifestation of Lovecraft's relationship with anxiety. This explains why he continuously stated that his literature was not for everyone. As Joshi points out: "Because Lovecraft realized that weird fiction was necessarily a cultivated taste, he was compelled to note repeatedly that he wrote only for the 'sensitive'" (Joshi 2013, 685). In his book, Joshi further includes one of Lovecraft's own statements about this subject: "I should write even if I were the only patient reader, for my aim is merely self-expression" (685).

But how could a person express such an abstract, personal, and even unfathomable concept like anxiety? How could it be possible to represent a complex emotion that could only be experienced but not truly defined? Lovecraft depicted this concept with the help of different and even opposing literary genres such as fantasy, horror, and realism. As Joshi suggests:

> Lovecraft always strove to associate weird fiction with realism […] This realism extended not merely to technique […] but in terms of philosophical orientation. Of course, it cannot be realistic in terms of *events,* so it must be realistic in terms of *human emotions*. Lovecraft again contrasts romanticism […] with fantasy: "But fantasy is something altogether different. Here we have an art based on the imaginative life of the human mind, *frankly recognized as such*; and in its way as natural and scientific—as truly related to natural (even if uncommon and delicate) psychological processes as the starkest of photographic realism." (684-85)

Contradictory as it seems, Lovecraft's decision to use fantasy to deal with something as blurry as anxiety was apt. In this way, he could treat this intangible concept without getting caught in the sharp limits of realism. While dealing mainly with a psychological phenomenon, he avoided using conventional means to represent it. On the contrary, the existential and metaphysical connotations of anxiety pushed him to create a unique form of expression:

> Lovecraft is carving out a very special position for his type of weird tale: it can neither be a mere *conte cruel* or a tale of physical gruesomeness (what is now termed "psychological suspense"), nor can it plainly violate *currently known* natural laws, as in standard supernatural fiction. Only the intermediate ground—"non-supernatural cosmic art," art that presents accounts of phenomena not currently explainable by science—can offer possibilities for creative expression in this field, at least for Lovecraft. (Joshi 2013, 1057)

Thus, Lovecraft's anxiety, symbolized by the insignificance of man in vast cosmos, found a place in his non-supernatural cosmic art. From this perspective, the "supernatural" elements of his writings, such as cosmic entities, become incarnations of his anxiety.[4] As seen earlier, Kierkegaard defines anxiety as a "foreign" (or as Micali says, "alien") power. This unwelcomed force that has to be interacted with is the reason and reminder of man's semi-freedom. As Micali states: "Anxiety is an alien, elusive power characterized by heteronomy" (Micali 2022, 183). A concept that is neither good nor bad, but simply indifferent. Yet man's relationship with it is very complex and unstable. Regarding Kierkegaard's comparison of anxiety with Grand Inquisitors, spies, and judges, Micali further comments: "Kierkegaard doesn't describe anxiety as a mood, rather as a cunning player" or as "an interlocutor as evasive as it is dominant. It is as if it had its own particular agency" (Micali 2022, 184). The artistic reflection of Kierkegaard's definition of anxiety as a foreign, autonomous, and uncontrollable power can be seen in Lovecraft's cosmic deities and in his description of completely alien situations. However, instead of giving anxiety human-like traits like Kierkegaard,[5] Lovecraft chooses to represent these deities as—literally—alien entities or "Gods," whose main characteristic is their complete indifference. As Joshi states: "The 'gods' in his tales are symbols of all that lies unknown in the boundless cosmos, and the randomness with which they can intrude violently into our own realm is a poignant reflection of the tenuousness of our fleeting and inconsequential existence" (Joshi 2013, 1446). By not giving anxiety human-like features or defining it using divine features, Lovecraft both deconstructs the traditional concept of God and accurately represents anxiety and man's relationship with it. It was this brilliant and unique

style that allowed him to truly construct his anxiety narratives. His description of one of his most famous (and, unfortunately, greatly misunderstood) cosmic entities, Cthulhu, can be a good example to better understand his style:

> 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. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the *general outline* of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful. (Lovecraft 2014, 383)

As Graham Harman comments in *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*:

> Capitalizing on the indirect character of literature as opposed to painting or cinema, Lovecraft hints at an octopoidal dragon while also suspending that literal depiction in three separate ways: (1) he downplays it as merely the result of his own "extravagant imagination"; (2) he evasively terms his description "not unfaithful to the spirit of the thing" rather than as dead-on correct; (3) he asks us to ignore the surface properties of dragon and octopus mixed with human and to focus instead on the fearsome "general outline of the whole." […] Any practiced reader of Lovecraft knows that this sort of de-literalizing gesture is not an isolated incident in his stories, but is perhaps his major stylistic trait as a writer. It is what I have called the "vertical" or allusive aspect of Lovecraft's style—the gap he produces between an ungraspable thing and the vaguely relevant descriptions that the narrator is able to attempt. (Harman 2012, 34)

Harman's analysis not only explains Lovecraft's style, but also illustrates the reasons why it is essential to "consciously" read his narratives in order to truly understand the author's purpose. He also points to the fragility (or unsuitability) of the representation of his writings via visual means. By conscious reading I mean having to look beyond the words to see the subtext; because instead of concretizing and visualizing depictions using the five senses, Lovecraft asks the reader to "live" them as a personal experience. His depictions, then, become emotional triggers that serve him (and readers) to turn inward and experience anxiety in their own way. On the other hand, Harman points to a "'noumenal' element" in Lovecraft's style and continues discussing what he calls "a 'horizontal' weirdness" (34), giving the following depiction from "The Dunwich Horror" as an example:

> It would be trite and not wholly accurate to say that no human pen could describe it, but one may properly say that it could not be vividly visualized by anyone whose ideas of aspect and contour are too closely bound up with the common life-forms of this planet and the known three dimensions. […] Above the waist it was semi-anthropomorphic; though its chest… had the leathery, reticulated hide of a crocodile or alligator. The back was piebald with yellow and black, and dimly suggested the squamous covering of certain snakes. Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer fantasy began… (34–35)

According to Harman, in the first part of this excerpt "we find a disclaimer that neutralizes the initial cliché by calling it 'trite and not wholly accurate,' but which then delves into a descriptive effort that is nearly impossible to visualize in literal terms anyway" (34). In this second part:

> The power of language is no longer enfeebled by an impossibly deep and distant reality. Instead, language is overloaded by a gluttonous excess of surfaces and aspects of the thing […] And then comes the crowning transition, telling us that while all of this might have been intelligible enough, what comes next will enter the realm of sheer fantasy. (35)

I will now go a step further and try to explain these "vertical" and "horizontal" aspects of Lovecraft's style in relation to their role in representing anxiety. As mentioned earlier, anxiety is a profoundly complex and inherently indescribable human emotion (or characteristic) and therefore needs to be approached rigorously. In this sense, it was convenient for Lovecraft to use different styles and methods that eventually led to the creation of a new subgenre.

As seen in Kierkegaard's accounts, it is not easy to describe anxiety per se without making metaphorical comparisons or referring to its physical manifestations to make the concept more concrete and understandable. Moreover, there is no single description of it since its "appearance" changes according to one's mental world and mood at that moment. As Kierkegaard further states: "In anxiety there is the selfish infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a choice but ensnaringly disquiets [*ængster*] with its sweet anxiousness [*Beængstelse*]" (Kierkegaard 1980, 61). He further associates anxiety with the concept of sin: "In each subsequent individual, anxiety is more reflective. This may be expressed by saying that the nothing that is the object

of anxiety becomes, as it were, more and more a something" (61). While this thesis doesn't explain anxiety with sin, the idea that anxiety is (or means) something personal for each individual makes sense and is relevant to my argument. Knowing this structure of anxiety, then, it is understandable that Lovecraft used the "vertical" style to mimic the individual's inability to find words in such a situation. On the other hand, although the "horizontal" aspect of his style may seem the opposite of the "vertical" one, both aspects essentially serve the same purpose. In this "horizontal" aspect, Lovecraft mimics a kind of compulsive talking[6] and stilted speech.[7] These over-descriptions, however, mean very little to the listener. Lastly, Lovecraft also emphasizes on the "noumenal" aspect of anxiety before making a phenomenological description of it. As Harman further summarizes: "This is the stylistic world of H.P. Lovecraft, a world in which (1) real objects are locked in impossible tension with the crippled descriptive powers of language, and (2) visible objects display unbearable seismic torsion with their own qualities" (Harman 2012, 36).

1.3.1 Understanding Lovecraft's Anxiety Narratives through Narrative Medicine

While Harman's analysis is important to better understand Lovecraft's style and thus its representation of anxiety, Lovecraft's narratives cannot be truly understood without the context of narrative medicine. The discipline of narrative medicine was first defined by Rita Charon in *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* as "medicine practiced with the narrative competence to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved by the stories of illness" and it "has emerged gradually from a confluence of sources—humanities and medicine, primary care medicine, contemporary narratology, and the study of effective doctor-patient relationships" (Charon 2006, vii). Moreover, narrative medicine is within the Critical Medical Humanities framework. Maria Giulia Marini states in *Narrative Medicine Bridging the Gap between Evidence-Based Care and Medical Humanities*: "Narrative medicine as well as medical

humanities mainly developed in the twentieth and twenty-first century as a tool to give voice back to patients, fragile people, and persons who had no right to speak and claim how they lived their disease" (Marini 2016, 13).

Thinking Lovecraft's anxiety narratives as stories of illness gives the author a new identity as a "wounded storyteller" in addition to his identity as a writer of weird fiction. The concept of wounded storyteller is first defined by Arthur W. Frank in his treatise *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* where he presents "ill people as wounded storytellers" with an aim to:

> Shift the dominant cultural conception of illness away from passivity—the ill person as "victim of" disease and then recipient of care—towards activity. The ill person who turns illness into story transforms fate into experience; the disease that sets the body apart from others becomes, in the story, the common bond of suffering that joins bodies in their shared vulnerability. (Frank 1995, xi)

As it will be examined in the following chapters, Lovecraft's weird stories are shaped by his ideology and perspective, while actually taking their source from the author's traumas, mental problems and existential anxiety. That's why I call them anxiety narratives and find it crucial to analyze these writings with a medical/health humanities approach. Lovecraft was indeed both a "wounded" individual and a gifted "storyteller" and his talent was able to transform these wounds into a philosophical and existential experience. He was a relentless writer, and as discussed earlier, he mainly wrote for himself as a way of self-expression. Joshi states that Lovecraft's "career as one of the great dreamers—or, to coin a term that must be coined for the phenomenon, nightmarers—of literary history" (Joshi 2013, 57) begins with the author's disturbing dreams[8] after his grandmother's death as "his boyhood dreams contain many conceptual and imagistic kernels of his mature tales" (57). He further states: "It would, of course, take a long time for Lovecraft to evolve his theory and practice of weird fiction; but with dreams like these at such an early age […] his career as a writer of horror tales comes to seem like an inevitable destiny" (57-8). Lovecraft's writings were not limited to anxiety

narratives; he was also an eager essayist and letter writer. For him, writing letters was as necessary as writing "fiction," although each served different purposes. As he explains it in a letter to his friend and writer, Long: "an isolated person requires correspondence as a means of seeing his ideas as others see them, and thus guarding against the dogmatisms and extravagances of solitary and uncorrected speculation" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 1097). In that sense, it wouldn't be wrong to say that writing, for Lovecraft, was expression, connection, and at the same time a coping mechanism.

Literature and medical/health humanities are more interconnected than one might think. According to Tess Maginess, literature makes four main contributions to this discipline: "The first is that literature brings us closer to reality by reflecting it, mimetically. […] A reality with which we are familiar and a reality with which we are not familiar" (Maginess 2018, 10). Indeed, analyzing Lovecraft's narratives using the medical/health humanities gives a new perspective, confronting the reader with an unfamiliar realm. Although anxiety per se is not a foreign concept to humans (as discussed earlier, in fact it is the opposite), the fact that each individual experiences it in a different way makes it difficult to decipher. Accordingly, medical/health humanities help the reader gain more insight to better understand anxiety and other related disorders such as dissociation, nightmares/night terrors, obsessive thoughts, paranoia, agoraphobia, etc. Maginess describes this kind of literature as follows: "[It] goes beyond what we know, presenting us with an otherworld of some sort — a culture, a time, a set of characters, a set of values or points of view we are not familiar with, often a world we have conceived of as marginal or hidden" (10).

Maginess continues by stating that "the second contribution is literature which critiques society, which challenges our norms, our hegemonies […] and it is clear that such literature most readily contributes to Critical Medical Humanities" (10). It is indeed possible to consider Lovecraft's anxiety narratives as critical and revolutionary since they reconstruct various

fundamental and well-established concepts such as neurosis, insanity, reality, control, among others.[9]

Another important contribution is "literature which springs from metaphorical comparisons; for example, the way in which *Hamlet* as a play can be said to operate as representing what we now call bi-polar illness as the condition of the hero, as well as representing the State as diseased, a rank garden" (Maginess 2018, 11). This approach actually guides this thesis by treating Lovecraft's weird stories as metaphors for his anxiety and other related mental disorders. As it was mentioned before, however, Lovecraft not only metaphorically represents his own neurosis, but also triggers the reader's collective unconscious by pointing to the inherent and inescapable aspect of anxiety. In this way, he reconstructs the concept of neurosis. As Jung states: "I am not altogether pessimistic about neurosis. In many cases we have to say: 'Thank heaven he could make up his mind to be neurotic.' Neurosis is really an attempt at self-cure, just as any physical disease is part an attempt at self-cure" (Jung 1976, 169). Similarly, Lovecraft sees neurosis as the result of having a rare and somewhat superior "sensitive" mind,[10] which gives the privilege to understand the existence—and its insignificance—in a more profound way.

Maginess finally states that:

> Perhaps, most importantly, the fourth contribution literature can make is to teach us to read both critically and imaginatively; to engender a kind of knowledge and wisdom which, though it might not make us happy, will help us to see under the surface, to see humanness in all its searing, ironic, hilarious and threnodic complexity (Maginess 2018, 11)

In that sense, analyzing Lovecraft's writings as anxiety narratives using medical/health humanities allows me to see the world through the author's eyes by uncovering metaphors and thus sharing his experience. In *Thinking with Metaphors in Medicine: The State of the Art*, Alan Bleakley mentions his correspondence with Anita Wohlmann where she suggests: "Metaphors

enable individuals to voice disruptive, personal experiences that are difficult to describe otherwise, for example through a coherent narrative" (Bleakley 2017, 19).

Metaphor is quite a common figure of speech in literary texts. But in some cases, the whole story becomes a metaphor that is very difficult to figure out with its multilayered structure and without any round or well-defined characters or a concrete narration, like in the case of Lovecraft's anxiety narratives. Indeed, his writings can be partly compared with what Arthur W. Frank defines as the "chaos narrative," which is one of the three types of illness narratives and "its plot imagines life never getting better. Stories are chaotic in their absence of narrative order. Events are told as the storyteller experiences life: without sequence or discernable causality" (Frank 1995, 97). Lack of any hope, randomness and indifferentism exist in both writings. Moreover, just like Lovecraft's narratives, "chaos narratives are also hard to hear because they are too threatening. The anxiety these stories provoke inhibits hearing" (Frank 1995, 97–98). Obviously, illness is prominent as the main theme in the chaos narratives, while Lovecraft chooses a more subtle and metaphorical approach to represent his neurosis. Still, they both generate similar feelings such as anxiety, despair, fear, and inquietude. Frank also points to the prerequisite of narrating trauma or illness, suggesting that:

> The teller of chaos stories is, preeminently, the wounded storyteller, but those who are truly *living* the chaos cannot tell in words. To turn the chaos into a verbal story is to have some reflective grasp of it. The chaos that can be told in story is already taking place at a distance and is being reflected on retrospectively. For a person to gain such a reflective grasp of her own life, distance is prerequisite. (98)

This "reflective grasp" allowed Lovecraft to metaphorically represent his crippling neurosis as well as to form his philosophy, cosmicism. As it will be seen especially in chapters 4 and 5, Lovecraft was very conscious about his anxiety disorders and took his time to observe and analyze what was going on with himself as well as to meditate on the traumas he had been

through. It was this role as an observer of his own mind and his place in the indifferent universe that made it possible to express himself artistically rather than being trapped inside.[11]

However, Frank also points to the question of narrative suggesting that:

> If narrative implies a sequence of events connected to each other through time, chaos stories are not narratives. When I refer below to the chaos narrative, I mean an *anti-narrative* of time without sequence, telling without mediation, and speaking about oneself without being fully able to reflect on oneself. (98)

This is the biggest difference between Lovecraft's narratives and chaos stories since while Lovecraft's narratives share some thematic and stylistic characteristics with chaos stories such as the pessimistic tone, unorthodox way of narration and description of an illness or trauma that is so complex, uncontrollable, and almost impossible to narrate, Lovecraft's writings are still narratives. Frank also gives the example of Gilda Radner to emphasize on the division between narrative and anti-narrative, stating that: "Gilda Radner's story of her treatment for ovarian cancer is not a chaos narrative, precisely because it is a narrative. But Radner allows readers some vision of the chaos" (100). Similarly, Lovecraft's anxiety narratives "allow readers some vision of the chaos" while they cannot be completely defined as chaos narratives. On the other hand, while Radner's story and Lovecraft's stories are totally different in terms of subject and style, they still share a common ground in the way these narratives represent chaos. In Radner's case "the chaos […] occurs during chemotherapy when the sleeping pills Radner takes cause her to forget, completely, whatever has happened" (Frank 1995, 100). However, "the deeper issue for Radner is the loss of control in her life; time lost during chemotherapy, real enough in itself, also represents this greater loss" (Frank 1995, 100). In the same way, in the stories of Lovecraft the chaos occurs when the protagonist confronts an alien entity/situation. However, this actually points to a deeper issue such as the author's existential anxiety and fear of losing control. In that sense, the reason these two seemingly very different stories somehow fall under the same category of writing is because they both essentially narrate a loss of control. As Frank

suggests: "The chaos story presupposes lack of control" since "chaos feeds on the sense that *no one* is in control"[12] (100). Where there is no sense of control, chaos and anxiety begin.

It is possible to suggest, then, cosmic horror (or cosmicism)—as Lovecraft understands it—was not only the perfect platform to represent this chaos and anxiety but was also a necessary factor to make sense of them. In other words, it was a prerequisite to turn chaos into a narrative. On the other hand, the reason I say "as Lovecraft understands it" is because Lovecraft reconstructed the concept of cosmic horror and did not invent it, although his unique understanding of this concept allowed him to create his anxiety narratives. In his essay, "The Birth of Cosmic Horror from the S(ub)lime of Lucretius," Sean Moreland dates back the earliest use of "cosmic horror" to 1883 which "derives from the idea of 'cosmic emotion' developed by English mathematician and philosopher, William Kingdon Clifford, who in turn derived it from English utilitarian philosopher, Henry Sidgwick" (Moreland 2018, 16). Moreland also cites Clifford's 1877 essay, where he defines cosmic emotion as "an emotion which is felt in regard to the universe or sum of things, viewed as a cosmos or order. There are two kinds of cosmic emotion—one having reference to the Macrocosm or universe surrounding and containing us, the other relating to the Microcosm or universe of our own souls" (16). The most important point of this description is that it doesn't really define the emotion itself. As Moreland comments:

> Clifford calls it "the cosmic emotion," rather than specifying *what* emotion it is, because "the character of the emotion with which men contemplate the world, the temper in which they stand in the presence of the immensities and the eternities, must depend first of all on what they think the world is." (16–17)

While Moreland continues to examine Clifford by analyzing how the world is understood depending on cultural and historical context and scientific developments, I would like to draw attention to another important point. Defining "cosmic emotion" as something that depends on an individual's perspective and mood parallels with the nature of anxiety that I mentioned

earlier when discussing Kierkegaard. Moreover, most of the time this cosmic emotion is almost automatically associated with anxiety. Reidar Thomte points to the following observation of Kierkegaard: "Deep within every human being there still lives the anxiety over the possibility of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked by the millions and millions in this enormous household" (Kierkegaard 1980, xiii). Similarly, Moreland states that "Clifford's ambiguous 'cosmic emotion' was resolved by American lexicographer, physician, and natural theologian George M. Gould into 'cosmic horror.'" As Gould further suggests: "I have learned that many another sensitive despairing soul, in the face of the glib creeds and the loneliness of subjectivity, has also and often felt the same clutching spasm of cosmic horror, the very heart of life stifled and stilled with an infinite fear and sense of lostness" (quoted in Moreland 2018, 17). It is interesting to see that the words that could come out of Lovecraft's mouth were said by someone who had a completely opposite worldview, since Gould associated cosmic horror "with a supposed pathological inability to recognize divinity in nature" (quoted in Moreland 2018, 17). Lovecraft's lack of interest in the divine, then, not only prevented him from transforming his anxiety, but also enabled him to master it and, in this way, he could be able to redefine cosmic horror on which he based his anxiety narratives. Consequently, he stated that whether a story is truly a tale of cosmic horror could be tested by responding "whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the unknown universe's utmost rim" (Lovecraft 2014, 29).

Unlike his fiction, however, in his letters Lovecraft uses this cosmic emotion to "console," as Matthew Beach argues in his article "Lovecraft's Consolation": "His correspondence reveals that Lovecraft understood his cosmic philosophy of time as offering consolation if not a strange form of hope to those struggling with what he called the 'local' problems of human existence"

(Beach 2019, 77). Beach points to a specific genre of letter among Lovecraft's correspondence, which he calls "the consolation letter," and describes it as "a genre [that] operates as an offering of sympathy to someone (the reader) experiencing suffering, pain, or loss. This sympathy is often offered not only through consoling words (of affection or advice) but primarily by forging an identification between the writer and the reader" (Beach 2019, 77). However, in his consolation letters, Lovecraft doesn't remove the anxiety factor that dominates his cosmic view; instead, he uses it to neutralize a more "local" pain. As Beach suggests:

> For Lovecraft, the discussion of time is an effective tool of consolation because it places "local and individual sorrows at the small end of the telescope." This "telescoping" of "local and individual sorrows" (and indeed all human affairs) is precisely how Lovecraft's weird form of consolation operates. […] To help relieve pain, make it more endurable, or simply put it in perspective, Lovecraft contextualizes the reader's local suffering within a larger framework of time. (79–80)

Beach further gives Lovecraft's correspondence with Helen Sully as an example for his consolation letters. In these letters Sully shares many personal problems with Lovecraft and consults him, while Lovecraft answers these questions from a cosmic perspective. According to Beach:

> His theories of cosmic time entail a more optimistic and pragmatic approach to humanity's insignificance. As he writes Sully in a 4 December 1935 letter, "So the voice of sound reason would seem to be saying, 'cheer up!' There aren't any phenomena in the cosmos really worth being mournful or depressed about." (84)

However, I would rather call Lovecraft's approach "therapeutic" (only for certain people) than "optimistic" because he doesn't adopt a new emotion to define his cosmic perspective. He just points to this therapeutic aspect of his philosophy, which may serve to desensitize some individuals by replacing local and overwhelming anxiety with a more "cosmic" one. Therefore, this approach can be considered as a coping mechanism based on dissociation rather than optimism. On the other hand, Beach is right in suggesting that:

> Lovecraft's consolation letters represent an inversion of the form of his weird fiction: his tales focus on phenomena rather than individuals to build up an intense mood of horror over time, while his letters break down an intense mood for a specific individual. Both do so by focusing on the phenomena of cosmic time and space, with the difference that in the consolation letter these impersonal phenomena are drawn into more intimate relation with the personal. (89)

Therefore, it is possible to say that Lovecraft uses the exposure technique to confront the reader with anxiety in his anxiety narratives, and dissociation—and more specifically, depersonalization—to cope with pain and anxiety in his consolation letters.

There is indeed no doubt that Lovecraft was the master of anxiety. He did not only experience anxiety and write about it, but he also observed, analyzed, and figured out its mechanism. He both terrorized the readers and consoled them using the same fundamental emotion. So, in the end, did he somehow manage to dominate his anxiety? As mentioned earlier, Lovecraft's cosmic horror was based on the idea of lack of control and the insignificance of man from a cosmic perspective. Moreover, his anxiety narratives have some common points with chaos narratives since "on the control dimension, the body telling chaos stories defines itself as being swept along, without control, by life's fundamental *contingency*" (Frank 1995, 102), just like the protagonists in Lovecraft's narratives. They confront the reader with the harsh and indifferent face of reality and for this reason these narratives are hard to digest. As Frank continues stating: "All of us on the outside of some chaos want assurances that if we fell in, we could get out. But the chaos narrative is beyond such bargaining; there is no way out" (102). While it is impossible to comment whether Lovecraft dominated his anxiety, it is clear that writing in general had a rehabilitative effect on him as it somehow served to create the illusion of control. His relationship with anxiety had been repeatedly represented in his writings, and the emphasis had been on exposure in his anxiety narratives, dissociation in consolation letters, and reconciliation in his essays. Therefore, mimicking the process of exposure to and recovery from (or acceptance of) anxiety (which is similar to trauma), might have given him a sense of

control over that anxiety. The relationship between exposure and dissociation is further analyzed by Frank as follows:

> The body is so degraded by an overdetermination of disease and social mistreatment that survival depends on the self's *dissociation* from the body, even while the body's suffering determines whatever life the person can lead. But matters are more complex than a "self" dissociating itself from a body. A person who has recently started to experience pain speaks of "it" hurting "me" and can dissociate from that "it." The chaos narrative is lived when "it" has hammered "me" out of self-recognition. (103)

In this way, Frank also points to the blurred limits between exposure and dissociation. Obviously, this kind of narrative is hard to understand or decipher at first glance and this may be the reason Lovecraft's writings tend to be analyzed as mere horror stories. They are difficult not only to decipher, but also to empathize with and empathy is a prerequisite for truly understanding and enjoying Lovecraft's anxiety narratives. As Frank states:

> Contingent, monadic, lacking desire, and dissociated—such is the configuration of traits that typify the *chaotic body*. It is often victim to dominating bodies, which make it the object of their force. It is scandal to mirroring bodies, since it shows how easily the images they use to construct themselves can be stripped away. To the disciplined body, the chaotic body represents weakness and inability to resist. The dominating, mirroring, and disciplined bodies each suppress the possibility that they could become chaotic; the chaotic body is the other against which these bodies define themselves. But they claim no empathic relation to this body; it represents only what they fear for themselves. (104)

The reader's reluctance to connect with the chaotic and sensitive protagonists of Lovecraft is understandable since these characters represent only what people fear for themselves.[13] Most of the time these narrators write on the edge of insanity, from a mental asylum or just before committing suicide after they experience the anxiety-inducing phenomena. "The Tomb" starts with Jervas Dudley stating:

> In relating the circumstances which have led to my confinement within this refuge for the demented, I am aware that my present position will create a natural doubt of the authenticity of my narrative. It is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of humanity is too limited in its mental vision to weigh with patience and intelligence those isolated phenomena, seen and felt only by a

> psychologically sensitive few, which lie outside its common experience. (Lovecraft 2014, 15)

"Dagon," on the other hand, starts with the following account: "I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. Penniless, and at the end of my supply of the drug which alone makes life endurable, I can bear the torture no longer; and shall cast myself from this garret window into the squalid street below" (Lovecraft 2014, 25). "Ex Oblivione" begins with the narrator's following statement:

> When the last days were upon me, and the ugly trifles of existence began to drive me to madness like the small drops of water that torturers let fall ceaselessly upon one spot of their victim's body, I loved the irradiate refuge of sleep. In my dreams I found a little of the beauty I had vainly sought in life, and wandered through old gardens and enchanted woods. (Lovecraft 2014, 155)

Lovecraft's narratives, then, represent anxiety through chaotic body because only this body can thoroughly process anxiety. As a result, the sensitive body and its narratives tended to be shunned or misunderstood by many readers. The literary critic Edmund Wilson was one of these readers. As he stated in a *New Yorker* article in 1945: "The only real horror in most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art. Lovecraft was not a good writer. The fact that his verbose and undistinguished style has been compared to Poe's is only one of the many bad signs that almost nobody any more pays real attention to writing" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 1396). Joshi rightly comments on Wilson's criticism as follows: "It is scarcely worth dissecting the errors and misconceptions […] Wilson should have realized that Lovecraft's tales, regardless of their merits, were not 'hack-work' because they were at least written with a sincerity of purpose lacking in most work of this kind" (1396). On the other hand, the overwhelming feeling they evoke may be the reason why his narratives are "shunned" and thus classified as "horror stories" rather than anxiety narratives,[14] in the same way chaos stories have been mislabeled by medical staff as mere depression. As Frank argues:

> The anxiety that the chaos story provokes in others leads to the standard clinical dismissal of chaos stories as documenting "depression." When chaos is thus redefined as a treatable condition, the restitution narrative is restored. Clinical staff can once again be comfortably in control: the chaos can be dismissed as the patient's personal malfunction. That reality is classified as either amenable or resistant to treatment; in either case it no longer represents an existential threat. (Frank 1995, 110)

It is important, then, to understand Lovecraft's narratives accurately since they were honest, unique, personal, and original in their form and content, although they included seemingly typical horror elements, such as cosmic entities and supernatural creatures or events, that would seem banal and childish, if not analyzed correctly. As Alissa Burger states in her article "Gazing Upon 'The Daemons of Unplumbed Space' with H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King: Theorizing Horror and Cosmic Horror": "At the center of Lovecraft's cosmic terrors are his Great Old Ones from beyond the realm of human knowledge or understanding, who may hold the fate of humanity within their monstrous gaze and care nothing for these individuals therein" (Burger 2018, 81). When Lovecraft's narratives are interpreted as a kind of chaos narrative, the Great Old Ones become the inescapable reality, not the bogeyman. Thus, the cosmic terror becomes the terror and anxiety one has to endure each and every day. As Burger further suggests:

> In both "The Call of Cthulhu" and "Nyarlathotep," the greatest part of Lovecraft's horror is found where it always is in his Cthulhu Mythos tales: in the realization of humanity's insignificance, its powerlessness in the face of a potent and destructive cosmic horror which defies comprehension, let alone control. (84)

However, even Lovecraft's anxiety narratives may evoke different responses other than anxiety. As Michel Houellebecq says: "The paradox, however, is that we prefer this universe, hideous as it is, to our own reality. In this, we are precisely the readers that Lovecraft anticipated. […] Satan or Nyarlathotep, either one will do, but we will not tolerate another moment of *realism*" (Houellebecq 2020, 43). This comfort, however, is different from the comfort that evoke his consolation letters. Here, comfort comes from escape rather than dissociation. However, viewed as an illness narrative, Lovecraft's anxiety narratives can be comforting as a

meaning-maker as well. As Claire Charlotte McKechnie states in "Anxieties of Communication: The Limits of Narrative in the Medical Humanities":

> Writing in defence of narrative as a means of valuable expression, Lisa Diedrich has argued that although there is failure in death, although death itself is inexpressible because it, like pain, is beyond comprehension or expression, we strive—through narrative—to recognize suffering, to explore new boundaries of loss and pain, to navigate ways of being in the world. Narrative, for Diedrich, is therapy *because* it demands interpretation. (McKechnie 2014, 121)

Therefore, Lovecraft's anxiety narratives can be therapeutic for the reader because these narratives serve to explore, represent, and interpret anxiety, and thus to cope with and make sense of it.

1.4 The Role of Quantum Mechanics in Lovecraft's Anxiety Narratives

Cosmicism took its sources from the scientific developments of the period. In this way, Lovecraft carried his anxiety narratives to another dimension and gave them a new meaning. This innovative approach also enriches his narratives by blurring the borders between the genres, thereby evoking a range of emotions in the reader, from anxiety to comfort.

These mentioned scientific developments were some of the major and most famous contributions of the 20th century, which changed—and still continues to change—people's understanding of reality as well as their relationship with it. Moreover, the beginning of quantum mechanics in 1900 with Max Planck and Albert Einstein's groundbreaking theory of relativity created a contrast with Lovecraft's scientific materialism. His discomfort with Einstein's theory—as well as with quantum mechanics—can be seen in the following excerpt from one of his letters written in 1923:

> I have no opinions—I believe in nothing … My cynicism and scepticism are increasing, and from an entirely new cause—the Einstein theory. […] 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 space-time. There are no values in all infinity—the last idea that there are is the

> supreme mockery of all. All the cosmos is a jest, and fit to be treated only as a jest, and one thing is as true as another. (quoted in Joshi 2013, 686-87)

While this excerpt contains some over-simplifications and misunderstandings, Lovecraft's frustration with the theory of relativity makes sense since it challenged Newtonian mechanics on which his scientific materialism was established. As Werner Heisenberg states in *Physics and Philosophy*: "Within the field of modern physics the theory of relativity has always played a very important role. It was in this theory that the necessity for a change in the fundamental principles of physics was recognized for the first time" (Heisenberg 2000, 67). As it will be further analyzed in Chapter 4, Lovecraft was influenced by Hugh Elliot's mechanistic materialism which has three main principles: "the uniformity of law, the denial of teleology and the denial of any form of existence other than those envisaged by physics and chemistry, that is to say, other existences that have some kind of palpable material characteristics and qualities" (Joshi 2013, 448). The theory of relativity proved that Newton's theory of gravity was wrong by introducing spacetime model, which adds one dimension of time to three dimensions of space. As Heisenberg further states:

> The geometry discussed in the theory of general relativity was not concerned with three-dimensional space only but with the four-dimensional manifold consisting of space and time. The theory established a connection between the geometry in this manifold and the distribution of masses in the world. Therefore, this theory raised in an entirely new form the old questions of the behavior of space and time in the largest dimensions; it could suggest possible answers that could be checked by observations. (Heisenberg 2000, 77)

While this theory—and Einstein's view of the universe—was still deterministic, the "uniformity of law" and the materialistic philosophy were mainly damaged by the Copenhagen interpretation of Quantum theory. The idea of a fundamentally probabilistic universe was disturbing Einstein[15] as well as Lovecraft. Heisenberg addresses this discontent as follows:

> All the opponents of the Copenhagen interpretation do agree on one point. It would, in their view, be desirable to return to the reality concept of classical physics or, to use a more general philosophic term, to the ontology of

> materialism. They would prefer to come back to the idea of an objective real world whose smallest parts exist objectively in the same sense as stones or trees exist, independently of whether or not we observe them. This, however, is impossible or at least not entirely possible because of the nature of the atomic phenomena (83)

It was not easy for Lovecraft to adapt to changing realities, and the mentioned probabilistic and uncertain aspects of quantum mechanics in particular were some of the reasons for his anxiety. Moreover, in his 1923 letter above, it is possible to see that Lovecraft's views on this new reality have a lot in common with the universe he created for anxiety narratives. His statement, "one thing is as true as another," refers specifically to the concept of wave-particle duality,[16] while Einstein would not agree with his interpretation that "all the cosmos is a jest, and fit to be treated only as a jest." More radical thoughts on the meaning of quantum mechanics had been introduced by the Copenhagen interpretation, which included the concept of complementarity based on Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. And in fact, what I would like to focus on when discussing cosmicism in this part is this uncertainty principle and its philosophical interpretations and implications.

The uncertainty (or indeterminacy) principle was articulated by Werner Heisenberg. As he further explains it in *Physics and Philosophy*, "in quantum theory the uncertainty relations put a definite limit on the accuracy with which positions and momenta, or time and energy, can be measured simultaneously" (Heisenberg 2000, 109). In other words, the idea was that it would not be possible to accurately calculate the position and the velocity of a particle at the same time. This principle, however, is more than just the main property of quantum mechanics. When translated into everyday life, it refers to the change in humanity's relationship with reality, to his/her limitations in understanding it, and therefore to the impossibility of talking about preciseness, order, or certainty. As Heisenberg states, "the general trend of human thinking in the nineteenth century"—including Elliot's scientific materialism—"had been toward an increasing confidence in the scientific method and in precise rational terms, and had let to a

general skepticism with regard to those concepts of natural language which do not fit into the closed frame of scientific thought—for instance, those of religion." The discomfort begins when "modern physics […] has […] turned it against the overestimation of precise scientific concepts, against a too-optimistic view on progress in general, and finally against skepticism itself" (Heisenberg 2000, 140). Looking at these changes, it is possible to understand Lovecraft's frustration with quantum mechanics as it serves to deepen the division between his obsessively rational and materialist self and the anxious other represented in his narratives. In this sense, quantum mechanics becomes a tool to feed and advocate for cosmicism, especially by emphasizing the ideas of the unknown, random, and uncertain universe as well as the human being's inability to understand it and therefore the impossibility of him/her having any significance. On the other hand, Heisenberg interprets mankind's relationship with the unknown as follows:

> One may say that the human ability to understand may be in a certain sense unlimited. But the existing scientific concepts cover always only a very limited part of reality, and the other part has not yet been understood is infinite. Whenever we proceed from the known into the unknown we may hope to understand, but we may have to learn at the same time a new meaning of the word "understanding." (140)

This account is important in that it implies that a fundamental change must be made in man's understanding and interpretation, before proceeding with his/her relationship with reality. That is, a change, both cognitive and linguistic, will be necessary to truly process the newly gained knowledge and be aware of the fact that it represents only a small fraction of—almost—inaccessible reality. While this idea evokes Schopenhauer's concepts of representation (*Vorstellung*) and will,[17] it actually separates itself from them due to changes in understanding the universe. Since Schopenhauer's ideas were based on Newtonian mechanics, they now might be insufficient to interpret the "reality" of quantum mechanics and man's relationship with it.

In his introduction to Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Christopher Janaway states:

> So our first task in *The World as Will and Representation* is to consider the world as it presents itself to us in our minds. In ordinary human experience, and in the extension of this in the realm of scientific enquiry, we encounter objects, and these are ordered for us, necessarily, by space and time, and by relations of cause and effect […] Everything in space and time has a determinate position in relation to other things in space and time, everything that happens has a determinate cause, every action relates back to a motive and to its agent's character, every truth is grounded in some other truth or in the evidence of the senses. (quoted in Schopenhauer 2010, xiv)

Since the Copenhagen interpretation challenged causality and determinism, a new approach was necessary to interpret the changing meanings of "reality," "will" and "representation" and our relationship with them. Lovecraft's cosmic indifferentist approach, in this sense, resolved this problem and therefore added a new meaning to his anxiety narratives.[18] Some of his best and most famous narratives, including "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," "The Colour Out of Space," "The Dunwich Horror," "At the Mountains of Madness," "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," "The Dreams in the Witch House," were all written between or after 1925-1927, when the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics was articulated. As Joshi states: "'The Call of Cthulhu' is a quantum leap for Lovecraft in more ways than one. It is, most empathetically, the first of his tales that can genuinely be termed cosmic" (Joshi 2013, 866). However, instead of just commenting on the role of modern physics in Lovecraft's narratives, I would like to draw attention to his effort to establish a philosophy based on quantum mechanics. He knew that the above mentioned cognitive and linguistic changes were necessary to interact with this new reality. His cosmic view, which evokes Schopenhauer's views on aesthetic experience,[19] thus has become a cognitive tool to interpret and to interact with a world based on quantum mechanics. Indeed, the reason cosmicism is so different from any other philosophy is that it literally gives reality a new meaning by destroying the concept of reality as we know it. Lovecraft did this by using

some ideas specific to quantum mechanics, such as the concept of the probability wave.[20] As Heisenberg suggests:

> This concept of the probability wave was something entirely new in theoretical physics since Newton […] The probability wave of Bohr, Kramer, Slater […] meant a tendency for something. It was a quantitative version of the old concept of "potentia" in Aristotelian philosophy. It introduced something standing in the middle between the idea of an event and the actual event, a strange kind of physical reality just in the middle between possibility and reality. (Heisenberg 2000, 11)

Thus, the probabilistic nature of quantum mechanics reflects itself in the random, uncertain and indeterministic universe represented by cosmicism, causing anxiety in its narrator, just as the concept of probability created discomfort among many physicists, including Einstein.

On the other hand, Lovecraft was also aware of the fact that he needed a new language to describe this new uncertain and alien realm. Therefore, the language he used in his anxiety narratives had to contain at least some words or sentences that were completely foreign to the world we know. In this sense, I would like to suggest that even the name "Cthulhu" meant more than just a fictitious name of an alien creature; what Lovecraft did here was actually pointing out a language problem, not unlike Heisenberg, who asserted that:

> The real problem behind these many controversies was the fact that no language existed in which one could speak consistently about the new situation. The ordinary language was based upon the old concepts of space and time and this language offered the only unambiguous means of communication about the setting up and the results of the measurements. Yet the experiments showed that the old concepts could not be applied everywhere. (Heisenberg 2000, 119)

Heisenberg's solution to this language problem makes sense: "With regard to the language […] one has gradually recognized that one should perhaps not insist too much on certain principles […] One should simply wait for the development of the language, which adjusts itself after some time to the new situation" (119). Lovecraft, on the other hand, decided to speed up this process, at least for the sake of his anxiety narratives. As he comments on the word "Cthulhu" in a letter written in 1934:

> The word is supposed to represent a fumbling human attempt to catch the phonetics of an *absolutely non-human* word. The name of the hellish entity was invented by beings whose vocal organs were not like man's, hence it has no relation to the human speech equipment. The syllables were determined by a physiological equipment wholly unlike ours, hence could never be uttered perfectly by human throats. (quoted in Joshi 2013, 866)

This is an innovative approach as Lovecraft's choice to produce and use new and alien words proves his literary skills as well as his awareness of the necessity to establish a new philosophy on which his narratives are based. In this way, he succeeded in adding a new dimension to his anxiety narratives by creating a deeply phenomenological experience for the reader.

1.5 Conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter was to analyze the concept of cosmicism in depth to truly understand Lovecraft's "weird stories," which I prefer to call "anxiety narratives." Therefore, I started examining the concept of anxiety and its possible meanings for Lovecraft. Given his life, personality, ideology, and writings, cosmicism evolves from a literary philosophy into a platform that allows Lovecraft to represent his relationship with anxiety. As a result, his narratives become a unique way of expressing this inherent concept, making it impossible to be categorized under the mere genres of fantasy and horror. They can be better understood using medical/health humanities; considering Lovecraft's narratives as illness stories and interpreting them as a type of "chaos story" gives them a new meaning and thus a deeper understanding of his writings. The role of scientific developments of his era was also worth mentioning since Lovecraft not only used the elements of modern physics in his writings, but he actually established a new philosophy based on quantum mechanics, which he used to represent his anxiety narratives. In this way, he could treat anxiety both as a noumenon and phenomenon.

[1] The relationship between anxiety and the sense of loss of control will be further examined in the following chapters.

[2] While there are various Lovecraft scholars, S.T. Joshi is by far the most prominent one. For this reason in this thesis I will mainly refer to his works to support my arguments.

[3] Joshi also points out: "Lovecraft stated in *In Defence of Dagon* that 'There are probably seven persons, in all, who really like my work; and they are enough. I should write even if I were the only patient reader, for my aim is merely self-expression.'" (Joshi 2013, 685).

[4] Dr. Thies Münchow mentions a very similar idea in his essay "Transgressing the Myth: H.P. Lovecraft's Philosophy of Life and Its Narrative Execution" without analyzing it in detail. He suggests: "Anxiety gets canalized, the non-object becomes objectivized in form of "Cthulhu," "Yog-Sothoth," "Nyalathotep" and all the other "Great Old Ones." […] In that way Lovecraft's anti-mythology is a plausible form of myth for a secular society" (Münchow 2017, 48). This idea is thoroughly analyzed and elaborated in this chapter of the thesis.

[5] Kierkegaard uses adjectives such as "cunning" and "discerning" to define anxiety: "And no Grand Inquisitor has such dreadful torments in readiness as anxiety has, and no secret agent knows as cunningly as anxiety how to attack his suspect in his weakest moment or to make alluring the trap in which he will be caught, and no discerning judge understands how to interrogate and examine the accused as does anxiety, which never lets the accused escaped, neither through amusement, nor by noise, nor during work, neither by day nor by night" (Kierkegaard 1980, 155–56).

[6] Compulsive talking is defined as a "pattern of speech in which the speaker feels the necessity to continue talking. People who struggle with compulsive talking may be aware that their speech is uncontrolled or obsessive, but also feel like they need to speak to feel safe and in control. Failing to speak when the compulsion arises can result in high levels of anxiety, feelings of anger, or sense of overwhelm" (BetterHelp 2022).

[7] Stilted speech is defined as a "communication characterized by situationally-inappropriate formality. This formality can be expressed both through abnormal prosody as well as speech content that is 'inappropriately pompous, legalistic, philosophical, or quaint.'" ("Stilted Speech" n.d.). Also, it is seen as one of the characteristics of Asperger syndrome: "Individuals with the 'classic' variant of Asperger syndrome are described as socially odd, extremely egocentric, clumsy with poor body awareness, having a peculiar gaze, stilted language, good verbal ability, and narrow and odd interests" (Sturm, Fernell, and Gillberg 2004, 444).

[8] These dreams will be further analyzed in Chapter 4.

[9] This theme will be further discussed in the following chapters.

[10] The concept of "sensitive" mind will be explored in Chapter 5.

[11] The idea of observer can also be explained with dissociation as a result of anxiety and will be discussed thoroughly in the next chapter.

[12] The question of control and its representation through cosmic horror will be analyzed in Chapter 3.

[13] Lovecraft's "sensitive" protagonists will be analyzed especially in chapters 4 and 5.

[14] Even August Derleth, co-founder of Arkham House, Lovecraft's first book publisher, and the person who coined the term "Cthulhu Mythos," couldn't endure Lovecraft's writings: "Derleth, himself a practicing Catholic, was unable to endure Lovecraft's bleak atheistic vision, and so he invented out of whole cloth the 'Elder Gods' […] as a counterweight to the 'evil' Old Ones, who had been 'expelled' from the earth but are eternally preparing to reemerge and destroy humanity. […] This invention of 'Elder Gods' allowed him to maintain that the 'Cthulhu Mythos' is substantially akin to Christianity, therefore making it acceptable to people of his conventional temperament" (Joshi 2013, 862–63).

[15] As Einstein comments in his famous letter to Max Born: "Quantum mechanics is certainly imposing. But an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but does not really bring us any closer to the secret of the 'Old One.' I, at any rate, am convinced that He is not playing at dice" (Einstein, Born, and Born 2005, 88). Till the end of his life, he tried to form a deterministic description of quantum physics. His hidden-variable theories were an attempt to achieve this aim. As Marco Genovese states in "Research on Hidden Variable Theories: A Review of Recent Progresses": "A possible way out from these problems would be if QM represents a statistical approximation of an unknown deterministic theory, where all observables have defined values fixed by unknown variables, the so called hidden variable theories (HVT), a suggestion dating since the celebrated Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paper of 1935" (Genovese 2005, 321). John Stewart Bell, however, disproved the need for local hidden variables in 1964: "Bell proved that you could rule out local hidden variable theories, and indeed rule out locality altogether, by measuring entangled particles' spins along different axes" (Brubaker 2021).

[16] "On the basis of experimental evidence, German physicist Albert Einstein first showed (1905) that light, which had been considered a form of electromagnetic waves, must also be thought of as particle-like, localized in packets of discrete energy" ("Wave-Particle Duality" 2022).

[17] Or Kant's idea of "representation" and the "thing-in-itself" (*Ding an sich*).

[18] Joshi further comments on indifferentism: "The question for Lovecraft was: how to conduct oneself with the realization that the human race was an insignificant atom in the vast realms of the cosmos? One solution was to adopt the perspective of a sort of bland cosmic spectator upon the human race" (Joshi 2013, 1043).

[19] As Schopenhauer states in *The World as Will and Representation*: "We can avoid all the suffering that comes from objects in the present just as well as we can avoid it from those that are remote as soon as we raise ourselves to viewing them in a purely objective way, thus creating the illusion that these objects alone are present and we are not: then, as pure subject of cognition, we are rid of our suffering selves and fully one with the objects, and in such moments our needs are as alien to us as they are to the objects. The world as representation is then all that remains, and the world as will has vanished" (Schopenhauer 2010, 222–23).

[20] It would be incomplete not to mention the origin of the concept of the probability wave. It dates back to the famous "double slit experiment" which "discovered that electrons, and all quantum particles, both exist as particles and probability waves. Quantum particles existing as probability waves means that we don't know for certain where these particles are, we can only know the probability of where they will be. These particles are said to be in superposition. This means that they are in all possible states at once. Once we try to observe the state of this particle, the wave function collapses into a single state" (Andal 2014).

2 DISSOCIATION AS A RESULT OF ANXIETY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the concept of cosmicism and its connection to the author's anxiety has been discussed. In his works, Lovecraft narrates his anxiety represented as the fear of unknown. However, although the words fear or horror are more frequently used when talking about Lovecraft, anxiety is the correct term to describe the affect that is present in his works. As neuroendocrinologist and Stanford University professor Robert Sapolsky, states:

> Fear is the vigilance and the need to escape from something real. Anxiety is about dread and foreboding and your imagination running away with you. Much as with depression, anxiety is rooted in a cognitive distortion. In this case, people prone toward anxiety overestimate risks and the likelihood of a bad outcome. (Sapolsky 2004, 630)

As discussed earlier, cosmicism provokes anxiety by showing how insignificant we are in the vast universe. However, to understand why the sense of insignificance leads to anxiety, first the biological aspect of anxiety and depression should be clarified in reference to Sapolsky's work.

On the other hand, dissociation is seen as a common result of severe anxiety. Therefore, I will also use the theories of PTM and SCM and will give the example of Nina Sayers from Darren Aronofksy's 2010 movie *Black Swan* to better understand the nature of anxiety and depression, and thus, to thoroughly comprehend Lovecraft's narratives.

2.2 Amygdala and Anxiety

The amygdala is important for this chapter due to its role. It is located in our limbic system,[1] the part of the brain which is related to fear and anxiety. To understand the nature of anxiety, we first need to comprehend the amygdala's function and see how it changes in an anxious brain. According to Sapolsky, brain-imaging studies are the most convincing evidence of the direct relationship between amygdala and anxiety[2]. Sapolsky worked with rats, primates, and human test subjects to investigate how various parts of the brain work, as well as to compare and contrast their unique reactions. When the amygdala is triggered, it works in a similar way both in various kinds of animals and in human beings:

> People with anxiety disorders have exaggerated startle responses, see menace that others don't. […] A frightening picture that is flashed up too briefly to be even noted subliminally in a control subject does the trick to the amygdala in someone who is anxious. No wonder the sympathetic nervous system then races—alarms are always going off in the amygdala. Why does the amygdala work differently in someone who is anxious? […] major stressors and glucocorticoids disrupt hippocampal function—the synapses aren't able to do that long-term potentiation business, and the dendritic processes in neurons shrink. Remarkably, stress and glucocorticoids do just the opposite in the amygdala—synapses become more excitable, neurons grow more of the cables that connect the cells to each other. And if you artificially make the amygdala of a rat more excitable, the animal shows an anxiety-like disorder afterward. (Sapolsky 2004, 636–38)

This technical explanation is necessary to become familiar with some very basic terms related to the mechanism of anxiety, and to better understand the biology of anxiety disorders. Amygdala is one of the most relevant parts of the brain when dealing with anxiety disorders and stress, but it is not the only part that gets activated when anxiety strikes. Our sympathetic nervous system[3] is another part that gets activated when we confront a stressful situation. The hippocampus,[4] on the other hand, is related to memory and is negatively affected by narrowing the connection between nerves when the individual is faced with constant and intense stress factors (and excessive glucocorticoids,[5] the hormones that are released when faced with a stress

factor). However, as Sapolsky suggests, in the case of the amygdala the process is the opposite: in this case, the connection between the nerves is accelerated.

Although everything is interconnected in our brain, this connection is not limited to the brain, but includes genetic, external, and social factors as well as our entire organism. Therefore, we need to analyze all these elements to fully understand the anatomy of the anxiety, or especially of an individual with an anxiety disorder. Sapolsky comments on all the major psychological stressors in his work, but I will use two that might describe the source of anxiety in Lovecraft's narratives and Nina's obsession: "predictability" and "control." Sapolsky draws attention to the role of predictability in stress, using as evidence the studies conducted on rats that were given electric shocks with prior warning:

> *Predictability* makes stressors less stressful. The rat with the warning gets two pieces of information. It learns when something dreadful is about to happen. The rest of the time, it learns that something dreadful is not about to happen. It can relax. The rat without a warning can always be a half-second away from the next shock. In effect, information that increases predictability tells you that there is bad news, but comforts you that it's not going to be worse—you are going to get shocked soon, but it's never going to be sprung on you without warning. (Sapolsky 2004, 509)

Unpredictability, ambiguity and uncertainty or anything unknown creates a stress factor for every living being. However, human beings seem to be more fragile and have a longer duration of stress responses, which can result in a variety of disorders. Cosmicism, as a literary philosophy, is psychologically unbearable as it points to this uncertainty. To feel significant and real, we must first feel that we are in control (even if we are not). Therefore, the concepts of unpredictability and control are complementary, and it is not surprising that we see uncontrollability as another stressor. According to Sapolsky:

> Loss of control and lack of predictive information are closely related. Some researchers have emphasized this, pointing out that the common theme is that the organism is subjected to novelty. You thought you knew how to manage things, you thought you knew what would happen next, and it turns out you are wrong in this novel situation. The potency of this is demonstrated in primate studies in which merely placing the animal into a novel cage suppresses its

> immune system. Others have emphasized that these types of stressors cause arousal and vigilance, as you search for the new rules of control and prediction. Both views are different aspects of the same issue. (518)

The concept of control forms the basis of Aronofksy's *Black Swan*. The protagonist of the movie, Nina Sayers, is a young, lonely, and brilliant ballet dancer who lives with her dominant mother and suffers from anxiety disorders. The root of Nina's mental struggle and anxiety is her obsession with being in control, and in the movie, Nina's obsession with control is related to her desire for perfection. Perfectionism, desire for control and, obsessive behaviors point to obsessive-compulsive disorder and therefore related to anxiety disorders. As Sapolsky comments: "Anxiety disorders come in a number of flavors. […] In obsessive-compulsive disorder, the anxiety buries and busies itself in endless patterns of calming, distracting ritual" (630).

2.3 NINA'S DISSOCIATION

The reason we talk about anxiety when analyzing Nina's character is because there is no tangible reason for her to be afraid or nervous. The main reason of her anxiety is her obsession with perfection and that's why we deal with anxiety, not fear. Perfection as something unattainable or almost "unknown" (because one cannot really define or know what perfection really is) causes anxiety, obsessive compulsive behavior and ultimately dissociation in Nina's case. Scientific research shows that there may be a link between OCD and dissociation,[6] as stated in the article of Pozza and Dèttore:

> Dissociation encompasses a set of distinct symptoms such as Amnesia […], Depersonalization/ Derealization […], and Absorption/ Imaginative Involvement (eg, immersion in an external/internal stimulus like a thought resulting in disconnection from the reality) […] The present exploratory study demonstrates that perfectionistic beliefs are associated with dissociative absorption/imaginative involvement in OCD. Perfectionism in OCD patients may be associated with a higher tendency to absorption or imaginal involvement. (Pozza and Dèttore 2019, 603–7)

This is also the reason I decided to dedicate this chapter to Nina and compare her case with that of Lovecraft. Although Lovecraft's cosmic anxiety may seem completely different, it is actually very similar to Nina's mundane anxiety. Moreover, her case is important in order to understand dissociation as a result of anxiety. Indeed, *Black Swan* successfully depicts different types of anxiety disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder, as well as other psychological problems that result from or are associated with anxiety, like dissociative disorders (especially dissociative identity disorder), paranoia and eating disorder. In this sense, comparing Lovecraft's anxiety with Nina's case allows me to analyze the recurrent pattern and dynamics of anxiety, even when experienced by two completely different people. In other words, this analysis will show how anxiety arising from the "unknown" creates almost the same symptoms in two very different people/situations, although its semantics varies from person to person. Similar to *Black Swan*, in Lovecraft's narratives in addition to generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and other accompanying mental conditions such as paranoia and dissociative disorders are also frequently treated. Especially dissociation has always been a dominant element in both Lovecraft's worldview and letters as well as in his narratives. As already seen in the first chapter and will be also discussed in the following chapters, different types of dissociative disorder such as depersonalization-derealization disorder (especially depersonalization has an important role on the author's cosmic vision and it even serves as a coping mechanism in some occasions) and dissociative identity disorder (especially when the narrator disappears and another voice takes over the narrative) have been repeatedly seen as an accompanying element of anxiety. Therefore, I find it crucial to analyze the nature of dissociation as a result of anxiety through Nina's case (treating it as a specific and semi-independent case study) to better understand Lovecraft's anxiety as well as the concept of the unknown and its effects on the individual.

The concept of dissociation, which plays a prominent role within the field of psychology, has time and again been addressed and explored within literary expression. Gothic fiction has in particular been a pioneer in representing not only phenomena and experiences of dissociation, but also many further kinds of mental illness that have a profound impact on the human psyche. As Margaret McAllister and Donna Lee Brien state in their article, "Haunted: Exploring Representations of Mental Health Through the Lens of the Gothic": "The linking of mental illness and the Gothic is prevalent and persistent historically, and has set up and reinforced vivid, often terrifying and horrifying images of mental illness and its treatment in the popular imagination" (McAllister and Brien 2015, 73). As the genre's main objective is to discover and represent what is underneath the surface in order to deal with the deepest fears, emotions and desires of human beings, it becomes a suitable platform to study different kinds of mental disorders. Moreover, by profoundly analysing and narrating all these conditions, Gothic fiction makes what is "fearful" and "strange" visible, revealing how normal, humane, and mundane they are. Dissociation, through narratives about the double, is one of the most recurrent themes and treated allegorically in many classical Gothic works such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Frankenstein*, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* or *The Double*. Even today, it is possible to see different examples of the representation of dissociation, not only in literature but also in movies such as *Black Swan*, which is inspired by Dostoevsky's *The Double*. As Aronofsky commented during an interview about his movie:

> I had the idea of the ballet world and I was thinking of doing something with *The Double* with Dostoevsky. I saw *Swan Lake*, I had never been to the ballet, and suddenly I saw a black swan and a white swan played by one dancer and I was like "oh." It was a eureka moment, because it was *The Double* in the ballet world […] The ballet *Swan Lake* is gothic. The story is: during the day she is a swan, and at night she is like a half-swan-half-human creature. (Aronofsky 2010)

The dissociation of the protagonist is represented perfectly in the movie through a process of physical and mental transformation. As can be seen also in Lovecraft's narratives,

dissociation recalls the idea of passage, as it makes the subject disconnect from the place or mental state he/she is in, placing him/her in another state of mind, as stated above by Pozza and Dèttore. It is clearly present and particularly acute in the disorder schizophrenia. Andrew Moskowitz, from the Department of Psychology at Touro College Berlin, mentions Eugen Bleuler's definition of schizophrenia in his article, "Schizophrenia, Trauma, Dissociation, and Scientific Revolutions":

> Bleuler's "definition" of *schizophrenia* reads almost as a calling card for dissociative disorders: 'If the disease is marked, the personality loses its unity; at different times different psychic complexes seem to represent the personality [...] one set of complexes dominates the personality for a time, while other groups of ideas or drives are "split off" and seem either partly or completely impotent. (Moskowitz 2011b, 349)

Moskowitz discusses different paradigms of schizophrenia and dissociation, beginning with the thoughts of Bleuler, who coined the term schizophrenia, and ending with the latest trauma/dissociation paradigm, indicating differences among them:

> Over the past several decades, the study of schizophrenia and the study of dissociative disorders have been dominated by opposing paradigms. For schizophrenia, the assumption of a genetic basis and biological causation has reigned supreme […] in contrast, the overriding paradigm for the study of dissociative disorders has focused almost exclusively on life events-traumatic or otherwise-that *are* assumed to be meaningfully related to the symptoms a person experiences […] at the same time, many trauma-oriented clinicians and researchers think of schizophrenia only as something dissociative disorders are *not*- but are often confused with; schizophrenia's validity as a biologically based entity is rarely questioned. (348)

Should the process of dissociation be defined as something pathological, as a mere mental disease, or can it also be a natural outcome of an overly sensitive psyche? This seemingly simple question raises many more questions: what is a sensitive psyche? What is the psychological profile of the specific person experiencing dissociation? What kind of dissociation is being referred to? Finally, what is considered normal and natural, or abnormal and pathological? Moskowitz begins this discussion by recalling an event that had a huge effect on him when he

was at the beginning of his training as a clinical psychologist. One day he was leading a men's group as a substitute therapist when one of the patients said:

> "You think you are better than us, don't you? You think this could never happen to you." […] Perhaps I didn't think I was better than them, but I certainly thought I was *different* from them. Like most of us in Western societies, I had grown up believing that psychiatric disorders were illnesses—*diseases* like any other—and there had been nothing in my training until then to convince me otherwise. But learning about trauma, dissociation, and attachment in the ensuing decades has changed my mind. (Moskowitz 2011b, 347)

Point of view, belief and definitions of mental disorders shape the way disorders are approached and understood. Therefore, before continuing with a psychological analysis of Nina, I would like to talk about one last term, psychosis. The concept of psychosis is another blurry term and is very hard to deal with. One major issue is how to categorize and name sets of symptoms or mental conditions with a term that is itself ambiguous. In another article, "On the Relation Between Trauma, Dissociation, Psychotic Symptoms and Schizophrenia," Moskowitz comments on the definition of psychosis:

> The term psychosis itself is not unproblematic. Earlier definitions of psychosis emphasizing "impaired reality testing" are no longer popular as positivistic views of consensually-based reality existing "out there" to be assessed by selves contained in bodies 'in here' are no longer tenable. But the current definitions are no better. For example, the DSM-IV diagnosis is entirely circular—"psychosis" is defined as experiencing delusions or hallucinations or, most broadly, as all the positive symptoms of schizophrenia! Clearly such as approach is not helpful. (Moskowitz 2011a)

The basic problem with defining these terms derives from the subjectivity of certain concepts such as "reality" as well as the ambiguity and fluidity of the human psyche. Our mental system is too complicated to be easily explained or categorized. As Moskowitz commented on the definition of psychosis in the DSM-IV, the description of such a term is barely sufficient. When we look at the latest version of the manual, DSM-V, we see that the problem with defining psychosis still continues. As David B. Arciniegas states:

> In their current conceptualization of psychosis, both the APA and the World Health Organization define psychosis narrowly by requiring the presence of hallucinations (without insight into their pathological nature), delusions, or both hallucinations without insight and delusions. In both of these current diagnostic classification systems, impaired reality testing remains central conceptually to psychosis. (Arciniegas 2015, 716)

These insufficient definitions make one wonder if it is possible to concretely define such fluid conditions. Clearly, the need for categorizing mental disorders or conditions derives from the desire to "treat" them. A disease is something that needs to be cured, so once such conditions are considered diseases, they will be investigated with cures in mind. However, one may ask if "fixing" and understanding are the same thing, or if something needs to be cured in the first place.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's controversial *Anti-Oedipus*, published in 1972, introduced radical ideas about the nature of psychosis and schizophrenia. More importantly, the work protests the ideas of psychoanalysis, providing some of Freud's theories as examples. The basic objective of psychoanalysis seems to give names to certain mental conditions, categorize them and treat patients based on these so-called categories and complexes. While in some cases the treatment is necessary and categories are required to define the condition and to be able to treat certain cases, the aim, according to Deleuze and Guattari, shouldn't be about ambitiously "fixing" them, nor reducing their conditions into diagnosis and complexes. The main aim in *Anti-Oedipus* is to introduce a different perspective regarding some mental disorders, such as schizophrenia and dissociation, and to discuss them from a philosophical point of view. As the title suggests, *Anti-Oedipus* refers to Freud's famous Oedipus complex, and throughout the book, they try to explain how reductive and insufficient Freud's psychoanalysis is for explaining psychosis. According to Gisela Brinker-Gabler:

> Based on a radical critique of Freud's psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari develop an image of the "body without organs" as a counter to the organic model of the (privatized) body and the centered self. They present this undifferentiated and "organless" body as the flow of energies and drives that

> ontologically precedes the shaping of the individual into an "organic" whole. (Brinker-Gabler 2014, 48)

The "body without organs" is one of Deleuze's most important concepts. As can be clearly understood from Brinker-Gabler's description, it refers to a decentred and fluid body full of multiplicities. As opposed to psychoanalysis which defends the unity of the ego, schizoanalysis is inspired and fuelled by the dynamic and multiple nature of the psyche. According to Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*:

> In order to resist organ-machines, the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected and interrupted flows, it sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid. In order to resist using words composed of articulated phonetic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound. We are of the opinion that what is ordinarily referred to as "primary repression" means precisely that: it is not a "countercathexis," but rather this *repulsion* of desiring-machines by the body without organs. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 9)

They comment further that various symptoms of schizophrenia such as dissociation and speech disorders are far from being the evidences of a disease; rather, they are considered as a kind of reaction against the dominance of a centred self and the established "truths" regarding the human psyche that psychoanalysis[7] attempted to maintain. Another important point might be the difficulty of upholding unity when confronted by remarkable stress and pressure.[8]

In *Black Swan*, the selection of the place and environment is perfectly suited for representing a situation in which daily stress creates the mentioned fracture in the protagonist of the movie. The story takes place in the New York City Ballet company and, because the world of ballet is known for its obsession with perfection, rigidity, and ruthlessness, the audience doesn't have any difficulty understanding one of the main sources of stress for the protagonist. The psychological problems of Nina become more visible after she is selected for the role of the Swan Queen in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. She is asked to perform not only Odette (the White Swan) but also Odile (the Black Swan). At this point, it is important to emphasize the fact that the main cause of Nina's dissociation is not a sudden traumatic event;

rather, it seems to be the consequence of constant daily emotional burden, stress, and pressure, just like in the case of Lovecraft and his protagonists. While Nina doesn't experience any problems in performing the part of the White Swan, the dissociation and so-called psychotic episodes start when she tries to embody the Black Swan. This is understandable, as this process forces her to confront a realm within herself that is still unknown and, also, undesirable. Again, this is no different from Lovecraft's relationship with the unknown, but in his case unknown is mostly represented as something originating from the outside world. In the movie, the Black Swan, the evil twin of the White Swan, represents the sensual self and the dark side of one's personality. In the original story, Odile deceives the prince, who would save Odette, trapped in the body of a White Swan, by giving her his true love. Tricked, the prince falls in love with Odile, believing she is Odette. This event leads Odette to commit suicide.[9] Nina's dark side starts to show as she tries to fully perform Odile's part. During this process, Nina experiences visual hallucinations, while also struggling with eating disorders, anxiety, and obsession. This inner fracture is provoked by the arrival of her double (shaped in flesh and bones as the character of Lily, another dancer in the same dance company). It is important to note that in Lovecraft's narratives the use of double is not dominant. His approach to dissociation is more subtle, enigmatic, and atmospheric (which is why it is difficult to adapt them for the big screen) and his protagonists seem to lose their selves in the unknown. In other words, their selves seem to have been destroyed rather than multiplied, as in the case of Nina.

Before continuing with the analysis of Lily, it would be better to examine and understand Nina's psychological transformation through the hallucinations. Although auditory hallucinations are more common in real life,[10] in the case of Nina, visual hallucinations dominate, which enables the audience to fully engage with the mind of the protagonist in an easier way. As Moskowitz states:

> The current diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia, with a strong emphasis on psychotic symptoms, differs substantially from Bleuler's original conception,

> which saw delusions and hallucinations as only secondary features of schizophrenia. For the past 30 years, specific psychotic symptoms derived from the writings of Kurt Schneider (so-called "first rank" symptoms), particularly certain forms of auditory hallucinations (voices conversing or commenting on one's behavior) and delusions (so-called "passivity phenomena") have been central to the diagnosis of schizophrenia. These symptoms, common in DID and easily understandable from a dissociation perspective, have led to considerable diagnostic confusion and most likely frequent misdiagnosis of DID patients as schizophrenic.[11] (Moskowitz 2011a)

In the movie, various visual hallucinations indicate the transformation of Nina into the Black Swan, such as seeing black swan feathers grow out of her body, her feet becoming webbed and changes in her legs and the neck. During her last appearance as the Black Swan on the stage, we see her total transformation into Odile: she grows wings while performing her famous 32 fouettés.[12] Aronofsky perfectly emphasizes both her transformation and dissociation, by showing Nina in her own body as she finishes the coda, with her shadow in the form of a swan. Again, while all these episodes can be evidence of psychosis and symptoms of schizophrenia, we need to keep in mind the ambiguity of the term psychosis and, as commented by Moskowitz above, the existence of the same symptoms in DID. As far as DID is concerned, there are two main approaches, as defined in the article "Dissociative Identity Disorder and the Sociocognitive Model: Recalling the Lessons of the Past":

> Over the past decade, two competing views concerning the genesis and nature of DID have emerged. One perspective, referred to by Gleaves (1996) as the posttraumatic model (PTM) maintains that DID is an etiologically distinct condition that is best conceptualized as a defensive response to childhood trauma, particularly severe sexual and physical abuse […] An alternative perspective on DID is afforded by the sociocognitive model (SCM). The SCM conceptualizes DID as a syndrome that consists of rule-governed and goal-directed experiences and displays of multiple role enactments that have been created, legitimized, and maintained by social reinforcement. (Lilienfeld et al. 1999, 507)

As far as these two models on DID are concerned, it is safe to suggest that Nina's condition seems to include the elements of SCM. We also see various episodes related to sexual harassment and pressure enacted by her abusive director Thomas[13] and her pathological

relationship with her dominant mother,[14] all of which can be considered traumatic events. Moreover, Thomas' abusive behaviors seem to be legitimized and ignored (in one scene, Nina's mother says that he has a "reputation"), although his abuses are known by everyone. This turns the abuse into a part of everyday life at the ballet company rather than a tragic and shocking traumatic event, although it may have the same traumatic effect on the subject. As Steve Lamberti from University of Rochester Medical Center writes about the character of Nina:

> Natalie Portman's character was involved in a highly stressful competition, she had conflicted relationships with her mother and with her understudy, and she was the object of sexual advances by her director. Any of these issues alone would be stressful, but experiencing all of them at once could be emotionally devastating, particularly for a young woman who is somewhat naïve and sheltered. (Donaldson James 2010)

One question would be on how traumatic events can become part of a daily routine and if it is possible to consider anxiety and dissociation as natural outcomes of this situation. As commented by Dr. Lamberti, Nina is portrayed as a fragile young woman and may be more sensitive than others, though this doesn't change the fact that she is in a highly stressful environment. Her director is a symbol of power and is an almost fascist, authoritative figure who makes and exerts continuous demands and pressure. In his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault comments on this kind of fascism as being one of the three adversaries confronted by the book: "The major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism […] And not only historical fascism […] but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" (Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari 1983, xiii). This is also reminiscent of Lovecraft's relationship with fascism in the sense that although he was subjected to and affected by mental and emotional abuse by his mother and had to endure many years of depressive and stressful home environment, which contributed to his anxiety, it still dominated his thoughts. Similarly, *Black Swan* tells us that Nina's main desire is to be perfect, although she is also dominated by

this very concept of perfection and its promulgators, such as Thomas. The source of her self-harm and obsessive behaviors, as well as her anxiety and eventual dissociation, is this very desire that dominates her daily life. Moreover, the role enactment, one of the main elements of the SCM, is encouraged in her daily life both by her director (pushing Nina to lose control and release her "dark side" to transform into the Black Swan) and by her mother, who insistently wants her to remain as her "sweet girl." In this sense, Nina is torn between two opposing demands. As mentioned further in the article by Lilienfield et. al:

> By *role enactment*, proponents of the SCM mean that DID patients adopt and enact social roles geared to their aspirations and the demand characteristics of varied social contexts. According to this view, the metaphor or concept of *role* does not imply that role related behaviors are the products of conscious deception. Instead, role enactments tend to flow spontaneously and are carried out with little or no conscious awareness and with a high degree of "organismic involvement" such that the role and "self" (or "multiple selves" as the case may be) coalesce so as to become essentially indistinguishable. (Lilienfeld et al. 1999, 508)

It would be possible to explain certain aspects of Nina's dissociation with the SCM, emphasizing role enactment rather than seeing it as a mere psychotic episode. It is also interesting to note that one refers to the literal meaning of the role when one discusses Nina's embodiment of Odile. In that sense, once again, we come to understand that this specific role enactment is indeed required in her daily life. Thus, Nina's dissociation is the consequence of a social role rather than psychosis or disease.

Another element that signals Nina's dissociation is the arrival of her double, Lily. As mentioned earlier, the concept of the double is widely used in the Gothic genre to represent the subject's dissociation. Given that Aronofsky's movie was inspired by Dostoevsky's *The Double*, we see a very similar situation with Nina. In *The Double*, while we are never sure whether the protagonist's double, Golyadkin Jr., exists, in *Black Swan*, the audience knows that Lily exists and represents everything that Nina would like to have, such as freedom and sensuality, in order to embody the main characteristics of a Black Swan. Nina's anxieties increase when Lily's

dance is praised by Thomas and when Lily is selected as Nina's alternate. In one scene, Nina begs her director not to select Lily as her substitute, saying "she is after me. She is trying to replace me!," just as Golyadkin Jr. does to Golyadkin Sr. in *The Double*. The source of anxiety is the same for both Nina and Golyadkin. Both fear being replaced by their doubles, who are somehow better than them in many ways. Their inner dissociation is complemented, or represented, by the external factor of the double, another person with the same or similar physical appearance. Gary Saul Morson comments on Golyadkin's condition: "The real horror, which the hero constantly tries to ward off, is that while subjectivity is indeed unique and only one of a *me* can exist- the real me is not mine but his, and I am the one who does not have a *me*! I am the pretender!" (Morson 2015, 50).

The theme of falseness and pretension is mentioned by Nina's director when he praises Lily's dance. He says: "She is not faking it," apparently comparing her style with that of Nina. From the very beginning of the movie, Lily seems to be the real Black Swan with her carefree and sensual personality. Nina, not having any of these personality traits, does indeed seem to fake them when she tries to transform herself. At the end of the movie, she metaphorically kills the White Swan inside her, failing to maintain two opposite forces in herself. The dissociation ends with self-annihilation.

Dissociation, as a result of daily stress and social requirements, is quite a natural outcome, both as a passage from one psychological state to another and as a mental transformation. Some models of DID, such as PTM and SCM, as well as the thoughts of Moskowitz and the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, demonstrate the complexity of this phenomenon. Various terms regarding human psychology are incapable of fully defining their objects and indicate the impossibility of naming or categorizing certain conditions. As Moskowitz rightfully states, the disorders that are considered diseases may not actually be illnesses—at least not in every case. What we call a disease may reflect our personal ideology and subjective thoughts on certain

concepts such as reality, normality etc. After all, there is not, and cannot be, any single objective thought on these abstract terms. Things that are normalized by the society (such as abuse and pressure) may not be normal, while the reactions to or consequence of this stress (such as dissociation) may be totally normal and natural. An ambivalence resides in every human being, and it is normal to have multiple selves rather than one single centered self. Although, in some cases (such as Nina's situation), it would be hard to deal with these opposite forces (especially when they are pushed by external factors rather than experienced naturally). The subject would remain singular (or, even worse, would disappear), as in the case of Nina (and many protagonists of Lovecraft). The sense of insignificance creates stress and leads to desperation. Moreover, its meaning and definition change depending on the person or situation. Indeed, man's discovery of his insignificance in the vast universe may create a similar psychological effect as experiencing the feeling of imperfection, as seen in Nina's case. As Sapolsky states: "We saw that certain features dominated as psychologically stressful: a loss of control and of predictability within certain contexts, a loss of outlets for frustration, a loss of sources of support, a perception of life worsening" (Sapolsky 2004, 592). However, on closer inspection, we see that the element of control is the common ground of these two cases.

2.4 Conclusion

The focus of this this chapter was dissociation as a result of anxiety. To do this, I discussed the fictional case of Nina Sayers, who suffers from various mental disorders such as anxiety disorders, OCD, and dissociation, and thus gained a better understanding of the relationship between anxiety and dissociation. Also, I examined how the feeling of the insignificance varies and can be experienced in totally different situations. Finally, these analyses led me to investigate the concept of control.

[1] As Sapolsky states in his lecture on the limbic system at Stanford University: "Originally, the limbic system was not known as the 'limbic system' but instead had a name reflecting the fact that people started off studying it in rats. And you take a rat brain [and there is] the olfactory bulb. This is the olfactory system of a rodent brain […] The olfactory bulb and its projections are 40% of the brain of a rodent. And when people began to understand where the neurons in the olfactory bulb were sending their projections [… they] began to call this region the 'rhinencephalon', the 'nose-brain'. Because, this is what was processing all this […] great amount of olfactory information coming in. And this area that we now know […] as the 'limbic system' at the time was called the 'rhinencephalon' […] if you are a rat, there's not an emotion on earth that's not intertwined with olfaction" (Stanford 2010a).

[2] As Sapolsky states: "Some of the most convincing work implicating the amygdala in anxiety comes from brain-imaging studies. Put people in a scanner, flash various pictures, see what parts of the brain are activated in response to each. Show a scary face, and the amygdala lights up. Make the pictures subliminal – flash them for thousandths of a second, too fast to be consciously seen (and too fast to activate the visual cortex), and the amygdala lights up" (Sapolsky 2004, 636).

[3] "The sympathetic nervous system kicks into action during emergencies, or what you think are emergencies. It helps mediate vigilance, arousal, activation, mobilization" (Sapolsky 2004, 58).

[4] "Just as there are different types of memory, there are different areas of the brain involved in memory storage and retrieval. One critical site is the cortex, the vast and convoluted surface of the brain. Another is a region tucked just underneath part of the cortex, called the hippocampus" (Sapolsky 2004, 406).

[5] "Two hormones vital to the stress-response, as already noted, are epinephrine and norephinephrine, released by the sympathetic nervous system. Another important class of hormones in the response to stress are called glucocorticoids" (Sapolsky 2004, 73).

[6] Or as the article "Dissociation and Symptom Dimensions of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: A Replication Study" suggests: "A number of previous reports have suggested that OCD might be associated with memory-related problems […] Concerning obsessive-compulsive symptoms, it is discussed that compulsive checking in particular is associated with impaired reality monitoring (which refers to the capacity to discriminate between memories of events that really happened and memories of events that were only imagined) […] Low confidence in memory might be seen as an expression of perfectionism in some patients with OCD, meaning that they wish to have a perfect memory (and are therefore dissatisfied with their memory)" (Rufer et al. 2006, 148).

[7] Deleuze and Guattari's approach to schizophrenia is almost metaphorical and emphasize the mistake of oversimplifying such complex disorders by labeling them. They don't try to blame the society nor to normalize or to justify such a condition. As they state: "When we say that schizophrenia is our characteristic malady, the malady of our era, we do not merely mean to say that modern life drives people mad. It is not a question of a way of life, but a process of production" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 34).

[8] At this point it would be better to add the thoughts of Sapolsky regarding the issue, as a neurobiologist. According to him the condition is totally the opposite, as he states in his lecture about schizophrenia at Stanford University: "Back in the 1960s, when all sorts of laudable things happened along certain cultural lines, there amid that was one horrifically damaging idiotic thing that emerged in psychiatry at the time, which was a minority view in psychiatry, a lunatic fringe view, that, basically, schizophrenia is not so bad. Schizophrenia has all sorts of hidden blessings. And soon, it had frameworks of things like schizophrenia is the disease of being healthy in a crazy world. Schizophrenia is the disease of having insights into life that other people cannot […] This is not a disease of hidden compensations and more insight into the world. This is one of the most horrific ways that biology can go wrong" (Stanford 2010b, pt. 42:43-44:58).

[9] *Swan Lake* has many different endings. See: https://pascb.com/ballet-lessons-swan-lake/.

[10] "While the majority of hallucinations reported in primary psychotic disorders are auditory, they may also be visual, olfactory, tactile, or gustatory" (Teeple, Caplan, and Stern 2009, 27). Though Moskowitz claims: "auditory verbal hallucinations or voices (and some passivity phenomena such as thought withdrawal or insertion) should, on the balance of the evidence, be considered dissociative rather than psychotic in nature" (Moskowitz 2011a).

[11] Another type of "delusion" can be seen in major depression as well, as Sapolsky suggests: "In a subset of such patients, the sense of grief and guilt can take on the quality of a delusion. By this, I do not mean the thought-disordered delusions of schizophrenics; instead, delusional thinking in depressives is of the sort where facts are distorted, over- or underinterpreted to the point where one must conclude that things are terrible and getting worse, hopeless" (Sapolsky 2004, 539).

[12] For the definition see: https://www.britannica.com/art/fouette-en-tournant.

[13] There are different ideas regarding the behavior of the director, Thomas, although in the article I considered it as an abuse. As Julie Sexeny comments: "He reframes her notion of perfection to include letting go and the value of surprise. But when he suddenly kisses her and she bites him in return, it is unclear what to make

of this. Is this an abuse of authority? Is he, like her mother, crossing boundaries in order to control her? Or does he cross a boundary with her precisely in order to test her ability to draw a line between them?" (Sexeny 2015, 53).

[14] In various scenes the audience witnesses the problematic and pathological relationship between Nina and her mother. As Julie Sexeny states: "Nina's control of her own self—especially her body—is reflected in the control her mother (Barbara Hershey) exerts over her. Even though she is a young adult, her mother wakes her and puts her to bed, feeds and dresses her, cuts her nails and surveys her body for any signs that she has cut or scratched herself" (Sexeny 2015, 53).

3 COVID-19, ANXIETY AND COSMIC HORROR

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Considering the current global situation and its uncanny connection to Lovecraftian horror, I would like to dedicate this chapter to the psychological outcomes of COVID-19 and try to interpret them through a Lovecraftian point of view. In this chapter my main aim will be to draw attention to the common elements between the sensation that arouses Lovecraft's anxiety writings and the psychological impact of COVID on our daily lives. In order to better understand the nature of a pandemic and its neurobiological impact on the people, I have taken two online courses, "Human Behavioral Biology" given by the Stanford University professor Robert Sapolsky and "Understanding the Brain: The Neurobiology of Everyday Life" (Mason 2020a) given by the University of Chicago professor Peggy Mason. Moreover, I conducted an interview with Prof. Mason[1] specifically for this chapter in which we discussed Lovecraftian horror, fear of the unknown, anxiety and COVID. The main aim of the interview was to discuss some basic concepts that we see in Lovecraft's narratives such as fear, unknown and madness from the point of view of a neurobiologist, as well as to discuss COVID and anxiety. Another interview I made was with clinical psychologist Ceren Koç,[2] who is a part-time lecturer at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, and works as a psychotherapist at Mentha Psychotherapy and Psychiatry, Istanbul. The aim of this interview was to understand the patient profile and common psychological disorders during this pandemic as well as to discuss the connection between the fear of the unknown and COVID. In this sense, this chapter gathers people and ideas from different disciplines and professions, to better understand people's stress responses, nature of a pandemic and the source of the anxiety in Lovecraft's narratives.

As mentioned before, Lovecraftian horror basically deals with the concept of the unknown and our relationship with it. According to him:

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft 2013, 6)

One may claim that COVID and its psychological effects on people are indeed very Lovecraftian as they fulfill almost all the requirements of the cosmic horror genre: the element of the unknown, the loss of control, a sense of chaos, a sense of desperation against something greater and much more powerful than us. In this chapter, each of these elements will be analyzed while comparing and contrasting them with the effects and nature of a pandemic. Especially the concept of the unknown and its link to loss of control will be investigated as one of the most important common elements that we see in the psychological impacts of COVID and Lovecraftian horror. Through COVID, we witness how everything can easily turn upside down and see that we don't have any control over anything although we like to think we have. In the same way, in Lovecraft's tales we usually see how the rational character confronts with something way greater than himself which totally breaks or violates his sense of reality as well as his sense of control over the world he "knows" and sinks into despair and, finally, loses his mind. Therefore, all these similarities make it inevitable to discuss whether we are now living a Lovecraftian period or not. Moreover, another important point is to understand, once again, that Lovecraft's narratives are not mere fiction with supernatural elements but represent writer's own anxieties, fears, and psychosis.

This dissertation has a comparative approach especially in this chapter, as it will analyze various psychological and neurobiological approaches to better understand Lovecraft's works.

As explained in the first chapter, the reason I prefer to refer to Lovecraft's narratives as "anxiety narratives" is to emphasize the nature of his stories, which are not mere products of his immense imagination but actually constitute an encoded version of his own mental condition. Besides, by comparing his works with the ongoing situation, it is possible to notice the fact that his cosmic anxiety can be experienced in real life when confronted with an extraordinary situation.

3.2 THE UNKNOWN AND COVID

The concept of the unknown, its role in Lovecraft's narratives and its connection with anxiety were all briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. Now we can try to understand why Lovecraft was almost obsessed with the unknown and what would be the connection between the unknown and COVID. Comparing and contrasting Lovecraft's thoughts with today's neurobiological and psychological ideas gives us considerable insight about the concept of the unknown as well as allowing us to discuss the accuracy of Lovecraft's point of view. In his essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," Lovecraft starts by stating: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft 2013, 1). This famous line can be considered as the core of Lovecraft's philosophy. As he elaborates his idea, we see that his thoughts on the unknown are not totally subjective, but they have a rather evolutionary basis. As he continues:

> The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part. The phenomenon of dreaming likewise helped to build up the notion of an unreal or spiritual world; and in general, all the conditions of savage dawn-life so strongly conduced toward a feeling of the supernatural, that we need not wonder at the thoroughness with which man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition. (2–3)

Today, Lovecraft's theories on the fear of the unknown have already been accepted by the scientists, as we can see in R. Nicholas Carleton's article "Fear of the Unknown: One Fear to Rule Them All":

> Perhaps the earliest direct written reference to FOTU as the fundamental fear came from Lovecraft in 1927: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." The quote remains relevant, with colloquialisms referencing not knowing as the worst part of distressing situations. FOTU tautologically does not require *a priori* learning; indeed, the first thing that *could* be feared would be "the perceived absence of information at any level of consciousness" […] FOTU logically fits within evolutionary psychology models […] Enough fear to approach unknowns with caution (i.e., treating unknowns as potential threats) would be adaptive, so long as the intensity did not compromise survival activities (e.g., seeking food, shelter, mates). Accordingly, evolution should have produced a selection bias for assessing unknowns as likely threatening and therein BIS activating, but still potentially beneficial. (Carleton 2016, 11–12)

The reason Lovecraftian horror separates itself from the typical examples of the horror fiction and "disturbs" the reader in a different way might be because of its evolutionary roots. The only thing Lovecraftian horror does is to manipulate and provoke our inherited fears. This very simple yet highly effective technique makes Lovecraft a unique horror writer. All he does is to let the people confront their own fears inherited from our ancestors. He scares us with our own imagination and creates anxiety in the reader rather than mere fear or disgust, and this makes him a timeless writer. As the author comments in his essay:

> Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse. With this foundation, no one need wonder at the existence of a literature of cosmic fear. It has always existed, and always will exist. (Lovecraft 2013, 4)

Today, we know that the fear of darkness (which has the same connotation as the fear of the unknown), is also hereditary, as discussed in *Fear of Darkness, the Full Moon and the Nocturnal Ecology of African Lions*:

> Attacks by man-eating predators commonly occur at night, and nocturnal species typically alter their behavior according to levels of moonlight. Our innate fear of darkness has long been considered an adaptation to the risk of nocturnal predation, yet the bright nights of the full moon are associated with widespread superstitions and persistent fallacies about human pathology. (Packer et al. 2011, 1)

Clearly, the fear has always been one of the strongest and most dominant emotions of human beings since we need it in order to survive. As Prof. Mason commented during our interview: "Fear is a very fundamental and useful emotion and it is an emotion of survival […] There are places in the brain that are more important than others to the expression of fear. It is going to take over your brain, it is an alarm signal. It is a very dominating emotion"[3] (Mason 2020b). However, in modern life, one may claim that the fear of the unknown and various phobias and anxieties are actually the evolved versions of once a vital instinct. Clearly, it is possible to activate a stress-response through self-generated stressors. Imagination might be the key word to understand this phenomenon. Therefore, another question might be about man's capacity to self-sabotage by activating the mentioned stress-response through a vivid imagination. As Sapolsky states:

> When we get into a physiological uproar and activate the stress-response for no reason at all, or over something we cannot do anything about, we call it things like "anxiety," "neurosis," "paranoia," or "needless hostility." Thus, the stress-response can be mobilized not only in response to physical and psychological insults, but also in expectation of them. It is this generality of the stress-response that is the most surprising—a physiological system activated not only by all sorts of physical disasters but by just thinking about them as well. (Sapolsky 2004, 29)

Once again, the connection between imagination and anxiety can be clearly seen and therefore it is pretty understandable why Lovecraft's narratives have a profound impact on the reader. It is also obvious that the unknown is one of the most anxiety-generating concepts for human beings. As Prof. Mason said:

> The thing about the unknown is that, the only thing that is known is in the past. The present is not known and the future is not known and you could argue that

> the entire point of the brain is to predict the future; so, it is not you were afraid of the unknown, it is that you were mired in it. And what we do is we create this fantasy that the next moment in time is not unknown; though we know what is going to happen. Every trivial action that you make depends on a complete belief in the next moment in time. (Mason 2020b)

Mason's idea about the unknown brings us to another level. The fear of the unknown has a logic and has evolutionary roots; the unknown represents potential danger, so it is very normal that it generates various emotions such as fear and anxiety. However, the reason we feel anxious might also derive from the fact that we consciously or unconsciously know that we are mired in the unknown, as Mason states. This might explain the nihilistic tone in Lovecraftian horror. The fact that we are destined to live constantly in a pit of unknown creates an unbearable sense of anxiety and must have been even more difficult for an overly sensitive mind like that of Lovecraft. This could be one of the reasons of his breakdown and psychological problems. Mason mentioned the "fantasy" we need to create in order not to lose our sanity while living. But what would happen if we cannot establish this very basic illusion? Probably we would stay in a constant loop of anxiety. It is not possible to be sure whether one of the reasons of Lovecraft's mental problems or his nervous breakdown might have originated from his incapacity to create the necessary fantasy to deal with the unknown. As stated by S.T. Joshi in his book, *I am Providence: The Life and Times of H. P. Lovecraft*: "Lovecraft is very reticent about the causes or sources of what we can only regard as a full-fledged nervous breakdown in the summer of 1908. Beyond the mere fact of its occurrence, we know little" (Joshi 2013, 185). Still, an account given by Lovecraft himself might help us to understand the details of his psychological condition:

> Many times in my youth I was so exhausted by the sheer burden of consciousness & mental & physical activity that I had to drop out of school for a greater or lesser period & take a complete rest free from all responsibilities; & when I was 18 I suffered such a breakdown that I had to forego college. In those days I could hardly bear to see or speak to anyone, & liked to shut out the world by pulling down dark shades & using artificial light. (quoted in Joshi 2013, 188)

While it is not possible to know for sure the real reason of Lovecraft's mental problems, it is possible to argue that the events he experienced during his lifetime, as well as his thought patterns, might have provoked his obsession with the unknown. It is already known that both of Lovecraft's parents suffered from mental illnesses and died in Butler Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island.[4] Seeing his own parents' condition, along with his own poor mental health, must have deepened Lovecraft's feeling of being in a continuous state of the unknown, that is a preoccupation about going mad sometime in the future. Or, it might be the other way around, as Manson stated: "It is not a fear of an unknown, it is a fear of something you think you know" (Mason 2020b). We may argue that not knowing anything can be equally overwhelming as knowing something but not being able to do anything about it. Or maybe in Lovecraft's case everything was unknown and known at the same time; considering his upbringing, environment, family history as well as his own psychological problems, he was probably aware of the fact that there was a big chance that he might end up just like his parents. It was something he "knew." What was unknown to him was when it would happen. Once again, we analyze an anxiety regarding the future and see a person who simply cannot continue living because of "too much" self-awareness. As Joshi commented:

> Lovecraft reports that "I didn't inherit a very good set of nerves, since near relatives on both sides of my ancestry were prone to headaches, nerve-exhaustion, and breakdowns." He goes on to cite the case of his grandfather (who had "frightful blind headaches"), his mother (who "could run him a close second"), and his father, whom at the time of the writing of this letter (1931) Lovecraft still believed to be affected by "paralysis" from overstrain. Then he adds: "My own headaches and nervous irritability and exhaustion-tendency began as early as my existence itself—I, too, was an early bottle baby with unexplained miseries and meagre nutriment-assimilative capacities…" (Joshi 2013, 97)

Lovecraft's life and mental condition give us a clue about his obsession with the unknown. However, as mentioned before, his approach to unknown and his anxieties are more complicated and multi-layered than a simple phobia. His narratives are a mixture of the

representation of his mental condition and the inherited collective fear of human beings; a mixture of the known and the unknown. However, both situations are equally anxiety-generating.

Understanding the concept of the unknown and its representation in Lovecraft's narratives can help us better understand the connection between the unknown and COVID. As suggested before, there seems to be an uncanny link between Lovecraftian anxiety and our emotions while living with a global pandemic. Moreover, during the pandemic, those who are more sensitive to uncertainty seem to react just like a typical character from Lovecraft's narratives. As stated in *The COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome Scale: Development and Psychometric Properties*:

> The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been with us since the end of 2019 and has brought profound changes to the way we live. These changes seem to have led to a surge of pandemic-related psychological distress including fear, anxiety, perceived threat, and stress […] There is a wide literature base that has shown that those suffering from pandemic-related psychological distress tend to exhibit elevated levels of post-traumatic stress, general stress, anxiety, health anxiety, and suicidality which may last well beyond the course of the pandemic. (Nikčević and Spada 2020, 1–2)

Whether a pandemic can cause permanent psychological damages was one of the questions that I asked both to Mason and Koç. Mason replied:

> What are the long-term effects of COVID, we don't know […] and then we don't know how people are reacting to this incredible upheaval in the way that we live which is in my lifetime unparalleled. 9/11 was a big deal in the U.S. and this is way more invasive. (Mason 2020b)

Koç remarked:

> Depression and anxiety may leave a mark. Economic recovery will also take time which would make the depression last longer. There may be permanent changes in social habits as well as changes in professional life […] But we shouldn't forget the fact that human beings are adaptive species. There may be permanent impacts but I believe, in time, we will adapt to the new normal. (Koç 2020)

These three statements show that the pandemic indeed has a psychological impact on people and may have long-term effects on certain individuals, although it is not possible to give an exact response yet. However, we can still make a comparison between Lovecraft's characters' reactions when they confront something unknown and menacing, and people's real-life reaction against COVID.

For instance, when we look at one of Lovecraft's most famous narratives, "The Color Out of Space," we see some similar elements. Donald R. Burleson summarizes the story as "[a] darkly atmospheric tale treating of the slow and morbid demise of a farm family on whose land a meteor has fallen, a meteor spreading a kind of alien poison that scintillates with a bizarre color not of the familiar spectrum" (Burleson 2009, 106). The narrator tries to discover what actually happened in the mentioned barren land, talking to an old man named Ammi Pierce who "relates the story of the meteor that fell on the Nahum Gardner place and spread the 'grey brittle death.' According to Pierce, the Gardner family gradually came to ruin, mentally and physically, after the meteor lodged in the ground beside the well" (106). The description and the effects of the meteor resemble a kind of illness or a disaster that was not known or heard before, and damages everything it interacts. The meteor is described as a totally alien entity, as commented by Joshi: "Scientists […] who come to examine the object find that its properties are of the most bizarre sort: the substance refuses to grow cool, displays shining bands on a spectroscope that had never been seen before, and fails to react to conventional solvents applied to it" (Joshi 2013, 901). It is possible to compare the meteor, which is both novel and detrimental, with COVID which is a new pathogen and is similarly harmful both to physical and mental health.[5] Joshi summarizes some of the negative impacts of the meteor:

> Nahum's harvest of apples and pears, though unprecedently huge in size, proves unfit to eat; plants and animals with peculiar mutations are seen; Nahum's cows start giving bad milk. Then Nahum's wife Nabby goes mad, 'screaming about things in the air which she could not describe'; she is locked in an upstairs room. Soon all the vegetation starts to crumble to a greyish powder. Nahum's son Thaddeus goes mad after a visit to the well, and his other sons Merwin and

> Zenas also break down. Then there is a period of days when Nahum is not seen or heard from. Ammi […] finds that the worst has happened: Nahum himself has snapped, and he can only utter confused fragments. (901-2)

So, the narrative deals with an unknown and harmful entity, which both damages the environment and affects people physically and mentally. Moreover, all the family members who somehow interacted with the "meteor" lost their minds. Although not as dramatic as in the story of Lovecraft, the serious psychological impacts of COVID cannot be ignored. The most common psychological impacts of the pandemic, as mentioned before, are depression and anxiety. As it is summarized on the website of WHO:

> In public mental health terms, the main psychological impact to date is elevated rates of stress or anxiety. But as new measures and impacts are introduced—especially quarantine and its effects on many people's usual activities, routines or livelihoods—levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behavior are also expected to rise. (World Health Organization 2020)

Another important similarity between the destructive unknown entity, the color, (or the general concept of the unknown in most of Lovecraft's narratives) and COVID is their very natures. Both are obviously harmful, new, and mostly unknown. All these properties have a negative connotation, but they are not inherently evil. As Joshi comments on the nature of the meteorite:

> To be sure, the meteorite causes great destruction […] but perhaps this is an inevitable product of the mingling of our world and its own. In order for an animate being to be morally culpable of "evil," it must be conscious that it is doing what is regarded as evil; but who can say whether the entities in "The Color out of Space" are conscious at all? (Joshi 2013, 904)

Although a fictional meteorite and a real-life virus are totally different from each other, their structures are more or less the same. Both the sensation they arouse and the physical and emotional impact they cause are similar while we cannot talk about evil. Even so, the consequences are still negative. As Joshi states:

> But Lovecraft has rendered the plight of the Gardner family inexpressibly poignant and tragic, so that although we cannot "blame" the meteorite for causing their deaths, we still experience a tremendous sense of sorrow mingled with horror at their fate. It is not merely that they have been physically destroyed; the meteorite has also beaten down their minds and wills, so that they are unable to escape its effects. (905)

It is interesting to see how the reader feels as if she/he witnesses a disease or a natural disaster that affects his/her loved ones. Again, we see how similar the natures of COVID and the fictional meteorite are. Moreover, the example of meteorite brings us to another very common theme in Lovecraft's tales which is the theme of indifference. Just like a novel virus in real life, the unknown entities in Lovecraft's narratives are not disturbing because they are evil; they are menacing because they are indifferent. There is no rational explanation regarding their aims or natures, and for this reason they generate anxiety. Lovecraft's characters cannot deal with the alien situation, nor do they fight back simply because of a lack of motive on the part of the "enemy." Knowing whether a certain thing or a situation is good or evil relieves us as it makes us comprehend the circumstance and act accordingly. In this sense, confronting with something evil is better than confronting with something unknown, uncertain or without any motive. I will discuss the concept of indifference once I analyze the theme of control and chaos but now, let's take a look at an account of a family member of a COVID victim, which summarizes the mentioned ideas. The account was made by Fiana Tulip after Trump himself caught COVID. The statements of Tulip, who has lost her mother because of COVID, were published by *People* as follows:

> Tulip said her "thoughts are with everyone who has lost a loved one to this virus" and added that COVID-19 "doesn't care about your politics." "It doesn't care about your religion, it doesn't care if you trust the scientists or the epidemiologists," she said. "It doesn't care if you are the president of the United States." (Neumann 2020)

This account is important for my argument since it points to the indifferent nature of disease and emphasizes on our (or our titles') insignificance. This very down to earth statement about a tragic real-life situation shares a lot in common with Lovecraft's cosmic horror.

3.3 The Sense of Control and COVID

The theme of control and the concept of indifference are very related to each other. Actually, they simply complement each other; the indifference and the unknown certainly affect our sense of control. Besides, these concepts constitute another common ground between Lovecraftian horror and COVID. As mentioned earlier, we—as-human beings—would prefer to foresee things and understand the motives of a certain situation in order to feel the mentioned sense of control. However, confronting with something unknown or indifferent prevents us from establishing the necessary illusion, thus, generates panic and anxiety. For this reason, I wondered whether the illusion of control is something vital for human brain to survive. Prof. Mason replied my question, saying:

> I think it is vital for any brain to survive. I don't think we [humans] are special case. I don't find it very interesting to look for human exceptionalism. I think there is a huge evolutionary advantage to craving […] So, everything that is in us, is in us because one way or another it served us well […] Everything, including all of those emotions evolved, they had/has some advantage. (Mason 2020b)

Koç, on the other hand, states:

> Certainty comforts people, we want clearness. Especially it comforts people when there is an end date for some negative situation. Given that people have tendency to focus more on the result rather than the process, certainty and control make them relaxed […] Uncertainty always creates anxiety […] We can't cope with a problem which we can't control. One cannot fight if he/she doesn't really know his/her enemy. One determines his/her strategy knowing the enemy's characteristics. (Koç 2020)

It is possible to argue that illusion of control is something necessary and important in order to be able to survive mentally and physically. COVID, just like the meteorite itself in

Lovecraft's story, is not something evil per se. Yet, it still causes physical and psychological damage on the people. Moreover, as mentioned before, COVID might actually be more terrifying and threatening because of this very "vagueness." It sounds counterintuitive but evil doesn't cause anxiety. Evil causes other emotions such as anger, desire of revenge or fear but not necessarily anxiety. For this reason, Lovecraft's characters feel anxiety; the fictitious world Lovecraft created, his cosmic "horror" is not actually evil; it is indifferent. As Joshi cites one of Lovecraft's letters, where he states:

> I am not a pessimist but an indifferentist—that is, I don't make the mistake of thinking that the resultant of the natural forces surrounding and governing organic life will have any connection with the wishes or tastes of any part of that organic life-process. Pessimists are just as illogical as optimists; insomuch as both envisage the aims of mankind as unified, and as having a direct relationship (either of frustration or of fulfilment) to the inevitable flow of terrestrial motivation and events. (quoted in Joshi 2013, 1043)

Lovecraft's belief and claims are painfully logical although it would be very hard to mentally survive and act accordingly in this kind of world. As human beings, we need to interact with life. We need to make an action and see its reaction. It is important not only because of the necessity of a sense of control but also to establish a sense of reality. All these thoughts lead us to the question of good and evil. Just like many other man-made creations, opposite concepts and moral values have been established by human beings for human beings, to guide as well as to comfort them in the vast and unknown universe. Therefore, naming or categorizing things is necessary for us. Giving names to various complicated things makes them concrete and thus, serves to comfort us. However, as Lovecraft states, the reality is the other way around: "Value is wholly relative, and the very idea of such a thing as meaning postulates a symmetrical relation to something else. No one thing, cosmically speaking, can be either good or evil, beautiful or unbeautiful; for entity is simply entity" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 1044). Still, he develops a coping mechanism in order to deal with such an indifferent universe. As he states: "I follow this acceptance [of traditional folkways] purely for my own personal pleasure—because I would

feel lost in a limitless and impersonal cosmos if I had no way of thinking of myself but as a dissociated and independent point" (Lovecraft, quoted in Joshi 2013, 1045). He also claims: "Tradition means nothing cosmically, but it means everything locally & pragmatically because we have nothing else to shield us from a devastating sense of 'lostness' in endless time & space" (Lovecraft in Joshi 2013, 1045-46). Another—yet complementary—reason the psychological impacts of both COVID and cosmic horror are so similar is that they both increase our level of sensitivity and alertness. Lovecraft's indifferentist view and its representation in his narratives allows us to see the world from a totally different perspective and, thus, generate intense feelings that are unusual to us. It challenges our established beliefs about the universe and our position in it; thus, it invades our comfort zone. His narratives show what would happen when we confront chaos all of a sudden. They question whether the world we see is as stable and simple as we want to believe, with certain rules or values we established, or does it have its own indifferent agenda. And if the correct answer is the second one, then what would happen if it showed us a glimpse of its indifference? In simplest terms, it means chaos for people. As a novel virus that brought total chaos to the world, we can consider COVID an example of nature's indifference as well. It temporarily (or maybe in some respects, permanently) changed our points of view towards life and made us experience new and frightening feelings during this process. Maybe, to a certain extent, the pandemic obliged us to adopt Lovecraft's painful perspective on the universe. And in order to deal with it, we are advised to develop some coping mechanisms as Lovecraft did. In the article, "Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of Surgeons and Coping Strategies,"[6] positive lifestyle behaviors and mindfulness are given as examples of coping strategies:

> Capitalizing on coping strategies akin to positive lifestyle behaviors can vastly improve mental health well-being. Eating healthy food, engaging in regular physical activity, practicing good sleep hygiene where possible, and guaranteeing sufficient rest between shifts have been recommended by the World Health Organization […] In addition to positive lifestyle changes, compliance with mindfulness-based programs have been shown to reduce

> symptoms of burnout in doctors […] Similarly, research has shown that specific relaxation techniques (i.e., progressive muscle relaxation) based on elements in mindfulness has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety and promote sleep quality in patients with COVID-19. (Balasubramanian et al. 2020, 1641)

Coping mechanisms are crucial in any anxiety-generating situation in order to re-establish the sense of control. Approaches or ideas such as "you can't control the others/other things, but you can control yourself" are not new but still effective tools to continue living with the mentioned illusion of control. Although we know that a pandemic and a philosophy (cosmicism) are not the same thing (as the first one being a global and inevitable disaster or crisis and the second one being a personal preference or ideology), both of them generate the same kind of feelings and reactions. As mentioned before, they both have the capacity to change our perspective on the world and on ourselves, along with creating anxiety, fear, and stress and obliging us to develop new coping mechanisms. In this sense, their very essence somehow seems to share interesting similarities. This may be because in both cases we deal with an unknown matter. As Lovecraft states:

> Man's relations to man do not captive my fancy. It is man's relation to the cosmos—to the unknown—which alone arouses in me the spark of creative imagination. The humanocentric pose is impossible to me, for I cannot acquire the primitive myopia which magnifies the earth and ignores the background.[7] (quoted in Joshi 2013, 686)

As Joshi comments on Lovecraft's lines above: "This is Lovecraft's first *explicit* expression of the view he would later call 'cosmicism.'" (686). Indeed, Lovecraft perfectly sums up his perspective on the universe. In his equation an alien entity is required. This explains the reason we can be able to talk about the similarities between the two-seemingly-different concepts. COVID is nothing but the painful interaction between man and a novel virus, which was totally alien and unknown to us until now,[8] just like Lovecraft's characters' encounter with an extraterrestrial or totally alien entity. Anything alien or unknown is naturally menacing to us. And only after such an interaction (between man and the alien), we can feel as we feel right

now during a pandemic; anxious, fearful, depressed, desperate, etc. And all these feelings and reactions, as natural outcomes of an encounter with the unknown, lead both us and the characters of Lovecraft to adopt a nihilistic attitude towards life. Once we see how powerless, desperate, and small we actually are, our points of view change. Joshi defines the concept of cosmicism as follows:

> Cosmicism is at once a metaphysical position (an awareness of the vastness of the universe in both space and time), an ethical position (an awareness of the insignificance of human beings within the realm of the universe), and an aesthetic position (a literary expression of this insignificance, to be affected by the minimizing of human character and the display of the titanic gulfs of space and time). (686)

If not a conscious ideological choice, one needs to experience an extreme situation in order to adopt such a point of view. It seems that a pandemic is pretty effective to generate some kind of skepticism towards life by questioning very basic elements about our position in life. The unknown violates our sense of control and makes us experience various emotions such as anxiety, shock, and fear. All these feelings make us think over the concepts such as the fragility of life and insignificance and smallness of people, as mentioned before. After all this process we start questioning things that we have not questioned (or did not need to question) before. Finally, all these steps lead us to chaos and desperation.

3.4 Chaos, Desperation and COVID

In the last step, Lovecraft's characters confront a total chaos that makes them feel totally desperate, broken or defeated and sometimes even causes them to lose their minds or lives. A very similar situation can be seen in real life when confronting COVID. As it was stated in *Societal Pandemic Burnout: A COVID Legacy*:

> Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. Burnout in the course of dealing with a pandemic can make you feel emotionally drained and unable to function in the

> context of many aspects of life. Burnout can lower your motivation and cause you to feel helpless, hopeless, and resentful. (Queen and Harding 2020, 873)

Once again, we are dealing with the question of the fragility of the human mind. Actually, the famous first paragraph of one of Lovecraft's most popular stories, "The Call of Cthulhu," perfectly sums up Lovecraft's thoughts on the nature of human mind and its relationship with the unknown:

> 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 2014, 381)

In my interview with Mason, another question I asked was whether the human mind is as fragile as Lovecraft claimed. She stated: "Personally, I do think we walk on a razor edge of psychological health. I could be wrong about that but I think that everyone falls of that razor edge every once in a while […] So personally, I think it's the much bigger challenge than physiological maintenance" (Mason 2020b). As mentioned earlier, both cosmicism and a real-life pandemic share a common ground as they both have psychological impacts on the individuals as well as a capacity to modify or manipulate our established beliefs and ideologies. For this reason, we could be able to compare and contrast these two concepts and see that they both create almost the same mental process; starting with a feeling of shock after confronting with something unknown which damages our sense of control and eventually leads us to desperation or "burnout." The symptomatic similarities exist in the last phase as well, as the mentioned burnout can be seen as something Lovecraft's characters experience after they confront an alien situation. Or simply adopting the philosophy of cosmicism can make us experience such an emotional phenomenon, sometimes accompanied by nihilistic thoughts. A (cosmic) indifferentist point of view is frequently seen in Lovecraft's personal writings as well:

> Each person lives in his own world of values, and can obviously (except for a few generalities based on essential similarities in human nature) speak only for himself when he calls this thing "silly and irrelevant" and that thing "vital and significant," as the case may be. We are all meaningless atoms adrift in the void. (quoted in Joshi 2013, 1044)

Nihilism and existential anxiety and fear can be seen during the pandemic as it was remarked in *The Self and Its World: A Neuro-Ecological and Temporo-Spatial Account of Existential Fear*:

> The pandemic of COVID-19 deeply affects our sense of self and its spatio-temporal neuronal dynamics providing the prerequisites for the manifestation of fear and existential anxiety, thus disrupting the brain-world relation with significant repercussions on our psyche and on our daily lives. (Scalabrini and Mucci 2020, 46)

Even though they seem similar, or almost the same, there are considerable differences between nihilism and cosmic horror. What's important for this last part of the third chapter is to understand the elements that would cause a sense of desperation; a highly frequent emotion which both exists in Lovecraft's tales and now during the pandemic. Feeling desperate has a lot to do with the sense of control. As mentioned before, not feeling "in control" creates anxiety. However, anxiety is not the only reaction to uncertainty, and it can be accompanied by or eventually turn into desperation or burnout. A pandemic, disaster or other extreme or unknown situation creates chaos because of lack of information, methods, or resources to deal with such a condition. The chaos arrives when the control collapses, which leads us to the previously mentioned chain of events and mental states. When it lasts for a long time, burnout becomes inevitable as a result of continuous anxiety and hopelessness. As Yıldırım and Solmaz state:

> The construct of burnout is defined as a psychological syndrome caused by a prolonged response to interpersonal stressors […] Literature typically demonstrates that individual characteristics and contextual factors are closely related to the development of burnout. Within the wider literature, burnout has been found to be associated with a wide range of health, mental health, and well-being indicators such as increased anxiety, depression, sleep problems, alcohol consumption, impaired memory, and neck and back pain. Burnout is also related to lower motivation and productivity, job dissatisfaction, and future sick leave and mental and behavioral disorders. (Yıldırım and Solmaz 2020, 2)

As mentioned earlier, in "The Color Out of Space" the unknown meteorite causes both physical and mental damage on the people. Its psychological impact continues even many years after the incident, as described in the narrative:

> They say the mental influences are very bad, too. Numbers went queer in the years after Nahum's taking, and always they lacked the power to get away. Then the stronger-minded folk all left the region, and only the foreigners tried to live in the crumbling old homesteads […] Their dreams at night, they protest, are very horrible in that grotesque country; and surely the very look of the dark realm is enough to stir a morbid fancy. (Lovecraft 2014, 659–60)

The reason we compare a fictional meteorite with a virus is because of a lack of information (or very limited information) about the nature or potential of these two entities, and the long-term psychological damage they can cause. As commented by Joshi:

> The key to the story, of course, is the anomalous meteorite. Is it—or the colored globulus inside it—animate in any sense we can recognize? Does it house a single entity or many entities? What are their physical properties? More significantly, what are their aims, goals, and motives? The fact that we can answer none of these questions very clearly is by no means a failing; indeed, this is exactly the source of terror in the tale. (Joshi 2013, 903)

As discussed before, any kind of unfamiliar, unknown, or unexpected event causes chaos and not being able to control this unknown situation may create anxiety, burnout, and even long-term mental disorders. As a person who suffered from depression and anxiety, Lovecraft could be able to portray the true nature of anxiety and its outcomes in a very realistic and successful way even though many of his tales include supernatural elements. In this sense it is important for us to understand what these supernatural elements stand for. Given that there is a huge symbolism in his narratives, deciphering all these symbols and hidden meanings can help us comprehend the anxiety narratives of Lovecraft. Indeed, what we basically see in Lovecraft's narratives is different faces of anxiety. Thanks to his profound imagination and insight, Lovecraft could be able to perfectly depict every aspect of fear and anxiety. The use of symbolism to define anxiety will be analyzed in the next chapter, however, we can conclude

this part by looking at the element of the meteorite in "The Color out of Space" for the last time. As explained before, the meteorite symbolizes anything unknown and dangerous for human beings although it is not necessarily evil per se. For this reason, its comparison with COVID is not irrelevant considering the meanings and effects of both entities. By choosing a meteorite—a totally unknown and indifferent entity, which seems to have its own system and nature—as the key element of his narrative, Lovecraft could be able to demonstrate human beings' relationship with the unknown. Using an extraterrestrial entity, he achieved to understand the nature of anxiety, its impact on the people and the aftermath. In this sense it is possible to see, once again, the way his stories reflect the reality, as well as the use of supernatural elements to depict very basic human emotions and mental disorders such as fear, anxiety, and depression. As Joshi remarks on the element of the meteorite:

> The chemical experiments performed on the object establish that It is physically unlike anything we know; and the utter absence of any sense of willful viciousness, or conventionalized "evil" in the object or the entities it contains similarly results in a psychological distancing from human or earthly standards. (Joshi 2013, 904)

These lines of Joshi sum up our argument on the nature of anxiety and its link with the unknown as well as its physical and psychological outcomes. In addition, he points out one of the most important elements of cosmic horror, which is the element of indifference.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to understand the similarities between the concept of cosmic horror and the ongoing global pandemic, gathering the thoughts from different disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, and neurobiology. More importantly, I tried to examine the nature of a pandemic and its psychological impacts on people and interpret them through a Lovecraftian point of view. After analyzing some basic concepts and themes of Lovecraft's anxiety writings such as fear of the unknown, existential anxiety, cosmic indifference, control, and madness, I

once again see that Lovecraftian horror is far from being a mere literary genre and can be actually applied and experienced in real life.

Interviewing two scholars from different fields and understanding their ideas on the fear of the unknown and anxiety definitely enriched my investigation and helped me to better understand the physical and psychological impacts of COVID, as well as to compare it with the philosophy of Lovecraft. Gathering the ideas of psychology, neurobiology, philosophy, and literature together was vital in order to fully comprehend the basis of Lovecraft's anxiety narratives which also demonstrate, once again, the genius of the author. I started by examining the nature of the fear of the unknown and understood its evolutionary basis as well as our perception of it, that we are consciously or unconsciously know that we are trapped in it, as Mason remarked. This perspective helped me interpret Lovecraft's nihilistic tone. Besides, understanding Lovecraft as a cosmic indifferentist as well as to investigate his mental condition and disorders were all essential to see what inspire him to create his art. Thus, we also see the true aspect of Lovecraft's writings, which are not actually horrific nor fictitious, but are perfect metaphorical depictions of his worldview. Knowing Lovecraft better allows me to compare and contrast his understanding of the world with our understanding of today's world of pandemic. Finally, I concluded that both cases are similar in psychological, philosophical and sociological contexts. As analyzed during this chapter, man's relationship with the unknown, anxiety, our need for control, burnout, fragility of human mind and coping mechanisms were some of the common elements between the two mentioned cases. All in all, it is possible to claim that the ongoing situation may indeed be Lovecraftian in many aspects and we can consider it a proof of the possibility of experiencing cosmicism in everyday life.

[1] Skype interview with Prof. Peggy Mason, September 3, 2020. See Appendix.
[2] Interview with Ceren Koç via email, October 13, 2020. See Appendix.
[3] As Sapolsky similarly states: "When we activate the stress-response out of fear of something that turns out to be real, we congratulate ourselves that this cognitive skill allows us to mobilize our defenses early. And

these anticipatory defenses can be quite protective, in that a lot of what the stress-response is about is preparative" (Sapolsky 2004, 29).

[4] "Butler Hospital was not a place for the treatment of ordinary physical maladies but was in fact an insane asylum" (Joshi 2013, 45).

[5] "A major difference between COVID-19 and influenza is that SARS-CoV-2 is a new pathogen and influenza is not. At the time of writing (May 2020), SARS-CoV-2 has triggered an immune response in over 5 million confirmed infections (and probably in many more), definitely too few to create anything close to herd immunity. Calculations using an estimated reproductive number (RO) for SARS-CoV-2 suggest that herd immunity would require at least 60% of the population to have protective immunity" (Van Damme et al. 2020, 5).

[6] Even if the article specifically discusses the mental health of the surgeons and their coping strategies, very similar coping strategies are advised to all people during the pandemic. In the website of World Health Organization, the infographic *Coping with Stress During the 2019-nCov Outbreak* advises: "If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle – including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends" (World Health Organization 2020). Also, various mindfulness exercises are advised to me by my psychotherapist to cope with stress during COVID.

[7] From H.P. Lovecraft's "In Defence of Dagon" essays (more specifically, from "The Defence Remains Open!"), published as a part of *Collected Essays, Volume 5: Philosophy*. (Lovecraft 2004)

[8] As we already know, other types of coronaviruses had already been seen in the past. As it was summarized in an article, "Bat Origin of Human Coronaviruses," from year 2015: "Bats have been recognized as the natural reservoirs of a large variety of viruses. Special attention has been paid to bat coronaviruses as the two emerging coronaviruses which have caused unexpected human disease outbreaks in the 21st century, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV), are suggested to be originated from bats" (Hu et al. 2015, 1). The article concludes by stating that: "Although the study of bat-borne coronaviruses has only started just about 10 years ago, the scientific community has already learnt a great deal of useful lessons which will be instrumental in mitigating, predicting, and preventing future zoonotic coronavirus outbreaks […] With human activity increasingly overlapping the habitats of bats, diseases outbreaks resulted from spillover of bat coronaviruses will continue to occur in the future despite the fact that direct transmission of bat coronaviruses to humans appears to be rare" (2015, 7). As it is clearly stated in the article, both the disease and the studies about it are pretty new even though COVID-19 was not the first coronavirus. Besides, COVID-19 can still be considered as totally new in the sense that it has originated the first global coronavirus pandemic.

4 TRAUMA, MADNESS, AND CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this chapter is to get to the bottom of the possible incidents that affected Lovecraft's life and shaped his literary philosophy, as well as to analyze their representations in his fiction. Since Lovecraft's traumas, breakdowns, mental problems, and family tragedies all played a crucial role in the formation of cosmicism, in the first part I will analyze these elements to better understand the connection between his personal life and philosophy. To do this, I will start by investigating the pathology of chorea minor, from which Lovecraft seemed to suffer during his childhood, concentrating on its neuropsychiatric symptoms and their connection to his nervous breakdowns. Then, I will analyze the impact of Lovecraft's family members' tragic deaths on the author's psychology. Finally, Lovecraft's relationship with his mother will be briefly discussed.

In the second part, Lovecraft's scientific interests and how these are reflected in his narratives will be examined. For this part, I also made an interview with Prof. David Wallace from the University of Pittsburgh, which helped me to see Lovecraft's ideas on the universe from a physicist's point of view. Prof. Wallace's opinions were important to understand and to compare different perspectives. Just like the previous chapters, this chapter will also have a multidisciplinary approach, using the ideas of physics, psychology, and philosophy. Indeed, Lovecraft's versatility obliges me to study different disciplines to fully understand what does cosmicism stand for. As S.T. Joshi states:

> How prototypical that it was not family ties, religious beliefs, or even—so far as the evidence of the above letter indicates—the urge to write that kept him from suicide, but scientific curiosity […] He was one of the most prodigious autodidacts in modern history, and he continued not merely to add to his store of knowledge to the end of his life but to revise his world view in light of that knowledge. (Joshi 2013, 147)

It is important to note that the aim of this chapter is not repeating the important events in Lovecraft's life or to make an emphasis on his vast store of knowledge but to understand how and why he interpreted and used all these elements to build his indifferentist perspective.

4.2 The Formation of Cosmicism

4.2.1 Lovecraft's Mental Health and Traumas

Throughout his life Lovecraft suffered from various mental disorders and neuropsychiatric problems and he was fully aware of his condition. He once commented on the symptoms he experienced during his childhood: "My own nervous state in childhood once produced a tendency inclining toward chorea, although not quite attaining that level. My face was full of unconscious & involuntary motions now & then—& the more I was urged to stop them, the more frequent they became" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 98). Joshi further comments:

> Lovecraft does not exactly date these chorea-like attacks, but context suggests that they occurred before the age of ten. All this led J. Vernon Shea to suspect that Lovecraft might actually have had chorea minor, a nervous ailment that 'manifests itself in uncontrollable facial tics and grimaces' but gradually dissipates by puberty. (98)

The reason I chose chorea minor as my starting point is because of its huge impact on Lovecraft's social and emotional life during his childhood and adolescence. Looking at his life and fiction, the effects of the chorea are clearly seen. Indeed, the neuropsychiatric symptoms of his chorea did not only affect his school performance but also contributed to his paranoia of becoming mad. But before continuing with the analysis, it would be better to take a deeper look at the disorder itself.

Chorea minor is not an independent disorder but is caused by a bacterial infection[1] and is linked to various psychiatric problems, as stated in "Neuropsychiatric Manifestations of Sydenham's Chorea: A Systematic Review":

> Neuropsychiatric symptoms are reported to be highly prevalent in individuals with Sydenham's chorea. Studies have focused on OCD, anxiety, mood disorders, psychotic features, tics, and ADHD. Some symptoms are not specific; for example, parents have described emotional liability, irritability, and regressive behavior. (Punukollu et al. 2016, 22)

Even if it is not possible to know whether Lovecraft's symptoms were entirely caused by chorea minor or to what degree was it the reason behind his troubles, some of the mentioned elements were indeed present in Lovecraft's case. As Joshi comments: "In an earlier letter Lovecraft stated that 'As an infant, I had been restless & prone to cry.' He refers to the effect of his maternal grandmother in correcting 'my increasingly boorish deportment—for my nervousness made me a very restless & uncontrollable child.'" (Joshi 2013, 97-8). Lovecraft's statements are in parallel with the above statements of the parents. However, there is still another ambiguous factor: it is not clear whether chorea minor was the reason—or partial reason—of Lovecraft's psychological state or if it was vice versa, as he believed.[2]

Lovecraft's poor school attendance and his inability to finish high school, again, support the idea that he indeed might have had chorea minor. As it is remarked in the article of Punukollu et al.:

> Sydenham's chorea causes a high burden of distress to patients and their families. Patients suffer from unpredictable periods of abnormal movements and behavior disorders, with missed school days and poor school performance causing a significant reduction in functionality. (Punukollu et al. 2016, 22)

Lovecraft had had four nervous breakdowns until he was 18: in 1898, 1900, 1906[3] and 1908. Moreover, in 1899 he suffered from irregular heart action[4] and fainting fits.[5] The first nervous breakdown occurred when he started going to school, while the last (and the worst) one occurred when he was in high school[6]. His dreams of going to the university were shattered

since he couldn't finish high school. As he stated: "My health did not permit me to go to the university—indeed, the steady application to high school gave me a sort of breakdown"[7] (quoted in Joshi 2013, 185), Again, Lovecraft seems to believe that the school was the reason of his breakdown. Although the school attendance seems to trigger something in Lovecraft,[8] the major reason that prevented him from finishing high school might be his chorea minor. Moreover, Lovecraft felt like an "alien" because of his inability to "function" properly, executing the most basic tasks of his age such as attending school regularly and entering a university.[9] Not knowing the exact reason of these "abnormalities" (although they were expected side effects of an illness rather than the products of an organic mental disorder) must have terrified him even more. This sense of alienation and lifelong fear of madness date back to his childhood and reflect themselves in his narratives, especially in the ones written during the high school years. His first short story, "The Beast in the Cave," can be read as an allegorical account of this panic. Written in 1905, the story is about a man who gets separated from his group and gets lost while touring a mammoth cave. Afterwards his torch burns out, he finds himself in total darkness and desperation. He cries for help only to attract the attention of a kind of beast. Thinking it must be a wild animal, he throws rocks towards the beast to protect himself. The creature collapses, the narrator escapes and, finally, meets with the guide. They go back to the place where the creature was wounded to examine it, only to find a dying man. "The Beast in the Cave" has many "Lovecraftian" elements like the fear of the unknown, paranoia and anxiety. The fear of the unknown not only derives from not knowing what the creature is, but also not knowing what will happen to the narrator. The panic intensifies when the torch fades: "Already my torch had begun to expire; soon I would be enveloped by the total and almost palpable blackness of the bowels of the earth" (Lovecraft 2014, 1). The darkness continues to be the antagonist of the story, as if it were the real danger: "The tension on my brain now became frightful. My disordered fancy conjured up hideous and fearsome shapes from the

sinister darkness that surrounded me, and that actually seemed to *press* upon my body" (3). The representation of darkness as something dangerous, unknown, sinister and, even, hallucinating reflects Lovecraft's mind as well as his confusion regarding his own mind. The beast's message, on the other hand, is clear: the result of being trapped in such a mind means transforming into an animal-like mad man. Lovecraft was afraid of becoming mad and this anxiety became a frequent theme in his stories, mostly represented through the rational narrator who loses his mind when confronts the "unknown."[10] As Joshi comments on the protagonist of the story: "Like many of Lovecraft's later protagonists, outward rationalism collapses in the face of the unknown" (Joshi 2013, 170). Having different neuropsychiatric symptoms but not knowing their exact reason clearly fed Lovecraft's—almost—innate anxiety.

Continuing with the theme of chorea, Joshi's comment below points to a connection between Lovecraft's neurological symptoms and his fourth breakdown:[11]

> Since we are generally left in the dark about the nature of this breakdown, we can work only on conjecture. We have two pieces of external evidence. One comes from Harry Brobst, who spoke to a woman who had gone to high school with Lovecraft: "She…described these terrible tics that he had—he'd be sitting in his seat and he'd suddenly up and jump—I think they referred to them as seizures. […] This certainly is a remarkable account, and it suggests that Lovecraft's chorea minor (if indeed he was afflicted with that disease) had not entirely worn off even by this time. (186)

Lovecraft's second story, "The Alchemist," which was written during the time of his fourth breakdown in 1908, is worth analyzing. Just like "The Beast in the Cave," this story also deals with the themes of the fear of the unknown and the inevitable end, but this time with more autobiographical elements and by adding his idea of the "cursed lineage." The narrator, Antoine, lives in a once-splendid old chateau of his ancestors. Just as in Lovecraft's own case, by the narrator's time, the chateau and the family have already lost their glory. Antoine never knows his parents and was raised by an old servant, Pierre. He narrates his lonely and isolated childhood as follows:

> I was an only child, and the lack of companionship which this fact entailed upon me was augmented by the strange care exercised by my aged guardian in excluding me from the society of the peasant children […] At the time, Pierre said that this restriction was imposed upon me because my noble birth placed me above association with such plebeian company. Now I know that its real object was to keep from my ears the idle tales of the dread curse upon our line. (Lovecraft 2014, 8)

The story not only reflects Lovecraft's loneliness as a child and the financial problems he and his family faced, but it also connects his isolation with the mentioned "curse." Antoine learns that the curse is that all his ancestors died at the age of thirty-two. The beginning of the curse dates back to the 13th century when Antoine's ancestor, Henri the Comte, kills a dark wizard named Michel Mauvais. The wizard's son, Charles Le Sorcier, curses him and his descendants giving them a life span of thirty-two years in revenge. The curse resembles a genetically transmitted disease to which the narrator decides to put an end by not having any children: "Upon one thing I was absolutely resolved. I should never wed, for since no other branches of my family were in existence, I might thus end the curse with myself"[12] (Lovecraft 2014, 10). Later Pierre dies, and Antoine waits for his end to come: "Thus was I left to ponder on myself as the only human creature within the great fortress, and in my utter solitude my mind began to cease its vain protest against the impending doom, to become almost reconciled to the fate which so many of my ancestors had met" (10–11). Looking at Lovecraft's life, it is not hard to associate "the impending doom" or "fate" with mental disorder that caused his parents to end up at the same psychiatric hospital. However, Antoine decides not to give up but to fight until the end: "In what strange form the curse should overtake me, I knew not; but I was resolved, at least, that it should not find me cowardly or a passive victim." At the end of the story Antoine succeeds in killing the "curse," who was actually Charles Le Sorcier.

Lovecraft gives "The Alchemist" a happy ending, with a protagonist who manages to avoid his "inevitable" end by taking necessary precautions and by fighting instead of escaping. However, the ending contrasts with the period in which the story was written since this was a

difficult year for Lovecraft, who was dealing with chorea symptoms and academic frustrations that led to his most serious nervous breakdown and fed his fear of madness. It is also worth emphasizing that with this story, Lovecraft reflects one of the most common precautions the people with mental disorders take, which is avoiding having children. As it is remarked in the article, "Prenatal Genetic Counselling for Psychiatric Disorders":

> Studies have shown that people often overestimate the chances for future children to develop psychiatric illness and this can have an impact on child-bearing decisions and provoke anxiety. […] Accordingly, people with psychiatric problems and their families have expressed desire for prenatal genetic counselling and/or genetic testing to address their concerns about the risks of psychiatric illness for their children. (Inglis, Morris, and Austin 2017, 6)

Joshi continues with the debate on Lovecraft's symptoms as follows:

> Brobst, a Ph.D. in psychology who was trained as a psychiatric nurse, considers the possibility of "chorea-like symptoms" and also conjectures that a hysteroid seizure—a purely psychological ailment without any organic basis—may have been involved. Whether these seizures were the actual cause of his removal from high school is something that cannot now be settled. (Joshi 2013, 186)

Today we know that the seizures are indeed present in chorea minor. As analyzed in "Acute Rheumatic Fever Presenting with Sydenham's Chorea":

> The differential diagnoses of Sydenham's chorea include atypical seizures, tics disorders […] Patients with Sydenham's chorea can have psychological and psychiatric manifestations such as depression, anxiety, personality changes, emotional lability, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), tics and attention deficit disorder. These are believed to be secondary to the motor difficulties, although sometimes these symptoms can precede the onset of chorea. (Woo, Liu, and Young 2003, 200)

In time, Lovecraft's psychiatric manifestations might have preceded the motor difficulties caused by chorea. This idea may explain his "mental weakness," which he attributes to genetic factors.[13]

Not only Lovecraft's chorea and his anxiety and fear but also abandoning high school and the subsequent tension between him and his mother Susie[14] can be linked to his fourth

breakdown. Apparently, during this period Lovecraft went into heavy depression.[15] Joshi further comments: "As a result, the period 1908-13 is a virtual blank in the life of H.P. Lovecraft […] It is also the only time of his life when the term 'eccentric recluse' […] can rightly be applied to him" (Joshi 2013, 188).

Not only the tension caused by the economic problems but also Susie's mental deterioration[16] affected her attitude towards her son, as Joshi points to Clara Hess's statement: "Mrs. Lovecraft talked continuously of her unfortunate son who was so hideous that he hid from everyone and did not like to walk upon the streets where people could gaze at him" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 193).[17] The relationship between Lovecraft and his mother[18] was highly complex and will be thoroughly analyzed in the next chapter. For now, it is better to look only at "The Outsider" to better understand the author's feeling of profound alienation caused by the mentioned reasons.

"The Outsider" was written in 1921, the year Susie died, and tells the story of a very lonely individual who never left his castle nor knew any other person in his life and learnt outside world only from the books of his library. It begins with a sincere account which seems to reflect Lovecraft's own feelings about his past:

> Unhappy is he to whom the memories of childhood bring only fear and sadness. Wretched is he who looks back upon lone hours in vast and dismal chambers with brown hangings and maddening rows of antique books, or upon awed watches in twilight groves of grotesque, gigantic, and vine-encumbered trees that silently wave twisted branches far aloft. Such a lot the gods gave to me—to me, the dazed, the disappointed; the barren, the broken. (Lovecraft 2014, 176)

The protagonist describes the castle he lives as "infinitely old and infinitely horrible" and "the stones in the crumbling corridors seemed always hideously damp, and there was an accursed smell everywhere, as of the piled-up corpses of dead generations" (176). He dreams about being with other people and craves for light. So, one day he decides to free himself: "Outside, across the putrid moat and under the dark mute trees, I would often lie and dream for

hours about what I read in the books; and would longingly picture myself amidst gay crowds in the sunny world beyond the endless forest" (177). Dark trees, putrid moat, endless forest, all creates a contrast with the ideas of light, gay crowds, and sunny world, and they can be interpreted as the metaphors of Lovecraft's gloomy childhood memories and depression. The forest metaphor becomes even more apt given its widespread use as a symbol of danger, chaos, anxiety, insanity, and mental illness.[19] Moreover, the "accursed smell" of "the piled-up corpses of dead generations" may be related to Lovecraft's idea of cursed lineage. Lovecraft's desire to overcome his depression is seen in narrator's attempt to abandon his castle in search of light.

The narrator then starts climbing up the wall to reach the black tower to be able to see the sky. However, this is not an easy process: "But more ghastly and terrible still was the slowness of my progress; for climb as I might, the darkness overhead grew no thinner, and a new chill as of haunted and venerable mould assailed me" (177). The narrator doesn't give up and finally reaches his goal and sees a group of people at a party. This might have been the narrator's chance to socialize after a long period of depression and isolation had the crowd not fled once he entered the room. Without understanding what/who was the thing that appeared next to him and frightened the crowd, he starts searching the room and finds out that the source of horror was himself. The tragic story finishes with a bitter acceptance, as the narrator says: "I know that light is not for me […]; yet in my new wildness and freedom I almost welcome the bitterness of alienage. […] I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men" (181). While the narrator fails to overcome depression and loneliness, he accepts and learns to live with his mental illness and physical flaws, which almost give him a privilege by making him different and unique. In other words, he finds peace in his condition.

Traumatic life events are another important subject to discuss when it comes to Lovecraft's anxiety and its representation in his narratives. Throughout his life, Lovecraft witnessed various

family tragedies, starting in 1893 with his father's commitment to a mental hospital.[20] Rather than Winfield's illness, which was probably syphilis,[21] my focus will be on its impact on Lovecraft and his mother. Winfield's years at the mental hospital affected Lovecraft's mother the most. As Joshi states:

> The trauma experienced by Susie Lovecraft over this excruciating period of five years—with doctors ignorant how to treat Winfield's illness, and with periods of false hope where the patient seems to recover only to lapse into more serious physical and mental deterioration—can only be imagined. (Joshi 2013, 43)

Winfield's hospitalization and his death at a mental hospital with unanswered questions about his disease must have fed Lovecraft's fear of madness.[22] Moreover, this tragic event affected Susie's mental health[23] as well as her relationship with her son. Joshi remarks:

> The immediate effect of the hospitalization of Winfield Scott Lovecraft was to bring the two-and-a-half-year-old Howard more closely than ever under the influence of his mother, his two aunts […], his grandmother Robie, and especially his grandfather Whipple. Naturally, his mother's influence was at the outset the dominant one. Lovecraft remarks that his mother was "permanently stricken with grief" upon her husband's illness, although one wonders whether shame and loathing were intermixed with this emotion. (48–49)

After Winfield's death, Whipple became Lovecraft's father figure.[24] He even played a crucial role in treating Lovecraft's fear of the dark. As Joshi states: "Whipple cured his grandson of his fear of the dark by daring him at the age of five to walk through a sequence of dark rooms at 454 Angell Street" (49). This can be considered as a great achievement, considering Lovecraft's anxious and phobic personality. Also, the weird seems to connect Lovecraft with his grandfather. Joshi comments on this subject while he discusses the possible literary sources and inspirations of Lovecraft's first prose fiction:

> A still more likely source, perhaps, would be his grandfather Whipple, the only member of his family who appears to have enjoyed the weird. As Lovecraft states in a late letter: "I never heard *oral* weird tales except from my grandfather—who, observing my tastes in reading, used to devise all sorts of impromptu original yarns about black woods, unfathomed caves, winged horrors (like the 'night-gaunts' of my dreams, about which I used to tell him), old witches with sinister cauldrons, & 'deep, low, moaning sounds'. (78)

The topic of the "night-gaunts" is also worth analyzing. Lovecraft expresses the way his grandmother Robie's death in 1896 affected Susie: "The death of my grandmother plunged the household into a gloom from which it never fully recovered. The black attire of my mother & aunts terrified & repelled me to such an extent that I would surreptitiously pin bits of bright cloth or paper to their skirts for sheer relief" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 56-7). His nightmares of "night-gaunts," started during this period, represent Susie's grief:

> And then it was that my former high spirits received their damper. I began to have nightmares of the most hideous description, peopled with things which I called "night-gaunts"—a compound word of my own coinage […] In dreams they were wont to whirl me through space at a sickening rate of speed, the while fretting & impelling me with their detestable tridents. (quoted in Joshi 2013, 57)

Clearly, the concept of the "night-gaunt" took its inspiration from Lovecraft's mother's and aunts' black attires, which they wore for mourning. In his account above, Lovecraft claims that his grandmother's death "plunged the household into a gloom from which it never fully recovered." Susie's melancholy must have affected Lovecraft deeply. The description of the "night-gaunts" in "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath" give additional clues about it:

> But Carter preferred to look at them than at his captors, which were indeed shocking and uncouth black beings with smooth, oily, whale-like surfaces […] And worst of all, they never spoke or laughed, and never smiled because they had no faces at all to smile with, but only a suggestive blankness where a face ought to be. All they ever did was clutch and fly and tickle; that was the way of night-gaunts. (Lovecraft 2014, 464)

The faceless black beings, who "never speak, laugh or smile" but only "clutch and tickle" seem to represent his mourning and depressed mother.

However, this was not the hardest mourning period for Lovecraft. Whipple died in 1904 and subsequent events became a turning point for the author. As Joshi comments: "This was probably the most traumatic event Lovecraft experienced prior to the death of his mother in 1921" (Joshi 2013, 143). Even if there were no breakdowns till 1906, Whipple's death, in addition to the economic problems caused by it, seriously affected Lovecraft.[25] He and Susie

had to move into a new house after Whipple's death and this obligatory change affected him deeply: "Psychologically the loss of his birthplace, to one so endowed with a sense of place, was shattering" (Joshi 2013, 143). As Lovecraft writes in 1934:

> I felt that I had lost my entire adjustment to the cosmos—for what indeed was HPL without the remembered rooms & hallways & hangings & staircases & statuary […] & all the rest? How could an old man of 14 (& I surely felt that way!) readjust his existence to a skimpy flat & new household programme & inferior outdoor setting in which almost nothing familiar remained? It seemed like a damn futile business to keep on living […] Oh, hell! Why not slough off consciousness altogether? (quoted in Joshi 2013, 145-46)

As is seen, Lovecraft had a strong "sense of place," which is not that surprising considering his rather reclusive lifestyle and personality. It is further remarked in the article "Quality of Life and Place Attachment Among People with Severe Mental Illness" that:

> The home is often experienced as an extension of person's self-image and identity since it provides a sense of security and connectedness, which in turn enhances opportunity to experience feelings of belonging and attachment. Feelings of attachment towards a place have, in particular, been associated with emotional distress regulation, which in the case of people with SMI, appears to be a crucial factor for psychiatric treatments' outcome. (Marcheschi et al. 2015, 145)

Lovecraft's place attachment was not limited to his home; he was very fond of his hometown as well. He only left Providence once, after he got married, and he regretted it. Lovecraft lived in New York for only two years, but his anxiety and unhappiness can be clearly seen in his stories, like "The Horror at Red Hook" and "He," written during that period. Indeed, "He" begins with a sincere account of this anxiety: "My coming to New York had been a mistake; for whereas I had looked for poignant wonder and inspiration, […] I had found instead only a sense of horror and oppression which threatened to master, paralyze, and annihilate me" (Lovecraft 2014, 355). The narrator's comments on New York reflect Lovecraft's ideas:

> So instead of the poems I had hoped for, there came only a shuddering blankness and ineffable loneliness; and I saw at last a fearful truth which no one had ever dared to breath before […] the fact that this city […] is in fact quite

> dead, its sprawling body imperfectly embalmed and infested with queer animate things which have nothing to do with it as it was in life. (356)

New York was a totally unfamiliar and different place for Lovecraft. Both the city and its people created a contrast with the uniformity and homogeneity of New England. Given that anything different was enough to make Lovecraft anxious, it was not a surprise that he hated this city. Since the anxiety and the sense of control go hand in hand, as discussed in the previous chapter, Lovecraft's low tolerance for differences and changes can be explained with the concept of control; since what is different or unfamiliar challenges the sense of control and increases anxiety. This may explain Lovecraft's craving for the familiar. As the article by Marcheschi et al. further states: "Home settings have been considered emblematic ambiences for the development of place attachment since they foster feelings of control and offer opportunities to restore from the external world" (Marcheschi et al. 2015, 145).

In addition to the familiar, family, roots and ancestors also had a special meaning for Lovecraft. He was proud of his wealthy and aristocratic roots but, at the same time, the mental disorders that ran in his family haunted him throughout his life. As a result, anxiety, obsession, paranoia, and hereditary curses became recurring themes in Lovecraft's narratives and the protagonists shared his personality traits and reflected his troubles. In many instances the narrator is described as an "overly-sensitive" individual, who can see more and feel more—and for this reason, suffers more—than the others. "The Tomb"'s narrator Jervas Dudley, who describes himself as a "dreamer and a visionary" (Lovecraft 2014, 15), says:

> It is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of humanity is too limited in its mental vision to weigh with patience and intelligence those isolated phenomena, seen and felt only by a psychologically sensitive few, which lie outside its common experience. Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction betwixt the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by the virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them; but the prosaic materialism of the majority condemns as madness the flashes of super-sight which penetrate the common veil of obvious empiricism. (15)

In "Hypnos," the narrator has "feverishly sensitive ears" (227); similarly, in "The Dreams in the Witch House," Walter Gilman's "ears were growing sensitive to a preternatural and intolerable degree" (924) and, for this reason, "life had become an insistent and almost unendurable cacophony, and there was that constant, terrifying impression of *other* sounds—perhaps from regions beyond life—trembling on the very brink of audibility" (927). In "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and his Family," Arthur Jermyn is described as "sensitive" (130). The protagonist of "The Horror at Red Hook," Thomas F. Malone, is again described as "the sensitive Celt" (344). In "The Colour Out of Space," the meteor affected the whole Gardner family but "Thaddeus, an especially sensitive youth, suffered the most" (645). One of the characters in "The Call of Cthulhu," Henry Anthony Wilcox,[26] is described as a "thin, dark young man of neurotic and excited aspect" (383), who "was a precocious youth of known genius but great eccentricity, and had from childhood excited attention through the strange stories and odd dreams he was in the habit of relating. He called himself 'physically hypersensitive,' but the staid folk of the ancient commercial city dismissed him as merely 'queer.'" (384). Similarly, the romantic hero of "The Silver Key," the once dreamer Randolph Carter, was discouraged by the scientific advances and materialism of his time and "had tried to do as others did, and pretended that the common events and emotions of earthy minds were more important than the fantasies of rare and delicate souls" (429). In "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," on the other hand, Lovecraft makes the following statement:

> It is hard to explain just how a single sight of a tangible object with measurable dimensions could so shake and change a man; and we may only say that there is about certain outlines and entities a power of symbolism and suggestion which acts frightfully on a sensitive thinker's perspective and whispers terrible hints of obscure cosmic relationships and unnamable realities behind the protective illusions of common vision. (612)

All these characters clearly represent Lovecraft's physical and psychological sensitivity, high intellect, and uniqueness. However, these very traits are also the reason why they are

misunderstood, discouraged, criticized, and even called "mad" or "queer." This type of sensitivity is, then, both a blessing and a curse. Lovecraft was very accurate in calling it "hypersensitivity," given that in 1997 the psychologists Elaine and Arthur Aron coined the term "sensory processing sensitivity," which "refers to a tendency to more strongly and deeply process a variety of information including the arts, caffeine, other people's moods, hunger and pain" (Liss et al. 2005, 1430). Moreover, "highly sensitive individuals tend to process and respond to lower thresholds of information and to better detect subtle differences in the environment. These processing differences are hypothesized to be genetically based, present at birth, and located in the central nervous system" (Liss et al. 2005, 1430). Therefore, it is possible to analyze Lovecraft's symptoms with the Arons' construct of "sensory processing sensitivity," in addition to other psychological disorders. As Liss et al. further suggest in their article:

> Research specifically using Aron and Aron's (1997) construct of sensory processing sensitivity has found that overall, highly sensitive people are more likely to experience anxiety disorders such as social phobia and avoidant personality disorder. Literature in the occupational therapy field has found sensory processing sensitivity (utilizing a different measure developed by Dunn, 2001) to be related to anxiety. (1430)

Indeed, in Lovecraft's case it is possible to see how the sensitivity and anxiety disorders go hand in hand. The idea of high sensitivity creates anxiety makes sense and both social phobia and avoidant personality traits were present in Lovecraft. These were especially apparent after his fourth and biggest breakdown. As Joshi indicates:

> Both Clara Hess and Harold W. Munro give evidence that Lovecraft did indeed avoid human contact in his post-high school period. Hess […] wrote: "Sometimes I would see Howard when walking up Angell Street, but he would not speak and would stare ahead with his coat collar turned up and chin down." Munro states: "Very much an introvert, he darted about like a sleuth, hunched over, always with books or papers clutched under his arm, peering straight ahead recognizing nobody." (Joshi 2013, 195)

Moreover, compared to a less sensitive individual, Lovecraft's childhood traumas and family tragedies may have affected him more and lead to anxiety disorders. As it is stated in the article by Liss et al.:

> The authors argued that highly sensitive people are not necessarily prone to more negative emotional states, but that they may be more sensitive to negative parental environments. Aron and Aron found two clusters of highly sensitive people, a smaller group who recalled troubled childhoods and a larger group who recalled happy childhoods. The group that recalled troubled childhoods was more introverted and emotional than those who recalled happy childhoods. (Liss et al. 2005, 1430)

While on the one hand his parents' mental problems increased Lovecraft's fear of madness, on the other hand, the losses and traumas he experienced during his childhood and adolescence contributed to his anxiety. It is not surprising to see fear and anxiety as common themes of his narratives, given that Lovecraft's anxiety narratives were the result of his traumas and hypersensitivity. "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family" begins as follows:

> Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer daemoniacal hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold more hideous. Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species—if separate species we be—for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world. If we knew what we are, we should do as Sir Arthur Jermyn did; and Arthur Jermyn soaked himself in oil and set fire to his clothing one night. (Lovecraft 2014, 122)

Lovecraft's desperateness, anxiety and paranoia can be seen in these depressive and pessimist remarks. Just like his many other stories, also "Arthur Jermyn" treats the themes of cursed lineage and madness. The story ends with the tragic death of the last member of Jermyn family, Arthur, who burns himself after discovering the reality of his lineage; that is, the wife of his ancestor, Sir Wade Jermyn, was an ape goddess. Lovecraft clearly reflects the ideas about his own family when he writes: "Madness was in all the Jermyns, and people were glad there were not many of them" (123). On the other hand, Arthur represents Lovecraft himself: "He was not like any other Jermyn who had ever lived, for he was a poet and a dreamer […] It was

the mind and character of Arthur Jermyn which atoned for his aspect. Gifted and learned, he took highest honours at Oxford and seemed likely to redeem the intellectual fame of his family" (126).

The change in Lovecraft's tone is also worth emphasizing. Compared to "The Alchemist," in "Arthur Jermyn" a more pessimistic and hopeless attitude is seen. The depressive mood never changes, and the story doesn't have a happy ending; the protagonist commits suicide when confronted with the "curse" instead of trying to survive. Apart from other reasons, this change of tone may be related to Susie's commitment to the psychiatric hospital a year before the story was written.

"The Rats in the Walls" is another story of Lovecraft that deals with the theme of cursed lineage. As the narrator tells: "In one chronicle there is a reference to a de la Poer as 'cursed of God' in 1307. […] The fireside tales […] represented my ancestors as a race of hereditary daemons beside whom Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade would seem the veriest tyros" (260). This time the narrator finds out that his ancestors were cannibals and even raised "human cattle" to satisfy their hunger. This discovery maddens the narrator; he attacks his friend and eats him, believing it was the rats in the walls who ate his friend. Here, the narrator's reaction to the hereditary madness is different than that of Arthur Jermyn. Instead of committing suicide, he becomes a cannibal just like his ancestors.

It is possible to interpret these two stories as the representations of two opposite reactions to hereditary madness (or, mental illness): acceptance or denial. Arthur learns, accepts, and chooses not to live with this hereditary curse, while Delapore discovers that he is insane like his entire family, but denies it.

Finally, the protagonist of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" accepts his fate after discovering his roots and tries to commit suicide. Contrary to Arthur, though, he can't kill himself: "No, I

shall not shoot myself—I cannot be made to shoot myself!" (922). Instead, he decides to live with it.

Lovecraft's fear of madness can be better understood with the concept of prospection, which is "a key element in positive psychology based on the human ability to imagine thoughts and images about the future. It is said that we are influenced by the past but drawn into the future, and this notion has significant implications for anxiety" (Rachman 2020, iii). While Lovecraft's fear was rooted in the past, fear itself was related to the future. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze it using the recent construct of "prospection" in addition to traditional psychotherapy which is "essentially retrospective" (Rachman 2020, 67). As Rachman further explains:

> Psychoanalysis and its derivates focus on the person's early childhood history to unravel the putative roots of their psychological problems—oral, anal, oedipal stages of sexual development, and so forth. Behavior therapy focuses on the patient's reinforcement history and current avoidance behavior. In contrast, prospection focuses on the person's prevailing anticipations, intentions, goals, desires. This forward-looking concept is a major component of positive psychology and has an important bearing on anxiety. Anxiety is essentially prospective. (67)

While knowing Lovecraft's past is essential, the analysis of his anxiety and fear would be incomplete without a prospective approach. For this reason, Lovecraft's narratives are of great importance as they serve both as the author's illness stories and reflect his anticipations and fears about the future.

On the other hand, it is important to take a look at Lovecraft's scientific interests and the way he used them in his stories to better understand his anxiety.

4.2.2 Lovecraft's Scientific Interests

Apart from tragic life events, mental disorders and traumas, Lovecraft's scientific studies are worth further mentioning for their relevance to his anxiety and their role in his narratives.

Lovecraft's interest in science started in 1898, the year when he had his first nervous breakdown.[27] After four years, he discovered one of his biggest passions of his life: astronomy.[28] It became a source of both pleasure and pain and affected his world view profoundly. As he states in 1922 essay "A Confession of Unfaith":

> By my thirteenth birthday I was thoroughly impressed with man's impermanence and insignificance, and by my seventeenth, about which time I did some particularly detailed writing on the subject, I had formed in all essential particulars my present pessimistic cosmic views. The futility of all existence began to impress and oppress me; and my references to human progress, formerly hopeful, began to decline in enthusiasm. (Lovecraft, quoted in Joshi 2013, 182)

This is an important account to see the pessimistic root of Lovecraft's indifferentist view, as he writes in 1929: "I am *not a pessimist* but an *indifferentist*—that is, I don't make the mistake of thinking that the resultant of the natural forces surrounding and governing organic life will have any connexion with the wishes or tastes of any part of that organic life-process"[29] (Lovecraft in Joshi 2013, 1043). Apparently, Lovecraft's opinions changed over time, and he finally decided to adopt the indifferentist attitude.

Joshi further comments: "He discovered astronomy just before the time when it was beginning to transform itself into astrophysics and enter the realm of philosophy with Einstein's formulation of the theory of relativity in 1905" (122). Yet, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Lovecraft's acceptance of quantum mechanics took time due to his firm materialistic beliefs. As Joshi states, especially Hugh Elliot's ideas on materialism supported Lovecraft's beliefs and affected his philosophy:[30] In this sense, "From Beyond" (1920) is worth analyzing as it brings together many important factors such as the inspiration Lovecraft took from Elliot,[31] the ideas of quantum mechanics, and his own ideas about human limitation and incapacity to comprehend the vast universe:

> "What do we know," he had said, "of the world and the universe about us? Our means of receiving impressions are absurdly few, and our notions of surrounding objects infinitely narrow. We see things only as we are constructed

> to see them, and can gain no idea of their absolute nature. With five feeble senses we pretend to comprehend the boundlessly complex cosmos, yet other beings with a wider, stronger, or different range of senses might not only see very differently the things we see, but might see and study whole worlds of matter, energy, and life which lie close at hand yet can never be detected with the senses we have." (Lovecraft 2014, 132)

Crawford Tillinghast's above monologue shows a parallelism with Prof. Sean Carroll's definition of quantum mechanics:

> Quantum mechanics is a whole new way of thinking […] There is a complex relationship between what the world is and what you see when you look at it, and that relationship involves the idea that you can never predict precisely what you will see, but you can simply say the probability of what you will see. Historically, physics has always been set around these ideas of observation and measurement, but in quantum mechanics, we have to rethink the fundamentals of what it means to even measure something. (Carroll 2020)

What's anxiety-provoking in "From Beyond" is not only human's innate inability and the shattering ideas of quantum mechanics, but also the loss of control; especially for the people who founded their realities on classical physics. Also, given the sense of control and certainty materialism provides, Lovecraft's unease with Heisenberg's uncertainty principle[32] makes sense. As Joshi comments on a letter that Lovecraft wrote about quantum theory in 1930:

> The point Lovecraft is trying to establish is that the "uncertainty" of quantum theory is not ontological, but epistemological; that it is only our inability (an inherent inability, not merely some deficiency in our sense-perception or general reasoning capacity) to predict the behavior of sub-atomic particles that results in uncertainty. Even this admission must have been a difficult one for Lovecraft to make, for it shatters the theoretical possibility […] that the human mind can someday absolutely predict the course of Nature if it has enough evidence at its disposal. (Joshi 2013, 1038-39)

In "From Beyond," Lovecraft further describes anxiety caused by the mentioned reasons (human's limitations, the lack of control and the unknown) using the idea of the alternate dimension. The narrator's friend, Tillinghast, creates a machine that emits ultra-violet waves so that the person can see the alternate world: "I have always believed that such strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows, and now I believe I have found a way to break

down the barriers. […] We shall overleap time, space, and dimensions, and without bodily motion peer to the bottom of creation" (Lovecraft 2014, 132). Using the machine, both the narrator and Tillinghast don't only detect the alternate world, but they also see strange and dangerous creatures living there: "Remember we're dealing with a hideous world in which we are practically helpless…Keep still!" (134). By using the idea of a device that enables to see beyond the visible by affecting the brain, Lovecraft makes the unknown tangible. At the end of the story, the narrator destroys the device—thus, any chance to physically confront with the unknown—but anxiety remains and, even, gives way to paranoia: "It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me. I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am weary" (137).

A similar kind of paranoia can be traced in Henry W. Akeley's letter in "The Whisperer in Darkness": "It is true—terribly true—that there are non-human creatures watching us all the time. […] The things come from another planet, being able to live in interstellar space and fly through it" (Lovecraft 2014, 726).

Quantum theory, leaving no room for control or certainty, was understandably unsettling for an anxious person like Lovecraft. In the end, though, he started to get along with Einstein's ideas:

> Lovecraft fairly quickly snapped out of his naïve views about Einstein and, by no later than 1929, actually welcomed him as another means to bolster a modified materialism that still outlawed teleology, monotheism, spirituality, and other tenets he rightly believed to be outmoded in light of nineteenth-century science. In so doing he evolved a metaphysical and ethical system not at all dissimilar to that of his two later philosophical mentors, Bertrand Russell and George Santayana. (Joshi 2013, 688)

However, it is important to note that Lovecraft's acceptance of quantum mechanics and his adoption of cosmic indifferentism did not remove the underlying pessimism found in the author's philosophy. This is interesting as it shows the differences in response between people.

In other words, cosmic indifferentism, which in Lovecraft's case is essentially anxiety-provoking, can be comforting to others. According to Rebecca Elson, who was a Canadian-American astronomer and writer, the vast and indifferent universe could actually be an "antidote to fear of death," As it is seen in the first lines of her poem of the same name: "Sometimes as an antidote / To fear of death, / I eat the stars" (Elson 2018, 60). Elson's poetry was read by astrophysicist Janna Levin, to which Maria Popova commented:

> Janna prefaces her reading with a Bohrsian reflection on the relationship between science and poetry, between the objective and the subjective, concluding with an […] observation of how the tension between these seemingly dipoles can dissolve upon closer inspection: "We are all navigating an external world—but only through the prism of our minds, our own subjective experience…The majesty of the universe is only ever conjured up in the mind." (Popova 2020)

Apparently, the effect of a vast and indifferent universe on man varies depending on his perspective; thus, "cosmic horror" may turn into "cosmic comfort" or "cosmic beauty." In my interview Prof. David Wallace states: "We've evolved to exist and thrive on earth, so parochially, those natural forces are reasonably friendly to us. And just as there's nothing in physics that particularly looks out for our interests, there's nothing that actively wants to kill us." In this sense, cosmicism can be fearful and anxiety-provoking or comforting and beautiful depending on one's point of view.

4.3 Conclusion

Lovecraft's traumas, nervous breakdowns, mental and physical problems, relationship with the family members, and scientific interests (especially astronomy) all had an influence on the formation of cosmicism. Since he was a highly sensitive person, anxieties, fears, and phobias were always present in his life. For this reason, these anxiety-provoking elements, as well as the anxiety itself, have been analyzed, along with their representations in his narratives. Moreover, Lovecraft's possible chorea minor was analyzed with today's data and investigations.

As a result of all this, it is again convenient to call his stories "anxiety narratives," since deciphering his fantasy stories turn them into "metaphorical illness stories," which can only be completely understood using medical/health humanities. In the next chapter the same approach will be used to thoroughly analyze Susie's share in Lovecraft's anxiety.

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[1] Today we know that chorea minor is a result of a common infection: "Sydenham's chorea is temporally associated with group A *β*-haemolytic streptococcus infection, and this association is supported by laboratory studies. The diagnosis fulfils the Jones criteria for rheumatic fever. Streptococcal pharyngitis, caused by group A streptococcus, is a common bacterial infection in children and young adults. Most infections are uncomplicated and respond easily to appropriate antibiotics. Infections may be so minor – resolving without intervention – that affected individuals do not seek medical attention. The causal relationship between group A streptococcus infection and Sydenham's chorea is supported by clinical and epidemiologic observations" (Punukollu et al. 2016, 16).

[2] As it was quoted earlier, Lovecraft seems to believe that his nervousness would cause chorea: "My own nervous state in childhood once produced a tendency inclining toward chorea, although not quite attaining that level" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 98).

[3] As Joshi comments: "Lovecraft returned to Hope High in September 1905, but his transcript states that he left on November 7 of that year, not returning until September 10, 1906 […] This is no doubt the period of his 'near-breakdown' of 1906. There is not much evidence as to the nature of this illness […] It is surely peculiar that Lovecraft does *not* admit to a 'near-breakdown' in 1904, when he faced the trauma of Whipple Phillips's death and the move from 454 Angell Street; the 1906 breakdown does not appear to have been as serious as its two predecessors (1898 and 1900), even if it did mean his withdrawal from high school for nearly a year" (Joshi 2013, 149–50). Some possible reasons of this third breakdown may be the stress caused by the death of his grandfather, the change of his living space, his possible Sydenham's chorea and the pressure derived from his schoolwork.

[4] Lovecraft mentions this problem while he is talking about his violin lessons: "I had a very irregular heart action—badly affected by physical exertion—& such acute kidney trouble that a local practitioner would have operated for stone in the bladder had not a Boston specialist given a sounder diagnosis & traced it to the nervous system. That was when I was 9" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 102).

[5] As Lovecraft notes: "My family kept me away from gymnasiums after I had a fainting fit in one at the age of 9" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 108-9).

[6] Joshi further comments: "Although Lovecraft maintains in the above letter that 'in time the tendency died down' and that his entrance into high school 'caused me to reform,' I shall have occasion to refer to possible recurrences of these chorea-like symptoms at various periods in Lovecraft's life, even into maturity" (Joshi 2013, 98).

[7] He similarly stated: "In 1908 I should have entered Brown University, but the broken state of my health rendered the idea absurd. I was and am a prey to intense headaches, insomnia, and general nervous weakness which prevents my continuous application to anything" (Lovecraft, quoted in Joshi 2013, 185). Also this account supports the idea that he might have been the victim of an untreated chorea minor.

[8] As Joshi states: "Lovecraft's breakdown—whether purely mental or nervous or a combination of mental and physical factors—was, clearly, something related to his schoolwork" (Joshi 2013, 187).

[9] In one of his statements Lovecraft calls himself an alien: "In 1918 he states: 'I no more visit the Ladd Observatory or various other attractions of Brown University. Once I expected to utilize them as a regularly entered student, and some day perhaps control some of them as a faculty member. But having known them with this 'inside' attitude, I am today unwilling to visit them as a casual outsider and non-university barbarian and alien.' This sense of alienation presumably began soon after his collapse in 1908" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 195).

[10] As discussed in the previous chapter, the unknown (which in this case, represents mental illness) was hardly something unknown for Lovecraft. He was aware of his genetic vulnerability, and for him, the question was not "what" but "when."

[11] Lovecraft's fourth breakdown, which occurred in 1908, can be considered as one of the most severe and troublesome events in Lovecraft's life, causing a huge emotional damage and changing his life in many aspects. As Joshi remarks: "What derailed that future—and what ensured that Lovecraft would never lead a "normal" life—was his fourth "near-breakdown," clearly the most serious of his life. In some ways he never recovered from it" (Joshi 2013, 184). Lovecraft states: "In 1908 I should have entered Brown University, but the broken state of my

health rendered the idea absurd. I was and am a prey to intense headaches, insomnia, and general nervous weakness which prevents my continuous application to any thing" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 185).

[12] A similar tendency is seen in the case of the character, Steven Crain, in *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018). In the Netflix adaptation of Shirley Jackson's novel of the same name, Steven undergoes vasectomy to avoid transmitting the "madness" that is present in his genes.

[13] Lovecraft, witnessing the various problems of his family members, tended to see his mental "weakness" as an outcome of genetic factors: "I didn't inherit a very good set of nerves, since near relatives on both sides of my ancestry were prone to headaches, nerve-exhaustion, and breakdowns" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 97).

[14] Not being able to finish high school did not only cause a life-time poverty for Lovecraft but also increased the tension between him and Susie. Joshi says: "Scott rightly conjectures: 'However she [Susie] adored him, there may have been a subconscious criticism of Howard, so brilliant but so economically useless.' No doubt her disappointment with her son's inability to finish high school, go to college, and support himself did not help this situation any" (Joshi 2013, 192-3).

[15] As Lovecraft further remarks: "when I was 18 I suffered such a breakdown that I had to forego college. In those days I could hardly bear to see or speak to anyone, & liked to shut out the world by pulling down dark shades & using artificial light" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 188).

[16] Joshi states: "What was his mother doing in this entire situation? […] Recall her own medical record at Butler Hospital (now destroyed) as paraphrased by Winfield Townley Scott: 'a woman of narrow interests who received, with a traumatic psychosis, an awareness of approaching bankruptcy.' This assessment was made in 1919, but the condition must have been developing for years, at the very least since the death of Susie's own father, Whipple Phillips" (Joshi 2013, 192).

[17] It is important to note that Susie may have been one of the reasons why Lovecraft was uncomfortable with his own appearance throughout his life. Joshi says: "by the age of eighteen or twenty he had perhaps reached his full height of five feet eleven inches, and had probably developed that long, prognathous jaw which he himself in later years considered a physical defect" (Joshi 2013, 194). "Harold W. Munro testifies that as early as his high school years Lovecraft was bothered by ingrown facial hairs" (194). "As late as February 1921 […] Lovecraft writes to his mother of a new suit that 'made me appear as nearly respectable as my face permits.'" (194).

[18] Joshi comments on Lovecraft's relationship with his mother: "Lovecraft's wife, although she never knew Susie, makes a plausible claim that Susie 'lavished both her love and her hate on her only child.'" (Joshi 2013, 193). Lovecraft was deeply affected by this as he "himself once (and only once) admitted to his wife that his mother's attitude to him was (and this is his word) 'devastating.'" (Joshi 2013, 194-5). Joshi further comments: "It is often conjectured that she was transferring to her son the hatred and disgust she felt at her husband after he was stricken with syphilis, and I think this is very likely" (194).

[19] As Charlotte Scott states in her article, "Dark Matter: Shakespeare's Foul Dens and Forests": "The history of anxiety associated with the forest is predominantly universal (largely based on a primal fear of darkness and predators) but that sense of threat in darkness was translated by the church into a sense of spiritual blindness or removal from God. In Christian terms, forests were representative of both error and separation and their wandering paths were a challenge to those who had strayed and erred to find salvation" (Scott 2011, 19). She further suggests while analyzing *Titus Andronicus*: "The forest becomes a place of madness and horror, and that which was once gentle is now fatal. […] The forest is never secure or stable; it is never essential or consistent but rather a map of the desiring or diseased mind, a backdrop for transformations and a space for the solitary – for the hunter and the hunted" (16).

[20] "The illness that struck Winfield Scott Lovecraft in April 1893 and forced him to remain in Butler Hospital in Providence until his death in July 1898 is worth examining in detail" (Joshi 2013, 39).

[21] "M. Eileen McNamara, M.D., studying Winfield's medical record, concluded that the probability of Winfield's having tertiary syphilis is very strong […] Winfield displayed nearly all the symptoms of tertiary syphilis as identified by Hinsie and Campbell: '(1) simple dementia […]; (2) paranoid form […]; (3) expansive or manic form […]; or (4) depressive form'" (Joshi 2013, 40).

[22] Joshi states: "Lovecraft must have known that something was not quite right here: he knew that Butler Hospital was not a place for the treatment of ordinary physical maladies but was in fact an insane asylum." He further adds: "I do not think that Lovecraft knew very much about his father's illness and death, but I think he wondered a great deal" (Joshi 2013, 45).

[23] "When Susie herself was admitted to Butler Hospital in 1919, her doctor, F.J. Farnell, 'found disorder had been evidenced for fifteen years; that in all, abnormality had existed at least twenty-six years.' It is no accident that the onset of her 'abnormality' dates to 1893" (Joshi 2013, 43).

[24] "For his part, Whipple Van Buren Phillips proved to be an entirely satisfactory replacement for the father Lovecraft never knew. Lovecraft's simple statement that at this time 'my beloved grandfather…became the center of my entire universe' is all we need to know" (Joshi 2013, 49).

[25] As Joshi comments: "The death of Whipple Philips and the loss of his birthplace in 1904 cause Lovecraft seriously to consider suicide" (Joshi 2013, 428).

[26] Joshi further states: "Wilcox is a name from Lovecraft's ancestry" (Joshi 2013, 855).

[27] "The year 1898 was certainly an eventful one for Lovecraft: he discovered Poe and science, and began learning Latin; he first began attendance at school; and he had his first nervous breakdown" (Joshi 2013, 97).

[28] "[…] it was in the winter of 1902-03 that Lovecraft discovered astronomy. (Joshi 2013, 119)

[29] This sentence was cited in the previous chapter to discuss another topic.

[30] "The English writer Hugh Elliot (1881-1930) was never held in much esteem as a philosopher, since he was merely a popularizer of the subject and not a pioneer in any capacity […] I cannot find any evidence that Lovecraft read any other work of his except *Modern Science and Materialism,* but this book encapsulated the doctrine of pure materialism ably enough to give him a clear foundation for his metaphysics" (Joshi 2013, 448).

[31] As Joshi states: "But the clearest borrowing from Elliot relates to the central weird phenomenon of the tale—the fact that every particle of space is populated by a mass of loathsome creatures that can flow through our own bodies. This is really nothing more than a horrific presentation of a common fact that most material objects consist largely of empty space" (Joshi 2013, 523).

[32] Werner Heisenberg said: "The ontology of materialism rested upon the illusion that the kind of existence, the direct 'actuality' of the world around us, can be extrapolated into the atomic range. This extrapolation, however, is impossible… atoms are not things" (quoted in Abdul 2019, 721).

5 THE QUESTION OF LOVE, FEAR AND ANXIETY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter already discussed Lovecraft's childhood traumas, physical and mental problems to better understand the nature of his anxiety. This chapter will go a step further and focus specifically on the relationship between Lovecraft and his mother and analyze the author's early emotional development, using Harry Harlow's ideas on mother love and maternal bond. Therefore, my first goal will be to understand whether the toxic relationship between Susie and her son was the starting point of his cosmicism.

The second aim of this chapter is to understand the way Lovecraft depicted mental illness in his writings. While anxiety and fear are two prominent themes of his fiction, it is important to remember that these may actually be visible consequences or symptoms of more subtle and complex mental disorder(s). Given that Lovecraft's life and writings are intertwined, identifying and deciphering the metaphors in his writings allows me to truly understand both the true meaning of his narratives and his own mental disorders and pain. For this reason, the role of medical/health humanities will be huge in my analysis.

The focus so far has been on fear, anxiety, and depression; however, it is not possible to understand these concepts without analyzing the question of love.[1] As Deborah Blum asks in *Love at Goon Park: Harry Harlow and the Science of Affection*: "And yet, can you understand love without understanding hurt?" (Blum 2002, 207).

An extensive analysis of Lovecraft's microcosm (traumas and mental illness in addition to Susie's role on his psychological development) is necessary to continue with the analysis of the "macrocosm" (cosmicism) he created.

5.2 *S"MOTHERED"*: UNDERSTANDING THE MOTHER'S ROLE IN LOVECRAFT'S ANXIETY NARRATIVES

The University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Harry Harlow's influential paper, "The Nature of Love," starts with the following statement:

> Love is a wondrous state, deep, tender, and rewarding. Because of its intimate and personal nature it is regarded by some as an improper topic for experimental research. But, whatever our personal feelings may be, our assigned mission as psychologists is to analyze all facets of human and animal behavior into their component variables. (Harlow 1958, 673)

Harlow's experiments with infant rhesus monkeys were groundbreaking as they scientifically proved the importance of mother love, the mother-baby bond and contact comfort, which were some of the ideas that were totally rejected by the scientists[2] of that era. Rhesus monkeys' complex, sophisticated and human-like systems (contrary to other popular subjects such as rats) allowed Harlow to observe, discover and prove the effects of love in human beings. One of his most important and famous experiments was the surrogate mother experiment where two surrogate "mothers" (one was made of terrycloth and other one was made of wire) were given to a baby rhesus monkey:

> In our initial experiment, the dual mother-surrogate condition, a cloth mother and a wire mother were placed in different cubicles attached to the infant's living cage […] For four newborn monkeys the cloth mother lactated and the wire mother did not; and, for the other four, the condition was reversed. (Harlow 1958, 676)

Harlow wanted to see which "mother" the baby monkeys would prefer. If they preferred the wire mother with food, then it would mean that the behaviorists and neo-behaviorists like

John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner or Freudians were right: the mother was nothing but a "breast" or a "food-provider" for an infant. According to Harlow, however, the mother-child relationship was much more complex than that; he believed that the mother essentially meant affection for the infant, and he wanted to prove this. "Thus, the experiment was designed as a test of the relative importance of the variables of contact comfort and nursing comfort" (676). The results proved Harlow right, the babies in both groups spent much more time with cloth mother than the wire mother. Actually, they only went to the "food-provider" wire mother when they were hungry but spent their whole time with the cloth mother: "These data make it obvious that contact comfort is a variable of overwhelming importance in the development of affectional responses, whereas lactation is a variable of negligible importance" (Harlow 1958, 676). As it will be further discussed, contact comfort and affection are two crucial concepts when it comes to Lovecraft, considering their roles in his life and their (non) representation both in his fiction and philosophy. However, first it is better to clarify the meaning of health humanities which will be used to analyze the representation of these concepts. In *How Health Humanities Will Save the Life of the Humanities*, Klugman defines health humanities as follows:

> The health humanities, then, are defined as an interdisciplinary field concerned with understanding the human condition of health and illness in order to create knowledgeable and sensitive health care providers, patients, and family caregivers. As a field (meaning a focus of study rather than a disciplinary method), the health humanities draws on the methodologies of the humanities and social sciences to provide insight, understanding, and meaning to people facing illness including professional care providers, lay care providers, patients, policy-makers and others concerned with the suffering of humans. (Klugman 2017, 421–22)

As is seen in the previous chapters, in addition to Lovecraft's biographical data, it is necessary to identify and decipher the metaphors in his writings to better understand his illness. As remarked by Brad Lewis in "Narrating Our Sadness, with a Little Help from the Humanities":

> Narrative approaches to metaphor move beyond commonsense notions of metaphor as simple embellishment or ornamentation. Scholars George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain it this way: "Metaphor is not just a matter of

> language, that is, of mere words. … On the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical." By shaping our concepts, metaphor structures the way we perceive the world, what we experience, how we relate to other people, and the choices we make. (Lewis 2014, 436)

Figure 1: Baby rhesus is not leaving its cloth mother even while is nursing from the wire mother, Harlow Primate Laboratory, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1959.[1]

Analyzing the connection between Lovecraft's anxiety and early emotional development using only Harlow's ideas without the support of health humanities would be incomplete. For this reason, it is important to pay equal attention both to Harlow's model and the ideas of health humanities to truly understand Lovecraft's condition.

Going back to Harlow's experiments, it is important to note that contact comfort in mother-child relationship was not his only focus. He wanted to understand every aspect of mother love and he knew that he had to investigate fear and fear responses to better understand love. So,

[1] Jolly, Alison. 2002. "Baby Love." Nature 420: 741. https://doi.org/10.1038/420741a. Figure 1. Reproduced by permission from Springer Nature.

Harlow continued with a test that "would trigger a fear response in the little monkeys" (Blum 2002, 160). As he states:

> One function of the real mother, human or subhuman, and presumably of a mother surrogate, is to provide a haven of safety for the infant in times of fear and danger. The frightened or ailing child clings to its mother, not its father; and this selective responsiveness in times of distress, disturbance, or danger may be used as a measure of the strength of affectional bonds. We have tested this kind of differential responsiveness by presenting to the infants in their cages, in the presence of the two mothers, various fear-producing stimuli such as the moving toy bear. (Harlow 1958, 678)

This is an important point when it comes to Lovecraft as he did not have a mother who fulfilled her role as a safe haven. What happens, then, when the primary figure of security, safety and affection fails to transmit these emotions to her infant? The lack of these elements clearly show itself in Lovecraft and his philosophy, as will be discussed later.

Harlow's fear test, once again, proved the importance of mother love and affection in times of fear and stress: "It is apparent that the cloth mother is highly preferred over the wire one, and this differential selectivity is enhanced by age and experience. In this situation, the variable of nursing appears to be of absolutely no importance: the infant consistently seeks the soft mother surrogate regardless of nursing condition" (Harlow 1958, 678). Lovecraft never had a "cloth mother" who gave emotional support during stressful situations.[3] His lonely life with constant stress, fear and tension can be metaphorically compared to being left alone, anxious, weak, and defenseless in a vast and overwhelming cosmos without any kind of aid or comfort. As Kenneth W. Faig Jr. further comments on Susie's mental disorders in his essay, "The Parents of Howard Phillips Lovecraft":

> Susie's psychiatrist established the commencement of her disorder from the death of her father and the loss of her home in the spring of 1904 and the commencement of abnormality from the admission of her husband to Butler Hospital in the spring of 1893. The correspondence of the commencement of Susie's abnormality and disorder with these major traumas in her life can be no coincidence, as Scott properly notes. (Faig Jr. 2011, 62)

Susie's mental disorder clearly affected her relationship with her son as she failed to establish the necessary mother-child bond. Attachment, which is another concept of great importance to understand Lovecraft, can be better understood through John Bowlby's attachment theory, which is summarized by Blum as follows:

> what attachment theory essentially says is that being loved matters—and, more than that, it matters who loves us and whom we love in return […] And in the case of the child's tie to the mother, it matters that the mother loves that baby and that the baby knows it. When you are a very small child, love needs to be as tangible as warm arms around you and as audible as the lull of a gentle voice at night. (Blum 2002, 57)

The attachment theory has another important feature which can be linked to Lovecraft's cosmic anxiety. As Blum comments: "There's a Darwinian side to this, Bowlby said, because a nearby parent undoubtedly increases the survival chances of the offspring" (58). While Susie never abandoned her son, her obsessive, toxic and controlling attitude prevented her to establish a true attachment based on love, peace, and security. Blum further states:

> Equally important, Bowlby said, if the mother isn't there, not only is there no food but no protection against predators, and cold, and all the dangers of the night. So you might logically expect that we would evolve to be afraid and even despairing if our parents suddenly disappear. If you see a baby who appears to be suffering in his loneliness, Bowlby said, then you are seeing reality. (58–59)

Indeed, Lovecraft's insecurity, weakness, fear, as well as his paranoid, hostile, anxious and phobic attitude towards the outside world (perceiving anything different as a threat and, perhaps, even his xenophobia), as well as his cosmic indifferentist view, can all be linked to the sense of protection his mother failed to transmit. Thus, his anxiety derived from feeling lonely, helpless, and small in a vast and indifferent cosmos transforms into an evolved form of feeling vulnerable "against predators, and cold, and all the dangers of the night" (Blum 2002, 58–59).

Before elaborating my argument, it is better to mention the concept of security, which is directly linked to the attachment and had already been thoroughly analyzed by Mary Salter Ainsworth, who was "a young supporter of John Bowlby's" (Blum 2002, 163). Ainsworth

"trained under […] William Blatz, who was trying to make everyone […] listen to his 'security' theory, which argued, in part, that a child derives security from being near his parents. That sense of safety, Blatz argued, enables the child to go out and explore the world" (Blum 2002, 163). While in Uganda, Ainsworth observed some Ugandan children who could experience the mentioned sense of security. As Blum narrates:

> The babies would make short excursions away from their mothers. Then they would stop and check, crawl back to touch, or just smile, making sure that she was still there for them. Ainsworth put it like this: "The mother seems to provide a secure base from which these excursions can be made without anxiety." Ainsworth, too, began to wonder about the nature of security. What behavior makes the good mother, the one who puts a child's world right? (164)

The connection between the sense of security and anxiety is quite clear in the account of Ainsworth, as it is in the case of Lovecraft. However, her ultimate question is still hard to respond to. Clearly the mother's very existence is essential but not sufficient to develop a sense of security in the child, as Blum points out: "What happens to the child who must navigate through life without a parent who is willing, or able, to provide security? If there's no way for a baby to bind a parent to him, heart to heart, then what provides him with a sense of safety while he explores the big, bad world out there?" (165). The "big, bad world" evokes Lovecraft's view of a vast and indifferent universe. As discussed earlier, according to Lovecraft the universe was not necessarily evil but indifferent, and realizing this truth was causing anxiety. Indeed, this anxiety can be clearly seen in the following lines of the narrator of "The Call of Cthulhu": "I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me" (Lovecraft 2014, 407). Robert Sapolsky echoes Lovecraft's view on indifference in his book, *Behave*, as he comments on the famous phrase of Elie Wiesel: "'The opposite of love is not hate; its opposite is indifference.' The biologies of strong love and strong hate are similar in many ways, as we'll see" (Sapolsky 2018, 19). It is hard to ignore the negative connotation of indifference. However, another

important question might be the following: is it really that worrying to live in an indifferent universe, or is it the lack of "sense of safety" that causes this chronic anxiety? Lovecraft seems to associate lack of safety with indifference. This connection makes sense considering especially the relation between sense of safety and mother love. Finally, Sapolsky's statement on the biological similarities between strong love and strong hate is also worth emphasizing given Susie's "love" for her son.[4]

The sense of security had been further investigated by Harlow through a specific experiment. As he states in the same article: "the mother or mother surrogate provides its young with a source of security, and this role or function is seen with special clarity when mother and child are in a strange situation" (Harlow 1958, 678–79). Harlow explains the test as follows:

> At the present time we have completed tests for this relationship on four of our eight baby monkeys assigned to the dual mother-surrogate condition by introducing them for three minutes into the strange environment of a room […] (also called the "open-field test") and containing multiple stimuli known to elicit curiosity-manipulatory responses in baby monkeys. The subjects were placed in this situation twice a week for eight weeks with no mother surrogate present during alternate sessions and the cloth mother present during the others. […] After one or two adaptation sessions, the infants always rushed to the mother surrogate when she was present […] After a few additional sessions, the infants began to use the mother surrogate as a source of security, a base of operations […] They would explore and manipulate a stimulus and then return to the mother before adventuring again into the strange new world. (679)

Bowlby, Ainsworth, and Harlow all show the importance of the sense of security in infants to "function" properly: the infant's comfortable interaction with the "unknown" could only be possible through mother's transmission of security and support. The anxiety hits when there was no "source of security" in the room; as Harlow indicates the infants "would freeze in a crouched position […] Emotionally indices such as vocalization, crouching, rocking, and sucking increased sharply" (679).

Figure 2: Infant rhesus monkey's reaction during its mother surrogate's absence in the open-field test, Harlow Primate Lab, 1958.[2]

Ainsworth's strange-situation test, which is very similar to open-field test, also shows the differences between securely attached and insecurely attached infant's behavior. In this test:

> Mother and infant arrive at the lab together and settle themselves in a playroom. A friendly researcher welcomes them and then sits quietly in a corner. Toys and games litter the cheerful room and, typically, once there, surrounded by all the bright plastic possibilities, the baby crawls off to explore […] A few minutes later, the mother leaves the room; the baby is now alone in that fascinating but still strange place. Only the unknown researcher remains. Then, after a few minutes or so, the mother returns. (Blum 2002, 165)

As expected, during the absence of their mother, the infants' responses are pretty similar to those of the baby monkeys. As Blum puts: "Without their mother, many of the children stopped playing, some cried. They might tearfully look around, search the room, toddle toward the door in search of the missing parent" (166). However, "sometimes, a child would continue playing in his mother's absence and, upon her return, still relaxed, merely look up, beaming. Ainsworth classed these children as beautifully, securely attached" (166). Thus, Ainsworth once again proves that mother love and true mother-child bond can indeed eliminate the infant's fear of the unknown. Ainsworth also finds the chance to visit the subject families in their houses and observes the relationship between the mother and the child and "found that the mothers of

[2] This photo was taken from Harry Harlow's article "The Nature of Love" which can be found in the works cited. The content is in the public domain as stated by APA PsycNet. http://rightslink.apa.org/journal/1960-02805-001

securely attached children were acutely tuned to their children. They were responsive to the cry and the smile, quicker to pick up a crying child, inclined to hold a baby longer and with more apparent pleasure" (Blum 2002, 167).

As discussed previously, Lovecraft wasn't calm as an infant. This might be—at least partially—related to the lack of a secure attachment. Joshi cites one of Lovecraft's accounts: "My own headaches and nervous irritability and exhaustion-tendency began as early as my existence itself—I, too, was an early bottle baby with unexplained miseries and meagre nutriment-assimilative capacities…"[5] (quoted in Joshi 2013, 97). Joshi also mentions an important remark of Kenneth Faig: "So, in addition to all her other worries, Susie had her infant's colic." and comments: "Early weaning was common practice at the turn of the century and for a long time thereafter; but Lovecraft's remark suggests that his weaning occurred even earlier than was the custom" (97). Infant colic indeed says a lot about the mother-child bond and is also related to mother's anxiety. As the article "Infant Colic: Mechanisms and Management" states:

> Family stress, maternal anxiety, and the transmission of tension from mother to infant might play a role in the aetiology of infant colic. Indeed, maternal anxiety disorders were a robust predictor for infant colic, even after controlling for potential confounders such as maternal age, education, and parity. Furthermore, mothers with a high trait anxiety score had a twofold higher risk of having an infant with colic than mothers with low trait anxiety scores. (Zeevenhooven et al. 2018, 485)

As discussed in the previous chapter and continues to be analyzed in this chapter, Susie's problems were not limited to anxiety disorders. However, her anxiety apparently affected Lovecraft when he was a baby and maybe even started his life-long obsession with the unknown. While it is totally normal to be afraid of the unknown,[6] mother love and secure attachment help the infant to cope with it. Because, while transmitting security and trust to her child, mother doesn't deny or eliminate the factor of the unknown; she simply transmits the idea (and feeling) that he/she is not alone or helpless inside the unknown. Thus, the mother metaphorically teaches

her son how to survive, mentally and emotionally, in this uncertain world. However, in Lovecraft's case a chronic existential anxiety is seen. As Sapolsky puts:

> For primates the definition of a stressor expands beyond merely a physical challenge to homeostasis. In addition, it includes thinking you are going to be thrown out of homeostasis. An anticipatory stress response is adaptive if there really is a physical challenge coming. However, if you are constantly but incorrectly convinced that you are about to be thrown out of balance, you are being an anxious, neurotic, paranoid, or hostile primate who is psychologically stressed. (Sapolsky 2018, 126)

Lovecraft's anxiety continued throughout his life and symptoms like "constant but incorrect" thoughts about "thrown out of balance," which demonstrated itself mainly in fear of madness, were present. Cognitive distortions play an important role in anxiety disorders and it is possible to see their metaphorical representations in Lovecraft's writings. This again supports my argument, which is to understand his writings as personal narratives rather than mere fictions. As Brad Lewis states: "Clark finds that personal 'narratives give voice to the ill, the traumatized, and the disabled' and restore the insights and wisdom they have achieved—wisdom that is often lost by medical research and clinical 'case studies' that too often turns people into statistics and diagnostic labels" (Lewis 2014, 439). However, before analyzing these examples, it would be better to explain cognitive distortion in anxiety disorders. In "The Anxious Child: Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment Strategies," Kendall et al. define distortions as "dysfunctional thinking processes" (Kendall, Howard, and Epps 1988, 284) and state that:

> In anxiety and depression, there are misperceptions of the demands of the environment, self-criticism, underappraisal of personal abilities, and characteristically—limited acting-out, aggressive, impulsive behavior. These children are not undercontrolled, but show a tendency toward overcontrol. Associated with overcontrol are characteristics of cognitive distortion. (284)

In their article on children's anxiety and threat perception abnormalities, Muris et al. focus specifically on anxious children's perception of danger and threat:

> According to Kendall's theory of childhood anxiety, pathological fear and anxiety result from the chronic overactivity of schemas around themes of danger and death. […] One example of such a cognitive distortion is interpretation bias, which reflects anxious children's tendency to more readily interpret ambiguous situations as threatening. (Muris et al. 2000, 124)

Threat perception abnormalities related to anxiety are seen in many of Lovecraft's writings. In "Dagon," the narrator describes the land onto which he washed up and its surroundings as follows:

> Perhaps I should not hope to convey in mere words the unutterable hideousness that can dwell in absolute silence and barren immensity. There was nothing within hearing, and nothing in sight save a vast reach of black slime; yet the very completeness of the stillness and the homogeneity of the landscape oppressed me with a nauseating fear. (Lovecraft 2014, 26)

The narrator continues perceiving neutral things/situations negatively, attributing them evil features: "The sun was blazing down from a sky which seemed to me almost black in its cloudless cruelty; as though reflecting the inky marsh beneath my feet" (26). Similarly, in "What the Moon Brings," the moon is perceived and depicted as something evil and threatening. "Moon-cursed waters" (Lovecraft 2014, 229), "hateful moon" (2014, 229), "evil moon" and "leering and treacherous yellow moon" can be given as examples in addition to the narrator's clear statement in the beginning of the story: "I hate the moon—I am afraid of it—for when it shines on certain scenes familiar and loved it sometimes makes them unfamiliar and hideous" (229). Another example can be found in "The Lurking Fear" when the narrator comments on the landscape:

> The ancient lightening-scarred trees seemed unnaturally large and twisted, and the other vegetation unnaturally thick and feverish, while curious mounds and hummocks in the weedy, fulgurite-pitted earth reminded me of snakes and dead men's skulls swelled to gigantic proportions. (239)

Finally, in "He" Lovecraft's dislike for New York becomes the story's source of horror: "I have said that I was alarmed, yet to my soul nothing was more deadly than the material daylight

world of New York" (359). In all these examples "horror" is born as a result of narrator's distorted perception. All the mentioned things (sun, moon, trees and vegetation, and even New York), what would otherwise be natural and normal, are the sources of fear and anxiety for the narrators in Lovecraft's writings. It is therefore a pertinent question whether Lovecraft's literary techniques for creating cosmic horror actually derive from his threat perception abnormality. However, in order to answer this crucial question, it is necessary to complete all the analyzes.

Another important point to mention in Lovecraft's analysis is the theme of overprotection. As is known, Susie was always overprotective with her son. Joshi comments:

> There is no question but that his mother both spoiled Lovecraft and was overprotective of him. This latter trait appears to have developed even before Winfield's hospitalization in 1893. Winfield Townley Scott tells the following story: "[…] Mrs. Lovecraft refused to eat her dinner in the dining room, not to leave her sleeping son alone for an hour one floor above. When a diminutive teacher-friend, Miss Ella Sweeney, took the rather rangy youngster to walk, holding his hand, she was enjoined by Howard's mother to stoop a little lest she pull the boy's arm from its socket. When Howards pedaled his tricycle […] his mother trooped beside him, a guarding hand upon his shoulder." (Joshi 2013, 98-9)

The following event in 1917, mainly told by Lovecraft's two friends (W. Paul Cook and Rheinhart Kleiner), once again demonstrates Susie's pathological approach to her 27 years old son:

> Both Cook and Kleiner are united on the extreme solicitude exercised by Susie and Lillian over Lovecraft. Cook notes: "Every few minutes Howard's mother or his aunt, or both, peeped into the room to see if he had fainted or shown signs of strain…" Kleiner tells a more remarkable story: "I noticed that at every hour or so his mother appeared in the doorway with a glass of milk, and Lovecraft forthwith drank it." It is this constant babying of Lovecraft by Susie and Lillian that no doubt helped to foster in Lovecraft's own mind a sense of his "invalidism." (quoted in Joshi 2013, 408–9)

Susie's mental problems were already discussed. However, it is also important to find their metaphorical representations in Lovecraft's fiction. In many of his writings, the mother character is represented as a passive and weak individual who is—or eventually becomes—mentally unstable. In "The Shunned House," "the widowed Rhoby Harris never recovered from

the shock of her husband's death, and the passing of her first-born Elkanah two years later was the final blow to her reason. In 1768 she fell victim to a mild form of insanity, and was thereafter confined to the upper part of the house" (Lovecraft 2014, 317). Rhoby's tragedy indeed evokes Susie's story, whose mental health deteriorated after her husband's death and who was eventually confined to a mental asylum. Lovecraft continues with the details regarding Rhoby's madness as follows: "Meanwhile poor Rhoby Harris, in her madness, gave voice to dreams and imaginings of the most hideous sort. At times her screams became insupportable, and for long periods she would utter shrieking horrors" (318). Indeed, it is possible to draw a parallel between Susie and Lovecraft's character, Rhoby, as the following account by Clara Hess gives a rather detailed information about the symptoms of Susie's mental disorder and show the resemblance between two women: "I remember that Mrs. Lovecraft spoke to me about weird and fantastic creatures that rushed out from behind buildings and from corners at dark, and that she shivered and looked about apprehensively as she told her story" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 427). She also recalled: "The last time I saw Mrs. Lovecraft we were both going 'down street' on the Butler Avenue car. She was excited and apparently did not know where she was" (quoted in Joshi 2013427). In "The Color Out of Space," when the contagious madness finally reaches Mrs. Gardner, she "screamed about things in the air which she could not describe. In her raving there was not a single specific noun, but only verbs and pronouns" (Lovecraft 2014, 646). Just like Rhoby Harris, after this incident Mrs. Gardner is confined in the attic.[7] On the other hand, in "The Outsider," the narrator says: "I think that whoever nursed me must have been shockingly aged, since my first conception of a living person was that of something mockingly like myself, yet distorted, shriveled, and decaying like the castle" (177). Finally, Susie's overprotection also finds itself a place in "The Thing on the Doorstep" as the narrator comments on Edward Pickman Derby's situation:

> Perhaps his private education and coddled seclusion had something to do with his premature flowering. An only child, he had organic weaknesses which

> startled his doting parents and caused them to keep him closely chained to their side. He was never allowed out without his nurse, and seldom had a chance to play unconstrainedly with other children. All this doubtless fostered a strange, secretive inner life in the boy, with imagination as his one avenue of freedom. (991)

Looking at the inferences he made, this story also draws attention to Lovecraft's self-awareness. The narrator openly talks about the negative consequences of overprotection, like preventing Derby to develop necessary social skills:[8]

> In self-reliance and practical affairs, however, Derby was greatly retarded because of his coddled existence. His health had improved, but his habits of childish dependence were fostered by overcareful parents; so that he never travelled alone, made independent decisions, or assumed responsibilities. It was early seen that he would not be equal to a struggle in the business or professional arena, but the family fortune was so ample that this formed no tragedy. (991)

Harlow's experiments with the cloth mother also support Lovecraft's lines. As Blum remarks:

> Harry also came to realize that a cloth mother's impenetrably passive nature made her a hopeless parent. She might be as cuddly as a fleece, but fluffy availability was never going to be enough. And it wasn't just that cloth mom didn't hug back. It was all the other things she didn't do: She didn't teach, direct, or steer the baby towards others. From cloth mom, the baby really learned more isolation, separation from others. (Blum 2002, 192)

Moreover, when Lovecraft is compared with the infant rhesus monkeys raised by an inanimate surrogate mother, a further resemblance is seen:

> Surrogate-reared animals are like alien monkeys from the planet nowhere. The cloth-mother-raised babies didn't engage in any of that all-important schmoozing. They didn't play with other monkeys; they didn't swing into the usual spring mating season. They had no idea what to do with other monkeys—as friends, as enemies, as potential mates, as casual companions. No one had showed them the social ropes and they simply couldn't find them without help. (Blum 2002, 192–93)

Blum's comparison of the surrogate-raised babies to "alien monkeys" makes sense in the same way Lovecraft felt like an outsider or an alien[9]. As he further tells: "Amongst my few playmates [at the age of five] I was very unpopular, since I would insist on playing out events

in history, or acting according to consistent plots" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 104). All the information regarding Lovecraft's social life during his childhood show that he simply didn't know how to play with his peers. Joshi gives the example of Lovecraft's cousin, Ethel M. Phillips: "She confessed in an interview conducted in 1977 that she did not much care for her cousin, finding him eccentric and aloof. She became very irritated because Lovecraft did not apparently know how a swing worked" (105). Lovecraft was well aware of his own inability: "The children I knew disliked me, & I disliked them. I was used to adult company & conversation […] I had nothing in common with the infant train. Their romping & shouting puzzled me. I hated mere play & dancing about" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 104). Neither Lovecraft nor Harlow's "alien" rhesus monkeys raised by cloth mother knew how to interact with their peers. And just like other autobiographical themes, this sense of alienation is also frequently represented in many of his narratives. A clear example is seen in "The Outsider," when the narrator says: "For although nepenthe has calmed me, I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men" (Lovecraft 2014, 181). In "The Silver Key," Randolph Carter "sought friends, but soon grew weary of the crudeness of their emotions, and the sameness and earthiness of their visions. He felt vaguely glad that all his relatives were distant and out of touch with him, for they could not have understood his mental life" (431). It is important to note that, at first it was Lovecraft's social awkwardness that prevented him from having friends. In time, though, his intellect and rare interests gave him an added eccentricity, replacing his awkwardness and reclusiveness with some kind of snobbery. This so-called mental superiority, which somehow excuses his difficulty in forming social relationships, became a frequent theme of his writings. What is more, he also associated superior intellect with madness. In "'His madness Held No Affinity': Reimagining Arkham Asylum," Benjamin Noad states:

> Madness is triggered by cataclysmic interactions with the cosmic unknown. There is something particularly privileged about Lovecraft's view of mental

> illness, privileged in the sense that it represents for Lovecraft an elite state of knowledge […] Lovecraft has a surprising and […] idealized view of madness. While the author is known for his racist views and adherence to notions such as the late nineteenth-century idea of social "degeneration", his fiction tends to sympathize with those who have become mad. Lovecraft's "mad" characters undergo constant and endless suffering perhaps mirroring his own misanthropy, potential depression, and general despair at the world. By reading this impulse in Lovecraft's asylums, and with some awareness of his family history, a sense of seclusion emerges; a haven for the Weird reader as much as for the Weird character. (Noad 2021, 45)

Indeed, Lovecraft's complex relationship with madness (madness as something to be afraid of vs. madness as a privilege and a proof of superior intellect and perception) requires careful analysis due to its direct link to cosmicism. The author's obsession with madness, originated both from his parents' and his own mental illness, is reflected in his writings and madness is represented as something both admirable and fearful. Moreover, the protagonist does not go mad just because of the horror of the cosmic unknown, but because of his own particular intellect which allows him to fully comprehend this horror. In this sense, the profound perception becomes both a blessing and a curse. As discussed in the previous chapter,[10] Lovecraft usually uses the term "sensitive few" to describe people with this rare characteristic. In "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," the narrator comments on the psychological effects of a horrific event as follows: "It is fortunate that they were all strong men of action and simple, orthodox religionists, for with more subtle introspectiveness and mental complexity they would have fared ill indeed" (Lovecraft 2014, 559). On the other hand, in "The Shadow Out of Time," the Great Race's choice points to a connection between higher intellectual capacity and cosmic unknown, as it chooses:

> The best discoverable representative of the highest of that period's life-forms; entering the organism's brain and setting up therein its own vibrations while the displaced mind would strike back to the period of the displacer, remaining in the latter's body till a reverse process was set up. (1035)

Therefore, the sensitive individual, who is thought to be "queer" or insane, becomes the "chosen one" because of his mental abilities.

However, Lovecraft's approach to madness is not limited with this rather "schizophrenic" interpretation. His understanding of madness as well as his love-hate relationship with it is very ambiguous and almost unfathomable but is still traceable in his works. As Noad further states:

> For Lovecraft, madness is always an empathetically reasonable response to the threat of impossible, incomprehensible, and unknown things from elsewhere; in Lovecraft's sanatoriums, madness is demonstrated as a sane response to cosmic horror, rather than a form of criminal transgression. (Noad 2021, 44)

One of the characteristics of the mentally ill is, then, his/her ability or wish to see "beyond" or to confront with the unknown. Again, in "From Beyond," the narrator's friend, Crawford Tillinghast, finds "a way to break down the barriers" between the world people know, see, and interact with and other worlds they can't normally reach, so that they can "see that at which dogs howl in the dark, and that at which cats prick up their ears after midnight" (Lovecraft 2014, 132). Tillinghast claims he has seen "truth" and wants to show it to narrator. After this experience, however, Tillinghast dies and the narrator is deeply traumatized because of what he saw. "Truth" turns him paranoid: "I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am weary" (137).

Moreover, Lovecraft stresses the painfully personal and abstract nature of mental illness, depicting his characters as extremely alone in their experiences. No one else sees or knows what they saw or knew and, for this reason, people can't understand or empathize with their fear and pain. In "The Nameless City," the narrator is the only person who has ever seen the legendary nameless city: "I alone have seen it, and that is why no other face bears such hideous lines of fear as mine; why no other man shivers so horribly when the night-wind rattles the windows" (165). Similarly in "The Lurking Fear" the narrator says: "Now that I am telling it anyway, lest the brooding make me a maniac, I wish I had never concealed it. For I, and I only, know what manner of fear lurked on that spectral and desolate mountain" (238). In "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," the narrator defines Charles Ward as psychologically unique: "His

madness held no affinity to any sort recorded in even the latest and most exhaustive of treatises, and was conjoined to a mental force which would have made him a genius or a leader had it not been twisted into strange and grotesque forms" (527).

Sensory distortion is another common feature between Lovecraft's "sensitive" characters. In "The Nameless City," the narrator says: "A presence seemed stalking among the spectral stones of the city, and when I glanced at the moon it seemed to quiver as though mirrored in unquiet waters" (168). Indeed, the word "seem" is frequently used to emphasize on characters' doubt regarding their own perception. In "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," the narrator similarly states: "As I looked, a certain object crossed or seemed to cross that dark rectangle; burning into my brain a momentary conception of nightmare which was all the more maddening because analysis could not shew a single nightmarish quality in it" (879). The same narrator also asserts elsewhere: "In the darkness every faint noise of the night seemed magnified, and a flood of doubly unpleasant thoughts swept over me" (902). Sensory distortion and paranoia indeed constitute an essential part of the mentioned superior intellect of Lovecraft's characters. Through these qualities they see and comprehend things more profoundly and discover the cosmic knowledge that would otherwise remain hidden from the humanity. In this sense, once again the mental illness becomes the key element to unearth the hidden reality.

Finally, the theme of control is worth emphasizing as Lovecraft's characters seem destined to confront with the "unknown" beyond their control. Indeed, the feeling of lack of control in stories is overwhelming. The narrator's statement in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" is quite illustrative: "It must have been some imp of the perverse—or some sardonic pull from dark, hidden sources—which made me change my plans as I did" (886). In "The Dreams in the Witch House," Walter Gilman becomes the victim of the same kind of "pull" or "attraction": "Some unknown attraction was pulling his eyes in a seemingly irrelevant direction, for he could not help staring at a certain vacant spot on the floor" (934). This "pull," which is actually a cosmic

call, is depicted like a compulsion: "The urge to walk was gradually changing to an urge to leap mystically into space, and suddenly he realized just where the source of the pull lay. It was in the sky. A definite point among the stars had a claim on him and was calling him" (935). A very similar situation is seen in Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee's account in "The Shadow Out of Time": "Nerves on edge, and whipped into a kind of perverse eagerness by that inexplicable, dread-mingled, pseudo-mnemonic urge towards the northeast, I plodded on beneath the evil, burning moon" (1056). More importantly, all these cases point to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). DSM-V's description of OCD perfectly coincides with the conditions of the characters:

> OCD is characterized by the presence of obsessions and/or compulsions. *Obsessions* are recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced as intrusive and unwanted, whereas *compulsions* are repetitive behaviors or mental acts that individual feels driven to perform in response to an obsession or according to rules that must be applied rigidly. (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 235)

Lovecraft, then, discusses several mental disorders in his writings such as threat perception abnormality, paranoia, anxiety disorder, OCD, depression, as well as illusions and hallucinations that all cause terror and fear. In this sense, it is possible to associate cosmic horror to mental illness since, for the characters, the real horror is being trapped in their own minds, all alone and without any control. However, as discussed, Lovecraft's mental illness cannot be understood without the developmental trauma (in addition to his other traumas) and Susie's role in it. Therefore, it is also possible to associate his fearfulness, as well as the theme of social intelligence (especially his social awkwardness), to his mother's inadequacy. Blum comments:

> In rhesus society, with its rigid top-to-bottom hierarchy, knowing your friends, their place, your place, adds up to a basic formula for survival. No one is born with that knowledge, and yet, from very early on, a child needs to know where he fits. If social intelligence has to be taught, the suggestion is that every child—human or monkey—requires a dedicated teacher. (Blum 2002, 199)

Apparently, Susie was not the dedicated teacher Lovecraft needed. It was partly due to this lack of education that he became socially dependent and incompetent. Indeed, this very social incompetence led some scholars, like Paul Roland, to diagnose Lovecraft with Asperger syndrome. As he suggests in his book*, The Curious Case of H.P. Lovecraft*:

> Had he been born a century later he might have been diagnosed with borderline Asperger Syndrome […] He certainly displayed all the symptoms: a lack of empathy and concern for others, obsessive interests and a work ethic bordering on the compulsive. Asperger sufferers typically demonstrate a degree of emotional immaturity, physical awkwardness and high anxiety which can manifest in a reluctance to leave their familiar environment […] (Roland 2014, 372)

However, diagnosing Lovecraft with Asperger Syndrome, based on the given characteristics, is rather superficial since the mentioned symptoms can be associated with many different disorders. As Darrell Schweitzer comments: "He [Roland] is in serious trouble by page 33 where he tries to apply a highly dubious diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome to explain both Lovecraft's social behavior and the lack of conventional characterization in his stories" (Schweitzer 2015, 227). Similarly, in his essay "Literary Biography and Psychological Criticism: In the Matter of H.P. Lovecraft" Stephen A. Black comments on and supports the idea that Lovecraft might have had a schizoid personality, as it was suggested by L. Sprague de Camp in *Lovecraft: A Biography*:

> He [De Camp] is probably correct in calling Lovecraft a schizoid personality, a diagnosis describing people who must generally avoid close personal relationships, are usually unable to express directly instinctual aggressive or hostile feelings, who are emotionally constricted, secretive and reclusive, and who tend to be autistic in their thinking. (Black 1979, 248)

This is, again, a risky interpretation of some nonspecific symptoms and does not reflect the truth, as in the case of Roland's analysis. The mentioned symptoms are too general to speculate on Lovecraft's diagnosis and, for this reason, using the biographical data, analyzing the clear symptoms such as anxiety, OCD, paranoia and depression and discovering their metaphorical

representations in his writings are the only things one can do to understand (and not to label) Lovecraft's inner world. Therefore, interpreting his writings as personal illness stories, without judgement and prejudies, is crucial. As Raymond C. Barfield and Lucy Selman state in "Health and Humanities: Spirituality and Religion":

> Anthropologists and sociologists have illimunated the ways in which human beings use narrative to make sense of and find meaning in their experiences, particularly those of suffering. Research has explored the reconstructive power of narrative in serious illness […] Patients' telling and retelling of their illness experiences or stories become a way of reasserting control, reestablishing personal identity, and (re)discovering meaning when these have been brought into crisis by illness. (Selman and Barfield 2014, 538)

Since Lovecraft's personal life, beliefs and writings are all intertwined, it is not easy to decipher the metaphors he used to create his anxiety narratives. However, Harlow's ideas indeed help to understand Susie's role in Lovecraft's emotional and social development without reducing their relationship to a mere Freudian complex by misinterpreting its dynamics. And with the help of health humanities, a complete analysis of his mental illness and anxiety narratives has emerged.

5.3 CONCLUSION

While Susie's role in Lovecraft's life was discussed before, analyzing her complex relationship with her son using Harlow's ideas helped for a better understanding of the psychosocial development of Lovecraft, as well as its link with cosmicism. Using health humanities, on the other hand, was necessary to understand the true meaning of Lovecraft's anxiety narratives. Since the writings of Lovecraft are not mere fiction but are allegorical expressions of his mental disorders, it is possible to identify and analyze them as illness stories.

Lovecraft's description of his mental illness, however, is quite ambiguous and it is necessary to decipher the metaphors and hidden meanings of his narratives. Once analyzed, it

is possible to see that his writings include a variety of mental problems with a predominance of anxiety disorders.

Since Lovecraft's writings and life are intertwined, understanding both Susie's role in his early development and the true meaning of his narratives are necessary to understand the author's psyche, and thus, cosmicism.

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[1] Many thanks to Prof. Peggy Mason for our discussion about Harry Harlow.

[2] As Deborah Blum writes in *Love at Goon Park*: "Nothing could be worse for a child, by this calculation, than being mothered. And being mothered meant being cradled, cuddled, cosseted. It was a recipe for softness, a strategy for undermining strong character […] Watson wrote an entire chapter on "The Dangers of Too Much Mother Love," in which he warned that obvious affection always produced 'invalidism' in a child. The cuddling parent, he said, is destined to end up with a whiny, irresponsible, dependent failure of a human being" (Blum 2002, 37). She also comments: "Another concept, beloved by the Freudians, was that the baby's first relationship was not with the mother as a whole, but with her breast […] When Freud wrote of mother love, he also explained that the breast that feeds is an infant's first erotic object, and that 'love has its origin in attachment to the satisfied need for nourishment.' […] After World War II, when she had worked with displaced children, Anna Freud was more willing to discuss the notion that a child might love a mother. But she didn't believe that bond began in affection: 'He forms an attachment to food –milk– and developing further from this point, to the person who feeds him and the love of the food becomes the basis of love for the mother.'" (Blum 2002, 56–57).

[3] In the previous chapter some examples were already given to support this argument. This chapter will continue with other examples and a more extensive research to complete the analysis.

[4] As it was discussed in the previous chapter.

[5] Moreover, as it was remarked in the previous chapter, Joshi also mentioned other statements of Lovecraft: "In an earlier letter Lovecraft stated that 'As an infant, I had been restless & prone to cry.' He refers to the effect of his maternal grandmother in correcting 'my increasingly boorish deportment—for my nervousness made me a very restless & uncontrollable child.'" (Joshi 2013, 97-8).

[6] The evolutionary origin of the fear of the unknown has been discussed in Chapter 3.

[7] Not unlike Bertha Mason (or other "madwomen in the attic," as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar analyzed) from Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre.*

[8] As Joshi comments: "Lovecraft led a comparatively solitary young childhood, with only his adult family members as his companions" (Joshi 2013, 104).

[9] As we saw in the previous chapter, Lovecraft described himself as a "casual outsider and non-university barbarian and alien" (Joshi 2013, 195) after his last nervous breakdown, as Joshi comments: "This sense of alienation presumably began soon after his collapse in 1908 […]" (195). Even if the reason of this sense of alienation was caused by the frustration he felt after he failed to finish high school because of his poor mental and physical health, I believe there is a deeper reason (or more than one reason) why he felt that way throughout his life, as it is analyzed in the text.

[10] See chapter 4.

6 BRAVE NEW ECOLOGY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: LIMITS OF THE ANXIOUS BODY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Today Lovecraft's anxiety narratives have become more relevant than ever not only due to current environmental and political problems, the pandemic, and the energy crisis, but also because of the feelings of constant uneasiness, hopelessness, despair, and uncertainty that surround us. As discussed in Chapter 3, COVID-19 had already made us personally experience these emotions, which can all be associated with cosmic anxiety, and reminded us how vulnerable, weak, and small we actually are. While we now have more knowledge about the virus and more "control" over it, which enables us to enter a post-pandemic period, the overall anxiety does not seem to diminish due to new and equally serious problems that make us question not only the nature of man, but also his position in and relationship with nature. As a matter of fact, a human's "consciousness," which separates him/her from other living beings and things by putting him/her in a somehow privileged and higher position in nature, has become more and more irrelevant every day. The tragic events, illnesses, natural disasters, and crises (in other words, all the things that make us feel anxious and desperate) all serve to demonstrate, again and again, that it is not possible to think human being as an autonomous entity, the center of the earth or the master of nature. These elements also point out the unpredictability and randomness of the things, and thus, defy the idea of control.

In this chapter, firstly I will discuss anxiety and its representation through anti-narrative, which shows the pure experience without the limits of syntaxes. In the second part, I will try to

approach anxiety as a non-human entity, a disease, and the actual storyteller of Lovecraft's narratives. This post-anthropocentric approach will combine the disciplines of medical/health humanities and posthumanism and thus, will help me to make a more updated and accurate reading of the author's writings. In this way, also I will be able to analyze changing anxieties and their direct relationship with the uncontrollable nature. Finally, I will try to answer whether a posthumanist reading of Lovecraft's anxiety narratives is possible.

6.2 Anti-Narrative and Anxiety

So far, Lovecraft's anxiety narratives have been analyzed using mainly narrative medicine, even though their focus is inherently chaotic and beyond narration. This approach allowed a better understanding of the author's mind, philosophy, and mental illness by uncovering and deciphering hidden and subtle meanings, and more importantly, it showed the impossibility of considering his writings as mere fiction or horror stories, by giving the role of the wounded storyteller to Lovecraft.

However, as discussed earlier, anxiety eventually transcends any kind of description, and most of the time words and language become insufficient to reflect its true nature.[1] This points to anxiety's own reality, which is impermeable to any kind of narrative form that follows strict linguistic rules. In "Before Narrative: Episodic Reading and Representations of Chronic Pain," Sara Wasson gives the following example:

> Lara Birk writes in her autoethnography that severe pain "not only ruptured the coherence of my narrative, it precluded coherence as a narrative possibility;" in her case, she found "the embodied narrative of the person in pain is unpredictable, unreliable, and seemingly unsuitable for communication." People living with chronic pain describe how their experience is disbelieved when it does not accord with expected narrations. (Wasson 2018, 107)

In the same way anxiety "precludes coherence as a narrative possibility" and allows Lovecraft to be experimental in his writings and gives them its weird, unorthodox and liminal

form that can be considered both as narrative and anti-narrative. Carl H. Sederholm points to "Nyarlathotep," stating:

> One of the biggest challenges of reading "Nyarlathotep" is understanding what happens to the narrator's voice somewhere between the penultimate and the concluding paragraphs. […] There are at least two key moments when the narrator's voice seems to disappear from the narrative altogether, thereby allowing some other voice and perspective to potentially enter into the tale. (Sederholm 2022, 301)

This approach is important because of its posthumanist connotation[2] and because it points to the stylistic aspect of the author's narratives, since by adding the voice of chaos or anxiety itself, Lovecraft interrupts his seemingly traditional narrative. Sederholm points to the structure of the opening paragraph: "Nyarlothotep … the crawling chaos … I am the last … I will tell the audient void…" (Lovecraft 2014, 138), which is followed by the narrator's account of a past event when he first saw and defied Nyarlathotep. The narrative then concludes with a vague and surreal depiction of an "outside" that is beyond comprehension. As Sederholm further comments: "The narrative voice, once so confident and rational, is now impersonal, distant, and lost. To underscore the point, Lovecraft turns from the narrative 'I' that he has used in the story so far" (Sederholm 2022, 304). By eliminating the narrative voice and giving a way to chaos, Lovecraft adds anti-narrative qualities to his anxiety narrative. While using these elements makes the narrative more original and weirder—therefore Lovecraft's preference to use them in his narratives makes sense, from a medical/health humanities perspective this can be interpreted as the only way possible for the author to approach his own anxiety. Just as in the case of chronic pain, anxiety defies coherence and shapes Lovecraft's narratives. In her article, "Mean Streets: Tracking the Dispositives of Address(es) with China Miéville's 'Reports of Certain Events in London'," Nicola Galubitz includes Miéville's comment regarding "The Call of Cthulhu":

> "[T]here is no story, only the slow uncovering, from disjointed information and discarded papers, of the fact of the Weird," writes China Miéville (the author, in a handbook article) about H.P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu." Miéville calls Lovecraft's "anti- narrative" "exemplary of Weird Fiction" because of its bricolage technique and its unprecedented, unrelatable monster, patched together out of several species. (Glaubitz 2021, 162)

Anti-narrative elements found in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives both serve to construct their weird base and to accurately represent the author's anxiety. As Wasson further states:

> Scholars of class, feminism and postcoloniality have identified many ways in which a narratively coherent self is a cultural construction imbricated with privilege. […] Similarly, Laura Salisbury, drawing on Angela Woods, warns that "linear narratives that stress deep psychological continuities across time and expressive, confessional "I" … might privilege and render problematically universal modes of subjectivity and self-expression that are, in fact, culturally and historically contingent. (Wasson 2018, 107–8)

Since anxiety is weird and visceral, it transcends any cultural or linguistic constructions, including the narrator himself. In other words, anxiety overrules its human host by taking over his logical and well-structured narrative voice. Sederholm states:

> For Lovecraft, calling attention to the ways human perception weakens and falls, particularly when faced with a cosmic perspective, is of paramount importance. […] He was especially interested in exploring moments in which his characters faced problems that were "unintelligible but real". (Sederholm 2022, 302–3)

He further comments: "It is precisely this kind of breakdown that Lovecraft articulates at this point in 'Nyarlathotep;' it is also the primary reason why the narrator disappears in his own narrative. He is no longer the confident and rational being he once was. His thinking is becoming weird." (303). This Weird element, again, evokes the loss of coherence that is present in illness stories. In her article, Wasson gives the example of Lous Heshusius, "the author of *Inside Chronic Pain: An Intimate and Critical Account*," who "has suffered profoundly from chronic pain for many years" (Wasson 2018, 109). Commenting on her work, Wasson further suggests: "Heshusius's work can certainly be approached as dramatising the way that illness

experience can destroy one's sense of a coherent narrative self" (110). Wasson's article contains an excerpt from Heshusius's work, where the author states:

> I try to speak to doctors about the severity of my pain. My words float strangely in the air. As I pronounce them, I myself become a spectator. As soon as I begin to speak, I am no longer there. Someone else is speaking these words. Someone who has not suffered the pain, for it is much worse than she says. How can she say so little? […] How can she, how can I, express this prelanguage torment? (110)

When Lovecraft's and Heshusius's texts are compared, it is really hard to ignore the uncanny similarity between the "disappearing" subjects. In both cases, when anxiety and pain take over the narratives, the originally present narrative voice "I" dissolves, transforming these narratives into pure chaos or anti-narratives. While this may seem like dissociation (and it may be, to a certain degree), it actually marks a transition to a realm beyond language (or prelanguage, as Heshusius puts it). And this realm, according to Wasson, can be liberating for the author:

> [Heshusius] experiences a moment of mindful awareness that overflows with solace. As Mark Sullivan and David Zucker explain, mindfulness requires resisting turning experience into narrative. Heshusius finds this state profoundly beneficial, describing a "disappearing me", "surrendering these things called 'I' and 'pain'". Furthermore, writing also yields benefits to Heshusius that are not best read as functions of a "coherent" narrative self. It offers a relief to the degree that it helps her feel heard and witnessed *in the moment*. (110)

In this sense, concentrating on the anti-narrative qualities in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives is indeed a beneficial method not only to better understand his texts as illness narratives, but also to witness his anxiety in its purest form. However, in her article Wasson also draws on "affect theory," which she defines as follows: "Affect theory is concerned with the inseparable entanglement of the somatic, the social and (in some of its incarnations) the emotional. This scholarship seeks language to describe emergent, visceral, often inchoate forces: as Joel Burges and Amy Elias say, this scholarship 'is the effort to understand the present as it plays out in somatic contexts'" (108).

While in this chapter I won't be using affect theory, this approach is still worth mentioning due to its relevance to my analysis regarding author's anxiety. In their article, "An Inventory of Shimmers," Seigworth and Gregg describe affect as follows:

> Affect […] is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1)

On the oher hand, affectivity is about man's subjective reaction to the happenings: "Affectivity, in this sense, is when something happens to us, and we react to it. We react according to the capacities we are able to mobilise. That is, the same impulse will propagate and crystallise in quite distinct manners, depending on who is being affected" (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015, 14). Affect and affectivity are quite important when it comes to complex and multifaceted concepts such as anxiety, which can be treated as an emotion or as something even more subtle and visceral than that. As it will be throughly analyzed in the second part of this chapter, anxiety can be seen as a "force" or "impulse" as well as our "reaction" to this force. It can be originated from inner senses or/and outer elements. Depending on the perspective, then, it can be both the object and the subject, and can be represented both as a non-human entity and as something totally anthropogenic. The reason this chapter begins with anti-narrative is, then, to show how our understanding changes and expands depending on the existence of a narrator or his disappearance from the "narrative" (which gives way to anti-narrative). While I have so far treated Lovecraft as the "wounded storyteller," shifting the focus from the subject (or the narrative voice) to the non-human object helps me better understand the author's anxiety and its limits.

6.3 A POSTHUMANIST READING OF LOVECRAFT'S ANXIETY NARRATIVES: IS IT POSSIBLE?

In "An Eldritch Crisis: Capitalist Paradigms in the Cthulhu Mythos," Daniel Doncel refers to Lovecraft as a "crisis author":

> Reading Lovecraft in the twenty-first century requires an awareness of how our common-sensical worldviews are shattered by reality. Because at the end of the day he is a crisis author, it is reasonable to say that the reason his fiction is appealing to contemporary audiences is because it deals with the very same kinds of crises we deal with here and now, in a capitalist world growing more decadent every day. The themes and narrative structures of the Cthulhu Mythos resonate with our own existential issues in that they all consist of the contradiction between a collapsing worldview and its resistance to being substituted by a more accurate one. They resonate, in a word, with a capitalist worldview that is the only thing we have been taught to see, and that is quickly proving to be a lie. (Doncel 2022, 141)

What's impressive about Lovecraft's narratives is the range of anxiety they represent. Indeed, his narratives cover many faces of anxiety, from the most personal and private type of anxiety stemming from traumas, family problems, and mental disorders, to a more existential type, and even those of purely social, economic, and environmental origin. This extensive representation of anxiety makes the author's narratives reusable—and reinterpretable—by recycling them in all kinds of troubled times.

But what is even more fascinating is that Lovecraft not only describes his experience of anxiety, but also accepts anxiety as an incomprehensible, semi-autonomous, and chaotic force and tries to convey it in its purest form. This creates the anti-narrative qualities mentioned earlier and allows for a posthumanist approach that will serve to further analyze anxiety as a non-human entity and subject.

However, before continuing with the analysis, it would be better to clarify the concepts and theories that I will use, and their relationship to my argument. The ideas of posthumanism are crucial to better understand the meaning of Lovecraft's anxiety narratives in today's world of crisis. In *Philosophical Posthumanism*, Francesca Ferrando cites Andy Miah's definition of posthumanism as follows:

> "A crucial premise of posthumanism is its critical stance towards the idea that humans are superior species in the natural order." In the following, he clarifies, "In this sense, the 'post' of posthumanism need not imply moving beyond humanness in some biological or evolutionary manner. Rather, the starting point should be an attempt to understand what has been omitted from an anthropocentric worldview." (Ferrando 2019, 23)

Rosi Braidotti, on the other hand, states that "[l]ife is not exclusively human: it encompasses both *bios* and *zoe* forces, as well as geo-and techno-relations that defy our collective and singular powers of perception and understanding" (Braidotti 2019, 51). Lovecraft's anxiety narratives, novel and "weird" for his time, make complete sense when read in today's quasi-posthumanist world. As a matter of fact, from a contemporary point of view, it is possible to say that the anxiety in his narratives stems from the subject's awareness of his own "posthumanity." As Braidotti suggests:

> Posthuman subjects establish relations on at least three levels: to one's self, to others and to the world. The world can be defined as a complex set of environmental, social and affective ecologies. […] The knowing subject is not Man, or *Anthropos* alone, but a more complex assemblage that undoes the boundaries between inside and outside the self, by emphasizing processes and flows. Neither unitary, nor autonomous, subjects are embodied and embedded, relational and affective collaborative entities, activated by relational ethics. (51)

However, in Lovecraft's narratives, the sensitive protagonist's almost instinctive awareness of his own posthumanity doesn't mean that he automatically understands, accepts, and embraces this idea and its connotations. On the contrary, this idea disturbs him, making him deeply uncomfortable and pathologically anxious, and even breaks him on several occasions. According to Braidotti, "posthuman subjectivity is a transversal alliance that nowadays involves non-human agents. This means that the posthuman subject relates at the same time to the Earth—land, water, plants, animals, bacteria—and to technological agents—plastic, wires, cells, codes, algorithms" (51). However, Lovecraft's posthuman subject doesn't want to be an "assemblage" without "boundaries," and contrary to Braidotti, he doesn't find

any comfort in this "cross-species transversality."[3] This creates one of the main conflicts and reflects itself, again, as anxiety.

6.3.1 Anxiety as Both Subject and Object

Interpreting Lovecraft's narratives using posthumanist ideas is not new. In fact, it has become a popular trend in recent years, especially with the ongoing pandemic and environmental crisis. As Natasha Rebry Coulthard states in "Lovecraft's Viral Networks: A Contaminated Ethics for the Chthulucene": "The steadily-expanding body of posthumanist-oriented Lovecraft scholarship in recent years reveals his work as an important source of non-anthropocentric sentiment in line with current scientific and philosophical theories of human-nonhuman intimacies" (Coulthard 2022, 143). What I would like to do, however, is to treat anxiety—represented through the unknown—as the subject, instead of the wounded storyteller or protagonist (or Lovecraft himself). At first this may seem to require a shift of focus from subject to object, but we will eventually see that there is no real subject or object in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives. This parallels with what Ferrando states when discussing posthumanism: "In the economy of knowledge, humans are both subjects and objects: even when trying to avoid anthropocentric positions, humans are still communicating specific and situated human understandings in a human language to other human beings" (Ferrando 2019, 23). This is important for two reasons: it points how intertwined subjects and objects actually are—as in the case of Lovecraft's narratives—and emphasizes the impossibility of getting rid of the anthropocentric view completely. While in his narratives Lovecraft preferred to highlight the vast cosmos (or the background) instead of humans, he did it as a human being, using a human language. In this sense, it is not possible to completely ignore the human source (or host) while treating maddening anxiety as the "subject" or the non-human narrator/entity. Still, approaching

this unknown and unfathomable force as a somewhat semi-independent entity or a disease (or parasite), will give us a new understanding.

Indeed, what is seen in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives is similar to the process of infection development. From the moment the protagonist meets the unknown force, his mental and physical health starts to deteriorate. Or, in other words, the unknown force establishes power and control over the protagonist. As it was seen earlier in the example of "Nyarlathotep," sometimes it takes man's narrative ability away. In other cases, like in the popular example of "The Colour Out of Space," it takes man's sanity and, eventually, life away. As it was already discussed in previous chapters, however, this force is impersonal and cannot be categorized as something bad or evil. But although it is something beyond words and man-made categories, it has still serious negative effects on the subject. Indeed, the reader often "identifies" this force by its devastating effects on the protagonist. In "Hypnos," for instance, the protagonist (a sculptor) and his only friend (with whom he met for the first time in a railway station while the friend was unconscious) decide to study the unknown, as well as to transcend and further explore it through dreaming, with the aid of some "exotic drugs." However, it is not possible to talk about these studies since "they held so slight a connection with anything of the world as living men conceive it. They were of that vaster and more appalling universe of dim entity and consciousness which lies deeper than matter, time, and space, and whose existence we suspect only in certain forms of sleep—those rare dreams beyond dreams which come never to common men, and but once or twice in the lifetime of imaginative men" (Lovecraft 2014, 224). The unknown, again, resists any attempt of description, and can only be "suspected" while dreaming and only by imaginative (or sensitive) few[4] (like Lovecraft himself). The protagonist then points to our superficial perception of the everyday world, stating that: "The cosmos of our waking knowledge, born from such an universe as a bubble is born from the pipe of a jester, touches it only as such a bubble may touch its sardonic source when sucked back by the jester's

whim" (224), echoing the ideas of cosmicism. While commenting on the cosmos and unknown, Lovecraft also makes a reference to Einstein (as mentioned before), stating: "One man with Oriental eyes has said that all time and space are relative, and men have laughed. But even that man with Oriental eyes has done no more than suspect"[5] (224). As mentioned, Lovecraft was still frustrated at the time "Hypnos" was written because Einstein's revolutionary ideas about cosmos was challenging his materialism. In this sense, the protagonist's wish to "try to do more than suspect," by delving into the unknown, may reflect Lovecraft's search for a solid theory which would not go against his philosophy.

After these reflections on the vast universe and unknown, which is basically a blend of Lovecraft's philosophy of cosmicism and his ideas about ongoing scientific advances, the protagonist tries (but fails) to describe his experience. Still, he gives us some clue about its effects:

> Among the agonies of these after days is that chief of torments—inarticulateness. What I learned and saw in those hours of impious exploration can never be told—for want of symbols or suggestions in any language. I say this because from first to last our discoveries partook only of the nature of *sensations*; sensations correlated with no impression which the nervous system of normal humanity is capable of receiving. They were sensations, yet within them lay unbelievable elements of time and space—things which at bottom possess no distinct and definite existence. Human utterance can best convey the general character of our experiences by calling them *plungings* or *soarings*; for in every period of revelation some part of our minds broke boldly away from all that is real and present, rushing aerially along shocking, unlighted, and fear-haunted abysses, and occasionally *tearing* through certain well-marked and typical obstacles describable only as viscous, uncouth clouds or vapours. (Lovecraft 2014, 224–25)

Although unfathomable, the unknown still has a kind of somatic effect on the protagonist. What he feels resembles floating along "shocking, unlighted, and fear-haunted abysses." The unknown, then, is associated with feelings of shock, fear, and anxiety, and even includes obstacles with tactile features. Indeed, Lovecraft's well-known disgust toward slippery and viscose things and surfaces, as well as to anything suggestive of aquatic animals (these are also some common physical characteristics of his many cosmic deities), makes the experience even

more unpleasant, since the protagonist and his friend have to tear through these obstacles that resemble "viscous, uncouth clouds or vapors." Later, another viscous obstacle, this time from the "realms of greater remoteness" than any they "had previously known" (225), and which only the friend could pass, is mentioned:

> My friend was vastly in advance as we plunged into this awesome ocean of virgin aether […] [I] found myself projected against an obstacle which I couldn't penetrate. It was like the others, yet incalculably denser; a sticky, clammy mass, if such terms can be applied to analogous qualities in a non-material sphere. (225)

There are again several important points to analyze in this account. Once again, Lovecraft prefers to associate the realm of the unknown with something he personally finds unpleasant and threatening (ocean), as well as to formulate it according to his own classical worldview by using the term "aether" (or ether).[6] Moreover, he uses the adjectives "dense," "sticky" and "clammy," which evoke the structure of aquatic animals, to further describe the obstacles in this "ocean." The unknown thus projects the author's mental world, reflecting what he deeply detests in real life. In the narrative, the protagonist wakes up in the physical world due to this obstacle. His friend wakes up in horror after passing the barrier, however, he urges not to go back to unknown ever again because of what he saw (but couldn't dare to tell). He also says that they must sleep as little as possible, on which the protagonist soon agrees: "That he was right, I soon learned from the unutterable fear which engulfed me whenever consciousness lapsed. After each short and inevitable sleep I seemed older, while my friend aged with a rapidity almost shocking" (226). In addition to fear of sleep and of solitude, the protagonist's friend also begins to avoid going out:

> Especially was he afraid to be out of doors alone when the stars were shining, and if forced to this condition he would often glance furtively at the sky as if hunted by some monstrous thing therein. He did not always glance at the same place in the sky—it seemed to be a different place at different times. (226)

Again, in these accounts fear, anxiety and paranoia show themselves through clear and tangible symptoms. The unknown damages the friend's mental health, making him more dysfunctional over time, and one day he falls asleep and never wakes up. This only makes things worse for the protagonist, who is now alone and scared. As he states: "The tension of my vigil became oppressive, and a wild train of trivial impressions and associations thronged through my almost unhinged mind" (227). Stress, anxiety, and obsessive thoughts start to break him. In this vulnerable moment, the constellation Corona Borealis (the protagonist later realizes that it was this constellation that his friend was looking at and feared) affects him as well, before leading him to a mental breakdown: "All at once my feverishly sensitive ears seemed to detect a new and wholly distinct component in the soft medley of drug-magnified sounds—a low and damnably insistent whine from very far away; droning, clamoring, mocking, calling, *from the northeast*" (227). But what actually affects protagonist is the appearance of a "shaft of horrible red-gold light—a shaft which bore with it no glow to disperse the darkness, but which streamed only upon the recumbent head of the troubled sleeper" (227–28), which makes his friend open his eyes and stare to the source of the light. The protagonist looks there as well and sees "for an instant what it saw" (228), which leads him to epileptic seizure. Again, this nervous breakdown is reminiscent of the author's worse breakdown in 1908, as well as of his supposedly hysteroid seizure and chorea minor, which were discussed in Chapter 4. The narrative ends with a twist, as the reader discovers that the protagonist never actually had a friend, but a sculpture modelled from his own face, upon which the name "Hypnos" was carved. As the sculptor comments: "Just what happened is unknown […] They have said, I know not for what reason, that I never had a friend, but that art, philosophy, and insanity had filled all my tragic life" (228). This is interesting since it involves both first-person and third-person perspectives; the protagonist calls the event "unknown," while the others point to his solitary life filled with madness and intellectuality (which is not unlike Lovecraft's own life). It is possible to interpret

this as the author's subtle association of the unknown with madness or, more importantly, as his awareness of the overall situation.

Instead of analyzing the whole story, what I wanted to do was to focus on the (non)representation of the unknown, its effects, and its connotations that caused the protagonist's mental breakdown. "Hypnos" is a good example to see how the question of describing the indescribable is approached. Lovecraft represents the unknown through vague descriptions, which combine what humans are inherently scared of (darkness, abyss), the things that disgust and bother Lovecraft himself (wetness or viscous and sticky surfaces and things), his frustration and anxiety due to the scientific developments of his time, as well as cosmos and cosmic events (Corona Borealis). Indeed, the constellation is another horror element of the narrative, which clearly takes its source from the author's interests in both astronomy and Greek mythology.[7] Even if there is an untold/unidentified part of the unknown, the information provided makes it impossible to separate the unknown from the author's own fears, anxieties, frustrations, and interests. In other words, the unknown becomes "well-known" when we truly know Lovecraft. Nightmares, insomnia, tantrums and seizures, and a rather isolated life, seen in "Hypnos" as the result of too much immersion into the unknown, were familiar elements for the author. A similar situation can be seen in "Nyarlathotep" if the loss of narrative voice is interpreted as the loss of conscious and logical self, due to severe anxiety or nervous breakdown. But what exactly does this mean and how can it be explained using posthumanism? Does this mean we shift the focus from subject to object just to find the subject again? If so, is it possible to talk about a true post-anthropocentrism in Lovecraft's narratives? The answer changes depending on the perspective. As mentioned earlier, Lovecraft's narratives and philosophy have already been rightly embraced by posthumanism and other related philosophical schools such as "new materialism, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, as well as human-animal studies" and "what these new theoretical paradigms have in common—and what they tend to

embrace in Lovecraft—is an antihumanist orientation that challenges universal human supremacy and rethinks the relation of the human to the nonhuman" (Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 4). The following statement by Lovecraft can also be interpreted as posthumanist: "Man's relations to man do not captivate my fancy. It is man's relation to the cosmos—to the unknown—which alone arouses in me the spark of creative imagination. The humanocentric pose is impossible to me, for I cannot acquire the primitive myopia which magnifies the earth and ignores the background" (quoted in Joshi 2013, 686). Indeed, the "nonhuman" unknown force or entity can be perfectly discussed using anti-anthropocentrism, as long as it remains "unknown" and unrelated to human. However, the question arises when this force is interpreted as a reflection of human fears and anxieties.

6.3.2 From Cosmic Horror to Ecophobia, and then to Eco-Anxiety

It is not without reason that Lovecraft's works inspire many posthumanist thinkers. As Sederholm and Weinstock state:

> The deflating of human pretensions to mastery and a profound anti-anthropocentrism at the heart of Lovecraft's philosophy of cosmicism also helps explain the congruence between Lovecraft and contemporary posthumanist theorizing […] For Deleuze and Guattari, as well as for Patricia MacCormack, Lovecraft's short story "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" exemplifies a process of being as becoming—becoming animal, becoming monster, becoming other than a fixed and finished human subject. (Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 7)

While discussing it from a posthumanist perspective, MacCormack doesn't deny the fact that the process of becoming was "horrific" for Lovecraft: "For Lovecraft, the affects of becoming monster and entering into becomings simultaneously with the monsters of his Ancient Ones pantheon are horrific; for contemporary theories of what it means to be human, these stories can be liberatory in many ways" (MacCormack 2016, 199). Becoming, changing, transition or hybridization are indeed recurrent themes in Lovecraft's narratives; but these

elements serve a totally opposite purpose from the posthumanist approach. These permeable, penetrating, and hybrid bodies are anxiety-inducing for Lovecraft's sterile, fixed, virgin, and closed body. Therefore, his narratives can be considered "liberatory" only if we remove the author and his perception from his writings, and this requires approaching them as fiction. In this sense, reading Lovecraft's writings as anxiety narratives contradicts with MacCormack's following statement: "Ultimately, Lovecraft's more cosmic works rethink life in an ecological mode of multiplicity and connectivity, uncannily evocative of contemporary ecosophical and chaosmological theory seen in the work of Continental philosophers such as Félix Guattari, Michel Serres, and Gilles Deleuze" (MacCormack 2016, 199). This is also the reason Donna Haraway insists on the irrelation between her "Chthulucene"[8] and Lovecraft's "Cthulhu":

> I also insist that we need a name for the dynamic ongoing symchthonic forces and powers of which people are a part, within which ongoingness is at stake. […] I am calling all this the Chthulucene—past, present, and to come. These real and possible time-spaces are not named after SF writer H.P. Lovecraft's misogynist racial-nightmare monster Cthulhu (note spelling difference), but rather after the diverse earthwide tentacular powers and forces and collected things with names like Naga, Gaia, Tangaroa, […] and many many more. (Haraway 2016, 101)

This is an important example for showing that not all posthumanist thinkers are in favor of Lovecraft, even though these two parties have things in common.

On the other hand, in his famous work Timothy Morton gives the example of Cthulhu to better explain his concept of hyperobject:

> Hyperobjects are *Gaussian*, disturbingly squishy and mollusk-like. […] It is as if we were inside a gigantic octopus. H.P. Lovecraft imagines the insane god Cthulhu this way. Cthulhu inhabits a non-Euclidean city, just like Gaussian spacetime. By understanding hyperobjects, human thinking has summoned Cthulhu-like entities into social, psychic, and philosophical space. The contemporary philosophical obsession with the monstrous provides a refreshing exit from human-scale thoughts. It is extremely healthy to know not only that there are monstrous beings, but that there are beings that are not purely thinkable, whose being is not directly correlated with whatever thinking is. (Morton 2013, 64)

The concept of hyperobject is important and now more popular than ever due to the pandemic and other energy and environmental crisis. It is also worth examining because of the bridge it establishes between Lovecraftian elements and our changing perceptions in today's world. Indeed, this concept can be considered as cosmicism finding a place in posthumanism. Morton further defines hyperobjects as: "[T]hings that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans. […] Hyperobjects, then, are 'hyper' in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not" (1). Hyperobjects also deeply evoke Lovecraft's cosmic entities because of their specific characteristics:

> They are *viscous*, which means that they "stick" to beings that are involved with them. They are *nonlocal*; in other words, any "local manifestation" of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to. […] Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. And they exhibit their effects *interobjectively*; that is, they can be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects. […] Hyperobjects are directly responsible for what I call *the end of the world*, rendering both denialism and apocalyptic environmentalism obsolete. (1–2)

Given these features, the unknown represented in Lovecraft's narratives can be regarded as a hyperobject. Despite mentioning Cthulhu (in the above excerpt) only once without further analysis, Morton's concept appears to be a formulation, elaboration, and adaptation of Lovecraft's unknown by giving it a name in posthumanist theory. However, Morton suggests that the idea of hyperobject preceded and actually gave way to Lovecraft's cosmic deities; that is, it is our awareness and perception of hyperobject that "summons Cthulhu-like entities" (64). Kaisa Kortekallio further defines the concept as: "[A] system or a process that escapes human sensory perception and cognitive capabilities, but still has the power to transform human existence. Global warming, radioactive materials, and ubiquitous plastic can be considered hyperobjects, but so can the processes of evolution and extinction, and so can things like the

English language and money" (Kortekallio 2020, 65). Gry Ulstein, however, points to a problem stemming from this understanding:

> Morton tries to explain Anthropocene anxieties in terms of the "weird loop" he calls ecological awareness […] [He] uses the weird as a mode to come to grips with Anthropocene issues like global warming […] This weird pathway might be what humanities scholars try to manæuvre as they turn to Lovecraft and the weird to find expression for the increasing awareness that humanity has become a "hyperobject." However, the attribution of Cthulhu-like qualities to hyperobjects like global warming might also discourage political engagement because the perceived threat, on the one hand, demands new habits and long-term thinking completely adverse to the way humans are used to thinking about and planning their existence. On the other hand, by extension, the perceived threat is so all-encompassing and inevitable that taking action can seem (is often referred to as) not only uncomfortable, but redundant. (Ulstein 2019, 55)

Morton uses "viscous," "nonlocal" and indescribable hyperobjects, which reflect the essence of Lovecraft's unknown, to approach Anthropocene. His concept parallels with the idea of anxiety stemming from human's awareness of his own posthumanity (as mentioned previously) and thus makes the unknown very known and human. However, as Ulstein points out, this approach is not unproblematic. Although novel and original, approaching concrete environmental problems that require immediate and efficient solutions with an abstract, complex, and bleak concept such as Lovecraft's unknown can be overwhelming for people. Interpreting the unknown as the author's anxiety also precludes such an approach.

Another problem would be starting to interpret everything as a hyperobject, although according to Laura Hudson, this is not something necessarily negative:

> Depending on your perspective, almost anything can be a hyperobject, can be inside one, or both. That doesn't make the concept meaningless, though: it means that the deep reality of your everyday world is quietly full to bursting with the uncanny, both familiar and alien in equal measure. If you start recognizing hyperobjects everywhere you go, then Morton has, on some level, succeeded—in changing your perspective, in reorienting your ontology. (Hudson 2021)

On the other hand, it is worth emphasizing the weird and subtle comfort all the mentioned Lovecraft-inspired posthumanist ideas give. As Hudson comments:

> Despite Morton's concerns, I don't think of *Hyperobjects* as an entirely pessimistic book. Even though certain parts of it leave me haunted and a little bit freaked out, there's something about discovering the language for a feeling, being able to name it, that is empowering—a way of finding a handhold in the dim light of confusion rather than scrambling around in the dark.

This account points to a crucial and somewhat contradictory point: The indescribability and unthinkability of the unknown represented in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives is used as a tool to construct a language for a posthumanist awareness. In other words, both MacCormack and Morton draw inspiration from the inexpressible and imprecise aspects of the enigmatic unknown to better explain our dynamic bodies, perceptions, and their relationship with the uncontrollable forces that surround us. Thus, the unknown, which is devastating and paralyzing in Lovecraft's case, turns into an uncanny driving force in posthumanist context. As Ulstein suggests while discussing the new weird:

> This new weird ecological ethics implies a responsibility to engage with the monstrous rather than become passively consumed with dread, as the old weird often entails. The new weird displays an interest in monsters that create space for environmental anxieties to be dissected, readjusted, and used to rethink the position of the human in the time of the Anthropocene. (Ulstein 2019, 54)

This may explain why a posthumanist understanding leads to eco-anxiety, while cosmicism leads to ecophobia. But how can two reactions be so different from one another when faced with the same—or similar type of—affect? This can be explained with how we process anxiety. In Lovecraft's anxiety narratives the unknown completely dominates the protagonist. That is, he fails to put a distance between his self and anxiety, which eventually makes him consumed by anxiety. As Dylan Trigg states in *Topophobia: A Phenomenology of Anxiety*:

> Heidegger's argument is that in anxiety, the pregiven meaning of things in their everyday context slips away, including that of our own selves. In this slippage of things, the subject "hovers" above and beyond their personal existence, revealing the "pure Da-sein" that dwells beneath this personalized being. The result is that we feel "ill-at-home" in the world, as the world reveals itself to be the site of an irreducible and original strangeness. (Trigg 2017, xxxi)

The mind conquered (or infected) by anxiety thus renders the subject dysfunctional, passive, and incapable of making a rational and realistic assessment of himself and his environment. It is not surprising, therefore, that we see ecophobic elements in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives. In line with my argument, Simon C. Estok defines ecophobia as follows:

> Ecophobia is all about frustrated agency. No wonder it is so central in tragic narratives. Tragedy has traditionally represented the frustrated assertion of human agency in the face of what Terry Eagleton has called "the unfathomable agencies of Nature." […] Tragedy measures out both human impotence before nature and a persistent inability to conquer, subdue, and maintain control over nature. […] It is precisely the loss of agency—often to nature—that has defined tragedy. (Estok 2018, 10)

On the other hand, a different understanding comes forward in eco-anxiety.[9] In this case, the posthuman subject has the ability to separate anxiety from his self. Thus, instead of drowning in anxiety, he evaluates it to better understand himself and his relationship with the outside world and his position there. This process eventually leads to eco-anxiety and gives a sense of responsibility to the subject.

Lovecraft's inability to get out of his own head causes him to remain in ecophobia without evolving into eco-anxiety. In this sense, his ecophobia (which not only includes elements of natural world like plants, animals, and non-human, but also race, class, gender, and sexuality)[10] can be seen as the extension of author's pathological anxiety. As Estok states:

> Part of the fear of foreign landscapes is actually a fear of foreigners, and this itself is a fear of "human nature, its fickleness, its potential for violence, and cruelty," as Yi-Fu Tuan explains in *Landscapes of Fear*; but another important part of the ecophobia toward foreign landscapes has to do with "predictabity in an uncertain environment." (121)

When viewed from this perspective, anything that seems indescribable, different, unpredictable, or unknown to Lovecraft (including his own mental illness) becomes a subject of his ecophobia. It is, therefore, no coincidence that he often uses monstrous cosmic entities. As Estok also notes:

> Writing monstrosity is the narrativization of ecophobia, imagining unpredictable agency in nature that must be subject to human power and discipline. Ecophobia is the affective reaction. Ecophobia is all about power. It is the something-other-than-humanness that is dangerous in the monster and the mad, and in order for this danger to have any potency, we need a fairly hostile conception of the natural world. (124)

But in the end, anything that seems nonhuman is actually all too human.

6.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I started by analyzing the anti-narrative elements found in Lovecraft's anxiety narratives to better understand his anxiety as well as to see the possibility of reading his narratives from a posthumanist point of view. Although Lovecraft's appeal to the collective and complex affects of humanity, his exploration of man's relationship with the uncontrollable nature, and his unique style that is ahead of its time all seem to make his writings particularly suitable for a posthumanist discussion, interpreting the unknown as the author's own anxiety makes such an understanding impossible. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that his narratives evolved with a posthumanist understanding and became a constructive force rather than a destructive one. This may explain why posthumanism creates an awareness that leads to eco-anxiety, while Lovecraft's cosmicism leads to ecophobia. It is also important to understand that his ecophobia is a result of his pathological anxiety and not vice versa.

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[1] This idea parallels with the following statement by Sergio Armando Hernández Roura: "Pese a que ya se han presentado el relieve y la estatuilla, el encuentro con Cthulhu excede a su representación. Entidad material que nace para oponerse a la ciencia positivista, se presenta como un horror inconmensurable no sólo en el sentido métrico, sino también epistemológico. Las palabras incluso no logran dar cuenta de él, así como de ninguna de las otras criaturas que componen el panteón lovecraftiano; aspecto que también supone el fracaso del lenguaje, como un descalabro más de la insignificante episteme humana" (Hernández Roura 2019, 31).

[2] This idea will be thoroughly discussed in the second part of this chapter.

[3] As Braidotti states: "This cross-species transversality is quite liberatory and therefore I am not prone to any sense of nostalgia for the humanist 'Man of Reason' or sovereign 'Anthropos.' Posthuman knowledge production is rich and creative and we should therefore avoid flat equivalences" (Braidotti 2019, 51).

[4] As discussed elsewhere, Lovecraft's aim of writing was "merely self-expression" and, as Joshi states: "[B]ecause Lovecraft realized that weird fiction was necessarily a cultivated taste, he was compelled to note repeatedly that he wrote only for the 'sensitive.'" (Joshi 2013, 685).

[5] As Joshi comments, this sentence "clearly refers to the failure of definitive proof of the relativity theory to have emerged at this time; a year later that proof was manifestly at hand" (Joshi 2013, 688).

[6] "With the formulation of the special theory of relativity by Albert Einstein in 1905 and its acceptance by scientists generally, the ether hypothesis was abandoned as being unnecessary in terms of Einstein's assumption that the speed of light, or any electromagnetic wave, is a universal constant" ("Ether" n.d.). By using the term "ether" in his account, Lovecraft ignores Einstein's assumption.

[7] "Corona Borealis, (Latin: 'Northern Crown') constellation in the northern sky at about 16 hours right ascension and 30° north in declination. Its brightest star is Alphecca, with a magnitude of 2.2. The star R Coronae Borealis is the prototype of a group of unusual variable stars that dim in brightness over the course of a few weeks and return slowly and irregularly to their previous level over several months […] In Greek mythology this constellation is the crown the god Dionysus presented to the Cretan princess Ariadne on the isle of Náxos" (Gregersen n.d.).

[8] Although Haraway's term is seemingly very similar to Lovecraft's "Cthulhu," their meanings are quite different. As she states: "*Chthulucene* is a simple word. It is a compound of two Greek roots (*khthôn* and *kainos*) that together name a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (Haraway 2016, 2). As Juliana Fadil-Luchkiw further comments in "Toward Relational Monsters": "In repudiating Lovecraft's 'misogynist racial-nightmare,' Haraway alienates Cthulhu further , and rather than dealing with this trauma, histories of correlating monstrosity and otherness remain latent. Because the Cthulhu requires the reorientation of the reader, it is a phenomenological creature that has the transformative capacity to make relations through its unknowability. Therefore, rather than renouncing Cthulhu, disidentifying with it and the traumatic hatred it embodies as an allegorical return of the repressed could provide the necessary transformative change in consciousness that Haraway hopes for with her slogans and manifestos" (Fadil-Luchkiw 2018).

[9] Eco-anxiety is defined in Collins English Dictionary as "a state of distress caused by concern about damage to the environment" (n.d.).

[10] "The ecophobia hypothesis seeks understanding of the confluent ways in which anxieties, indifference, and irrational fears of difference play out along a spectrum of otherness that in its broad sweep includes race, class, environment, gender, sexuality—indeed, any and every category of abjection" (Estok 2018, 151).

CONCLUSIONES

El objetivo principal de esta tesis fue hacer una lectura de relatos seleccionados de Howard Phillips Lovecraft utilizando las humanidades médicas. He argumentado aquí que, conociendo los detalles de su vida, es posible leer la ficción de Lovecraft como textos metafóricos de enfermedad. En sus narraciones, el autor utiliza las metáforas principalmente para describir la ansiedad, que es desconocida, fluida e irrepresentable, pero poderosa y dominante. Otros trastornos que suelen acompañar a la ansiedad, como la paranoia, disociación y obsesión, también se pueden ver en sus narraciones. En otras palabras, Lovecraft ha usado el poder de la literatura y específicamente de la *weird fiction* para representar la ansiedad y su efecto en la mente humana.

Lovecraft escribía principalmente para sí mismo y sus relatos tienen como inspiración su propria vida y, más específicamente, su familia, traumas y enfermedades mentales y físicas. Además de dar ejemplos originales para el género *weird*, utilizó las metáforas como una forma para describir lo indescriptible. En efecto, conocer su vida en detalle (gracias a sus biógrafos y a sus cartas) me permite asociar su filosofía, los hechos de su vida, así como su reacción ante estos hechos con lo representado en sus narraciones. Por lo tanto, conocer su vida en profundidad era imprescindible para comprender verdaderamente sus obras. Me he basado tanto en las humanidades medicas como en el esquizoanálisis para proponer una interpretación de su representación de la ansiedad porque ambos enfoques me permitieron comprender verdaderamente a Lovecraft en lugar de categorizarlo. Es decir, mi objetivo era escuchar lo que intentaba contar el autor y analizar el uso del lenguaje que le ayudaba a articular sus emociones.

Al final, estos métodos no hicieron el concepto de la ansiedad más simple o comprensible, pero me ayudaron a comprender mejor la psique del autor.

Los relatos de Lovecraft se derivan de su filosofía literaria, el cosmicismo, que se basaba esencialmente en la ansiedad derivada de la insignificancia del ser humano en el vasto y desconocido universo. Por ello, empecé con el análisis del concepto de la ansiedad y sus diferentes aspectos que se representan en las narraciones de Lovecraft, junto con las metáforas utilizadas para representarlos. La interpretación de la ansiedad de Søren Kierkegaard me permitió comprender el aspecto existencial e inherente de este concepto, así como compararlo con el enfoque de Lovecraft. Kierkegaard separa la ansiedad del miedo al enfatizar la falta de un objeto cierto en la ansiedad, lo que evoca la naturaleza irrepresentable del concepto. La idea de que la ansiedad deriva de una "conciencia" está también presente en ambos enfoques. Además, ambos interpretan la ansiedad como una fuerza ajena, pero también enfatizan cómo cambia según la percepción del individuo, acercándose así al concepto como noúmeno y fenómeno. De hecho, sus descripciones de la ansiedad y sus relaciones con ella son bastante parecidas, aunque sus puntos de vista religiosos son completamente diferentes.

También sostengo que es la representación de la ansiedad como noúmeno y fenómeno lo que hace que las narraciones del autor sean completamente diferentes y profundamente únicas. En este sentido, estoy de acuerdo con lo que Graham Harman llama aspectos "verticales" y "horizontales" del estilo de Lovecraft, pero también sostengo que estos aspectos eran elementos necesarios para representar plenamente la ansiedad más que solamente una elección estilística.

Esta tesis abordó a Lovecraft principalmente como un paciente o, como Arthur Frank lo llama, un "narrador herido." Por lo tanto, utilizar las humanidades médicas para analizar las narraciones de Lovecraft no solo era necesario, sino también un resultado natural. El uso de este campo también fue esencial por su enfoque sensible, sin prejuicios e interdisciplinario que permite comprender el significado real detrás de las metáforas. De hecho, es posible considerar

las narraciones del autor en parte como "narrativas del caos" por su acercamiento a la experiencia subjetiva de la ansiedad del individuo, su estructura alusiva y por los elementos anti-narrativos que se utilizan para representar este fenómeno irrepresentable.

El uso del enfoque de las humanidades médicas requirió la inclusión de otras disciplinas, como la neurobiología y la psicología, además de la literatura y la filosofía, para una comprensión más completa y empírica de las narraciones de ansiedad del autor. Por lo cual, también se han abordado otros trastornos que suelen acompañar a la ansiedad, como la disociación, la fobia, la obsesión y la depresión. La naturaleza de la disociación ha sido analizada a través del caso de Nina y la comparación de su ansiedad con la de Lovecraft mostró cómo lo desconocido (no importa si es el cosmos o la perfección) tiene un efecto similar en diferentes individuos. Aquí también he señalado la tendencia del psicoanálisis (o de cualquier sistema dominante y establecido) a patologizar, utilizando principalmente el esquizoanálisis de Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari. El esquizoanálisis y dos modelos de TID me permitieron ver tanto la ansiedad como la disociación desde una perspectiva diferente y entenderlas como situaciones naturales, fluidas y viscerales. Como resultado, esto me permitió abordar y analizar el tema de la enfermedad mental como una experiencia única y subjetiva más que una "enfermedad" de verdad.

Comparar la COVID-19 (como un virus desconocido) con lo "desconocido" que crea el horror Lovecraftiano sirvió para hacer más tangible el concepto. También, discutir el efecto psicológico de la COVID en la sociedad y los perfiles de los pacientes durante este período me permitió comprender mejor esta emoción inherente. Por lo tanto, sostengo que no importa si se origina en el cosmos, en la perfección o en un virus, lo desconocido tiene casi el mismo efecto psicológico en la mente humana y en realidad es el tema del control en el que debemos centrarnos. Porque no es la indiferencia y la inmensidad del universo o el sentimiento de

insignificancia, ni siquiera lo desconocido en sí mismo, lo que pone ansioso a Lovecraft; es la pérdida de control.

Explorar y analizar a fondo la vida del autor me permitió comprender las posibles razones—como los traumas, las enfermedades mentales y físicas y las tragedias familiares o incluso los intereses personales e intelectuales—que podrían haber causado su obsesión por el control. En efecto, después de analizar estos elementos, es posible sugerir que todos contribuyeron de alguna manera a la ansiedad de Lovecraft. Presté especial atención a la relación de Lovecraft con su madre, ya que ella es la figura más dominante en la vida del autor. De hecho, no es posible comprender completamente el desarrollo emocional y de su ansiedad sin analizar primero a su madre. Me he basado principalmente en la psicología del desarrollo, y específicamente en las ideas de Harry Harlow sobre el amor maternal para analizar el papel de Susie en el desarrollo mental y emocional de su hijo. Como resultado, he encontrado similitudes muy importantes entre la ansiedad de Lovecraft y la ansiedad de los monos Rhesus, que están inseguramente apegados a sus madres. De esta manera, también he visto cómo el amor y el miedo (o la ansiedad o la indiferencia) son complementarios y la falta de uno afecta al otro.

Como "autor de crisis," Lovecraft se ha vuelto aún más popular en los últimos años y sus narraciones influyeron en una de las corrientes filosóficas más importantes de la actualidad, el posthumanismo. Sin embargo, en esta tesis la pregunta que traté de responder fue si era posible analizar las narraciones de Lovecraft a través de la teoría posthumanista considerándolas como narraciones de ansiedad. Y sostengo que solo es posible explicar sus narraciones utilizando el posthumanismo si se interpretan como ficción, y no como narraciones de ansiedad. Lo que parece extraño, no humano o desconocido se vuelve familiar, demasiado humano y conocido cuando las narrativas del autor son consideradas como narraciones de ansiedad. En otras palabras, la humanidad y la mente humana siguen siendo el centro de la narración. Además,

aunque en ocasiones parece estar inspirado en el estilo y las narraciones de Lovecraft, en el posthumanismo se aprecia una actitud diferente: al cambiar el enfoque de la humanidad a su "trasfondo," como el cosmos, el cambio climático, los desastres naturales, etc., el enfoque posthumanista crea una ansiedad necesaria y constructiva sobre nuestra ecología, mientras que las narraciones fóbicas de Lovecraft solo alimentan el miedo y la ecofobia.

El objetivo de esta tesis fue introducir una lectura alternativa de los relatos de H.P. Lovecraft, considerándolos como narraciones de ansiedad, explorando así los significados ocultos de sus textos y comprendiendo más profundamente la psique del autor. Al hacerlo, también se trató de examinar el papel del lenguaje y la literatura en la representación de la enfermedad mental.

APPENDIX

1 INTERVIEW WITH PROF. PEGGY MASON FROM UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

1) In his essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft states: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." How does fear affect our brains?

P.M.: Fear is a very fundamental and useful emotion and it is an emotion of survival. It is certainly true that most neurobiologists today would say that fear is the most fundamental one. I personally have been reading a lot of Harry Harlow and I am a fan of Harry Harlow actually and for him, I don't know if we surpass fear but it certainly would give fear a run for its money which is love. His studies are so interesting because he manages to make love a very palpable emotion, a very real one. Now that is so very out of fashion. So now what people do as they talk about filiation and they talk about bonding. They don't particularly talk about love. But the point being that both love and fear are very fundamental. There are places in the brain that are more important than others to the expression of fear. It is going to take over your brain, it is an alarm signal. It is a very dominating emotion. The thing about the unknown is that, the only thing that is known is in the past. The present is not known and the future is not known and you could argue that the entire point of the brain is to predict the future so it is not you were afraid of the unknown; it is that you were mired in it. Whether we like it or not, we are mired in it. And what we do is we create this fantasy that the next moment in time is not unknown; though we know what is going to happen. Every trivial action that you make depends on a complete

belief in the next moment in time. Of course, we are trying to stretch out that time from seconds to minutes to hours to years. We [humans] have made this special case of trying to predict so much and we are so convinced that we've done it that we feel that we know. We don't but we feel we know and the reason it feels good is because it's actually helped us survive. So, it has an evolutionary advantage to predict the future, to predict "if I go this way I am going to find food, if I go that way I am going to get eaten." So, that is a good thing to be able to predict.

2) **Lovecraftian horror basically deals with the concept of the unknown and our relationship with it. According to him: "The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain- a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space." One may claim that Covid and its psychological effects on the people are indeed very Lovecraftian as they fulfill almost all the requirements: the element of the unknown, the loss of control, a sense of chaos, a sense of desperation against something greater and much more powerful than us. As a neuroscientist, do you think the human mind is as fragile as Lovecraft claims? Can a pandemic cause permanent neurological and psychological damage on the people?**

P.M.: Personally, I do think that we walk on a razor edge of psychological health. I could be wrong about that but I think that everyone falls off that razor edge every once in a while. But I think things happen and it's hard to incorporate into the self. And then you are disbanded or

you are just not in a place where you are happy with yourself or happy with life. So personally, I think it's the much bigger challenge than physiological maintenance. I think psychological, emotional health is way more difficult and that's true as an individual and then the fact is that we don't exist as individuals, we exist in groups. Add the group, it gets even more complicated. Which is why I have a fascination with people who travel into space. Because that's a very difficult situation where people are stuck with each other and to be under best behavior for months and possibly years is tough. On the other hand, what are the long-term effects of COVID, we don't know. We don't know how much of it is virus we don't know how much of it is virus does this and does that and then we don't know how people are reacting to this incredible upheaval in the way that we live which is in my lifetime unparalleled. 9/11 was a big deal in the U.S. and this is way more invasive.

3) **Being the father of terror, Lovecraft could be able to create a sense of anxiety on the reader rather than mere fear or disgust. He achieved it basically by manipulating common and universal fears and anxieties of the human beings. As he said: "Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse. With this foundation, no one need wonder at the existence of a literature of cosmic fear. It has always existed, and always will exist." We now know that fear of the unknown is also inherited from our ancestors and stimulates our fight or flight response. However, one question would be about the role of imagination in activating this response in modern life. Would it be possible to self-sabotage and activate the stress response through a**

vivid imagination? Or would it be possible to see these kinds of phobias as evolved versions of once a vital instinct?

P.M.: I think it is a good point. The past comes in through perception. We know that perception is completely flawed. The past is only present today from memory and we know memory is flawed. So, you have perception is flawed, memory is flawed and now you are going into the future?! Well there is just no way that those flaws don't multiply. And so, I think that our imagination of the future is extremely flawed. The future is very poorly imagined by us. If you think for example "okay, this weekend I am going to get all the stuff done" and you list a bunch of stuff that you can get done but in fact just getting the first thing done takes way more time than it does in your imagination, your projection to the future. These are ideas that bizarrely come from a book called *Stumbling on Happiness* by Daniel Gilbert from Harvard. I think if you cross that with the idea that we have these emotional thermostats where you are most comfortable viewing something as either half full or half empty. So, if you realize that you can't predict the future, you are sort of bound to; you are bound to operate on some idea what the future looks like and if you are coming from half full, that's going to be a rosy picture. But if you are coming from half empty you can put yourself into an adverse condition that they may not come to pass. We have to imagine the future and we have to be ourselves. So, a person that is half empty can't pretend to be half full and a person that is half full can't pretend to be half empty.

4) **I believe one of the common elements of both COVID and Lovecraftian horror is loss of control. With COVID we witness how everything can easily turn upside down and we see that we don't have any control over anything though we would like to believe we have. In the same way, in Lovecraft's tales we usually see how the rational**

protagonist confronts something great and awful which totally breaks or violates his sense of reality as well as his sense of control over the world he "knows" and sinks into despair and loses his mind. Do you think the illusion of control is something vital for the human brain to survive?

P.M.: I think it is vital for any brain to survive. I don't think we [humans] are a special case. I don't find it very interesting to look for human exceptionalism. I think there is a huge evolutionary advantage to craving. The biggest craving is air and water is probably number two and food is number three. And things like sex don't even rate. So, everything that is in us, is in us because one way or another it served us well. The pressures that we have in modern life are not the same pressures that we had through evolutionary time. So, for example, through evolutionary time food was very scarce. So, you found food, you ate it. The drive for appetite is high and easily triggered. The drive for satiety is very difficult to trigger. That was great for us when we were evolving. The pressure is off. Now, it is not so great for us. Everything, including all of those emotions evolved, they had/have some advantage.

5) **Lovecraft was very afraid of going mad because of his family's medical history. Both of his parents went crazy and he was afraid of losing his mind at some point and maybe the concept of insanity was something unknown to him. And maybe he was afraid of this "unknown" because insanity itself is something very abstract…**

P.M.: That's very understandable. It is not a fear of an unknown, it is a fear of something you think you know. I can totally understand how he could have a deep seeded fear of losing his mind. We are afraid of what has happened to our parents. It is the first order prognosticator what is going to happen to you.

2 INTERVIEW WITH CEREN KOÇ[1]

1) We have been living with a pandemic since March. We clearly see the physical and economic damage caused by the virus. But what about its psychological impact on people?

C.K.: I believe first of all it stunned people. Loss of control, uncertainty, lack of options were all huge difficulties for people. Staying at home and being obliged to stay indoors are not the same thing. Not having an end date, uncertainty all increased the level of anxiety. Habits and rituals have changed. The people who were going to gym stopped going to gym, theatre or cinema lovers or the ones who were going to cafes or restaurants needed to stop doing these activities. Social support decreased; many people felt very alone during this time. The ones who live abroad have become distanced from their families and friends. The world stopped being a global place; countries withdrew and people could not travel. People who live abroad, thinking it is easy to reach their hometown or any other place, could not be able to reach anywhere. Working from home changed the routines of many people; before people could be able to separate their working hours from their leisure times but during the pandemic they started checking and replying to their emails at 11 p.m. Staying constantly at the same place with the same people made the relationships (between the partners, family members) way more difficult. Alcohol consumption increased. Technology addiction (internet, video games, and social media) was already a problem but it also increased; it even became "functional" while staying at home (spending time with computer, messaging, video chat, etc.)

[1] Ceren Koç currently works as a clinical psychologist at Mentha Psychiatry & Psychotherapy. She is also a part-time lecturer at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul.

2) **You work mostly with adolescents and young adults. Is there any significant change in your patients' profile or number during this period?**

C.K.: Frankly, there is no significant change in my patients' profile or number; however, the people who were already dealing with anxiety disorders became more anxious. Anxiety of COVID-19 is common. In addition, people who recovered from COVID had anxious thoughts about the potential permanent damages of the disease.

3) **I believe COVID has/had a kind of impact on every kind of people during this period. Based upon your patients, which personality types are affected more heavily by COVID?**

C.K.: COVID affected hypochondriac or obsessive people more; so the ones who had already had a tendency for anxiety. People with addiction problems had more difficulties during this period. Alcohol or drug use (with the lockdown people who were using drugs could not reach their dealers that easily) and prescription drug abuse increased; people with technology addiction experienced more difficulties.

4) **I assume one of the most obvious emotions that COVID aroused is fear and anxiety of the unknown. If this assumption is right, why do you think we are afraid of the unknown?**

C.K.: Life ends with death. Even though we do not know when, we do know that we will die, that there is an end. The day ends with a night, there is "tomorrow." Certainty comforts people, we want clearness. Especially it comforts people when there is an end date for some negative

situation. Given that people have the tendency to focus more on the result rather than the process, certainty and control make them relaxed. In order to conduct the process, they need control as well as to know what is going to happen in the end. Uncertainty always creates anxiety. We know that pandemics have an end as well, but not knowing its exact end date, waking up with brand-new information every day, being that these pieces of information are sometimes correct, sometimes false, coming up with a new result of a new research about this new virus, all damage people's sense of control. We cannot cope with a problem that we cannot control. One cannot fight if he/she does not really know his/her enemy. One determines his/her strategy knowing the enemy's characteristics. Now people are beginning to know the virus for this reason they still cannot develop a certain fight strategy, which increases the anxiety.

5) Do you think the process of the pandemic would create long-term or permanent psychological damages on the individuals?

C.K.: Maybe, we will see. Depression and anxiety may leave a mark. Economic recovery will also take time which would make the depression last longer. There may be permanent changes in social habits as well as changes in professional life. There may be an increase in online jobs or online meetings. However, we should not forget the fact that human beings are adaptive species. There may be permanent impacts but I believe in time we will adapt to the new normal.

3 A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH PROF. DAVID WALLACE FROM UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

1) Lovecraft's literary philosophy, cosmicism (or cosmic horror) defends the insignificance of the human beings in a totally indifferent universe. As he says in a letter: "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 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." What is your opinion, as a physicist, about such an approach?

D.W.: If it's "as an approach to doing physics," then, sure: things like human interest and emotions aren't going to show up in any physics analysis. But by the same token, physics isn't really in a position to judge their validity and significance. There's more to life than physics!

2) Lovecraft also analyzed the impact of the vast and indifferent universe on the human beings. According to him, such a universe would cause anxiety and fear. As S.T. Joshi comments: "The question for Lovecraft was: how to conduct oneself with the realization that the human race was an insignificant atom in the vast realms of the cosmos? One solution was to adopt the perspective of a sort of bland cosmic spectator upon the human race." Indeed, Lovecraft defined himself as an "indifferentist" stating: "I am not a pessimist but an indifferentist—that is, I don't make the mistake of thinking that the resultant of the natural forces surrounding and governing organic life will have connection with the wishes or tastes of any part of that organic life-process." What do you think of such an indifferentist attitude?

D.W.: In a sense I think it's clearly right that the "natural forces surrounding and governing human life" don't really care about our wishes and tastes. If there's a gamma ray burst a few light years away and it kills us all, that's just too bad for us. That said, we're evolved to exist

and thrive on earth, so parochially, those natural forces are reasonably friendly to us. And just as there's nothing in physics that particularly looks out for our interests, there's nothing that actively wants to kill us. I don't think there's any physics bar on us thriving as individuals and as a species for very long times. And I don't think these factual observations really commit us to any change in our personal attitude to life.

3) As mentioned before, cosmicism deals with the anxiety caused by the realization of human beings' insignificance in an indifferent and infinite universe. In many of his stories the rational protagonist becomes insane as a result of this realization. *The Call of Cthulhu* starts with the following sentence: "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents." On the other hand, many people find this universe fascinating because of the very same reasons and even find peace acknowledging one's smallness and insignificance. As a physicist how do you feel about such a universe?

D.W.: I don't really have an intuitive sense of the size of the Universe – or even of the Solar System, frankly. I know how to describe its scales formally, but at some level my mind bounces off a real appreciation of those scales. It's a bit dizzying.

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RESUMO

Howard Phillips Lovecraft é unha das figuras máis controvertidas do século XX, cuxa popularidade creceu radicalmente nos últimos anos. Aínda que os seus comentarios sexistas, racistas e xenófobos veñen á mente cando se escoita o seu nome por primeira vez, e por tanto evitouse durante moito tempo, agora é máis popular que nunca debido ás súas narrativas que inspiran tendencias recentes como a ontoloxía orientada a obxectos, o posthumanismo e antihumanismo, así como estudos de medios ou, máis especificamente, estudos de xogos. Con todo, esta disertación ofrece unha perspectiva diferente, abordando as narrativas de Lovecraft como historias de enfermidade en lugar de mera ficción.

A filosofía literaria de Lovecraft, o cosmicismo, é o concepto central desta disertación debido ao seu papel crucial tanto na cosmovisión do autor como nas súas narrativas. De feito, analizar o cosmicismo é importante para ter unha comprensión máis profunda do que inspira, perturba e inflúe psicolóxica e filosoficamente no autor. E debido a que no corazón do cosmicismo se atopa a ansiedade, esta disertación examina todos os aspectos posibles (fenomenolóxicos, existenciais, psicolóxicos, neurobiolóxicos) deste afecto. A ansiedade é en efecto insondable e enigmático, e por esta razón sempre foi un concepto intrigante para diferentes disciplinas. Mentres hai humanidade, hai ansiedade, e isto podería explicar a atemporalidade das obras de Lovecraft. Ademais, é tanto un afecto colectivo como individual e pode analizarse tanto como suxeito como como obxecto. Lovecraft representa todos estes aspectos da ansiedade nas súas narracións, pero interpretalos como mera ficción fai imposible unha análise máis profunda. Noutras

palabras, as narracións do autor non poden entenderse completamente sen coñecer verdadeiramente a súa vida e personalidade. Doutra banda, é importante resaltar que o obxectivo desta tese non é dar un diagnóstico sobre Lovecraft, senón todo o contrario: trata de liberalo de malentendidos e malas interpretacións para poder facer unha análise certeirz de si mesmo e das súas narrativas.

Outro obxectivo igualmente importante desta tese é explorar a representación da enfermidade mental a través de narrativas. A enfermidade mental é difícil, en todos os sentidos. É difícil tela, darlle sentido, falar dela, representala, así como entendela verdadeiramente. Aínda que insondable, aínda está moi aberta a xuízo, etiquetaxe e categorización. Con todo, cada persoa experimenta a enfermidade mental dunha maneira única, e é importante entender verdadeiramente este fenómeno individual. Aínda que é imposible representala con precisión ou darlle sentido completo, a maioría das veces a linguaxe úsase para falar ou escribir sobre ela. Así, a enfermidade mental, aínda que limitada, atopa un lugar na realidade obxectiva á marxe da mente do individuo.

E é esta natureza complexa da enfermidade mental o que me leva a facer unha análise das narrativas de Lovecraft utilizando as humanidades médicas e da saúde. O interesante é que o significado das súas narracións cambia cando o lector coñece en detalle a vida do autor. Aínda que a primeira vista poidan parecer historias de terror, coñecer a vida de Lovecraft ofrécenos un novo mundo por analizar. De feito, obsérvase un patrón nestas narracións. Ademais, este patrón apunta ao natural no sobrenatural e, de súpeto, os elementos non humanos vólvense demasiado humanos. Tamén me intrigaba a posibilidade de facer unha análise actualizada das posibles enfermidades mentais do autor e a súa encarnación a través das súas narracións, así como ver o papel, o poder e os límites da linguaxe na representación de conceptos tan abstractos. Neste sentido, o uso das humanidades médicas/sanitarias volveuse case inevitable.

As humanidades médicas son un campo interdisciplinario en rápido desenvolvemento e trátase principalmente de coidar, comprender e empatizar coas diferentes condicións e experiencias persoais dos seres humanos. Anne Whitehead e Angela Woods dan unha definición máis técnica en *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities*: "As humanidades médicas, afirmamos, nomean unha serie de interseccióńs, intercambios e enredos entre as ciencias biomédicas, as artes e as humanidades, e as ciencias sociais" (Whitehead et ao. 2016, 1). Pola súa propia natureza, este campo céntrase nas vulnerabilidades inherentes a todo ser humano. Noutras palabras, en lugar de interpretar estas vulnerabilidades como problemas a evitar ou curar, ou como elementos negativos e alleos, este enfoque abarca e busca comprender a fondo os fenómenos que fan ás persoas humanas. Por tanto, desafía o contraste entre san e enfermo, forte e débil, funcional e disfuncional, ao tratar estas características como partes diferentes dun mesmo todo. Desta forma, tamén pretende abordar conceptos que se consideran indesexables e por tanto marxinados ou ignorados polo sistema. Daquela, era crucial utilizar o enfoque das humanidades médicas ao examinar as capas da mente de Lovecraft e as súas reflexións sobre a súa arte. Máis especificamente, esta disertación adopta un enfoque crítico das humanidades médicas e baséase especialmente na medicina narrativa. Doutra banda, é importante aclarar a razón pola que elixín usar o termo "humanidades médicas/da saúde" en lugar de "humanidades médicas" ou "humanidades da saúde". En 2014, inspirados polo argumento de Paul Crawford e a súa creación da Rede Internacional de Humanidades da Saúde (2010), Therese Jones, Delese Wear e Lester D. Friedman adoptaron o termo "humanidades da saúde" en lugar de "humanidades médicas" pola súa connotación "máis abranguedora, contemporánea e precisa" (Jones, Wear e Friedman 2014, 25). Con todo, o termo humanidades médicas aínda está en uso e debido a que a medicina narrativa está orixinalmente vinculada ao enfoque das

humanidades médicas, decidín conservar ambos termos. Hoxe vemos que ambos se usan por separado ou xuntos (como humanidades mentais e da saúde), e aínda que este cambio parece unha simple modificación, apoio a decisión de Jones et al. de elixir un termo que inclúa unha audiencia máis ampla e estea máis aliñado cos obxectivos da disciplina.

Como xa sinalaron os destacados estudosos de Lovecraft S. T. Joshi e David E. Schultz, e como tamén pode notar facilmente un lector ávido, as narracións de Lovecraft baséanse en gran medida en elementos autobiográficos. Estaba a escribir principalmente para si mesmo, e aínda que nunca se fixo famoso na súa vida, continuou escribindo ata a súa morte. Neste sentido, esta disertación vai en paralelo coa crítica contemporánea. Con todo, vai un paso máis alá e pretende comprender tanto a Lovecraft como ás súas narracións de forma aínda máis profunda e precisa coa axuda de teorías actuais e novos enfoques. Como mencionei antes, aínda hoxe creo que Lovecraft non recibe o nivel de atención que merece; de feito, tende a ser rexeitado tanto pola súa visión do mundo problemática como pola natureza estraña, insondable e irrepresentable das súas narracións. De feito, aínda que se fixeron moitos intentos para levar as súas obras ou o seu estilo á pantalla grande, moi poucos o lograron. Na industria do videoxogo, con todo, o seu estilo obtivo un gran éxito. Como se ve en moitos exemplos novos e antigos, como *Bloodborne*, *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, *Soma* e *The Sinking City*, o estilo lovecraftiano demostrou a súa compatibilidade con este formato. Aínda así, o seu nome segue sendo o maior obstáculo para un maior recoñecemento e investigación. De feito, esta foi outra razón pola que elixín a este autor e as súas narrativas para analizar. No mundo de hoxe, que cada día é máis odioso, desapegado e apático, existe unha tendencia a ignorar ou encubrir o indesexable, o que creo que só serve para aumentar o odio, a desconexión e a indiferenza. Por esta razón, paréceme crucial explorar o indesexable para analizar máis a fondo as capas evitadas da mente humana que poden dicirnos moito sobre a importancia

da percepción. De feito, argumento nesta disertación que o que vemos esencialmente nas narrativas de Lovecraft é a distorsión da percepción. As representacións literarias desta distorsión vólvense máis claras cando os escritos do autor interprétanse como narracións de ansiedade e analízanse en consecuencia. Lovecraft usa elementos estraños para representar estes obxectos ou situacións que provocan ansiedade, e aínda que a ansiedade nas súas narracións parece provir de estímulos externos, tras un exame máis detido, enténdese que en realidade é a mente humana a que distorsiona a realidade e, por tanto, crea ansiedade. Como unha fervenza, a ansiedade descende como un veo sobre os ollos do espectador. De feito, outro punto importante que analizo nesta disertación é esta natureza fluída e travesa da ansiedade. Ao desafiar os límites que nos separan do mundo exterior, a ansiedade engana a nosa percepción da realidade, de tal maneira que xa non podemos estar seguros da súa orixe. Ademais, esta disertación tamén está informada pola idea de que a ansiedade non vén soa; na maioría dos casos trae consigo disociación, paranoia e TOC, e é posible atopar as representacións metafóricas (ou ás veces directas) de todos estes elementos nas narrativas de Lovecraft. Finalmente, esta disertación foi escrita no seu maior parte durante a pandemia do coronavirus, o que me inspirou a comparar a ansiedade derivada do COVID-19 coa ansiedade lovecraftiana, e finalmente descubrín que hai máis similitudes entre as dúas do que pensaba. De feito, o cosmicismo é máis que unha mera filosofía literaria; ten a súa orixe nunha ansiedade inherente compartida por todos os humanos, e é esta estraña familiaridade a que atrae e afecta o lector. Por tanto, non sorprende atopar que un virus novo e descoñecido evoca unha sensación similar á dunha entidade cósmica que se atopa nas narrativas do autor. O feito de que a pandemia coincidise co proceso de redacción desta tese foi, en certo xeito, beneficioso para a tese; na miña entrevista co psicólogo clínico Dr. Ceren Koç atopei a oportunidade de preguntar sobre o perfil do paciente e as reaccións dos pacientes durante

este período para comparalas coas reaccións dos protagonistas das narrativas de Lovecraft. Desta maneira, a angustia provocada polo cosmicismo fíxose máis concreta e adquiriu un aspecto máis empírico.

Foron necesarios diferentes enfoques, ideas, teorías e disciplinas para facer unha análise completa das narrativas de ansiedade do autor. Por tanto, ademais de utilizar a medicina narrativa de Rita Charon e adoptar o concepto do narrador ferido de Arthur Frank para proporcionar unha base para a miña análise, esta disertación tamén se basea en: a) Søren Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Stefano Micali, por nomear algúns, para mellorar comprender o aspecto filosófico e a fenomenología da angustia; b) o concepto de esquizoanálise de Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari para discutir principalmente a disociación; c) Rosi Braidotti, Francesca Ferrando, Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, entre outros, para analizar o papel do posthumanismo e a obxectualidade ontolóxica orientada á comprensión das narrativas da ansiedade de Lovecraft; d) a interpretación filosófica da física cuántica de Werner Heisenberg; e) a psicoloxía e a neurobioloxía para comprender mellor o sistema da ansiedade. Ademais, utilicei a entrevista como un dos meus métodos de investigación, xa que me permitiu facer preguntas específicas a varios académicos, que son autoridades nos seus campos (neurobioloxía, psicoloxía e física) para aprender máis sobre áreas nas que teño un coñecemento limitado, así como comparar diferentes perspectivas. Como resultado, esta disertación divídese en seis capítulos e comeza cun exame teórico da ansiedade para analizar o concepto de cosmicismo e a súa representación nas narrativas de Lovecraft.

O capítulo 1, "Comprender o concepto de cosmicismo," explora os conceptos de ansiedade e medo e analiza a fenomenología da ansiedade e a súa representación a través do cosmicismo. Neste capítulo discuto o enfoque de Kierkegaard sobre a ansiedade comparándoo coa ansiedade lovecraftiana para comprender mellor o aspecto existencial

deste afecto. Ademais, discútese o papel das humanidades médicas/da saúde na análise das narrativas de ansiedade do autor. Aquí utilizo especialmente o enfoque da medicina narrativa e o concepto de Frank do narrador ferido para examinar as características do narrador nas narracións de Lovecraft. Doutra banda, discútese a mecánica cuántica e o seu significado en relación coa realidade utilizando principalmente a interpretación filosófica de Heisenberg polo seu efecto sobre a ansiedade do autor.

O capítulo 2, "A disociación como resultado do sentimento de insignificancia," analiza o aspecto neurobiolóxico da ansiedade a través das conferencias e o traballo de Sapolsky. O enfoque deste capítulo é a disociación causada pola ansiedade e utilizo á protagonista de *Black Swan*, Nina Sayers, como caso de estudo para comprender mellor este fenómeno, así como para comparalo e contrastalo coa representación da ansiedade nas narrativas de Lovecraft. Para iso apóiome tanto na esquizoanálise de Deleuze e Guattari e o seu concepto de corpo sen órganos, como en dous modelos de DID (SCM e PTM) para unha mellor comprensión da disociación.

O capítulo 3, "COVID, Ansiedade e Horror Cósmico," enfócase no tema do control e o seu vínculo coa ansiedade ao explorar o efecto psicolóxico da COVID nos humanos. Ademais, compara a ansiedade lovecraftiana coa ansiedade provocada pola pandemia, convertendo así o horror cósmico nun afecto máis tanxible e experimentable na nosa vida cotiá. Os datos que obtiven deste enfoque empírico e as entrevistas serviron para unha comprensión máis profunda do cosmicismo. Este capítulo tamén examina o descoñecido e discute a relación problemática do ser humano con el. Analizar a relación entre os conceptos do descoñecido, control e ansiedade dá unha idea para abordar adecuadamente as narrativas de Lovecraft.

O capítulo 4, "Trauma, tolemia e perspectivas cambiantes," explora H.P. Lovecraft e analiza os seus traumas e enfermidades físicas e mentais que o inspiraron para formar a

súa filosofía literaria. En particular, o destacado erudito de Lovecraft S. T. Joshi guíame a explorar e comprender cada detalle da vida do autor para poder facer unha análise precisa das súas narracións. Coñecer estes detalles foi crucial para atopar as súas proxeccións metafóricas nos escritos de Lovecraft, o que finalmente confirmou a miña hipótese de que estas narracións poderían considerarse historias de enfermidades en lugar de mera ficción. Neste sentido, este capítulo ofrece un exame crítico das súas obras seleccionadas a través das humanidades médico-sanitarias e analiza os posibles trastornos mentais e problemas físicos do autor coa axuda dos avances científicos actuais.

O capítulo 5, "A cuestión do amor, o medo e a ansiedade," céntrase especificamente no papel da nai de Lovecraft no desenvolvemento psicolóxico do autor, utilizando as ideas de Harry Harlow sobre o afecto, o amor materno e o vínculo nai-fillo. O obxectivo deste capítulo é analizar a Susan e a súa relación co seu fillo para ver se tivo algún efecto sobre a ansiedade do autor. Sen utilizar a psicanálise freudiano, aquí baséome unicamente na psicoloxía do desenvolvemento para explorar o significado do consolo materno en xeral e, máis especificamente, para analizar o significado de Susan e a súa representación nas narrativas de ansiedade da autora. Explorar o amor era necesario para comprender mellor a ansiedade e o enfoque médico/humanitario da saúde permitiume atopar e analizar as representacións literarias deste afecto tan complexo nas narrativas da ansiedade de Lovecraft.

Finalmente, o último capítulo, "Brave New Ecology and its Discontents: Limits of Anxious Body," tamén se basea nas humanidades médicas e da saúde e examina os elementos antinarrativos que se atopan nos escritos de Lovecraft para analizar a representación da ansiedade e a súa precisión. Ademais, este capítulo discute varios enfoques posthumanistas, como as ideas de Francesca Ferrando e Rosi Braidotti, o concepto de hiperobxectos de Timothy Morton e o Chthuluceno de Donna Haraway para

comprender se é posible abordar as narrativas de ansiedade de Lovecraft desde unha perspectiva posthumanista. Aquí tamén analizo a ecofobia presente nas narrativas do autor e examino a súa conexión coa súa ansiedade.

Como resultado, esta tese ten como obxectivo analizar cada aspecto da ansiedade de Lovecraft e a súa representación literaria nas súas narrativas, utilizando principalmente a medicina narrativa, para obter unha comprensión máis profunda tanto da psique do autor como do uso da literatura para representar a enfermidade mental.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze H.P. Lovecraft's psychological problems and traumas to understand the true meaning behind his narratives that he wrote between the years 1905 and 1935. Lovecraft's narratives, stemming directly from the author's life, fears, anxieties, and traumas, are more than fiction and can be considered as a means to reach the hidden corners of his complex mind. Therefore, I argue that deciphering these writings as anxiety narratives will be giving a new insight about the author as well as mental illness in general. To do so, Lovecraft's life and his literary philosophy, cosmicism, are explored, with a specific attention to the concepts of (existential) anxiety, fear, and phobia, which were predominant themes/affects in both Lovecraft's life and his narratives.