The Fear of the Unknown in H. P. Lovecraft's Works

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Strah od nepoznatog u djelima H.P. Lovecrafta

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

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Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract:

Howard Philips Lovecraft is now considered to be an iconic American writer of horror and science fiction; however, he did not believe that his fiction would leave such a monumental mark on literature as it did. Lovecraft did not write for money or commercial success, and his references to Greek and Roman mythology, use of Latin quotes, eighteenth-century New England world view, racism and paranoia make him a writer whose works hardly seem accessible, even for his time. But this is exactly what makes his works unique and interesting. What Lovecraft did in his writing was to search the depths of human imagination. His stories explore everything which is strange or unknown to us and everything incomprehensible. Therefore, the fear of the unknown that surrounds his stories is one of the major themes that make Lovecraft rightfully a master storyteller and great writer. This paper will examine what the unknown in Lovecraft's stories is, how it appears and what it says about the human condition and our understanding of the universe we live in, and it will do so by analysing the following stories: "The Call of Cthulhu", "The Dreams in the Witch House", "The Outsider" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth".

Keywords: fear, unknown, H. P. Lovecraft, cosmic fear, modern horror.

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Introduction

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (20 August 1890 – 15 March 1937) is undoubtedly the most prominent writer of the American Gothic tradition and horror fiction since Edgar Allan Poe, and is included in the literary cannon both as a writer of genre and literary fiction. His greatest achievements are his short stories, and similarly to Poe, it is safe to say that he is also a great writer of the short story. However, while it is clear that Lovecraft echoes Poe in form, he also differs from Poe and previous writers greatly. In stories such as Poe's, Bierce's or Hawthorne's the human factor is decisive, in other words, the struggles of the psyche and perception of the characters, while Lovecraft partly abandons this and partly drives it to the extreme by introducing the element of *the unknown*. Although it cannot be claimed that Lovecraft invented the concept of *the unknown* in literature or the weird story, since he never hid the influence that the works by Robert W. Chambers, Algernon Blackwood and Arthur Machen (especially *The Great God Pan*) and Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* had on his own work, it is fair to say that nobody wrote weird stories with a style and scope that could rival Lovecraft's. The main reason for it is that while Hawthorne or Poe also wrote non-horror short stories, Lovecraft never went outside of horror, and even his stories of science fiction contain the elements of horror, the weird and *the unknown*. This might be the explanation why Lovecraft is the most prominent writer of the weird story and why when we think of cosmic horror, we think of Lovecraft and often describe it as "lovecraftian". This paper will examine what *the unknown* in Lovecraft's stories is, how it appears and what it says about the human condition and our understanding of the universe we live in.

1. Lovecraft's Universe

This chapter will focus on the way the universe is perceived by the characters in the stories and the lovecraftian aspects of it. Throughout his personal life Lovecraft faced many difficulties and frustrations, but ultimately he became aware that he did not understand the practical side of life even though he was a very well read and intelligent man. Things like politics, money or war meant very little to him, and he perceived these types of human struggle as unimportant in a supposedly infinite universe. Lovecraft came to this realization through his great love for astronomy, and this is something that everyone with a telescope can experience. When

looking at night at the planets or countless stars, a person can realize how small the human life is in comparison to the incomprehensible size of the whole universe. Such moment is the purest way for a human to experience *the unknown* first-hand. The other, (perhaps) intellectual, way for us to experience it is in reading weird stories by writers such as Lovecraft. Understandably, Lovecraft sees the human situation in a rather nihilistic way, and his only reaction to it is not wonder, but horror. In the introduction of his study "Supernatural Horror in Literature", Lovecraft famously wrote "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft), showing thus what his preferred topic is going to be. While Lovecraft was inspired by writers who hinted at *the unknown* and the wideness of the universe, it was Lovecraft who took those ideas and first spoke about them to such an extent. Whether this is good or bad, an anti-humanist approach in reading and writing literature is Lovecraft's achievement, and it is from this point of view that we should read and study his texts – with confusion, wonder and deeply rooted fear of everything we cannot even begin to understand. As Lovecraft stated, he does not write to uplift the reader, or explain the world to him:

> Against it are discharged all the shafts of a materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naively insipid idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature to uplift the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism. (Lovecraft)

Or in the words of Houellebecq: "Life is painful and disappointing. It is useless, therefore, to write new realistic novels" (29). While this might be a polarizing opinion, this is the truly significant feature of the lovecraftian weird tale.

2 Fantastic Monsters to Believe in

This chapter will examine elements of the fantastic that are found in Lovecraft's stories. The weird tale rejects any form of realism. The moment when the truly weird tale of *the unknown* becomes rational, it stops being a weird tale. Therefore, even some of the best gothic and horror stories are not part of this category, not even stories of unspeakable and horrific events such as, for instance, Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily", which become even scarier due to the fact that they

are possible. However, while some stories gain power through their plausibility, Lovecraft's stories cannot be explained by any means rational. In his book on the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov writes:

> Which bring us to the very heart of the fantastic. In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (Todorov 25)

In such stories the reader is not too aware of the fictional nature of the story and imagines the characters, scenes and the story's world in order to become a part of it, like an invisible ghost, and for the duration of reading the story becomes real. Fantastic creatures such as Cthulhu are described and the reader has to believe in them as well. In fact, most of Lovecraft's characters and creations are unusual and interesting, but at first glance do not seem to serve a greater purpose that in the end will be explained. The ending of "The Call of Cthulhu" could, therefore, also be seen as anticlimactic because Cthulhu appears seldom and nothing gets explained. There is no major revelation and no real purpose in Cthulhu. In fact, Cthulhu is above purpose; it is not a tool or an instrument to reveal the story but the opposite. The story aims to reveal Cthulhu, but in the end also fails because words cannot describe the true essence of what Cthulhu might be. These stories are unable to satisfy the reader who looks for logic or searches for meaning. They are aesthetic (or grotesque) creations but, most importantly, creations of the imagination, not intelligence. Ironically, while Lovecraft is a writer that writes from and about the human imagination and impossible things to terrify and provoke wonder, none of his work could be filmed or adapted to stage and stay faithful. Once again, *the unknown* lies in the dimension of pure imagination and the moment when light gets shined on it, it is no longer unknown. While there have been films of Lovecraft's work (notably Andrew Lewman's *The Call of Cthulhu* 2005 adaptation), they do not fail as films or works of art, but do in the sense of the weird and *the unknown*. Cthulhu as a creature defies human perception, language and even mere sight. The smallest glimpse alone drives the person to madness.

3 Understanding the World and the Unknown

3.1 Science

In his fiction, Lovecraft, is deeply interested in scientific and philosophical phenomena, some of which will be examined in this chapter. As mentioned, Lovecraft and other writers of weird fiction put realism behind and write for and from the imagination because it is the way to write about *the unknown*. Naturally, this seems the reason why Lovecraft had interest in writing stories about (or against) science. Through science (especially mathematics), humans try to explain the world to one another in order to make life better and easier, and also more comprehensible. While the human mind has a deep longing to put things in order that is fuelled by the thirst for knowledge, Lovecraft is more pessimistic on this issue. In "The Call of Cthulhu" he writes:

> 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)

In Lovecraft's view the only thing that is certain is that people know nothing. This, of course, is debatable but still a feature of *the unknown* encountered in the short stories by Lovecraft. Nietzsche argued, by famously saying "God is dead", that there is no longer a fear of God, or in other words, that the modern man rejected the idea of God and turned to science to replace God. While it might be hard to give a definite answer to what God and science ultimately are, John Gray argues that the idea of God is not an ideal one, but even though science took precedence, it might have its own limitations as well. Gray writes: "It is a strange fancy to suppose that science can bring reason to an irrational world, when all it can ever do is give another twist to the normal

madness" (Gray, *Straw Dogs* 28). Lovecraft and Gray are very likely to be of the opinion that chaos reigns in our universe, and when people try to understand it, they come to realize where their limitations are. People are not so different from animals, with, perhaps, the only distinction in that people have a slightly better understanding of the universe and possess greater self-awareness than other animals. In his essay "Weird Realism", Gray writes: "[…] the human mind is an accident in the universe, which is indifferent to the welfare of the species. We can have no view of the scheme of things or our place in it, because there may be no such scheme. The final result of scientific inquiry could well be that the universe is a lawless chaos".

3.2 Mathematics

If we were to look for an explanation of what mathematics could be, one possibility is that it is the language of the universe and logic. While in the beginning of human civilization the need for mathematics was obvious in business and trading, more complex mathematics began out of the need for something else. One of the first great discoveries therefore is zero. It is interesting that in nature one cannot find zero, because everything has a value, there is nothing that is nothing. For example, when trading, one cannot trade no cows for something. Positive and negative numbers make sense when applied to the real world, but zero seems more abstract and hardly usable in the real world. Another issue is the question of infinity, similarly to Zeno's paradox and an infinite series, or process that does seem to find an ending. Therefore, what infinity and zero are is very hard for us to imagine. It seems even more absurd to think that we could set a value to something like infinity, or that the sum of all natural numbers N (1+2+3+….) could be -1/12. Dr. Tony Padilla writes on this issue:

> […] I'm sure, −1/12. It's by no means obvious, but this is the *only* sensible value one can attach to this divergent sum. Infinity is not a sensible value. In my opinion, as a physicist, infinity has no place in physical observables, and therefore no place in Nature. David Hilbert, one of the founding fathers of quantum mechanics, described infinity as "a mathematical abstraction that does not have a physical content". I think most physicists would firmly agree with this sentiment. The trouble is that divergent sums like the one we discuss in the video do appear in calculations of physical observables, such as the Casimir energy, or in the

> dimensionality of the Universe in bosonic string theory. Therefore, only a very brave individual would dream of attaching the value infinity to sums like this. Minus a twelfth is far less crazy a value when you start talking about Physics. (Padilla)

That the result of an infinite series is -1/12 is very strange because the number is both a fraction and a negative, and we were adding only positive whole numbers in the first place. How true or correct this might be, is no topic for a paper on literature such as this, but for much more complex considerations of mathematics or science. However, it is a more than necessary example for the illustration of how counterintuitive and perhaps even nonsensical these concepts and ideas may seem to the (ordinary) human mind. The fact, that most people (including Lovecraft) have a great difficulty in mathematics seems paradoxical as well. As stated above, if mathematics is the language of the universe, and it deals with such numbers and results, then it seems that people were not meant to understand it. Therefore, we could call such a result or inquiry lovecraftian, too. In Lovecraft's short story "The Dreams in the Witch House" this can be seen in the character of Walter Gillman. He is a university student who took up mathematics, but when he makes an old witch house his home, strange dreams come to him and all the problems of time and space seem to disappear. He sees things that no one else has seen, not even the university professors who are represented as authorities on all matters scientific. Although highly intelligent, they are unable to comprehend what Gilman saw, and in the long run, these dreams become very disturbing to Walter Gilman as well:

> Non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics are enough to stretch any brain; and when one mixes them with folklore, and tries to trace a strange background of multi-dimensional reality behind the ghoulish hints of the Gothic tales and the wild whispers of the chimney-corner, one can hardly expect to be wholly free from mental tension. (Lovecraft)

4 On Human Beings and Life

4.1 The Need for Character and Beauty

This chapter will examine the role of life and humanity in Lovecraft's fiction. Lovecraft's range of characters is slim. Lovecraft tells his stories almost exclusively in the first person. This, of course, is similar to Poe, who, just like Lovecraft, wanted to make use of an unreliable narrator. Another reason why the first person perspective is necessary is because Lovecraft treats his protagonists not as fully fleshed out characters but more as marionettes which, in one way or the other, show a part of his personality – the white sensitive man of obscure knowledge and history. In addition to this, the unreliability of the first person narrator unsettles the reader additionally and makes "the truth" about life and the strange events in the stories even more questionable. For Houellebecq this, too, is another reason why he considers Lovecraft to be an author who, as he says is "against life". He writes:

> The deaths of his heroes have no meaning. Death brings no appeasement. It is in no way allows the story to conclude. Implacably, HPL destroys his characters, evoking only the dismemberment of marionettes. (32)

Clearly, Lovecraft, does not write to evoke sympathy or goodness in the reader because Lovecraft's goal is to write about *the unknown* and evoke the reader to use his own imagination. Therefore, the madness and death that every single one of his characters in the end faces is inevitable and does not matter either to Lovecraft or the reader. Yet, the reader can still feel empathy towards Lovecraft's characters in stories such as "The Dreams in the Witch House" or "Shadow over Innsmouth", but especially in "The Outsider". The apt title of "The Outsider" is often attributed to the idea of how Lovecraft might have felt about himself. While this might as well be partly true, it is also wrong because Lovecraft was to some extent a social being. However, he was never able to maintain an active job, nor was he personally interested in status or money. This is reflected in his stories and characters as well. Whatever the interests in the society and erotic passion in his characters might be, the reader does not know. What is true, however, is that Lovecraft was proud of his heritage and he puts emphasis on the elder

(supposedly wiser) people, who again can be seen as outsiders with regard to the society of active grownups. Lovecraft's immense dislike for realistic fiction explains why he is the complete literary opposite to writers such as Tolstoy or Dickens, who tried to bring in their works as much social criticism, problems and milieu as possible; Lovecraft, on the other hand, tried to leave out as much as possible. He did not care for the love life of his characters or their economical struggle, nor was he interested in their psychological analysis. In fact, "Every sentimental fiction has been eradicated. Purity, chastity, fidelity, and decency are ridiculous stigmas. The value of a human being today is measured in terms of his economic efficiency and his erotic potential – that is to say, in terms of the two things that Lovecraft most despised" (Houellebecq 116).

The greatest obscurity, perhaps, is the lack of female characters. In fact, women appear only a few times in his entire oeuvre and they are never main protagonists. The woman in "The Dreams in the Witch House" is an incredibly old witch of grotesque appearance. The witch carries a horrifying rat creature with her and shifts in other dimensions. Some other female characters include Lavinia Whateley ("The Dunwich Horror"), Asenath Waite ("The Thing on the Doorstep"), or the Ape Queen ("Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family") and they are all represented as dangerous and ugly.[1] There is nothing beautiful or elegant here that could charm the reader. In fact, the theme of ugliness is very present in the works of Lovecraft. Ugliness can be seen in the terrifying fish-like appearance of the Innsmouth people, that Lovecraft describes as Innsmouth look. Here, a similarity with Poe's poem "Alone" can be seen. Poe says: "And the cloud that took the form / (When the rest of Heaven was blue)/ Of a demon in my view –" (20-22). This poem showcases a shocking revelation of the inner struggle through the speaker's appearance, and it is quite strongly expressed in Lovecraft's "The Outsider". It is also one of the few stories by Lovecraft that does not feature a certain gigantic cyclopean entity from outer space. In this story Lovecraft masterfully crafts a type of horror within the main character. To sum it up, Lovecraft's monsters like Cthulhu or Nyarlathotep are obviously not humans, but his human characters (similarly to the Innsmouth people, the outsider and the witch) are also not particularly "human"; they are only humanoid in appearance. This

[1] "In the world of science fiction, the iconography has been divided into four neat categories, according to the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Women are objects to be Desired; Feared; Rescued or Destroyed" (Clute and Nicholls 1343). See also: "The Changing Role of Women in Science Fiction: Weird Tales, 1925-1945". Lovecraft's approach was largely to represent women as characters to be feared and, ultimately, destroyed.

could be further interpreted from the point of view of psychology or existentialism, but ultimately Lovecraft was not looking for this either. He was simply not interested in writing about human beings or from the point of view of a human being, as he wanted to show the ultimate insignificance of humanity in the universe.

4.2 Non Human and The Danger of Knowing

Lovecraft's creatures are everything but human, and this is something that is unique in his horror. This is the essence of what to consider *the unknown* in Lovecraft's fiction. As determined, there is a sense of ugliness but also a weird sense of aestheticism in all of Lovecraft's creatures. This is not present in classical horror such as Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Stoker's *Dracula*, when both Frankenstein's creature and Count Dracula seem in many ways more human than the people who hunt them. Both monsters suffer, but this is not the case in Lovecraft. Here, the good and righteous people cannot save themselves (like Mina in *Dracula*) nor is there any moral lesson like perhaps in *Frankenstein*. Lovecraft gives cold and almost scientific descriptions of his creatures, and this is *the unknown*. On the topic of character, every single one of Lovecraft's characters features someone who finds out something he is not supposed to know. Lovecraft's fiction is always in one way or another concerned with the concept of forbidden knowledge. The dangers of knowledge are illustrated in historical examples of the abuse of important scientific discoveries – instead of using them for the benefit of humanity, they were used for destruction (for example, dynamite and nuclear power). Even the splitting of the atom, which in itself is an important discovery, opened up the doors for the atom bomb. In horror literature like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Lovecraft's stories, knowledge is represented as dangerous, and not knowing the *unknown* might even keep us sane, but the price of ignorance seems equally steep.

4.3 Racism

Racism is present in many of Lovecraft's stories. Even stories like "The Outsider" which appear to have nothing to do with racism get a new meaning when looked upon in the same context of racism as "The Call of Cthulhu". Lovecraft's racism came from a lack of knowledge or

misdirection. As can be seen from his writings, Lovecraft read a great number of works and even mentions some anthropological books in “The Call of Cthulhu”:

> […] them citations from theosophical books and magazines (notably W. Scott-Elliot’s *Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria*), and the rest comments on long-surviving secret societies and hidden cults, with references to passages in such mythological and anthropological source-books as Frazer’s *Golden Bough* and Miss Murray’s *Witch-Cult in Western Europe*”. (Lovecraft)

However, he never had any real contact with the people whom he possibly considered to be “the Other” and his knowledge was quite abstract. So, although Lovecraft might not have been unknowing of other cultures, his view of them was very misguided, which is mirrored in his fiction. His stories are steeped in a strong sense of paranoia and fear toward other races.

The most famous example is clearly “The Call of Cthulhu” where he depicts non-white people as devil-worshipers: “Besides nameless rites and human sacrifices there were certain queer hereditary rituals addressed to a supreme elder devil”. According to Lovecraft, the “Others” worship the devil and act and live in secret and dark societies, hidden from all civilization (or from what Lovecraft considered civilization to be). In fact, Lovecraft never went to Europe or even anywhere outside of America (not even that, he stayed in Providence almost all of his life, and his trip to New York was a shocking experience for Lovecraft who could not deal with the diversity of the port city such as New York). In that sense, biographical data adds to the readers' understanding of Lovecraft as a person and explains where his racism comes from, which in turn helps in understanding his stories. Therefore, “The Call of Cthulhu” is often interpreted as an allegory of the fear of immigrants or other people who are not a part of the New England WASP culture. However, while all this is true, and should not be ignored, it would be a mistake to focus solely on racism, as his stories hardly ever have the purpose of promoting racism (see for example, “The Dreams in the Witch House” or “The Outsider”). “Shadow over Innsmouth,” for instance, gets a new meaning if the reader is acquainted with Lovecraft's attitudes about the other, as it is about people living in a small town who are not part of the New England WASP culture and Lovecraft probably felt that if they existed, they too might have been involved in incest,

devil-worship and other scary things. As mentioned, this can only be seen in the texts if the reader wants to see it from Lovecraft's own paranoid view.

While for the contemporary reader Lovecraft's racism is hard to ignore, it is important to note that his fiction is not political, and Lovecraft did not write his fiction with the goal to spread hate speech. In his stories, he mystifies racism, and some might say that racism is simply a part of the peculiar aesthetic of the story. Ruff's novel *Lovecraft Country,* deals with racism as well, but from the perspective of a black man under Jim Crow laws; and in Mignola's graphic novel *Hellboy* racism is present in the form of Nazism. One should not ignore nor accept racism that is present in Lovecraft's fiction, but when one looks at Lovecraft's life more carefully and becomes aware of his phobias and his own paranoia, his irrational, but not intentional, racism[2] may be seen as inspiration for his stories about the threat that the (alien) "others" represent to the human race. Finally, Lovecraft's personal racism is indeed complicated, but only a small shadow when compared to *the unknown*.

4.4 Language

Like many twentieth century writers, Lovecraft was interested in language, and his fiction illustrates his experimentation with language. In reading Lovecraft and other Modernist writers one realizes that language has its limits and this is clearly shown in Lovecraft's stories. Many of his descriptions of landscapes, houses, and monsters are very picturesque and scientific but ultimately nothing is able to do his imagination justice. In a sense, Cthulhu and the dreams in the witch house are so scary that the narrative fails to capture all of their horror and his characters often lack the words to express what they have seen or felt. Were it possible to imagine the creatures, one would be confronted with a strangely abstract, absurd and grotesque imagery; imagery so disturbing that, if the readers were to trust Lovecraft's stories, upon seeing it, they would become mad. When reading Lovecraft and the alien speech available in stories such as "The Call of Cthulhu", for instance: "*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn* (Lovecraft), the reader is completely alienated, much like the readers of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, a work completely different in genre, but with a shared degree of linguistic experimentation. The

[2] For example, his wife Sonia Greene was Jewish, and Robert Bloch, Lovecraft's protégé, had Jewish heritage as well.

words that Cthulhu utters and his name itself are purposefully crafted by Lovecraft so that the readers cannot pronounce it. This way, the unknown – the incomprehensible – is brought to life along with the understanding that human beings are insignificant in the cosmic order of things. The narrators realize that the things that they witnessed cannot be described by words, yet they, more often than once, continue to try to explain it, in order to try to make some sense of what they have witnessed. The truth, however is, that this too is part of *the unknown*, and there is no logical explanation behind it. In "The Shadow over Innsmouth" the narrator therefore says:

> But at last I am going to defy the ban on speech about this thing. Results, I am certain, are so thorough that no public harm save a shock of repulsion could ever accrue from a hinting of what was found by those horrified raiders at Innsmouth. Besides, what was found might possibly have more than one explanation. I do not know just how much of the whole tale has been told even to me, and I have many reasons for not wishing to probe deeper. For my contact with this affair has been closer than that of any other layman, and I have carried away impressions which are yet to drive me to drastic measures. (Lovecraft)

In most of Lovecraft's stories, this realization ends up with the protagonist's/narrator's madness caused by the newly gained awareness of the size of the universe as well as by the realization that the powerful alien gods are neither benevolent nor interested in humanity.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that Lovecraft's stories deal with *the unknown*, and this is the main reason why they evoke such great horror and fear. Everything that the readers are confronted with in Lovecraft's stories simply is not human, and this includes (as shown before): characters, creatures, landscapes, cities, language, and the fabrics of time and space itself. The four stories which were here examined ("The Outsider", "The Shadow over Innsmouth", "The Dreams in the Witch House" and "The Call of Cthulhu") display similar plot patterns, and deal with some type of fear of *the unknown*. Moreover, if one were to examine all of Lovecraft's stories one would see

how all of his stories are connected to each other and form a universe full of horror that is unique in literature both for its scale and the fact that not many writers wrote horror to such extent. This is in itself a great literary achievement that offers both escapism and the opportunity to ponder on the position of humanity in the universe. Lovecraft's stories, situated somewhere between the literary canon and pop-culture, will hardly be as widely read as Austen, Dickens, King or Rowling, but will offer much to a specific kind of reader who looks for imagination and astonishment. Besides this, if one were to search for meaning in Lovecraft, one might get disappointed as Lovecraft does not offer ready-made answers about the meaning and purpose of life. Rather, he tends to suggest that there is no meaning in life. However, to read Lovecraft does not mean one should simply succumb to nihilism, but question our daily lives and realize where and why humanity is at a certain point in space and time. The philosopher Lao Tzu wrote: "Darkness within darkness. / The gateway to all understanding." This summarises Lovecraft's ideas almost perfectly. People will never find any true answers on anything that Lovecraft wrote about, and as frustrating as this might appear, it is ultimately liberating. These types of stories allow us to accept chaos, darkness, and helplessness which sometimes seem to damage our free will. When we read Lovecraft, the only thing we can do is to look at the stars and wonder about ourselves and the world we live in. This way, we come towards understanding.

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